

ANGEL DUST

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Angel dust or phencyclidine (PCP)¹⁻³ is a crystalline powder which can have a high potential for toxicity.⁴ This arylcyclohexylamine is usually smoked but can also be taken by other routes such as the intranasal route or injected since it can be dissolved in a solvent. Marijuana can also be laced with PCP.

In the 1950s this drug was marketed as an anaesthetic pharmaceutical but this was later discontinued due to its adverse effect profile. PCP may induce hallucinations, erratic and violent behavior, dissociative states and paranoia. Other psychiatric manifestations have been reported⁵ including psychosis and suicidal urges. Other effects include gait disturbance, incoherent slurred speech, balance disturbances, with severe intoxication potentially even leading to convulsions.⁶ Instances of self-mutilation, cannibalism, rape and drowning in a bath have been reported to have occurred under the influence. It is neurotoxic and high dosages can give rise to rhabdomyolysis. There is the propensity for drug tolerance and withdrawal. Using dogs as animal models has shown that PCP can cause spasm of the cerebral arteries.⁷ Use of angel dust may also have adverse effects on the fetus.

PCP effects are mostly mediated through N-methyl-D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor blockade.^{8,9} Research on rodent models have indicated that PCP, being a nicotinic acetylcholine receptor inhibitor,¹⁰ exerts its effect on dopamine receptor binding.^{11,12} Other associations include monoamine dysfunction^{13,14} and dopaminergic dysregulation.^{15,16}

Strategies are sought to deter drug users through education, awareness and drug testing amongst others.¹⁷⁻²⁰ Further strategies are pursued to prevent abuse. In Malta, organizations and agencies such as Sedqa, Oasi Foundation, Caritas and Narcotics Anonymous provide support for drug-related issues.

As Vourakis and Bennett conclude, angel dust was definitely not heaven sent!²¹

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