

Magic Mushrooms vs Depression

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If there is one thing just about everyone can agree on, it is that times are changing. And with changing times comes changing regulations. As of right now, a drug commonly known as magic mushrooms is illegal for consumption. However, many progressive medical professionals and lawmakers are trying to change that. Magic mushrooms have a key active ingredient called psilocybin, which is what causes hallucinations in individuals who choose to take them. To most people, magic mushrooms are to be taken for fun. They are supposed to give people an unworldly experience that cannot be converted into words. Although that is still likely the most common use for them, doctors have figured out that psilocybin can be used to treat conditions such as depression. It seems like a wonderful idea; a way to quickly treat depression in those who have suffered for so long. However, there are many people who are skeptical of this drug. Mark Wallach and Dawn Reinfeld, city council member and executive director, respectively, write about their concerns for using magic mushrooms medicinally. In *The Colorado Sun*, Wallach and Reinfeld (2022) discuss their queries about Proposition 122, which would introduce the use of psilocybin to treat medical and mental health conditions, similar to medical cannabis. Their main emphasis being that proper testing and regulations should not be rushed, and that this bill is being introduced too early. While they can agree that there are some great benefits to legalizing psilocybin, their overall point is that it is not a good idea to do so right now. I agree with them that proper testing is important. However, the use of mushrooms is not new, and if people proceed with caution, I believe that the pros of this bill will far outweigh the cons.

Wallach and Reinfeld (2022) argue that research into using psychedelics to treat mental health disorders is very new and not at all ready to be used in a clinical setting. They state,

“Current research into therapeutic uses of certain psychedelic substances in the treatment of serious mental health issues has shown promise. It’s also nowhere near being adopted for widespread clinical use, and there are no completed clinical trials on the use of psilocybin to treat PTSD.” However, their statement is not completely accurate. While it is true that there is not extensive research into the use of psilocybin to treat PTSD, there have been very successful trials for its use in treating depression. In fact, psilocybin has shown to be much more effective at treating depression than common antidepressants. Informed Health (2022) says that antidepressants need to be taken every day to be effective, and roughly a few weeks to a month later symptoms will ease. In order to keep depression symptoms at bay, the antidepressants should be taken regularly for sometimes years. The goal is to make the depression “go away”, and once it has, the medication still needs to be continued anywhere from four to nine months in order to prevent relapse. Psilocybin, on the other hand, only needs to be taken a few times to help with symptoms of depression. According to Yasemin Nicola Sakay, a journalist from Medical News Today (2022), “One of the advantages of using psychedelics in depression or anxiety treatment, as studies have shown, is that researchers have managed to improve or get rid of symptoms with just a few uses, particularly with psilocybin.” This shows to be much more effective since it does not need to be taken over and over. In addition to that it may also be cheaper in the long run since repurchasing the prescription every month would be eliminated.

Wallach and Reinfeld (2022) question the integrity of proposition 122 to support their claims that legalizing psychedelics is a bad call for the state of Colorado. They ask, “Why, then, would we be so eager to jump the gun and unleash an unregulated flood of untested psychedelics onto the streets of Colorado?” They have a solid point that lawmakers may be rushing into this, but the current medications just aren’t working. So many people suffer day-to-day because of

their depression, and pushing to legalize something that has shown extreme effectiveness can increase the quality of life for thousands of people. Whether it is rushed or not, maybe that is a good thing. Especially considering the climbing rates of suicide and self-harm. Psilocybin works much faster than antidepressants, so its positive results can be seen sooner. Dana G. Smith from the New York Times (2022) says, “Ketamine, psilocybin and LSD stimulate prolific cell growth and provide psychological relief within a matter of hours.” Which is a massive difference compared to the several weeks that antidepressants can take. It could be a matter of life or death for those struggling with suicidal thoughts. In addition, there are some cases where depression was as close as possible to cured. In her article, Sakay (2022) states, “By the 4th week after initial treatment, 54% of the participants were no longer classified as depressed.” Being that major depressive disorder can last several months to years, no longer being considered depressed after only four weeks is a huge breakthrough.

One thing that I can agree with Wallach and Reinfeld on is the importance of testing the safety of the drugs before releasing it to the public. In their article, Wallach and Reinfeld (2022) say, “If we are going to view these substances as medicine, we need to test and approve them like medicine, and psychedelics have a long way to go to clear that threshold. There are systems in place to evaluate new treatments for safety and efficacy, and these drugs have not gone through those systems.” They are absolutely correct. Psilocybin has not gone through the same testing every other drug has to go through. Because of that, there are some risks associated with taking mushrooms, whether it is for fun or for treatment. However, with every drug comes side effects. Some of them are minor, and some can become very dangerous. For example, Smith (2022) asserts that those who have a family history of schizophrenia would not be considered eligible to receive psilocybin as a treatment for mental health because it can lead to an increased

risk of psychosis. Since psychedelics have such a profound effect on the brain, there are increased concerns for how suitable the treatment may be for everyone. Also, people with certain types of anxiety may not be recommended the treatment due to the possibility of having a ‘bad trip’. Those who tend to overthink and are overly anxious would be at a greater risk of having a bad experience because of their mental headspace prior to taking mushrooms. With that being said, the possibilities of bad outcomes should not be reason enough to withhold this treatment from everyone. Simply taking extra precautions when it comes to who is eligible to take the drug can help prevent negative outcomes.

While Wallach and Reinfeld bring up some good points in their article against legalizing psilocybin, I can't agree with them that it is a bad idea. I do believe that safety is important, which is why restrictions should be in place for the use of this drug, and not just anybody should be able to take it. Psilocybin proves to be a promising treatment for depression and potentially other mental health issues, so when Wallach and Reinfeld (2022) urge people to “Vote no on 122.”, they are taking away a great opportunity for those who have been suffering too long. While it is true that all drugs have their downsides, I don't believe that is a good enough reason to prevent a possible treatment for thousands of people. Colorado is taking a step in the right direction, and I just hope others can set their opinions aside and follow suit.

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