

PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

**RESEARCH ABUSES
AGAINST PEOPLE OF
COLOUR AND OTHER
VULNERABLE GROUPS IN
EARLY PSYCHEDELIC
RESEARCH**



EARLY PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH

-----1938-----

LSD synthesized in 1938; studied for treating anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and terminal illness. Over 1,000 studies involving 40,000+ participants before research halted by 1970 Controlled Substances Act.

---1947---

Nuremberg Code

CIA's MKUltra program (1953–73)

---1953---

covertly funded LSD experiments on civilians, prisoners, and patients.

---1964---

Declaration of Helsinki

---1970---

Controlled Substances Act

---1973---

Many participants were unaware; Nazi scientists consulted post-WWII.

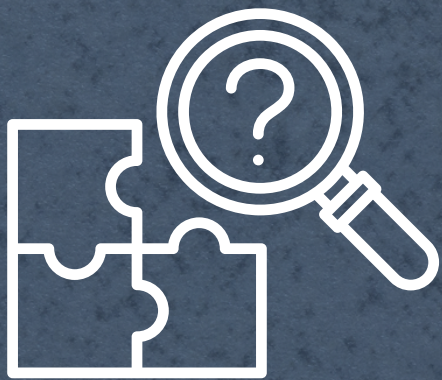
---1979---

Belmont Report

Established protections for research participants, especially vulnerable groups.

BACKGROUND

- Black Americans, incarcerated individuals, and psychiatric patients were targeted without consent.
- Abuses included coercion, high-risk dosing, and lack of safety — especially at CIA-linked ARC in Kentucky.



Gap: No systematic examination of how people of colour (POC), incarcerated individuals, and those with mental illness were exploited in early U.S. psychedelic research.



Objective: Analyze early U.S. studies (1950–1980) to evaluate ethics in participant selection, consent, dosing, and institutional context using modern ethical standards.

METHODS



Scope: Reviewed 48 studies from 1950–1980 conducted in the U.S. using psychedelics on vulnerable populations.



Inclusion Criteria: Studies involving POC, incarcerated individuals, and psychiatric inpatients.

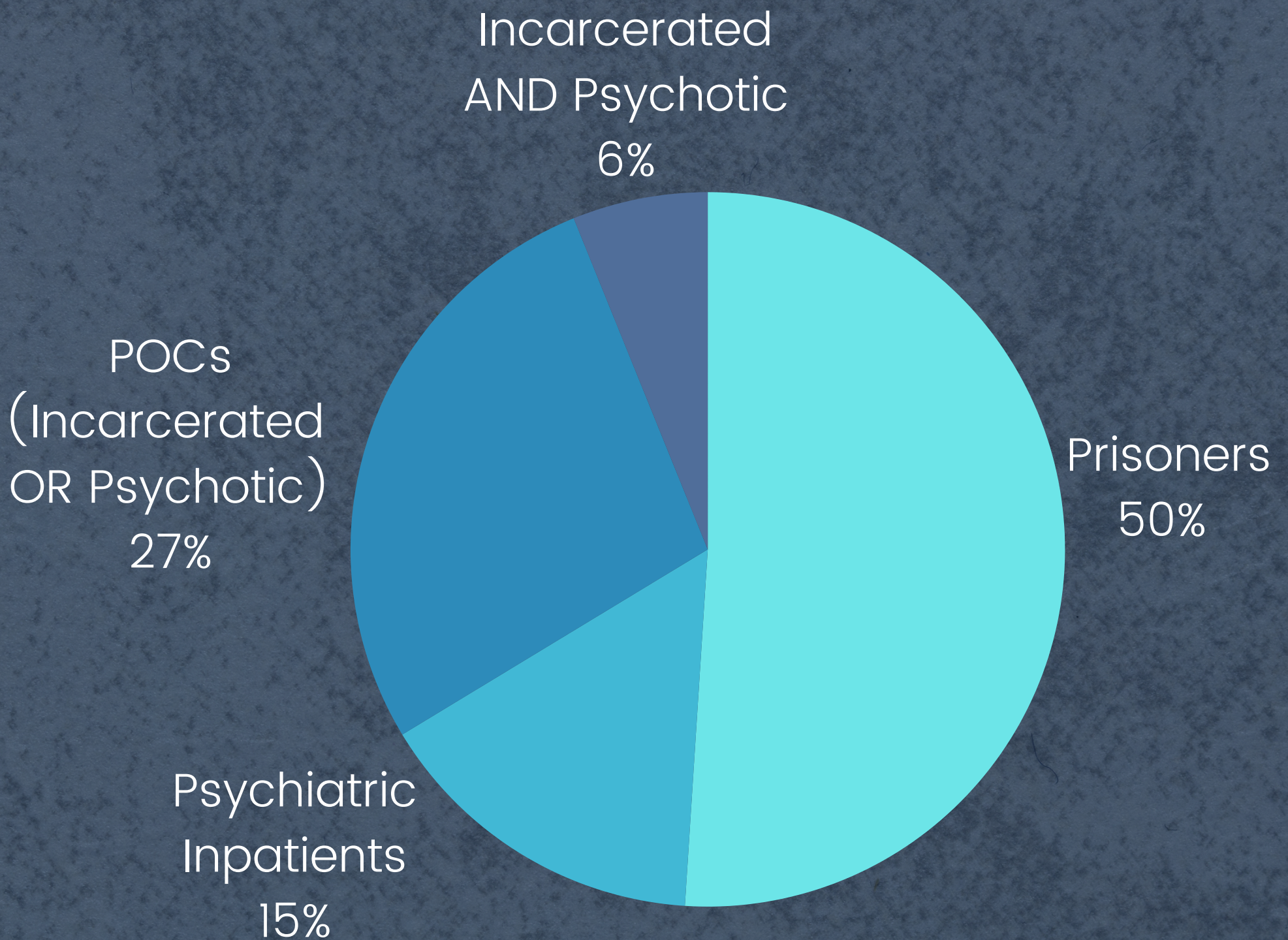


Analysis: Thematic analysis and descriptive statistics used to assess recruitment, consent, dosing, and safety practices.



MAPS
CANADA 

INCARCERATED POPULATIONS & UNDUE INFLUENCE:



Coercive incentives included sentence reductions or paying with heroine.

Disproportionate recruitment of Black Americans; e.g., ARC in Kentucky had 66% POC in a 7% POC state.

RESULTS



Differential Treatment:

- Black participants dosed more heavily than White counterparts (up to 180 μ g LSD vs. 75 μ g). Some received daily high-dose LSD for over 85 days without proper consent.
- Differential treatment based on race (4%); Undue influence (52%); No informed consent (60%).



Problematic Dosing & Scientific Rigor:

- 77% of studies used high-risk dosing schedules.
- Many administered multiple psychedelics without justification.
- Study designs were often exploitative and scientifically weak.



Neglect of Set and Setting

- No attempt to create safe or culturally informed environments.
- Black and incarcerated participants often dosed in prisons or labs; White participants dosed in comfort (e.g., PI's home).

ETHICS AND IMPACT

- Most early studies would fail today's ethical standards (Belmont Report, Declaration of Helsinki).
- POC were uniquely exploited through race-based differential treatment, coercion, and lack of informed consent.
- Lack of proper set/setting exacerbated harm, especially considering the racial and cultural context of participants.



MOVING FORWARD



Reparation includes community consultation, inclusive research design, and rejecting exploitative legacies.



Ethically fraught studies should be acknowledged but not valorized or cited without context.

Cultural competency, diverse research teams, and community engagement are essential.

NOW

FUTURE

PAST

Present-day psychedelic researchers must address past harms.



MAPS
CANADA

LIMITATIONS

- Historical records lacked detail on race, consent, and dosing timelines.
- Many studies failed to report participant demographics.



CONCLUSION

- Early psychedelic research involved systemic exploitation of POC and other vulnerable groups.
- Current and future research must confront this legacy, ensure equity, and prevent repeat abuses through inclusive, ethical practice.



CITATION

**Research abuses against people of colour
and other vulnerable groups in early
psychedelic research**

**Strauss, D., de la Salle, S., Sloshower, J., &
Williams, M. T.**

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737.**

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2