

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Development and Validation of a Doping Attitudes and Behaviour Scale (DABS)

Athletes' use of prohibited ergogenic substances for performance enhancement is a form of cheating behaviour which can jeopardise their health and careers. Unfortunately, few studies have attempted to understand the psychological mechanisms underlying such behaviour (Roberts et al., 2004). This oversight is unfortunate because anti-doping measures cannot be fully effective unless they address the reasons why athletes engage in cheating in the first place. Against this background, Moran, Guerin, McCaffrey & MacIntyre (2004) conducted a qualitative study of Irish athletes' understanding of cheating in sport. They discovered that cheating was perceived to occur along a continuum of behaviour ranging from less serious activities such as "smart play" (or gamesmanship), at one end, to the use of banned substances to enhance performance (doping), at the other end. They also found that cheating was rarely perceived as stemming from an individual decision by an athlete but was attributed to a particular type of coaching environment characterised by a "win at all costs" approach. Given such findings, the next step in this programme of research is to explore the "doping" end of the cheating continuum by developing a theoretically-based, self-report instrument which can measure not only athletes' attitudes to doping but also their propensity to engage in doping behaviour. This scale development task requires three separate studies using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology (see Biddle, Markland, Gilbourne, Chatzisarantis & Sparkes, 2001) and is guided by the following research questions. First, what are Irish athletes and coaches' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, doping in sport? This question will be investigated using a series of semi-structured interviews with athletes and coaches/managers from sports (e.g., athletics, cycling and weightlifting) in which doping is known to be prevalent. Of particular interest in this study will be the attitudes and experiences of athletes who have been investigated for alleged breaches of anti-doping regulations. Second, based on the attitudes elicited by our interviews, what is the best way to design a theoretically-grounded, objectively scored, self-report scale to measure athletes' attitudes to doping and their propensity to engage in doping behaviour? This question will be answered by rigorous psychometric analysis. Finally, what combination of relevant psychological variables produces the best prediction of a proclivity to engage in doping? Among the predictor variables to be investigated here will be moral reasoning (Tod & Hodge, 2001), perceived motivational/coaching climate (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre & Treasure, 2003), attributional style (e.g., Hanrahan, Grove & Hattie, 1989) and perceived importance of competition (as there is evidence that athletes are more likely to engage in doping when the outcome is perceived as especially important). Although each of these variables has been associated with cheating in sport, no study has yet combined them statistically using multiple regression analysis to predict a propensity to engage in doping behaviour. In summary, the purpose of our study is to develop a theoretically-based, psychometrically sound, self-report scale provisionally entitled the "Doping Attitudes and Behaviour" Questionnaire to assess athletes' attitudes to, and propensity to engage in, doping behaviour in sport.