

New Study Links Psychedelics to Fewer Bad Headaches

New Research Suggests Psychedelics Could Be a Future Treatment Option for Headache Disorders

A recent study has found that individuals who have used classic psychedelics, such as LSD or psilocybin (magic mushrooms), are significantly less likely to report frequent bad headaches. This research, published in the *Journal of Pharmacology*, adds to the growing body of evidence suggesting that psychedelics could serve as a potential treatment for primary headache disorders in the future.

Study Analyzes Data from Long-Term Cohort Study

Researchers utilized data from the British Child Development Study 1958, which tracked 11,419 individuals born over a single week in March 1958. The study examined responses to three key questions:

Do you often have bad headaches?

Have you ever tried LSD, also known as acid or trips?

Have you ever tried magic mushrooms?

The findings showed that individuals who had used psychedelics at least once in their lifetime had 25% lower odds of experiencing frequent bad headaches compared to those who had never used them.

Limitations of the Study: Correlation Does Not Imply Causation

Despite the intriguing findings, the study authors caution against drawing direct causal conclusions. The research is observational in nature, meaning other factors could explain the association. For instance, people suffering from frequent headaches might intentionally avoid using psychedelics.

Similarly, prior studies using data from the same survey have shown that low alcohol consumption is linked to a higher likelihood of frequent headaches. This has been interpreted as individuals who experience headaches choosing to abstain from alcohol, which is known to be a common headache trigger.

Gender Differences in Psychedelics and Headache Relief

Interestingly, when researchers analyzed the data based on gender, they found a more pronounced effect among female participants. Women who had used psychedelics had 30% lower odds of experiencing frequent bad headaches. However, no significant association was found in men.

Researchers hypothesize that this discrepancy could be due to differences in lifestyle habits or physiological responses to psychedelics. Male participants were more likely to report daily alcohol consumption and use of other drugs, potentially masking any positive effects of psychedelics on headaches.

Animal studies suggest that psychedelics may interact with male and female physiology differently. Differences in gene expression and dendritic spine density in the brain could play a role in how psychedelics influence headache disorders.

Growing Interest in Psychedelics for Headache and Pain Treatment

The research team, based at the Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, Sweden, believes that further investigation into psychedelics as a treatment for headache disorders is warranted.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recognized psychedelics as a promising treatment for headache disorders and chronic pain. These substances are believed to reduce inflammation and alter pain perception through interactions with serotonin receptors in the brain.

Legal and Policy Implications

The potential of psychedelics to treat headaches has even reached legislative discussions. Last month, New Hampshire State Representative Kathleen Paquette shared her personal experience with cluster headaches while advocating for a bill to decriminalize psilocybin. She highlighted how microdoses—or even a single dose—of psilocybin could stop a headache cycle in its tracks and drastically improve quality of life.

Federal agencies have also begun taking psychedelics more seriously as a therapeutic option. The National Institutes of Health's National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) has acknowledged psilocybin's potential benefits for treating conditions such as alcohol use disorder, anxiety, depression, and pain-related disorders.

Future Research Directions

As psychedelic research gains momentum, scientists and policymakers alike are paying closer attention to its potential medical applications. The latest study adds to the growing evidence that psychedelics may play a role in treating headache disorders. However, more controlled clinical trials are needed to establish definitive cause-and-effect relationships and determine the best treatment protocols.

For now, the findings suggest a promising new frontier in headache treatment—one that could reshape how we approach chronic pain management in the future.

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