From Altered States to Psychological Change: The Role of Self-Processing and Psychological Flexibility in Mental Health

Authors: Riya Salaria, Dr. Sanjay Khare, Dr. Rituparna Ghosh, Dr. Tanya Raj, Dr. Rajiv Patil
Institutional Affiliation: Apollo Hospitals, Navi Mumbai, India
Contact: riyasalariaa@gmail.com
Keywords: Altered States; Psychological Flexibility; Emotional Regulation; Mental Health; Mind–Body Practices

Abstract: Altered states of consciousness are increasingly investigated as potential pathways to psychological change, yet the psychological processes through which these experiences may contribute to positive mental health outcomes remain poorly understood. This study investigates whether psychological flexibility, emotional regulation and perceived meaning are associated with more beneficial altered-state experiences arising from non-pharmacological practices including meditation, yoga and controlled breathing. Approximately 100 adults participating in a hospital-based mind-body programme were assessed using the DASS-21, a validated measure of psychological flexibility and a structured assessment of altered-state experiences, including intensity, emotional valence, perceived meaningfulness and subsequent psychological impact. Quantitative associations between altered-state characteristics, psychological flexibility and psychological distress were examined alongside thematic analysis of participants' descriptions of transformative experiences. Findings are expected to indicate that greater psychological flexibility and emotional regulation are associated with more positive psychological outcomes following altered-state experiences, while perceived meaning and integration may further contribute to beneficial adjustment. These findings would suggest that therapeutic change may depend not simply on entering an altered state, but on the psychological processes occurring during and following the experience. Understanding these mechanisms may support the development of safer, more targeted mind–body interventions and provide clinically relevant insights for emerging approaches to altered-state therapies, including psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.