

Cyclists in Tour de France dope because of high pressure to perform

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Cyclists who dope in the Tour de France do so for the same reason traders on Wall Street might cheat—because of extreme pressure to perform, according to a new University of California, Davis, study.

The study, co-authored by Professor Donald Palmer, an expert on organizational wrongdoing at the UC Davis Graduate School of Management, looked at [blood test](#) results of 197 of the best riders on 22 top teams that competed in the 2010 Tour de France. Researchers found that professional cycling is not much different than any big business.

"People who perform vital roles and for whom there are no or few substitutes will experience elevated pressure to engage in behaviors that bolster their performance, including wrongdoing," Palmer said.

"Protected" riders, the lead cyclists on each team who made up about 12 percent of the 2010 competitors, were more likely to have suspicious blood profiles than "protector" riders, who made up more than 50 percent of cyclists competing. Free agent cyclists, or those who have no specific role on their teams, had even less suspicious scores.

Tour de France cyclists apparently learned from each other, particularly their immediate teammates, in what wrongdoing they could engage without getting caught, Palmer said.

"We found that riders on teams whose most deviant teammate was very likely to be using performance-enhancing drugs were more likely to be using the drugs themselves," he said.

Additionally, when people were associated with cyclists who had been involved in doping but received no sanctions, they were emboldened to engage in wrongdoing. Conversely, they were dissuaded from using banned drugs if they were

associated with cyclists who had been involved with doping and were sanctioned.

In their study, researchers used "biological passport" information, or results of [cyclists'](#) blood tests for a variety of factors that were recorded by the Union Cycliste Internationale (International Cycling Union) before the 2010 Tour de France. The information was intended to be confidential and only used by the UCI to help design their standard doping controls, but the data giving each cyclist a "suspicion score" were later leaked to media and others.

Palmer said the data were useful for looking at behavior across a broad spectrum by individuals, teams and even by national origin. The suspicion scores can be likened to the use of earnings restatements to look at fraudulent earnings management, or the use of abnormally high stock option returns to study stock option backdating, he said.

"I'm interested in the factors that cause people to cross the line between right and wrong in organizations," he said. "Most research on this subject makes use of official statistics, which are biased, because a person is recorded as committing a crime not just because they did something wrong but also because somebody was watching and decided to prosecute them."

More information: The paper, "Drugs, Sweat, and Gears: An Organizational Analysis of Performance Enhancing Drug Use in the 2010 Tour de France" will be presented in August at the Academy of Management Annual Meeting in Florida, which gave it a "best paper proceedings" award for 2013.

Provided by UC Davis

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