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School of Nursing

Psychedelic Therapy Versus Antidepressants for Treating Chronic Depression

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University of Maine School of Nursing



Introduction

In the United States, more than 18 million people suffer from depression making it the number 1 cause of disability worldwide. Since Prozac was introduced 30 years ago there have only been new variations of existing selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) and serotonin norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRI). Although this is the case, over 50% of individuals do not respond to existing antidepressants. Researchers have been studying the use of psychedelic therapy (psilocybin, LSD, etc.) in the treatment of chronic depression.

PICO

In (P) patients with chronic depression, (I) does the use of psychedelic therapy, (C) compared to patients on antidepressant, (O) improve mood and signs of depression?

Methods

We examined research articles in CINAHL and PsycINFO, focusing on the keywords:

- “Psychedelic therapy”
- “Depression”
- “Hallucinogens”
- “Psilocybin”
- “LSD”

Table 3. Adverse Events Reported during the 6-Week Trial Period and on Dosing-Day 1.*

Event	6-Wk Trial Period	
	Psilocybin (N=30)	Escitalopram (N=29)
	number of patients	
Any adverse event	26 (87)	24 (83)
Serious adverse event	0	0
Related adverse event†	22 (73)	23 (79)
Adverse event reported in ≥3 patients during the full trial period		
Headache	20 (67)	15 (52)
Nausea	8 (27)	9 (31)
Fatigue	2 (7)	7 (24)
Anxiety	0	4 (14)
Dry mouth	0	4 (14)
Migraine	3 (10)	1 (3)

(Carhart-Harris et al., 2021)

Considerations

There are many factors that impact the outcome of psychedelic therapy. For example, a study conducted in Maryland implemented music, sunglasses, and headphones during psilocybin dosing sessions (Davis et al., 2021). Unlike prescribed antidepressants such as SSRIs where the effect of the therapy is the pharmacological action of the drug, the therapeutic effect of psychedelic therapy is affected by:

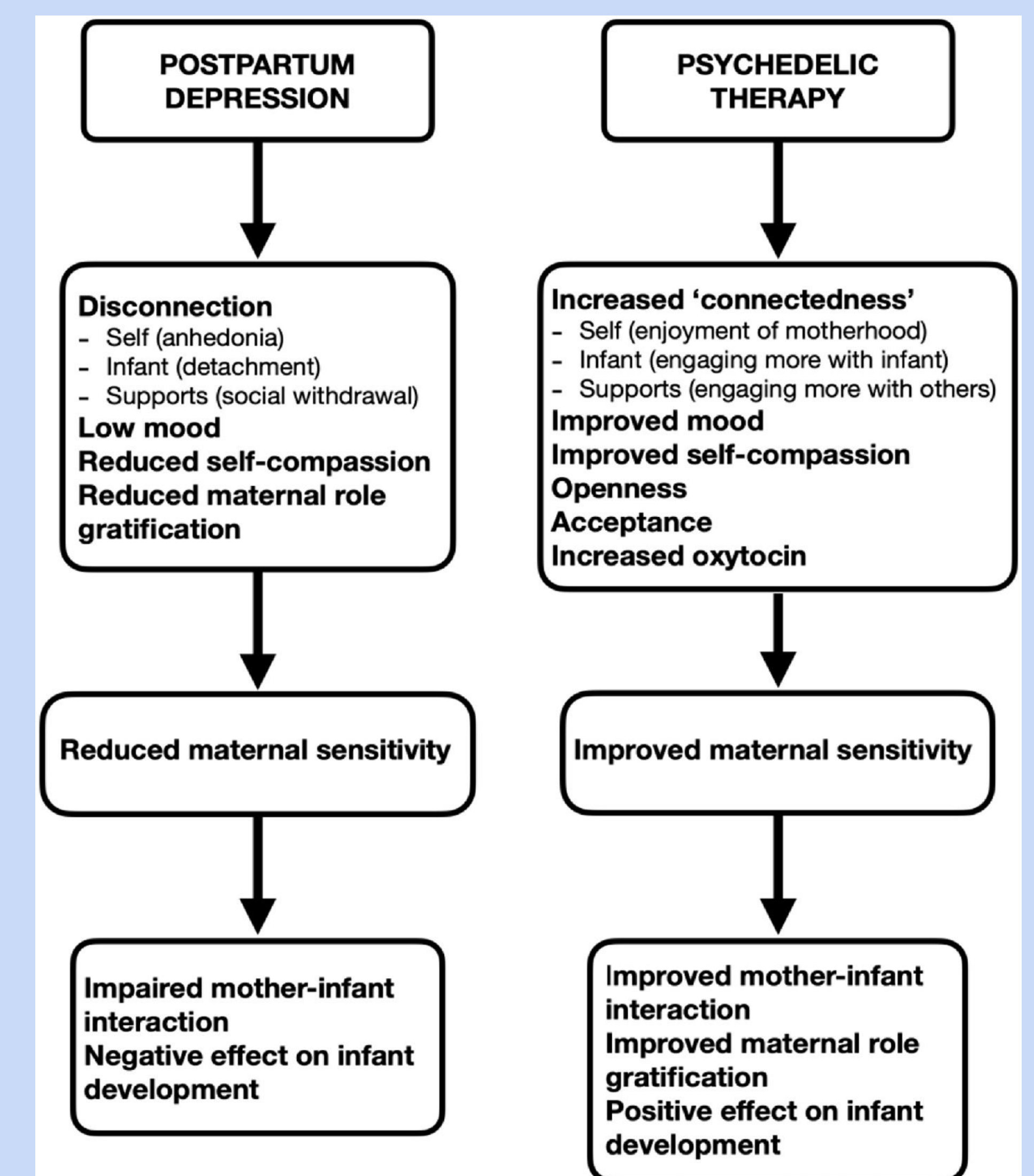
- Mental state
- Subjective experience
- Quality of psychosocial support
- Context of consumption during dosing
- Integration post consumption
- Memories
- Perceptions
- Supportive environment

Results

- The data showed an improvement in depressive symptoms in patients who participated in the clinical trials.
- The effects of psychedelic therapy compared to prescribed antidepressants showed similar or better improvement in feelings of depression.
- The *Trial of Psilocybin versus Escitalopram for Depression* displayed there was no significant difference between the two and resulted in no serious adverse effects.
- Some common adverse effects seen in patients using psilocybin therapy include headache, nausea, and fatigue.
- The article *Effects of Psilocybin-Assisted Therapy on Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)* discovered psilocybin was effective in managing MDD, alongside psychological support.
- LSD use revealed a reduce in anxiety, feelings of happiness and trust, and no serious adverse effects.

Conclusions

- The conclusion of our research shows the use of psychedelic therapy in treatment of depression has a significant decrease in depressive symptoms in patients struggling with chronic depression.
- Although some studies have shown psychedelics are effective in treating chronic depression, more trials are needed to be done before it can be used for treatment throughout the nation.



(Jairaj, Rucker, et al, 2022)

References

Carhart-Harris, R., Giribaldi, B., Watts, R., Baker-Jones, M., Murphy-Beiner, A., Murphy, R., Martell, J., Blenkins, A., Erritzoe, D., & Nutt, D. J. (2021). Trial of Psilocybin versus Escitalopram for Depression. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 384(15), 1402–1411. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2032994>

Davis, A. K., Barrett, F. S., May, D. G., Cosimano, M. P., Sepeda, N. D., Johnson, M. W., Finan, P. H., & Griffiths, R. R. (2021). Effects of Psilocybin-Assisted Therapy on Major Depressive Disorder: A Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 78(5), 481–489. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2020.3285>