

Acupuncture, counselling or usual care for depression and comorbid pain: secondary analysis of a randomised controlled trial.

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Abstract

**BACKGROUND:**

Depression with comorbid pain is associated with a poor response to various treatments. The objective in this secondary analysis was to determine whether patients reporting pain have different depression and pain outcomes over time in response to acupuncture, counselling or usual care.

**METHODS:**

Self-reported ratings of depression and pain from 755 patients in a pragmatic randomised controlled trial of acupuncture (302) or counselling (302) compared to usual care alone (151) are described and analysed using a series of regression models and analysis of covariance. Patient-reported outcomes of Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-9 for depression, SF36 bodily pain and EQ-5D, all at baseline, 3, 6, 9 and 12 months.

**RESULTS:**

At baseline, 755 patients reported EQ-5D pain categories; 384 (50.9%) reported moderate-to-extreme pain. Controlling for baseline depression, a linear regression model showed that the presence of pain at baseline was associated with poorer depression outcomes at 3 months mean difference=-1.16, (95% CI 0.12 to 2.2). Participants with moderate-to-extreme pain at baseline did better at 3 months if they received acupuncture (mean reduction in Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ-9) from baseline=6.0, 95% CI 5.0 to 7.1 and a mean reduction in SF-36 bodily pain=11.2, (95% CI 7.1 to 15.2) compared to improvements for those who received counselling (4.3, 95% CI 3.3 to 5.4; 7.6, 95% CI 3.6 to 11.6) or usual care (2.7, 95% CI 1.50 to 4.0: 7.2, 95% CI 2.3 to 12.1). In comparison, no notable differences were seen between treatment arms within the no pain comparator group.

**CONCLUSIONS:**

Patients with depression and pain at baseline recovered less well from treatment over 3 months than those with depression and no pain. Reductions in both depression and pain were most marked in the acupuncture group, followed by the counselling group and then the usual care group.

**KEYWORDS:**

Acupuncture, Comorbid pain, Counselling, Depression, Usual Care

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