

Researchers examine classic versus novel psychedelic use in United States

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Classic psychedelics, which include LSD, mescaline and psilocybin, have been used by humans for millennia, and there is a rather extensive body of scientific knowledge surrounding these substances and their effects. Recently, new drugs referred to as novel psychedelics have emerged on the scene., Though similar in pharmacology to classic psychedelics, there is a much smaller body of evidence on these substances. A recent study

at the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health found that novel psychedelics have been used by only a fraction of the population, and those who have used novel psychedelics tend to be young, white, college-educated men.

The study, which was published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, examined the prevalence of novel psychedelic use and the associations of novel psychedelic use with mental health outcomes.

"Our goal was to differentiate classic psychedelics from novel [psychedelic](#) substances," said James Sexton, lead study author and a research assistant in the Department of Health Behavior at the UAB School of Public Health. "This is because there is a wave of research that is investigating classic psychedelics as clinical tools for various psychiatric illnesses."

According to Sexton, novel psychedelics do not have a long history of human use and/or do not have a significant amount of scientific or [research data](#) that examines its use, unlike classic psychedelics, which have a long history of scientific and cultural use.

"Novel psychedelics are typically found online in Darknet markets, such as the former Silk Road and other sites," Sexton explained. "Before recent legislation banned some of these substances, many could be found online and purchased by anyone with a debit card. Most of these drugs are accounted for by online purchases."

The study examined data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, a survey that examines the prevalence of substance use and mental illness among adults in the United States between 2008 and 2016. During the eight-year period, approximately 273,000 adults reported using novel psychedelics.

"While 273,000 individuals is a small percentage of the United States population, it is still a significant number of people," Sexton said.

"Knowing who uses novel psychedelics, and which novel psychedelics are used, will help clinicians be prepared to treat complications or overdoses from the drug use."

The most common novel psychedelics reported in the survey were the 2C-B, 2C-E and 2C-I compounds.

The majority of people who reported using novel psychedelics were white men of college age or who had recently graduated from college. They also reported significantly higher drug use compared to the general population.

Those who used both classic and novel psychedelics were at higher risk for past suicidal thinking and planning compared to those who had used only classic psychedelics. However, Sexton says further research is needed to understand the relationship between the two in order to understand why this increases the risk of suicidality.

As for novel psychedelics, the study found there is no evidence suggesting an association with [psychological distress](#) or suicidality; but there is also no indication that taking the [substances](#) may be beneficial to one's mental health.

"We need further research to differentiate and categorize specific novel psychedelics included in this study as either candidates for clinical application or concerns for public [health](#)," Sexton said.

More information: James D Sexton et al. Prevalence and epidemiological associates of novel psychedelic use in the United States adult population, *Journal of Psychopharmacology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0269881119827796](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881119827796)

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