

Androgenic Anabolic Steroids: a  
qualitative study of socio-cultural  
aspects of use

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# Background

- Setting: ‘Lifeline’ in Middlesbrough
- A large ‘problem’; worries about effects on mental health and cardiovascular health,
- Certain groups more ‘at risk’ (poor self esteem)
- Increasing muscular ideal male image<sup>3</sup>
- Qualitative studies limited to specific groups (body builders) <sup>1,2</sup>

# Aims

- To evaluate the steroid ‘pilot’ at Lifeline.
- To describe a range of socio-cultural aspects of steroid use (purposes of use, how they are used, relationship with other drug use and describe a typology of users)

# Method

- Focus groups with different types of user using purposive ‘sampling’
- Individual interviews with two steroid ‘workers’ (key informants)
- Tape recorded, fully transcribed
- Analysed according to usual qualitative techniques

# The groups

Description	Invitations	Participants
Mixed		7
Mixed		4
Mixed	4	1
Heroin users	7	6
Bodybuilder	4	2
Young	5	3
Ex-offender	5	3
Sports		3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>29</b>

# Why are steroids used?

- For appearance: bigger or 'ripped'
- For ease or because of plateau effect
- For confidence
- For strength
- Injuries/ health problems

# Steroids as ‘stimulants’

- ‘Energy’, a ‘rush’
- Increased appetite
- Ability to train harder
- Positive feedback from others (confidence)
- Re-interpretation of ‘irritability’ and aggression.

## Steroids as ‘stimulants’ (2)

- *You cannot match it; especially with testosterone because it just goes from your feet all the way through your body and you just feel that rush all the time. (focus group 4)*



# Social context of use

- Gym culture
- Comparison with others
- Obtaining supplies
- Use with cocaine
- Acceptable/ non acceptable use in different groups

## Social context of use (2)

- *If you're in a more working class background or middle class, it's fine, but if you're in a more upper class area and stuff like that, they would frown on you*

## Social context of use (3)

- *But when I was younger, my mates used to go to the gym beforehand, get their jabs done from the gym, so say like five of you there, you just end up getting one anyway even if you didn't want to do it you'd just get one*

## Social context of use (4)

- *They're usually in like the cool group do you know what I mean and the cool group means it's cool to take coke*

# Heroin users (1)

- Improved appearance
- Reassurance of progress (relatives and for the individual)
- Hide the effect of heroin
- To function/survive within their group

## Heroin users (2)

- *When I come off heroin and that like I've just gone on steroids basically for my parents and that do you know what I mean. You lose all your weight when you're on heroin and things like that. (focus group 4)*

# Heroin users (3)

- *When you get bigger that's when you get approached off older lads who say right, do you want do you want this laying on, to sell this other drug, crack, heroin or whatever. So as soon as you get that big size and they think you don't want to do the stashing, do you know what I mean? As soon as you get big... people start trusting you, do you know what I mean?...*
- *No-one's going to tax you. (focus group 4)*

# Ex-offenders (1)

- Commonly used (though variation between prisons)
- Intimidation purposes
- A worthwhile objective in the context of boredom



## Ex-offenders (2)

- *I think its, like I say, it's like a two fingers up choice, you know. Lock me up for however many years, I'm getting out and I'm getting out healthier and bigger and better*

# Conclusions

- Wide range of socio-cultural factors explaining why and how steroids are used, their acceptability, how they experienced
- ‘Stimulant’ effect from the context of use.
- Reasons for association with heroin use: to hide the effects of heroin and for functioning