

Ketamine found to alleviate depression

April 10 2015



Credit: George Hodan/Public Domain

Researchers at the University of Hertfordshire have found that Ketamine, which has a reputation as an illicit 'recreational' drug, has an extremely large depression reducing effect. Although Ketamine has been in medical use for 50 years as an anesthetic, the past few years has seen it being trialled as a treatment for major and bipolar depression.

Significant reduction

The research looked at all of the data from 21 published studies where Ketamine had been trialled with people suffering from [depression](#). It found that depression was significantly reduced within four hours by a single administration of the drug. The findings represent a possible new avenue for treatment and, because of its immediate impact, it could be especially significant for treating people who are suicidal.

Immediate results

Dr. Keith Laws, Professor of Cognitive Neuropsychology in the School of Life and Medical Sciences at the University of Hertfordshire, said:

"The prospect of using Ketamine as an anti-depressant is a fascinating one, particularly in terms of its potential for rapidly alleviating [depressive symptoms](#) in individuals who haven't responded to more traditional treatments. While conventional antidepressants and psychotherapy may take weeks or months to produce any effect, [ketamine](#) infusions produce benefits within hours."

Depression can take many forms and can range from mild to severe. Common signs include feeling low, feeling bad about yourself and not wanting to do things. It is thought to affect around 3% of the UK population.

The possible drawbacks of using Ketamine are that studies have yet to follow-up patients beyond 7-14 days so the long term affects remain to be scientifically tested. The drug also has possible negative consequences in the long-term, it may cause bladder damage, worsen some pre-existing psychological problems, and even has the potential to become addictive.

Exciting potential

Dr. Laws added:

"More controlled longer-term follow-up studies are needed before Ketamine can be regarded as a viable intervention for depression, but this research suggests it has exciting potential."

The research was published in *Human Psychopharmacology* this week.

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

Citation: Ketamine found to alleviate depression (2015, April 10) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-04-ketamine-alleviate-depression.html>

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