

Reported Effects of Psychedelic Experiences on Personal Cognitions and Beliefs in Aotearoa

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Introduction: Evidence suggests psychedelic drugs have the potential to induce lasting changes in users' beliefs and cognitions. Previous research has examined specific, unidirectional changes in beliefs and cognitions that can occur following psychedelic consumption. However, little qualitative research has explored users' reports of multidirectional changes in beliefs and cognitions due to naturalistic psychedelic drug use.

Abstract body text: To explore changes in cognitions and beliefs, we interviewed 19 participants across eight groups (age range 18-44) about their psychedelic experiences. Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted from a critical realist perspective. Three major themes were generated based on participants reports: 1) Openness & Insight, 2) Connection, Empathy and Appreciation, and 3) Lack of Change and Disappointment. Analysis highlighted that increased open-mindedness and insight were commonly experienced and often led to a readiness to re-examine one's beliefs. Greater connectedness and empathy were also frequent and were associated with shifts towards enduring panpsychist or pantheistic beliefs. Some participants reported desiring lasting changes, but these did not always occur, which often resulted in disappointment.

Discussions and Conclusions: This qualitative approach allowed for the exploration of the deeper, multidirectional changes in beliefs and cognitions that can occur due to psychedelic use. The greater understanding provided by discussions helped elucidate the changes, or lack thereof, in beliefs and cognitions caused by users' subjective psychedelic experiences. The prospect of belief change that is induced or mediated by these drugs demands further research if they are to be considered tools with medical/therapeutic applications.

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