Are Psychedelics a Solution? A Treatment for Suicidality
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ABSTRACT
The treatment of major depression and suicide has had little innovation or development either pharmacologically or therapeutically. The first MAOIs (monoamine oxidase inhibitors), were developed and used in the 1950s. Prozac, the first SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor), came onto the market in 1987. Even when medication or therapy is used in treatment, it can take up to twelve weeks to be effective. Traditionally, available treatment methods are not always effective. Psychedelics have shown initial promise as a rapid reducer of suicidal ideation, (Price & Matthew, 2015). Research indicates that Psilocybin is consistently the best at reducing suicidal ideation and has the longest lasting effects. However, Ketamine has also been shown to have a statistically significant reduction in suicidal ideation, although the reduction is short-lived. Research has been limited in number and replication. The initial findings are promising, but more research needs to be done.

INTRODUCTION
The current studies around psychedelic use and their associated potential to reduce suicidal ideation seem promising, but there is not enough existing research to prove concretely that this correlation exists. Various studies have been conducted among people with depression, marginalized women and more. Among these populations, it was most often discovered that psychedelic use, though fast-acting, was not sustainable as a long-term solution. However, when analyzing research studies, one must always look critically at sample size because the larger the population is that is being studied, the more telling your results will be. In many of the following studies, the sample size was 500 or less. This, though, is not to say that these studies are not a good place to start in trying to understand the benefits of psychedelic use when treating depression and other mental illnesses. We are confident that more research will be conducted in the near future on this subject in the hopes that more individuals at risk are able to access life-saving information.

Psilocybin

In a more thorough dive into psilocybin using the same data as the previous study, psilocybin was found to have the greatest impact in reducing suicide and distress (Hendricks et al., 2015). In another study by Chard et al. (2018), Psilocybin markedly reduced symptoms in treatment resistant depression in a 2017 study by Carhart-Harris et al. “Relative to baseline, marked reductions in depressive symptoms were observed for the first 5 weeks post-treatment (Cohen’s d=2.2 at week 2.3 at week 5, both p<0.001); nine of the ten patients met the criteria for response and remission at week 5. Results remained positive at 3 and 6 months (Cohen’s d=1.5 and 1.4, respectively, both p<0.001). No patients sought conventional antidepressant treatment within 5 weeks of psilocybin. Reductions in symptoms at 5 weeks were predicted by the quality of the acute psychedelic experience” (p. 399).

There were a number of limitations from research including small sample sizes and lack of provable evidence but most research showed psilocybin was beneficial in the short-term timeframe. Future studies should include larger sample sizes and more longitudinal studies to further development with using psychedelics to treat suicidal ideation.

DISCUSSION

In a review of the literature surrounding the use of psychedelics to treat clients experiencing suicidal ideations, many studies discussed a need for a rapid solution (Belouin & Henningfield, 2018). (Fond et al. 2014) (Soleimani & Murrough, 2015) With the implications of suicidality, an immediate medicinal reaction can be a turning point for many patients (Price et al, 2014).

Ketamine

In a meta-analysis of Ketamine administration for treatment resistant depression, overall, depression score significantly decreased in Ketamine groups compared to control (SMD= -.99; 95% CI -1.23, -.75; p<.01) However, the decrease in symptoms only lasted, on average, 2-3 days (Fond, Loundou, Rabu, Lacon, Brittner & Boyer, 2014). In another meta-analysis of Ketamine administration in an ER setting with suicidal patients, an immediate reduction of suicidal ideation was reported, but again, there was a lack of lasting results (Ras & Andrade, 2017). In a single study by Price & Matthew (2015), Ketamine showed initial promise as a rapid reducer of suicidal ideation.

All Psychedelics

Another study by Hedricks et al. (2015), using a multi-variate regression model and survey results from 150,000 US participants, found that classic psychedelic use is associated with statistically significant reduction in suicidal thinking, planning, psychological distress and past year suicide.

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Relative Harm of Illicit Drugs

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REFERENCES