

**Research Article**

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**Acupuncture in the treatment of pain**

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**Abstract**

Pain is a feeling that can be felt in many areas in the body (back, pelvis, chest, abdomen) and is triggered by the nervous system. Pain is most common symptom in conditions of the musculoskeletal system, but also can accompany other conditions like hormonal imbalance, autoimmune, neurological diseases etc. The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) recommends more intensive treatment for pain with acupuncture and herbal medicine, so the blocked Qi can be released and the normal body function can be stimulated. In our study we have done a survey on our patients with questionnaire of 13 questions in our clinic. In the survey participated 41 patients, 6 male and 35 female, of different age groups, with different conditions and with main symptom of pain. All patients have done acupuncture treatment in our clinic in the past year with certain number of treatments. In 63.41% or 26 patients, the overall health condition was improved totally, in 31.71% or 13 patients the condition is partially better and only 4.88% or 2 patients did not have any improvement.

**Keywords:** Pain, Treatment, Traditional Chinese medicine, Acupuncture.

**INTRODUCTION**

TCM dates back more than 2,500 years. TCM as an alternative medical system has a comprehensive approach to health that attempts to bring harmony to the mind, body, and spirit. TCM includes many different techniques, including Chinese herbal medicine acupuncture, moxibustion tui na, tai chi, qi gong and other.<sup>[1,2]</sup> TCM describes the cosmos and the body, like two opposing forces: yin – the passive, cold and slow principle and yang – the active, excited, hot principle. When these forces are in balance the body is also balanced and healthy, while the disease appears when there is internal imbalance of yin and yang. Acupuncture as part of TCM, works by activating the body's own self-healing mechanism by stimulating acupuncture points. On the human body are located more than 2000 acupuncture points that are connected with meridians (12 main meridians and 8 secondary). The acupuncture points stimulation technique includes insertion of a fine, sterile needles into the skin where point is located. Acupuncture nowadays is used most broadly to relieve pain. Acupuncture successfully treats musculoskeletal problems in a way that helps the pain to be relieved, the flow of the energy in the damaged part to be balanced and the whole well being harmonized.<sup>[3-5]</sup>

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The survey was primary done to examine and understand what are the main causes of pain for our patients, how acupuncture worked for them and are they satisfied from the final results. In this study participated 41 patients, 6 male and 35 female, who answered on 13 questions related to their health condition and pain symptom. For the survey was used the online application SmartSurvey, which was shared with our patients who already had acupuncture treatment for pain in our clinic and gave their answers anonymously. For the pain level was used categorical numerical rating scale 1-10 (1-no pain, 10-severe pain). Obtained answers were analyzed and summarized in detail and the results are pretty satisfying. All the patients had acupuncture treatment in our clinic for TCM and acupuncture in Skopje, Macedonia by doctor specialist in acupuncture. Treatments were done either with hot or cold needles, on different acupuncture points depending on the syndrome, health condition and localization of the pain.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The survey was consisted of 13 questions, on which our patients answered anonymously. The survey was shared online via our official facebook page in September 2016. From total 41 patients, 6 were male (14.63%) and 35 female (85.37). Although more female patients responded to our survey, we can't say

precisely that women suffer and have pain symptom more often than men. Pain as a symptom can be experienced by anyone, it comes in many forms, with different intensity and pain threshold is individual and variable. According to some studies women suffer from pain more often than man and have higher pain tolerance.<sup>[6,7]</sup> According to the age, there were 7 age groups, of which the most common was from 30 to 40 years of age (16 patients - 39.02%). The results from the age groups are shown on table 1.

**Table 1:** Age groups

Age group	Response Percent	Number of patients
< 20	0.00%	0
20-30	31.71%	13
30-40	39.02%	16
40-50	14.63%	6
50-60	7.32%	3
60-70	4.88%	2
> 70	2.44%	1

According to the health condition/disease most common was musculoskeletal pain – 22 patients or 53.66%. Other conditions that were causing pain are neurological diseases (14.6%), respiratory (7.3%), digestive (7.3%), autoimmune (12.19%) and hormonal imbalance (4.2%). Despite pain, other symptoms that patients experienced are: edema, erythema, tremors, limited motion, loss of balance, insomnia, dizziness, acne, anxiety, bloating, tiredness and etc.

18 of the patients or 43.90% said that nothing was worsening the pain and 23 patients or 56.10% said that the pain was worsened by certain movements, tiredness, activity, hard work, incorrect posture, before menstruation, change in the weather, stress, cold and etc. In 8 patients or 21.68% nothing was helping with the pain and in 29 patients or 78.38% the pain was relieved with acupuncture, rest, warm compresses, vitamin C, massage, cupping, exercises, pain tablets and etc. According to the description of the pain, most of the patients described the pain as dull (36.69%), tensile (34.15%), constant (31.71%), sharp (24.39%), pulsating, tense, tingling, prickling and etc.

During the acupuncture treatment 25 patients or 64.10% haven't been taking any other medicamentous therapies and 14 patients or 35.90% were taking other therapies, mostly pain tablets and tablets for diabetes and hypertension.

According to the number of therapies, there were 6 offered answers, and mostly of the patients have made 5 to 10 therapies (11 patients, 27.50%). 40 patients answered on the question and 1 patient skipped it. The results from the number of the therapies are shown on table 2.

For explanation and the degree of the pain was used categorical numerical rating scale 1-10 (1-no pain, 10-severe pain). Before the therapies most of the patients had severe pain with grade 10 (12 patients, 30%) and after the therapies most of the patients had minimum pain with grade 2 (11 patients, 28.95%) and 10 patients (26.32%) had no pain - grade 1. The results from the pain scale before and after the treatments are shown on table 3.

After the acupuncture treatment in 17 patients (41.46%) the pain and other symptoms were completely gone, in 22 patients (53.66%) the symptoms were partially gone and in 2 patients (4.88) there was no improvement. In 63.41% or 26 patients, the overall health condition was improved totally, in 31.71% or 13 patients the condition is partially better and only 4.88% or 2 patients didn't have any improvement.

**Table 2:** Number of therapies done

Number of therapies	Response percent	Number of patients
1-5	22.50%	9
5-10	27.50%	11
10-15	10.00%	4
15-20	10.00%	4
20-30	7.50%	3
>30	22.50%	9

**Table 3:** Pain scale rating (1-no pain, 10-severe pain)

Pain degree	Before treatment	After treatment
1	1 (2.50%)	10 (26.32%)
2	/	11 (28.95%)
3	3 (7.50%)	5 (13.16%)
4	2 (5.00%)	5 (13.16%)
5	3 (7.50%)	4 (10.53%)
6	4 (10.00)	1 (2.63%)
7	1 (2.50)	1 (2.63%)
8	8 (20.00)	/
9	6 (15.00)	1 (2.63%)
10	12 (30.00)	/

The acupuncture may be helpful for many types of pains low-back pain, neck pain, osteoarthritis/knee pain, headaches and etc. In the treatment of pain Western medicine uses the treatment method R.I.C.E. (Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation). The Traditional Chinese Medicine recommends more intensive treatment with acupuncture and herbal medicine.<sup>[8]</sup> The acupuncturists mostly need to know where, and how intense, the pain is, to start treating it.<sup>[9]</sup> Stimulation of certain acupuncture points reduces sensitivity to pain and stress. Acupuncture can help to relieve the chronic pain by stimulation of the nerves located in the muscles and other tissues, by increasing the release of the compound - adenosine, which has anti-nociceptive properties and can reduce inflammation by promoting release of immunomodulatory and vascular factors, thus can improve the muscle stiffness and joint mobility with local microcirculation increment.<sup>[10]</sup> Traditional acupuncturists believe that the illness and pain occur when the body's qi or vital energy, cannot flow freely. Stimulation of acupuncture points re-establish the free flow of Qi and restores body balance.<sup>[11]</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Acupuncture as part of the 5000 year old TCM is a pretty successful, non-invasive treatment for acute and chronic pain, musculoskeletal pain as well as pain in conditions like hormonal imbalance, neurological diseases, respiratory and digestive and gives excellent and long lasting results.

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