

## **Background**

- The European Commission's Communication on Sport in January 2011, *Developing the European Dimension in Sport*, stated that doping remains an important threat to sport and that the use of doping substances by amateur athletes poses serious public health hazards and calls for preventive action, including in fitness centres.
- In response to this statement the European Health and Fitness Association was supported by the European Commission to launch the *Fitness Against Doping* (FAD) project to determine the prevalence of doping within the fitness sector and develop a responsible sector strategy to reduce the prevalence of doping.

## **Results**

- The project is nearing its conclusion, and through a review of the existing research in the field of doping within recreational sport concluded:
  - Previous research has focused on young males and Androgenic Anabolic Steroids
  - There has been a lack of co-operation between anti-doping organisations at an elite level and recreational sport
  - The motivations of doping users have not been investigated, and therefore no behavioural change interventions have been developed
  - Insufficient evidence exists with which to develop an anti-doping strategy within recreational sport
- Given these conclusions the FAD project undertook primary research in 8 European countries to understand the doping experiences of over 10,300 exercise professionals, consumers, and managers within the fitness sector.
- Importantly, the research was conducted with a representative sample of consumers, and surveyed experiences of performance or image enhancing drugs (PIEDs), recreational drugs, and supplements
- The key conclusions of the research were as follows:
  - 1.23% of consumers use performance enhancing substances (anabolic steroids, prohormones etc)
  - 1.85% of consumers use recreational drugs (amphetamines, diuretics, marijuana etc)
  - 2.52 % of all respondents replied they use one or both of the above
  - 41.82% of those who use performance enhancing substances play another sport, therefore indicating a strong connection between those who play sport and take doping substances.
  - 27% of consumers reported using a food supplement
  - 34% of consumers purchase supplements through the internet
  - Over 95% of exercise professionals would never recommend the use of substances to their clients
  - 95% of exercise professionals agreed to support a campaign against the use of substances

## **Conclusions**

- The *Fitness Against Doping* Project represents the largest primary research into the doping experiences within the fitness sector, and for the first time included PIEDs, Recreational Drugs, and Supplements.
- The motivation for taking banned substances varies from: to improve muscle growth (34%); aid faster healing from an injury (31%) ; extend period of time you can spend training (31%) ; to achieve a particular goal such as running a marathon (20%). Given the range of motivations **interventions must take into account behavioural change theory.**
- Doping within amateur sport is a complex issue driven by a wide range of motivating factors, and **therefore simple testing will not solve the issue** rather “using” individuals will simply continue their behaviour elsewhere.
- As 40% of those who take a performance enhancing substances (within the survey) also play sport, **there must be co-operation between elite sport anti-doping organisations and amateur sports.**
- 80% of fitness centre managers agreed to support an ant-doping campaign therefore **an advertising campaign for the fitness sector should be developed.**
- Exercise professionals should **have improved understanding to identify the signs of doping practice, educate individuals of the negative impact of doping and educate individuals on proper nutritional plans.**

