

Claims of Paranormal Experiences - II: Attitudes Toward Psychical Research and Factors Associated with Psi and Psi-Related Experiences

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Abstract

In this second part of the paper, data concerning opinions and attitudes of the respondents toward value of parapsychological research and impact of paranormal experiences on their lives will be presented. Important associations between psi related experiences and other factors will be discussed.

The paranormal experiences were found to be positively correlated with recall of dreams and lucid dreams as well as with the practice of meditation and use of mind expanding drugs. That is, both natural and induced altered states of consciousness were found to be good predictors of psi and psi-related experiences.

A majority of the respondents had a positive attitude toward the value of parapsychological research. Some of them considered paranormal experiences as valuable to them while others sought help from the psychics. Although the authenticity of these experiences could not be established, they definitely have an impact on the lives of the experients. For a better understanding and utility of such experiences, further studies on larger samples are suggested.

Key words -

**Paranormal experiences,
Psi-experiences,
Psi-related experiences,
Extrasensory perception (ESP),
ESP survey**

In part I of this paper [1], the findings of a survey of paranormal experiences in a selected sample of college students were reported. In this part the opinions of the respondents toward parapsychological research and the significance attached to and psi-related experiences will be presented. The associations of various factors connected with psi and psi-related experiences will be discussed. Tables I and II provide information about opinions on related topics and significance given for psi experiences.

A.

Opinions on Psi-related Topics

Parapsychological research: Respondents were required to choose among a series of alternatives concerning their opinions about 'the scientific study of psychic phenomena'. Three hundred and fifteen respondents answered this question. Two hundred and nineteen (70%) respondents thought it was important or meaningful. However, 40 (13%) respondents felt it was foolish, sinful or unfruitful, and 56 (18%) held no opinion.

Palmer's [2] results were somewhat different on the importance of psychical research. In his study, 86 per cent of the respondents thought that parapsychological research was important or meaningful; 11 per cent felt it was unfruitful or sinful; and only five per cent held no opinion. However, most of the respondents seemed to have a positive attitude towards psychical research in both the surveys.

Table I - Opinions on Psi-related Topics

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Survival. The question whether they believed that the human soul survives after death was answered by 315 respondents. One hundred and twenty nine (41%) of the respondents considered it to be a possibility or a probability; while 76 (24%) considered survival after death as a certainty. Fifty (16%) of the respondents felt the survival after death was untrue or unlikely; 60 (19%) held no opinion.

Palmer's [2] and Haraldsson's [3] results indicate similar results with regard to survival as a possibility / probability (49% and 48% respectively). A higher percentage of respondents reported survival of death to be a certainty in the following surveys: Palmer [2] (32%), Haraldsson [3] (40%) and Blackmore [4] (42%). Very few respondents in Palmer's [2] and Haraldsson's [3] study held no opinion (3% and 5% respectively). The belief in the certainty of survival was much lower in the present study than the studies reported from the West.

B.

Significance given for Psi-Experiences

Saved in crisis: Respondents were asked whether any of their own or someone else's psychic experiences had ever saved them or their psychic experiences had saved another person from 'a serious or tragic event such as illness, severe emotional crisis, accident, or death'. Twenty eight (9%) respondents claimed that their psychic experiences had saved them from a crisis; nine per cent had saved someone else from a serious or tragic event; 12 per cent had been saved by someone else.

Palmer's [2] survey results are quite similar in these regards. Of the 268 respondents seven per cent reported to have saved themselves from crisis/danger; five per cent had saved someone else; and four per cent had been saved by someone else.

Changes of attitudes/feelings. The question was designed to elicit whether any of the psi experiences of the respondents had significantly influenced or changed any of their 'attitudes or feelings'. Forty-five (20%) answered this question. Majority of those who claimed to have had a psi experience felt that psi experience had changed their attitudes and feelings towards self, meaning of life, marriage, family, emotions, and humanity etc. The most reported change was towards self (44%) followed by spiritual

beliefs (42%), emotions (36%) and towards life (33%). Attitudes and feeling toward other areas fall below 30 per cent All the alternatives given by Palmer [2] for this item had not been used in the present investigation. However, of the item included, his respondents showed change in attitude because of the psychic experiences, toward self (36%), spiritual beliefs (25%), and meaning of life (31%).

Table II - Significance given for psi experiences

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Note: Sample size varies from question to question due to non-responders. Figures shown in parentheses refer to number of responders.

- a. Presence of an experience or an activity.
- b. Percentages for this column are calculated from respondents who claimed the basic experiences or activity, not from the total responders.

Influence on decisions. The question .

In this category also, some items were deleted from the original Palmer's questionnaire. of whether the claimed psychic experience had significantly influenced or changed any of the 'important decisions' that they had made in their lives was answered positively by 46 (21%) respondents. A majority of the students felt that these experiences had influenced or changed their decisions concerning their life style (63%), choice of friends (48%), studies (30%), health (22%), vocation (15%), behaviour and attitude towards religion and people (9%).

It seems that a number of respondents were affected in some way by their experiences and that these experiences are most likely to affect one's life in different spheres. This finding is in agreement with Palmer's [2] study.

C.

Relationship between Psi, Psi-related Experiences and Activities/Practices Relevant to Psi

Table III provides information regarding relationship between psi-related experiences and activities relevant to psi.

Table III - Relationship between Psi, Psi-related Experiences, Activities/Practices Relevant to Psi

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Each cell contains the chi-square values (DF=1)

Dreams. Recall of dreams was significantly related to Deja vu, ESP dreams and waking ESP.

The present findings are similar to Palmer's [2] with regard to the positive relationship between recall of dreams, waking ESP and ESP dream. However in his study, experience of deja vu is not significantly related to recall of dreams but the occurrence of apparitions is.

Lucid dreams are significantly related to deja vu, waking ESP, and OBEs.

Palmer's [2] results also showed significant relationship between lucid dreams and waking ESP and OBEs but not deja vu. In addition, his results showed significant relationship of lucid dreams with ESP

dreams and apparitions. Blackmore [4] also reported from her survey that lucid dreams and OBEs are positively related.

Both recall of dreams and lucid dreams seem to be good predictors of psi and psi related experiences. According to Palmer [2] they seem 'to reflect the degree to which the conscious mind is capable of gaining access to the content of the unconscious mind' and that 'this faculty makes one prone to psi or psi-related experiences'.

Use of mind expanding drugs. It was found to be significantly correlated to deja vu, waking ESP, apparitions and OBEs. As stated in the first part of this report, only 18 per cent of drug users reported that few of their experiences occurred under the influence of drugs and only one respondent reported that he had most of his experiences while under the influence of drugs.

In Palmer's [2] study, however, only OBEs were significantly related to the use of drugs.

Meditation. Meditation was found to be strong predictor of psi experience. It was significantly related to deja vu, ESI dreams, waking ESP and OBEs.

In Palmer's survey meditation was not found to be a strong predictor of psi experience, although the direction of the relationship was almost always positive.

Mystical experiences. Mystical experience were significantly related to deja vu and hauntings (lived/stayed in a haunted house), with a tendency towards a positive relationship with waking ESP.

The mystical experiences were significantly related to waking ESP in Palmer's [2] study. He also reported a positive relationship between mystical experiences an apparitions, communications with the dead, OBEs, hauntings and past-life memories.

Visits to psychics. Visits to psychics were d to he significantly related to ESP agency, communication with the dead and hauntings (lived in a haunted house).

Palmer's [2] study showed significant relationship between visits to psychics and ESP agency, past life memories and aura vision.

D.

Relationship between Psi, Psi-related Experiences, Activities/Practices Relevant to Psi and Demographic Variables

Table IV provides chi square values on the relationship between psi related experiences, activities and some demographic variables.

Table IV - Relationship between Psi, Psi-related Experiences, Activities/Practices Relevant to Psi and Demographic Variables

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DF=1

The demographic variables considered here were age, sex and religion. Correlations for educational and socio-economic status were not attempted, because all the students had 14 years of formal education, Enough data on socio-economic status was not available for a meaningful comparison.

A significant relationship between age and mystical experiences was found. Younger age group (21

and below) respondents reported more number of mystical experiences. No explanations for these associations can be offered.

Sex was found to be significantly related to OBEs and mind expanding drugs. Males reported more OBEs than females. Frequent use of mind expanding drugs was also reported more by male respondents.

Religion was found to be significantly correlated with mind expanding drugs and meditation. Hindus reported to have used drugs and practiced meditation, more frequently than non-Hindus. Demographic variables did not fare well as predictors of psi experiences in Palmer's [2] and Kohr's [5] surveys.

Discussion

A majority (70%) of the respondents showed an open mindedness toward the value of scientific investigation of paranormal phenomena. They considered that the study of such phenomena may help 'to discover some basic facts about psychic phenomena', and 'it will profoundly effect the life of every member of society'. However, a small number (13%) of the respondents felt it was unfruitful to study the phenomena, "because they are so unpredictable and difficult to pin down. Science can probably not either prove or disprove them". The remaining 17 per cent had no opinion about the value of paranormal research.

The psi experiences were found to be positively correlated with recall of dreams and lucid dreams. The respondents reported to having had such experiences while practicing meditation or under the influence of mind expanding drugs. The use of drugs, was significantly related to waking ESP, deja vu, OBEs, apparitions and a tendency toward communication with dead, while practice of meditation showed a positive correlation with deja vu, ESP dreams and waking ESP and OBEs. The use of mind expanding drugs and practice of meditation were good predictors of psi and psi-related experiences. This finding in the present study, although different from Palmer's study [2], is in line with the other finding that dreams are good predictors of psi and psi-related experiences. In other words, altered states of consciousness (both natural and induced) facilitate such experiences.

The male respondents reported to having experienced OBEs more often than their female counterparts and they also admitted to their frequent use of mind expanding drugs. These two factors seem to be inter-related. As the above trend shows that (the OBEs are positively related to the use of mind expanding drugs) males having used drugs more often had more OBEs than the female respondents. Hindu respondents reported use of mind expanding drugs and practice of meditation more oftener than the non-Hindu respondents. However, the frequency of psi or psi-related experiences did not seem to have been influenced by membership to any particular religion.

Among the psi-related activities, visits to psychics were significantly related to ESP agency, communication with the dead and hauntings. It is possible that because these experiences one seeks the help (psychics. As reported by the respondents 52 per cent of them had found their visits to psychics helpful.

Paranormal experiences are also reported to occur in pathological conditions (functional and organic). However as stated earlier earlier, this paper reports experiences that were considered as paranormal by the respondents dents, it is difficult to say how many them had had authentic paranormal experiences and how many had them due to other conditions. Some of the respondents who claimed such

experiences considered them valuable since they were able to avert a crisis for themselves or for someone else. These experiences were also reported have been helpful in making their decisions in day to day life, changed their attitude toward self, others and meaning of life and death in general. In spite of the reported positive influence of such experiences on the respondents, the importance of further investigations of such claims cannot be undermined. It is quite possible that some of their experiences that they considered paranormal were unwitting falsifications, imaginations or even pathological which, if taken at face value may lead to erroneous conclusions. On the other hand, some respondents were definitely troubled by such experiences and hence sought some help from outside agencies. Both the group - those who consider such experience helpful as well as those who find the harmful or even threatening - may need professional help. The intervention can be offered only after learning more about the prevalence rate of claims of paranormal phenomena by conducting surveys of large populations and examining such claims normal as well as clinical populations for a better understanding and management of paranormal and pathological conditions.

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