

First Marijuana, Now Ecstasy? Illegal Drugs Are Not the Cure for PTSD

A South Carolina psychiatrist is pushing MDMA, a pure form of the party drug known as **Ecstasy**, as a way of treating war veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). But illegal drugs are not the cure for emotional distress.

Dr. Michael Mithoefer and Ann Mithoefer offer studies they say reveal the power of the psychoactive stimulant to reduce fear and defensiveness and increase trust. But experimenting with an illegal drug to restore mental health defies common sense and opens the door to long-term substance abuse.

Despite the widespread problem of soldiers getting hooked on prescription drugs after suffering combat injuries, these researchers aren't overly concerned soldiers will get hooked on Ecstasy after suffering mental injuries—if the use is supervised. But introducing someone to euphoric experiences of any kind may tempt the flesh to pursue those same feelings again and again in an unsupervised setting.

Mithoefer admits that Ecstasy “does cause some euphoria” and insists it’s “not a take-home medicine.” But take home or not, you can buy Ecstasy on the streets. Prescribing soldiers who have already suffered tremendous emotional trauma a way of escape through Ecstasy—an illegal psychedelic drug that studies show can cause long-lasting damage to nerve cells that contain serotonin—is not the cure.

The so-called “hug drug” has already infiltrated America’s military. Do we really need to open the door to a potentially life-long addiction to party drugs, which only mask rather than cure the root of PTSD? Some researchers argue that giving

Ecstasy to soldiers with PTSD helps them open up and talk about the horrifying experiences they endured. But there are other proven ways to treat PTSD without getting veterans high on drugs that could cause further harm.

When I lived in Alabama, I had a friend who did two tours of duty in Vietnam. We lived near Fort Rucker and helicopters often flew overhead conducting training exercises. My veteran friend's PTSD was so bad that he often got agitated when he heard the choppers. He was on all manner of prescription drugs—and also smoked marijuana—but he grew worse instead of better over the years. Drugs weren't the answer for him. I doubt adding Ecstasy to his pharmaceutical regimen would have done anything more than got him hooked on yet another illegal drug.

Ironically, the military has been fighting an internal drug war on Ecstasy for more than 10 years. Again, Illegal drugs are not the answer to PTSD—and getting FDA approval for illegal drugs to treat PTSD is not the answer either. Thankfully, some in the field recognize this truth. Ron Acierno, director of the PTSD clinical team at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center in Charleston, acknowledged that the “abuse potential is high.” And therein lies the problem with introducing drugs like oxycotin, Xanax, marijuana and Ecstasy. The abuse potential is high.

I am all for helping veterans—and others—with PTSD recover. I understand the reports that show people who took MDMA shed their PTSD diagnoses after therapy. But just because the superficial fruit of PTSD subsided doesn't mean true healing took place. The studies I've read don't discuss the propensity for problems to reemerge—or for drug abuse to follow the therapy.

I stand against bringing more illegal drugs into the “healing” process. I never read about Jesus give anyone Ecstasy. Jesus healed by the power of the **Holy Spirit**. I would rather see the

church rise up than see illegal drug use to rise up, wouldn't you? Giving the nod to illegal drugs at any level opens a Pandora's box that you can't easily close.

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