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## Psychedelics might reduce internalized shame and complex trauma symptoms in those with a history of childhood abuse

by [Eric W. Dolan](#) — September 30, 2021 in [Mental Health](#), [Psychedelic Drugs](#)



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The use of psychedelic drugs is associated with lower levels of complex posttraumatic stress symptoms and internalized shame in adults who suffered maltreatment in childhood, according to new research published in the journal *Chronic Stress*.


“There’s an abundance of clinical studies of the therapeutic effects of psychedelics, but few studies have examined the therapeutic potential of psychedelic use in naturalistic (non-clinical) settings,” said study author CJ Healy, a PhD student at The New School for Social Research.

“Most of the people in the world who are healing themselves with psychedelics are taking them in naturalistic settings — in nature, with friends, at home, at a rave — and so I wanted to study empirically whether this naturalistic, therapeutic use of psychedelics is also showing benefits in terms of symptom reduction and improvements in self-concept, particularly among people with histories of complex trauma in childhood.”

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The researchers surveyed 166 English-speaking adults regarding childhood maltreatment, posttraumatic stress symptoms, and internalized shame. The survey also asked: “Have you ever used a psychedelic/entheogenic/hallucinogenic substance (including, but not limited to: psilocybin ‘magic’ mushrooms or truffles, LSD/‘acid’, ayahuasca/yagé, mescaline/peyote/San Pedro, DMT, MDMA/ecstasy, ketamine, or 2 C-B) with the intention of healing or processing childhood trauma?”

Approximately 93% of participants scored in the severe range on at least one of the childhood maltreatment type subscales (physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, and emotional neglect), while approximately 31% reported a history of intentional therapeutic psychedelic use.

The researchers found that child maltreatment was associated with higher levels of both posttraumatic stress symptoms and internalized shame. Those with a history of intentional therapeutic psychedelic use, however, tended to report less symptoms associated with disturbances in self-organization, a cluster of complex trauma symptoms that is comprised of affective dysregulation, negative self-concept, and disturbances in relationships.

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Importantly, the researchers also found that reporting more than five occasions of intentional therapeutic psychedelic use weakened the relationship between emotional abuse/neglect and disturbances in self-organization.

The findings suggest that “using psychedelics with therapeutic intentions, even in non-clinical settings, may help reduce internalized shame and complex trauma symptoms in people with histories of complex trauma in childhood,” Healy told PsyPost.

“Moreover, these benefits might be more pronounced with repeated use; in this study, the group that reported the overall lowest levels of internalized shame and complex trauma symptoms was the group that had used psychedelics with therapeutic intent more than five times.”


Like many psychedelic studies, the current research is still in a preliminary stage. The findings come with some important caveats, which could be addressed in future research.

“As is often the case with cross-sectional, survey-based studies such as these, causality can’t be determined; we can’t say whether the psychedelics

explained. "To more robustly and causally demonstrate the efficacy of therapeutic psychedelic use in naturalistic settings, future studies will need to have a longitudinal design, meaning they will need to do assessments (e.g., of complex trauma symptoms) before the participants use the psychedelic, then follow up with them later to assess what, if anything, has changed or gotten better."

"Another problem is that the sample of this study was predominantly White," Healy added. "It's a longstanding problem in psychedelic science that people of color, especially Black people, are dramatically underrepresented in study samples. More research needs to be done using samples higher in racial and socioeconomic diversity in order to represent the experiences of oppressed and marginalized peoples in our findings."

The study, "Using Psychedelics With Therapeutic Intent Is Associated With Lower Shame and Complex Trauma Symptoms in Adults With Histories of Child Maltreatment", was authored by C. J. Healy, Kellie Ann Lee, and Wendy D'Andrea.

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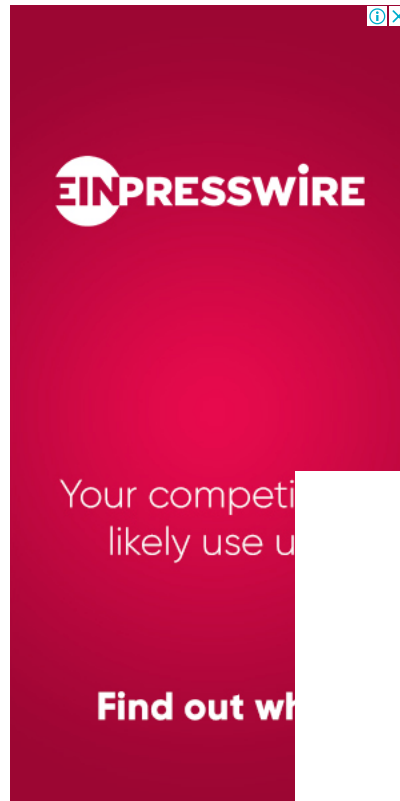
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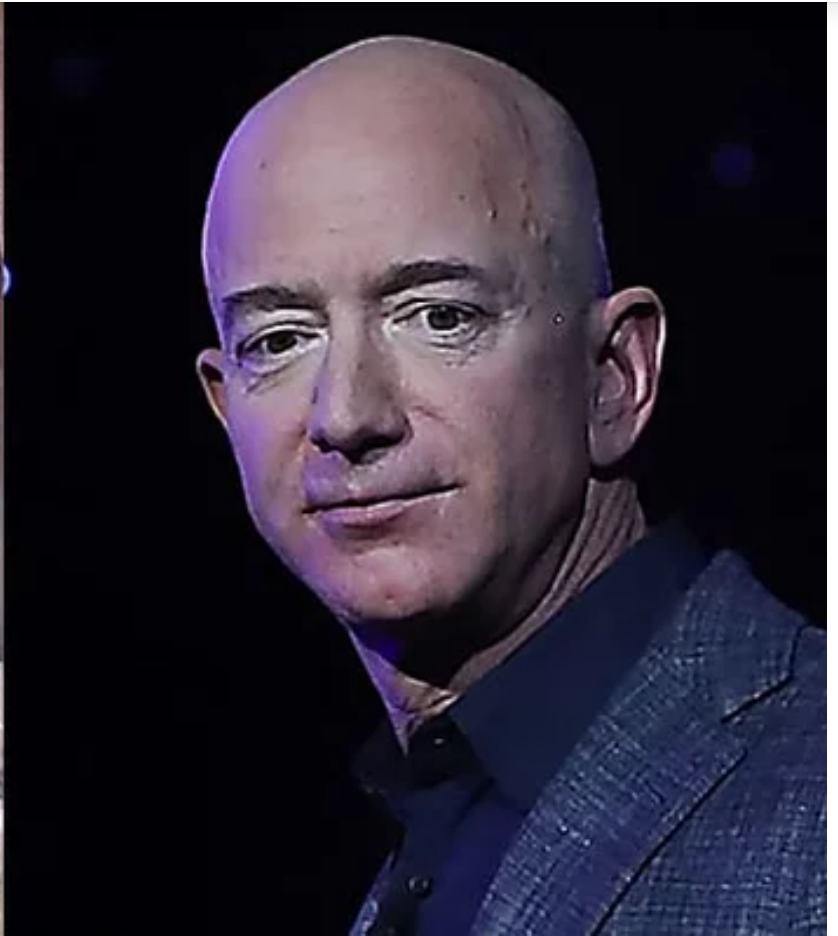


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