Athletes’ beliefs about the legitimacy of anti-doping control procedures. A qualitative study

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Structure of anti-doping

WORLD ANTI-DOPING AGENCY

NADA
National Anti-Doping Agency

INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

FIFA

IAAF Athletics
Pillars of anti-doping system

- **Strict Control system**
  - Not able to refuse
  - Supervision during control
  - Whereabouts
  - Biological passport

- **Strict Liability**
  - Athletes are solely responsible for what's in their body despite whether there was an intention to cheat or not
Are anti-doping policies transparent?

- The IOC's True Ideals: Corruption and Greed

- RUSADA: FOR HEALTH AND FAIRNESS IN SPORT!
Research evidence

- Competitive and amateur athletes generally support a strict doping control system  
  Stamm et al., 2014

- In principle anti-doping policies are legitimate  
  Efverström et al., 2014

- Athletes question the legitimacy of the way the rules and principles are enforced in practice  
  Efverström et al., 2016

- Doping controls in other countries are not transparent  
  Overbye, 2015
Aim of the study

- The purpose of the present study was to investigate athletes’ beliefs about the anti-doping policies.

- A qualitative approach with the use of semi-structured interviews was used.
Method

Elite Greek athletes (n=18)

Individual sports (n=4)

Team sports (n=5)

Mixed sports (n=5)

Mixed sports (n=4)
Interview

- The questions about the legitimacy of anti-doping policies were based on:
  - past research on athletes’ perspectives of doping and anti-doping,
  - the psychological perspectives on legitimacy of regulatory authorities.
Procedure

- Interviews were performed by a trained former elite athlete
  - establishing rapport with participants
  - ensure higher participation rates
- Interviews were audio taped
- Interviews were verbatim transcribed
Results

The thematic analysis revealed 2 main themes:

- Legitimacy of anti-doping policies
  - ADP as prevention tool
  - ADP protect sport values
  - ADP restore image of sports

- Trustworthiness of anti-doping policies
  - Equal application of ADP
  - Fairness of ADP
Legitimacy of anti-doping policies

- **ADP as prevention tool**
  - **Personal responsibility**
    - ...it is the coach and the athlete himself that plays the most important role ....
  - **Sport authorities’ responsibility**
    - ...it is clearly the federations’ and the state’s responsibility to combat doping ...
Legitimacy of anti-doping policies

ADP protect sport values

The values of sport could be preserved, but unfortunately in the way this system exists and operates it seems that they are not protected.
Legitimacy of anti-doping policies

ADP restore image of sport

anti doping policies don’t help the restoration of the image of sports since cases of doping continue to exist
Trustworthiness of anti-doping policies

Equal application of ADP

- Personal
  - ...you are being targeted, they control you more often....

- Sport
  - ...there is a big difference from one sport to another...

- International
  - I trust the international more than the national, but it depends on the country
I don’t trust it because there is always the possibility of unfairness.
Conclusions

- Athletes reported rather negative beliefs about the ADP
- Sport authorities should further justify the importance of ADP
- Sport authorities should minimize inequalities in the application of ADP
Thank you for your attention