Acupuncture found to help alleviate PTSD symptoms in combat veterans

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Acupuncture may be clinically efficacious in combat veterans seeking treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), according to a study published online Feb. 21 in *JAMA Psychiatry*.

Michael Hollifield, M.D., from the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center in Long Beach, California, and colleagues randomly assigned 93 veterans seeking treatment for PTSD to verum or sham acupuncture (24 one-hour sessions, twice weekly).

The researchers found a large treatment effect of verum (Cohen d,

1.17), a moderate effect of sham (d, 0.67), and a moderate between-group effect favoring verum (mean Δ, 7.1; t_{90} = 2.87; d, 0.63) in the intention-to-treat analysis.

In the treatment-completed analysis, the effect pattern was similar (verum d, 1.53; sham d, 0.86; between-group mean Δ, 7.4; t_{69} = 2.64; d, 0.63). For fear-potentiated startle during extinction (i.e., better fear extinction), there was a significant symptom reduction from pretreatment to posttreatment in the verum but not the sham group and a significant correlation (r = 0.31). Rates of withdrawal were low.

"These data call for more research about relative effectiveness and synergy of acupuncture to current best practices, mechanisms of action, the durability of treatment in broader populations, and perhaps most importantly early predictors of treatment response to enhance efficiency of treatment choice," the authors write.

More information: Michael Hollifield et al, Acupuncture for Combat-Related Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, *JAMA Psychiatry* (2024). DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2023.5651