

Abstract

The present dissertation deals with the topic of the experience with the use of classical psychedelics (i.e. synthetic or naturally occurring psilocybin, LSD, DMT, 5-MeO-DMT and mescaline) in the context of clinical psychology and health psychology. It links the topic with findings from other relevant fields such as anthropology, neuroscience and pharmacology. The theoretical review summarizes previous research on psychedelics, with an emphasis on psilocybin, as well as findings on their use from history to the present, including mechanism of action, extrapharmacological factors of use, mental health benefits, risks and adverse effects.

The empirical section explored these topics in the clinical and naturalistic context of the Czech Republic in two studies and presents results from a) a descriptive analysis of a dataset from a self-nominated sample ($N = 1\,177$) of people with a lifetime prevalence of psychedelic use from a retrospective cross-sectional online study and b) from a prospective measurement using a battery of standardized questionnaires on life satisfaction, mental health, mindfulness and self-actualization in 19 healthy volunteers who used psilocybin in a double-blind, randomized, controlled clinical trial.

The results suggest that, in line with the literature from international studies, psychedelics can be used safely in formal clinical and a variety of unregulated contexts, with predominantly beneficial but also neutral and negative effects on aspects of mental health, the latter particularly in naturalistic contexts. These results contribute to the knowledge base on the phenomenon of psychedelic use and may serve to inform the field of mental health and other helping services, public health and policy around psychoactive substances.

Given the acceleration of research, public interest and naturalistic use of psychedelics, the thesis is complemented by two theoretical sections offering a selective overview, perspectives and reflections on the current state and possible future direction, with an emphasis on the associated risks and challenges of psychedelic research and the potential implementation of psychedelics into mental health care practice. It also highlights in this context the importance of psychotherapy and health psychology in research and the development of standards of good practice.