

Center for Reiki Research Study Summary

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Autonomic nervous system changes during Reiki treatment: A preliminary study

Reference

McKay, N, Hansen, S and McFarlane, MA. Autonomic nervous system changes during Reiki treatment: A preliminary study. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 10(6): 1077-81, 2004.

Purpose of Study

To further investigate findings by other researchers that Reiki therapy has an effect on indices of autonomic nervous system function.

Objective/goals/hypotheses

The hypothesis was that there are differences in the responses of one or more parameters of the autonomic nervous system (ANS) to Reiki treatment compared with placebo treatment, against the null hypothesis that there would be no difference in any parameter.

Methods

Forty-five test subjects were randomly assigned to one of three groups, 15 per group, in a blind trial. Each group had a 15-minute rest period to establish baseline measurements followed by a 30-minute treatment period of either Reiki treatment, placebo (sham Reiki) treatment, or a resting period; each group was then given another 10-minute rest period. Each subject was monitored for heart rate (HR); systolic, diastolic, and mean blood pressure (BP); cardiac vagal tone (CVT); cardiac sensitivity to baroreflex (CSB); and respiration, using the trademarked NeuroScope system and a stretch-sensitive resistance plethysmograph (specifically for measuring amplitude of breathing movement).

All measurements and collected data were analyzed for statistical significance in comparison to baseline measurements with a chosen p-value significance level of <0.05. Due to large patient variability, a two-way ANOVA analysis was employed using change in each parameter as the response, and data set (group) and patient as the factors.

Results

In both Reiki and placebo groups, the HR and respiration rate decreased compared to baseline, while CVT and CSB increased after treatment, indicating increased parasympathetic activity. The control group showed no change in any parameter. The decrease in HR was significantly greater in the Reiki group compared to both placebo and control groups. Both diastolic BP and mean BP showed significant reduction in the Reiki group while there were no changes in either the placebo or control groups compared to baseline.

Strengths

This was a blind random study that included a Reiki treatment group, a placebo (sham Reiki) group and a control group; each of the three groups had a mix of 8 females and 7 males, a roughly even sex distribution with an age range of 23-59 years; multiple autonomic nervous system indices were monitored over the course of the study.

Weaknesses

The sample size was small and race/ethnicity was not specified, so it is not clear that the results are generalizable; quality of measurements was questionable, special mention was made of calibration difficulties with the oscillometric method of blood pressure monitoring.

Additional comments

This was a pilot study; the results add justification and support for larger Reiki studies.

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