



# Psychic Experiences In The World



The idea of psychic experiences is essentially a connection between a strong feeling, vision, or hunch and a particular event. General examples include having a specific dream, and the contents of the dream coming true the next day. People have reported having pains in a particular area of their body only to discover a loved one has been injured in that bodily area as well. More general examples involve dreaming of a loved one right before their passing, or an absolute knowledge that a loved one was in trouble or danger, when they in fact were. First, let's address common psychological confounds with

psychic experiences and then examine more difficult-to-explain cases.

## Cognition without Awareness



Many researchers believe that aspects of PSI may be unconscious in nature. Likewise, a counterargument is that many results of PSI studies are the result of unconscious learning or a tendency to pick up information around us without realizing we have stored or learned it. Examples include work by Zajonc (1968), who demonstrated that previous exposure to symbols produced greater liking of those previously exposed symbols when mixed in with others. Despite the fact that participants had consciously forgotten the symbols, results suggest that their unconscious

had not.

## Probability Misjudgment

One of the more common explanations for belief in personal psychic experiences is a surprising series of research in social and cognitive psychology demonstrating that we as humans are very poor at estimating the probability of an event occurring. Much of this work was pioneered by Tversky and Kahneman (1973), but many subsequent studies have shown that we easily overestimate the odds of something occurring by chance and often are very inaccurate about calculating probability. As such, we may see a guess or intuition of an event as psychic, when in fact we had a high probability of getting the answer correct by chance in the first place.

## Propensity to find Correspondences (*illusory correlation*)

One of the findings in social science literature is the tendency to draw a connection between two events, even when no real relationship exists between them. This phenomenon is typically called illusory correlation or superstitious thinking, such as the belief that walking under ladders will bring bad luck (e.g, Langer, 1975). Research has shown that humans (mostly due to the way we are wired to process and store information) can and do engage in illusory correlations. However, sometimes this term is used in a pejorative sense toward people who believe that events can be connected or predictive (i.e., psychics). It is worth noting that, although somewhat



ridiculous, scientific data is not available with superstitions. In other words, we can't say for sure if stepping on a crack can break your mother's back. Likewise, while false relationships between two unrelated events can occur, there is no solid research demonstrating these events are spurious.

Similar to our discussion with subjective haunting phenomena, memory errors can also occur when it comes to validating our psychic claims. It is not uncommon for humans in general to be selective in what they remember in an event, and not uncommon to remember information that typically supports their existing interpretation of a situation.

### Does Psi Occur In Everyday Life?



Many case reports of telepathy, ESP, premonitions, and clairvoyance have been collected over the decades by researchers. Louisa Rhine collected thousands of accounts, but Schwarz and Schouten have also collected their own case studies of premonitions. General characteristics of such reports show that between 38 to 49% of these reports revolve around death, accidents, or the severe illness of a friend or loved one. Other research has shown that up to 67% of Americans report some type of psychic experience, and studies in other countries produce similar percentages (Sheldrake, 2015).

For those who want more definitive research, Sheldrake demonstrated that mothers would lactate at approximately the same time their child (being away and babysat) would show distress. These time-associated distance events were significant even when controlling for regular feeding schedules. In a much more generally applicable sense, Sheldrake also conducted a series of studies examining if there was any genuine effect to knowing who was going to call you on a telephone before they call. His results, with randomization controls in place, showed a 45% premonition rate, when chance from the study should only have produced a 25% premonition rate. Finally, a study was conducted to examine if people would wake up before their alarms went off, even when alarms were randomly set. Results again showed that people would wake up before the alarm with greater than chance expectancy (Sheldrake, 2015).

Other examples of these sort of studies exist, but the sum of the findings suggest that PSI may play a larger role in our lives than we may recognize at first. However, skeptics and parapsychologists are right to claim that much more research and replication is needed for field PSI to empirically verify their existence.

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