

Study shows drug taking in team sports is not the norm

October 10 2013



Team Sport. Credit: Steve Lindridge/Commonwealth Games Scotland

Athletes are less likely to be tempted to take drugs if they are part of a team, according to research from sport experts at the University of Stirling.

Sport doping researcher Dr Paul Dimeo led the Stirling study to investigate if the team sport environment provided protection from the risk of doping compared with athletes who pursued individual [sports](#).

The research is published just weeks after a Scottish Rugby player was served with a two-year ban after admitting taking steroids, sparking claims banned substance use is rife in the amateur game.

The study, commissioned by the World Anti Doping Agency (WADA), compared the responses of 200 Scottish athletes competing in team, individual and hybrid sports.

He said: "It emerged that the team environment and the sense of belonging to a "team" of some description protects athletes as they fear both the shame of being caught and banned as well as the likely social marginalisation that would follow.

"We also found that there was a perceived distinction between individual and team sports with regard to the pressures influencing athletes to dope, particularly in terms of the influence or otherwise of a coach.

"Some team sport athletes were of the opinion the coach-athlete relationship may have a slightly different emphasis in individual sports as a result of greater one-to-one contact time, the coach may exercise more influence over the athlete.

"Team athletes may in part be 'protected' against doping because of the coach-created motivational environment focusing more on mastery and development than purely outcomes."

Most athletes in the study felt doping was liable to be of greater benefit to those competing in endurance and power-based sports than sports with a significant tactical component.

The study also highlighted a potential need to tighten existing anti-doping legislation. Article 11 of the WADA Code states that sanctions such as loss of points and disqualification can be imposed upon a team if

three or more people in the team are found guilty of a doping violation.

Few athletes were aware of the current legislation and feedback from the Scottish athletes have led to the authors of the study providing a number of recommendations.

Dr Dimeo added: "We can see the value in regulating against teams found to have a number of athletes who tested positive, for example clean athletes don't want to feel cheated if they lose to a team found to have a number of doped performers.

"And if team sport athletes are aware of the potential consequences then they might promote anti-doping within their own team. However, the sanctioning of teams could lead to clean athletes 'harbouring' dopers.

"We have noted a lack of awareness of this legislation and discrepancies in its implementation, but the fear of being caught and the shame it brings remain the strongest factors preventing [team](#) athletes from considering using banned substances."

WADA President John Fahey said: "This study has been very insightful in offering explanations as to why athletes chose different paths. While we must remember that this study offers just a snapshot of Scottish athletes, there is no doubt it paints an interesting picture of the influences [athletes](#) face, and how they decide to act in the company of their peers. The results of this study have presented us with some rich information that we can take forward to help shape future anti-doping conversation and policy."

More information: [Dr Dimeo BBC Viewpoint](#).

Provided by University of Stirling

Citation: Study shows drug taking in team sports is not the norm (2013, October 10) retrieved 17 July 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-drug-team-sports-norm.html>

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