



The effects of auriculotherapy in the treatment for anxiety: an integrative review

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze the scientific productions on auriculotherapy in the treatment of anxiety in different contexts in a way that made it possible to identify, analyze and synthesize the results. **Methodology:** This is an integrative review that brings at its core a broad and diversified methodology, in which a search was carried out in the following databases: VHL and Google Academic, having as inclusion criteria texts in the Portuguese language published from 2015. The exclusion criteria were books, course completion works, events, master's and doctoral dissertations, repeated articles and research projects. The search resulted in the identification of 126 articles and after the final readings 8 were selected. **Results and Discussions:** The articles demonstrated the effectiveness of auriculotherapy in the treatment of anxiety, being possible to identify the most used points, such as Shen men, (100%), Kidney (77.7%) and Sympathetic (77.7%). The different auricular points found in the protocols for anxiety are related to the factors that trigger their emergence, leading

us to understand that specific points do not always need to be present in the protocols, as in the case of the anxiety point that was visualized in only 5 articles, which leads to understand that some authors do not take this point into account. **Conclusion:** In view of what was discussed in this review, it can be observed that auriculotherapy has great therapeutic potential in the treatment of anxiety leading to significant reduction of symptoms. In the protocols identified, the most used points were Shen men (100%), Kidney (77.7%), Sympathetic (77.7%), Anxiety (55.5%) and liver (44.4%). It was also evidenced in this research that the point of anxiety did not present a higher percentage in the protocols found, making it possible to understand that the authors sought alternatives that were linked to the factors that generated anxiety. Thus, it is defended the need for research that makes it possible to measure the effects of the anxiety point in the specific treatment so that its effectiveness is better understood.

Keywords: Auriculotherapy, Anxiety, Mental health

1 INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a natural response of the body to new and unknown situations, being conceptualized as an excessive and unpleasant fear about the future. However, when manifested in uncontrolled, distorting the real scenario with an exaggerated concern can become a disease affecting the quality of life. Modern society leads us to experience several circumstances that can cause emotional and behavioral discontrol and are related to hectic life, excessive routine, competitiveness in the job market, fear of unemployment, fear of leaving home and being robbed (FERNANDES et al., 2018).

Although it is seen as a reaction imposed by the organism, anxiety when uncontrolled can generate physical and social damage and cause significant losses in the individual's life, which can affect their performance in the work environment. Anxiety disorder (AD) is related to this lack of control and persistence of symptoms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the



American continent reaches higher proportions, and Brazil has the highest number of cases among all countries in the world, as it is present in 9.3% of the population, and the world prevalence is 3.6% (World Health Organization-WHO, 2017).

Fernandes et al (2018) in their studies accounted for the highest number of absences from work due to anxiety disorder, with a mixed prevalence of anxiety and depression. For Baptista and Carneiro (2011), the symptoms of anxiety and depression may appear together in the individual, although they are clinically different, causing symptoms such as nervousness, irritability and concentration problems. In this context, it is clear the importance of building strategies that enable the reduction and control of mental disorders, especially anxiety, in order to promote better quality of life in individuals.

An intervention that is used for the prevention and control of anxiety is auriculotherapy, which is a non-pharmacological method, easy to handle and low cost. This method is part of the Integrative and Complementary Practices (PICs) of the Unified Health System (SUS), implemented in Brazil as a public policy since 2006. They are practices based on ancient traditional knowledge. In the 1970s, the WHO recommended and encouraged ICPs to its member countries, calling them traditional and complementary/alternative medicine (TM/MCA) (BRASIL, 2015).

In the therapeutic context, auriculotherapy uses the auricular pavilion, one of the microsystems of acupuncture, aiming to promote a response in certain organs or specific regions of the body, being based on neurophysiological bases, since the auricle is an innervated area, with a direct reflection on the brain and this with the whole body (SILVÉRIO-LOPES, 2020).

In view of these assertions and the relevance of the topic today, this study aimed to analyze the scientific evidence about auriculotherapy as a treatment for anxiety. In addition, it aimed to identify in the protocols that succeeded in the treatment which auricular points were most frequently used for a better understanding of these changes.

2 METHODOLOGY

This is an integrative literature review, which aims to structure the content for a better understanding and analysis of the findings. The guiding question was: what is the scientific evidence found in the literature about auriculotherapy as a treatment for anxiety? For the selection of articles, a search was carried out in the following databases: BVS and Google Acadêmico, using the following descriptors: auriculotherapy, anxiety and mental health.

The eligibility criteria for the selection of articles were: 1) that the studies addressed auriculotherapy for the treatment of anxiety; 2) that the evaluation of the impact of auriculotherapy was the main theme of the study; 3) that the articles were in Portuguese published between 2015 and 2021. Books, course completion work, events, master's and doctoral dissertations, repeated articles and

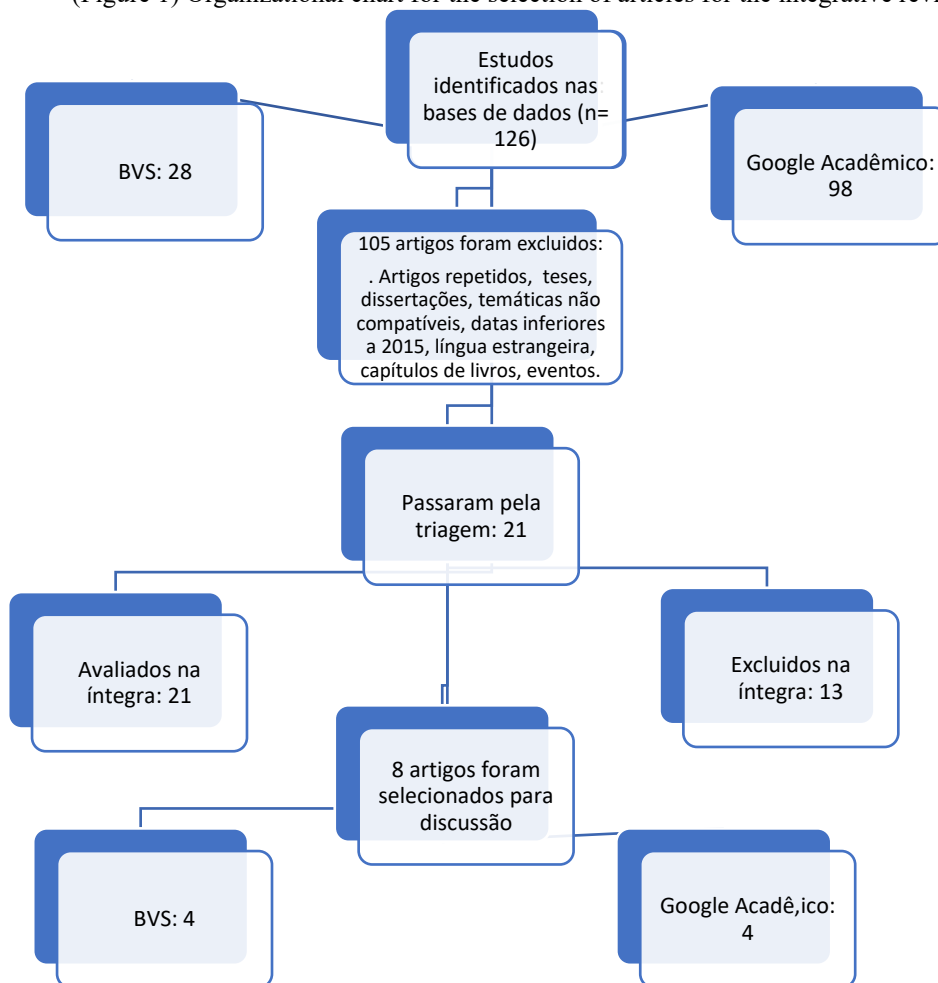


research projects were excluded from the analysis. The search and selection of studies are part of the second stage and are shown in Figure 1.

For a better methodological understanding, this study is based on steps that are proposed by Mendes, Silveira and Galvão (2019), namely: 1) elaboration of the literature review question; 2) search and selection of published studies; 3) extraction of data from studies; 4) critical evaluation of the studies included in the review; 5) synthesis of the review results and 6) presentation of the review/synthesis of knowledge.

For the elaboration of the first stage, a tool was used that made it possible to assist in the construction of the guiding question, with the PICO strategy being the instrument of choice composed of four components: Population/Patient/Problem: individuals with anxiety; Intervention: treating anxiety with auriculotherapy; Comparison: the protocols found; Results: auricular points most frequently used for anxiety that were able to reduce signs and symptoms. Thus, defining the following guiding question: what evidence is available in the literature on the effectiveness of auriculotherapy as a treatment for anxiety?

(Figure 1) Organizational chart for the selection of articles for the integrative review





The third and fourth steps are related to the extraction and analysis of the selected study, with this, it was decided to perform descriptively, where it allowed a greater contact with the subject researched, and from there it was possible to observe, describe and classify the data, which favored a critical evaluation of the studies. In the fifth step, a synthesis of the results of the review was carried out, comparing and interpreting the data evidenced in the selected articles that made it possible to obtain a complete picture of the phenomenon analyzed.

For the sixth stage, the presentations of the integrative review were made, which are inserted in the results and discussions. Seeking a better understanding of this step, a table was prepared classifying the articles that were used in the review, adding the title, authors, objectives, points used and effects of the treatment, and with this, it generated a consistent and understandable panorama on the studied theme, specified in Table 1.

Table 1

Nº	Title	Authors	Objectives	Points used	Effects
01	Auriculotherapy in nursing professionals in the coronavirus pandemic: multiple case studies	OLIVEIRA, Cristina Mattos Camargo de et al, 2021.	To evaluate the effect before and after an auriculotherapy session on the levels of anxiety, depression and stress in nursing professionals assigned to provide care during the coronavirus pandemic.	Shen-men, Kidney, Sympathetic Nervous System (SNV), Joy, Anxiety, Antidepressant, Heart, Endocrine, Lung and Muscle Relaxation.	Auriculotherapy was effective in reducing emotional disturbances in nursing professionals.
02	Use of auriculotherapy in the control of low back pain, anxiety and stress of professionals in the prison system	GRAÇA, Bianca Carvalho da et al, 2020	Identify the contributions of auriculotherapy to the promotion of quality of life of professionals in the penitentiary system.	Shen-men, Kidney, Diaphragm, Liver, Heart, Brainstem and Anxiety	Auriculoetry has shown promise in this occupational context and can bring direct benefits to professionals
03	Effects of auriculotherapy on stress, anxiety and depression in adults and older adults: a systematic review	CORRÊA, Hérica Pinheiro et al., 2020	Identify evidence in the scientific literature about the effects of auriculotherapy in the treatment of stress, anxiety and depression in adults and the elderly, analyzing the main protocols for the application of the intervention.	In this study, the identified protocols were different, but there are frequent points such as: Shen-men, Kidney, Autonomic Nervous System, Heart, Brainstem and Liver 1 and 2	The evidence available in the literature supports the effectiveness of the technique. However, the randomized clinical trials showed weakness in methodological quality.
04	Effects of auriculotherapy on the anxiety of pregnant women in low-risk prenatal care	SILVA, Hércules Luz da et al., 2020	To evaluate the effects of auriculotherapy on anxiety levels in pregnant women attending low-risk prenatal care.	ShenMen, Kidney, Sympathetic, Brainstem, Spleen and Anxiety	After intervention with auriculotherapy there was a significant reduction in anxiety state
05	Auriculotherapy: effects on anxiety, sleep and quality of life	NOVAK, Vanessa Cristina et al., 2020	to evaluate the effect of auriculotherapy in individuals with symptoms of anxiety,	ShenMen, Sympathetic, Kidney, Anxiety 1 and 2	Auriculotherapy proved to be effective in improving anxiety and consequently the



			sleep disturbance and quality of life		quality of sleep and life of the participants.
06	Use of auriculotherapy in individuals with anxiety: a narrative review	SILVA, Pedro Murilo Pontes da; AZEVEDO, Renata Muniz Gonçalves de; SOUZA, YlziCarollaine Rodrigues de; CAMPOS, Carmindo Carlos Cardoso. 2020	To verify the results of auriculotherapy in individuals with anxiety	In this study, the analyzed works had variation of the points used in therapy, but the most used points were: ShenMen (100%), Kidney (66.67%), Sympathetic (55.55%), Liver and Anxiety with (33.33%).	When comparing the studies, it was realized that auriculoterapist brings excellent results, regardless of the material or method applied.
07	Effectiveness of auriculotherapy on anxiety in labor: randomized clinical trial	MAFETONI, Reginaldo Roque; RODRIGUES, Mariana Haddad; JACOB, Lia Maristela da Silva; SHIMO, Antonieta Keiko Kakuda, 2018.	To evaluate the effectiveness of auriculotherapy on women's anxiety during labor.	In this study they were divided into 3 groups: GI: Shen-men, Uterus, neurasthenia area and endocrine; GP (used points not indicated for the proposed treatment): Ankle, Knee, Tooth and Jaw; CG: no intervention.	Women in the GI group maintained anxiety control during the active phase of PT, indicating a useful effect of this therapy
08	Auriculotherapy for reducing anxiety and pain in nursing professionals: randomized clinical trial	Kurebayashi, LeoniceFumiko Sato et al., 2017	Evaluate the effectiveness of the auricular protocol to reduce anxiety, pain and improve quality of life in a hospital nursing team.	Shen-men, Tranquilizer, Thalamus, Autonomic or Sympathetic System and Zero Point	The protocol used (APPA) reduced anxiety levels in Nursing staff after 10 sessions

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

A total of 126 articles were found. Of these, 105 were excluded because they were duplicated and were part of the exclusion criteria such as books, course completion work, events, master's and doctoral dissertations and research projects. Thus, 21 studies were screened and 13 were excluded in full after reading titles and abstracts. Thus, the number of components of this integrative review generated a final sample of 8 articles (Figure 1).

The sample population for this study cannot be accurately accounted for, as in two articles the quantitative data were not exposed, so it was possible to count an approximate value of 3,003 participants. To facilitate the identification of the articles, a numerical sequence was called, with dates in descending order from 2021.

The eight articles that make up the study in question evaluated and identified the response of auriculotherapy as a treatment for anxiety, in different contexts, such as in nursing professionals who attended patients with COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic; in pregnant women in low-risk prenatal care; in labor; in chronic pain, in improving sleep and quality of life, as well as for those individuals who have anxiety, stress and depression.



Table 2 shows the information related to the databases and their respective articles found, the methodology used and the instruments that were applied to measure anxiety. Of the articles that make up the study, 5 (70%) used the randomized clinical study in their analysis, which is a powerful tool for obtaining evidence for health care.

The main anxiety measurement tools found in the studies were the Hamilton Scale, which is an instrument most used by researchers, as it assesses anxiety levels related to symptoms of anxious mood and physical symptoms of anxiety; the IDATE, an instrument that assesses anxiety as a state and trait, that is, it analyzes a transient reaction, the moment and the individual's way of dealing with anxiety throughout life.

Table 2

Database	Methodology	Instruments for measuring anxiety
VHL - 1, 2, 4 and 7	1- Case Study; 2- Randomized Clinical Trial; 4 -Randomized clinical trial; 7 -Experimental Study.	1 -Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21); 2 - Trait-State Anxiety Inventory (TSEA); 4 - State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (IDATE); 7 -Hamilton Anxiety Scale.
Google Scholar -3, 5, 6 and 8	3 - Systematic review; 5 -Non-randomized clinical trial; 6 - Narrative review 8 - Randomized clinical trial.	3 -Inventory of Trait-State Anxiety (IDATE), Hamilton Anxiety and Depression Scale; 5 -Hamilton Scale and IDATE; 6 - Absence 8 - IDATE

It is worth noting that the new coronavirus pandemic provided a high workload and caused considerable stress in those health professionals who worked on the front line. In this assumption, study 1 showed in its analyzes that auriculotherapy was effective in reducing emotional disorders in nursing professionals and the auricular points used were Shen-men, Kidney, Sympathetic Nervous System (SNV), Joy, Anxiety, Antidepressant, Heart, Endocrine, Lung and Muscle Relaxation.

After a deeper analysis, it was possible to observe that auriculotherapy contributed to a better outcome in the quality of life of individuals, as shown in studies 2 and 5, in which the effectiveness of the practice was proven in different contexts that generate anxiety. In article 2, the practice occurred among workers in a prison system. We know that this work environment promotes greater wear and tear on the worker due to the inherent risk of the service as well as the precarious structural conditions.

It is possible to understand that the psychosocial repercussions that some work environments promote, can interfere in the individual's life and contribute positively or negatively affecting people's quality of life (FREITAS and FREIRE, 2021). Thus, auriculotherapy was promising in the occupational context with benefits for those who performed the practice.



Quality of life is related to the individual's living conditions, especially to what surrounds him, such as having a job, housing, eating conditions, among others. It is approached by many authors as synonymous with health, having as determining factors, in addition to lifestyle, advances in human biology, the physical and social environment and health services (SANCHEZ, 2017).

For study 5, it was found that this therapeutic practice favored the quality of life of volunteers from a physiotherapy school clinic who declared themselves anxious in the research. The present study addressed issues related to anxiety levels, quality of life and sleep during therapy applications. For these two studies, the auricular points used were, respectively: Shen-men, Kidney, Diaphragm, Liver, Heart, Brainstem and Anxiety; Shen-men, Sympathetic, Kidney, Anxiety 1 and 2.

Articles 4 and 8 bring information about the results of auriculotherapy in women in different and at the same time related situations, such as prenatal care, where anxiety is seen as a common finding due to several factors that alter the emotional health of the pregnant woman, and in labor, causing a high level of stress and anxiety in women, where the authors attributed this exacerbated symptomatology to fear of childbirth and lack of knowledge.

For study 4, the effects of therapeutic practice were promising in the group of pregnant women who do low-risk prenatal care. The authors concluded that after the intervention there was a significant reduction in the state of anxiety in these women, and the auricular points Shen-men, Kidney, Sympathetic, Brainstem, Spleen and Anxiety were used in the treatment.

Because it is an analysis with pregnant women who attend prenatal care, study 04 pointed out obstetric risks and endocrine and behavioral changes as probable facilitators of increased anxiety in the gestational period, with the likelihood of the emergence of puerperal depression if anxiety levels remain high.

Some scholars understand that anxiety has become a common finding in pregnant women in labor. On this assumption, study 8 was a randomized clinical trial with three groups of women in this phase of pregnancy. The authors described that auriculotherapy progressed to maintain anxiety control during the active phase of labor in the group that had the intervention for anxiety (GI), indicating a useful effect of this therapy. For this group of women, the points used were Shen-men, Uterus, neurasthenia area and endocrine.

Study 06, is a narrative literature review, nine articles were selected and identified efficacy in comparing the methods and points used, regardless of the material or method applied, with a more expressive improvement being observed in the study that made use of two materials simultaneously, seed and needle. There was a variation in the points, but the most used were: Shen-men (100%), Kidney (66.67%), Sympathetic (55.55%), Liver and Anxiety (33.33%).

Study 03 is a systematic review with the purpose of identifying evidence in the scientific literature about the effects of auriculotherapy in the treatment of stress, anxiety and depression in adults



and the elderly. With a sample of 24 articles, of these, 22 (92%) showed a positive effect of auriculotherapy, although they presented methodological weaknesses. The protocols were diversified, but some points were frequent such as Shen-men, Kidney, Autonomic Neural System, Heart, Brainstem and Liver 1 and 2 corroborating with other studies described here.

For most of the articles that were part of this study, auriculotherapy proved to be effective in the treatment of anxiety, as well as in different situations that are capable of triggering stress, anxiety and depression, such as pregnancy, labor, sleep disturbance and pain. In addition to its effectiveness, it was possible to identify the most used points as Shen-men, which is present in all the analyzed protocols, the Kidney and Sympathetic appearing in 7 studies out of the 9 analyzed, corroborating the studies by SILVA *et al.*(2020), and this leads us to believe the importance of these findings in clinical practice in different health contexts.

When analyzing the studies, it was possible to observe that auriculotherapy established a positive therapeutic response in relation to some possible situations that lead people to physical and psychological suffering, such as pain and depression. Perhaps it is due to being a therapeutic practice that makes use of the auricle reflex on the central nervous system causing a reduction in symptoms and suffering that affects people's well-being.

The different auricular points found in the protocols for anxiety are related to the factors that trigger its emergence, as, for example, in the studies by Mafetoni (2018), the uterus and endocrine points were added in one of the proposed groups. These points are linked to the physiological processes of PT and when stimulated they promoted anxiety control during the active phase.

It is important to understand that in the daily routine of clinical practice, the basis that supports knowledge is linked to experience, study and research. In this assumption, this study showed that some professionals did not include specific points in the therapy, such as the point of anxiety, which in some protocols was not part of the therapy, being visualized in only 5 of the 8 articles studied here, which leads to question why some studies did not take this point into account.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

When comparing the studies, it can be seen that auriculotherapy showed promising results in improving anxiety, with Shen-men (100%), Kidney (77.7%), Sympathetic (77.7%), Anxiety (55.5%) and liver (44.4%) being the most used points, making it possible to understand the similarity in energy characteristics, as well as the importance of the presence of these auricular points in the treatment protocols, especially for the therapy proposed in this study.

It was also evidenced in this research that the anxiety point did not present a higher percentage in the protocols found, making it possible to understand that the authors sought points that were linked to the factors that generated anxiety, without the need to include it in the treatment. Thus, it is defended



the need for research that makes it possible to measure the effects of the anxiety point in the specific treatment so that its effectiveness is better understood.



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