

INCREASING INCIDENCE OF PSYCHEDELIC DRUG USE AMONG AUSTRALIANS: CAUSE FOR CONCERN OR OPPORTUNITY FOR THERAPEUTIC LEVERAGE?

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Introduction / Issues: The NDSHS, the EDRS and customs seizures indicate that use of psychedelic drugs is increasing in Australia. Further, psychedelics represent the largest class of emerging Novel Psychoactive Substances. This paper aimed to examine whether this trend is a cause for concern.

Method / Approach: Literature published over the past 10 years regarding psychedelic drugs was reviewed.

Key Findings: An international renaissance has led to dozens of studies that demonstrate a range of benefits from psychedelic drugs administered in clinical settings. Psychedelics have been shown to occasion mystical experiences, increase in the personality dimension of openness and treat a range of mental health conditions including posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression and end-of-life anxiety. Psychedelics have also been shown to be effective treatments for alcohol dependence and smoking. Two large epidemiological studies suggest that there is a reduced incidence of mental health conditions among people who have use psychedelic drugs outside of a clinical setting.

Discussions and Conclusions: While mounting evidence suggests that psychedelic drugs administered in a clinical setting show promise as safe and effective treatments, there are risks associated with the use of these drugs outside of such controlled environments. Hence, it would not be advisable to encourage the use of such drugs. However, the past use of psychedelic drugs among people seeking treatment could be used as grist for the therapeutic mill.

Implications for Practice: This presentation will present harm reduction information and psychotherapeutic models that could be used to enhance treatment among people who have past psychedelic drug experiences.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: Dr Bright is vice-president of Psychedelic Research in Science and Medicine, a not-for-profit organisation that aims to facilitate psychedelic research in Australia.