Development and Evaluation of Scenario-based Anti-Doping Education

In the midst of the recent scandals around elite sport, the need to preserve the public image of clean sport and to protect clean athletes from doping is pressing. Sir Craig Reddie, the President of the World Anti-Doping Agency, recently stated that values-based education is "one of the best weapons in the battle for clean sport". The core concept of values-based anti-doping education is creating a clean sport culture by promoting the intrinsic values of the Spirit of Sport. However, literature evidence suggests that these values are endorsed by most athletes even when doping appears as an acceptable mean to a desired end; and co-exists with the values attached to performance excellence.

Funded by the International Olympic Committee, the SMART project (SenseMaking in Anti-doping Reasoning Training’) aims to develop a case-based training programme, which will equip athletes with improved evaluation- and decision-making skills and help them to navigate in novel, highly complex and ambiguous ethical situations. The project challenges the inherent assumption that 'doping happens when one is turning a back to the values inherent in the spirit of sport'. We argue that individuals can maintain beliefs in the global values such as fairness, joy and camaraderie at the abstract level and justify acting against them in specific situational when facing day-to-day challenges (also recognised as pressure points in WADA’s ALPHA). We propose that (1) this situational ‘translation’ of values can be captured via 'sensemaking' processes; (2) 'sensemaking' is a trainable skill; and (3) this training can be the integral part of anti-doping education through scenario-based learning. Turning away from targeting the 'dopers', sensemaking training represents a positive approach to anti-doping, benefitting all athletes.

Recognising the complexity of the research problem, the project utilises a state-of-the-art mixed-methods research design combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies; and Multi-site Participatory Action Research to facilitate community involvement and co-creation. To ensure ecological validity, we will actively involve current or recently retired competitive athletes in the development of the SMART module as co-researchers.

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