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COPING WITH PAIN THROUGH HYPNOSIS, MINDFULNESS AND SPIRITUALITY: INTERIM RESULTS OF A 4-ARMS PARALLEL PROSPECTIVE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

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Background: Previous research supports the usefulness of spiritual/religious practices such as prayer, in producing changes in pain-related outcomes, especially among patients with chronic pain. Other commonly studied strategies to manage pain, that previous research has been shown to be useful for pain management are mindfulness meditation and self-hypnosis. However, the beneficial effects of such brief practices on acute pain have been less studied. Furthermore, no previous research, to the best of our knowledge, compared, in a head-to-head study, the effects of all these three approaches on pain-related outcomes on the same study.

Aims: This study examined the effects of brief sessions of Christian prayer (CP), mindfulness meditation (MM), and self-hypnosis (SH) in changing pain intensity, pain tolerance, and pain-related stress, in healthy adults submitted to experimentally induced pain.

Method: This is four-arms parallel prospective experimental study. Two-hundred and twelve healthy adults were randomly assigned to 20-minute sessions of CP, MM, SH, or an attention control (CN). Participants underwent two cycles of Cold Pressor Arm Wrap (CPAW), prior and after the 20-minute sessions. CPAW is a novel experimental procedure, adapted from the traditional Cold Pressor Test (CPT), safely inducing pain experimentally. The 20-minute sessions of CP, MM, SH, and CN were audio-delivered. Pre- and post-test pain intensity (0-10 Numerical Rating Scale), pain tolerance (in seconds), and pain-related stress (heart rate variability) were assessed

Preliminary results: A decrease in pain intensity, and an increase in pain tolerance were observed from the pre to the post-test CPAW cycles. MM and SH participants reported greater increases in pain tolerance, while SH participants reported greater decreases in pain intensity. SH participants reported significantly lower pain intensity and higher pain tolerance at post-test relative to the CN and CP participants. These interim results indicate single sessions of SH and MM, but not CP, produce changes in CPAW pain tolerance, while only SH produce changes in pain intensity.

Keywords: Spirituality/Religiosity, Prayer, Meditation, Mindfulness, Experimentally Induced Pain

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