

Anti-doping – a legitimate effort?

Elite athletes' perspectives on policy and practice

av

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Abstract:

The global anti-doping enterprise in sport is a comprehensive system in which the athlete is at the centre of regulation, scrutiny and control. There is limited knowledge about the implications of this extensive control system for athletes and about how athletes perceive the system; little is known about possible consequences of these implications and perceptions for the legitimacy of the system. The overall aim of this thesis is to analyse the legitimacy of global anti-doping policy and practice from the perspectives of international elite athletes.

Four articles are included in this compilation thesis. The first illustrates, based on a discourse analytical approach, how claims for legitimacy of the anti-doping system are produced in policy documents aimed at athletes. The second explores the perceptions and legitimacy of anti-doping policy and practice through a survey aimed at elite athletes in different sports and from different regions of the world. The third article examines, through an interview study, how athletes in different contexts experience the practice of anti-doping and what consequences this may have for the system's legitimacy. The interview study was also the basis for the fourth article, focusing on the athletes' experiences and perceptions of their opportunities for compliance and how this is related to their view of the system's legitimacy. Using the four articles as a basis, the analysis of legitimacy within the anti-doping system is expanded in the thesis through an overarching analytical framework inspired by David Beetham.

The results show that the legitimacy of the policy documents is based on essentially authoritative, but also rational, arguments for justifying the anti-doping enterprise. Elite athletes are generally in favour of anti-doping policy and the principle that doping should be prohibited. However, when the rules are implemented into practice, problems to do with lack of procedural justice arise which may have an impact on the system's legitimacy. Procedures in the system are perceived as having a negative effect on sportspersons' private life, and as ineffective and unequally implemented across the world; also, athletes have little influence over decision-making processes. Anti-doping practice is moreover perceived to cause structural inequalities due to inequality in access to technology, education and knowledge as well as supportive systems. Most athletes wish to comply with the rules, but many struggle with lack of control and have limited scope for taking responsibility regarding compliance with the doping rules. Even when athletes are dutiful and perform acts that confer legitimacy to the rules and the authorities, some experiences and perceptions could endanger the legitimacy of antidoping, as seen in the overall legitimacy analysis of the thesis. Athletes' perceptions of inequality, ineffectiveness and lack of leeway can be interpreted as a lack of rule conformity to the anti-doping authority. There also appears to be a lack of shared normative beliefs between sportspersons and the anti-doping authorities, as many athletes feel that their opinions are not taken into account. Decision-making processes that do not pay attention to the perceptions of those involved can result in a discrepancy between the rules and the norms.

The international anti-doping system is a major international enterprise with comprehensive rules that need to be applied equally around the world, and that also need to be legitimated in different countries where athletes have different conditions to comply with the regulations. In this thesis, I have shown that these different conditions have consequences for the ability to comply with the rules and also for the application of the regulations. The far-reaching rules mean that procedures within the system are experienced as causing a number of negative consequences. I have shown that this poses a risk to the legitimacy of the system if these problems are not addressed.

Keywords: Anti-doping, Doping in sports, Legitimacy, Elite athletes, Compliance, WADA

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