Committee: UNODC

Topic: The usage of appearance performance enhancing drugs (APEDs) and sports: their interconnection.

Country: UNITED KINGDOM

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Appearance and Performance Enhancing Drugs (APEDs) is a relatively common term used to describe substances which are taken for either appearance -enhancing or performance-enhancing reasons, or both. These can include substances which promote weight loss, change skin colour, build muscle and allow longer, more intense training, and are normally injected, taken orally, or applied topically using a cream or gel. APEDs, in the context of sport, are substances banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), as per the Prohibited List.

According to the 2017 APED Survey, the most common demographic for the onset of APED use was 20-24 year-old males. A study carried out by UKAD for Clean Sport Week 2019 found 34% of the gym-goers surveyed are aware of APED use in their gym or club, demonstrating that APED use is moving beyond the sporting environment. The use of APED is dangerous to human health and the public, in 2018, the University of Copenhagen published a survey in the Journal of Internal Medicine of over 500 men who used steroids. Over the seven years of the study, mortality rates were three times higher amongst users compared to nonusers.

The 2016 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem was held in New York in a joint commitment to effectively addressing and countering the world drug problem which U.K was part of this event. The United Nation general assembly focus on drug problem globally. UK Anti-Doping (UKAD) is an active participant in the global fight against doping in sport - and is the national body responsible for creating a UK-wide environment of confidence in clean sport. It is UKAD’s role to ensure sports bodies comply with the World Anti-Doping Code through implementation and management of the UK’s National Anti-Doping Policy, via testing of athletes, education and working with partners in areas including science and intelligence.

The National APED Survey 2016, conducted by Liverpool John Moores University, interviewed 684 people who had used APEDs in the past 12 months. The study showed that 89% of those surveyed used oral APEDs, the most common of which was methandrostenolone, an anabolic steroids sold under the brand name Dianabol. The study also showed that 85% of those surveyed took APEDs by injection. The taking of drugs to improve sporting performance, or ‘doping’, is not a new threat to sport but over the past 20 years the use of APEDs, particularly anabolic steroids, has increased significantly in the UK, moving out of a narrow band of elite athletes and into amateur and recreational sport. UKAD prosecutes athletes and any support personnel against the UK Anti-Doping Rules. Successful prosecutions are called Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRV). Between 2012 - 2017, there were 185 ADRVs issued by UKAD across 23 sports. 46% of those related to the use of anabolic agents and 30% to the use of stimulants. Other substances prohibited by WADA were under 6% each.

Budget increased in the run up to Tokyo 2020 to cement UKAD’s position as one of the leading anti-doping agencies in the world. Investment of £6.1 million will help educate athletes, share intelligence and conduct testing in the fight against drug cheats to keep sport clean. The move comes after the first full-scale review of the organisation since it was set up in 2009 that has resulted in a number of recommendations to help make further progress in anti-doping.

These include:

UKAD to consider submitting a framework to government and sports to allow doping control officers to have unfettered access to conduct random testing at competitions.

UKAD to encourage greater collaboration from law enforcement agencies and to ensure whistle-blowers have confidence to come forward.

Sports in receipt of public funding to report annually on their anti-doping education programmes to UKAD and publish this information on their websites.

Health harms associated with the abuses of Appeareance and Performance Enhancing Drugs (APEDs) should be integrated into drug information and education supported by Public Health England, Public Health Wales, Health Scotland, Public Health (Northern Ireland) and the Home Office Drugs Strategy

Government should revise the National Anti-Doping Policy by September 2018 in consultation with UKAD and the Home Country Sport Councils UKAD to ensure that all publicly funded athletes and support personnel participate in annual anti-doping education programmes. UKAD to establish an Innovations Committee later this year to signpost new trends in doping. A new international strategy to be drawn up by UKAD to help drive a global approach to innovation in anti-doping.