

Vocational Steroid Use: Reconsidering the Effectiveness of a Prohibition Approach

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Abstract. *The vast majority of literature on the topic of anabolic steroid use pertains to use by athletes and/or bodybuilders. Recent evidence suggests that performance-enhancing drugs, and anabolic steroids in particular, are used widely outside the realm of sport. In this paper, the term “vocational steroid use” is further developed and explored, referring to any form of steroid use for the purposes of enhanced performance in the workplace; a type of use uncharacteristic of most illicit substances. Vocational steroid users do not use steroids because of addictions or for recreation; they do so to increase their workplace abilities and productivity. Seven forms of documented vocational steroid use are described including use by: athletes, bodybuilders, police, actors, strength coaches, firefighters, and soldiers. While little research has examined the idea of vocational steroid use, even less attention has been given to issues related to examining the effectiveness of steroid prohibition strategies. This paper concludes with a discussion on the dangers of continued prohibition strategies on steroids, particularly in light of vocational steroid use. This study utilized an unobtrusive methodological approach. The unobtrusive data in this study involved media file collection, indexing, and analysis derived from online archives of newspapers throughout Canada and the United States.*

Keywords: *anabolic steroids, controlled drugs and substances, Canadian drug policy*

Raktažodžiai: *anaboliniai steroidai, kontroliuojami vaistai ir medžiagos, Kanados vaistų politika.*

“None of us used steroids for any other reason than to become better football players. For us, they were vocational not recreational drugs. We didn’t use them to look good at the beach or to win body-building contests. We used them to become more productive at our jobs.”

Former NFL football player Steve Courson (1991, 141–142).

Introduction

Under current Canadian law it is not illegal to use steroids. There are, however, several legal provisions surrounding the use of steroids outlined in the

Canadian Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. In Canada, anabolic steroids are regulated under the Controlled Drug and Substances Act applicable to Schedule IV. It is a criminal offense in Canada to seek or obtain Schedule IV drugs without a valid prescription, as well as to traffic, import, export, and/or produce them without a valid license. Similar laws of prohibition exist throughout the United States and many other Western countries.

According to the United States Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 2004, the term ‘anabolic steroid’ refers to “any drug or hormonal substance, chemically and pharmacologically related to testosterone” (p. 1). While no definition of the term anabolic steroid is provided in Canadian legal doctrine, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act lists 43 different types of anabolic steroids and their derivatives which fall under legal control.

Many substances under the heading of steroids are unlawful without a prescription in Canada including, but not limited to: Oxymetholone, Stanozolol, Nandrolone, Methandrostenolone, Oxandrolone, Boldenone, Methenolone, Mesterolone, Testosterone Cypionate, Testosterone Enanthate, Testosterone Propionate, and Testosterone Undecanoate (Health Canada 2000). Each of these drugs has been reported to have negative physiological and psychological effects on those who use them (Koziris 2007; Sirois 2003; Uzych 1992; Jendrick 2006; Skancke, Friedman 2009; The Mitchell Report 2008).

The aim of this paper is to explore the documented evidence of different vocational groups who are known to use steroids including: athletes, bodybuilders, police, actors, strength coaches, firefighters, and soldiers. These groups, including both men and women, violate laws and prohibition strategies to obtain and use steroids to be better able to perform in their jobs. Vocational drug use reveals the inaccuracies of some perspectives on why people use steroids, highlights the ineffectiveness of drug prohibition strategies, and begs the question of what harms are being caused by steroid prohibition. Each of these areas will be explored in this paper, beginning with a definition of vocational drug use.

Towards a Concept of Vocational Drug Use

Much of the existing research pertaining to steroids in Canada focuses on the possible health consequences of use (Koziris 2007; Sirois 2003; Uzych 1992), social consequences of use (Hoaken, Stewart 2003; Vanhelder 1991), body image and use (Blouin, Goldfield 1995; Goldfield 2009), statistical prevalence of use (Melia et al. 1996) and the ethics of steroid use in amateur and professional sport (Boudreau, Konzak 1991; Kirkwood 2009). Beyond research on steroids in sport, little research has examined the idea of vocational steroid use and even less attention has been given to issues related to steroid prohibition strategies.

The term “vocational steroid use” has been developed to describe individuals who use steroids for the purposes of increasing their performance in their everyday work. They do not use steroids because of addictions or for recreation; they do so to increase their workplace abilities and productivity. As will be discussed in the following section, vocational steroid use can be useful in occupations that require physical strength, endurance, a large stature, a muscular physique, and an edge to have confidence in dealing with dangerous workplace settings and situations.

Methodological Approach

This study utilized an unobtrusive methodological approach. Unobtrusive methods require no human-contact for the purposes of developing research data and, instead, rely on existing information as data (Webb et al. 2000). Furthermore, the existing information that is used as data has typically not been created with the intent that it will serve to be used for academic research. While there are limitations of this approach, particularly that the research analysis is limited to available information, the approach does allow the research to analyze information that has not been shaped by an academic production process, e.g. a face-to-face interview.

The unobtrusive data in this study involved media file collection, indexing, and analysis. Online archives of newspapers in Canada and the United States were searched for articles pertaining to steroid use, possession, and trafficking. These searches yielded thousands of articles. For the purposes of this research study, articles pertaining to vocational steroid use were separated and organized into themes based on the occupation of the users. The occupational groups that were represented through this indexing include: athletes, body-builders, police, actors, strength coaches, firefighters, and soldiers.

Documented Vocational Steroid Users

1) Athletes

In recent years, steroid use in professional sport has been receiving significant legal and media attention. This is particularly the case in Major League Baseball (MLB), which came under the scrutiny of the US Congress through a two-year investigation leading to The Mitchell Report (2007). Also in 2007, track and field star Marion Jones admitted to using steroids to help her earn five medals in the 2000 Summer Olympics (Hertado 2008). In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, 14 athletes and six horses were disqualified for prohibited doping; numerous others were suspended before the games even began (Lee 2010). In 2010, Tour de France winner Alberto Contador tested positive for a banned substance, while Lance Armstrong remains under intense media scrutiny for

possible use of illicit performance-enhancing substances throughout his infamous career (Lee 2010).

While receiving much less media attention, the University of Waterloo football program in Canada was suspended for the 2010-2011 season following the positive test of nine football players (McElroy 2010). After the arrest of a team player for steroid trafficking and possession, the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) made an unprecedented move to test every player on the University of Waterloo football team for the use of illicit performance-enhancers. When the results showed that nine players on the team tested positive for banned substances, the University of Waterloo suspended the team and placed the coaching staff on administrative leave for one year.

These cases only scratch the surface on the prevalence of steroid use in sport. There can be little doubt that steroids are commonplace in sport and, in fact, the Canadian Football League did not even start testing professional football players for steroid use until the 2011 season. Describing the prevalence of steroid use in the 1970s in sport, Dave Meggyesy (1971) writes:

The violent and brutal player that television viewers marvel over on Saturdays and Sundays is often a synthetic product... I saw players taking not only steroids, but also amphetamines and barbiturates at an astonishing rate... trainers do more dealing in these drugs than the average junky (p. 73).

The exact extent of steroid use in sport is not known, but there is definite evidence of use. Possible reasons to engage in this form of vocational drug use include: recovering from sports injuries faster, slowing the bodies aging process to stay in sport for longer, to become bigger, to become faster, to become stronger, to gain a higher paying contract, to avoid injuries, and to provide a more entertaining product on the field.

2) Bodybuilders

Beyond athletes, bodybuilders appear to receive the most media and scholarly attention for their illicit use of steroids. The reason behind this appears quite obvious, as steroid use can allow bodybuilders exceed their genetic potential. Drug free bodybuilding competitions do exist throughout North America, but the bodybuilders simply do not look the same in terms of overall mass as in bodybuilding competitions where steroid use is permitted. Likewise, some bodybuilders lift weights and develop their physiques for lifting competitions. The added size and strength associated with steroid use can help bodybuilders to excel in their vocations.

The use of steroids by many bodybuilders could be considered cosmetic vocational drug use. For many bodybuilders, the benefits of steroid use are purely for cosmetic purposes to add size and muscular definition. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that a primary reason why people engage in steroid use if

for cosmetic purposes, which counters the idea that steroids are used primary for performance-enhancement in sport.

Examples of bodybuilders being charged with possessing and distributing significant quantities of steroids are seemingly endless. There are even several bodybuilding sites with dedicated forums for steroid users to communicate with one another about new forms of drugs, places to purchase drugs illicitly, ways of injecting substances, and different ways of stacking and cycling steroids to achieve better cosmetic gains.

3) Police

Despite the inclusion of steroids in the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act making the possession of the drug illegal in the absence of a valid medical prescription, there is strong evidence to suggest that steroids are used widely by police throughout North America. This use can likely be attributed to the desire to look tough and achieve levels of physical strength to provide individual protection in a dangerous line of work. Some evidence suggests, however, that steroid use among policing could be linked to occurrences of police brutality involving excessive force.

Following several complaints of police brutality as a result of “roid rage” an investigation into steroid use among New Jersey police revealed rampant use. It is believed that a single doctor illegally provided steroids to over 250 public safety officials (Ali 2011). Lawrence Payne, a spokesman for the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) recently estimated that approximately 25% or more of police officers have used steroids (Benson 2010). In many jurisdictions, officers are not necessarily even required to undergo drug testing.

An expert on steroid use, John Hoberman (2005), writes:

One of the remarkable anomalies of the anti-steroid campaign of the past two decades is that it has virtually ignored the many reports of steroid use by police officers in the United States and in other countries. Unknown but clearly significant numbers of policemen have imported, smuggled, sold, and used anabolic steroids over this time period.

In a 1991 article in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin it was claimed that: “Anabolic steroid abuse by police officers is a serious problem that merits greater awareness by departments across the country” (Swanson, Gaines 1991,19). While the exact numbers are unknown, there does appear to be a prevalence of steroid use among police officers in Canada, the United States, and other countries.

4) Actors

Steroid use in film is nothing new. In the 1980s and 1990s, Arnold Schwarzenegger admittedly used steroids to develop the physique that led to

his winning several bodybuilding championship titles and appearing in leading roles in Conan the Barbarian, Conan the Destroyer, The Terminator, and many other films. According to Hollywood trainer Logan Hood, steroid use “still occurs in Hollywood” (Keegan, 2011). Another leading actor from the 1980s and 1990s, Sylvester Stallone was charged for possession of forty vials of human growth hormones several years ago, revealing a strong likelihood that the muscle physique that appeared in the Rocky series and Rambo series was a product of chemical enhancement (Squires 2007).

If wrestling entertainers such as those in the former World Wrestling Federation (WWF) now World Wrestling Entertaining are grouped with actors, this drastically raises the prevalence of vocational drug use in this group. In 2007, 10 WWE wrestlers were investigated for illicit involvement in steroid purchasing, use, and distribution. Furthermore, steroids were found in the house of WWE wrestler Chris Benoit who violently killed himself, his wife, and his young children (Kirkey 2007).

For actors of different sorts, steroids can serve the vocational function of helping them achieve a physique that is demanded for particular roles. It helps them to train harder and achieve extra muscle mass to fulfill certain roles. Furthermore, steroid use could help some actors remain in the business by slowing the visual effects of aging, such as a decline in muscle mass.

5) Strength Coaches

The involvement of strength and conditioning coaches in the use and distribution of steroids made national headlines in the United States with the arrest of Barry Bond's trainer Greg Anderson. Anderson was sentenced to prison on charges related to his involvement with steroids (Williams, Fainaru-Waday 2006). In a more recent case, a personal trainer at a Lifestyles Fitness Center was charged for possession 200 vials of anabolic steroids (Hughes 2011). The use of steroids by strength and conditioning coaches is a logical extension from the use of steroids by athletes, bodybuilders, and actors. These individuals rely on strength coaches to help them achieve the size and strength necessary to excel in their vocations.

The use of steroids by trainers might be, in part, a simple function of being around others who are using steroids for their jobs. There might also be a cosmetic function of wanting to have a large and chiseled muscular physique as a trainer, as it could be seen as a way to sell one's services. For example, an athlete might be more willing to trust the training of a strength coach who has bulging muscles than one who does not.

6) Firefighters

Investigations into steroid use by police officers have simultaneously revealed the use of steroids by firefighters through tracing chains of distribution. One investigation revealed the use of steroids by 53 firefighters in New

Jersey (Benson 2010). Many similar reports and legal convictions suggest a similar usage pattern among firefighters.

The vocational reasons for fire fighters to use steroids appear to be related directly to developing physical strength. The work of being a firefighter can involve heavy lifting and strength in situations that can help protect one's self from harm or others from dangerous situations. Like those who use steroids in the military, firefighters might also be better able to overcome some of the fear of certain tasks in their jobs with the use of steroids.

7) Soldiers

In a steroid bust by Italian officials, over 215,000 doses of illicit steroids and other performance-enhancers were seized while in transport to military troops in Iraq (Simpson 2005, 1). One soldier who spent time lifting weights alongside other soldiers in Iraq suggested that steroids were widely available to any soldiers who wanted them.

In a separate investigation of 700 soldiers bound for Afghanistan, nearly half indicated that they had previously or were currently using steroids. "I wanted to get stronger. I knew we were deploying," one soldier told investigators. "We had this road march through the woods [during training], and I almost fell out, and they had to take my weapon ... I wanted to make sure that didn't happen over there" (Berton 2010).

Like others discussed in this paper, reports by steroid users in the military indicate that use is driven by the need for added strength and conditioning. The ultimate aim is to be a better soldier. Beyond the physical advantages that could be associated with using steroids while training for combat, steroids might also help give soldiers a feeling of confidence entering into warfare, helping them overcome possible fears of death and catastrophic injuries.

Failures of a Prohibition Strategy

1) Ineffective

Prohibition strategies on steroids, as with many other controlled substances, are failing. An exploration of various vocational groups who use steroids for the basic purpose of improving performance in their jobs makes this failure evident. Steroid use is not being controlled, and the effect of continued prohibition is the development of many possible harms as is outlined below. Current prohibition strategies are not even effective in keeping police officers themselves from not illegally obtaining and using steroids.

The vocational groups discussed above are just some of the documented groups who use steroids to perform better in their jobs. This list should not be treated as exhaustive, as it is likely that individuals in many other occupations use steroids for vocational purposes such as construction workers, male sex

trade workers, and night club bouncers. Prohibition strategies are costly and appear ineffective in keeping people from using steroids.

2) Unsafe use

American medical research into steroid use by athletes indicates that non-medically monitored steroid use often involves “stacking” and “cycling” (Taylor 2002). Stacking refers to the use of several types of steroids simultaneously, while cycling involves taking large amounts of particular steroids in short intervals with periods of less use in between. Without the advice of medical professionals, stacking and cycling of drugs can be particularly dangerous. As long as steroid use remains prohibited, people are not likely to seek the help of medical professionals in monitoring and structuring their steroid use.

The manners in which steroids are injected into the body can also be unsafe when performed outside the supervision and direction of a medical establishment. Internet forums on steroid use are filled with questions by young men on how to use needles properly, and what to do if the injection needle is not working. There are also documented issues associated with sharing needles among steroid users, and the high risk of transferring infectious diseases through needle exchange (Perry et. al. 1992).

3) Unsafe product

Illicit drug users often do not know the source or origin of the product they are purchasing. A common method of obtaining steroids is through internet ordering from countries that currently do not ban the possession, use, and distribution of steroids. The purchaser does not, however, know how or where the drug was manufactured. They do not necessarily have an accurate date on the manufacture of the drug, nor can they insure that the drug is what it says it is on the vial.

It is possible that ordered vials could be filled with expired substances, higher doses than labeled, mislabeled substances, or potentially harmful substances. In the illicit drug trade, it is common for substances to be added to the advertised product for various reasons. It might mean adding a filler like vegetable oil to raise the profit margin or could be with a more harmful substance like cocaine in an attempt to addict the user and increase sales in other substances. In an unregulated market, monitoring the quality and safety of products is not possible.

4) Develops an underground economy

Like other failing drug prohibition strategies, steroid prohibition can put the sales market into the hands of individuals involved in organized crime. There is a clear demand for the illicit sale of steroids. In the absence of legitimate providers an underground economy develops. The underground economy is free of taxation and is tied into the sale of other harder drugs and the

violence of defending organized crime territories. There are many accounts where major drug traffickers have been caught in possession of steroids, along with substances like crystal meth, heroine, and cocaine.

5) Fails to address larger issues related to steroid use

A significant limitation of a prohibition approach to the social control of steroids is that it is largely a reactive approach. Little effort is placed on understanding the social and cultural factors that are leading men to inject potentially dangerous substances into their bodies for the purposes of workplace performance-enhancement.

The aim of a prohibition strategy is to punish and deter. The results of prohibition strategies in Canada and the United States have been unequal punishments and a clear lack of deterrence. Resources are being poured into apprehending offenders; resources that could be better used for reasons such as: extended research on the motivations for steroid use, education programs to teach people safer means to workplace performance-enhancement, as well as physical and mental health programs to help steroid users to safely manage or discontinue their use.

Conclusion

Like other historical and contemporary drug prohibition strategies developed in Canada and in other countries worldwide, the continued prohibition strategy on steroids is failing. As this paper has detailed, the mechanisms for the social control of steroids that are currently in place are not even capable of controlling the use of steroids by the police, a primary agent of social control. The primary outcome of the current prohibition strategy on steroids is that more harm is being caused to users who are using the drugs to perform better at their jobs, whether as actors, football players, or police officers.

There is no doubt that the current legal framework surrounding steroid use and distribution in Canada, and in other countries adopting a prohibition approach, is desperately in need of comprehensive review to detail and rectify the possible harms to which it is directly and indirectly contributing. This paper should be seen as a beginning; a call for increased scholarly research on the dangers and failings of a prohibition approach to control the use of steroids.

More comprehensive research is needed on the use of steroids for vocational performance, as well as on illicit steroid use, production, and distribution in general. Steroid researchers must broaden the scope of their work. This continued research will be vital to the development of appropriate drug strategies and policies that minimize harm and replace ineffective, and potentially harmful, steroid prohibition strategies.

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Profesinis steroidų vartojimas: permąstant draudimo priegigos efektyvumą

Santrauka

Didžiuma mokslinės literatūros apie anabolinių steroidų vartojimą yra susijusi su sportininkais ir kultūristais. Tačiau dabar atrandama vis daugiau įrodymų, kad fizinį pajėgumą stiprinantys vaistai, ypač anaboliniai steroidai, plačiai vartojami ir už sporto ribų. Šiame straipsnyje toliau plėtojama ir analizuojama sąvoka „profesinis steroidų vartojimas“, kuri reiškia bet kokią steroidų vartojimą siekiant sustiprinti fizinį pajėgumą darbo vietoje; šis vartojimo būdas nebūdingas daugumai uždraustų medžiagų. Asmenys, vartojantys steroidus dėl savo profesijos, nevartoja jų dėl priklausomybės ar siekdami atsipalaiduoti; jie vartoja juos norėdami pagerinti savo profesines kompetencijas ir produktyvumą. Straipsnyje aprašomos septynios užfiksuotos profesinio steroidų vartojimo formos: steroidai, kuriuos vartoja atletai, kultūristai, policininkai, aktoriai, jėgos treneriai, gaisrininkai ir kareiviai. Nors profesinio steroidų vartojimo idėja tyrinėta itin nedaug, dar mažiau mokslininkai skiria dėmesio klausimams, susijusiems su steroidų draudimo strategijų efektyvumu. Šiame tyrime remtasi nepastebimos metodologijos prieiga: buvo renkami, sisteminami ir analizuojami „nepastebimi“ duomenys, kuriuos sudarė žiniasklaidos dokumentai iš internetinių Kanados ir JAV laikraščių archyvų. Straipsnis baigiamas diskusija apie tebegaliojančio steroidų draudimo pavojus, ypač turint galvoje vis platesnį profesinį steroidų vartojimą.