

Psychoactive Medicines in the 20th Century.

Nearly every culture throughout history has used chemicals found in plants to alter consciousness for healing and spiritual exploration. In the 20th century these psychoactive medicines caught the attention of scientists. Psychedelics, as they were named, proved effective at treating intractable illnesses like depression and addiction. They also became a tool for studying the mind, opening “the doors of perception,” as Aldous Huxley wrote. But those doors slammed shut when President Nixon declared psychedelics dangerous and medically useless.

In 1968, Dahlberg and colleagues published an article in the American Journal of Psychiatry detailing various forces that had successfully discredited legitimate psychoactive research. The essay argues that individuals in government and the pharmaceutical industry sabotaged the psychedelic research community by canceling ongoing studies and analysis while labeling genuine scientists as charlatans.

Studies on medicinal applications of psychedelics ceased entirely in the United States when the [Controlled Substances Act](#) was passed in 1970. Despite objections from the scientific community, authorized research into therapeutic applications of psychedelic medicines had been discontinued worldwide by the 1980s.

Early 21st Century Resurgence.

In the early 2000s, a renewal of interest in the therapeutic potential of psychoactive medicines has contributed to an increase in clinical research focusing on their [psychopharmacological](#) effects and their subsequent applications. The new century also ushered in a broader change in political attitude towards psychedelic medicine—specifically within the [Food and Drug Administration](#). Curtis Wright, deputy director of the FDA Division of Anesthetic, Critical Care and Addiction Drugs explains: “The agency was challenged legally in a number of cases and also underwent a process of introspection, asking 'Is it proper to treat this class of drugs differently?'”

Much of the current clinical research has been conducted with psilocybin and MDMA in the United States with special permission by the [FDA](#); MDMA-assisted psychotherapy is being actively researched by [MAPS](#). Phase two trials conducted between 2004 and 2010 reported an overall remission rate of 66.2% and low rates of adverse effects for subjects with chronic PTSD.

Applications

Psychoactive substances which may have beneficial therapeutic utility include [psilocybin](#) (the main active compound found in magic mushrooms), and MDMA. Some research has shown that these substances have helped people with such mental conditions as [obsessive-compulsive disorder](#), [post-traumatic stress disorder](#), [alcoholism](#), [depression](#), terminal-illness anxiety and [cluster headaches](#).