

Abstract

Background: Hallucinogen persisting perception disorder (HPPD) is a rare and understudied disorder affecting users of hallucinogenic substances. There is limited information on its pathogenesis, prevalence, course, and treatment options. With the increasing interest of both the professional and general public in the topic of psychedelics, it is appropriate to pay more attention to the issue of adverse effects of psychedelics, including HPPD.

Aims: The aim of this thesis was to describe the prevalence of HPPD symptoms in psychedelic substance users, specifically their prevalence, course, and possible association with specific substances and psychedelic experiences. The aim was also to determine users' awareness of the risk of developing HPPD.

Methods: Data were collected using an online cross-sectional survey posted on social media in groups of psychoactive substance users in February and March 2023. The study sample consisted of 158 adults with experience of using one or more psychedelic substances. Selection was non-random, with respondents entering the study on the basis of self-nomination.

Results: 41,8% of respondents experienced abnormal visual phenomena. Of these, 4.5% reported limitations in daily functioning and 6.1% said they had considered seeking professional help. The proportion of users of specific substances whose use was associated with the occurrence of abnormal visual phenomena was highest for LSD. For PCP, there was statistical evidence of an association between lifetime use and the occurrence of HPPD symptoms. The most frequently reported specifics of the experience after which the phenomena developed were high dose and challenging course. 38,0% of respondents reported that they were not aware of the risk of developing HPPD before using the substances.

Conclusion: Almost half of the respondents had experienced some form of abnormal visual phenomena, and the specific manifestations and psychedelic experiences that led to their development were highly variable. LSD was the substance most frequently associated with the occurrence of abnormal visual phenomena, but a statistically significant association was found only for PCP (which should be assessed with caution due to methodological limitations). More than a third of respondents were unaware of the risk of developing HPPD before using the substances, indicating a lack of awareness among users. Psychedelic substance users should be adequately informed about the risks of HPPD.

Key words: HPPD – hallucinogen persisting perception disorder – psychedelics – hallucinogens