

Jonathan Updike
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A Brief Introduction to Reiki

Introduction

Definition

The International Center for Reiki Training defines Reiki as “a non-physical healing energy made up of life force energy that is guided by the Higher Intelligence, or spiritually guided life force energy.”¹ The word “Reiki” is combined from two Japanese words: Rei, or “Higher Intelligence,” and Ki, “the non-physical energy that animates all living things... including plants, animals, and humans.”¹

Origin

Reiki had been purportedly practiced for “thousands of years,” with the current dominant form of Reiki resulting from a profound experience Mikao Usui had in March 1922 on a sacred mountain, Kurama yama, north of Kyoto.² Many practices of Reiki exist, but formal instruction in Usui Reiki requires attunement, which is claimed to be a process in which a Reiki Master connects the student with the Reiki source.³

Technique

Reiki claims to be practiced by laying hands on a client or from a distance using different hand positions to scan for Reiki, manipulating Reiki with one’s eyes or breath, or removing negative energy.^{4,5} Reiki practice may involve stones, crystals, meditation, and symbols.⁵

Training

Training to perform or teach Reiki varies. The New York International Reiki Center offers 2-day, weekend courses teaching Reiki 1 & 2, and 3-day Advanced Reiki Training (ART) and Reiki Master Teacher courses that “provide a complete Reiki training for your use and benefit” and result in a Certificate of Achievement.⁶ The International Center for Reiki Training (ICRT) offers 2 and 3-day courses in personal Reiki, including Usui/Tibetan Reiki and Holy Fire Reiki.⁷ Usui/Tibetan Reiki includes Reiki 1 & 2, Advanced Reiki Training, and Karuna Reiki for “treatment of self or others.”⁵

The ICRT also claims to accredit Licensed Reiki Master Teachers (LRMTs) with a minimum of year-long coursework, a written examination, performing at least 100 complete Reiki treatments, and co-teaching every class before independent instruction with annual course review and student feedback.⁸

Evidence

Because of the distinction Reiki practitioners place on their treatment modality, only evidence explicitly assessing the effectiveness of Reiki is included, rather than other terms which may nonspecifically include Reiki, such as Energy Therapy, Therapeutic Touch, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, etc. Studies from journals with an impact factor of less than 2.0 or were published more than 5 years ago have been excluded.

Depression and Anxiety

Reiki has been studied with randomized controlled trials (RCTs) as a therapy for depression and anxiety, as a recent Cochrane review selected three articles for analysis.⁹⁻¹² This review found that these RCTs had sample sizes too small for an adequate analysis to be

performed, and these studies did not adequately select participants with clinical diagnoses of depression or anxiety.¹² From the limited and moderate quality evidence examined, the authors of this review could not conclude whether Reiki may be an effective treatment for anxiety or depression.¹²

A clinical trial demonstrated reductions in Child Depression Inventory (CDI) scores for adolescents with the use of Reiki.¹³ However, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) produced significantly greater reductions in CDI, and despite this trial being conducted as a moderately sized RCT (n=188), comparisons were made to patients placed on a waitlist rather than patients treated with a placebo or “sham” Reiki.¹³ These findings suggest that Reiki may be effective in treating depressive symptoms in adolescents, but greater evidence comparing Reiki against a placebo is needed to strengthen this claim.¹³

Conclusion

Reiki may improve depressive symptoms in adolescents, but the lack of high-quality evidence limits widespread, routine recommendation for its use. Reiki needs more rigorous studies with larger sample sizes in order to assess its effectiveness as a treatment for depression and other specific conditions. At the moment, it does not appear that Reiki has sufficient evidence to be recommended in treating any condition, but it also lacks evidence demonstrating harm.

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