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Pilot study of acupuncture to treat anxiety in children and adolescents

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Aim: This pilot study investigated the use of acupuncture in the treatment of pediatric anxiety, using a waitlist control trial design.

Methods: Children with anxiety, age 8 to 16, were randomized to either the acupuncture or waitlist control group. Anxiety was measured using the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale for Children and Adolescents with Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children 2nd Edition (MASC-2) self-rated and parent-rated forms.

Results: Twenty participants were enrolled in the study and 19 completed all the questionnaires to be included in the analysis. No difference in sociodemographic characteristics at baseline between the two groups. At the second assessment, the mean MASC-parent score for the Acupuncture group was significantly lower than the Waitlist group (65.6 (SD 15.0) compared to 81.0 (SD 11.9), $p = 0.025$) with an effect size = 1.13. The pre- and post-treatment comparisons were also significantly lower for both groups in the anxiety measures. In the Acupuncture group: MASC-Parent ($p = 0.008$, effect size 0.75), and the HAM-A ($p < 0.001$, effect size 1.4). In the Waitlist group: MASC-self ($p = 0.022$; effect size 0.4), MASC-parent ($p = 0.048$; effect size 0.75) and HAM-A ($p = 0.007$; effect size 1.21).

Conclusions: This study provided promising results on the potential use of acupuncture to treat children and adolescents with general anxiety. Future research of a RCT with sufficient sample size to control for confounds and sham (placebo) comparator is warranted.

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