

## **Prevalence of acupuncture in Japan: results from nationwide surveys from 2003-2006**

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Acupuncture originated in China and is widespread throughout Asia. It is expected that a higher utilization of this remedy exists in these countries compared to western countries. We conducted annual nationwide surveys from 2003 through 2006 on the utilization of acupuncture in Japan. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 2,000 individuals randomly chosen from the resident database, which was stratified by geographical area and city size. Common questions in all four surveys included utilization of acupuncture or moxibustion within the past 12 month, lifetime experience, and basic characteristics of the respondents such as age, gender, education level, and occupation. Other questions regarding the main symptoms for which acupuncture was applied, reasons or expectations for the use of acupuncture treatment, the respondents' inclination to utilize the remedy in the future, satisfaction with conventional medicine, and use of other CAM were also included in various years. Annual utilization percentages, based on the number of respondents, from 2003 to 2006 were 6.5%, 4.7%, 6.4%, and 6.7%, respectively, while lifetime experiences were estimated as 26.4%, 19.1%, 24.4% and 25.4%, respectively. Respondents who had utilized acupuncture and/or moxibustion tended to be older than those who had no experience. Acupuncture was mainly used for musculoskeletal symptoms (estimated as 81.6% of users in 2003), and a detailed breakdown of the musculoskeletal symptoms identified in the 2005 survey showed 50.9% for low back pain, 35.9% for shoulder stiffness, and 12.0% for knee pain. The percentage of users in 2003 who intended to continue therapy was 50.4%, while those who did not accounted for 37.1%. Reasons given for continuing therapy included the effective amelioration of symptoms, comfort of the procedure, and low number of side effects, while those who decided against continuing cited no improvement of symptoms, cost, and lack of time for treatment. Acupuncture was found to be the fourth most popular treatment following dietary supplements (15.6%), herbal medicine (11.3%), and massage (10.4%) from the survey taken in 2003. According to the results from all the surveys, annual utilization of acupuncture and/or moxibustion was estimated at more than 6%, and the percentage of those with a lifetime experience was approximately 25%, thus demonstrating the relatively higher utilization of acupuncture and/or moxibustion in Japan over utilization in western countries. Application of the treatment for musculoskeletal problems and utilization by the older population were specific standouts from the 2003 to 2006 surveys of the use of acupuncture and/or moxibustion in Japan.

**Key words:** acupuncture, prevalence, Japan, aim, reason