The benefit of acupuncture in children with different types of pain

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Abstract

Chronic pain impacts the ability of children to function similarly to their peers. Because most of their pain is long-term, conventional medicinal treatment may become expensive. Therefore, healthcare providers recommend unconventional medicine, such as acupuncture, as a safe and cost-effective treatment. However, less is known about the effectiveness of acupuncture in a pediatric population with a range of pain diagnoses. We hypothesized that pain and quality-of-life would not differ between patients with only pain and patients with pain and medical diagnoses. It was also hypothesized that self-reported pain would decrease and health related quality of life (HRQOL) would increase after receiving two treatment sessions of acupuncture. Participants (n=38, Mage=15.13, SD=2.68) presented with various pain symptoms to a pain clinic at a metropolitan hospital. Participants were grouped into two pain categories: patients with only pain symptoms (Group-1:n=10) and patients with pain symptoms and medical diagnoses (Group-2:n=27). The study was a between-subjects, pre/posttest design. Participants completed the Faces Pain Scale and the PedsQL to assess HRQOL self-report at baseline and after the second acupuncture treatment (T2). Parents also completed the Parent PedsQL to report on their child’s HRQOL. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to assess differences between pain group at baseline and at T2. No significant differences were found between Group-1 and Group-2 at baseline and at T2. To examine whether pain decreased and HRQOL increased from baseline to T2, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests were conducted. No significant differences were found for child-reported HRQOL. However, parents’ report on their child’s HRQOL significantly increased from baseline to T2, Z=-2.84, p<.01 (Mdnbaseline=47.72; MdnT2=53.36). Additionally, pain decreased from baseline to T2, Z=-4.71, p<.001 (baseline:Mdn=3; T2:Mdn=1). Results demonstrate that acupuncture is effective in reducing the reported amount of pain and increasing the child’s HRQOL. Therefore, acupuncture is beneficial to children with all types of chronic pain.

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