

Experiences of reiki for people undergoing alcohol withdrawal: A qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Increasing alcohol-related mortality and number of people treated for alcoholic poisoning indicates insufficient resources and/or therapies. Reiki, a complementary biofield method has successfully been used at a withdrawal clinic in Australia since 1992, though there is a research gap in the area of reiki and alcohol withdrawal.

Primary Study Objective: The aim of this pilot study was to describe how people undergoing alcohol withdrawal experience the effects of reiki and its influence on alcohol addiction.

Design: The study had a qualitative design to catch each individual's experiences of effects after reiki.

Participants: Nine patients at a withdrawal clinic, including five women and four men between 41 and 69 years.

Setting: The study was carried out at the withdrawal clinic and at another health care clinic.

Intervention: The patients received an average of seven reiki sessions each. Their experiences after reiki were documented through qualitative interviews and narrative methods.

Results: The results revealed an overall theme: *Natural processes towards greater harmonic normality and reduced need for alcohol*. The theme includes two categories: *Psychological change and personal development* and *Physical processes*.

Conclusion: The study indicates that reiki has a potential to be a complementary method during alcohol withdrawal, providing increased wellbeing and reduced need for alcohol. There may be processes involving temporary discomfort. Further studies to highlight complementary effects of reiki are required.

Keywords

Reiki, alcohol withdrawal, energy medicine, biofield therapy, complementary medicine

Introduction

Alcohol addictions

Alcohol addictions is a major risk factor for increased mortality and morbidity globally. In recent decades there have been an increasing alcohol-related mortality and number of people treated for alcoholic poisoning (1,2) which indicates insufficient resources and/or therapies. According to The ICN Code of Ethics for Nurses (3) nurses are responsible for continual learning and for developing research-based knowledge in the nursing profession. One way is to expand knowledge exploring complementary methods. At a withdrawal clinic (4) in Australia, the complementary method reiki successfully is included in their treatment program since 1992. At this clinic Chapman and Milton (5) did a systematic evaluation of 10 years of experience, based on about 14000 reiki sessions, staff records, staff surveys and case studies. The conclusion says:

Reiki appears to induce a profound relaxation response within 10 minutes for nearly all recipients. This relaxation may last from a few hours to even a week, and is usually coupled with a reduction in client anxiety, tension and aggression. Recipients of reiki also generally express feelings of 'peace', 'wellbeing' and spiritual 'upliftment', with a greater ability to sleep after treatment. (p. 10) (6).

To achieve a life without alcohol addiction one important factor is the mental wellbeing (6) and reiki is a complementary method potential to increase mental well-being (7–9).

Reiki

Reiki means universal life energy, but also the method when using this energy is named reiki. This is originally a Japanese method of stress reduction that promotes natural healing. It was founded by Usui in the 1900s in Japan and since then been spread throughout the world, creating variants of the original method (10). Reiki is explained by energy theories where all living beings, including human, animates of a non-physical energy circulating through the body and surrounding it. When energy is flowing freely we feel good, but when there are restrictions in the flow, we are more vulnerable to illness (10,11). It is an holistic therapy, meaning not only directed to a specific physical or functional level, but also to the underlying spiritual, mental and emotional levels. The reiki therapist transmits the life energy to the receiver who automatically absorbs the energy where it is most needed. This dissolves blockages allowing energy flow freely again, which triggers the natural healing processes (10). Within complementary medicine reiki belongs to biofield therapies, which aims to revitalize the energy field (12).

In many countries, as in the United States, biofield therapies are increasingly accepted and integrated in clinical care (13) and they are included in educational books for nurses (14). Since 1994, nurses have been able to make use of NANDA's (North American Nursing Diagnosis Association) nursing diagnosis: "Disruption of the flow of energy surrounding the person's being results in disharmony of the body, mind and/or spirit." (15). Also the reiki method has been increasingly appreciated in clinical health care in the United States (12,16) and practices at more than 800 hospitals (16). Reiki is considered to be an effective method of stress reduction that can be easily integrated into conventional care. The method is harmless and can not be overdosed because the patient attracts automatically the energy needed. Reiki is also a flexible method, which easily will be adapted to the medical circumstances and the patient's needs, supporting conventional medical interventions. Reiki can improve the wellbeing of patients, relatives and staff at a low cost and is easy to learn (12). After reiki sessions patients experience less stress and anxiety, also they are more relaxed and would easier fall asleep. Additionally the reiki method seems to spread peace throughout the environment (17). According to healthcare records patients experience improved well-being after reiki sessions. They report reduced anxiety (12,13,17), increased

relaxation, reduced insomnia (12,13,17,18), reduced pain (12,13,18), reduced side effects, improved relationships with health professionals and general increasing patient satisfaction (12,13).

Despite incomplete evidence (19) there are some clinical documentation (12,13,16–18,20) and studies (20–22) indicating that reiki could be a complementary treatment/caring method increasing mental and physical well-being at various conditions, possibly including alcohol addiction. However, there is a lack of research on reiki effects during alcohol withdrawal which justifies this study.

Aim

The aim of this study was to describe how people during alcohol withdrawal experience the effects of reiki and its influence on alcohol addiction.

Methods

Design

When reiki is a holistic complementary method to improve wellbeing generally, it is important to avoid limiting focus to specific areas. A qualitative research design was chosen to capture each person's unique experiences of the effects of reiki. The data collection was made through semi-structured interviews, as well as through a narrative method. Interventions and data collection took place from February to April 2015; four informants and from February to August 2016; five informants.

Selection

Inclusion: Adult patients enrolled in a clinic in western Sweden for the withdrawal of alcohol addiction. Exclusion: Drug addiction. The informants were selected by a clinical nurse, who requested them orally and handed written information. The author/interviewer phoned those who were interested, giving them opportunity to further information and making an appointment. Everyone interested went ahead with the study; nine informants between 41 and 69 years, including five women and four men. Two of them had tried reiki several years ago, three had heard about it, while reiki was completely unknown to the other four, who were very skeptical of the method.

Intervention

The informants received 45 minutes reiki sessions, 1-3 times/week for two months by various reiki practitioners. The treatment was not addressed to anything specific but was intended to generally increase informant's well-being. Frequency and number of reiki sessions depended on practical conditions and each informant's needs. One informant received 10 sessions, one 8, one ended at 4 as he was prevented several times. Others received 7 sessions. At sessions, in silence with informant laying on a bench with a pillow and blanket, reiki practitioner positioned hands above the body, to exclude physical touch as influencing factor. After the sessions the informants were drinking water and reminded to drink extra water to facilitate purification processes in the body. The first four informants received sessions at their withdrawal clinic and, due to lack of space, the last five went to another health care clinic where the interviewer is working. Nine reiki practitioners with varying experience were recruited from the interviewer's students and colleagues. One had been practicing reiki for six months, six of them one to three years, and two of them for over ten years. The informants did not have the same reiki practitioner every time, but three to four different reiki practitioners at different times.

Data collection

The author/interviewer, who is a psychiatric nurse and reiki practitioner, documented the informants' experiences. After reiki sessions the informants reported if something felt different immediately, and before the treatments they reported if they experienced any changes in some area of their lives since the

last treatment. They were encouraged to freely tell their story, but also a complementary form was used, with key words: emotional (anxiety, aggression, harmony); psychological/mental (thoughts, concentration, creativity, energy, sleep); physical (pain, mobility, elimination, appetite); social (relationships); other. This form they also brought at home to make notes. Some returned detailed narratives, while others chose to report orally. At the last occasion longer qualitative interviews were conducted (approximately 60 minutes). These started with the interviewer reading the documentations and narratives, allowing the informant to recall and to correct any misunderstandings. To clarify and deepen comprehension of the informants' experiences there were questions like: "How did you feel?", "What did you think?", "Please give an example?" The last interviews were audio taped and transcribed by the interviewer.

Data analysis

The transcribed interviews, documented conversations and informants narratives formed the basis of a qualitative content analysis with inductive approach. This means to analyzing the text with an open mind to illuminate the contents, without assuming any theory or model (23). After thorough reading the material, meaningful units were lifted out of the text and encoded; named based on content. Then the codes were grouped into similar experiences, so that each code ended up in a category, which was named. The categories were then united into main categories or divided into subcategories. Finally an overall theme turned out. This was an ongoing process returning to the texts to adjust or confirm the categories and theme.

Ethical considerations

The study was performed during education, a master thesis which not require approvement of ethical Board (24), but nevertheless ethical considerations have been made according the Declaration of Helsinki (25). The informants were informed about their voluntary participation, their right to cancel at any time without explanation and their right to request destruction of all their personalized material. They were also informed that it did not affect ordinary care in any way if they refrained from taking part or discontinued the study. Everything is kept confidential and all material stored inaccessible to unauthorized people. Personal information has been made anonymous in results report, in order that nothing will be attributed directly or indirectly to the individuals.

Ocasionally after reiki a lot of emotions will be released, and the informants were informed about this both written and orally, also repeated during the talks. Consequently continuing meetings at the withdrawal clinic and the opportunity to talk to someone was important. They also had the possibility to contact the interviewer at any time. Sometimes the interviewer called them, especially after the first sessions or if the informant was not feeling quite well.

Findings

How people during alcohol withdrawal experience effects of reiki sessions is described with an overall theme: *Natural processes towards greater harmonic normality and reduced need for alcohol*. The theme includes two categories: *Psychological changes and personal development* and *Physical processes*. The categories include seven subcategories: See table 1. After the quotes below there are numbers in parentheses, which refers to the informant and number of reiki sessions received. For example (1.2) means informant number one, received two sessions at the time for the statement.

Table 1. Theme, categories and subcategories.

Theme	Natural processes towards greater harmonic normality and reduced need for alcohol	
Category	Psychological changes & personal development	Physical processes
Sub-category	Greater harmony Releasing repressed emotions Expanding consciousness and changing focus Improved self-esteem and self-confidence Improved relationships and greater socializing	Temporary physical experiences Reduced physical complaints and normalized body functions

Natural processes towards greater harmonic normality and reduced need for alcohol

While weaning from alcohol addiction is a long process, this study does not claim to demonstrate weaning from addiction, as informants only received reiki in about two months. Though **during this time**, shorter or longer periods, **they experienced** natural processes towards harmonic normality and also reduced alcohol addictions. They described their decreased alcohol intake after reiki: stopped drinking earlier, didn't drink the entire bottle, could control drinking in social context, or had been able to abstain completely from alcohol:

The two months of the study was the longest period in 30 years when I kept completely sober. I've never felt as good as then. (2.6)

Some informants experienced reduced alcohol craving, though often gradually after some sessions:

But I actually felt it last time I was here. I actually had no craving at all when I left. I think it was really cool. ... it was a great feeling. ... It's up here in my head [cravings]. So it is there all the time. It gnaws somewhere. ... So it really lasted some time, but then it turned up this with [relative's disease] which disrupted my harmonic period. (4.6)

Sometimes the alcohol cravings were replaced with increased cravings for sweets. Some informants experienced how they could divert thoughts to something else when alcohol craving arised. Also ideas about alcohol changed, being less problematic thoughts; less desire, dreams and glorifying of alcohol, including an increased determination:

I feel more determined. The very first glass is very far away. I'm more attentive and careful if I become too happy or too depressed. (2.3)

One informant expressed satisfaction that he had been able to manage panic disorder without any alcohol:

I woke up one night with panic disorder. Were concerned about the future. This lasted about two hours and then I fell asleep. I thought about it later, I didn't have a singel thought about alcohol! ... as formerly. (6.4)

There also were regressions into old patterns, drinking alcohol to escape or celebrate. It could happens in

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turbulence of life as accidents, illnesses and deaths of relatives and also when old unpleasant feelings appeared:

Felt mentally ill, anxious, discomfort (+ neck pain as usual). ... I bought beer and went to my apartment. (1.2)

There could also be regression when everything felt wonderful:

I went buying a bottle of wine [directly after the first reiki session]. Drank. Tuesday morning, I contacted the clinic and requested admission ... I felt such an incredible happiness within, which I don't think I have ever experienced. Wanted to celebrate this, thought I would manage everything because of my happiness and joy. (2.1)

The informants experienced reiki to start various processes which resulted in more normal functions and conditions. Physical, psychological as well as social areas could be affected. Although the study was directed to people with alcohol addiction other effects appeared.

... [reduced] tensions, nodes of physical/psychological nature ... It must be reiki!! I believe the alcohol is secondary. Not to ignore, but it is important to find balance in life. (8.9)

It did not always turn up positive effects immediately, but processes begun and there was often a peak right after reiki sessions. The peak could consist of an improvement or an impairment. The first few days a discomfort, such as alcohol cravings, could disappear completely and sometimes it gradually returned. In the same way unpleasant feelings and physical discomfort of varying intensity could arise, and then decrease directly or gradually. It could disappear in an hour or a day, seldom remaining over three days. Afterwards there was a relief when the original discomfort was reduced or disappeared completely. The study indicates accumulating effects of reiki, because informants experienced increased well-being over time. The effects increased with further sessions making the discomfort finally disappear completely, and/or new processes to start up. Many informants yearned for the next reiki session and some expressed they never felt as good as during this study.

Psychological change and personal development

Greater harmony. The results shows greater harmony, in varying degrees, to be a common effect. Several informants experienced harmony directly after the first session, and for some it appeared after a couple of sessions. Harmony was described by feeling calmer, more relaxed, and the majority felt that their sleep had improved; easier to fall asleep, a more coherent and peaceful sleep. They also described harmony as increased security and trust – to oneself, to life and/or to others, and to feel more loving and greater balance:

I have become more balanced. When I face a problem, I don't dig me down, don't get hurt and don't blow-up, as I did before. I have carried the problem 24 hours a day before. Now it has become better. (7.6)

Also the increased harmony was described as a psychic relief and some informants decreased their intake of antidepressant and sedative medications during the study. Increased harmony included letting go of worries and other unpleasant emotions such as anxiety, distress, depression, aggression, irritation:

Most grateful to get rid of the anguish now. Before: If I had nothing to worry about, yet I found something. (2.3)

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Another informant had tantrums several times a week before starting the study, but not anymore:

I feel no anger anymore. In any case not such, what shall we say, the more powerful feeling of anger. I don't feel that anymore. (7.6)

The harmonious feeling often included happiness, energy and enjoying life. There were feelings from a boost in mood, feeling more positive and happier to feelings of euphoria, exhilaration and feeling like a new person. Some experienced greater creativity and being able to carry out things and many felt increasing energy:

I left the session with a great laugh. Very different after this session. Had really fun and was very positive in several days. I got incredibly much energy. (5.5)

One informant described how incredibly euphoric she was right after the first session:

I was euphoric, very happy and lucky. It was long ago since I had such a feeling. Used to be 99% anguish otherwise. (2.1)

Peaks of exhilaration gradually became normalized into a harmonious balance in everyday life:

Well it was the first couple of weeks they noticed my dramatic and incredible transformation. Now, my husband and children are used to see me harmonious and peaceful. Gradually I became normalized and more like this (horizontal hand motion) in the mood. In the past, I was up there (pointing at the ceiling) to suddenly be down here (pointing at the floor). It could really be contrasts. So now I have become more and more at a medium-level and my mood is more even. (2.6)

Releasing repressed emotions. One of the informants did not have any discomfort when depressed feelings arised. Instead there was a tremendous exhilaration when she experienced how repressed feelings of shame and guilt and of being useless were released. Other informants felt more or less discomfort when repressed feelings, thoughts and memories arised to the surface, such as anguish, fear, frustration, anger, shame, guilt and feelings of depression like despair, grief, sadness, melancholy and experiencing yourself to be suppressed. It could be a feeling of "reiki opens the lid". Sometimes there were traumatic memories of abuse and old feelings of panic attacks welling up, meanwhile they were able to manage this better and avert the attack. The analysis shows that several informants experienced restless sleep when memories arised in dreams, sometimes as nightmares. Some remembered and understood what it was about and others only recalled unpleasant feelings from the dream. Also old conflicts in relationships could escalate, in that the feelings involved were released and pronounced. One informant experienced a lot of arising discomfort, yet still she felt positive about it coming to the surface, realizing it is harmless:

Reiki allows me to proceed with myself. ... What will happen if I go further? Strong fears. So it's very terrifying. my fears destroy. But when they arise to the surface it cannot destroy as it has done in the past. ... And now I've noticed talking isn't that dangerous actually ... Beginning to understand that much of what happened in my life isn't my fault only, though I have made myself responsible for everything and always blamed myself. (5.5)

The unpleasant feelings could last some days, occasionally a whole week and decline gradually, while sometimes they disappeared very quickly:

On my way home [after reiki session] I was a little low, sad. ... it lasted a couple of hours. (6.3)

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The results indicate that there may be a need to be alone when being in the midst of feelings:

I woke up with crying feelings throughout the body – still. Don't know why. Went out for a walk yesterday, but it didn't help. Just want to be alone. Just sad, heavy and dull. Tried to understand why, but there is no apparent reason. Is it because of the latest powerful reiki session pulling out things not wanted out earlier? It is strange. But good if everything disappear out now!!! (8.10)

There was often an increased need to talk when emotions and memories arised. The informants in this study still had their regular meetings, and also meetings with interviewer before and after reiki sessions. In between, they could call any time, and some also came for additional talk with interviewer. Sometimes the interviewer called to hear how they were doing. One informant felt a need of more frequently psychologist counseling. Also these talks became more effective as emotions were realeased it became easier to talk about it and process it:

During my discussions with the psychologist much sorrow, guilt, shame, and so on arises. Now the feelings arise and I can talk about it. I haven't been able doing this in the past. Drop and go ahead! (5.5)

When depressed feelings were expressed, it felt easier within:

I have never been aggressive outwardly, but now old stuff arises which makes me angry/sad. Today there was a situation when anger/annoyance welled up. I expressed it to the person. This I have never done before. Kept it inside. Afterwards it felt easier inside my stomach. (5.1)

Expanding consciousness and changed focus. The results revealed expanding consciousness with changed focus by most informants. It could be about giving up fights, choosing to release annoyance, dropping old things, forgiving and go ahead, including decreased need to control and releasing responsibilites which belongs to others. It could also be about more listening within, following your heart, being more clear-sighted and reflective, seeing your own part in issues, gaining insights as for example realise what's important in life:

Well we all have our worries. But it is also true that I may have enlarged my own and made them bigger than they really are, compared to others and so on. And I have always buried myself in my own worries. ... [now] you might take it for what it is in a different way, also thinking this isn't important. There are other things, more important. (7.5)

Expanded consciousness could give insights about the origins of the problem, and then reduce pain and anxiety:

... then I immediately felt anguish in the chest. I became scared, but it disappeared quickly when I was able to identify the cause: I got anguish because of my anger. Formerly the anguish remained. (2.4)

Expanded consciousness with changed focus included wider perspectives, as being able to see from someone else's perspective:

I was able to stay calm and thought: Well he doesn't know better and cannot realize hurting me. (2.3)

Changed focus involved more positive perspectives. Old negative thought patterns were released and negative thoughts could easier be diverted, even in case of panic disorder:

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If black thoughts show up, I take care of them. I think about what I'm thinking. Former I failed to force myself thinking differently because I couldn't find anything positive to think about. (2.4)

A positive perspektiv could be to see a brighter future and to see opportunities to do something about their situation:

Then [when I open the lid to emotions] I feel a joy, wow, damn, I can do something about this! ... Dropping the old shit. Releasing old anger, frustration, everything. ... I have been a very negative person. ... I appreciate it [the small things] more now ... I feel like my life is moving forward now. (5.5)

The optimistic beleif in future the informants credenced reiki. They saw it as an opportunity to help themselves feeling better, but also to be able to help others.

Havn't felt this good in ages. I'm convinced it is because of reiki. Have heard that you can learn reiki yourself and I definitely want to take such a class. Want to be able to help others with this as well. (3.8)

Changed focus also could be temporarily impaired concentration, confusing and memory lapses, though most of the informants described experiences of being more focused, thoughtful, sober and having better concentration:

Have been very focused. Can control thoughts better now, more consciously. Really cool! (9.1)

Changed focus also involved experiences of being in a non-presence, as in a bubble or a little absent-minded. The same informant could experience both of those conditions:

Sometimes I feel like being in a bubble; not quite present. In my own little world. ... then, when we are talking or doing something, I am more focused and present and listening. (6.6)

Improved self-esteem and self-confidence. The results show how a lot of informants formerly felt being worthless and now after reiki sessions, valued themselves more with improved self-esteem. It was described as being less vulnerable, releasing own requirements, stop condemning themselves, stop allowing others to depress them, being able to see their own value and feeling mentally stronger:

Don't sitting crying anymore, as I have done in the past. ... don't kick myself anymore. ... I have become calmer now. Former, everything have been my fault. Whatever happened, it has always been blame on me as being worthless. ... I don't allow anyone stepping on me anymore. ... I will not tolerate it any longer. ... I have been standing up and becoming stronger. (2.1)

Together with the improved self-esteem followed improved self-confidence, and many informants expressed feelings of being more satisfied with themselves and proud of themselves. This included to dare to open up and talk about feelings, and especially dare to stand for who you are, to express your opinion and your truth, to speak up, be determined and stand for your opinion. There were also feelings of gaining more respect from others. Also colleagues, family, friends and staff could see changes toward improved self-confidence:

[psychologist] declares that I am stronger, more stable and dare to stand up, which I never have done in the past. Former I kept quiet and suffered. (5.7)

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The improved self-esteem and self-confidence included less bothering about other people's opinions. The ability to relax in being yourself would create a sense of freedom:

... to drop some demands on myself. ... I've been so damn dutiful and like that, you know. ... People may not think I misbehave in any way. ... and maybe I've released some of this. ... Allowing people to think what ever they want. ... There is a sense of freedom, being able to let go of those demands. ... You'll be happy, you become quite excited. (7.5)

Many informants experienced improved self-confidence. They gained more initiative and started to affect their life without depending on others' opinions. One informant, working as a foreman, now got the confidence to act according to his own beliefs and then chose to "free instead of trap":

We set this aside and preserve our good relationship. ... Doing so feels great. ... I feel like I am doing right ... and I feel good by such a decision. ... Throughout my life I've had a very poor self-esteem and low confidence and so on. ... I have stepped aside and stayed behind. I have kept a low profile, never expressed what I really think. (7.5)

Improved relationships and greater socializing. The results display many informants experiencing improved relationships with colleagues, family and friends. There were experiences of cooperating better with other people now, ability to express themselves and feeling respected. One informant expressed being able to carry out normal conversations with colleagues, from whom she had previously experienced ignorance and bullying. Analysis indicates that they who described improved relationships also experienced expanded consciousness as realizing their own part in the conflict. There was also a connection between increased harmony and self-esteem, including improved ability to express their emotions and their opinions and an improved communication:

Now we have much better conversations and more often. ... She [the wife] is very grateful [for him being involved in this study]. (6.6)

Several informants described themselves as being more socialized. Some who former isolated themselves now socialized more and had opened up more. They now could talk easier about feelings and dared admitting people into their life and home. Greater socializing could also be about accepting help and beginning to ask for help, or adapting your integrity and open up more among close friends. The analysis showed a connection between socializing and improved relationships, as dropping old conflicts and battles:

I'm more open. Not fighting with my sister anymore. Relationships are moving in the right direction: getting better, meeting kindness in daily life and at work. I was on a date the first time in years! (5.4)

The analysis shows that some of the informants were greater socialized by starting with social activities such as theatre, music and yoga:

Former I have closed out everyone and everything. Have now been to three try-on-yoga and Gospel. I want to start. So fun! I'm more socialized and interact with people. (8.10)

Physical processes

Temporary physical experiences. The informants had varying physical experiences coming and leaving. Nearly everyone described some kind of change in energy. It was common to perceive increased energy, but also the opposite; lower energy and fatigue. This could be a mental as well as physical fatigue

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and multiple informants slept more, especially directly after the sessions:

As previous it has been quiet, harmonious the whole session day, also tired, almost a little pixilated, drowsing. [laughter] Yes but you are. I am anyway. (4.3)

Other temporary physical experiences could be increased thirst, appetite and sugar need. There could also be sensations as heating hands, numbness, flicker in legs, tremors in the body, freezing, sens of lightness, tinnitus, ear flap, increased sensitivity to light and sound, visual deterioration, dizziness, nausea, unclear feeling in the head, unstable blood pressure and heart palpitations.

Many informants experienced activation of the immune system and cleansing processes after reiki, such as increased urinary volumes and increased faeces; more frequently, softer and sometimes diarrhea. Some got cough, runny nose, fever, sweating and releasing from the sinuses. The processes also could include eczema, herpes blisters or increasing inflammations or swellings, which later were reduced.

Increased pain belonged to the common temporary physical experiences. The pain could derive from different parts of the body. A common feature for everyone was that these pains were recognized as old problems they had in the past or still had, which increased temporary and then subsided.

Pain in all muscles and tendons, hips, shoulders, back, fingers, head. ... under right scapula: pain/cramping/stabbing. ... Recognize all these symptoms – have had them before. Though my back haven't been that bad before. (8.1)

The first [3] days the pain increased, and then it became much better! (5.2)

Reduced physical complaints and normalized body functions. Most informants felt that some pains and physical complaints were reduced or completely disappeared. This could bring a relief in everyday life as well as nights.

I don't need visiting the toilet at nights anymore. ... [formerly] I was up 3-4 times a night. ... I haven't needed my prescribed medication [against prostatic hyperplasia]. (6.3)

This study didn't include any physical measurements, but some informants discovered at regular controls, more normalized values of body functions after reiki. Reducing asthma symptoms were confirmed by normalized spirometry values. Some measured lowered pulse and lowered blood pressure, and one informant declared that her former unstable blood pressure had become stable:

I have previously had a very bouncy blood pressure, high-low-high. Have now been able to reduce my medicine. My blood pressure is very stable and low to what I'm used to. Diastole was often 90-100 with medicine. Now with reduced medication: 125/75, 130/80. (5.7)

Normalized body functions were also experienced by reduced stiffness, pain and swelling in joints as well as improved mobility. Trigger fingers and other contractures improved:

... and the trigger. It's very strange. ... So I have cancelled my hand surgeon now. I would have been there today. ... I actually can [wiggling her thumb]. I couldn't do this before, I couldn't stretch out. (3.7)

The results show reduced medication. Several informants reduced their intake of painkillers, sedatives and antidepressants, also one informant didn't need his medicine for prostate hyperplasia. Another has been able to reduce medication against asthma and high blood pressure:

Regarding medicine I eat very little medicine nowadays. Totally amazing! Haven't needed Pulmicort, halved the dose of hypertensives, decreased pain medication. (5.5)

Reiki effects assumed to reduce needs for alcohol. Often before the informants experienced reduced alcohol addictions physical and psychological improvement occurred. This increased wellbeing in turn may have reduced the need for alcohol. Increased harmony included improved confidence and reduced anxiety, anguish and aggression. Expanded consciousness and changed focus included new insights and broader perspective on life which reduced depression and frustration. Improved self-esteem and -confidence involved increased self-respect and reduced vulnerability. Reduced pain and physical complaints made daily life easier and provided a brighter future. These kind of factors may have contributed to the reduced need for alcohol.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that people during alcohol withdrawal experience natural processes towards greater harmonic normality and reduced need for alcohol after reiki, and that these processes may include release of depressed emotions, which sometimes cause more or less inconvenience. This is consistent with Kirshbaums (26) study of cancer patients where they found one theme to be "Release of emotional strain during reiki". They also found that reiki can produce effects like tranquility, peace, relaxation, reduced depression and increased energy level, which supports the results of greater harmony, joy and energy in this study. Also this study findings about increased expanded consciousness and changed focus as well as improved self-confidence correlate with Kirshbaum's study, describing how reiki gave informants improved self-confidence, hope, ability to handle life and releasing fears and negative thoughts. Kirshbaum also found improvements in various physical symptoms and reduced pain, which support this study's results of reduced physical complaints and normalized body functions (26).

There are quantitative studies supporting some findings of this study. The subcategory **Greater harmony** is consistent with the studies indicating that reiki has the potential to reduce anxiety and depression (7–9,20–22,27–34), and those that have found increased peace and relaxation and improved sleep (27,31–34). The findings of this study indicate that pain can be reduced or disappear after reiki, which is indicated in previous studies (20–22), and that reiki can cause reduced heart rate and blood pressure, which is supported by a study showing significant reduced heart rate and diastolic blood pressure in the reiki group (35).

Concerning previous experiences of reiki during alcohol withdrawal there was only revealed a systematic evaluation at a withdrawal clinic (5). Their findings showed that recipients experienced reduced anxiety and aggression, increased well-being, relaxation, improved sleep and spiritual "elevation". These effects were confirmed in this study, except spiritual elevation.

This study, which indicates that reiki may reduce the need for alcohol, is a first step to evaluate a complementary method for alcohol withdrawal. Varying effects which lead to increased mental and physical well-being may have reduced the need for alcohol. The informants also experienced expanded consciousness after reiki, and nursing theorist Newman (36–38) define the health process as expanded consciousness, which may be one explanation for the reduced alcohol need.

In this study the processes after reiki could continue until the next session, which was usually one week. Occasionally it lasted longer and it is possible that the processes continued then, though the analysis has not focused on this question. Other authors also describe a cumulative effect of reiki (26).

The results shows that sometimes there is an increased need to talk to someone when depressed feelings and memories arise. During the study the informants had access to their usual counseling and also a hotline to the interviewer. Many used the hotline and also came to the interviewer for conversation. One informant experienced counseling at the psychologist to be more effective after reiki when emotions

were released. This reveals the importance to combine reiki sessions with counseling, when concerning patients during alcohol withdrawal, and that reiki and counseling are a good combination.

In the reviewed literature, no harmful effects have been reported, however it is recommended caution when it comes to people with mental illnesses, because reiki may cause suppressed emotions coming to the surface (19). Others argue that it can create a positive relief after releasing negative emotions during treatment (5). In this study most informants experienced how emotions were released and they felt better afterwards, but also they occasionally felt uncomfortable when emotions arised. In reiki literature (10) these releasing of emotions are termed as cleansing effects, which also includes temporary physical experiences described in this study. Those who are familiar with reiki know these effects, though they are seldom visible in the scientific literature. This is probably because most reiki studies are quantitative and measure effects according certain hypotheses, overlooking the processes prior to the impact achieved. This is an annoying gap of knowledge since it is important to know that it can be tough periods with increasing pain, mental as well as physical. This pre-understanding is especially valuable when coming to people with alcohol addictions, as those often have a lot of depressed feelings and poor psychological health. Further qualitative studies are recommended to elucidate the effects and processes after the holistic reiki method.

Strengths and weaknesses

It was a strength that the interviewer had worked with reiki for many years, including in connection with drug withdrawal, and thus had an understanding of potential impacts. This pre-understanding did not prevent the interviewer to be openminded, as the effects vary. The pre-understanding was a necessary asset to reassure informants if having unpleasant reactions, that they were normal and transient. Though in the analysis phase, it was important to set aside preconceptions. As it emerged experiences and concepts unknown to the author, it indicates that the data was analyzed with new eyes.

At the complete interview, the informants could clarify, correct and approve the narrative material and documented conversations. This participant control provides increased reliability to the data analyzed.

A limitation of this study was its small size. Yet it emerged much experience through the nine informants. It is not for sure that the findings had changed with a larger group of informants.

After the reiki sessions the informants experienced improvements in mental, physical and social areas. They experienced them as major changes and that reiki was the cause. However, there are some uncertainties. First, it is known that people involved in studies usually feel better, also in the placebo groups. Secondly, all of the informants had conversations with the interviewer, which may have been a contributing factor to feel better. However interviewer tried to limit the talks to their experiences after reiki. In an ordinary situation there had been a more extensive counselling along with the reiki sessions. Thirdly, the informants continued their daily life with many varying situations and experiences, like relatives' illness and death. It may then be difficult to know if their feelings were attributed to processes of reiki or to the new situations.

The informants received reiki sessions from various practitioners, which means they got treatment from both beginners and experienced. The analysis did not focus on connections between results and practitioners' experience, but maybe the result would have been different if there were only beginners or only experienced reiki practitioners.

Conclusions

The results suggests that reiki could be a complementary method during alcohol withdrawal for increased well-being mentally, physically and socially, with reduced need for alcohol. Physical and emotional discomfort may temporarily arise, with an increased need of counselling. Further research is required to evaluate effects after reiki.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

None Declared.

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