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Biofield Therapies: Concept and Current Status

Ms. Suchika Siotia, M.S

Psychologist

Email: suchisiotia@gmail.com

Ms. Vikasni Kannan, M.Phil Clinical Psychology

Clinical Psychologist, India (RCI registered)

Email: vikasnikannan@gmail.com

Abstract

Keywords

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The term "biofield" refers to a massless field that both surrounds and permeates living beings and plays a vital part in an individual's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Biofield therapies are non-invasive treatments that are practitioner-mediated. It specifically engages with the biofield of both the practitioner and the client and is performed with the aim to induce a healing response in the client. There are limited studies relating to the effectiveness of Reiki and Pranic Healing. There is a need to integrate these complementary healing techniques with mainstream western treatment modalities for holistic treatment approach. However, there is a need for more rigorous scientific trials that may help in its scientific establishment. This paper focuses on the limited evidence of Reiki and Pranic Healing effectiveness and sheds light on moving towards an integrative paradigm.

Introduction

Human beings are made up of the tangible physical body and the intangible energy body surrounding them. Numerous studies have covered the physical body and mind, its functioning, ailments, and cures. Studying human beings, their thoughts, actions, and emotions are only partial if one doesn't consider the energy system that influences human behavior, emotions, psyche, and relationships. Understanding the energy systems can help us heal some of the

ailments which are related to energies. Considering the importance of energy systems, numerous spiritual traditions, cultures, and texts have described modes and pathways of energy within and surrounding the physical body (Jain et al., 2015). For thousands of years, there has been discussion about subtle energy, its methods, and applications for healing. Numerous complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies aim to enhance energy flow through minimally invasive procedures.

The vital energy concepts encompass the subtle or nonphysical energy systems which leads to effects on the body and mind of conscious beings that have been collectively termed as 'biofield therapies'. In 1992, the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM) at the US National Institutes of Health put together a group of CAM practitioners and researchers to develop the term. It defined biofield as "a massless field, not necessarily electromagnetic, that surrounds and permeates living bodies and affects the body" (Rubik et al., 1995). Biofield therapy as Krieger (1993) defines it is "The conscious use of one's hands to direct or modulate, for therapeutic purposes, selected nonphysical human energies that activate the physical body." The term biofield therapy includes both "non-touch healing," in which the healer performs the act of healing without any physical touch with the body of the subject, and the "touch healing," which involves some form of physical contact between the healer's hands and the subject's body. For this paper, we consider biofield energy therapies as healing therapies which manipulate the client's energy body and contribute to physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It includes both proximal and distant healing practices, in the form of Pranic healing and Reiki practices

Theory and Process

Pranic Healing

The word pranic is derived from "prana," a Sanskrit word meaning invisible vital energy (Rajagopalan et al., 2018 & Sui, 2015). This vital energy is said to pervade different levels of the universe, including the human body. The word is considered to be synonymous with the "Qi" or "Chi," terms used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), where the "Qi" is said to be circulating the meridians, which are the body's energy channels. These invisible meridians or 'nadis' are closely related to particular body organs and their functioning. Wherever two 'nadis' cross, there is a whirlpool of energy called a "chakra". These energy centers control and energize the internal organs and psychological

conditions (Rajagopalan et al., 2018 & Sui, 2015). A smooth and healthy prana or energy flow can be crucial to maintaining good physical and mental health.

The Pranic Healer treats patients by manipulating the aura i.e. the energy body that encircles and pervades the physical body. The healer uses the chakra and auric energies during the diagnostic and healing processes. During the healing process, the practitioner will transmit prana from the environment, to the person's energy body to facilitate recovery. This energy is derived from the life forces available in nature, such as energy from the sun, the air, and the earth. The hands of the healer serve as the "sensor" during the first step of the healing process, which entails the healer scanning the patient's body to identify the location(s) and degree of any physical or psychological illnesses. The healer then manipulates the subtle energy or the 'prana' with their hands to realize specific desired improvements. Post locating the energy blocks/depletions, the healer removes (cleanses) the 'congested prana' associated with the dysfunction or disease and then injects (energizes) that area with 'clean prana'. Healer scans and re-scans throughout the process to see the improvement and remove any residue of diseased energies. The basic concept here is that to repair the imbalance in the circulation of prana, one must first clear the congestion and then energize themselves with new prana (Rajagopalan et al., 2018 & Sui, 2015).

Effectiveness of Pranic Healing

The effectiveness of Pranic Healing has been seen in reducing pain and sympathetic activity in patients with chronic musculoskeletal pain. Using Pranic Healing techniques in the birthing rooms showed positive outcomes on the birthing process, an increased percentage of non-medicated births, and reduced complications (Mishra, 2007; Tarabek&Sorden, 2003; Tsuchiya &Motoyama, 2009). The effectiveness of the healing methods has also been demonstrated in breast cancer patients (Soni, Soni& Sharma, 2013; Jain et al., 2015). Pranic healing has proved to be an

effective adjunct therapy for mild and moderate depression in a randomized, double-blind controlled trial (Rajagopal et al., 2018).

Reiki

It is a traditional method of treatment that uses energy. It is said to have originated from the Tibetan Sutras many centuries ago, but it was misplaced for a long time until it was discovered in the 1800s by a Japanese monk by the name of Dr. Mikao Usui. The term "universal life energy" is what the Japanese word Reiki refers to, and this energy permeates everything with a pulse. It is essential to adhere to the five principles outlined below to ensure that the effects of any Reiki treatment are long-lasting (Thrane et al., 2017). They are- "Just for today I will give thanks to my many blessings," "Just for today I will not worry," "Just for today I will not be angry," "Just for today I will do my work honestly" and "Just for today I will be kind to my neighbor and every living thing ." Reiki is primarily a passive practice, and the treatment is given by lightly touching a person in 12 places on their head and the front and back of their torso. Hands may or may not be placed on the hurt area. Individuals consider that Reiki has the potency to re-align the biofield at the core level of vibration. This would eliminate the subtle causes of illness and make the body more robust overall. Reiki can be provided in-person through the use of touch or distance (Thrane et al., 2017).

Effectiveness of Reiki

Reiki has been shown to promote relaxation and immunological response in scientific studies. Significant reductions in state anxiety, systolic blood pressure, and salivary IgA levels have been seen. In addition, considerable alterations in acupuncture meridians, a reduction in pain, and an improvement in mobility have been identified as the primary biochemical consequences (Brewitt et al., 1997; Wardell & Engebretson, 2002; Singh et al., 1999). Reiki treatment has shown a significant reduction in pain intensity and degree of pain relief post-dental surgery and pain relief in knee osteoarthritis (Wirth, 1993; Evanoff & Newton,

1999; Midilli & Eser, 2015). Reiki has been helpful in symptom management of children receiving palliative care and cancer patients (Thrane et al., 2017; Siegel et al., 2016; Rosenbaum & Velde, 2016; Orsak et al., 2015) and helpful to community health workers in reducing stress and promoting well-being (Rosada et al., 2015; Novoa & Cain, 2014). Studies have demonstrated a significant difference in depression, selected personality variables, anxiety, overall well-being, and mood symptoms in groups that received Reiki treatment (Dressin & Singg, 1998; Shore et al., 2004; Thrane & Cohen, 2014). Reiki helped cancer patients feel more relaxed, less worried, happier, less lonely, and less isolated (Marcus et al., 2013).

Critical Analysis of Biofield therapies-Pranic Healing and Reiki

Biofield therapies like Reiki and Pranic Healing are criticized because there is difficulty in ascertaining their mechanism of these therapies and accurately test the effectiveness of these therapies because of the lack of scientific evidence. There is no standardized assessment procedure for these procedures since it is an upheaval task, given the intangible nature of energy bodies. Furthermore, the paucity of research with conflicting evidence adds to neglect of these adjunct therapies in mainstream treatment modalities. The effect of these therapies varies with various uncontrollable variables such as faith and receptivity of the person receiving the healing. Other variables, such as the healer's energy levels and expertise, contribute to faster change in the client. Thus, regular meditation, exercises and practice of the technique by the healer can be the mechanism of change. One of the advantages of these therapies is their ability to speed up the body's natural healing process. When done in a methodical manner, there are very few chances of adverse effects. It is non-invasive and thus poses no physical harm either. They also help deal with physical and psychological ailments through various healing procedures and reduce relapse rates. These therapies holistically teach the individual about other concepts of life as well like 'dharma,' 'karma,' forgiveness, etc., which can

help individuals become more self aware and enhance their well-being. However, in order to be accepted by clinicians in mainstream treatment, these therapies have to gain scientific status related to the effectiveness and mechanism of change.

Moving towards integration

Even though research into biofield therapies is just getting started, what we know so far suggests that the theories behind biofield therapies may not be entirely at odds with scientific models. The goal of these therapies is to rebalance the body's energy system, making it more robust in its ability to heal and more resistant to stress as a whole. It also aids in rapid recovery and elevation of both physical and psychological distress. In theory, energy therapies like Reiki and Pranic healing work are similar to several models in physics. Some Asian script lines these therapies with models in bioelectromagnetism, quantum physics, and superstring theory. They suggest that very subtle vibrations may be the bedrock of reality, and thus these vibrational energies may aid in determining health and disease (Walleczek, 1995). Therefore, an integrated medical practice may be the need of the hour; instead of contradictions between medical and complementary medicine, both systems must work in tandem. Since these therapies are not stand-alone and should not delay the need for medical emphasis, instead, these are to become complementary to traditional medicine. Indian beliefs in complementary medicine should be utilized for better symptom management. This will aid in enhancing clients' well-being and quality of life, which is the goal of any healthcare professional.

Conclusion

Health incorporates spiritual well-being; thus, healing from infirmity is a multidimensional process, and psychospiritual resources and medical support are necessary. Recently, the medical world is also accepting the importance of patients' values, beliefs, and philosophical perspectives on life and well-being.

Complementary medicine, such as biofield therapies, especially Pranic Healing and Reiki, allows patients to experience relaxation by alleviating symptoms and incorporating a spiritual connection that increases their resilience and coping skills. The most reliable research on the effectiveness of these therapies should find outcome measures, like an increased sense of spiritual well-being, that are important to patients and may affect clinical outcomes.

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