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**Acupressure and
Stress Resilience**

COMIRB # 12-0452



CURRENT RESEARCH

Acupressure and stress resilience in a population of Veterans with co-occurring mTBI and PTSD.

Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 19 Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC)

<http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn19>

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Background Description

Mild traumatic brain injury (mTBI) is a common injury sustained by military personnel serving in Afghanistan and Iraq. Work by Terrio, Brenner and colleagues (2009) suggests that 22.8% of Soldiers in one Brigade Combat Team returning from Iraq had clinician-confirmed TBI. At post-deployment, 7.5% of the total (n=3,973) continue to endorse three or more symptoms including headaches, irritability, and cognitive difficulties.

Recent work by Hoge et al. (2008), suggests that those with TBI are at greater risk for developing PTSD than those without such a history. Approximately 44% of Soldiers reporting a loss of consciousness associated with TBI also met criteria for PTSD. This co-morbid rate is high in comparison to PTSD rates of 16.2% in those with other injuries and 9.1% of those with no injuries. A history of PTSD has also been associated with diminished cognitive, psychiatric and psychosocial functioning including suicidality, substance abuse and family problems (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

Identifying an efficacious and accessible treatment strategy would be of significant benefit to Veterans/military personnel, their family members and the military/VA health care systems.

Acupressure, a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modality, potentially fulfills this need. Acupressure (Burmeister, 1997) is non-pharmacological. Initially it can be administered by a skilled clinician. Follow-up treatment can be self-administered; thereby facilitating long-term maintenance and portability.

Aims

Study Goals:

- To determine if acupressure can reduce the adverse physiological, psychological and cognitive consequences of the stress response in a laboratory stress task when compared to a Placebo control condition matched for attention and physical contact (Placebo acupressure).
- To determine if acupressure can improve mental health when compared to a Placebo control condition matched for attention and physical contact (Placebo acupressure).
- To determine if acupressure can improve aspects of day-to-day function compared to a Placebo control condition matched for attention and physical contact (Placebo acupressure).

Progress Report

We are awaiting final approval to begin recruiting and enrolling research participants.

Long-term Goals: Putting Research into Practice

The findings from this study are expected to generalize to civilian and non-military health care settings. Any hospital or clinic treating those with co-occurring mild TBI and PTSD could offer acupressure as part of a treatment package. Over time, acupressure can be learned and self-administered. It is therefore portable, self-sustaining, and without side effects. Such qualities would be expected to provide long term cost-savings to consumers and health care systems. Therefore, the aims of this project certainly could benefit the general public.

