

A Qualitative Study on the Perceived Benefits of Tai Chi Practice

Abstract:

Background: Previous quantitative research demonstrates that Tai Chi provides positive results for people with chronic pain conditions.¹ For example, a study by Maddali et al., published in 2015, examined the effects of Tai Chi on patients with fibromyalgia and found positive results in terms of pain, disability, quality of life, and anxiety.² Another study by Hall et al., published in 2011, discovered that Tai Chi has more beneficial results compared to conservative care for patients with low back pain.³ It has been suggested that qualitative research should be done in order to further understand the effects of Tai Chi from the patient's perspective.⁴ Qualitative research may help to provide additional information as to which participants are likely to benefit from a specific intervention and what components of that intervention are most beneficial. For example, Brunzli utilized semi-structured interviews to examine patient perspective regarding the benefits of cognitive functional therapy for low back pain.⁵ This qualitative approach provided the researchers with additional insight into the positive outcomes yielded by their intervention. A literature review was unable to find qualitative research articles related to the benefits of Tai Chi practice.

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to investigate participant's experience and perceived benefits of practicing Tai Chi, with the goal of improving the design and focus of future research.

Design: This is a non-interventional, qualitative, cross-sectional study.

Methodology: One on one, semi structured interviews are being conducted with individuals who have been regularly attending Tai Chi classes for greater than six weeks at a time. Participants are excluded if they have been practicing Tai Chi for less than six weeks or don't experience chronic pain. Interviews are being audio recorded and then transcribed by the interviewer. Transcripts of the interviews are then analyzed for themes and coded by two separate researchers. Each interview includes questions pertaining to individual's Tai Chi practice and how they perceive that it impacts their pain condition. We are specifically seeking to attain information on what particular aspects of Tai Chi the participants believe are most beneficial to them.

Results: At the time of abstract submission, data has been collected, but analysis has not been completed. Preliminary data collection reveals that individuals who practice Tai Chi have experienced improvements in pain, function, and quality of life. We predict that these results are related to the biopsychosocial approach to pain management that Tai Chi provides through the combination of physical activity and awareness of movement with meditation and breathing techniques.

Discussion: These findings could potentially provide additional insight into the patient perspective, thus further contributing to clinical practice and research into the management of chronic pain. By gathering qualitative information regarding the benefits of Tai Chi for individuals with chronic pain, we can begin to seek and research the best methods by which chronic pain can be treated.

References:

1. Kong LJ, Lauche R, Klose P, et al. Tai chi for chronic pain conditions: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Sci Rep.* 6 (2016)
2. Maddali Bongi S, Paoletti G, Calà M, et al. Efficacy of rehabilitation with tai ji quan in an italian cohort of patients with fibromyalgia syndrome. *Complement Ther Med.* 2016;24:109–115.
3. Hall AM, Maher CG, Lam P, Ferreira M, Latimer J. Tai chi exercise for treatment of pain and disability in people with persistent low back pain: a randomized controlled trial. *Arthritis Care Res.* 2011;63(11):1576-1583.
4. Li G, Yuan H, Zhang W. Effects of Tai Chi on health related quality of life in patients with chronic conditions: a systematic review of randomized controlled trials. *Complement Ther Med.* 2014;22(4):743-755.
5. Bunzli S, McEvoy S, Dankaerts W, et al. Patient Perspectives on Participation in Cognitive Functional Therapy for Chronic Low Back Pain. *Phys Ther.* 2016;96(9):1397-1407.