

## "If everyone is using, shouldn't I?": Perceived norms of anabolic androgenic steroid use among high school athletes.

In recent years there has been a plethora of high profile cases of professional athletes testing positive for performance enhancing drugs, such as anabolic androgenic steroids. These incidents may impact the perception that drug use is not only accepted, but a necessity for success in sport. From the high school athlete's perspective, if drug use is perceived as being high, particularly among their peers, then this may influence their decision to use steroids. Research suggests that an individual's perception of normative behavior, particularly among relevant reference groups, predicts intentions to engage in similar behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Thus the perception of widespread steroid use is not conducive to fostering a doping-free culture in sport. It is therefore important to determine the extent to which high school athletes believe steroids are used in their sport. Consequently this study will investigate the perceptions of steroid use among high school athletes and the ways in which this influences their intentions to use, and attitudes towards steroids. Prevalence of steroid use among high school students is reported to be between 3 and 12% (Calfee & Fadale, 2006; Yesalis & Bahrke, 2000). Data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System and the Monitoring the Future study provides a more modest account with reported lifetime use at 3.3% and 2.5% respectively. However, there is evidence to suggest that high school athletes perceive the use of steroids to be rising (Laure, Lecerf, Friser, & Binsinger, 2004) and to be more prevalent among their competitors (Bloodworth & McNamee, 2010). In addition, Woolf (2009) has reported elite high school baseball players to exaggerate perceptions of steroid use at the high school and professional level (but not at the collegiate level). Whereas the perception that competitors are using steroids may serve an ego saving function ("they won because they cheated"), or a rally cry ("lets beat those cheat"), it may also serve to motivate usage. Although there have been calls for research in this area (see Donovan, Egger, Kapernick, & Mendoza, 2002), little is known about the impact of perceived norms on steroid related attitudes and behavior. To determine the impact of perceived norms on intentions to use, and attitude towards steroids, male high school athletes in football, baseball, and basketball will be recruited to participate in an online survey. Parental and child consent will be sought for each athlete. Participants will indicate their perceived norms of steroid use among athletes in their sport at the high school, collegiate, and professional level. Intentions to use steroids, previous/current use of steroids, and attitude towards steroids will be assessed to determine the extent to which perceived

norms influence these variables. The outcome from this study will have theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective it will advance our knowledge on the influence of perceived norms on attitudes, intentions, and behavior. From a practical perspective the findings from this study will inform the development of educational and social marketing material to help tackle the issue of drugs in sport.