

Voices from the Psychedelic Journey: A Narrative Exploration of Motivations, Experiences, and Impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand

Authors: Ethan Mills^a (BSc), Jai Whelan^a (MSc), Sarah McGruddy^a (BSc (Hons)), & Ryan D. Ward^a (PhD)

^a*Department of Psychology, University of Otago, Ōtepoti/Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand*

Presenter's email: ethanj.mills@icloud.com

Introduction: *While interest in psychedelic research has recently increased globally, lived experiences of psychedelic use in Aotearoa New Zealand remain largely unexplored, despite these substances being strictly prohibited. The present qualitative study aimed to delve deeper into the motivations, subjective features, and impacts of psychedelic experiences among New Zealanders.*

Method: *36 people were recruited to participate in thirteen semi-structured, exploratory interviews, where they discussed a range of topics associated with psychedelics. Analysis of interviews focussed on participants' motivations, experiences and impacts when using psychedelic substances.*

Results: *Through reflexive thematic analysis, six themes emerged, reflecting a diverse range of perspectives: (1) Embracing Psychedelic Curiosity; (2) The Social Experience; (3) Feeling Overwhelmed and Concerned, "A Negative Feedback Loop"; (4) Psychedelics as Catalysts for Personal Growth; (5) Psychedelics Enhancing Connection & Appreciation; (6) Psychedelic Experiences Promotes Change in Preparation and Consumption Behaviour.*

Conclusions: *This qualitative study provides rich insights into the nuanced motivations, subjective experiences, and impacts surrounding psychedelic use in New Zealand's unique cultural context. By giving voice to personal narratives, it reveals an evolution towards therapeutic and growth-oriented motivations yielding more positive outcomes, while illuminating needs for progressive policy reforms and comprehensive harm reduction strategies. These findings represent a compelling basis for recalibrating drug policies, destigmatizing psychedelic use through public education, and prioritizing safety alongside potential therapeutic benefits.*

Disclosure of Interest Statement: *All resources and funding required for this research was provided by the University of Otago*