

The Stigma of Anabolic Steroid Use

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Introduction

Little is known about the stigma of anabolic steroids compared with other illicit drugs

Steroid stigma has implications for treatment-seeking and for public policy development

Steroid stigma is likely a double-edged sword that discourages both treatment-seeking and uptake of the drug

Aims and hypotheses

Aims: i) To elucidate predictors of steroid stigma, and ii) to compare steroid stigma with the stigma of marijuana (a “soft” drug)

Hypotheses: i) Exposure to steroid users and lifetime history of drug use would predict lower levels of steroid stigma, and ii) time spent exercising, participation in competitive sports, and participation in weight-training or bodybuilding would predict higher levels of steroid stigma

Methods

Sample: 304 psychology undergraduates (33% male, 60% Caucasian, $M_{\text{age}} = 19$ years)

Measures: Personal history of drug use, exposure to drug users, and stigma of drug use (for both stigma and marijuana)

Design: Within-subjects

Procedure: Participants completed a 20-minute Internet survey in return for course credit. Order-of-presentation of stigma and marijuana measures was counterbalanced

Analyses: Multiple regressions predicting i) stigma toward users, and b) exposure to users

Citation

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Discussion

Steroid use is heavily stigmatised, more so than marijuana (a “soft” drug), and comparable with “hard” drugs (e.g., heroin)

Social exposure to steroid users is surprisingly common – even amongst a sample of predominantly young women

Greater social exposure to steroid users does not predict reduced steroid stigma, whereas greater exposure to marijuana users predicts reduced marijuana stigma. This discrepancy may reflect the public’s difficulty empathising with male body image- and eating-related concerns and disorders more generally.

Results

Exposure: 15% of undergraduates reported that they have a friend who uses steroids (a firm belief – not just suspicion)

Stigma: Undergraduates report much greater stigma toward steroid use than marijuana use (a very large effect)

Stigma predictors: Greater exposure to steroid users did not predict steroid stigma, but greater exposure to marijuana users did predict less marijuana stigma. Steroid stigma was not predicted by time spent exercising, participation in competitive sports, or participation in weight-training or bodybuilding. History of drug use predicted lower stigma of both steroids and marijuana