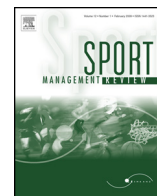




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Evaluation of an anti-doping intervention for adolescents: Findings from a school-based study



Vassilis Barkoukis^{a,*}, Katerina Kartali^a, Lambros Lazuras^b,
Haralambos Tsorbatzoudis^a

^a Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

^b Department of Psychology, Sociology & Politics, Sheffield Hallam University, UK

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effectiveness of a school-based intervention in promoting an anti-doping culture in adolescents. Participants were 218 high school students attending Health Education programs in Greek secondary education. Students completed a questionnaire including measures of attitudes towards nutritional supplement and doping use, social norms and norm salience, and values and harms of sport. The intervention consisted of 10 teaching units focusing on the health, moral, social and psychological aspects of nutritional supplement and doping use. The results showed that intervention group participants reported significantly weaker attitudes towards doping use, and increased norm salience. Health was ranked as the most important value of sport in both intervention and control groups, and doping use was ranked as the most important threat to the integrity of sport in the intervention group. The findings are discussed with respect to policy making and the role of school-based interventions in promoting an anti-doping culture in young people.

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The use of illegal performance enhancement substances (PES) to improve athletic performance is a major problem in contemporary sports and a large body of evidence has shown that the abuse of prohibited PES (i.e., doping), like androgenic anabolic steroids, is evidenced across all levels, amateur and competitive/elite sports, and is likely to inflict people as young as 12 years old (Dunn & White, 2011; Lucidi et al., 2008; Petroczi, 2007). Interventions are needed to prevent doping use in sports, and the focal point of anti-doping campaigns and related initiatives is usually athletes and their entourage (e.g., coaches). The ATLAS (Adolescents Training and Learning to Avoid Steroids; see Goldberg & Elliot, 2005; Goldberg et al., 1996, 2000) and ATHENA (Athletes Targeting Healthy Exercise and Nutrition Alternatives; see Elliot et al., 2008; Goldberg & Elliot, 2005) are two gender-based interventions that were designed to prevent the use of chemically-assisted performance enhancement, including both legal and illegal PES. These interventions were peer-led and coach-facilitated, and delivered through a series of lectures where female and male athletes were differentially targeted (e.g., emphasis on muscularity was given to male participants, whereas the drive for thinness was addressed among females). Target groups received information about the side effects of doping use, the risks involved in the excessive and careless use of legal PES, as well as the

* Corresponding author at: Department of Physical Education and Sport Science, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 54124 Thessaloniki, Greece. Tel.: +30 6945415797; fax: +30 2310992171.

E-mail address: bark@phed.auth.gr (V. Barkoukis).

alternative and more legitimate performance enhancement methods (e.g., dieting and training regimes; [Bahrke, 2012](#); [Goldberg & Elliot, 2005](#)).

A recent meta-analysis of experimental studies using the ATLAS/ATHENA programs found that, although there were significant but small effects on doping intentions, there were no effects on doping use in follow-up measures ([Ntoumanis, Ng, Barkoukis, & Backhouse, 2014](#)). A potential explanation was that ATLAS/ATHENA adopted a wider health promotion perspective and tackled a wide range of other health behaviors (e.g., eating patterns and nutrition, tobacco and alcohol use) alongside PES use. Accordingly, ATLAS and ATHENA were developed 20 years ago, and their content may be missing the most recent developments in PES use research. This signifies the need for more updated interventions that will have a clearer focus on PES use, and utilize state-of-the-art research on the psychosocial risk factors for PES use.

1. Anti-doping interventions outside sports settings: The roles of values, public attitudes and social norms

There is a need to fight doping at grassroots levels, and implement anti-doping interventions involving wider social groups (e.g., amateur athletes), inside and outside typical sports settings, such as schools. Two main reasons justify the need for such an approach. Firstly, doping use tends to be disproportionately higher in non-athletes than among athletes ([Wanjek, Rosendahl, Strauss, & Gabriel, 2007](#)), and adolescents tend to be more susceptible to PES use ([Dunn & White, 2011](#); [Petroczi, 2007](#)); thus, implying that doping is an emerging public health issue, and not just a concern limited to the sports community. Secondly, sporting values in the social context can shape social norms towards doping and accordingly explain the formation of both public and individual (athlete) attitudes towards doping use. In support of this argument, [Smith and Stewart \(2010\)](#) found that values about sports shaped sporting culture, which then shaped attitudes towards doping use in sports among athletes. Values about sports, including values related to doping use in sports, may be formed early in life, and endure to shape concomitant attitudes and behavioral tendencies at later stages. Thus, by targeting values about sports, interventions could be effective in preventing the formation of pro-doping beliefs (e.g., that doping use is common practice in sports), and accordingly, making doping less acceptable among sports consumers. This argument is supported by [Petroczi and Aidman \(2008\)](#), who argued that values of sports may represent both systemic and situational factors that can inhibit (or facilitate) the use of PES.

The anti-doping code issued by WADA recognizes 11 attributes that represent the essential values of the Spirit or Sports: ethics, fair play and honesty; health; excellence in performance; character and education; fun and joy; teamwork; dedication and commitment; respect for rules and laws; respect for the self and other participants; courage; community and solidarity. [Mazanov, Huybers, and Connor \(2012\)](#) used the best-worst scaling (BWS) approach to assess how the general public prioritized these attributes, and found that ethics, fair play, and honesty topped the list. Further on, [Connor, Huybers and Mazanov \(2011\)](#) identified 16 attributes that harm the integrity of sports, including doping use, alcohol and illicit drugs use, athlete misconduct (on and off-field), fan misconduct, corruption, emphasis on winning, exploitation of athletes, big business in sport, legal betting, preferential government funding of certain sports, lack of diversity in sport exposure and participation, media reporting of sport, gap between sport technology and the rules of sport, and mixing politics and sport. By applying the BWS approach, [Connor et al. \(2011\)](#) showed that doping, illicit drug use and corruption were the most prominent threats to the integrity of sports, and further argued that interventions aimed at developing an anti-doping culture should target the prioritization of both the essential values/attributes of sports, as well as the threats of the integrity of sports.

In addition to values, public attitudes and emergent social norms towards doping should also be considered in the design of anti-doping interventions ([Moston, Engelberg, & Skinner, 2015](#); [Moston, Skinner, & Engelberg, 2012](#)). There is ample evidence showing that public attitudes towards regulatory policies, ranging from tobacco use in public places (e.g., [Hyland et al., 2009](#)) to pro-environmental action ([Jones & Eiser, 2010](#)), can shape actual implementation of these policies. In the context of doping, one key success indicator of anti-doping policy is the public's awareness and attitudes towards doping ([Stamm, Lamprecht, Kamber, Marti, & Mahler, 2008](#)). To illustrate this point, [Schneider \(2006\)](#) made a case about public attitudes and anti-doping values in relation to the Tour de France. She argued that, to successfully promote an anti-doping culture in the Tour, public attitudes towards doping should be congruent with the (anti-doping) attitudes of officials and policy-makers.

Finally, cultural beliefs and expectations shape social norms towards the issue in question ([Flay, Snyder, & Petraitis, 2009](#)), and a growing body of research has shown that behavior is guided by perception of social norms, such as the perceived popularity or prevalence of a given behavior ([Lapinski & Rimal, 2005](#)). Persuasive campaigns often utilize the power of social norms to shape behavioral tendencies in a variety of domains, from pro-environmental action to reducing substance use in youth populations ([Cialdini, 2003](#); [Perkins, 2003](#)). In the context of doping use, several studies have shown that social norms directly influence both intentions and actual doping use in athletes and non-athlete populations, across age groups (e.g., [Lazarus, Barkoukis, Rodafinos, & Tzorbatzoudis, 2010](#); [Lucidi et al., 2008](#); [Ntoumanis et al., 2014](#); [Wiefferink, Detmar, Coumans, Vogels, & Paulussen, 2008](#)).

2. The present study

Recognizing the need for an empirically updated anti-doping campaign outside the sports setting, as well as the role of sport values, public attitudes and social norms towards doping use in sports, the present study was concerned with the

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