

Interrogating Power, Stigma, and Autonomy in the Context of Testosterone Self-Medication

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Introduction: Recent research has shown that there is a group of men that has resorted to using non-prescribed steroids as a form of testosterone-replacement therapy (TRT) through self-medication. The current study aimed to explore the experiences of these men.

Method: A purposive sample of participants was recruited via social media advertising, researcher contacts, and snowball sampling. Participants were eligible to be included if they resided in Australia; were aged 18 years or older; and reported the use of non-prescribed AAS for testosterone replacement. Interviews were conducted online. A semi-structured interview schedule was utilised. The data were analysed thematically.

Results: Fourteen men were interviewed (Mage=38 years). Stigma regarding testosterone's role in men's health, and its link to non-medical AAS use and performance/image enhancement, created a barrier for men to seek medical support; this in turn led them to use non-medical AAS for TRT purposes. Participants took a variety of pathways to get to self-medicated TRT, such as accessing medical professionals, anti-aging clinics, and sports clinics; medical professionals played a significant role in shaping participants' pathways. All participants unanimously expressed the belief that men with low testosterone should ideally have access to TRT through the guidance of healthcare professionals.

Discussions and Conclusions: The pathways to self-medicating with testosterone among the participants in this study highlight the complexities and challenges individuals face when seeking hormone replacement therapy.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The use of steroids for enhancement purposes has led to stricter government oversight, particularly for medical professionals who may prescribe testosterone.

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