



Perspective Article

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Psychedelics for Use and Wellbeing Cultural Context and Recent Developments: A Jamaican Perspective

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Background

Proclaimed as the “new frontier” in psychiatry, the use of Psychedelics, including Psilocybin as a treatment for mental health and wellbeing has gained momentum over the last few years [1,2]. The scientific progress and clinical promise of this movement owes much of its success to the history of indigenous healing practices. Though “discovered” in 1956 by Roger Heim [3], the history of Psilocybin use extends to as far back as 6,000 BCE with depictions of Psilocybin containing mushrooms in the Selva Pascuala Mural in Spain [4]. There have been documented use among indigenous peoples from Pre-Columbian Americas, ancient Egypt, and Greco-Roman ceremonies for sacred rituals, and as a way of “communing with the gods” and resolving complex themes [5-7]. This kind of use falls within the realm of Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM). This approach seeks therapies which accompany traditional medicine to contribute to and diversify current frameworks, and is also seen as pleasant and non-invasive, in contrast to conventional medical practices and the use of manufactured pharmaceutical products [8].

Keywords: Psychedelics; Psilocybin; Wellbeing; Culture; Jamaica; Complementary and Alternative Medicine

Perspective

Despite growing evidence of the therapeutic benefits of Psychedelic drugs such as Psilocybin and LSD in the 1950s and 1960s, concerns arose about their recreational use with the rise of the “counterculture movement” in the United States [9]. This led to the halting of pivotal research, their subsequent classification as Schedule I compounds, and a delay in understanding the beneficial effects of Psilocybin [10,11]. Regulatory approval to resume Psychedelic research in the United States was obtained in 2000, leading to a milestone study which sparked the revival of Psilocybin research globally [12]. Subsequently, there has been a new era of interest in Psilocybin research and its effectiveness for the treatment of multiple mental health conditions [13-16], with numerous studies demonstrating the efficacy and safety of

using Psilocybin to treat treatment resistant depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, and trauma related disorders [17-20]. In Jesse and Griffiths [21], healthy individuals treated with high dose Psilocybin reported deep mystical experiences defined as encountering a profound sense of unity, transcendence of time and space, a deeply felt positive mood, and a renewed sense of purpose and meaning. At the 14-month follow-up, these effects were maintained.

Research also suggests that Psychedelics may potentially reduce criminal behaviour [22-24]. This is of particular interest for Jamaica, given the country’s high homicide rate of 43.85/100,000 persons [25], and is an area of clinical significance in targeting underlying psychopathy. Previous research in Jamaica shows prevalence

rates of underlying personality disorders of 66.67% in prison populations, compared with 25-33% in the general population [26]. Given the limited traditional techniques for treatment and their variable outcomes in addressing these disorders, this is a challenge for this small island state.

Jamaicans have long embraced “natural/herbal remedies”, with plant products being readily accepted and preferred by many for treating various ailments [27-29]. Historical records of the island’s indigenous peoples and current estimates suggest that this preference and willingness to rely on traditional healing modalities, including herbal remedies for health maintenance and therapeutic management of disease has remained [30,31]. As the Psychedelic renaissance continues to gain traction, Jamaica is uniquely positioned to take part in the decolonization of Psychedelic use, being one of the few countries in the world in which Psilocybin containing mushrooms are legal [32].

This puts the Caribbean nation at an advantage to invest in this alternative means of treatment and to embrace the use of Psilocybin [32], within the framework of CAM. This embrace would attract industry and investment from several avenues, including the cultivation of mushrooms, bio-pharmaceutical companies interested in production, research and clinical trials [32]. This would offer possibilities for the health care system, agricultural system, food diversity, security and export, education system and possibly violence intervention programs.

Though the use of Psilocybin has not been popular in Jamaica, with no existing laws against its production and use, Jamaica has already begun to reap the benefits through wellness tourism and a noticeable demand for “magic mushrooms” at various “mushroom retreats” over the past few years [32]. Following the legalization of marijuana for medicinal and religious purposes in 2015, Cabinet in February 2018 approved nutraceuticals as a separate category in the country’s Food and Drug Act [33]. Advocacy efforts and official calls for regulation of a Psilocybin industry have been made. On February 2, 2022, the Manager of Tourism at Jamaica Promotions Corporation (JAMPRO) announced that the agency has identified opportunities in the development of facilities for treatment, and research and development with Psilocybin mushrooms [34], based on their observation of a growing international interest in the research of Psilocybin mushrooms.

Conclusion

As we venture into this New Frontier in Psychiatry, countries like Jamaica should be engaged for conducting clinical trials using psychedelics for treating mental health conditions, as well as promoting its benefits for general wellbeing. We must ensure that the Caribbean’s/Jamaica’s rapidly expanding Psychedelic wellness and medical programmes are safe, while maintaining the highest ethical standards in the therapeutic use of Psychedelics.

Acknowledgement

None.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for the authors of this paper.

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