

From Neuralgia to Hallucinogen Persistent Perception Disorder and Back Again: A Cautionary Tale

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Introduction: Hallucinogen Persistent Perception Disorder (HPPD) is characterized by ongoing experiences of perceptual distortions or hallucinations after the consumption of a psychoactive drug. Here, we discuss the experiences of a person with complex HPPD.

Abstract body text: With a history of binge eating disorder, self-harm, existential dread, and occipital neuralgia, the 29-year-old female attempted to treat their neuralgia with mescaline. They reported experiencing a severely distressing psychedelic experience, with subsequent and continuing perceptual disturbances. Self-reported perceptual changes were diverse in type, intensity, and frequency. They described experiencing depersonalization and panic attacks over time, and became anxious and depressed, however their chronic pain reduced significantly. After consultation with a psychiatrist, multiple pharmacotherapies were trialled with little success. They attempted use of different psychedelics to treat their HPPD on multiple occasions, all which resulted in intense experiences but did not aid symptom resolution. Limited symptomatic relieve was reported following prescribed high dose clonazepam treatment, although secondary complications arose when attempting tapering. They reported increased feelings of spirituality and acceptance of their continued HPPD, including a dream in which they decided to exchange their HPPD for their original neuralgia pain level. After several months, the HPPD effects subsided, and pain associated with neuralgia returned.

Discussions and Conclusions: This interesting and severe case of HPPD presents potential risk of psychedelic use when mental health issues are present, and highlights treatment challenges faced by people with the disorder. It also highlights potential avenues for further investigation of HPPD aetiology and highlights the potential importance of subjective experience.

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