

Can a Naturalistic Psychedelic Experience Help Mitigate the Harmful Effects of Alcohol?

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Context

Classic psychedelic use (LSD, psilocybin, ayahuasca, DMT, mescaline, 5-MeO-DMT) has been associated with alcohol behaviour modification in clinical, recreational or ritualistic setting.

This study aims to understand the lived experience of psychedelic users and how these changed their relationship with alcohol.

Methods

Recrutement

- Snowball sampling method
- Inclusion criteria:
 - classic psychedelic use (past 12 months)
 - alcohol use (lifetime)
 - French-speaking

Data collection

- 15 participants from Montreal, Canada
- Semi-structured interviews
- Topics:
 - Psychedelic use
 - Alcohol use
 - Relationship with alcohol following psychedelic experiences

Data analysis

- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
- Inductive approach
 - Inductive coding
 - Thematic analysis

Emerging themes

Theme 1 Motives for Psychedelic Use

1. Explore the mind in an altered state
2. Enhance pleasure
3. Better self-understanding and heal traumas
4. Deepen relationship with friends and loved ones

"There is no fix objective. I don't take DMT to deal with certain issues. It is really to open my horizons." (P2)

"It brings me considerations in regards of myself in relationship with the "world." (P3)

Theme 2 Key Factors in Alcohol Behavior Changes

1. Increased sensitivity towards social context
2. Connection with true motivation
3. Better convenience of psychedelics for social settings
4. Lower impact of psychedelics on cognitive functions

"Psychedelics give you the ability to see yourself 1 on 1, like if you were seeing yourself from an outsider's perspective. [...] when you see yourself drink in a social setting, you're asking yourself questions regarding these things, [...] you can realize then if it is really necessary to drink? Do I have a problem with alcohol? There's a personal work that can be done." (P5)

Theme 3 Co-use of psychedelics and alcohol

1. Sensory clash of alcohol and psychedelics
2. Intentional use and substance incompatibility
3. Anxiety reduction
4. Balancing psychedelics and alcohol for optimal effects

"In my head, psychedelics are sacred. Like I don't want to mix them with everything, in the sense that I have to respect them. Alcohol seems unnecessary because it reduces your conscience. It makes you dumber while psychedelics brings me farther and makes me think differently about things." (P6)

Theme 4 Therapeutic potential

1. Sense of belonging and unconditional love
2. Tools for substance use modulation and harm reduction
3. Enhanced introspection

"When you have an addiction, it's similar to seeking validation or searching for a sense of love. [...] The pursuit of substances is a way of searching for that feeling. But once psychedelics made me feel what it's like to be unconditionally loved, it ended a quest I didn't even know I was on at the time." (P4)

Take home message

For psychedelic users...

- Crucial role of motives and contexts in psychedelic experiences
 - Different outcomes according to initial motives
- Psychedelics and alcohol co-use not favoured
 - However, some microdosed to consume less alcohol, or reduce anxiety

For social and community service professionals...

- Clarify distinct effects of each substance to the population and the different motives to use or combine them.
- Consider psychedelics as support for introspection

For researchers and clinicians...

- Potential harm reduction approaches
 - Guidance for safer use of psychedelics
 - Dosage with alcohol co-use
 - Microdosing as potential substitute for social drinking
- Further explorations needed regarding interactions between psychedelics and alcohol
 - How can psychedelics be leveraged as tools for alcohol use disorder treatment?