

Risks faced by women using anabolic steroids in Australia

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A new [study](#) published in *Drug and Alcohol Review* has revealed critical insights into the challenges and risks faced by women who use anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS).

While these substances are illegal in Australia, changing ideals in body aesthetics and the growing popularity of sports such as powerlifting are pushing more women to extreme measures.

With steroid use previously and typically seen as being a men's practice, the research highlighted the gender-specific obstacles women encountered in acquiring safe and reliable AAS and the urgent need for tailored harm-reduction interventions.

Lead researcher Dr. Tim Piatkowski said women were increasingly turning to steroids to meet the demands of competitive sports and fitness cultures that valued muscularity.

"It's important to understand the motivations and [health risks](#) associated with this trend," he said. "By focusing on [women's experiences](#) with [anabolic steroids](#), we can begin to address the significant knowledge gap in [sports medicine](#) and develop more effective support and intervention strategies."

Dr. Piatkowski also emphasized that being an illegal substance, there were a lot of unknowns for anybody using steroids.

"The lack of accountability in the underground market puts the health of any user at serious risk, with information and health support difficult to access.

"Men and women have different ideals when seeking out AAS, yet products promoted to women can often contain undesired compounds such as testosterone, which can lead to unintended and potentially harmful side effects."

These side effects could include masculinizing impacts such as voice deepening or facial hair growth, plus acne, menstrual irregularities,

clitoral enlargement and psychological distress.

Global estimates indicated AAS were used by about 4% of women, however this number rose significantly among female bodybuilders to almost 17%.

In jurisdictions (outside Australia) where use of AAS is legal, approximately 60% of women using sought guidance or prescriptions from licensed medical practitioners.

In Australia however, users generally concealed their usage from medical practitioners.

The research emphasized the necessity for drug checking services specifically designed for women who use AAS.

Such services could verify the authenticity and safety of AAS products, helping to mitigate the risks associated with counterfeit substances.

The research team also advocated for better education on the use of AAS tailored to women, termed "steroid literacy," to equip women with the knowledge to make informed decisions and reduce health risks associated with AAS use.

More information: Timothy Piatkowski et al, "The compounds for females are really commonly faked!": Women's challenges in anabolic steroid acquisition and the place of drug checking interventions, *Drug and Alcohol Review* (2024). [DOI: 10.1111/dar.13931](https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.13931)

Provided by Griffith University

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