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Title of project:

*Evaluating the effectiveness of ayahuasca in the treatment of addictions: The Ayahuasca Treatment Outcome Project (ATOP)*

Abstract: Ayahuasca has been identified as having therapeutic potential for the treatment of addiction and other mental health challenges such as depression and trauma-related disorders. While long-standing indigenous knowledge, anecdotal evidence and several preliminary observational studies consistently point in this direction more research is needed with more rigorous methods and diverse therapeutic settings and cultural contexts. This presentation will outline the rationale for and design of a multi-country, multi-site program of research known as the Ayahuasca Treatment Outcome Project. The presentation will discuss key principles, legal, ethical and methodological challenges identified to date in project planning and implementation – for example, the rationale to focus on addictions; the appropriateness and feasibility of identifying the “active ingredients” of an integrated approach that combines shamanic and psychotherapeutic approaches; bio-ethical issues in site selection related to both energetic and physical safety; choice of outcomes to monitor over time. This presentation will also briefly outline the pros and cons of alternative and potentially complementary approaches to the study of the therapeutic benefits of ayahuasca – traditional clinical research with controlled designs, health services research in more naturalistic settings, realist evaluation and indigenous-culture based evaluation. The aim will be to stimulate reflection and discussion of these alternative approaches and the potential for reconciliation and synergy. We will draw upon the experience of ATOP and conclude with an update on current status of funding proposals under development and review for 2014-15 for project sites in Peru, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.