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The effect of acupuncture on pain, dyspareunia, and quality of life in Brazilian women with endometriosis: A randomized clinical trial

Tatiane Regina de Sousa ^{a, *}, Bruna Cruz de Souza ^b, Kamilla Zomkowsk ^c,
Priscila Cibils da Rosa ^c, Fabiana Flores Sperandio ^d

^a University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), University Center Professor Estacio (CUESC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil

^b Physiotherapy Academic of the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil

^c University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil

^d State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC), Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Endometriosis is a disease characterized by the presence of endometrial tissue outside the cavity of the uterus, its cause is still unknown, but the most accepted theory is the retrograde menstruation, which states that part of the menstrual blood returns to the body instead of being eliminated.

Objectives: The aim of this study, based on a randomized clinical trial, was to observe the effects of an acupuncture protocol on chronic pelvic pain, dyspareunia, and quality of life in women with endometriosis.

Methods: To test the efficacy of acupuncture, we selected 42 women who were on the waiting list to undergo a videolaparoscopy at the University Hospital of Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, Brazil. These women were divided into two sample groups. The first received the experimental treatment of acupuncture, and the other received placebo therapy, for which the needles were inserted 3 cm apart from the points of energy. Each group underwent five treatment sessions lasting on average 40 min. Randomization was carried out using Clinical Trial Management System software, and the allocation sequence was performed by a laboratory assistant and hidden to the team conducting the project, which was responsible for collecting the information. To monitor the effects of this intervention, we used the visual analogue scale (VAS) and the quality-of-life questionnaire for Endometriosis Health Profile 30 (EHP-30) endometriosis. Variables were measured at three time points: pre-therapy, post-therapy, and 2 months after therapy.

Results: The results were analysed with SAS software version 9.1.3 using analysis of variance. A decrease in VAS scores for chronic pelvic pain and dyspareunia was observed in both groups analysed. However, 2 months after therapy, the results were maintained only in the experimental group. Regarding quality of life, we observed an improvement in all variables analysed, although these were statistically significant only in the experimental group. In contrast, the variable for infertility did not reach significance in either group.

Conclusions: We concluded that acupuncture confers beneficial and long-lasting effects, even 2 months after therapy, as demonstrated by the variables studied.

Registered in the Brazilian Clinical Trials Registry (REBEC) with the identification code RBR-7cfctd.

1. Introduction

Positive diagnoses of endometriosis have increased significantly in the last decade, making it one of the most prevalent conditions in women of reproductive age [1,2]. Currently, the average time

between the onset of the disease and the diagnosis is 7–9 years. In addition, the incidence of endometriosis has been reported in several publications to vary from 5% to 15% in the young population (15–25) and from 2% to 5% in postmenopausal women, compromising their work, social life, and personal relationships over time [1–5].

Endometriosis can impair the functionality of different organs and affect multiple systems. For a long time, it was considered to be a gynaecological disease. However, recently, with the advent of new tracking techniques for identifying endometrial lesion outbreaks,

* Corresponding author. Rua Pascoal Simone, No 358, Coqueiros, Florianópolis, Santa Catarina, 88080350, Brazil.

E-mail address: tatianereginafio@gmail.com (T.R. de Sousa).

diagnosing this condition requires the collaboration of different specialists.

An important point to be considered is the high prevalence of pain and sexual changes caused by endometriosis in sexually active women. Data show that dyspareunia is the principal gynaecological disorder that can be observed in endometriosis, followed by chronic pelvic pain (CPP). Further, 46% of these women did not experience positive responses to existing conservative treatments [4,5]. In some cases, videolaparoscopy or surgery is recommended to improve these women's quality of life (QL). However, these treatments are not synonymous with a cure and can lead to other complications such as infertility, even if the woman is at the peak of her reproductive age (18–35) [4].

Systematic reviews carried out during this research revealed that pelvic strengthening, massage therapy, and relaxation exercises have already been suggested as adjuvant therapies, with the intent to relieve pain. However, their effectiveness has not been proven thus far [5]. The consensus among researchers is that hypoestrogenic drugs are the first choice of treatment, since they have proved to be more efficient than other therapies [4,5]. However, these therapies are considered palliative because they promote the relief of secondary symptoms only when patients are taking these drugs [1,4,5].

Positive scientific evidence for the efficacy of acupuncture has been shown in systematic reviews analysing the treatment of

gynaecological disorders, such as polycystic ovary syndrome and dysmenorrhoea. In these studies, acupuncture has demonstrated quick and long-lasting benefits [6–9]. However, the majority of studies in which acupuncture is used as a therapy present methodological limitations that vary from significant biases to small sample sizes, thus hindering their reproducibility [8,9].

In general, acupuncture was found to confer positive results in chronic diseases [9]. However, we sought to understand the role of acupuncture as an adjunct therapy for major endometrial disorders. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effect of acupuncture in CPP, dyspareunia, and QL in women with endometriosis.

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Study design and randomization

This study followed the regulations of the CONSORT STATEMENT (2010) for randomized clinical trials. The study subjects, randomization, allocation of groups, and follow-up after the intervention are shown in Fig. 1.

2.2. Recruitment and allocation

The participants were recruited from the Department of Pelvic Pain of the Professor Polydoro Ernani de São Thiago University

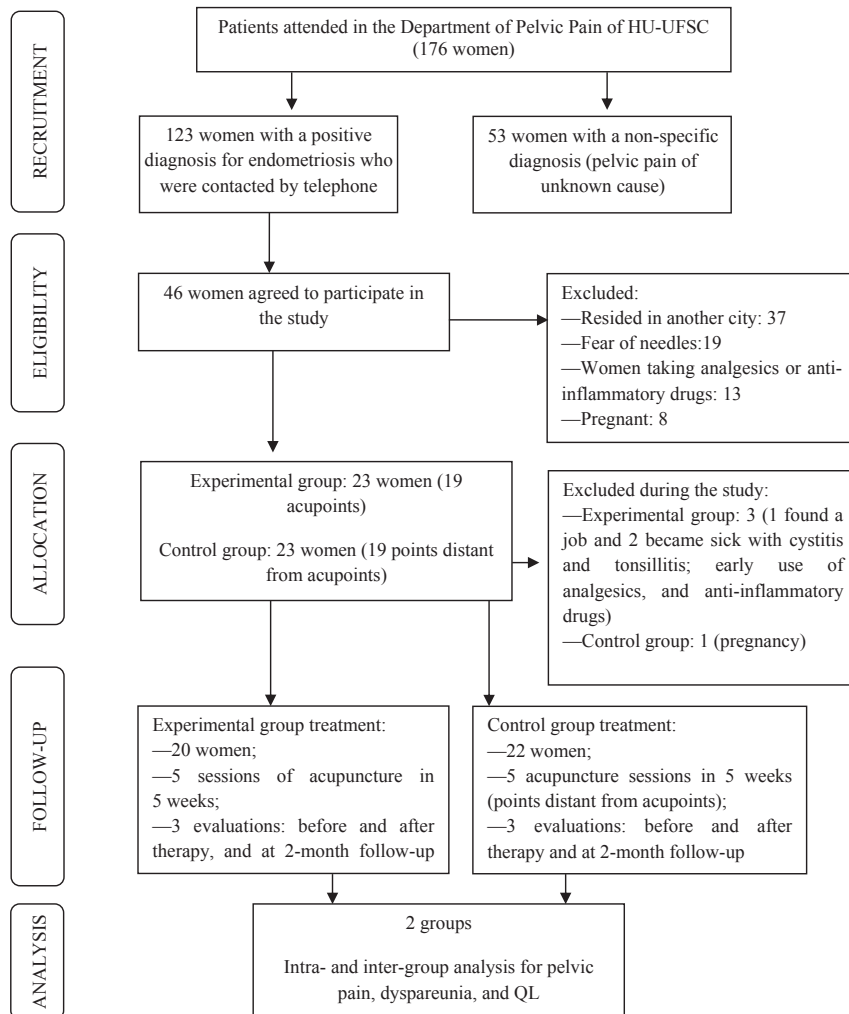


Fig. 1. Study design.

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