



Psychedelic Drug Use and Reduced Suicidality Among Women Sex Workers in Metro Vancouver, Canada

Background

Suicide is a public health concern worldwide. Sex workers, in particular, experience disproportionately high rates of psychological distress and suicidality (suicidal thoughts, behaviours, or attempts). Some evidence suggests that psychedelic drug use may protect against suicidality, but research has been limited.

The Question

Does psychedelic drug use protect against suicidality among sex workers?

The Study

The research team drew upon interviews with 766 women in sex work in Vancouver, Canada, from January 2010 to August 2014. Analysis was restricted to participants who had never thought about or attempted suicide at the time of their baseline interview, and who then completed at least one follow-up interview. A total of 290 participants were eligible for inclusion. Data came from AESHA (An Evaluation of Sex Workers Health Access), a community-based and trans-inclusive cohort of women sex workers.

The Results

- *Suicidality:* Almost half (**46%**) of AESHA participants reported lifetime suicidality at baseline. Of the 290 women sex workers included in the follow-up analysis, **11%** reported thinking about or having attempted suicide in the last six months for the first time.
- *Childhood abuse:* Among women sex workers who reported suicidality, **77%** had experienced childhood abuse, in contrast to **43%** among those who did not report suicidality.
- *Drug use:* Illicit drug use was demonstrated to increase the risk of suicidality among women sex workers, with the exception of psychedelic drug use, which was independently associated with a **60%** reduced risk of suicidality.

Psychedelic drug use was associated with a reduced risk for suicidality among sex workers in Vancouver, Canada.

The Policy Implications

- This study suggests psychedelic substances may be useful in addressing mental health issues and risks for suicide. Given the limited efficacy of currently available interventions for suicidality, there is a need to support research on innovative treatments and interventions, including psychedelic medicine.
- The high rate of suicidality among sex workers in this study is a critical public health concern. Given that historical experiences of violence and trauma present significant risks for suicide, there is an urgent need to provide integrated, trauma-informed intervention services for sex workers and other marginalized populations.

Elena Argento, Steffanie A Strathdee, Kenneth Tupper, Melissa Braschel, Evan Wood, Kate Shannon. Psychedelic use predicts reduced suicidality: Findings from a longitudinal study of women sex workers. *BMJ Open*, 2017.