

Follow-up study finds lasting benefit from MDMA for people with PTSD

November 21 2012, by Bob Yirka



MDMA powder. Credit: Wikipedia.

(Medical Xpress)—A research team made up of a group of private practitioners and medical experts has conducted a follow-up study of a trial of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) use in therapy sessions to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In describing their results in their paper published in the *Journal of Psychopharmacology*, the team says that 17 of 20 patients who participated in the original study reported positive results long term.

The follow-up study was based on an original trial held in 2010 where 20 patients suffering from long term PTSD were given [MDMA](#) (the main ingredient in the party drug ecstasy) as part of their psychotherapy

sessions. The researchers reported at the time that 83% of the participants showed improvements in their condition two months later.

In this new work, the researchers revisited the original patients three and a half years later (one refused to participate leaving just 19) to see how well they were doing. They found that just two of the patients had suffered a relapse – the rest they say maintained the relief they had found in the original trial.

The research was sponsored by the group Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), whose mission is to seek out treatments for a variety of mental ailments using non-traditional [drug therapies](#). In addition to providing funds for the trials they also worked out agreements with the government to allow for legal testing of the drug (it currently has as a Schedule I status.)

Study leads (and husband and wife) Michael and Ann Mithoefer conducted the original trial out of their private practice office. Each trial was conducted with a single patient at a time and involved a non-pharmaceutical [therapy session](#) followed by one where the patient was given a dose of MDMA. Another traditional session was held later – the sessions that included use of the drug lasted up to eight hours because the effects of the drugs last that long.

The researchers believe that MDMA helps [PTSD](#) sufferers by allowing them to relive the emotionally traumatic experience that led to their condition in a more relaxed and receptive way. Because of the promising results, MAPS is calling on the government to relax its rules on the testing and use of MDMA for medical applications.

More information: Durability of improvement in posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and absence of harmful effects or drug dependency after 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine-assisted psychotherapy: a

prospective long-term follow-up study, *Journal of Psychopharmacology*,
Published online before print November 20, 2012, [doi:
10.1177/0269881112456611](#) ([Full text PDF](#))

Abstract

We report follow-up data evaluating the long-term outcomes for the first completed trial of 3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA)-assisted psychotherapy for chronic, treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Mithoefer et al., 2011). All of the 19 subjects who received MDMA-assisted treatment in the original trial participated in the long-term follow-up (LTFU), with 16 out of 19 completing all of the long-term outcome measures, which were administered from 17 to 74 months after the original study's final MDMA session (mean = 45.4; SD = 17.3). Our primary outcome measure used was the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale (CAPS). Secondary outcome measures were the Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) and the Neuroticism Extroversion Openness Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R) Personality Inventory. We also collected a long-term follow-up questionnaire. Results for the 16 CAPS completers showed there were no statistical differences between mean CAPS score at LTFU (mean = 23.7; SD = 22.8) ($t_{\text{matched}} = 0.1$; $df = 15$, $p = 0.91$) and the mean CAPS score previously obtained at Study Exit (mean = 24.6, SD = 18.6). On average, subjects maintained statistically and clinically-significant gains in symptom relief, although two of these subjects did relapse. It was promising that we found the majority of these subjects with previously severe PTSD who were unresponsive to existing treatments had symptomatic relief provided by MDMA-assisted psychotherapy that persisted over time, with no subjects reporting harm from participation in the study.

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