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Current trends in the use of Ayahuasca, sacred plant medicine from the Amazon basin

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Ayahuasca is a plant medicine prepared from two Amazonian plants and is part of the vast pharmacopeia of indigenous South American traditional medicine. This decoction possesses psychedelic properties and has been used for centuries for healing purposes in cultural and shamanic ritualistic practices among tribes of the Amazon basin. Syncretic religions in Brazil have also been founded and based on drinking Ayahuasca as a sacrament. In recent decades, people from around the world have increasingly sought to partake in ayahuasca ceremonies. In western societies practices of ayahuasca drinking have emerged varying between religious, spiritual, therapeutic, mindfulness-based and neo-shamanic circles. Online surveys and current research convey that ayahuasca use is associated with improvements in general well-being and benefits within a spectrum of psychological and mindfulness-based parameters. Increasing research explores its therapeutic potential for mental health and addictions disorders. On the other hand, although studies confirm its low toxicity, some risks associated with ayahuasca use are connected to dangers of mixing analogue substances to induce a more intense experience, inexperienced individual use by ordering it on the internet, lack of support previous to and following the experience, misinformation regarding potential interactions (e.g. particularly with serotonergic anti-depressants), contraindications with certain medical and mental health diagnoses. This paper reviews the potential benefits and dangers of Ayahuasca use and suggestions for future research. Literature review, internet keyword search of ayahuasca retreats happening around Europe and USA and on harms and adverse experiences on thematic forums and Facebook support groups.

Biography

Francesca Morgante has completed her MSc in Western Herbal Medicine from Middlesex University, London, UK. She has been working as a Medical Herbalist, consulting clients on the therapeutic use of herbs and traditional natural methods for four years. Her research interests are on medicinal plants around the world, including healing traditions in the Amazon region, psychoactive plants and the psycho-social dimension of their use.

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