

**ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN HEALING: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

Natural healing process is vital for maintenance of health in all life forms. Recent studies have generated evidences regarding the connections between psychological factors and susceptibility to injury or wounds & the healing process. Immunity is associated with the psychological status which gets regulated by pro inflammatory mediators. In this context Ayurveda, the ancient medical science of Indian sub-continent has described emotional well-being & status as vital player in the process of healing and maintenance of health at large. Ayurveda has assigned much importance to emotional states of a individual by describing its importance in causation of any disease pathology and simultaneously emphasizing emotional regulation as treatment modality also. This article attempts to emphasize the connections between *harsha* an emotional state of satisfaction/happiness and the process of wound healing.

Keywords: Ayurveda, *harsha*, healing, inflammatory mediators

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade it has become clear that stress can significantly slow wound healing. Considerable insight has been gained into mechanisms underlying the effects of stress on healing. Stressors ranging in magnitude and duration impair healing in humans and animals. In humans, both the chronic stress and relatively brief stress impedes healing. Similarly, restraint stress slows healing in mice. The interactive effects of glucocorticoids (e.g. cortisol and corticosterone) and pro-inflammatory cytokines (e.g. interleukin- 1, IL-1 , IL-6, IL-8, and tumor necrosis factor) are primary physiological mechanisms underlying the stress and healing connection. The effects of stress on healing have important implications in the context of surgery and naturally occurring wounds, particularly among at-risk and chronically ill populations. In research with clinical populations, greater attention to measurement of health behaviors is needed to better separate behavioral versus direct physiological effects of stress on healing.¹ The skin is the body's largest organ and primary immune defense, preventing bacteria, viruses and other exogenous antigens from entering² and limiting the movement of water in and out of the body³. As such, the skin's ability to heal wounds quickly and effectively is essential to good health. We now know that stress can slow the rate of wound healing. This has significant implications in the context of surgery and the healing of naturally occurring wounds.

Ayurveda the ancient medical science practiced in the Indian sub continent since 3500 years has a holistic approach in understanding biological phenomenon and proposed novel translational solutions. *Sushruta Samhita* describes *Shoka* (grief) as a major psychological affliction and

advocates for *Harsha* (feeling of satisfied/happiness) as a mean to alleviating the affliction. Many disease conditions are enlisted where psychological factors are evident to influence the biological mechanisms. This article attempts to analyze the contextual references for clear understanding of the phenomenon.

Descriptions of psychological factors (*Harsha*) in context of healing in *Sushruta Samhita*.

1. Psychological factors defined as *Shalya*⁴

“*Shalya*” the term is defined as which afflicts the body & mind. It proposes that psychosomatic congruence is the key factor which needs to be considered while deciding the treatment modalities. Further it is said that mind has also its own *shalya* which affects its functioning. Thus *yantra* is defined accordingly which is the means to extract or root out the *shalya* (cause of affliction)

2. Describing *Harsha* as an instrument/means to annihilate psychological afflictions⁵

“*Harsha*” has been described as a “*Upayantra*” which is meant for annihilating the *Shalya* (afflicting mind & in turn affecting body also).

3. Defining *Harsha* as Satisfaction or Happiness⁶

While enumerating *Harsha* as one of the *Upayantra* to annihilate mental affliction/torment *dalhana* says that *harsha* means *tushti* or satisfaction or being happy with current circumstances/surroundings.

4. *Shoka* (grief) as *Shalya*⁷

Specifically *Shoka* (grief) is described as *Shalya*, which emphasizes profound deleterious psychosomatic effect of grief.

Grief is to be countered with *harsha* which will help to restore normalcy & harmony towards health

5. Diet for psychological modulation⁸

Mamsa is described to exert *harshana*. It means *Harsha* & *utsaaha* are generated when psychosomatically when *mamsa* is administered properly.

6. Taste for psychological modulation⁹

Madhura rasa exerts *Pushiti* (nourishment) *Utsaha* (enthusiasm) and *Harsha* and the opposing features are observed when antagonistic *rasa* (tastes) are administered.

7. Harsha (happiness) as a mean to pacify Shoka (grief) in heart¹⁰

Sushruta samhita has enlisted *Harsha* as a potential mean to alleviate *Shoka* (grief) which leads to restoration of normal health.

Discussion

It is evident from the descriptions that Ayurveda advocates for a holistic view considering psychological status as factors influencing health and also plays vital role in psychosomatic disease conditions & subsequent healing processes. The very definition of *Shalya* incorporates mental afflictions, which validate its importance and while describing the means / techniques for alleviating the *shalya*, Psychological factors are credited.

Shoka (Grief) has been depicted as *Shalya* which affects heart, the seat of emotions and creates adverse conditions for healing. Thus *Harsha* has been described as means to root out the grief and re-establish the conducive environment for health & harmony. Diet & its taste are said to be means for modulating the emotional status of an individual. *Mamsa* & *Madhura Rasa* are described to generate *Harsha* & *Utsaha* which would help to enhance *bala* (strength/immunity) and accelerate the healing process.

Current biological understanding of psychological factors and healing process has uncovered many intermediate metabolites which are linked to the immunology. These corroborate the fact that psychological status has a definite role to play in health maintenance and healing process. Proper sleep, diet, exercise & social interactions are vital aspects to regulate proper emotional balance and their modulation can be used as intervention in diseased conditions.

Conclusion

Over past decades Psychology & Immunology has been addressed jointly to reveal newer connections in health & psychosomatic healing. *Ayurveda* has provided operational network for understanding the interconnections between psychological & immunological aspects of health & healing process. Thus it is necessary to carry out further studies to objectively quantify the psychological factors in healing process and translate them into clinical practice.

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