

# Research Progress of TCM Psychological Techniques in the Treatment of Clinical Depression

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**Abstract:** With the improvement of social productivity, social pressure is generally increasing. Depression caused by social factors is increasing day by day. Although Western antidepressant drugs have achieved clinical efficacy, they often have large side effects, poor group tolerance, and high recurrence rate. At present, the TCM concept has achieved remarkable results in the treatment of mental diseases. This article will review the research of various TCM psychological techniques in the treatment of clinical depression.

**Keywords:** TCM psychological technology; depression; ear electroacupuncture; low impedance thought imprint psychotherapy; chiropractic therapy; five elements music therapy

## 1. Introduction

Depression is a common emotional disorder of mental illness which seriously endangers physical and mental health. It is the result of biological, psychological and social factors. The common clinical manifestations of patients are: long-term sustained depression, pessimism, self-evaluation ability decreased; Often accompanied by anxiety symptoms, even hallucinations and delusions; Severe cases are more likely to commit suicide, resulting in serious negative social impacts [1]. At present, in Western medicine, antidepressants are often used clinically to control and alleviate the adverse emotional reactions of patients to a certain extent, but often due to large side effects, patients have psychological resistance, and due to the differences in the biological level of patient groups, the tolerance of various antidepressants needs to be improved. In addition, the clinical causes of depression are not the same, and the use of the same class of antidepressant drugs is often uneven. In line with the concept of "treating the same disease with different diseases, treating different diseases with the same", Chinese medicine has achieved remarkable results in the treatment and relief of clinical symptoms of depression. This article will review the research progress of various TCM psychological techniques used in the treatment of different types of depression, in order to provide reference for clinical treatment.

## 2. Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) Treatment of Depression Based on Modern Psychiatry

Traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes "syndrome differentiation and treatment", and the clinical syndrome differentiation of depression should focus on mental symptoms [2]. Depression is different from traditional physical diseases. It is a kind of mental disease with both physical and mental symptoms. The common mental symptoms of depression include long-term low mood and decreased interest; The accompanying physical symptoms commonly include sleep disorders, eating disorders, and slow thinking. Although mind-body integration, the improvement of physical symptoms can indeed ease the mental pain of patients to a certain extent, but if the physical symptoms as the core symptoms of depression for dialectical treatment, often only alleviate part of the physical symptoms, but if the patient's mood changes little, but will increase the recurrence of depression. Therefore, the traditional Chinese medicine treatment of depression in clinical practice takes the mental state of the patient as the core of syndrome differentiation and treatment, while taking into account the improvement of physical symptoms. The theory of traditional Chinese medicine states that the pathogenesis of depression is "Yang qi stagnation". Yang qi does not rise, the five gods are lost, so the mood is low and the interest is diminished. According to the different stages of the disease, the viscera can be located, which is usually most closely related to the liver, heart, spleen and kidney.

The theory of traditional Chinese medicine considers that the main cause of depression is the lack of mood and the stagnation of qi in the liver, and puts depression into the category of depression. However, current clinical trials have proved that if we blindly pay attention to the qi treatment of soothing liver and resolving depression, it may lead to the deterioration of some patients' conditions. According to the relevant theories of modern psychiatry, it can be subdivided into monophasic depression and bipolar depression. Different pathogenesis should be analyzed according to the different clinical manifestations and severity of the same disease, and different treatment plans should be proposed. Different from monophasic depression, the pathogenesis of bipolar depression is Yin deficiency and Yang hyperactivity. If the traditional treatment idea of soothing liver and relieving depression is adopted, it may further damage Yin and help Yang, leading to the deterioration of the disease. The "depression" category of traditional Chinese medicine is only applicable to mild depression, and soothing the liver can play a therapeutic effect, but the effect is not good for moderate and severe depression. Therefore, some scholars further proposed the pathogenesis of "kidney deficiency and liver depression" [3], and explored "warming kidney to relieve depression [4]" and "tonifying kidney to regulate qi" to treat patients with moderate and severe depression, and achieved certain results.

### 3. TCM Acupuncture Technique to Treat Depression

#### 3.1 Ear Electroacupuncture Technology

At present, antidepressants are still the first choice for first-line antidepressant treatment, and selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI), monoamine oxidase inhibitors, tricyclic and atypical antidepressants are commonly used. However, due to the complex etiology of depression, about 30% of patients still have no significant improvement in their condition under drug treatment, so this kind of disease is called refractory depression (TRD) [5]. For such patients with major depression, antidepressant drugs not only have great side effects, but also have delayed effect and poor efficacy [6].

It has been proved that the application of auricular electroacupuncture technology can effectively treat depression, and its principle of action is to stimulate the ear vagus nerve, so as to play a therapeutic effect [7-9]. One of the methods of Vagus Nerve Stimulation (VNS) is invasive Vagus Nerve Stimulation (i VNS), but this method is invasive Vagus nerve stimulation (I VNS), which is costly and has some limitations. The other is to stimulate the vagus nerve by stimulating the auricular branch of vagus nerve (ABVN), which is called noninvasive transepidermal vagus nerve stimulation and is a new noninvasive physical therapy [10]. Studies have proved that electroacupuncture combined with SSRIs has the best curative effect after 6 weeks in individuals with moderate and mild depression [11]. For refractory depression (TRD), clinical studies have reported that auricular electroacupuncture (taVNS) combined with basic drugs (SSRIs) has achieved initial efficacy in the treatment of TRD [12]. Auricular electroacupuncture technology can effectively control the clinical symptoms of patients with major depression without significant side effects, and has better efficacy than traditional in vitro acupuncture technology. The effectiveness of traditional antidepressant drugs (such as SSRIs) alone is slow in dealing with TRD cases [13, 14], and the combination of electroauricular acupuncture can significantly shorten the time of drug onset [15].

In addition, one of the reasons why auricular electroacupuncture technology (taVNS) has a significant effect on the treatment of TRD is that it can effectively relieve the common co-occurring symptoms of TRD patients, such as anxiety, insomnia, and confusion. Among them, anxiety symptoms may be one of the reasons for the evolution of moderate and mild depression into treatment-resistant depression [16]. Insomnia is also one of the risk factors for recurrent depression, and the duration and cycle shortening of rapid eye movement (REM), one of the biological indicators of major depression in TRD patients, is positively correlated with the degree of individual depression [17].

#### 3.2 Electroacupuncture Combined with Escitalopram Oxalate

Women in perimenopause due to their own autonomic nervous system disorders, endocrine disorders, often lead to different degrees of depression. At present, the more common treatment of perimenopausal depression is the use of antidepressant drugs combined with psychotherapy. As a highly selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor, escitalopram has the dual effect of anti-depression and anxiety, but the efficacy of escitalopram on post-menopausal depressed individuals is different, and patients have resistance to drug treatment due to their poor tolerance to the drug [18].

Traditional Chinese medicine classifies perimenopausal depression into the categories of "depression" and "symptoms before and after menopause" [19], and believes that its onset is closely related to liver, heart and kidney. Studies have shown that one of the important reasons for the onset of perimenopausal depression is the imbalance of the adjustment function of the liver, heart and kidney to the seven emotions. The acupuncture technique of traditional Chinese medicine has fewer adverse reactions in the treatment of mental diseases and has definite curative effect. The head is the shrewd house, so the operation of the various organs of the human body is closely related to the head. There are relevant clinical studies on acupuncture at Baihui, Sishencong, Shenting and other acupoints [20], supplemented by low-pulse current to enhance acupoint stimulation, which can play a role in regulating and regulating the governor, calming the heart and soothing the liver. The principle is that acupuncture can regulate the neuroendocrine function and the levels of related hormones and transmitters to a certain extent, thereby improving the concurrent symptoms of depression such as insomnia and anxiety, and improving the cognitive function of patients [21]. Therefore, electroacupuncture therapy of traditional Chinese medicine combined with escitalopram oxalate can improve the clinical symptoms of perimenopausal depression patients as a whole, such as anxiety and depression, insomnia, physical disorders, etc., so as to achieve a good therapeutic effect.

#### **4. The mechanism of TCM compound treatment of depression**

##### **4.1 Xiaoyao SAN**

Compound Xiaoyao Powder is composed of drugs for soothing liver and strengthening spleen. It is a classic prescription for soothing liver and relieving depression. Its antidepressant effect has been widely concerned at home and abroad. TCM compounds have the advantages and characteristics of multi-target, multi-link and multi-system treatment. The reason why Xiaoyao Powder can play a significant effect in the treatment of depression is that its mechanism of action has something in common with the mechanism of glucose metabolism imbalance in depression in modern medicine [22]. In the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, the liver regulates emotion, the spleen regulates energy metabolism, and the two storage systems of liver and spleen are mutually pathological. The biological connotation is the imbalance of emotion-energy network. Modern medical hypotheses on the pathogenesis of depression include monoamine transmitters, neuroendocrine, neuroimmunity, HPA axis, energy metabolism and so on. Since depression often co-occurs with diabetes, more and more studies have focused on the role of glucose metabolism in the pathogenesis of depression. In fact, glucose supply is involved in the process of neurotransmitter synthesis and neurotransmission. When the central glucose metabolism is disturbed and insulin sensitivity is decreased, it will lead to changes in brain structure and function, leading to depression. In traditional Chinese medicine, the main liver is catharsis, and the clinical symptoms of depression are similar to those of mood disturbance caused by liver dysfunction. The spleen carries out the transformation of matter and energy [23], and glucose is one of the most important energy sources in the body. Among the fine substances produced and transported by the spleen, glucose is the most important material component. Therefore, the compound Xiaoyao Powder plays a role in the two diseases of "liver depression" and "spleen deficiency", alleviates depression by "soothing the liver", and maintains the balance of energy metabolism by "strengthening the spleen", which conforms to the imbalance mechanism of glucose metabolism in the pathogenesis of depression.

##### **4.2 Pinggan Jieyu Decoction**

Postpartum depression is a mental illness caused by the mutation of hormone levels in pregnant women, the change of family role and the lack of parenting experience. Traditional Chinese medicine classifies postpartum depression into the categories of "depression" and "viscera-mania". Aiming at the deficiency of heart and spleen, stagnation of liver qi and stasis of blood stasis after delivery, it adopts the principle of soothing liver depression and removing blood stasis to tonifying spleen [24]. Studies have shown that on the basis of psychological treatment, Pinggan Jieyu decoction can effectively relieve the anxiety of postpartum depression patients and improve the treatment effect of depression. The endocrine disorder caused by the imbalance of estrogen and progesterone levels during pregnancy is the main cause of postpartum depression [25]. In addition, inhibition of gonadotropin by prolactin may also indirectly lead to postpartum depression [26]. Pinggan Jieyu Decoction can effectively regulate the disorder of various related hormone levels in patients, so as to improve the clinical symptoms of postpartum depression patients.

## 5. Other TCM Psychological Techniques

### 5.1 Low Impedance Thought Imprint Psychotherapy (TIP Therapy)

Thought Imprint Psychotherapy (TIP) is based on the theory of low impedance psychotherapy and the theory of ideation psychotherapy. In a state of low impedance, patients introduce certain "ideas" formed by the healer according to the therapeutic needs into the treated, and make the treated accept the implanted information. In the brain, a certain "environment" that meets the needs of treatment is formed, thus further affecting the memory and implicit cognition of the treated [27]. Research results show that TIP technology using regenerative therapy technology has better clinical efficacy in treating depression than western medicine group and acupuncture group [28]. Because TIP technology, combined with re-growth technology, induces patients to suggest themselves through the imported information module, changes the personality susceptibility caused by abnormal development, and improves personality development, this treatment technology can promote the long-term maintenance of curative effect and reduce the recurrence rate of depression, which is better than the clinical treatment effect of Western classic cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

### 5.2 Chiropractic Therapy

Chiropractic method of traditional Chinese medicine has the effect of balancing Yin and Yang, relaxing the meridian and activating the collaterality, invigorating qi and benefiting blood, and is often used to assist the treatment of depression accompanied by sleep disorders. Studies have shown that chiropractic therapy combined with the serotonin reuptake inhibitor escitalopram can effectively improve patients' depressive mood and sleep quality [29].

### 5.3 Five Elements Music Therapy

Five elements music therapy is based on the theory of Yin and Yang and five elements of traditional Chinese medicine and the corresponding five tones, using five different tones of horn, Zheng, Gong, Shang and Yu to treat diseases. The five tones belong to the five elements: wood, fire, earth, gold, and water to the liver, heart, spleen, lung, and kidney. According to the relationship between Zang-fu organs, meridians combined with Yin-yang and five elements, the corresponding music was selected to treat the patient. According to the five tunes of music, they belong to the five elements, and the five elements match the five viscera, so as to realize the dialectical treatment of traditional music. In the study of five elements music therapy for postpartum depression, music therapy can be performed according to different times. At the same time, different styles of music can also be selected for treatment according to different constitutions, such as Wenqu treatment for those with partial Yang and Wuqu treatment for those with partial Yin. Research results show that five-element music therapy can effectively alleviate the anxiety and depression of postpartum depression patients [30].

## 6. Conclusion

TCM psychological technology is based on the principle of syndrome differentiation and treatment, in the treatment of different types of depression, in line with the principle of soothing the liver and strengthening the spleen, TCM compounds such as Xiaoyao powder, Pinggan Jieyu Decoction, etc. Acupuncture treatment and chiropractic treatment were carried out on the basis of combining with Western medicine to improve and enhance the curative effect of drug treatment. In addition, combined with the growth therapy technology of low-impedance ideation therapy, five elements music therapy and other traditional Chinese psychological treatment methods in the clinical treatment of depression has also achieved significant results. But at the same time, researchers should also realize that the causes of depression are complex and diverse, and should continue to explore, study and innovate with The Times of TCM psychotherapy technology, in order to obtain more stable curative effect and reduce the recurrence rate of depression.

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