

The Use of Pharmaceuticals by Track and Field Athletes

P. Georgakopoulos, G. Papadopoulos, N. Sitaras and J.S. Papadopoulos

Department of Experimental Pharmacology, Medical School, University of Athens, M. Asias 75, 115 27 Athens, Greece

AIM

This study assessed the use of pharmaceuticals by track and field elite athletes.

METHODS

One hundred fourteen (114) male and female athletes (mean age 23.22 ± 3.22 ys and 22.33 ± 3.76 ys respectively) among the top 15 in the national classification were asked to self-report about a) the preferable pharmaceuticals used to enhance their performance, b) the person who advised them to use these substances and c) the expected benefits.

RESULTS

The results of this study, suggested that:

I. 91.03% of males and 90.91% of females athletes use pharmaceuticals regularly, especially Vitamins (92.30% and 90.90%), followed by iron tablets (78.79% and 51.28%), electrolytes (51.28% and 40.90%); food supplements (34.61% and 25.75%), Proteins (23.07% and 13.63%), illicit substances (3.03% of females only)

II. The majority of males take the pharmaceuticals by themselves (64.10%) and of females by their coaches (71.21%).

III. Among the most powerful motivations for both males and females were «the good performance in a competition» (87.17% and 90.90%), followed by «to gain a medal in National Competitions» (73.07% and 78.79%), «to gain a medal in international competitions» (39.74% and 19.70%), «the entrance in the National Academy of Physi-

cal Education and Sport» (34.61% and 37.88%), «to get money» (28.20% and 34.85%).

IV. No use of illicit substances reported 23.07% of males and 9.09% of females, «fear of adverse reactions» 22.23% and 27.28% respectively, «fear of punishment» 16.67% and 0%, «negative advisement of my coach» 22.22% and 27.27%.

CONCLUSIONS

The use of pharmaceuticals is worldwide, by competitive male and female athletes (91.03% and 90.91% respectively), even if most of them have questionable results on enhancing the athletic performance.

Athletes, coaches and sport leaders, (and no medical personnel) are the most significant factors that influence the decision of athletes about the use of these substances.

The main target of every athlete is to get a good performance, a medal in national or international competition, «the entrance» in the university or to get more money.

The non-athletic «offers» make an athlete indifferent about adverse effects on his/her health (22.22% and 27.27%); a small percentage of male athletes only (16.67%) consider the punishment as a factor of no use.

Only 23.07% of males and 16.67% of females self-reported no use of illicit or banned substances, a fact that enhances our opinion about the worldwide use of them by the elite athletes, even if the athletes don't admit they are they are taking drugs in the fear of prosecution.