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The positive influence of higher education on doping behaviors in elite athletes**Marie Therese McMahon**

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Use of doping agents amongst elite athletes remains widespread. Anti-doping educational strategies are currently very popular, striving to highlight the health risks involved and to discourage agent abuse. Reported prevalence remains high, indicating weaknesses in the effectiveness and timing of existing educational interventions to at-risk athletes. Education in general is shown to assist in developing defensive mechanisms required for navigating life's many challenges. The impact of higher education on elite athlete doping behaviors has been rarely considered. 81 Olympic athletes, comprising the top world ranked male cyclists and rowers were researched. Using a mixed methods approach, information on the athletes' doping history and their levels of education were collected by means of a qualitative questionnaire, official sporting bodies, autobiographies and biographies as well as personal interviews. The results showed that the education of the elite athlete to university level was statistically significantly associated with less doping activity (Fisher's exact test, $p=0.0001$). The findings support previous findings on the enduring effects of educational enrichment to third level. The data suggests education to university level is a potential protective factor against doping. This study did not address what specific factors of a university education are critical in forming the decision not to dope. These factors should be investigated further in order to specifically target and exploit these in the prevention of doping.

Biography

Marie Therese McMahon completed her Masters in Sports Science from the University of Konstanz Germany and is currently pursuing her PhD in doping in sports. She also holds a degree in applied European languages from University College Dublin, Ireland and Post Graduate Business Studies from the University of Leuven, Belgium. In her senior roles as Clinical Advisor and Trainer in the medical device industry, most notably in the area of sports orthopedic medicine and sport injuries, she interfaces personally with clinicians to many of the world's elite athletes.

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