

The relationship between moral code, participation in sport, and attitudes towards performance enhancing drugs in young people.

Summary

Despite widespread recognition that prevention, rather than detection, remains the best strategy for eliminating drug use in sport, anti-doping research has typically targeted elite adult athletes. The importance of studying young athletes has been highlighted by the frequency with which drug use in young athletes has been observed. There is a considerable body of evidence that suggests that athletes as young as 11 or 12 years of age use performance enhancing drugs, and that such use has increased in the past decade. Research has also suggested that individual characteristics of athletes (such as level of moral development) and the social environment are possibly important predictors of both usage of, and attitudes towards, performance enhancing drugs.

The proposed study will examine the behaviours and attitudes of a cohort of 12-17 year olds with regard to performance enhancing drugs. Half of the subjects will be elite athletes; the remaining subjects will be non-elite athletes.

This research project has four specific aims:

1. To assess the incidence of performance enhancing drug use
2. To assess attitudes towards performance enhancing drug use
3. To examine the relationship between level of moral development, the usage of and attitudes towards performance enhancing drug use
4. To examine the relationship between participation in sport at an elite level, the usage of and attitudes towards performance enhancing drug use.

Results from the proposed study will be used to improve theoretical models of why some athletes choose to use performance enhancing drugs, with particular emphasis on the role of moral reasoning and level of sport involvement, and their relationship to doping attitudes. The results will also inform education efforts aimed at deterring young athletes from using drugs.