

New approach needed on drugs, say bodybuilders

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The research focused exclusively on recreational bodybuilders, to understand how their motivations to use drugs, and patterns of use. Credit: University of Queensland

Prohibition is failing to curb recreational bodybuilders' use of performance and image-enhancing drugs, and the policy is sexist and causes harm, according to participants in a first-of-its-kind University of Queensland study.

Study author Dr Mair Underwood from the School of Social Science said her research focused exclusively on recreational [bodybuilders](#) to understand how their motivations to use drugs, and patterns of use,

differed from those of their competitive counterparts.

She gathered information from recreational bodybuilders who idolise the deceased Australian internet fitness celebrity Zyzz (Aziz Shavershian) through participant observation in social media sites including Facebook.

"Until now we have had little idea about the perceived benefits of recreational image and performance-enhancing drug use because previous research has focused on use as a criminal activity or a body image problem," Dr Underwood said.

Dr Underwood said due to bodybuilding becoming mainstream over the last 30 years, most image and performance enhancing drug users were not athletes or competitive bodybuilders but rather "recreational bodybuilders who use drugs not only to change their bodies but also to change social relations," Dr Underwood said.

"Some participants suggested that prohibition was sexist as women are legally able to enhance their appearance in far more invasive ways such as cosmetic surgery."

Dr Underwood said the results indicated society should aim to minimise image and performance enhancing drug related harm, as efforts to stop use altogether were failing and causing harm to users.

Her study indicated useful harm minimisation steps would be to provide information and services specific to bodybuilders; to make bodybuilders aware of the results of current research and to bridge the divide between bodybuilders and the medical and scientific communities by building mutual respect.

The bodybuilding community had responded well to the research, and members have been discussing and circulating the study online, she said.

More information: Mair Underwood. Exploring the social lives of image and performance enhancing drugs: An online ethnography of the Zyzz fandom of recreational bodybuilders, *International Journal of Drug Policy* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.08.012](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2016.08.012)

Provided by University of Queensland

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