

Impact of Psychedelic Retreat Programs on Chronic Pain in Military Veterans



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Introduction

Chronic pain, persisting beyond the expected healing period [1], is **prevalent among military veterans** [2,3] and is linked to **lower quality of life**, poorer mental health and, co-morbid conditions including PTSD in this group [4,5]. **Psychedelics**, such as psilocybin and Ayahuasca, are being explored as **potential treatments for pain conditions** due to their effects on neuroplasticity, mood and cognition [6,7]. Single-session intervention may reduce the burden of lifelong pain management, yet, how **psychedelic retreats impact chronic pain in veterans** has not been investigated.

Methods

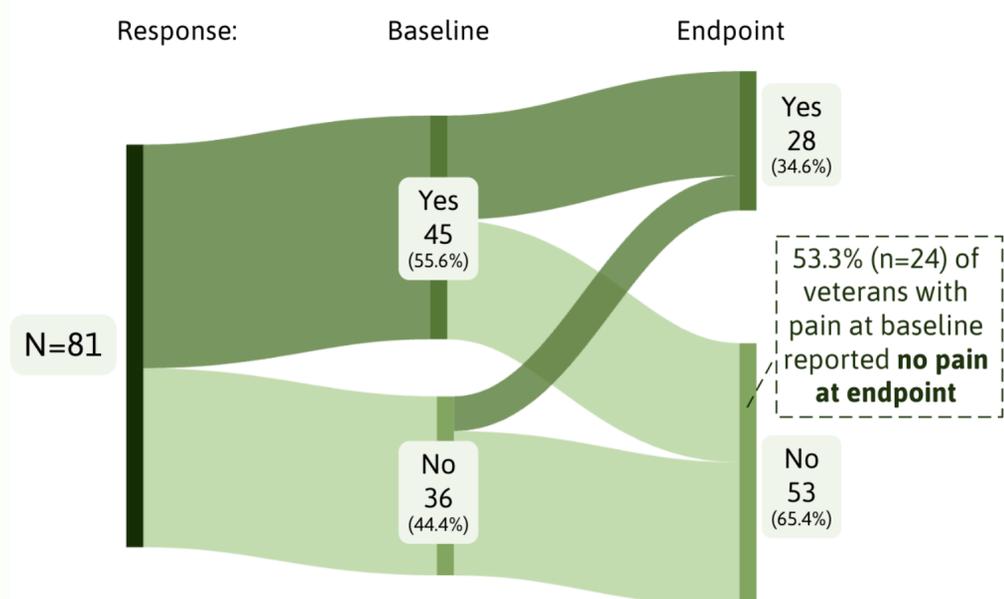
Veterans (**N=81**) attended psychedelic retreats, with psilocybin or Ayahuasca. The program stages are outlined in Table 1. **Pain Severity and Impact on Life** outcomes were **compared between timepoints**, and changes were correlated with Total Insight and PIQ items.

Phase	Timeframe	Activities
Pre-Retreat	Over a 4 week period prior to retreat	Participants meet coaches and other retreat attendees. Engage in preparation discussions and psychological readiness practices.
Baseline Assessment	4 weeks prior to retreat	Participants receive pre-retreat baseline surveys, including the Brief Pain Inventory (BPI)
Retreat Attendance	1 week	Participants travel to the retreat centre and participate in guided psychedelic experiences.
Post-Retreat	Over a 4 week period after retreat	Participants meet with coaches and fellow attendees and engage in integration and group support.
Follow-up Assessment	4 weeks after returning from retreat	Participants receive surveys for follow-up assessment, including the BPI and Psychological Insight Questionnaire (PIQ)

Table 1. Retreat and research schedule

Results

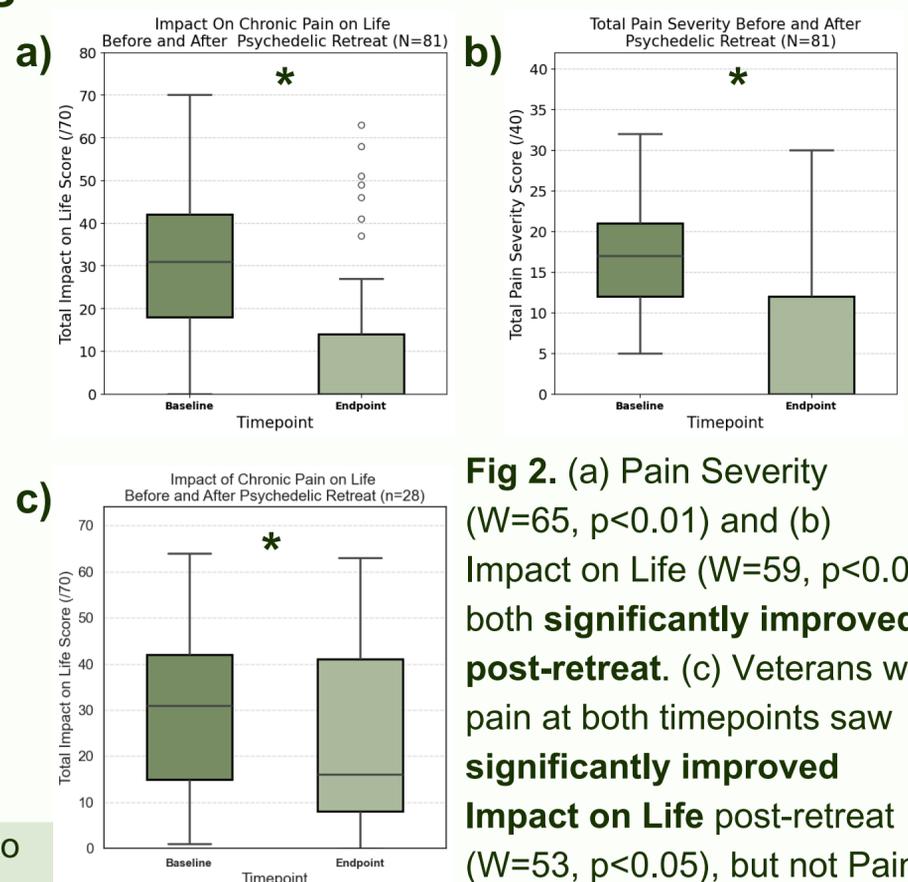
Rates of chronic pain before and after a psychedelic retreat*



*Response to Brief Pain Inventory Question 1: Throughout our lives, most of us have had pain from time to time (such as minor headaches, sprains and toothaches). Have you had pain other than these every day kinds of pain today?

Fig 1. Reduced rates of chronic pain following psychedelic retreat

Total insight and scores for the six PIQ items (assessing insight into past events, self and lifestyle) **did not correlate with pain outcomes.**



Discussion

Pain Perception: reduced impact on life without change in pain severity, for those with continued pain, suggests retreat altered pain perception, rather than neuropathology [1].

Mechanisms: Lack of correlation with insight suggests other psychopharmacological mechanisms underpin reduced pain [9].

Treatment Benefits: Non-addictive [8], single-session approach contrasts conventional chronic pain medications.

Setting vs Drug Effect?: Effects of psychological support and therapy versus drug action requires investigation.

Assessment Limitations: 4-week follow-up is insufficient to truly assess lasting effect on a chronic condition; follow up at 6 months would support lasting effects [1].

Conclusions

Over 50% of veterans with chronic pain no longer experienced this after a psychedelic retreat. Pain severity and impact on life significantly improved. Those with continued pain experienced **reduced impact on life**, suggesting retreats benefited quality of life despite unchanged severity. The non-addictive, time-limited nature of psychedelic retreats warrants further investigation for chronic pain management in this population.

References

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