

# THE STEROID-USER'S PATH TO VIOLENT CRIME



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**A**nabolic steroid-users committed two particularly brutal murders in Sydney in the mid-1990s. One man, with recent paranoid tendencies, took a claw hammer and battered his wife to death, and then shot himself.

Another man met a woman he knew at a nightclub. They went to the stairwell of a nearby hotel where he murdered her. He would later say: "Something snapped." Experienced police described the attack as the most brutal they had encountered.

In both these murders, the level of aggression and violence fits the term known well among steroid users: "Roid rage".

Preclinical, clinical, and anecdotal reports certainly suggest that steroids contribute to psychiatric dysfunction. Although many users report feeling good about themselves while on anabolic steroids, extreme mood swings can also occur.

These swings include manic-like symptoms which could lead to violence. Reports also exist of paranoid jealousy, extreme irritability, delusions, and impaired judgment stemming from feelings of invincibility.

People with low self-esteem are often the ones who use medication to improve their muscle bulk. But, without intensive training as well, the effects fail to eventuate and the user becomes disappointed and might use increasingly larger amounts. That user is more likely to suffer side effects (including the psychological ones).

Early effects are seen as changes in mood and euphoria, and an increase in confidence, energy and self-esteem, with enhanced motivation and enthusiasm. There is also diminished fatigue, sleeplessness and an ability to train through pain.

Libido may be decreased but is more often increased, sometimes markedly. Irritability, anger, agitation and a "strange edgy feeling" are commonly reported.

With larger doses or, after taking anabolic steroids for a longer time, there comes a loss of inhibition and a lack of judgement, with mood swings or grandiose ideas. Long-time users become suspicious, quarrelsome, impulsive and more aggressive.

Severe effects manifest when these aggressive feelings increase to the extent that violent, hostile, anti-social behaviour develops – "roid rage".

These rages sometimes result in property damage, self-harm, assaults, marriage break-ups, domestic violence, child abuse, and even murder or suicide.

Anabolic-androgenic steroids are synthetically produced variants of testosterone, the naturally occurring male sex hormone. Anabolic strictly means the "building up" or growing of tissue.

The word steroid generally refers to the anabolic steroids. One commonly used in medicine is cortisone. Steroid creams (hydrocortisone 1 per cent) are used for dermatitis while prednisolone is used for asthma and autoimmune diseases.

In the mid-1930s, three different scientists had synthesized testosterone, making it the first anabolic steroid. Testosterone was tested on dogs which then bulked up. After that, experiments were carried out on men.

People soon realized how testosterone would help athletes and, in 1954, the US weightlifting team began using it. The team doctor, John Ziegler, started working with pharmaceutical companies to refine the substance to make it enhance strength more efficiently.

In 1967, anabolic steroids were banned by the International Olympic Council, and many sports organizations followed suit. This was the beginning of the ongoing struggle between sporting bodies and athletes.

Soon, the IOC had a test to determine if athletes had used testosterone steroids, but it did not take long for the athletes to develop different types of steroids to get

around the tests. The first was a steroid which would leave the body quickly so as not to show up on the test.

Some anabolic steroids come in tablet form while others are injected into muscle. Sustanon is commonly used as testosterone replacement after castration (owing to a tumour) or deficiency from a brain pituitary problem.

The steroid deca-durabolin was commonly used in men and women for osteoporosis until new drugs (biphosphinates) improved bone density with fewer side effects.

Steroids such as stanozolol, boldebal-h, nandrolin, spectriol, drive and stanabolic are made for use on animals.

The effects of steroids are:

- For men – shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, infertility, baldness, development of breasts, increased risk of prostate cancer.
- For women – growth of facial hair, male-pattern baldness, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle, enlargement of the clitoris, deepened voice.
- For adolescents – stunted growth owing to premature skeletal maturation and accelerated puberty changes, risk of not reaching expected height if steroids are taken before the typical adolescent growth spurt.

The body tries to break down the steroids and, as it does, the liver produces other "steroids". If the liver gets too much work, through the ingestion of oral steroids, it can become inflamed (hepatitis).

If the steroids are injected into a muscle, the breakdown of the injected material usually turns into oestrogen, which produces female hormone effects, such as increased breast tissue.

The problem of steroid abuse is not that common in Australia now but, for those affected, the implications can be severe and life-threatening.