

TikTok videos on deadly bodybuilding drugs viewed 89m times by young people in UK

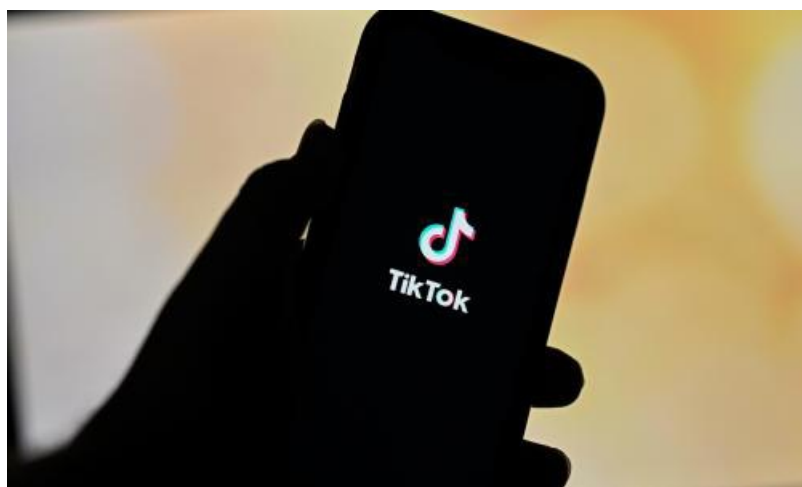
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Young TikTok users in the UK have viewed videos that promote deadly and illegal bodybuilding drugs 89m times, a report has found. The report, titled TikTok's Toxic Trade, by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), looks into the promotion of bodybuilding drugs and a rise in toxic content aimed at young men. The report suggests the content encourages unrealistic physiques for men, magnified by toxic masculinity, affecting the self-esteem of young boys and men. Using TikTok's own tools, the researchers found that in the UK, users of all ages had viewed content posted to hashtags promoting steroids and similar drugs nearly 117m times over the last three years. From these views, 89 million came from users aged 18 to 24. In the US, videos promoting the substances were viewed by users of all ages 587m times in three years, including 420m times by users aged 18 to 24. The findings are part of a wider study looking into TikTok's issue with the promotion of dangerous and illegal drugs, which are targeted at teenage boys and young men. CCDH researchers looked into videos that promoted and posted content found videos relating to the sales of three classes of steroids and steroid-like drugs: anabolic-androgenic steroids, peptides and selective androgen receptor modulators (SARMs). Researchers found that content posted to related hashtags often promoted drug use and downplayed potential risks. For example, some videos encourage viewers to dismiss concerns and to "just tell your parents they're vitamins". The report also identified websites that used TikTok influencers to sell steroid-like drugs – one UK-based company was promoting a SARMs drug that is illegal to sell in the UK and can cause health problems. Influencers involved in the promotion of steroids and drugs through promotional partnerships have a combined 1.8 million followers and can be paid commissions of up to 30% of sales. TikTok's community guidelines prohibit content showing or promoting recreational drug use, the trade of drugs, or showing or promoting young people possessing or consuming drugs. Recent reports have suggested buying drugs on social media is easy, with them being openly sold on platforms. Users are able to get around having their videos taken down by using codewords, for instance. Deaths in the bodybuilding community have also led to warnings about the accessibility of illegal bodybuilding drugs. CCDH is calling for TikTok to uphold its own community standards and for transparency regarding researchers being able to view data about how many of the platform's youngest users, aged under 18, are viewing harmful content. Imran Ahmed, the chief executive of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, said this "warped" idea of masculinity puts young men at risk. "Young men are being told that they are not real men unless they have these Avenger-type bodies, which is unattainable for most people. This is damaging their self-esteem, and then seeking to profit from this by selling drugs that could kill them. "TikTok's algorithm is incredibly addictive and dangerous, they need to be cautious about what content they are serving

as recommended content to young people.” TikTok was approached for comment.