



Doping use in sport teams: The development and validation of measures of team-based efficacy beliefs and moral disengagement from a cross-national perspective



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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The main goal of this research focused on the development and validation of three instruments designed to assess athletes' self-regulatory efficacy in team contexts, team collective efficacy and team moral disengagement with relevance for doping use across three European countries.

Design: The research relied on three distinct studies. A first qualitative study focused on item development. The second study assessed the factor structure and internal reliability of each of the new team instruments. The third study provided evidence for instrument validity by assessing the hypothesis that efficacy measures and moral disengagement would contribute to team athletes' doping intentions. The latter two studies also focused on the relations among measures and on measurement reliability, both within and across countries.

Method: The first study relied on focus group data collected from twenty-one team sport professionals (mean age = 34; SD = 11.65). Four hundred and fourteen adolescent athletes (mean age = 16.69; SD = 1.55) participated in the second study, whereas seven hundred forty-nine adolescent team athletes (mean age = 16.43; SD = 1.69) participated in the third study. For the latter two studies, team athletes were recruited across Italy, Germany and Greece and provided data on the new team measures. Only athletes participating in the third study provided data on doping intentions.

Results: The findings of the three studies supported the empirical goals of the investigation and provided evidence for the factor structure, reliability and validity of the team instruments. Furthermore, multi-group findings supported the hypothesis that the new instruments would have equivalent measurement and validity characteristics across the three European countries. The conclusions focus on the conceptual and practical implications of these findings.

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Sport is promoted as the hallmark of excellence and human virtues, and is believed to promote moral functioning and ethical behaviour (Kavussanu, Roberts, & Ntoumanis, 2002). Nevertheless, several studies have questioned the moral character-building properties of sport participation and showed that several sport behaviours can be classified as immoral or unethical, such as

injuring an opponent, cheating, or faking an injury (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2007; Lee, Whitehead, & Ntoumanis, 2007; Shields & Bredemeier, 2007).

Doping represents a case of cheating in sport, and is considered to be unethical, illegal, and health-compromising (Maravelias, Dona, Stefanidou, & Spiliopoulou, 2005). Research on the underlying psychological processes has clearly acknowledged that doping use is a complex phenomenon that is partly due to the co-existence of conflicting value systems ranging from a need for performance enhancement and the search for a competitive edge, to the desire to

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control the methods by which enhancement can be achieved (Heikkala, 1993; Petróczy & Strauss, 2015; Volkwein, 1995). Furthermore, scholars recognize that this complexity may inherently generate ambiguity between the expectation for high-performing athletes and the anti-doping rules which prohibit the use of a defined set of drugs and methods (Petróczy, 2013). Thus, performance enhancement, per se, is not necessarily condemned, and performance enhancement with permissible means (e.g., nutritional or herbal supplements, training methods, technological advancements, etc.) may, in fact, not only be tolerated but also actively supported throughout athletic career development (Petróczy, 2013).

As a result, the general view that values such as ethics, fair play or honesty, respect for self and others actually guide decision-making in sport has been largely challenged, and some scholars have suggested that, while values are relatively stable entities, their moment-to-moment priority over an athlete's life course may differ as a function of the complex interplay among individuals' personal characteristics, specific enacted behaviours, and ongoing social and environmental circumstances (e.g., Petróczy & Aidman, 2008). This broad perspective is currently shared by several theoretical frameworks in doping research (e.g., Barkoukis, Lazuras, Tsorbatzoudis, & Rodafinos, 2013; Chan et al., 2015; Lazuras, 2015; Lucidi, Zelli, & Mallia, 2013; Petróczy, 2013; Whitaker, Long, Petróczy, & Backhouse, 2014), and some of them have moved research forward by addressing the specific ways athletes' value priority changes over time and influences their cognitive and behavioural experiences (e.g., Petróczy, 2013).

Despite their specific characteristics, theoretical frameworks in doping research seem to share the general notion that doping use is a conscious, goal-directed behaviour (i.e., performance or appearance enhancement) that involves deliberate reasoning. Thus, despite being a clear violation of explicit ethical and legal norms (e.g., Backhouse, Patterson, & McKenna, 2012), an athlete may view doping use as an inevitable part of performance enhancement, and this view might be the expression of beliefs about particular physical, athletic or social demands of the moment and/or of personal evaluations about the extent to which one has the resources to pursue and to reach socially desirable sport objectives.

From a broad perspective, the conceptual model that has most explicitly conceived a dynamic three-fold interplay among the person, the environment and the behaviour is that of social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). This framework has been largely utilized in the psychological study of doping use (Boardley, Grix, & Dewar, 2014; Lucidi, Grano, Leone, Lombardo & Pesce; 2004; Lucidi et al., 2013; Lucidi et al., 2008; Ntoumanis, Ng, Barkoukis, & Backhouse, 2014; Zelli, Mallia, & Lucidi, 2010). According to social cognitive theory, doping can be conceptualized as a form of transgressive behaviour that might be related to athletes' social contexts and self-regulatory capacities. In particular, the decision to use doping substances can be explained by the dynamic interplay among social and environmental or contextual factors (e.g., explicit and implicit norms, external pressures to use doping), along with personal factors, such as one's self-reflective capacities and internal standards for moral conduct (Barkoukis et al., 2013; Lazuras, 2015; Lazuras, Barkoukis, & Tsorbatzoudis, 2015).

The remaining sections of this introduction will briefly describe the constructs of social-cognitive theory that have thus far characterized the study of doping, propose that some constructs specifically referring to team dynamics have yet to be incorporated in doping research, and summarize the main characteristics of an investigation designed to empirically validate a set of team instruments that might move social cognitive research on doping forward.

1. Social-cognitive theory and doping use: the contribution of self-regulatory efficacy and moral disengagement

The construct of self-efficacy lies at the core of social cognitive theory and reflects one's perceived capacity to effectively regulate goal-directed behaviours (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy emphasizes the dynamic relationship between personal resources and capacities to perform (or inhibit) a behaviour, and the possible influence that can be ascribed to the surrounding environment or context wherein a particular behaviour takes place (Bandura, 1997). With respect to behavioural conduct, the construct of self-regulatory efficacy represents one's perceived capacity to cope with or overcome particular circumstances or situations that might be deleterious for the self (e.g., peer pressure to engage in unhealthy behaviours). Consistent with this definition, higher self-regulatory efficacy should be more likely to prevent or minimize risky behaviours than should lower self-regulatory efficacy. Indeed, self-regulatory efficacy has been associated with positive behavioural outcomes in adolescence, such as prosocial behaviour, and with a reduction in delinquency and antisocial behaviour (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001).

Social cognitive theory also posits that moral reasoning plays an important role in the process of self-regulation by enabling people to monitor their intentions and action tendencies and to restrain those behaviours that are incongruent with personal standards or social norms (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; McAlister, Bandura, & Owen, 2006). However, people often display behaviours of questionable morality or even behaviours that can be deemed illegal in specific contexts, such as an athlete engaging in doping use. At times, people who transgress and find no support from their social environment (e.g., peer support, social norms) may try to justify their behaviours by resorting to personal self-regulatory capacities. Moral disengagement (MD) is a self-serving self-regulatory process whereby people who transgress still believe they are acting morally (Bandura, 1986; Bandura et al., 2001). In this perspective, MD serves a self-justification function that reduces the cognitive dissonance that may arise at those times people perform value-incongruent behaviours. Broadly, MD operates through distinct and interrelated mechanisms concerning a variety of behavioural dimensions such as the actual conduct (e.g., justifying the reprehensible conduct or comparing it to even worse misconduct), specific behavioural consequences (e.g., minimizing or ignoring the consequences of the misconduct), or the characteristics of the victim or target of the behaviour (e.g., dehumanizing or attributing blame to the victim). To date, a large body of evidence has shown that MD is prospectively associated with the display of immoral and anti-social behaviours, especially among adolescents (e.g., Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Hyde, Shaw, & Moilanen, 2010).

In the domain of doping research, Lucidi et al. (2008) have longitudinally examined the predictive contribution that self-regulatory efficacy and moral disengagement may have on people's doping intentions and use. Their findings showed that higher baseline MD scores and lower self-regulatory efficacy scores uniquely contributed to adolescent athletes' doping intentions and self-reported doping use, over and above the effects of other social cognitive predictors, such as doping attitudes and social norms (Lucidi et al., 2008). Other studies independently confirmed the association between moral disengagement and doping use (e.g., Boardley et al., 2014; Boardley, Grix, & Harkin, 2015) and the effects that self-regulatory efficacy (e.g., resisting social situations that solicit doping use) have on athletes' doping intentions across different ages and sport levels (e.g., Barkoukis et al. 2013; Lazuras, Barkoukis, Rodafinos, & Tsorbatzoudis, 2010; Lazuras et al., 2015).

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