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Double-blind randomized placebo-controlled trial using tongue acupuncture in autistic spectrum disorder

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Background: We aim to use an innovative method, tongue acupuncture (TAC) to improve the overall functional status in these children through improving behaviour or affect, thus affecting communication and cognition.

Methodology: A double-blind randomized control trial on 50 children with ASD was conducted. These children were randomly assigned to treatment group (T) with TAC (40 sessions over 8 weeks) or control group (C) (Sham TAC on non-acupoints in the tongue). Current autism program was continued in both groups. We used the following outcome measure to assess the post and pre TAC difference.

1) Griffiths Mental Developmental Scale, 2) Ritvo-Freeman Real Life Scale, 3) Reynell Language Developmental Scale, 4) Symbolic Play Test and 5) Functional Independence Measure for children (WeeFIM).

Result: The T group had statistically significant improvement compared with C group in WeeFIM. In WeeFIM (Total Score): the mean difference in score in self care of C and T group was $1.5+/-2.59$ and $5+/-3.92$ respectively (p -value < 0.005); and in cognition, this was $0.42+/-1.61$ and $1.28+/-1.37$ respectively (p -value = 0.006) and in total, this was $3.04+/-4.02$ and $7.92+/-4.96$ respectively (p -value < 0.0005). In WeeFIM (Quotient): the mean difference in score in self care of C and T groups was $0.03+/-0.05$ and $0.08+/-0.09$ respectively (p -value = 0.007); and in cognition, this was $0.008+/-0.04$ and $0.05+/-0.04$ respectively (p -value < 0.0005) and in total, this was $0.02+/-0.03$ and $0.07+/-0.05$ respectively (p -value < 0.0005). There was improvement in both T and C groups with other assessed measures, more so in the T than the C group, though not to the extent of statistically significant differences.

Conclusion: A short course of 40 sessions of consecutive TAC programme demonstrated efficacy in improving certain functional aspects in ASD. The long-term efficacy in functional gain needs to be explored.