Are altered states of consciousness (ASCs) that may occur during ketamine-infusion therapy associated with antidepressant benefits?

In collaboration with the anesthesia clinic Drs. Gugath and Kist in Baden-Württemberg a patient questionnaire study is being conducted as part of the UZH/ETH joint project Consciousness Studies under the direction of PD Dr. Kurt Stocker. The study investigates whether altered states of consciousness (ASCs) that may occur during ketamine-infusion therapy are associated with antidepressant benefits. The term ASC refers to short-term modes of experience that clearly differ from everyday waking consciousness – for instance, certain changes in thought processes, changes in time perception, or strong emotional and imaginary impressions (Dittrich, Lamparter, & Maurer, 2006). Not uncommonly, individuals who are treated with ketamine-infusion therapy due to severe depression report that they experience ASCs during the infusion. Furthermore, not uncommonly they associate these ASCs with antidepressant benefits (Stocker, Hasler, & Hartmann, 2019; Stocker & Hartmann, in press). However, despite such patient testimonials, there are hardly any investigations on the question of whether ketamine-induced ASCs have antidepressant effects. In the current questionnaire study, we are investigating precisely this question. We hope that the results of this study will provide insights into the treatment of depression.


