

Study: Psychedelic Mushrooms Linked to Early Human Consciousness

New Study Explores Role of Psilocybin Mushrooms in Human Consciousness Evolution

Buenos Aires, Argentina – A new paper delves into the potential influence of psilocybin mushrooms on the evolution of human consciousness, suggesting that the psychedelic compounds in these fungi could have had profound neurological and psychological impacts on early human development. The literature review, conducted by researchers from the Miguel Lillo Foundation, takes a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating insights from biology, ethnobotany, and neuroscience.

Psilocybin and Human Evolution

The study, authored by Jehoshua Macedo-Bedoya of the University Nacional Mayor de San Marcos in Lima, Peru, and Fatima Calvo-Bellido of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru, reviews existing research on psilocybin and human consciousness. They propose that psilocybin mushrooms might have played a crucial role in the cognitive evolution of early humans.

“The hypothesis that psilocybin mushrooms may have intervened as a factor in the evolution of human consciousness, either as catalysts of mystical experiences or as drivers of cognitive processes, raises profound reflections on the ancestral interaction between human beings and their environment,” the authors wrote, according to a translation from the original Spanish. “The origin of human consciousness is one of the great questions facing man, and the material collected indicates that psilocybin may have contributed to its early development.”

The ‘Stoned Ape’ Theory

The paper revisits the “stoned ape” theory popularized by ethnobotanist Terrence McKenna. According to this theory, as human ancestors moved from forested areas into grasslands, they encountered more hoofed animals and, subsequently, psilocybin mushrooms growing in the animals’ excrement. Consuming these mushrooms could have triggered various changes in the brains of pre-human hominids, enhancing their cognitive abilities and altering their perception.

The study suggests that these changes might have improved hunting and food-gathering skills, increased sexual stimulation and mating opportunities, and facilitated the development of language and abstract thinking. These factors could have expanded the human mind, fostering creativity, introspection, and advanced cognitive processes.

Brain and Evolutionary Implications

“Considering the importance of psilocybin mushrooms in the interaction with human consciousness, it is crucial to explore both their brain and evolutionary implications,” the authors concluded. They highlighted

that psilocybin affects multiple brain areas, including the prefrontal cortex, hippocampus, and anterior cingulate cortex, leading to changes in memory, decision-making, and retrospection. These effects have garnered interest for their potential therapeutic applications, particularly in treating mental disorders like depression and anxiety.

From an evolutionary perspective, the study posits that psilocybin ingestion could have enhanced visual abilities and reproductive success in communities that used these mushrooms.

Historical and Botanical Context

A separate genomic study published earlier this year traces the origins of psilocybin mushrooms back approximately 67 million years, around the time of the dinosaurs' extinction. This research indicates that the ability to produce psilocybin may have transferred between different fungi over millions of years, with wood decomposition as the likely ancestral ecological niche for [Psilocybe](#) species.

In terms of human use, the ingestion of psilocybin mushrooms potentially dates back millions of years, contrasting with the more recent use of cannabis. Studies suggest that humans began using Cannabis plants around 10,000 years ago, initially for fibers and nutrition, with experiential use emerging roughly 3,000 years ago.

Cannabis Evolution and Use

Research indicates that cannabis and its closest relative, hops, diverged about 28 million years ago. The rise of cannabinoids like THC and CBD may have been influenced by ancient viruses, leading to the psychoactive properties of modern cannabis.

The new paper offers intriguing insights into the possible role of psilocybin mushrooms in human cognitive evolution. By exploring the neurological and evolutionary impacts of these psychedelic fungi, the study adds a fascinating dimension to our understanding of the complex interplay between human beings and their environment throughout history.

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