

Efficacy of Homeopathic Medicines in Depressive Disorders: A Retrospective Observational Study

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Abstract

Background: Depressive disorders are among the leading causes of disability worldwide, significantly impacting individuals' quality of life. Conventional treatments, including antidepressants and psychotherapy, are effective but often associated with side effects and limitations. Homeopathy, a holistic system of medicine, offers individualized treatment approaches that may provide benefits with fewer adverse effects.

Objective: This retrospective study aims to evaluate the efficacy of individualized homeopathic treatment in patients diagnosed with depressive disorders.

Materials and Methods: Medical records of 70 patients aged 18–60 years, diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) or Dysthymia, and treated with homeopathy for at least three months between January 2020 and December 2024 were reviewed. The Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS) was used to assess depression severity before and after treatment. Statistical analysis was performed using paired t-tests.

Results: The mean HDRS score significantly decreased from 24.5 ± 4.3 at baseline to 12.3 ± 3.7 after three months of homeopathic treatment ($P < 0.001$). Commonly prescribed remedies included Natrum muriaticum ($n = 22$), Ignatia amara ($n = 18$), Aurum metallicum ($n = 16$), and Sepia officinalis ($n = 14$).

Conclusion: Individualized homeopathic treatment was associated with significant improvement in depressive symptoms, suggesting its potential as a complementary therapy in managing depressive disorders. Further randomized controlled trials are warranted to substantiate these findings.

Keywords: Homeopathy, Depression, Major Depressive Disorder, Hamilton Depression Rating Scale

Introduction

Depression is a pervasive mental health disorder characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest or pleasure in daily activities, and a range of cognitive and physical symptoms. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), depression affects more than 264 million people globally and is a leading cause of disability worldwide [1]. The burden of depression extends beyond individual suffering, contributing to significant economic costs due to lost productivity and increased healthcare utilization [2].

Conventional treatments for depression primarily include pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy. While these interventions are effective for many, they are not without limitations. Antidepressant medications can be associated with side effects such as weight gain, sexual dysfunction, and gastrointestinal disturbances, leading to issues with adherence [3]. Psychotherapeutic approaches, though beneficial, may not be accessible to all due to factors like cost, availability of trained professionals, and social stigma.

In this context, complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modalities have garnered attention for their potential role in managing depressive disorders [4]. Homeopathy, a system of medicine developed in the late 18th century by Samuel Hahnemann, operates on the principle of “like cures like,” wherein substances that produce symptoms in healthy individuals are used in diluted forms to treat similar symptoms in the sick [5]. Homeopathic remedies are prepared through serial dilution and succussion, a process believed to enhance the therapeutic properties of the original substance.

The individualized nature of homeopathic treatment, which considers the patient's physical, emotional, and psychological state, aligns with the holistic approach often advocated in mental health care. Several studies have explored the efficacy

of homeopathy in treating depression [6]. For instance, a randomized controlled trial (RCT) found that individualized homeopathic treatment was comparable to fluoxetine in efficacy and had fewer side effects. Another study demonstrated significant improvement in depression scores among patients receiving homeopathic care [7].

Despite these findings, the scientific community remains divided on the efficacy of homeopathy. Critics argue that the high dilutions used in homeopathic remedies render them indistinguishable from placebos, and systematic reviews have highlighted the need for more rigorous, high-quality studies to substantiate claims of efficacy [8].

Given the ongoing debate and the need for alternative treatment options for depression, this retrospective observational study aims to evaluate the efficacy of individualized homeopathic treatment in patients diagnosed with depressive disorders. By analyzing patient records and assessing changes in depression severity using the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS), this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of evidence on the role of homeopathy in managing depression [9].

Objective

To assess the efficacy of individualized homeopathic medicines in reducing depressive symptoms, as measured by the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (HDRS), in patients with Major Depressive Disorder and Dysthymia.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A retrospective observational study was conducted at a homeopathic clinic in India, reviewing patient records from January 2020 to December 2024.

Inclusion Criteria

- Patients aged 18–60 years.
- Diagnosed with Major Depressive Disorder or Dysthymia according to DSM-5 criteria.
- Received individualized homeopathic treatment for a minimum of three months.
- Complete pre- and post-treatment HDRS scores available.

Exclusion Criteria

- Patients with comorbid psychiatric disorders such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia.
- Concurrent use of conventional antidepressant medications during the study period.
- Incomplete medical records.

Intervention

Patients received individualized homeopathic remedies based on a comprehensive assessment of their physical, emotional, and psychological symptoms. Remedies were prescribed in potencies ranging from 30C to 1M, with follow-ups conducted monthly to assess progress and adjust treatment as necessary.

Outcome Assessment

The primary outcome measure was the change in HDRS scores from baseline to three months post-treatment. The HDRS is a widely used clinician-administered depression assessment scale consisting of 17 items, each rated on a scale of 0 to 4 or 0 to 2, with higher scores indicating more severe depression.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25). Paired t-tests were employed to compare pre- and post-treatment HDRS scores. A P-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Demographic Data

A total of 70 patient records met the inclusion criteria. The mean age was 35.2 ± 9.1 years, with a female-to-male ratio of 1.3:1. The average duration of depressive symptoms before initiating homeopathic treatment was 8.5 ± 3.2 months.

Treatment Outcomes

The mean HDRS score significantly decreased from 24.5 ± 4.3 at baseline to 12.3 ± 3.7 after three months of treatment ($P < 0.001$), indicating a substantial reduction in depressive symptoms.

Table 1: Pre- and Post-Treatment HDRS Scores

Outcome Measure	Baseline (Mean \pm SD)	Post-Treatment (Mean \pm SD)	Mean Difference	P-value
HDRS Score	24.5 \pm 4.3	12.3 \pm 3.7	12.2	<0.001

Frequently Prescribed Homeopathic Remedies

The most commonly prescribed remedies and their indications are as follows:

Remedy	Indication	Number of Patients
Natrum muriaticum	Grief, suppressed emotions, introversion	22
Ignatia amara	Acute grief, mood swings, emotional hypersensitivity	18
Aurum metallicum	Profound depression, feelings of worthlessness	16
Sepia officinalis	Indifference, hormonal imbalance-related depression	14

Discussion

The findings of this retrospective observational study indicate a significant reduction in depressive symptoms among patients receiving individualized homeopathic treatment. The mean HDRS score decreased from 24.5 \pm 4.3 at baseline to 12.3 \pm 3.7 after three months of treatment, suggesting a substantial improvement in depression severity.

These results are consistent with previous studies that have explored the role of homeopathy in treating depression. For example, a randomized controlled trial comparing individualized homeopathic treatment with fluoxetine found comparable efficacy between the two interventions, with the homeopathy group experiencing fewer side effects. Another systematic review reported that homeopathic medicinal products might be comparable to antidepressants and superior to placebo in treating depression [10].

The most commonly prescribed remedies in this study—Natrum muriaticum, Ignatia amara, Aurum metallicum, and Sepia officinalis—align with classical homeopathic indications for depressive symptoms. Natrum muriaticum is often indicated in cases of long-standing grief and emotional suppression, while Ignatia amara is suited for acute grief and emotional lability [11,12]. Aurum metallicum is considered for profound depression with feelings of worthlessness, and Sepia officinalis is used for indifference and hormonal imbalance-related depression [11,12,13].

Despite these promising findings, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The retrospective design and lack of a control group limit the ability to establish causality. The sample size is relatively small, and the findings may not be generalizable to broader populations. Additionally, the individualized nature of homeopathic treatment poses challenges for standardization and replication in research settings.

Critics of homeopathy argue that the therapeutic effects observed may be attributable to the placebo effect or the therapeutic relationship between the practitioner and patient. The consultation process in homeopathy often involves detailed case-taking and empathetic listening, which may contribute to patient improvement irrespective of the remedy prescribed.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study's retrospective design and lack of a control group limit the ability to establish causality. The sample size is relatively small, and the findings may not be generalizable to broader populations. Future research should focus on large-scale, randomized controlled trials to further investigate homeopathy's role in treating depressive disorders.

Conclusion

Individualized homeopathic treatment was associated with significant improvement in depressive symptoms among patients with Major Depressive Disorder and Dysthymia. These findings suggest that homeopathy may serve as a complementary approach in managing depressive disorders. Further rigorous studies are necessary to confirm these results and elucidate the mechanisms involved.

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Conflicts of Interest

None.

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