



Investigation and Assessment of Sham Reiki Protocols in Reiki Research

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Objectives: When people receive Reiki they also receive the benefits of touch and human attention. In research, sham Reiki control groups are necessary to separate out effects of touch and human presence. The prevalence and types of sham Reiki protocols and whether they produce benefits (placebo effects) have received little attention. This scoping review addresses those gaps.

Methods: Studies were included if they were randomized controlled trials of Reiki administered in-person for a therapeutic purpose, included a sham Reiki control group and were published in peer-reviewed journals. Studies were excluded if they combined Reiki with another modality.

Results: Thirty-five studies of 154 (22%) fulfilled inclusion criteria. In most cases (28/35; 80%) the sham protocol mimicked the Reiki protocol except that the practitioner lacked Reiki training. Twelve of these 28 studies showed significant improvements in outcomes for sham Reiki, suggesting a placebo effect. In 6 of 7 studies with differing sham Reiki and Reiki protocols, a placebo effect was not observed. In 19 studies where sham outcomes were compared with those from included no-treatment control groups, 8 showed a placebo effect. In 6 of 35 studies (17%) where the sham practitioner had connections with Reiki, only one showed a placebo effect.

Conclusions: Inclusion of sham Reiki groups in published Reiki research is limited. Most use similar protocols for sham Reiki and Reiki. The placebo effect is more likely when sham Reiki and Reiki protocols are similar and/or if the sham practitioner is not connected with Reiki.