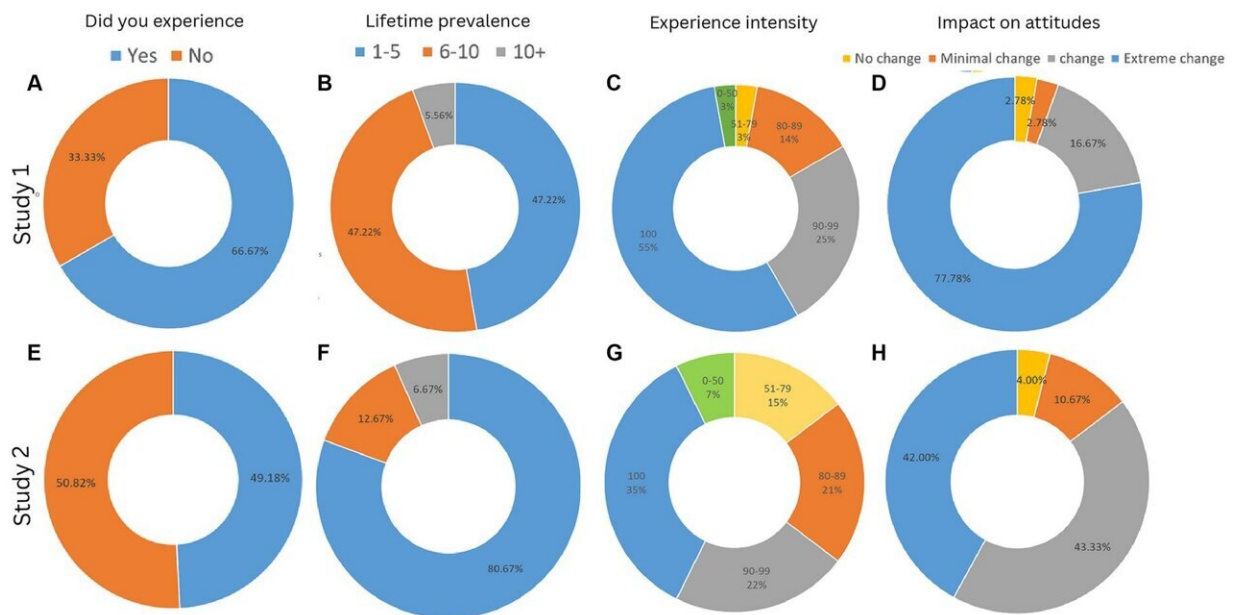


Ayahuasca-induced personal death subjective experiences: A literature review

February 2 2024



Prevalence and characteristics of APD experiences across Studies 1 and 2: Top row (A–D) displays results from Study 1, and bottom row (E–H) from Study 2. The overall occurrence (yes/no) of APD experiences are displayed in (A,E). For those who had experienced APDs, (B,F) displays their lifetime frequency rates, (C,G) displays their perceived intensity, and (D,H) their perceived impact on attitudes related to death. Credit: *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2023). DOI: 10.3389/fpsy.2023.1287961

Researchers analyzed studies on self-reported experiences related to the sensation of death during ayahuasca ceremonies (ayahuasca-induced

personal death—APDs). More than half of the participants report having felt APDs and classify them as strong and transformative experiences, being associated with an increased sense of transcending death, as well as the certainty of the continuation of consciousness after death.

Despite an emerging understanding regarding the pivotal role of subjective experiences that unfold during acute psychedelic states, very little has been done in the direction of better characterizing such experiences and determining their long-term impact.

To fill this gap, with the support of the BIAL Foundation, Aviva Berkovich-Ohana and Yair Dor-Ziderman, headed an international team that examined—for the first time in the literature—the characteristics and outcomes of self-reported [past experiences](#) related to one's subjective sense of death during ayahuasca ceremonies, termed as APDs.

In [the article](#), "Ayahuasca-induced personal death experiences: prevalence, characteristics, and impact on attitudes towards death, life, and the environment," published in December in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, the team of researchers from Israel, the U.S., Brazil, and Spain conducted two studies.

Study 1 included 54 participants, reports on the prevalence, demographics, intensity, and impact of APDs on attitudes towards death, explores the possible relationship between APDs and psychopathology, and their impact on self-reported environmental concerns. Study 2, on the other hand, included a larger and more diverse population of 306 ayahuasca users, aimed to generalize the basic results obtained in Study 1 regarding APD experience, as well as trying to understand whether APDs are associated with coping strategies and self-reported life values.

The results indicate that APDs occur in more than half of those participating in ayahuasca ceremonies, being usually described as strong

and transformative experiences, and are associated with an increased sense of transcending death (Study 1), as well as the certainty in the continuation of consciousness after death (Study 2).

The researchers didn't find associations between having undergone APD experiences and participants' demographics, personality type, and psychopathology. However, APDs were associated with increased environmental concern (Study 1). These experiences were also shown to impact life in profound ways. APDs were found to be associated with increases in one's ability to cope with distress-causing life problems and the sense of fulfillment in life (Study 2).

According to lead researcher Jonathan David, the results of the study "highlight the prevalence, safety, and potency of [death](#) experiences that occur during ayahuasca ceremonies, marking them as possible mechanisms for psychedelics' long-term salutatory effects in non-clinical populations."

More information: Jonathan David et al, Ayahuasca-induced personal death experiences: prevalence, characteristics, and impact on attitudes toward death, life, and the environment, *Frontiers in Psychiatry* (2023). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1287961](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1287961)

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