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# The Experience of Receiving Reiki: Results from a Large Scale Study

**LIVE WEBINAR**

**Friday August 19th  
12pm PT/3pm ET**



**with Dr. Natalie Dyer, PhD, Dr. Ann Baldwin, PhD, & Akleema Ali, BSc**

# OVERVIEW

- Background
- Methodology
- Results
- Implications and Future Directions
- Conclusion
- Q&A

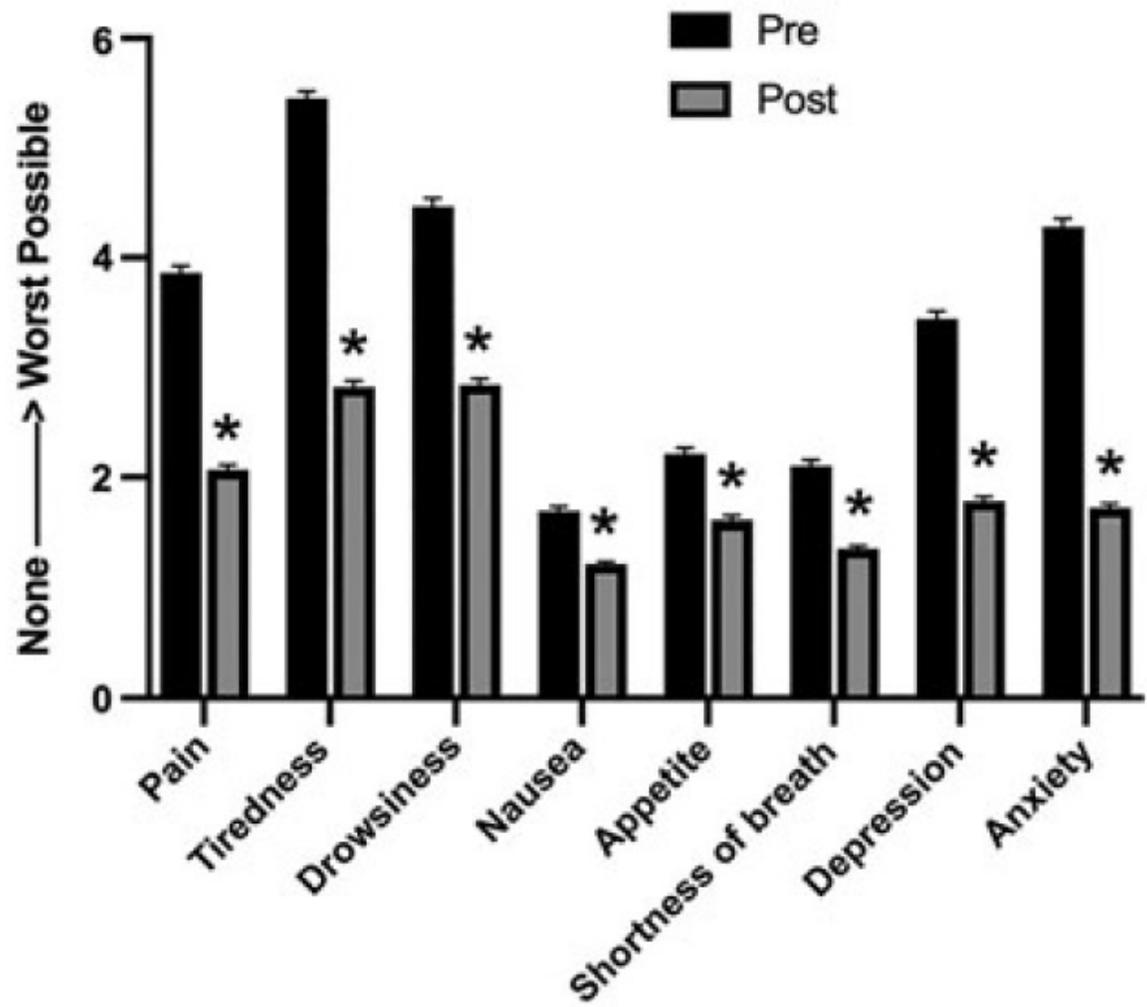
# BACKGROUND

- In addition to improvements in psychological and physical health, Reiki is also associated with a unique transformative subjective healing experience
- May guide research to the underlying mechanisms of Reiki's effectiveness
- Previous studies (5) of the Reiki experience contain only a small number of participants within specific clinical populations
- No study to date had examined the subjective experience of Reiki in a large nonclinical population, where Reiki often occurs

# METHODOLOGY

- This study was conducted as a collaboration between Harvard University and The Center for Reiki Research
- Qualitative aspect of a largescale pragmatic effectiveness trial which showed that a single session of Reiki improved psychological and physical health symptoms (Dyer et al., 2019)





# METHODOLOGY

- Study setting: Private Reiki practices across the United States
- Inclusion criteria: (1) certified licensed Reiki master, (2) an active Reiki practice for  $\geq 1$  year, (3) at least two 45–90min sessions per week, (4) Reiki is the only modality, (5) a computer available with internet
- Immediately after the Reiki session, Reiki clients were asked to: ***Please describe what you experienced during the session***
- Qualitative data analysis was conducted using a grounded theory approach



# RESULTS: DEMOGRAPHICS

- Of N = 1575 Reiki sessions conducted, N = 1284 provided responses (82%)
- 81% females (n = 1044) and 17% males (n = 218)
- The mean age was 49.2 (18 to 89)
- 83% were Caucasian or White, 7% Hispanic, 2% African American or Black, 1.9% Asian American, and 6% other or multiracial



# THEMES OF THE REIKI EXPERIENCE

Eight major themes were revealed:

- 1) Deep relaxation and calm
- 2) Body sensations/somatic experiences
- 3) Emotions
- 4) Spiritual/symbolic significance
- 5) Changes in symptoms
- 6) Changes in perception
- 7) Sleep and drowsiness
- 8) Changes to breathing



# 1) DEEP RELAXATION AND CALM

- 68% of sample
- Feelings or experiences with a sense of relaxation, peace, calm and stillness

“Powerful experience of receiving Reiki that has brought a sense of physical calm and peace with everything”

“Overwhelming sense of peace and calm”

“I am completely relaxed and feel 100% at ease and free in my mind”



## 2) BODY SENSATIONS/SOMATIC EXPERIENCES

- 53% of sample

3 minor themes:

### **Body Sensations**

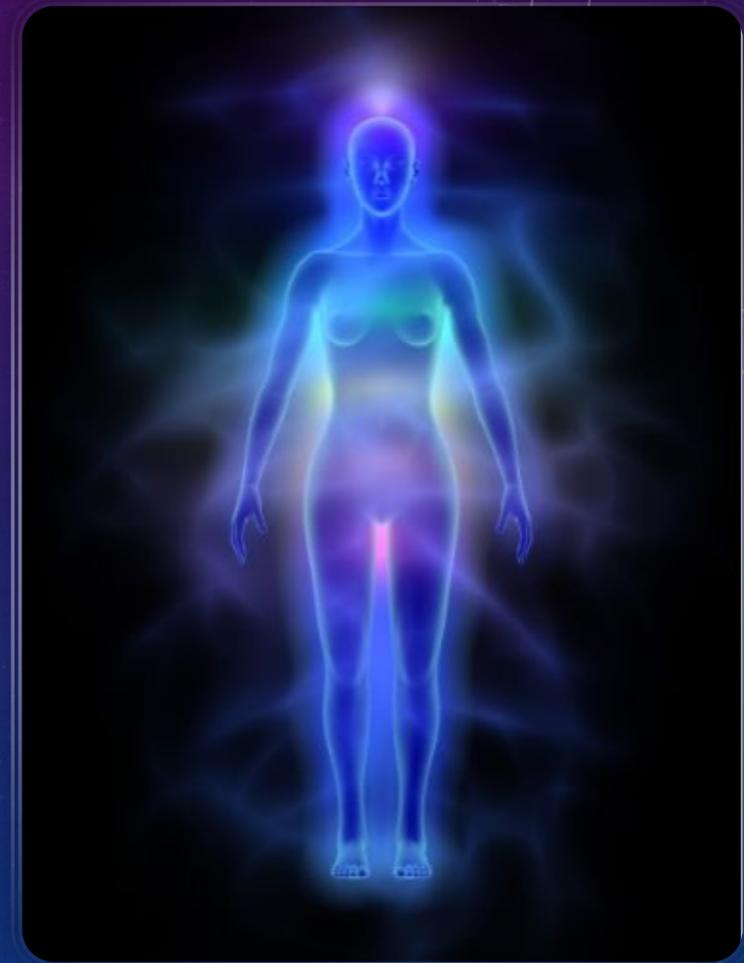
- Feelings or experiences with the physical body such as heat, pulsing, vibrations, twitching, tingles

### **Energy Sensations**

- Feelings or experiences of energy around the body, phantom hands

### **Floating, Lightness and Out of Body Experience (OBE)**

- Feelings or experiences such as floating, lightness, loss of sense of where body/parts are located

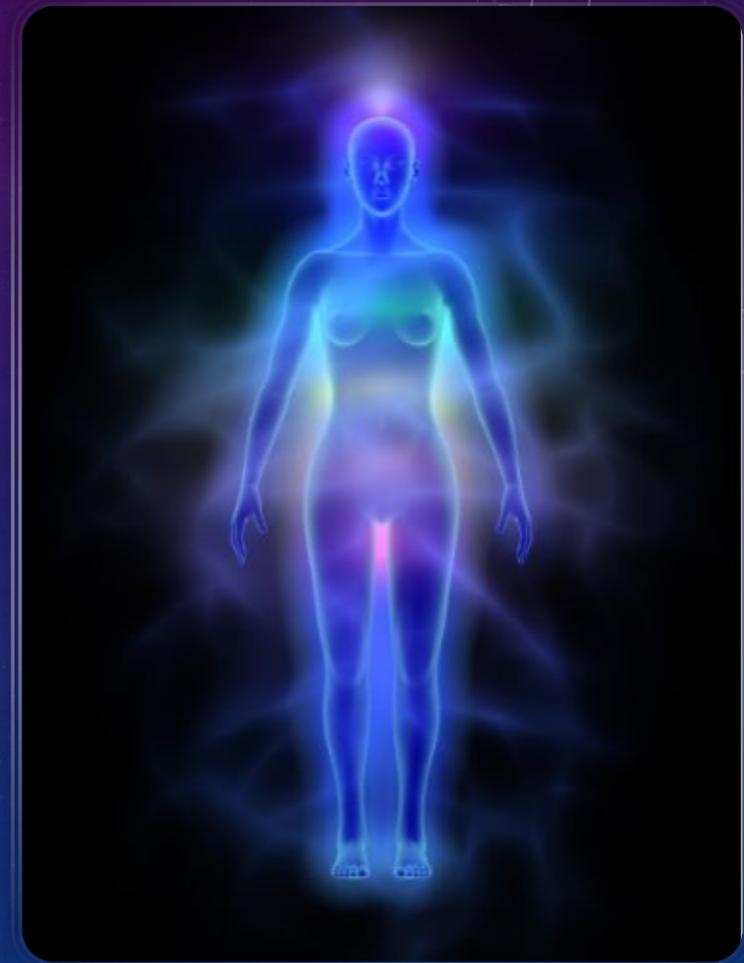


## 2) BODY SENSATIONS/SOMATIC EXPERIENCES

“A physical heat can be felt coming from the practitioner's hands. I can feel a sort of pressure and release, especially in the forehead.”

“At one point during the session, I was laying still with my eyes closed and felt warm pressure on my left arm. I thought the practitioner was holding my arm but, when I opened my eyes, she was on the opposite side of the table with both hands over my torso.”

“Ethereal, felt like I was floating above my body.”



### 3) EMOTIONS

- 29% of sample

3 minor themes:

#### **Positive Emotions**

- Emotions that are pleasant or desirable

#### **Negative Emotions**

- Emotions that are unpleasant and unwanted

#### **Emotional release and healing**

- Finding the root of issues and seeing how to heal them, sensation of something lifting that has been stored in the body



### 3) EMOTIONS

“I have a sense of gratitude, love and centeredness”

“Being able to find out what was the root of my emotional state and how to correct the bad energy that needed to be released”

“My tears flowed hot, searing into my skin like lava and yet, so ashamed of the tears, till I heard, it was good to let them flow, cleansing tears. I felt my soul shake, and then, finally, the tears stopped.”



## 4) SPIRITUAL/SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

- 18% of sample

5 minor themes:

**Journey and Visualizations** - Journeying to other places, travelling and seeing a story or movie being played out

**Inspiration** - Focused on the future, a realization of what to do next and getting new ideas

**Visitations** - Saw or felt deceased relatives, family members, or other beings

**Connection to Oneness and the Universe** - Feeling connected to source, oneness with everything and a sense of renewed faith

**Statement of Intention** - Directing the session towards a specific goal/aim



## 4) SPIRITUAL/SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

“I got a vision of walking in a peaceful setting somewhere in Japan, under a row of beautiful cherry blossom trees”

“Empowered to think about myself more and set my boundaries.”

“That is when Jesus appeared with a message, I felt tense and He said, ‘Do not worry, everything is ok. I am in charge of everything. Why do you ask me to help, when you continue worrying. You are always seeking for me and ask me where I am. And when I am in front of you, you do not recognize me. I am in each person that you see’”

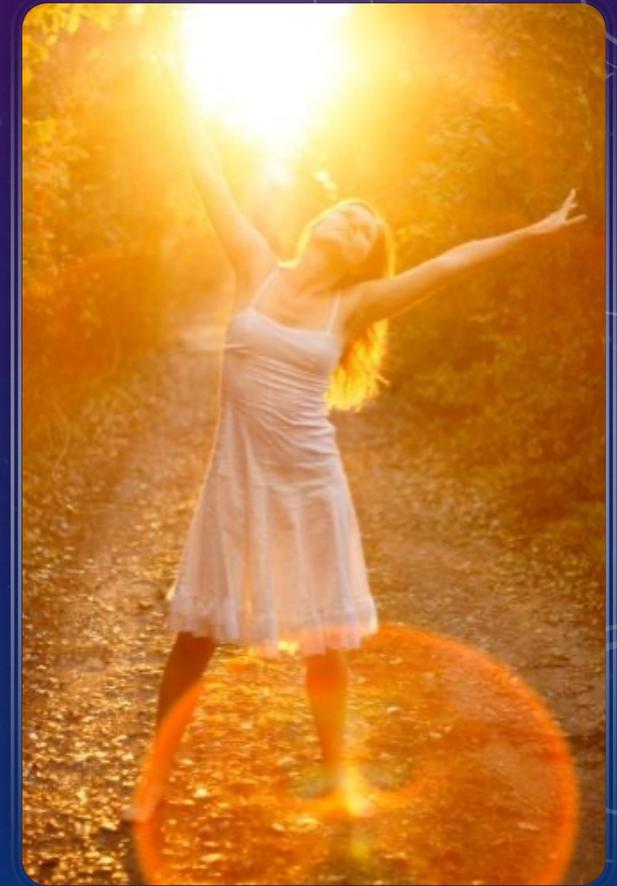


## 4) SPIRITUAL/SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE

“Connection with the Divine”

“Surrounded and held by something greater than I”

“My intention for the day was to cut loose people and relationships who do not respect my boundaries and to welcome those who do. I kept my mind on this intention and various relationships and people floated through my thoughts”



## 5) CHANGES IN SYMPTOMS

- 17% of sample

2 minor themes:

### **Reduced Symptoms (84%)**

- Symptoms that are lessened or minimized in size and intensity

### **Increased Symptoms (23%)**

- Symptoms that have been magnified and expanded in amount and intensity



## 5) CHANGES IN SYMPTOMS

“Pain in an area that I had surgery in quickly disappeared. A pain up my left hip when the foot was worked on again that disappeared. My brain fog is gone and sinus fluid drained during the process.”

“Blood pressure reading dropped from 146/89 to 134/64.”

“I asked to stop after about 1/2 of the total treatment time for today because of the pain associated with the spasms.”

“I do now have a really bad headache almost like a squeezing of my head inward.”



## 6) CHANGES IN PERCEPTION

- 11% of sample

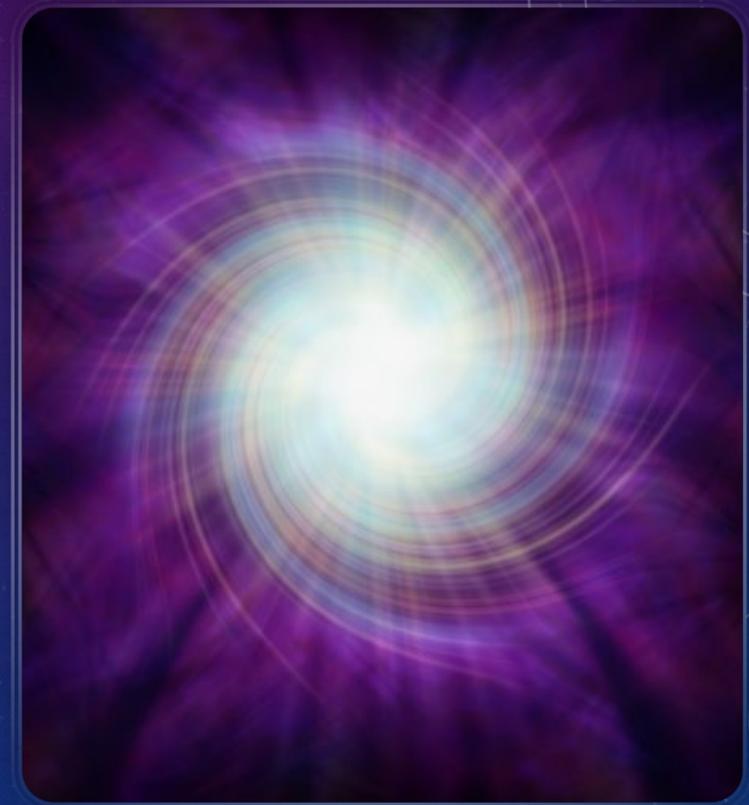
4 minor themes:

**Visual Perception** - Seeing colors, lights, auras

**Time Perception Changes** - Time going faster or slower than usual

**Auditory Perception** - Sounds heard (e.g., that were not in the room)

**Olfactory Perception** - Specific smell or odor identified during session



## 6) CHANGES IN PERCEPTION

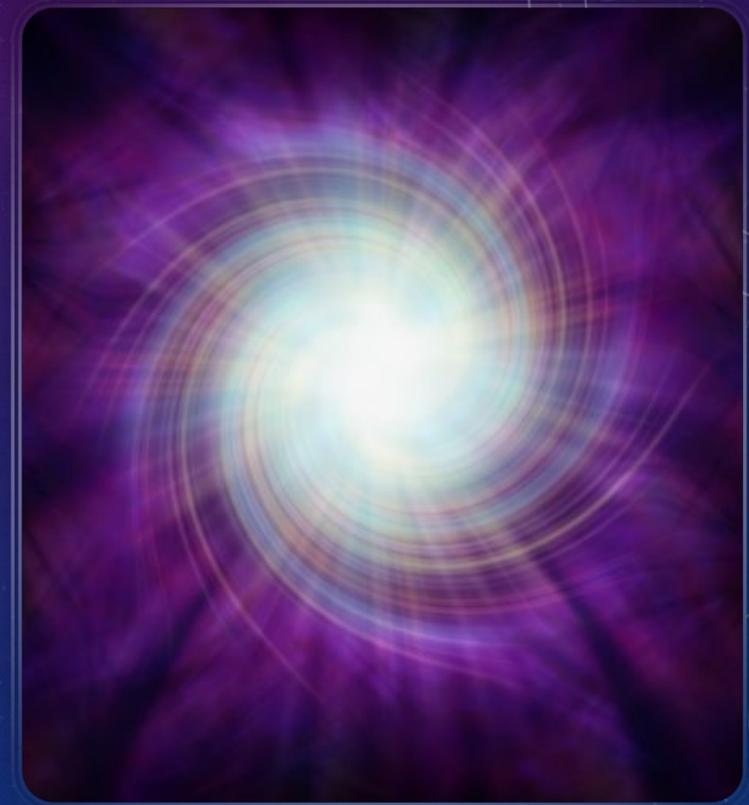
“At different moments there were bursts of color which moved across. Primarily yellow and white.”

“I saw purple color and yellow and a rainbow of lights while I had my eyes closed.”

“I feel like I was only on the table for about five to ten minutes but, in fact, was laying on the table for about forty-eight minutes.”

“When she first touched my head I heard a whirring, like a large turbine.”

“I also had an odd odor that came and left like a rotting smell.”



## 7) SLEEP AND DROWSINESS

- 10% of sample
- Sleep, drowsiness, inability to stay awake

“I know I fell asleep for a while.”

“I slept for a while during the treatment.”



## 8) CHANGES TO BREATHING

- 4% of sample

5 minor themes:

**Conscious/Focused Breathing** - Direction and awareness of the breath

**Difficulty/Shortness of Breath** - Difficult breathing

**Shallow/Low Breathing** - Shallow, low breathing

**Relaxed Deeper Breathing** - Deeper, calmer breathing

**Holding in Breath** - Keeping the air in and not exhaling



## 8) CHANGES TO BREATHING

“Focused on breathing in and out from belly”

“My breathing slowed down”

“Within 5 minutes of contact I could feel my body totally relax and ‘drift.’ Breathing rate decreased, heart rate decreased.”

“I became very aware of how much I hold my breath, braced for the next wave of fear, pain, worry, fatigue. I had to be prompted to breathe and again and again.”



# GENDER DIFFERENCES

- **Gender analysis with Mann-Whitney U test**
- Males reported more relaxation (76% vs 67%) and time perception changes (5% vs 1%).
- Females reported more body sensations (49% vs 31%), emotional release and healing (14% vs 8%), visual perceptions (10% vs 5%), and floating, lightness and OBEs (9% vs 5%).



# CORRELATIONS BETWEEN THEMES

- **Spearman correlations were calculated between each major theme**
- Highest correlations were between changes in perceptions and spiritual significance,  $r = .203$ ,  $p < 0.001$
- Deep relaxation and body sensations were negatively correlated,  $r = -.147$ ,  $p < 0.001$

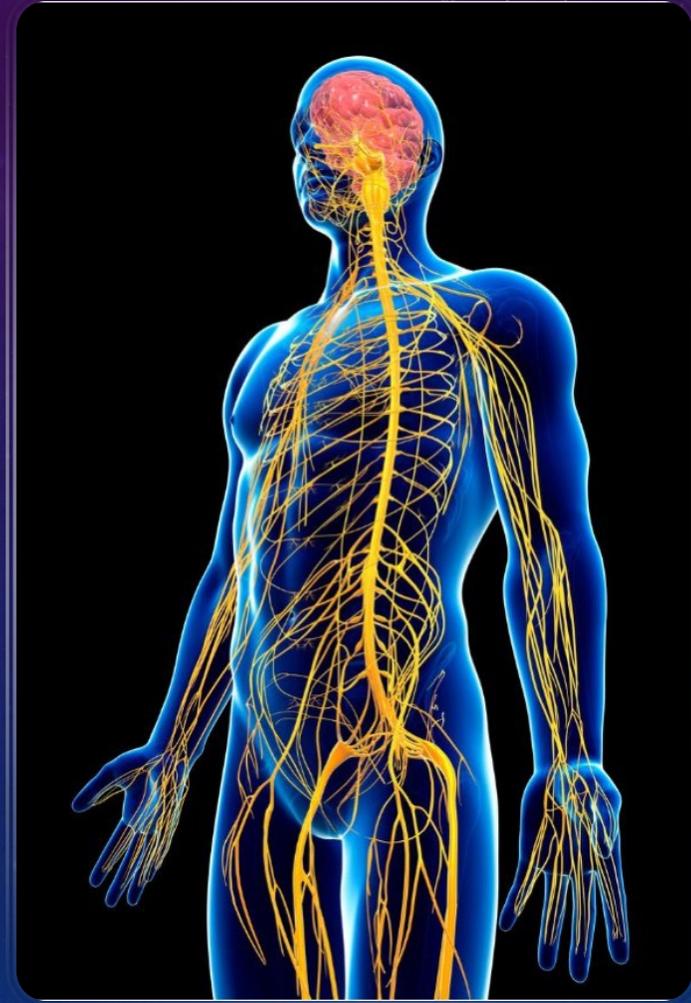
# SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- This was the first qualitative study of the subjective experience of Reiki in a large nonclinical population
- Eight major themes were discovered
- Males and females showed differences in the types of themes reported, though females wrote more text than males
- While some themes were correlated with each other, the strength of relationships between themes were low overall



# IMPLICATIONS

- The themes were similar to the few previous qualitative studies, comparable across clinical and nonclinical populations
- Reiki can elicit deep relaxation, improve emotions or release stored negative emotions, reduce symptoms, alter sensory perception, and bring clarity and meaning to one's life
- Reiki stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and leads to initiation of the relaxation response



# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Are different themes associated with changes in different symptoms? (i.e., potential mediating factors of Reiki's effectiveness)
- How does the experience of Reiki differ with sham Reiki or other biofield therapies?
- Does the subjective experience change over time with multiple sessions?



# CONCLUSIONS

- The findings from this qualitative study suggest that Reiki can elicit the relaxation response and alter emotions and perception in such a way as to facilitate a transformative subjective healing experience
- More work is needed to understand the association between the subjective experience, such as the emotional healing component, and health outcomes

# GRATITUDE

- We would like to thank the 99 Reiki Masters that contributed their Reiki practice and clients to this study
- We also would like to thank Corey Bippes for his assistance in recruiting the Reiki practitioners

