

Harm reduction as a ceremonial practice interspersed with biomedicine: Exploring Australian consumers' experiences within psychedelic sub-cultures

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Introduction: *The use of psychedelics in Australia has received global attention after the Therapeutic Goods Administration controversially approved the prescribing of MDMA for PTSD and psilocybin for treatment refractory depression. Outside medical settings, psychedelic consumption is also going through a renaissance. However, many, what remain illicit practices within psychedelic sub-cultures, remain hidden. This work explores psychedelic consumers' experiences of doing harm reduction in naturalistic settings.*

Methods: *In-depth interviews were conducted with people who use psychedelics (e.g., LSD; psilocybin, ayahuasca, DMT; iboga; salvia divinorum) in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. Interviews trace experiences before, during and after, a 'trip'/ceremony/session.*

Key Findings: *Findings illuminate how 'set and setting' influence and shape harm reduction and psychedelic consumption. Beyond individualist notions of drug consumption in private settings, many participants describe highly ceremonial, social and spiritual psychedelic consumption practices. These practices selectively involve: (i) ancient knowledges (often from the Global South, sometimes involving Shamanism) such as 'saging' practices and burning herbs when forming trip intentions; song and music; (ii) using the human body as drug checking apparatus via microdosing strategies; and, (iii) the application of Western biomedicine (e.g., via mental health assessments; informal 'models of care' in group facilitation; cardiac monitoring technologies). Further, experiences often framed as 'harms' in addiction studies (e.g., severely altered consciousness; purging/vomiting), are often reframed as manageable and cathartic components of 'plant medicine'.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *'Harm reduction' in psychedelic sub-cultures synthesises different knowledges and practices. Rethinking 'harm reduction' as also a spiritual practice offers different ways of doing drugs in society.*

Implications for community: *Creating harm reduction materials for people who use psychedelics in society requires deep knowledge of engagements with 'set and setting'. The findings may inform: (i) the design of resources to promote safer psychedelic consumption; and, (ii) discussions within medical settings about the role of 'set and setting'.*

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