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Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Efverström, A., Bäckström, Å., Ahmadi, N., Hoff, D. (2016)

Contexts and conditions for a level playing field: Elite athletes' perspectives on anti-doping in practice.

Performance Enhancement & Health, 5(2): 77-85

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.peh.2016.08.001>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

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<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:gih:diva-4549>

Contexts and conditions for a level playing field: elite athletes' perspectives on anti-doping in practice

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Abstract

Implementation of global anti-doping regulations was intended to provide a level playing field for all athletes entering sports competitions. However, studies have shown that the worldwide harmonization of rules has not been entirely efficacious. For instance, great variation has been found in how anti-doping organizations implement anti-doping regulations, and it has also been shown that athletes distrust the equivalence of the worldwide rules as regards their effects. The purpose of the present article is to examine how elite athletes from different contexts experience anti-doping procedures and to analyse the legitimacy of anti-doping practice. In order to capture a variety of voices and perspectives, 13 elite athletes from five different continents and three international sports federations were interviewed. The analysis shows that when global anti-doping policy is implemented in different contexts and under different conditions, inequities and structural injustices emerge concerning infrastructure, knowledge and support at the individual athlete level. These consequences may have implications for the legitimacy of anti-doping work, because the existence of procedural justice may be called into question. We therefore suggest that anti-doping policy-making should be based on taking into account these different conditions and being aware of the perspectives that underpin regulations intended to be applied global.

Keywords: Legitimacy; Anti-doping; Harmonization; Doping in sports; Sports policy

1. Introduction

A level playing field for athletes all over the world has been the ambition of anti-doping efforts during the late 20th century. This was clearly manifested by establishment of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in 1999. One important objective of the global work against doping in sports is that policies and rules be the same, i.e. harmonized, for athletes worldwide (WADA, 2015a). Harmonized anti-doping practice may be described as the very essence of the commonly used notion of “a level playing field” for the athletes, thus enabling them to compete in sports on equal terms. Nevertheless, studies have shown that the harmonization process has not been entirely efficacious (see, e.g., Hanstad & Houlihan, 2015; Houlihan, 2014), meaning that anti-doping practices still result in different conditions for athletes acting in different contexts.

Imposition of global regulations, such as supranational anti-doping policies, is inevitably associated with numerous challenges. It requires consideration of local variation in resources and assets, taking equity aspects into account, as well as the cooperation of authorities at different levels (Palmer, 2013). However, the anti-doping programme largely consists of elements taken from existing anti-doping practices in Western Europe and North America (Houlihan, 2014). In addition, the globalized work against doping in sports has been called technologically driven governance from the so-called First World (Jin-kyung, 2005) – governance that may also serve to increase inequities across world regions. There is reason to question whether sufficient attention has been paid to different contexts and conditions, i.e. the setting for the to-be-levelled playing field, and whether total harmonization is achievable using the current policy approach. The key players on this field are athletes worldwide, who

are expected to adhere to regulations, keep to procedures and are the targets of sanctions when rules are broken. Because the perceived fairness of the procedures used by an authority to exercise influence may have implications for these procedures' legitimacy (Suchman, 1995), it is important that athletes' voices be heard when an anti-doping system is being built and developed.

The purpose of the present article is to qualitatively examine how elite athletes experience anti-doping procedures and to analyse the legitimacy of anti-doping practice. The research questions posed are: How do 13 elite athletes from five different continents and three international sports federations perceive the global equivalence of the anti-doping programme? What are these athletes' everyday life experiences of the conditions under which they participate in anti-doping procedures? By examining our interview data on the athletes' perceptions and experiences in relation to theories of procedural justice, we aim to analyse the legitimacy of anti-doping in practice. Although we base our findings on a fairly small sample, we are able to make theoretical generalizations and comparisons with previous empirical studies.

1.1 Legitimacy

Theories of legitimacy offer a useful tool for analysing perceptions and experiences of anti-doping as a phenomenon, and in the present article we will use the concept of procedural justice in our analyses of the legitimacy of anti-doping work practice. Thus far, theoretically grounded analysis of the legitimacy of anti-doping is an approach that has, with few exceptions, attracted little interest on the part of both policy-makers and researchers (McDermott, 2016). Yet athletes' perceptions of the legitimacy of anti-doping have been found to be one of the factors underlying their attitudes towards the use of doping substances (Donovan, Egger, Kapernick, & Mendoza, 2002; Jalleh, Donovan, & Jobling, 2014).

Furthermore, Jalleh et al. (2014) emphasized that the legitimacy of anti-doping programmes is an ignored area and that preventive work would benefit from focusing more on such issues.

The concept of legitimacy can be understood as “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (Suchman 1995, 574). According to this definition, the *actions* of an entity are of central importance to perceptions of legitimacy, which speaks in favour of research that examines how those affected by anti-doping practices perceive these actions. Concerning actions within a social order, procedural justice has been found to be an important element of legitimacy (Tyler & Jackson 2014, Tyler 2006).

Perceptions of procedural justice and, in turn, legitimacy are thought to affect compliance with regulations (cf. Levi, Sacks, & Tyler, 2009; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tankebe, 2013; Tyler, 2001, 2006). This so-called social-values-based motivation, where a legitimate authority gains compliance, is distinct from following rules to avoid punishment, which is seen as an instrumental approach (Suchman, 1995).

Perceptions of procedural justice and, in turn, legitimacy depend partly on how members of a group, within a social order, view the decision-making procedures used in the context (Tyler & Jackson 2014; Tyler, 2006). It is important that members feel they are involved in decision-making, have the opportunity to discuss their opinions and have them considered, and experience these processes as neutral and independent (Tyler, 2006). Interpersonal aspects have also been found to be essential for how members perceive procedural justice. This aspect includes members experiencing fair and respectful treatment of themselves as individuals as well as of their rights. Social connections between the superior and the subordinate are valued in particular for the signals they send about respect for the group and its members (Zelditch, 2001). Judgements of procedural justice are also dependent on how members evaluate the authority’s motives as well as whether the outcome of the procedures is considered fair

(Tyler, 2006). Examining elite athletes' views on anti-doping procedures based on aspects of procedural justice is one way of improving our understanding of the legitimacy of the system.

1.2 Global harmonization

Anti-doping authorities have worked to create a global, level playing field by harmonizing rules and procedures in the regulatory document the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC) and by monitoring implementation of these regulations across the world. A recent indication of the emphasis put on harmonization processes is WADA's appointment of the Compliance Review Committee in 2015 (WADA 2016a). This committee's task is to monitor the compliance of signatories, such as National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs) or National Olympic Committees (NOCs). Another measure taken is partnership programmes between NADOs from different regions meant to strengthen compliance with the Code. In these programmes, expertise is to be transferred to countries that are thought to need to develop their anti-doping programme (Hanstad & Houlihan 2015; WADA 2015b). Making rules and conditions the same for the world's athletes is, by all accounts, a major issue for anti-doping authorities.

Research has also shown the difficulties and deficiencies of harmonizing anti-doping rules. In surveys with NADOs, significant variation has been found in the existence of registered testing pools¹, handling of the whereabouts system, conditions of athletes' availability for testing and sanction requirements (Dikic, Samardzic, & Mc Namee, 2011; Hanstad, Skille, & Loland, 2010). These studies emphasize that the legitimacy of regulating bodies and their rules is threatened when there are obvious discrepancies in how the rules are enforced. There have been various explanations for why rules are not applied equally by organizations, despite signed agreements. One explanation focuses on the shortcomings of countries or

¹ 'The pool of highest-priority Athletes established separately at the international level by International Federations and at the national level by National Anti-Doping Organizations, who are subject to focused In-Competition and Out-of-Competition Testing' (WADA, 2014).

organizations when it comes to rule implementation. For example, anti-doping authorities might choose not to comply based on cost-benefit calculations (Houlihan, 2014; Mazanov & Connor, 2010). They might be unable to comply due to a lack of resources or political instability, or they might be inadvertently non-compliant owing to their, e.g., low competence (Houlihan, 2014). Others have instead focused on the premises for policy-making as well as on which and whose perspective is allowed to inform the decision-making procedures for anti-doping regulations (see, e.g., Henne, 2015; Jin-kyung, 2005; McDermott, 2016; Palmer, 2013). This explanation takes into account the fact that differing contexts influence how the work against drugs in sports is understood and delivered as well as the fact that Western perspectives and practices have been predominant in anti-doping settings. Just as for policy-making in general, specific contextual conditions have impacted the design and implementation of anti-doping rules.

Whether discrepancies between nations' and organizations' anti-doping work are considered to spring from difficulties in implementation processes or from flaws related to variation in policy-making contexts and conditions, we can conclude that anti-doping work at a global level is not fully harmonized and that this may have implications for the legitimacy of anti-doping. The question of harmonization and global equity in anti-doping work needs to be further elucidated, not least from the athletes' perspective.

1.3 Anti-doping at the individual level

Although regulations, harmonization and compliance are dealt with at an international and national level as well as at an organizational level, the everyday effects of anti-doping work mainly fall upon the individual athlete in the form of responsibility. A vast number of anti-doping obligations are aimed at the athlete. These range from, e.g., doping testing in- and out-of-competition, keeping oneself informed about the prohibited substances and methods list as

well as filing whereabouts information, to having testing variables collected in biological passports. The risk associated with having a strong focus on the individual in the anti-doping sphere is that the effects of broader, structural forces will be disregarded (Henne, 2015). Concerning their management of both sporting and anti-doping commitments, athletes are affected by actors at different levels: from coaches to representatives of national and international federations. In several studies, athlete support personnel have been found to influence athletes' decision-making and doping behaviour (Donovan et al., 2002; Jalleh et al., 2014; Huybers & Mazanov, 2012) Furthermore, it has been suggested that support personnel often lack knowledge about, or fail to pay sufficient attention to, the rules regulating doping in sports, something that has been emphasized as a risk for the athletes whom they advise and support (see, e.g., Backhouse & McKenna, 2011; Dikic, McNamee, Günter, Samardzic Markovic, & Vajgic, 2013; Engelberg & Moston, 2015; Mazanov, Backhouse, Connor, Hemphill, & Quirk, 2014).

One prerequisite for having a legitimate anti-doping system is that athletes regard the regulations and procedures as fair (Tyler, 2006), believe that the same rules apply to all competitors, and see that the terms for fulfilling the responsibility that comes with the role of athlete, according to the WADC, are the same for everyone. Athletes' perceptions and experiences of anti-doping activities have mainly been studied in separate countries in Western Europe, and results from this research show that athletes perceive discrepancies in how regulations are implemented in different countries and federations (Bloodworth & McNamee, 2010; Christiansen & Møller, 2007; de Hon, Eijs, & Havenga, 2011; Hanstad, Skille, & Thurston, 2009; Overbye & Wagner, 2013). These studies have concluded that perceptions of unequal conditions may cause athletes to become less compliant with the system when they are experiencing unfairness, although theories of legitimacy are not employed in these studies to any significant extent. Beyond the focus on Western Europe,

some studies have examined athletes' perceptions of anti-doping in other parts of the world and done so from explicit legitimacy perspectives. An Australian interview study (McDermott, 2016) showed that sportspersons perceived lack of fairness in relation to differences in anti-doping organizations' implementation of testing procedures, or when organizations do not supply athletes with relevant education. This was emphasized as having a negative effect on the legitimacy of anti-doping work. Additionally, a quantitative international study showed that athletes question the equity of the worldwide implementation of several anti-doping elements, which was considered to put the legitimacy of anti-doping work at risk (Efverström et al., 2016).

Existing research has thus predominantly been carried out in the Western world and using a quantitative approach. This reveals the need for qualitative studies focusing on procedures and their fairness and equal conditions globally, as well as on their implications for the legitimacy of anti-doping work. Here, we address this gap by analysing the experiences of athletes from various regions of the world, our aim being to better understand the terms of a legitimate anti-doping system.

2. Method

In order to capture individual elite athletes' everyday experiences, their understanding of anti-doping work and perceptions of procedures, we have chosen to carry out qualitative interviews (cf. Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The methodology applied has provided a multifaceted understanding of and insight into the societal phenomena of anti-doping owing to the rich and detailed empirical data we were able to collect about the subject (see, eg., Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

2.1 Participants and Procedures

The present study is part of a larger research project focusing on the legitimacy of anti-doping work from the athletes' perspective. The interviewees were recruited in connection with an international survey on elite athletes' perception of anti-doping (Efverström et al., 2016). The survey respondents had the option to register for participation in a related interview study on the same subject, which was a feasible way of gaining access to our target group: elite athletes from different regions of the world. Out of the 261 elite athletes from four sports federations who participated in the survey, we were able to conduct interviews with 13 athletes. The sample consisted of six female and seven male athletes belonging to the international federations of athletics (IAAF), basketball (FIBA) and skiing (FIS). The interviewees came from five different continents: North America, South America, Europe, Africa and Asia. In the results section, the athletes will be referred to by code (e.g. i1 refers to interviewee number 1), sex, age and region. The sample could be seen as limited with regard to size, but the kind of dispersion of participants over regions and sports achieved here is rare in studies with elite athletes. The purposive sampling procedure provided participants who were relevant in relation to the study aim (Bryman, 2012). Hence, the findings provide insight into the perceptions and experiences of a wide range of athletes from nearly all regions of the world.

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process,² and the participants' informed consent was obtained prior to the interviews. The interviews followed a semi-structured design to allow for flexibility regarding form and to give participants opportunities to elaborate on their views (Bryman, 2012). At the same time, the design helped to ensure that all interviews covered the same topic areas and were conducted using similar wording. The

² The research was approved by the Regional Ethics Board in Uppsala, Sweden.

interview guide was designed to collect data on topic areas such as perceptions of equity, experiences of different anti-doping elements, and the athletes' influence in anti-doping settings. A test interview preceded the interviews, which resulted in a few changes to the interview guide and increased the interviewer's familiarity with the interview procedures. The interviews were conducted during the spring of 2015. Three of them were conducted face-to-face and ten via video call using a web camera. As the interviewees were geographically dispersed, video calls allowed for verbal communication including facial expressions and, to some extent, body language. Although a video call interview will never be able to replace a face-to-face interview, the possibility of seeing the interviewee enables the interviewer to note feelings of, for example, discomfort or confusion (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Bryman, 2012). In both cases, the focus of the interviews provided comprehensive data on the athletes' experiences and understandings of anti-doping work.

The interviews lasted for approximately one hour, and no differences were experienced between live versus video call situations in terms of content or atmosphere. In fact, during the analysis, the authors had trouble telling the difference between the transcripts in this regard. The majority of the interviews were held in English. One interview was conducted via an interpreter, and in 12 of the 13 interviews, either the interviewer or both the interviewer and the interviewee were not speaking their native tongue. Foreign language use in qualitative interviewing may have implications for the accuracy and authenticity of the data (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). On the other hand, the use of interpreters for all interviews with non-English native speakers would also have potentially affected the outcome by introducing a third party (Welch & Piekkari, 2006). In cases of possible language deficits, we have chosen to disregard the statement, whereas in some cases we have clarified obvious grammatical mistakes.

2.2 Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to explore the interview data. This offered flexibility and the possibility to provide a detailed and deep, yet complex, account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic process was driven by the study aim (Patton, 2015) and aided by the use of a software programme for qualitative data analysis, from transcription to the structuring of overarching themes. Transcription of the data was in itself part of the interpretation and contributed to a thorough understanding of the data (cf. Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). The transcripts were read through repeatedly before preliminary coding was conducted. Each part of the data was given equal attention and patterns found in the material were continuously compared with the new data that were being processed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although we did not intend to focus on similarities and differences, when asked about practices and experiences the interviewees often reasoned using comparisons. These comparisons were framed as divergences in anti-doping practices in different *contexts*, and they appeared as dissimilarities, sometimes expressed as inequities, in relation to *conditions* of various sorts.

The coding of these findings was successively refined through an iterative process (Bryman, 2012) and formed the basis for the structuring of sub-themes. Athletes from the same region of the world often expressed the same viewpoints concerning how they experienced the anti-doping programme, and these viewpoints could be seen as contradictory to the views of athletes from other regions. These signs of disparate experiences of the anti-doping work appeared repeatedly in relation to different aspects of the subject. An example of two opposite codes is ‘We need support regarding the List³’ and ‘No problem with the List, support is there’. Another example of two closely connected codes is ‘ASP (Athlete Support Personnel) have too much control’ vs. ‘ASP provide good help’. These codes were grouped with other codes to form the two sub-themes ‘Support is good/sufficient’ and ‘Lack of support and/or

³ WADA’s List of prohibited substances and methods

own control'. The sub-themes provided building blocks for the main themes, which were also defined and refined, both concerning the data within each theme and the distinguishing features between the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on these sub-themes, three main themes were elaborated: infrastructure, knowledge and support. The main themes were interpreted and analysed with the help of existing literature and theoretical concepts.

3. Findings and Discussion

One precondition for perceiving anti-doping practice as legitimate is that procedures are imposed fairly and that the same regulations apply to all (cf. Donovan et al., 2002; Jalleh et al., 2014; Tyler, 2006). When the interviewees were asked direct questions about their experiences and perceptions of the fairness and equity of anti-doping work, some athletes had confidence in the work being done and some were more critical concerning the equivalence of the conditions globally. The trustful and confident attitudes focused on the athletes' own experiences of practical procedures in different countries, as well as thoughts about how the anti-doping programme functions in different countries. The more critical voices took up experiences of procedures that had caused them to question whether the conditions are equal for all athletes; they also mentioned their perceptions of different levels of professionalism among testing agencies. Lack of harmonization at an organizational level has been shown in previous research (Dikic et al., 2011; Hanstad et al., 2010). It has also been shown that elite athletes have doubts about the global equivalence of the anti-doping work (e.g. de Hon et al., 2011; Hanstad et al., 2009; Overbye & Wagner, 2013) and that this distrust could constitute a threat to the legitimacy of the work as a whole (Efverström et al., 2016). Procedural justice, with perceived fair actions, is an important component of the legitimacy of a social order (Tyler, 2006, Tyler & Jackson 2014), such as anti-doping. Consequently, when athletes

believe that competitors in other contexts are not subject to equally stringent anti-doping procedures, which was the case for some of the interviewees in the present study, the legitimacy of the work is put at risk. A striking finding was that many of the interviewees stated that anti-doping was not an issue that athletes discussed when they got together. This might contribute to the assumption that there are equal conditions for all. If the subject is not discussed, and athletes do not learn about others' conditions, it is not far-fetched for them to believe that their own conditions are standard.

However, our comprehensive material, which enabled us to make comparisons of conditions and contexts for athletes from different parts of the world, points to an anti-doping playing field that is not level. As we will show, the globally equivalent rules result in different conditions for athletes in different contexts, in relation to infrastructure, knowledge and support.

3.1 Contexts and conditions: Infrastructure

It is of great importance to the legitimacy of the anti-doping system that athletes experience equitably carried out procedures with fair outcomes in everyday anti-doping practice (cf. Donovan et al., 2002; Tyler, 2006). When the interviewees were asked about their daily lives and experiences, their responses revealed divergences in practices regarding the structures and systems for matters such as services and information, i.e., the infrastructure. In the analysis, it became obvious that the athletes were experiencing very different conditions concerning basic and practical matters, such as issues of technology, which had led to unequal opportunities to be compliant. Having access to a computer and a functional Internet connection, as well as a home address, are important prerequisites for being able to follow the anti-doping regulations, for example, for handling whereabouts information and looking up information on rules or the prohibited list.

Among our interviewees, there were athletes who apparently seldom used computers, which may cause problems with filing and updating whereabouts information and staying informed on rules. Here, one of the athletes brought up the problem of keeping updated on the prohibited list:

... It's hard for almost all athletes in [my country], because, as for me, at least I know something about computers. So I use the computer and they publish the list. But the other athletes do not know. They are not educated on the... on the prohibited list. So, someone goes to the chemist, the pharmacist, to buy some medicine for headache or... for some problem. And then it happens... you are caught. You have tested positive ... and you did not intend to. That's the main problem. (i6, male, 26-30 years old, Africa)

The implicit comparisons this interviewee was making indicate that athletes in other countries (elsewhere) have better opportunities to keep informed due to better access to technology.

Likewise, another athlete implicitly referred to the situation in his own country as being different to that in other countries with regard to technical problems in keeping oneself informed about regulations and filing whereabouts information:

... And I think it would be useful to get to this kind of information about what we are supposed to do and how it should be done. And also, in my country, I have difficulties with the Internet. It is not always I can get access to the Internet to read more. And I normally get better access to the Internet when I am somewhere else, in other countries. ... Internet can really be a problem, because I had such cases when I couldn't fill in the information for WADA, just because of Internet problems. (i9, male, 21-25 years old, Central Asia)

In contrast to these views on infrastructure, there were athletes who talked about the technological side of keeping oneself informed, filing whereabouts, etc., as highly unproblematic. For example, when talking about the risk of taking forbidden substances in conjunction with medication, one of the interviewees emphasized that:

If I were to get really really sick, I would for sure ... call somebody, before I got anything, to make sure that what I was taking was legal. And actually, in [my country] there's a website that is really user-friendly [...] you can type in the ingredient of something and then it will tell you if it is prohibited or not, prohibited on the updated list. So again, it's very very user-friendly and I ... don't get stressed over it. (i2, male, 31-35 years old, North America)

Thus, there are substantial differences in the outcome of anti-doping procedures that are tied to the athletes' ability to follow regulations, which depends on their access to technology. Further, filing whereabouts information requires that an athlete can state an address, often a home address, where he/she can be reached for out-of-competition testing. In some of the interviews, it was obvious that this was not always possible. One interviewee talked about his situation in the beginning when he filed whereabouts information, and illustrated the difficulties in this way:

I think the maps in [my country] are not like... the maps in some other countries. .. You can't fill in your address ... to your home address... that will allow the anti-doping officials of my federation to come. Here in [my country] it's a bit difficult to explain to a person the right route to your house. So that was my main difficulty during my first year. But for now they understand where I'm staying, so they can come without any difficulty, any time. (i7, male, 21-25 years old, Africa)

The athlete's comparison of his country with other countries with regard to infrastructure shows his perception of divergent contexts and conditions for athletes. We can assume that there are greater risks of failure to provide whereabouts information and of taking prohibited substances if technology and infrastructure are lacking, thus denying the athlete the support that the rules presuppose. The 2009 version of the World Anti-Doping Code had stricter rules concerning whereabouts information, which caused technical and logistic difficulties (Houlihan, 2014). When new regulations are imposed there are seldom any accompanying resources, and this has been identified as a possible reason for variability in organizations' implementation processes (Hanstad et al., 2010). For example, Houlihan (2014) pointed out that 'some NADOs in central and Eastern Europe are under-resourced to such an extent that their capacity to operate effectively is seriously in doubt' (268). In fact, the development of anti-doping regulations has been found to be technology driven and shaped by technological developments (Henne, 2014), which puts organizations with scarce resources at a disadvantage. These circumstances, found at the organizational level, have repercussions at the level of the individual athletes. Sportspersons from regions with limited means will have

more difficulties in meeting the requirements and run a greater risk of breaching the rules.

These obvious differences in matters of infrastructure could cause athletes to question whether the outcomes of the procedures are fair, which is an important aspect of the notion of procedural justice and, in turn, legitimacy.

An additional infrastructure-related issue that prevents athletes from following anti-doping regulations is language. Some interviewees mentioned language barriers as a problem for acquiring information and communication on anti-doping matters. This is another aspect of the anti-doping context that may have an effect on the legitimacy of the system, as fair treatment and being able to make one's view heard are important elements of experiencing procedural justice (Tyler, 2006). Examples of language difficulties were provided by this athlete:

And, of course I would like to have more information about the rules, how the tests are carried out and which are the right rules. Because, often there are these rules, but they are in English, they are not translated [...]. The information about the rules should be given to Russian athletes in Russian, to French athletes in French, it would be much easier also. Because, often athletes are disqualified, but they don't know why. They don't really understand what has happened... It is very common that athletes do not get the right information; they don't know their own rights. And when they are disqualified they don't really know why. And nobody can explain it to them. And it could also happen that they are cheating because of this, in some way. ...they don't really understand what is wrong and what is right. (i9, male, 21-25 years old, Central Asia)

He pointed out some effects of language barriers and the potential inequities resulting from them. Another athlete (i10, female, 31-35 years old, South America) talked about how language could be a problem with regard to influencing and taking part in the work of governing bodies in sports, e.g. an athletes' commission, because the representatives of different organizations were mostly from English-speaking countries. In both these examples, there are obvious implicit comparisons with athletes who have the advantage of being able to use their native language. Thus, there are reasons to pay attention to linguistic barriers to athletes' access to information and ability to communicate and participate in decision-making procedures. Limited access to readily understandable information could complicate the

situation for the athletes and increase the risk of inadvertent failures. Further, language bias also sends signals about who is at the centre of the anti-doping arena and who is at the periphery, which could be perceived as unfair and disrespectful treatment and, therefore, procedurally unjust (cf. Tyler & Jackson 2014; Tyler, 2006). It must also be considered a serious problem if language prevents athletes from certain regions from having an influence on anti-doping settings. Fairness in and the possibility to participate in decision-making procedures are important elements of procedural justice (Tyler, 2006). In summary, different contexts and conditions regarding infrastructure issues in athletes' daily lives can reduce the legitimacy of anti-doping work.

3.2 Contexts and conditions: Knowledge

Athletes seem to have different perceptions of their access to knowledge and education about anti-doping, which may have implications for assessments of procedural justice and legitimacy (cf. Tyler, 2006). Some respondents very clearly expressed the need for education in their region, while others were confident about the regulations and how education was organized for athletes in their own country. There were athletes who showed great awareness of education programmes and the procedures for taking the courses. Concerning the degree of education and information provided, one athlete said:

Yeah, every year I have to do a course, an anti-doping course ...online. ...before I get any support from the [...] government for my sport. And that's pretty extensive ... it's a few hours, and I do it every year. Even though it's the same stuff ... (laughter) ... and it seems like it's annoying and we all complain about it, but at the same time ... is it that annoying? Again, when you look at sport like a privilege ... you sit down with your computer for two hours – like I kill two hours at my computer, daily, looking at like, Twitter and Instagram ... (laughter) - so it's not that bad. (i2, male, 31-35 years old, North America)

The quote offers insight into the athlete's awareness of the procedures of anti-doping education. This athlete also agreed willingly to participate in the annual educational effort,

though he did not seem to believe the training was of great importance, because it consists of elements already well known to the athletes.

As a counterpoint to the view that the education programmes are a regular and rather unproblematic part of athletes' duties, there were also perceptions of a major need for knowledge and education. An example of this opposing view is when one of the interviewees stressed the importance of education at the end of the interview, when asked if she wanted to add anything:

... Yeah, the only thing is that they have to...do much more about education. And I think that they have ...they have our contact details, they have to inform athletes about ... they have to send us ... the book containing the drugs that are banned. So ... they have to ship in in everything, for us to be informed in a good way, before they ... before someone is using the drugs. They have to get us first. Education is the best thing. (i5, female, 26-30 years old, Africa)

The stance that athletes need to "be educated" was expressed by several of the athletes.

Regarding filing of whereabouts information, this interviewee emphasized that some athletes have difficulties carrying out the task:

I think there are not so many [that file whereabouts information]...and some of them are done by their managers [...] because some of them are not so educated. (i6, male, 26-30 years old, Africa)

Apparently, athletes perceive a lack of knowledge about anti-doping, and several of the interviewees pointed out young athletes as an important target group for education, as they were believed to have particularly low levels of knowledge about anti-doping programmes. In response to questions about organizations' involvement in anti-doping education, some of the interviewees stressed the lack of responsibility of their national federations. One athlete reported that the shortcomings of his federation had caused him to violate the doping rules, after which he was banned. Concerning education and who he thinks is responsible for providing anti-doping education, he responded:

I think it's the national Federation, Athletics Federation of the nation. But they have not been doing so. Even... when I went for the case, the case before I got banned, I asked them what I should have done. I

was told I should have got the therapeutic use exception, the TUE, but some of them didn't know what TUE means. They didn't know what TUE is, so... I could be blamed, and some athletes are banned because of ignorance from the National Federation. (i6, male, 26-30 years old, Africa)

In total, the athletes who emphasized the need for education were rather critical of their national federations, which they felt did not comply with such a commitment. If athletes lack knowledge owing to their organizations' low emphasis on education, these athletes' daily lives may be more complicated and they may have an increased risk of inadvertent doping. When some of the tasks that an athlete is responsible for, such as filing whereabouts information, must be managed by another party due to lack of education, the individual athlete's control of the situation may be compromised. Furthermore, if this party makes mistakes, it is still the individual athlete who risks punishment. These results on unequal access to knowledge could have implications for the legitimacy of anti-doping work. As McDermott (2016) pointed out, if the current anti-doping strategy, with its deterrence and sanction approach, is to be viewed as legitimate, it is imperative that athletes are educated about the rules and their obligations. Athletes who perceive they are not receiving the education they require may question whether the treatment from authorities is fair and respectful. As shown above, when this lack of knowledge results in a doping conviction, athletes may also question the fairness of the outcome of the procedure.

Differences in athletes' knowledge and in the education they receive may lead to differences in their abilities to pursue the elements of anti-doping that they are expected to. Some of the interviewees seem to be part of a sporting context where questions of anti-doping are inherent, which has made them aware of procedures; these interviewees also think of the anti-doping norm as natural. Concerning the organizational level, Houlihan discussed how stakeholders who show a lower degree of compliance could be made to engage more and "internalize the norms" through repeated interaction with "core regime members, such as WADA officers" (2014, 274). It is reasonable, then, to believe that athletes are also affected by organizations'

deeper engagement, and that internalization of norms also occurs at the individual level. Anti-doping policy-makers want education to be values based in “fostering anti-doping behaviours” and to build the anti-doping culture using these values (WADA, 2016b). McDermott (2016) also stressed that if the aim is to develop a culture that rejects doping, education is a key component. According to Suchman (1995), the legitimacy of a social order is derived from an agreement between an organization and its cultural environment. An important question in connection with this is whether global elite sports constitute *one* cultural environment with shared values? It might be argued, not least from a legitimacy perspective, that the starting point for developing values-based education programmes should include considerations of the grounds on which these values are formed, and of who will have influence over this process when, as McDermott, Henne, and Connor (2013) pointed out, diverging world views and contexts will affect how anti-doping is understood.

3.3 Contexts and conditions: Support

Fair procedures in anti-doping must ensure that athletes have the same possibilities to follow regulations (cf. Donovan et al., 2002; Jalleh et al., 2014; Tyler, 2006), which sometimes requires external support. Nonetheless, among the interviewees it was obvious that there were differences as regards the provision of support needed to comply with anti-doping rules. Sufficient and appropriate support can be seen as helping the athletes gain control over their sporting lives. Some of the athletes gave several examples of situations where substantial support resources were almost always at hand; this included support from one’s entourage, such as coaches and doctors, as well as from anti-doping organizations. However, others reported not having the support needed for top-level sports or for anti-doping measures. One example of experiencing sufficient support was given by an athlete who, in connection with

the issue of banned substances, replied as follows concerning possible difficulties in knowing which medication to take:

No, it's not hard. It's not hard cause ...you have the...the List of WADA of the prohibited substances....Also our doctor, the doctor of the team ... he tells us what we can take and what not (i4, female, 26-30 years old, West Europe)

She continued by stating that the physician could always be reached by phone if needed.

According to some of the athletes, support was also given from coaches, for example concerning forward planning for filing whereabouts information months ahead. One athlete said, regarding his team's constant moving during season:

So there's a lot of different hotels, a lot of movement and a lot of different things, so it's really nice to have a coach that would say; "for the next month, these are the addresses and dates that you would be staying at". So then I can fill it in. (i2, male, 31-35 years old, North America)

Keeping track of addresses may seem like a simple task, but, as noted earlier, the interviewees stressed that basic and practical matters connected to anti-doping elements were important to their ability to follow regulations. This may also affect perceptions of fair and respectful treatment.

The views of those athletes who describe that their sporting lives are supported by, e.g., coaches and doctors – as well as round-the-clock telephone support from anti-doping authorities – can be contrasted against those who lack this support or sense of control, both in terms of sports performances and anti-doping activities. One of the athletes depicted her career as an elite athlete as a lonely struggle without support from, e.g., the national federation as regards education and facilities:

It is difficult in [my country] to be an athlete. You have to focus and be determined in everything you do. It is so difficult ... they just help us ... let's say, not even 20 % but 80 % comes from the athlete. You have to struggle alone, and even ... look for a way forward. But there is not [the federation] to help you. (i5, female, 26-30 years old, Africa)

When she was asked to elucidate on the kind of help she requested, she emphasized support that helps athletes gain control and focus on their sporting lives. The implicit comparison of her conditions with those of athletes in other countries implies that she sees herself and her compatriots as disadvantaged. The lack of support described above could have implications for athletes' abilities to manage their lives as elite athletes, which demands both sporting success and anti-doping activities, and may also have an impact on perceptions of procedural justice. Another athlete commented on his situation regarding support with medications and the prohibited list:

I'm an athlete, not a doctor, so it's very difficult for me to understand what I can take and what I cannot take. And when I was on the whereabouts program I was even afraid to take a headache pill. So I didn't use any medicine at all. (i9, male, 21-25 years old, Central Asia)

When asked whether he had a physician who could provide support with medical issues, he continued:

Our Federation has no means to keep such a specialist, so we don't have anyone who can help us, and assist in that... (i9, male, 21-25 years old, Central Asia)

It is obvious that this perceived lack of medical support negatively affected the conditions under which this athlete was able to perform and comply with regulations.

When analysing the interviews, we also found a type of support that crosses the border into governance and that may also play a role in the conditions under which athletes attempt to follow regulations. This kind of governance can cause the athlete to become dependent on support personnel and experience less individual control over anti-doping elements, such as filing of whereabouts information and intake of medicine and supplements. One interviewee described how athletes are quite powerless in their relations with support personnel, and gave the following example of being told to take some pills:

When they give me something I ask them: "What is it?" and I will research on Google what is this drug, what does it do and which one is good for me and which one is not good for me. I start to say: "no, I'm

not using this.” Then the head coaches inform the president [of the federation]: “she is undisciplined, because she is not using what we give to her”. Because of this I have some problems with my federation [...]...and I want to be healthy, I don’t want anymore.... (i12, female, 21-25 years old, West Asia)

Similarly, another athlete was given dietary supplements by support personnel, a procedure she strongly questioned:

... I always question a lot... especially when I go to the National Team. Because we practice so hard ...sometimes six hours a day... So, they usually give us supplements. So I always questioned what I was taking. If it is good for me ...and what could be the consequence...? I mean, when I was young they gave me creatine ... and I felt my body getting so big or so much bigger. And I was like; “woo, is this healthy, is this ok? It’s not doping?” I was not only thinking about me...I believe every athlete should be like that...question, not just take it. (i10, female, 31-35, South America)

Governance of the athlete and the lack of control over one’s own body and the procedures used on it can be seen as the central points in these quotes. This is closely connected to the strict liability principle in the anti-doping regulations, which means that an athlete is always responsible for any substance found in her or his body. If the athlete does not have control over, e.g., medicine intake and medical procedures, and at the same time is dependent on, for example, the coach to remain on the team, this puts the athlete in a rather vulnerable position. In the current situation, much of the anti-doping activities are aimed at the individual athletes. And it is the athletes who are subjected to sanctions when the rules are violated, even though they may have no control over the circumstances that lead to the violation. When athletes lose control due to support that crosses over into governance, or due to inadequate support in anti-doping matters, it may have implications for perceptions concerning the procedural justice of anti-doping work. Support personnel have been found to have a substantial impact on athletes with regard to doping (Donovan et al., 2002; Jalleh et al., 2014; Huybers & Mazanov, 2012). The athlete could possibly see his/her entourage as an authority in this respect. In cases where support merges into governance, the authority’s motives might be questioned and have an impact on the perceived procedural justice. As the regulations for athlete support staff have been sharpened in the latest version of WADC, this may lead to an improved situation for the

individual athlete. Nevertheless, the athlete must also be allowed to influence the choice of support personnel, as it is a violation of the rules to associate with a person who has been convicted of or disciplined for doping (WADA, 2015a).

It is evident from our empirical material that athletes from different regions of the world are living in different sporting and anti-doping contexts. The emerging picture shows that the design of the present anti-doping regulatory framework gives athletes unequal means of fulfilling the requirements of the regulations. This may entail, as showed in our analysis, that procedures are not perceived as fair, thus decreasing the legitimacy of the anti-doping system.

4. Conclusion

When athletes were asked explicitly about harmonization of the global anti-doping programme, there were diverging views about its equivalence. Moreover, it was striking how often athletes did not discuss their conditions from a cross-national perspective. Nevertheless, the rich and comprehensive material from our study shows that when global anti-doping policy is implemented in different contexts under different conditions, there are consequences that may have implications for the legitimacy of anti-doping work. These consequences appear at the athlete level as inequities and structural injustices and may be summarized by stating that anti-doping practice contain elements that: 1) ignore the fact that athletes have different infrastructural conditions, including unequal conditions for participating in decision-making procedures due to language barriers, 2) fail to supply athletes with equitable and essential knowledge, and 3) result in injustices regarding support with managing the required anti-doping elements, sometimes governing athletes in a way that causes them to lose individual control. We believe that the constant comparisons offered in the interviews reflect the on-going efforts to harmonize anti-doping regulations globally, and the results indicate

that more work is needed. These inequities and the lack of a level playing field shed light on the risk of legitimacy deficiencies, as procedural justice is not evident for all athletes.

Thus, the contexts and conditions for athletes are different regarding their ability to comply with anti-doping rules. The consequence of these differences in athletes' everyday lives, as they deal with anti-doping, is a playing field that is not level. Disadvantaged athletes face greater risks of failing to meet the requirements, and ultimately, of being sanctioned. This could mean being banned from participation in sports, but also financial and social sanctions as well as self-imposed sanctions, all causing feelings of shame and guilt (Overbye, Elbe, Knudsen, & Pfister, 2015). As Henne (2015) pointed out, the strong focus on the individual in the anti-doping sphere brings with it a greater risk of ignoring the effects of broader, structural forces. Athletes can become the scapegoats for rule violations that stem from a negligent or incapable organization. A country, or a sport's governing body, may be compliant "on paper", but then fail to give athletes the best possible conditions for following regulations (cf. Hanstad & Houlihan, 2015; Mazanov & Connor, 2010). And yet, if an athlete is found guilty of doping, the blame falls on the individual, regardless of whether she/he had the same conditions for compliance as an athlete whose country or governing body provides better support. Thus, the organization or the country is rarely penalized in cases of non-compliance, even though the underlying cause may be on the structural, rather than the individual, level.⁴ Non-compliance at the individual level is relatively easy to detect and punish, while adherence to regulations at the organizational level is more difficult to measure and monitor (Houlihan, 2014). These circumstances may shed some light on the fact that a large part of anti-doping activities target the individual athletes (Henne, 2015; McDermott, 2016).

⁴ One exception is the IAAF affair during the fall of 2015, when the Russian Athletics Federation was actually banned for non-compliance with regulations (see, e.g., Ingle 2015).

In discussions on harmonization and compliance, the starting point is often that countries and organizations are to be made compliant through sanctioning, education and rewards (Houlihan, 2014). Although the foundation of anti-doping rules has been discussed previously (see, e.g., Christiansen & Møller, 2007; Hanstad & Loland 2009; Houlihan, 2014; Mazanov & Connor, 2010), the different terms and conditions that apply at local levels have received less attention (Henne, 2015; Palmer, 2013). We should not overlook the fact that an organization which works globally, like WADA, has special conditions for establishing fair procedures and legitimacy for the decisions that are made. Although the intention is for all participating countries to have equal influence, some will be more powerful owing to their access to superior resources. This may result in a hierarchy among the member countries and in a divergence from the norm of fair procedures – a situation that, in turn, may affect the legitimacy of the decisions that are made (Beetham, 2013). Many parts of the anti-doping programme regulated in the WADC are based on anti-doping practice formed in countries in Western Europe and North America (Houlihan, 2014). It is therefore reasonable to assume that these countries have an advantage in implementing and complying with regulations, regarding both the content and form of the required activities. Undeniably, discrepancies in conditions for, i.e., technology might be overcome within a few years with continued technological development in all parts of the world, but that is not the central point. There will always be differences in contexts and conditions. What is needed in global policy-making is an understanding of these variations and an ability to see issues from different perspectives. Palmer suggested that WADA's global policy can be seen as a quest for cultural homogeneity, while it could instead offer "a challenge for a more nuanced form of policy-making that can take into account local (and national) variations when considering policy compliance and uptake" (2013, 55). The creation of anti-doping policies should involve being aware of and

taking into consideration what and whose perspectives underpin the regulations that are intended to be applied globally.

The aim of the present article was to analyse the consequences of anti-doping work at the individual athletes' level in order to be able to discuss the terms of a system that is perceived as equal and legitimate worldwide. The present sample, though admittedly limited in size, has given insights into the different realities of athletes all over the world. We suggest that if global rules are to be perceived as legitimate, and benefit from worldwide compliance, they need to be developed using processes that take into account variations in contexts and conditions. Under the circumstances at present, the legitimacy of anti-doping procedures could well be determined by "privileged" athletes, as they enjoy conditions that support their sporting lives. At the same time, athletes who experience inequities and who do not face procedural justice in anti-doping practice may be expected to question the legitimacy of anti-doping work. Suchman's (1995) definition of legitimacy implies that the legitimacy of an order requires the existence of a social context that is shared by members of a group. Can we say that all athletes share the same social and cultural system of norms, values and definitions when it comes to anti-doping? Is the anti-doping system *one* social system, perceived in the same way by all? Perhaps it is the case that the applied regulations presuppose that all athletes are within the same social and cultural sphere, when in reality this is not true. It ought to be of fundamental importance for anti-doping authorities to direct their focus to different contexts and conditions when developing rules that are to be applied by all, everywhere.

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