

New research confirms lingering mood benefit of psychedelics

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People who had recently used psychedelics such as psilocybin report a sustained improvement in mood and feeling closer to others after the high has worn off, shows a new Yale study published the week of Jan. 20

in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The results of a field study of more than 1,200 people attending multi-day arts and [music festivals](#) in the United States and United Kingdom confirm previous laboratory research indicating that [psychedelic substances](#) enhance feelings of social connectedness and improve mental well-being, the authors say.

"Our results show that people who take psychedelics 'in the wild' report positive experiences very similar to those observed in controlled [laboratory studies](#)," said Yale's Matthias Forstmann, postdoctoral fellow and first author of the paper.

Senior author and assistant professor of psychology Molly Crockett and her team visited a half dozen festivals and asked attendees who were not then under the influence of psychedelics about their recent social experiences, mood and substance use. By surveying them, the researchers were able to characterize the [psychological effects](#) of the "afterglow" of [psychedelic](#) experiences.

The team found that people who recently took psychedelics such as LSD and psilocybin, more commonly known as magic mushrooms, were more likely to report having "transformative experiences" so profound that they came out of the experience radically changed, including changes to their moral values. Transformative experiences, in turn, were associated with feelings of social connectedness and positive mood. The most pronounced effects were reported by psychedelics users who had taken the drugs within the past 24 hours.

People who abstained from substance use, drank alcohol or took other drugs such as cocaine or opioids did not report transformative experiences, increased connectedness with others or positive mood to the same degree, the study showed.

Crockett cautioned that the study was not designed to assess the [negative reactions](#) to the use of psychedelics that have been reported.

Further studies are necessary to learn which environmental factors are associated with positive versus negative psychedelic experiences, she said. But the findings add to a body of evidence suggesting psychedelic substances may have potential as therapy for mood disorders.

"We are encouraged that our study is consistent with previous laboratory findings showing mood benefits of psychedelics in healthy people and in patients suffering from anxiety and depression," she said.

More information: Matthias Forstmann et al., "Transformative experience and social connectedness mediate the mood-enhancing effects of psychedelic use in naturalistic settings," *PNAS* (2020). www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.1918477117

Provided by Yale University

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