

## Acupuncture May Help Ease PTSD After Natural Disaster

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Acupuncture may be an effective complementary treatment for improving psychological and pain symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) after a natural disaster, according to a new study by Italian researchers. Acupuncture is a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) therapy that involves the insertion of needles into specific points in the body on the energetic meridians.

For the study, the researchers looked at the effects of acupuncture on the victims of a 6.0 earthquake that caused nearly 300 deaths and left 30,000 people homeless in Amatrice, Central Italy in August 2016. Earthquakes are unpredictable disasters that cause widespread

devastation and can lead to severe psychiatric disorders among survivors, including anxiety, depression and PTSD.

Current first-line therapies for PTSD include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and medication; however, many patients don't follow through with these treatments due to negative emotional reactions after therapy and/or the side effects from the medications, say the authors.

The acupuncture effort was led by two medical associations: Lombard Association of Medical Acupuncturists (ALMA) and Acupuncture in the World (AGOM).

Acupuncture treatments were performed by medical doctors who had at least 3 years of clinical experience with acupuncture. Each subject received four 20-minute acupuncture treatments over consecutive days for a total of 5 weeks, from September to October 2016.

Before the treatment began, more than 68 percent of the participants reported having both pain and psychological symptoms that could be associated with PTSD. According to the study, anxiety may include symptoms such as uncontrollable worry, restlessness and hypervigilance.

PTSD is described as anxiety symptoms that last for more than one month. A PTSD diagnosis includes symptoms from four groups: persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event; avoidant symptoms; negative change in general responsiveness; and increased arousal and reactivity.

Depression involves a loss of pleasure in daily activities for more than two weeks and is associated with sleep disorders, loss of appetite, sexual dysfunction and low levels of activity.

After the third treatment, both the pain and psychological symptom scores had improved significantly, with no serious adverse effects attributed to the treatment. The most frequently used meridian points were kidney (13 percent), followed by large intestine (12 percent), spleen (12 percent) and gall bladder (10 percent).

The findings are published in the journal *Medical Acupuncture* as part of a special issue on Acupuncture to Foster Health Promotion and Disease Prevention.

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