

Performance and image enhancing drug use among Australian women: The role of interpersonal relationships in facilitating use

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Introduction: Women comprise a minority of performance and image enhancing drug (PIED) consumers, with use linked to undesirable side effects. Preliminary work suggests that many women have little knowledge of what substances they are using, with males close to them involved in their use. This study aimed to explore women's motivations for PIED use; to examine the negative health experiences related to use; and to understand how interpersonal relationships facilitate their use.

Method: Women who had used PIEDs were invited to participate in an online survey (N=28) and/or interview (N=10). Open text survey and interview data were analysed using content and thematic analyses respectively.

Key Findings: Three key areas (motivations, health experience, role of third parties) and 12 theme-categories were developed from the survey data. Three overarching themes were developed from interviews expanding on this data: Socialising women's use, facilitating women's use, and PIEDs exacerbating existing issues.

Discussions and Conclusions: Women reported perceived stigmatisation from men and women regarding their PIED use. The social context in which PIED use was supported was facilitated by third parties who were often men (e.g., partners, coaches). However, the advice provided was unqualified and potentially led to increased harms. For example, women experienced physical effects, but spoke more notably of mental health effects. Some women had developed their own psychosocial strategies such as peer support, which were however unequipped to provide accurate health advice. Consequently, the feasibility of substance literacy interventions is an area of need for future research.