

Abstract

Background: Pelvic girdle pain (PGP) affect 30 percent of pregnant women. The aim of this study were to compare the impact of CranioSacral therapy (CST) as adjunct to standard treatment with standard treatment alone for PGP during pregnancy. **Methods:** In a single-blind, mixed-methods randomized trial, 123 pregnant women with PGP was recruited from 26 antenatal clinics in Sweden. They were randomly allocated to treatment for eight weeks with standard treatment (n=60) or to standard treatment plus CST (n=63). Primary outcomes were pain on a visual analogue scale, 0-100 mm and frequency of sick leave. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 27 women to elucidate the quantitative findings. **Results:** After treatment, median pain decreased in the CST group from 27.5 to 27 and increased from 28 to 35 in the standard group (P=0.017). There were no differences in change in women on sick-leave. However, qualitative analysis indicated that some women receiving CST got aware of that their bodily tensions had connection with it (the pain) and made the PGP worse. This can explain why PGP did not aggravate in the CST group during the study period. **Conclusion** This study showed statistical small and clinically questionable improvements for the CST group. The process of interpreting RCT data is complex and contextual but according to the findings of this study CST is not cost-effective.

Qualitative findings

The qualitative analysis provides insight into how the women experienced CST. Two categories emerged; ‘No expectations, more likely a skeptical view’ and ‘Something within my body changed that eased the tension and made the muscles relax’

No expectations, more likely a skeptical view

The women had no knowledge of CST. A lot of them were skeptical towards the treatment since it wasn't approved by the health authorities. Still they wanted to give it a try.

They described the therapist as very professional. Someone who was a good listener and whose information was persuasive. The women felt the treatment comfortable. It was performed with gentle hands. To start with the therapist passively put his hands on the patients head and stomach. Then he moved his hands to the hip and the lumbar region of the back. This made some of the women feeling very relaxed, starting from their head all down to their pelvis. When the therapist pressed a finger on a précis area on the back of the patients head, the women got an instant feeling of warmth, flushing all over their face and head. They could feel their neck move even when lying down in a relaxed position.

"Wow, shit...I'm joined together like a ragdoll, that's obvious...I think we are on to something here"

The women pointed out that it was difficult to find the time and the discipline to do the exercises you are supposed to do at home. They thought it was nice to attend a therapist appointment instead. It meant that they shared the responsibility with their therapist for their wellbeing. This way the treatment was a support and they felt encouraged to take charge of their own wellbeing.

”You are supposed to do the exercises yourself but sometimes it's nice to get some help from outside". xx

Something within my body changed that eased the tension and made the muscles relax

Women told that during treatment something inside them changed. Before treatment their bodies were tens and stiff. Something had changed something that eased the tension and made the muscles relax. This something soothes the pain. Their body felt more relaxed like they had reached equilibrium. It felt like their body exhaled with relief. They told that their mobility increased that they could walk further and that their whole body felt more resilient. Increased mobility without pain made them feel liberated to do whatever they set their mind to. As an example, now they could turn around in bed without waking up. One of the women pointed out that her tension headaches and neck pain had decreased. Another woman that she had stopped using her pelvic belt and another one had dropped her crutches.

”My body gets more flexible, it feels more in tune. The pain that drives you out of your mind is no longer there... My workmates told me I stopped limping as soon as I had been for the treatment” LW

Women told that they felt their treatment had been effective even if some of their ailments still taunted them. They didn't feel "border-line" anymore. The women said that the effect of the treatment could last as long as just during the treatment session up to a week after.

”The first treatment was awesome. The following sessions didn't change much but it still felt you had turned a corner” VJ

The effect of the pain relief was depending on what kind of activities was performed. Some women said that CST didn't have any noticeable effect, others that they experienced benefits such as a decrease in pain after the first treatment sessions.

"... It feels like there are a lot of things going on inside my body. I feel safe and my whole body is in a state of total relaxation. At that point all the pain went. It was gone. Unfortunately this didn't happen the next time". YG

The women expressed that the treatment differed from what they expected. They experienced the therapist as careful, competent and professional and the treatment as a soft touch or pressure that gave a warm feeling.