LSD is fast-emerging as a treatment for depression. Does it work?

LSD usage is on the rise among U.S. adults – especially young adults with depression. And the trend mirrors growing research into the psychedelic drug’s ability to treat mental health disorders like anxiety and depression.

The number of Americans with depression who say they’ve taken LSD within the last year more than tripled from 0.5% in 2008 to 1.8% in 2019, according to a new study published in JAMA Psychiatry.

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Still, advocates say psychedelics like LSD can be medically beneficial when used under appropriate supervision, and the buzz around psychedelics in the U.S. has exploded in recent years. Major media outlets have heralded “a new era in psychiatric treatment” as studies on the mental health benefits of psychedelics have piled up and efforts to legalize these substances have started making gains.

A 2018 study showed that manmade psychedelic substances like LSD and MDMA can induce structural changes in the brain that can improve symptoms of depression, anxiety and PTSD. Psilocybin, the compound found in “magic” psychedelic mushrooms, has been found to be an effective treatment for anxiety, depression, PTSD and anorexia.

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