

Sleep Potions: Brew Your Sleeps with Psychology and TCM

Introduction + Objectives

Under the highly stressed society in Hong Kong, the latest research studying insomnia among Hong Kong college students was done in 2010, presenting that up to nearly 60% of interviewed university students were insomniacs (Sing & Wong, 2010).

Common insomnia treatments like CBT-I, although shown to improve the sleeping time by 8 minutes, it seems that it is not practically significant (Trauer et al., 2015).

For hypnotics, although multiple researches show hypnotic medication is effective in coping with insomnia, patients easily become dependent on drugs. Moreover, it is also shown that patients may develop endurance to the drugs and insomnia may rebound more severely once medications for a certain period; it is not suitable for users like the elderly, children and pregnant women (尤, 2019).

Therefore, this proposal is going to look into insomnia from a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) perspective and provide ways other than Western medicine. I am going to talk about how students with insomnia can improve their sleeping conditions, by using lifestyle medicine, changing diets and drinking self-made herbal tea. The objective is to allow university students to improve their sleeping issues through self-help, by using CBT and changing diet, through altering small parts of life.

How do psychology and TCM understand insomnia?

Psychology

According to DSM-5, insomnia disorder is defined as below:

“A. A predominant complaint of dissatisfaction with sleep quantity or quality, associated with one (or more) of the following symptoms:

1. Difficulty initiating sleep. (In children, this may manifest as difficulty initiating sleep without caregiver intervention.)
2. Difficulty maintaining sleep, characterised by frequent awakenings or problems returning to sleep after awakenings. (In children, this may manifest as difficulty returning to sleep without caregiver intervention.)
3. Early-morning awakening with inability to return to sleep.

D. The sleep difficulty is present for at least 3 months.”

(National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2016)

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

The pathological principle explained by TCM is the deficiency and imbalance among the yin(陰) and yang(陽), qi(氣) and blood(血), more specific situations are listed such as qi-stagnation of the liver (肝鬱), yin deficiency causing hyperactivity of fire(陰虛火旺) and weakness of spleen and kidney(脾腎虧虛). TCM also agrees that psychological states and physiological conditions are mutually affecting each other so if psychological treatment like CBT-I is to deal with psychological state, TCM is to adjust the body condition. Insomnia is divided into two types, yin deficiency(陰虛) and yang excess (實熱). Deficiency refers to the lack of yin, causing yang not resting in yin, causing the patient to maintain an active state even at night, explaining why one cannot sleep; as for yang-excess, it is too much yang stuck to the qi and fluid(津液) (尤, 2019). The former should be healed with CBT-based or diet-therapy-based strategies, complemented with TCM medication; the latter should apply the opposite strategies (尤, 2019).

Proposed Solution

The program will combine both psychological treatment and TCM treatment, in order to achieve a more effective and comprehensive method of coping insomnia among college students. The project will be divided into three parts in total, which are education and promotion, pop-up event booth, and data collection.

Education and Promotion

To promote sleeping education and related coping methods, an IG page will be created. The goal is to provide simple knowledge of insomnia, CBT and other effective psychological treatments, and TCM treatments which include acupuncture and herbal tea recipes. Not only to raise awareness of sleeping problems but also to build a platform for people to get in touch with more about psychology and TCM. The page can slowly develop into one talking about things more than insomnia.

The IG page will be run by 1 psychology student and 1 Chinese Medicine (CMed)

student, posts will be updated 2-3 times a week. It is also encouraged that posts and stories can be diversely presented, including memes, videos and reels, to match college students' preferences. For psychology, it can be about insomnia, behavioural and psychological treatment such as CBT-I, stimulus control and sleep restriction (Morin et al., 2023), including treatment details and demonstration video if applicable. For TCM treatment, both the mechanisms and simple solutions will be introduced.

For instance, those whose liver of which the qi is stagnated, normally can be identified by features like being easily irritated, feeling bitter in the mouth and the tongue rather red (Eu Yan Sang Premier Chinese Medicine Center, n.d.). and we can use chrysanthemum tea or spine date seed congee(酸棗仁粥) to reduce the excessive yang and smoothen the qi circulation(尤, 2019).

Posters will also be created to promote the knowledge once a month and activity details of the other event, which is the pop-up booth, will be promoted.

Pop-up booth event

A pop-up booth will be placed in CU, venues could be in front of YIA and Pommerenke Student Centre. Activities include free TCM consultation(問診) conducted by Chinese Medicine practitioner volunteers and psychological well-being practitioners answering students' questions. Free herbal tea packages will be distributed on spots according to the body conditions examined by the TCM practitioners and reminders of the tea will also be sent out, an example is attached in the appendix.

Food like longan barley congee (桂圓薏仁粥), celery and lily bulb soup (百合芹菜湯) and chrysanthemum tea will be distributed as free samples. All passer-by can try and taste the food and include these healthy food into their daily life diet.

PWP and psychology student helpers could also help students to customize their own sleep management plans and allow students to try out ways to improve their sleeping conditions.

Data collection

Students will be asked to fill out a Google form regarding their sleeping qualities and past history of insomnia before attending the TCM consultation or PWP consultation. After that, students may receive the service and we will try to keep track of the progress by sending emails and Google forms to the students every 2 weeks. The form includes questions like the change they have in lifestyle, the change in their sleeping qualities, both physiological and psychological wellbeing and etc.

Not only can this maintain and facilitate the medical history and follow-up that can be done accordingly, but it can also help us collect data in analysing whether the combination of TCM and psychology is effective. Although this may not be reliable data, it provides us with some insights and referencing ideas into whether the two areas can be researched more and even develop a service link between the two.

Students will be kept track of every 2 weeks, continuing for 3 months and HKD 200 dollars will be rewarded for completing all the forms sent throughout these 3 months.

Expected Outcomes

Students should raise their awareness and knowledge about insomnia, and understanding the importance of maintaining a healthy body is equally essential to maintaining a healthy mind and the fact that the two factors mutually influence each other. More insights and investigations can be drawn on the possibility in collaborating and researching on Psychology and TCM can be developed in the future.

Features and Potential Benefits

Uniqueness

Combining TCM and psychology is not a common service pattern that can be seen in Hong Kong, and unlike China, no systematic research is done regarding this area in HK as well. Breaking the rigid and stereotypical idea of seeking medical help in either

TCM or psychological is a breakthrough in this proposal and it is hoped that students can raise awareness in more of their lifestyle and how body and mind interact with each other.

Feasibility and Practicum opportunity

The most concerning part of this project is probably the booth as practitioners need to be recruited for service. It is highly feasible as a similar TCM service has been done in SHHO college during their communal dining, and the event went well, benefiting both college staff and students, and the CMed students who attend the section near the practitioners. Adapting such service into campus setting can be more challenging yet the benefits and potentials are appreciable too.

Timeline

| | |
|---------|---|
| Phase 1 | Contact CMed department for collaborations Prepare materials, recruit student helpers and volunteers |
| Phase 2 | Finalise materials (IG posts, recipes and herbal tea bag) |
| Phase 3 | Buy and pack herbal tea ingredients, IG page start |
| Phase 4 | Poster and booth |

Budget

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| Student helper fee | \$5000 |
| Ingredients | \$6000 |
| Tea bag | \$300 |
| Others (printing fee, venue, etc.) | \$2000 |
| Total | \$13300 |

Challenges and Solutions

It can be challenging and time-consuming to get support from the Chinese Medicine Department as this is unprecedented, and it can be solved by working with the committee that organized the Chinese Medicine communal in SHHO, of which has more experience in planning and seeking volunteering TCM practitioners. More TCM student helpers can be recruited to help run the events.

Another possible challenge is that people may need to wait for a long period of time to receive TCM consultations, which could be discouraging. To tackle such a problem, more sessions can be added and held in every college as a mobile booth. This could increase the accessibility and convenience of the service, it also act as a natural promoting strategy.

CUHK PSY @ 2024

Reference List

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Appendix I: Herbal tea formula extracted for reference

| 編號 | 組成 | 功效 |
|----|-------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | 素馨花 5 克，石斛花 5 克，金盞菊 5 克 | 疏肝解鬱，清肝明目 |
| 2 | 黨參 5 克，枸杞 5 克，圓肉 5 克 | 補中益氣，養肝明目 |
| 3 | 菊花 5 克，茉莉花 5 克，薄荷 5 克 | 清熱明目，利咽生津 |
| 4 | 山楂 5 克，玫瑰花 5 克，洛神花 5 克 | 消食健胃，理氣美顏 |
| 5 | 淮小麥 6 克，炙甘草 5 克，大棗 9 克 | 養心安神，健脾益氣 |

Appendix II: Reminder for drinking herbal tea reference

【飲用花茶前注意事項】

Cautions about Drinking the Herbal Tea

- 請在 2024 年 3 月 1 日或之前服用此花茶，逾期勿服。
Please drink the herbal tea by March 1, 2024.
- 用熱水浸泡花茶茶包十至十五分鐘即可飲用，請勿直接食用茶包的內容物。
Before drinking, immerse the herbal tea bag in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes. Do not eat the ingredients directly.
- 請將花茶茶包放在陰涼處，避免陽光直射和蟲蝕。
Please store the herbal tea bag in a cool and dry environment. Avoid direct sunlight and potential insect damage if possible.
- 每日只可服用一個茶包，若第二日應用則需更替一個新的茶包。
Only one herbal tea bag should be used per day and mustn't be reused the next day.
- 孕婦、糖尿病患者、服用藥物人士、即將手術者請勿飲用花茶。
Please avoid drinking herbal tea if you are pregnant, diagnosed with diabetes, on medication, or about to undergo surgery.
- 請勿轉讓花茶予他人飲用，因應體質不同可能導致不適。
Please do not share the herbal tea with others, as it may cause discomfort due to differences in individual constitutions.
- 如服用後出現任何不適，請立即停止服用，並儘早向中醫師尋求醫療協助。
If any discomfort occurs after drinking the herbal tea, please stop taking it immediately and seek medical assistance from a Chinese medicine practitioner as soon as possible.