

## **The mind possessed project: Mapping the varieties of possession experiences**

### **ABSTRACT:**

#### **Background**

Possession experiences are widely reported across cultures and those possessed are often regarded as a channel for spiritual agents.

#### **Aims**

We conducted two studies to investigate the psychological characteristics of individuals who regularly experience possession states, and the varieties of these experiences.

#### **Method**

Study 1 used a set of personality, cognitive, and mental health measures and compared Umbanda religious participants who regularly experience possession with those who have never experienced possession states. Study 2 collected possession narratives contrasting individuals from Afro-Brazilian versus Christian Evangelical Pentecostal backgrounds.

#### **Results**

Umbanda mediums were no different from a control group across all measures, except for anxiety, where they scored lower than the control group. We also found that the level of fusion with the spiritual entity was a predictor of quality of life. Analysis of possession narratives showed that Afro-Brazilian individuals shared commonalities with Christian Pentecostals but emphasised more changes in self/identity.

#### **Conclusions**

Results suggest that individuals regularly experiencing possession within an Afro-Brazilian religious context are psychologically very similar to others who never experienced the same phenomenon, and that the way they appraise their experiences as meaningful, as well as the level of spiritual fusion, are predictors of wellbeing. In addition, we have found that different religious traditions share many characteristics of possession experience, though their different contexts and beliefs may also moderately shape the diversity and qualities of such experiences.

#### **Keywords**

Possession, Paranormal beliefs, Personality, Wellbeing

### **Published Work:**

Delmonte, R., Farias, M., Bastos, M. A. V., Júnior, Madeira, L., & Sonogo, B. (2022). The mind possessed: well-being, personality, and cognitive characteristics of individuals regularly experiencing religious possession. *Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry*, 44(5), 486–494. doi: 10.47626/1516-4446-2021-2414

Os textos são da exclusiva responsabilidade dos autores  
All texts are of the exclusive responsibility of the authors

Short Film - <https://vimeo.com/430303432>

**Researcher's Contacts:**

Miguel Farias  
SCIO, 8 Norham Gardens  
Oxford OX2 6QB, England  
United Kingdom

Website: [miguelfarias.co.uk](http://miguelfarias.co.uk)

Phone: +44 01865366 620

Email: [miguel.farias@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:miguel.farias@coventry.ac.uk)