

The harm reduction practices of female steroid users

Timothy Piatkowski¹, Matthew Dunn², Bianca Whiteside², Severine Lamon³, Jonathan⁴ Robertson

¹School of Applied Psychology, Griffith University, ²Institute for Health Transformation, Deakin University, ³Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition, Deakin University, ⁴Centre for Sport Research, Deakin University

Presenter's email: t.piatkowski@griffith.edu.au

Introduction: Steroid use can have severe physical and psychological impacts for women, such as masculinisation and mental health concerns. Despite these risks, women continue to use steroids. Understanding the strategies they use to navigate these risks is necessary.

Method: Ten women who were using steroid participated in a semi-structured interview regarding their lived experiences of using these substances and how they manage the risks associated. This data was analysed using thematic analysis.

Key Findings: The findings demonstrate three overarching themes: the practices and attitudes of steroid use among this cohort, health checking behaviours women engage in, and support networks utilised for harm reduction.

Discussions and Conclusions: The strategies women use to prevent or mitigate harms associated with steroid use include health checking behaviours and harm reduction practices. While some women reported being aware of the potential harms associated with steroid use, others appeared to be unaware or were willing to take higher risks. Poor education was identified as a key factor.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Further research is required to understand precisely the education and resources this group is most interested in and how healthcare could be more appropriately provisioned to them – for example, through optimising engagement strategies of providers. These strategies are particularly important for younger women using steroid as they appear to be at higher risk of harms.