**A scale to measure moral disengagement for occupational gains: a scale for use in illicit drug public health initiatives for vocational populations.**

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**Background:** Illicit drug use in the UK working age population has been deemed an economic and public health problem. There is now evidence that illicit drugs used by employees are expanding at populational health level and Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) are being used by vocational occupations (E.g., Military, police etc.). Despite risks to health and moral standing, there is limited evidence of PIEDs enhancing occupational performance in workplace settings. Originally described by Bandura (1991), Moral Disengagement (MD) refers to cognitive mechanisms that separate our morals from our actions, allowing us to engage in unethical behaviour. This may explain the mechanisms that perpetuate this type of workplace misconduct. In this study we report the development of a psychometric instrument that can be used to assess propensity to morally disengage in the context of the workplace and to inform appropriate public health initiatives.

**Methods:** An internet-mediated quantitative study was conducted using social media. Eight-four participants (34 PIED and 50 Non-PIED users) were recruited using snowball sampling resulting in 10 vocational occupations. The Qualtrics questionnaire was based on an 8-factor model proposed by Bandura et al (1996) with items adapted from validated MD scales. Twenty items measured the following factors: Moral Disengagement, Euphemistic Labelling, Advantageous Comparison, Diffusion of Responsibility, Distortion of Consequences and Displacement of Responsibility. Participants completed the questionnaire using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). IBM SPSS (v26.0) was used to conduct Principal Component Analysis, Cronbach’s alpha, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Concurrent validity was measured using Pearson’s Product-Moment Correlation using correlation coefficients (p 0.50-0.75). An independent t-test was used to test differences between PIED and non-PIED users. G\*Power (3.1.9.6) was used to ensure there was no Type II errors.

**Results:** Cronbach’s alpha scores for all factors (α value of 0.90) demonstrated excellent/good internal reliability. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity (BToS) (p<.001) were confirmed satisfactory. Principal Component Analysis confirmed 2 Eigenvalues (λ) with factor loadings confirming discriminatory validity. The questionnaire was confirmed as psychometrically robust and demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference in moral disengagement between PIED and non-PIED groups in an occupational context (p<.001).

**Conclusions:** The Moral Disengagement for Occupational Gains Scale demonstrated psychometric properties supporting its use as a valid and reliable measure of moral disengagement for use in public health to support population level evidence-based initiatives and manage drug misuse at work.

**Key words:** Moral disengagement, Illicit drug use, Public Health initiatives