

# Visceral osteopathy: a cross-sectional study investigating utilisation, beliefs and reflections on evidence in Italian osteopaths

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**Background.** Justified by classical osteopathic principles that emphasise the need to treat the patient as a whole, visceral techniques are part of practical osteopathic practice. Compared to most musculoskeletal structures, visceral structures are often difficult to locate and diagnostic procedures have low reliability (Guillad et al., 2018). As with other manual approaches, there is little evidence of efficacy (Guillad et al., 2018; Switters et al., 2019). Biological mechanisms justifying their potential efficacy remain hypothetical (Horton, 2015). Nevertheless, they are used by most osteopaths (Alvarez et al., 2020; Cerritelli et al., 2020) Two studies have examined in detail the use of visceral techniques by Australian osteopaths (Fleischmann et al, 2020; Fleischmann et al, 2021) and attempted to identify enablers and inhibitors to their use. The aim of this study is to investigate the use of visceral osteopathy in a population of Italian osteopaths.

**Methods.** A survey was developed for the purpose. The type of approach (specific and non-specific) and the frequency of treating different organs/viscera according to the type of disease and the clinical reasoning used will be investigated. It will also examine the influence of the evidence supporting visceral osteopathy on the clinical practice of visceral osteopathy, both in the choice of treatment and in communication with the patient and other health professionals. Finally, it will examine the specific training course and attempt to identify the skills on which it has focused. The aim is to collect responses from the population of practising osteopaths in the coming months.

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