

Female teen steroid use not limited to athletes

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Researchers from the Division of Health Promotion & Sports Medicine at Oregon Health & Science University have found steroid use among teen girls is not limited to athletes and often goes hand in hand with other unhealthy choices, including smoking and taking diet pills. The study will be published in the June issue of *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, a JAMA/Archives journal.

Diane Elliot, M.D., professor of medicine (health promotion and sports medicine), OHSU School of Medicine, and colleagues analyzed findings from the Center for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behavior Survey of 7,544 ninth- through 12th-grade girls from around the country. The questionnaire asked about sports participation, anabolic steroid and drug use, and other illegal or unhealthy behaviors. Approximately 5 percent of participants reported prior or ongoing anabolic steroid use.

In addition to greater substance use, young female steroid users were more likely to have had sexual intercourse before age 13; have been pregnant; drink and drive or have ridden with a drinking driver; carry a weapon; have been in a fight on school property; have feelings of sadness or hopelessness almost every day for at least two weeks; and have attempted suicide. Those reporting anabolic steroid use were less likely to participate in team athletics.

Overall, more than two-thirds of those surveyed reported trying to change their weight. Girls who used steroids were more likely try extreme weight-loss techniques, such as vomiting and laxative use.

Adolescent girls reporting anabolic steroid use had significantly more other health-harming behaviors, Elliot explained, “They were much more likely to use other unhealthy substances, including cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and cocaine.”

“Across all grades, these seem to be troubled adolescents with co-occurring health-compromising activities in the domains of substance use, sexual behavior, violence and mental health,” Elliot said. “Anabolic steroid use is a marker for high-risk girls. High-risk young women have received less attention than young men, perhaps reflecting that their actions are less socially, albeit more personally, destructive. Further study is needed to develop effective interventions for these young women.”

Source: Oregon Health & Science University

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