

EFFECTS OF PSILOCYBIN ON RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS IN CLERGY



PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

BACKGROUND

- Psychedelics can induce “mystical” experiences with features such as unity, awe, timelessness, and ineffability.
- Such states are comparable to those reported in prayer, meditation, near-death experiences, and ritual practices.
- Psilocybin has been linked to sustained improvements in well-being, spirituality, and therapeutic outcomes in clinical populations (e.g., depression, cancer-related distress, addictions).

RESEARCH GAPS

No prior studies on how psychedelics are experienced and interpreted by clergy.

Limited research on long-term spiritual/religious effects of psychedelics in major religious settings, research is primarily on Indigenous and ritual contexts.

AIMS



Evaluate acute and long-term effects of psilocybin in psychedelic-naïve clergy from major world religions.

Assess changes in spirituality, religious attitudes, leadership, and overall well-being.

Compare outcomes between clergy who received psilocybin vs. a delayed-control group.

METHODOLOGY

Griffiths et al., 2025
Figure 1

Design: Randomised,
waitlist-controlled trial.

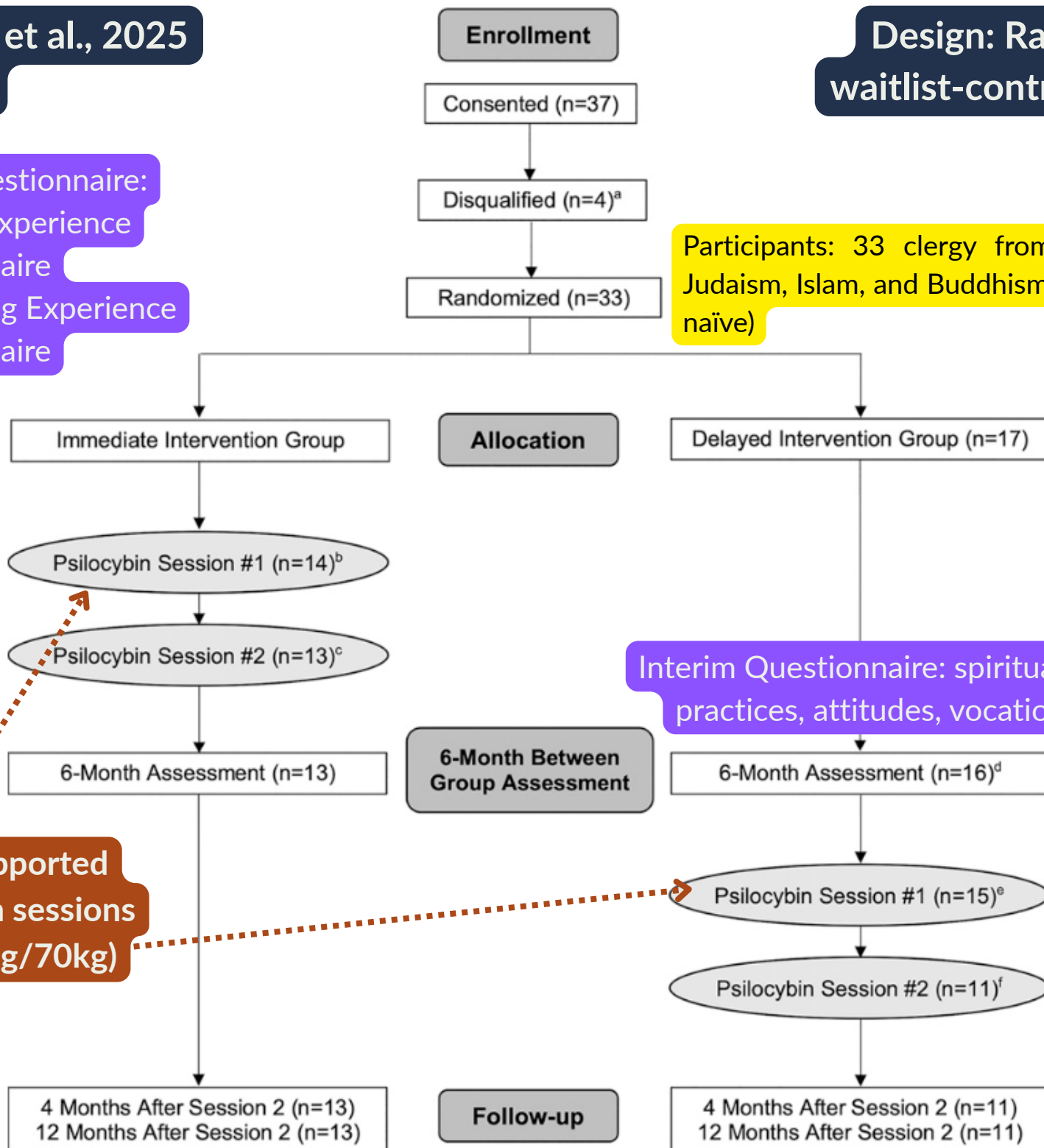
Acute Questionnaire:
Mystical Experience
Questionnaire
Challenging Experience
Questionnaire

Participants: 33 clergy from Christianity,
Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism (psychedelic-
naïve)

Interim Questionnaire: spirituality,
practices, attitudes, vocation

Two supported
psilocybin sessions
(20-30mg/70kg)

Persisting Effects Questionnaire -
spiritual and professional changes



Extension of Good Friday Experiment (1962)

RESULTS

Mean age 50 yrs; 31% female; 97% White; 93% post-grad; ~22 yrs ministry experience

Religions: Christianity 76%, Judaism 17%, Islam 3%, Buddhism 3%

Between-group (6 months)

Outcome Area	Immediate Group
Spiritual Experience	62% reported top-5 spiritual experience (vs. 0% of delayed group) (vs 0% delayed group reported)
Religious Attitudes/Behavior	Higher scores than delayed group on 5/7 positive changes (in relation to spiritual vocation)
Religious Attitudes (specific)	Higher scores than delayed group on 7/9 positive attitudes (in relation to leadership effectiveness)
Psychological/Social Outcomes	Greater improvements than delayed group in mood, altruism, spirituality, life & self attitudes
Negative Changes	Lower scores (less negative) than delayed group
Well-being/Life Satisfaction	Significantly higher scores than delayed group

RESULTS

ACUTE SESSION EXPERIENCES

96%: top-5 spiritual experience
42%: single most sacred experience

Mysticism Scale scores increased significantly from baseline to 16 months

79%: increased sacredness in daily life, effectiveness as clergy, and enriched prayer/meditation

Positive changes (65%) far outweighed negatives (2%)

88% reported higher well-being/life satisfaction

92% would take psilocybin again

VOCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Considering leaving ministry: no significant change vs baseline

Burnout: remained low, no significant differences

KEY FINDINGS

Psilocybin led to significant positive changes in clergy's religious attitudes, practices, and leadership effectiveness.

Benefits persisted at 16 months: enriched prayer/meditation, greater spiritual awareness, increased appreciation of one's own & other traditions, stronger sense of sacred in daily life.

Effects comparable to or extending prior findings (e.g., Good Friday Experiment).

IMPLICATIONS

Psilocybin can lead to meaningful, lasting spiritual growth in trained clergy.

Potential applications: religious education, chaplaincy, interfaith tolerance, end-of-life care.

Safe when conducted with careful screening, preparation, support, and integration.

LIMITATIONS



Small, homogenous sample (mostly White, male, Christian; self-selected).

Waitlist control only (no active placebo).

Framing as “sacred experiences” may have influenced responses

CONCLUSIONS



Clergy from four world religions interpreted experiences as religiously significant, meaningful, and beneficial.

No serious adverse events; similar risk to prior studies.

Future: larger, more diverse, rigorously controlled trials needed to explore impacts across traditions and worldviews.



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CANADA

CITATIONS

“Effects of Psilocybin on Religious and Spiritual Attitudes and Behaviors in Clergy from Various Major World Religions. *Psychedelic Medicine*.

Griffiths, R.R., Jesse, R., Richards, W.A., Johnson, M.W., Sepeda, N.D., Bossis, A.P., & Ross, S. (2025).

<https://doi.org/10.1089/psymed.2023.0044>

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