

Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) & its Efficacy on Anxiety

Ahmed Medhat Mohamed

Zewail City of Science & Technology

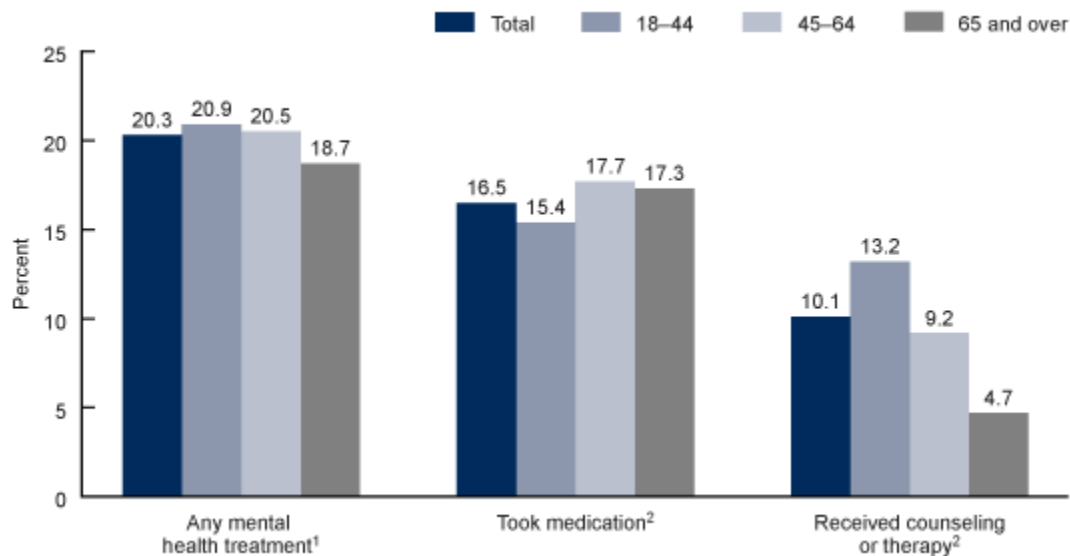
SCH 273 – Cognitive Psychology

## Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) & its Efficacy on Anxiety

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention provided data based on a national health interview survey that found that 20.3% of adults had received mental health treatment in the past 12 months. (Norris & Terlizzi, 2021). Data found that 16.5% of the American population had received psychotropic medication for their mental health diagnosis, while 10.1% received counseling or therapeutic services from a mental health professional (Norris & Terlizzi, 2021).

**Figure 1.**

*Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who received any mental health treatment in the United States in the year (2020).*



The graph demonstrates the percentages of adults aged 18 and over who received mental health treatment, medication for their mental health, or therapy from a mental health professional in the last 12 months according to their specific age group.

United States statistics show that 3.6 percent of the American population is affected by General Anxiety Disorder (Djordjevic, 2021). Additionally, Djordjevic finds that depression and

anxiety are the most common mental illnesses in the United States, impacting a third of Americans.

According to the DSM IV, generalized anxiety disorder 300.02 (F41.1) is characterized by excessive anxiety and worry. It can occur more often than not for at least 6 months, and an individual finds it difficult to control the worry. Anxiety and worry are associated with three or more of the following six symptoms: irritability, restlessness or feeling on edge, being easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, the mind going blank, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 122–123).

The majority of Americans are referred to mental health clinics, which provide a traditional medical model reinforced by health insurance company policies. In the last two decades, studies have found that rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide have risen among young adults. These mental health disorders are commonly treated after a psychiatric diagnosis is given, medications are prescribed, and talk therapy is recommended (Howley, 2020). Research is showing that individuals are showing an interest in a more holistic alternative to treating their mental illness.

### **Causes of Anxiety**

Research provided by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) found that a combination of genetic and environmental factors may play a role in someone suffering from anxiety. The individual's mental health state, health conditions, and/or substance abuse have also been attributed to anxiety (Kuabala, 2021). Furthermore, additional factors that can have a direct correlation to anxiety are stressful life events even in childhood, abuse, death, racism, personality type, one's sex, gender dysphoria, trauma, and some medications that can exacerbate symptoms of anxiety (Kubala, 2021).

In the year 2019, a research review by PubMed Central examined evidence of neurobiological links between stress and anxiety from various studies. The research concluded that "neural features in specific parts of the brain, such as the amygdala, can assist in understanding how stress contributes to anxiety" (Kubala, 2021).

### **Implications of Anxiety**

Studies highlighted by Bach et al. suggest that anxiety can increase the risk of developing long-term physical health problems, including diabetes, stomach ulcers, and heart problems" (2021). A systematic review of 31 studies, including 16,922 patients, found that physiological measures of health as well as medical diagnosis were strongly correlated to anxiety (Bach et al., 2019). Although there is a plethora of research published about anxiety, more research needs to be conducted in order to pinpoint the exact risks and populations that are most impacted.

The most reliable information available today is that anxiety impacts all individuals at some point in their lives. According to large population-based surveys, up to 33.7% of the overall population is affected by anxiety disorder during their lifetime (Bandelow & Michaelis, 2015).

The treatment interventions that have been traditionally used to treat anxiety are psychotherapy and psychotropic medication. For the purpose of this paper, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) will be the focus of the paper as a treatment option for reducing anxiety.

### **EFT definition**

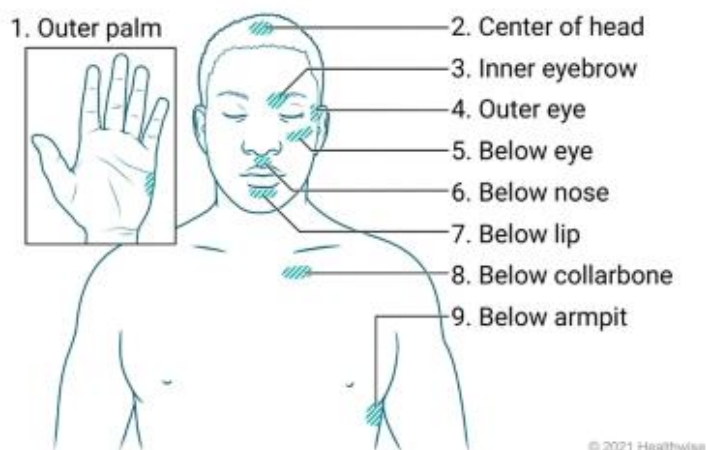
Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is an evidence-based self-help therapeutic method, and over 100 studies demonstrate its efficacy. It is considered holistic due to its being derived from Chinese medicine. It is a novel therapy that combines both cognitive and somatic elements (Bach et al., 2019). "The tapping foundation explains EFT best as, "It consists of tapping with

your fingertips on meridian points while talking through varying emotions one is experiencing as well as any traumatic memories" (Haragutchi, 2022). It uses a five-step technique that uses a specific pattern of gentle tapping on nine meridian points to focus on any physical or emotional pain your body is feeling. The nine EFT tapping points include the side of the hand, the inner points of the eyebrow, the side of the eye, under the eye, under the nose, above the chin, the collarbone, under the arm, and the top of the head (Haragutchi, 2022). By tapping on these meridian points, one can restore their body's energy and essentially bring it into balance. Tapping is used to treat anxiety, depression, trauma, phobias, and pain disorders. (Haragutchi, 2022).

## EFT Tapping Points

**Figure 2**

*Emotional Freedom Technique (Cigna, 2022).*



The literature review yielded limited evidence on EFT tapping's effectiveness in reducing anxiety alone. However, the evidence does indicate significant findings on the related issue of EFT tapping in conjunction with psychotherapy and CBT and its effectiveness in reducing

psychological and physiological symptoms. Psychological and physiological symptoms can be significantly reduced with EFT, based on the statistical evidence found in the literature.

### **Review of the evidence**

Clond (2016) conducted a systematic review with meta-analysis on the effectiveness of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) in reducing anxiety. The analysis included randomized controlled trials retrieved by literature searches that were assessed for quality using the criteria developed by the American Psychological Association's Division Task Force on empirically validated treatments. The analysis covered the year 2015, and 14 randomized studies ( $n = 658$ ) met the inclusion criteria. Results indicated that EFT decreased anxiety scores, even when accounting for the effect size of the control treatment. However, there were few data points available comparing EFT to standard-of-care treatments, including CBT. Further research is suggested in order to establish the relative efficacy of EFT compared to the established protocols.

Bach et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of EFT in improving anxiety disorders. The analysis included 14 randomized controlled trials of EFT for anxiety disorders ( $n = 658$ ) and found a very large treatment effect of  $d = 1.23$  (95% CI 0.82-1.64,  $P < 0.001$ ), while the effect size for combined controls was 0.41 (95% CI 0.17-0.67,  $P = 0.001$ ). The combined effect size for controls was 0.41 (95% CI 0.17–.067,  $P = 0.001$ ). Results indicated EFT treatment was associated with a significant decrease in anxiety scores, even when accounting for the size of treatment in the control group.

Bach et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of the effectiveness of Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) in treating anxiety. This analysis covered a period of 5.5 years with 5,000 patients in 11 clinics seeking treatment for anxiety. The patients in this study received traditional

anxiety treatment in the form of CBT, with medication if needed, or acupoint tapping with no medication. The research found a 90% improvement in patients who received acupoint tapping therapy, compared to 63% of the CBT participants. Only three acupoint sessions were needed before an individual's anxiety was reduced, while an average of 15 was needed for CBT to show results. A total of 76% of people in the acupoint tapping group found relief from symptoms, compared with 51% of the people in the CBT group. The research found that a year later, the improvements seen were maintained by 78% of the acupoint group compared to 69% of the CBT group. Other studies also indicate equivalence or superiority to CBT. Percentages are presented since no P value was provided in the study.

A self-applied EFT for anxiety, depression, pain, and cravings in 216 healthcare workers resulted in significant improvements in the distress subscales and ratings of pain, emotional distress, and cravings following 2 hours of intervention, with gains maintained at follow-up. The severity and range of psychological symptoms were reduced, and greater subsequent use of EFT was associated with a steeper decrease in symptoms. A meta-analysis of 14 randomized controlled trials of EFT for anxiety disorders ( $n = 658$ ) found a very large treatment effect of  $d = 1.23$  (95% CI 0.82–1.624,  $P < 0.001$ ). EFT treatment was associated with a significant decrease in anxiety scores, even when accounting for the size of the control group (Bach et al., 2019).

Bach et al. (2019) included research that focused on a study that included EFT workshops and 203 participants at 6 different clinics trained in EFT to measure physiological change. The participants at one of these workshops ( $n = 31$ ) also received a comprehensive battery of medical tests. The psychological testing was similar at all six workshops with pre- and post-measures. The participants were 65% women and older than 50 years of age. They were assessed for depression and anxiety using the hospital anxiety and depression scale. Cravings were assessed

before and after a 1-hour module on the use of EFT for this topic. Participants were provided with chocolate and self-assessed their pretest level of craving. Participant scores for happiness, anxiety, depression, PTSD, pain, and cravings were compared before and after treatment using the Wilcoxon signed rank test for paired samples. The findings showed a significant decrease in anxiety, depression, PTSD, pain, and cravings and a significant increase in happiness. In the subset of participants in whom physiological indicators of health were assessed ( $n = 31$ ), psychological measurements, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, pain, and cravings, all improved. The changes corresponded with an increase in happiness ( $P = 0.0004$ ) and immune function in the form of Sig A Secretion ( $P = 0.17$ ).

Bach et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of EFT for depression and examined 20 studies. These included outcome studies ( $n = 461$ ) as well as 12 randomized controlled trials ( $n = 398$ ). The findings demonstrated a very large effect in the treatment of depression. Cohen's  $d$  across all studies was 1.31, with very little impact between randomized controlled trials and uncontrolled outcome studies. The effect sizes at posttest, less than 90 days, and greater than 90 days were 1.31, 1.21, and 1.11, respectively, indicating durable maintenance of participant gains. EFT was more effective than physical interventions such as diaphragmatic breathing as well as psychological interventions such as supportive interviews. The study of healthcare workers also found a significant reduction in depression after EFT.

Bach et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of EFT for depression and examined 20 studies. These included eight outcome studies ( $n = 461$ ) as well as 12 randomized controlled trials ( $n = 398$ ). EFT demonstrated a very effective treatment for depression. Effect sizes for the post-test, less than 90 days and greater than 90 days were 1.31, 1.21, and 1.11, indicating steady



maintenance of participant gains. EFT was more efficacious than diaphragmatic breathing and supportive interviews.

A similar study, but with healthcare workers, found a significant reduction in depression after EFT. A randomized controlled trial with a population of 59 veterans successfully treated for PTSD also found a significant reduction in depressive symptoms after six 1-hour EFT sessions.

Baker and Sigel (2003) conducted a meta-analysis focused on the partial replication of Wels et al.'s original study on EFT used to treat intense phobias of small animals, which then proved to have greater results than the comparison to a breathing condition. The purpose was to measure generalizability by assessing whether such findings reflected non-specific phenomena common to many forms of psychotherapy, methodological artifacts such as regression, fatigue, the passage of time, or therapeutic ingredients specific to EFT. The dependent variables showed mostly that EFT conditions showed a significant decrease in fear of small animals immediately after. This also occurred 1.38 years after one 45-minute intervention, whereas a supportive interview and a no-treatment condition did not.

Church et al. performed a triple-blind, randomized controlled trial comparing EFT to talk therapy and rest in a non-clinical sample of 83 participants. They found significant declines in the stress hormone cortisol. However, a trial with a smaller group did not have sufficient power to identify significant cortisol reductions. Two clinical case histories also report cortisol reductions. The meta-analysis studies show anxiety reduction as a direct result of EFT. The studies provided evidence of EFT tapping reducing psychological and physiological conditions in patients when used in conjunction with CBT and psychotherapy or in comparison to the research provided including data showing reductions in anxiety, depression, and PTSD when using CBT, psychotherapy, and EFT in conjunction.

Since its development, over 100 articles have been published demonstrating the effectiveness of tapping used in EFT. In 2020, the American Psychological Association (APA) published a study that proved that 1 hour of tapping reduced the biological markers of stress in individuals experiencing symptoms related to anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. The literature reviewed proved that in one study, tapping helped reduce symptoms related to anxiety. EFT also showed a 90% reduction rate in reducing anxiety symptoms in comparison to a 63% reduction for those who treated their symptoms with Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Tapping was effective even without increasing medication dosage in just 3 sessions in comparison to the 15 sessions needed in CBT.

Studies have found that EFT tapping is effective in treating anxiety symptoms in a number of populations, including adolescents, students, healthcare workers, and a diverse number of adults. The reduction in anxiety symptoms persisted even after the tapping treatment ended, with one study finding reduced symptoms after 3 months of said treatment. EFT tapping was found to reduce depression by 41% in a review of a meta-analysis, and there was a 90% reduction in PTSD symptoms after 6 tapping sessions. Tapping has also been found to reduce chronic pain symptoms and multiple mental health conditions (Haragutchi, 2022).

### **Recommendations**

Databases such as the National Library of Medicine, Scientific Research, EBSCO, NCBI, EFT Universe, and PubMed include more peer-reviewed articles that focus solely on EFT and meta-analysis studies for future research. The research found now includes EFT combined with CBT and psychotherapy to treat anxiety, PTSD, and depression. The research provided found the efficacy of EFT tapping combined with CBT and Psychotherapy to treat PTSD, depression, and physical pain. The recommendations are that EFT be introduced to more mental health clinics

and made more accessible to more impoverished and underserved neighborhoods. Additionally, advocating for EFT training for clinicians in all organizations that facilitate mental health treatment for clients from all walks of life can be very beneficial to a client's healing, and it allows clinicians and future social workers to expand their lenses in the social work field. Furthermore, providing information about EFT to colleagues is another way of making it more accessible to clients. According to Sheltering Arms supervisor, a recommendation was made to provide research data on the effectiveness of EFT in treating not only anxiety and depression but also PTSD and other forms of mental illness to the clinical director. Additionally, a suggestion was made to bring forth data to the lead in the research and development team and the CEO of the company.

### **Implications**

The use of EFT has been extensively studied for its psychological improvements as well as for the treatment of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. The currently available information on EFT, which is based on reviews and meta-analyses of EFT, demonstrates that it is an evidence-based practice. This can assist in the reduction of anxiety levels, which supports psychological health (Blacher, 2023). The implementation of the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) has the potential to bring about change in the more traditional medical model that currently exists when treating mental illness. On a macro level, it can widen the overall scope of treatment options for clients interested in a more holistic approach to their healing journey. By widening the scope, EFT can be made billable as well as more accessible to many of the vulnerable populations that social workers serve. Additionally, on a micro level, it can assist in redefining the way that clients approach their healing journey and take charge of it.

## **Conclusion**

The evidence showing the effectiveness of EFT in treating anxiety, depression, phobias, and PTSD is well established. Research investigating the physiological improvements after EFT intervention still has its limitations. Currently, EFT can only be associated with multidimensional improvements across a spectrum of physiological systems. Therefore, EFT should be more accessible and incorporated alongside the current medical treatment model for the treatment of mental health illnesses. EFT is currently made accessible in the private sector with an EFT therapist who may charge between \$100 and \$200 (Haragutchi, 2022). This leaves out most marginalized populations that cannot afford a co-pay that is this high but wish to be treated with this more holistic yet evidence-based approach. EFT should also be made billable in clinics alone, as research has shown that it is effective in reducing the mental and physical ailments one may be suffering from. By incorporating EFT as a treatment option for clients, one is giving all a fair chance at healing without the limitations often presented due to a client's financial status. This can make a huge difference in the way that clients are supported in their healing, as it allows them to have more autonomy in choosing the healing modality of their choice.

## References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Desk reference to the diagnostic criteria from the Dsm-5* (Ser. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).
- Anxiety and panic attacks*. Mind. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks/about-anxiety/>
- Bach, D., Groesbeck, G., Stapleton, P., Sims, R., Blickheuser, K., & Church, D. (2019). Clinical Eft (emotional freedom techniques) improves multiple physiological markers of health. *Journal of Evidence-Based Integrative Medicine*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515690x18823691>
- Blacher, S. (2023). Emotional freedom technique (EFT): Tap to relieve stress and Burnout. *Journal of Interprofessional Education & Practice*, 30, 100599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.xjep.2023.100599>
- Daviu, N., Bruchas, M. R., Moghaddam, B., Sandi, C., & Beyeler, A. (2019). Neurobiological links between stress and anxiety. *Neurobiology of Stress*, 11, 100191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ynstr.2019.100191>
- Emotional freedom technique (EFT)*. Cigna. (2022, October 20). <https://www.cigna.com/knowledge-center/hw/emotional-freedom-technique-acl9225>
- Haragutchi, H. (2022, May 5). *EFT tapping (emotional freedom technique): How it works, cost, & effectiveness*. Choosing Therapy. <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/eft-tapping/>

- Howley, T. (2021, February 4). *For outcomes and cost, study supports holistic approach to mental health care*. College of Health and Human Sciences.  
<https://chhs.source.colostate.edu/effective-holistic-approach-to-mental-health-care/>
- Katharina Star, P. D. (2021, May 7). *Emotional freedom technique (EFT) for panic and anxiety*. Very well Mind. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/emotional-freedom-technique-2584293>
- MA, W. by: H. H., & MD, R. by: L. B. (2022, May 5). *EFT tapping (emotional freedom technique): How it works, cost, & effectiveness*. Choosing Therapy.  
<https://www.choosingtherapy.com/eft-tapping/>
- Clond, M. (2016). Emotional freedom techniques for anxiety. *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease*, 204(5), 388–395. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nmd.0000000000000483>
- Nikola Djordjevic, M. D. (2022, February 8). *34 eye-opening Anxiety Statistics & Facts to know in 2022*. MedAlertHelp.org. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from  
<https://medalerthelp.org/blog/anxiety-statistics/>
- Bandelow, B., & Michaelis, S. (2015). Epidemiology of Anxiety Disorders in the 21st Century. *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, 17(3), 327–335.  
<https://doi.org/10.31887/dens.2015.17.3/bbandelow>
- Team, T. H. E. (2021, October 11). *What causes anxiety? Risk factors and more*. Healthline. Retrieved October 12, 2022, from <https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety-causes>

*The Tapping Solution Foundation.* The Tapping Solution Foundation - Tapping Solution Foundation - Promoting the healing effects of EFT tapping to people of all ages around the world. (n.d.). Retrieved October 20, 2022, from <https://www.tappingsolutionfoundation.org/>

Terlizzi, E. P., & Norris, T. (2021, October). *Mental health treatment among adults: United States, 2020*. www.cdc.gov. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db419.pdf>

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Covid-19 pandemic triggers 25% increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide*. World Health Organization. Retrieved October 10, 2022.