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Investigating the Risky Behaviour of Elite Athletes

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in the amount of coverage regarding the off-field behaviours of elite athletes and they are often reported to engage in risky behaviour. There are many cases published in the media such as the Edward Lee ‘Fast Eddie’ Johnson Jr, case, a former NBA player, who was involved with drugs and was convicted of sexual battery and child molestation. Another example is the more recent case of Adam Johnson, a former England football player, who was convicted of sexual activity with an underage girl. Much of the previous research has focused on collegiate athletes. The current research aims to explore the factors contributing to risky behaviours within elite athletes. A sample of elite athletes will be accessed and will aim to be complete a specifically tailored questionnaire consisting of multiple scales with the purpose of examining the factors which lead to such risky behaviour. The paper discusses the implications of the expected findings as well as direction for future research.

Introduction

Risky behaviour is defined as activities such as rape, group sex, infidelity, gambling, driving while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, committed at a rate of 1 in 144 (CAEQ, 2002). These types of behaviour are often described as “risky” in that they can be labelled as illegal or immoral, with little academic or empirical focus being applied to elite athletes. The differences between collegiate athletes and elite athletes are not substantial, elite athletes remain a distinct group because they carry out their roles as full-time jobs. Reports of athletes being involved in risky behaviour show no signs of abating. As such, efforts to understand how and why elite athletes engage in such risky behaviour should be of primary concern. This research will state a specific hypothesis and through the use of qualitative research methods, further clarify why elite athletes engage in such risky behaviour.

Risky Behaviour Statistics

In 2010 there were 497 cases of National Football League (NFL) players between 2010 and 2011 involved in 48.8% of players were sentenced each year, with many of these cases being related to driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, which is a statistical rate of 1 in 144 (CAEQ, 2002). It has been reported that the conviction rate for accused athletes only having a conviction rate of 0.39% (National Coalition Against Violent Athletes, 2012).

Using these facts the study will investigate the influence of the following main aspects on risk taking:

- Power stance
- Penchant
- Psychopathy
- Sensation seeking
- Alcohol use

Project Aims

The main aim of this research is to gather unique information from elite athletes in regards to their risk taking behaviour.

Objectives

1) To develop an understanding of risk taking behaviour in elite athletes.
2) To understand the factors as to why they might be at a higher risk of engaging in risky behaviour.
3) To build on previous research in the area which predominantly focuses on collegiate athletes.

Method

The study will use a sample of elite athletes and amateur athletes (control group) from around the world in order to investigate their risky behaviour and the factors which contribute to these behaviours. To do this a specifically designed questionnaire will be administered to the participants via a Qualtrics survey in order to collect the data. The questions are shown as follows:

- Demographic questionnaire.
- An informed consent form.
- The Sense of Power Scale (Anderson et al 2000).
- Personality Attribution Questionnaire (EAG) short form (Spence & Heilbrun, 1970).
- Social Antecedents Risk Taking Scale (DPSERT), (Bliss & Woody, 2000).
- The Rosenberg-Bussel Risk Perceptions Questionnaire (d’Almeida, 2007).
- The Sensation Seeking-Sensation Seeking Inventory (Zuckerman, 1994).
- The Comprehensive Alcohol Expectancy Questionnaire (CSEQ). (Donnell & Hogan, 2003b).

Causative of Risky Behaviour in Athletes

Some of the aspects related to risk taking behaviour are the following:
- Celebrity status which brings them power (Anderson & Olaleye, 2000).
- Peer influence (Griffin & Steinberg, 2000).
- Sensation seeking (Martinez, 1998).
- Attributional differences (Bliss & Woody, 1998).
- Moral reasoning (Keltner, 2000).
- Substance abuse (Drenck, 2000).

Implications of results

Through the findings it will be possible to devise a training scheme to help educate existing and aspiring athletes in both a professional and collegiate setting in order to reduce the prominence of these risky behaviours. A reduction of these types of behaviour will contribute to the development of the athlete’s overall performance and create some viable role models for the general population, especially the younger population. By educating of collegiate level it may help to reduce these behaviours throughout their lives whether that be as a professional athlete or in another profession.

In the long term it is hoped that by reducing risky behaviours in athletes may decrease these behaviours in the general population, as many athletes have a better behaviour than commonly expected.

References

[References list]

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