

'BRO SCIENCE' AND MAINSTREAM SCIENCE: HOW BODYBUILDERS NEGOTIATE KNOWLEDGE AND POWER IN THEIR PERFORMANCE AND IMAGE ENHANCING DRUG (PIED) HARM MINIMISATION EFFORTS

Author:

MAIR UNDERWOOD

School of Social Science, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Presenter's email: m.underwood@uq.edu.au

Introduction/Issues:

Perhaps the greatest cause of performance and image enhancing drug (PIED)-related harm is the long-standing disconnect between bodybuilders on the one hand, and health professionals and scientists on the other. While we have known for some time that this disconnect exists, this is the first study to explore how bodybuilders negotiate it, and develop harm minimisation strategies despite it.

Method / Approach:

This study focussed on recreational PIED use through a multi-sited, ethnography of online sites (primarily social media and forums), and interviews with people who use PIEDs recreationally (n=20). It approached PIEDs as having 'social lives' i.e. as taking on meaning through social relations and having implications for these relations.

Key Findings:

In contrast to previous suggestions that online forums promote a culture of risk-taking, evidence of harm-minimisation was found. In the absence of public health messages that resonate with their experiences and practices, people who use PIEDs recreationally have developed harm minimisation strategies that combine mainstream health science, with the experiential knowledge of bodybuilders ('bro science'), such as new use patterns (e.g. 'blasting and cruising'). This paper describes how bodybuilders negotiate the power relations that result from differentially valued forms of PIED knowledge, and explains why 'bro science' may be better conceptualised as 'folk pharmacology' than 'ethnopharmacology' (as it has been previously described).

Discussions and Conclusions:

One perspective has been largely ignored in discussions of PIED harm minimisation, and that is the perspective of those who actually use these drugs. This paper describes this perspective.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The author is funded by a University of Queensland Early Career Researcher Grant. No pharmaceutical grants were received in the development of this study.