



Case Report

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Therapeutic Effect of *Inkibab* (Steam application) and *Hijama Muzliqa* (Massage cupping) in case of *Waj al-Zahr* (Non-specific low back pain) - A Case Report

Athar Parvez Ansari¹, Pervaiz Ahmad Dar², Mohammad Afsahul Kalam¹, Shameem Ahmad Rather³, Mohammad Arif⁴, Abu Nasir⁵

¹ Research Officer (Unani), Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar under CCRUM, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India

² Reader, Department of Ilmul Advia (Unani Pharmacology), Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar under CCRUM, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India

³ Reader, Department of Moalijat (Unani Medicine), Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar under CCRUM, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India

⁴ Lecturer, Department of Amraz-e-Ain, Uzn, Anf va Halaq, Hakeem Syed Ziaul Hasan Govt. Unani Medical College, Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

⁵ M.D. Scholar, Department of Ilmul Advia (Unani Pharmacology), Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar under CCRUM, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt. of India

ABSTRACT

Waj al-Zahr (pain in lower back) is typically defined as pain in the lumbo-sacral area of the back which is sometimes radiated to the lower extremities of the body including buttocks, hips, thighs and legs. It is usually caused by muscle strain, degenerative disorders of vertebral column, herniated vertebral discs, gynaecological disorders in females etc. In Unani Medicine, the low back pain is known as *Waj al-Zahr* which is dealt under *Waj al-Mafasil* (arthritis). Regimenal therapy is one such core mode of treatment through which the morbid humour is diverted/ eliminated or its excessive production is checked or its spread is arrested and ultimately resolved by *tabiyat* (physic) of the body. *Inkibab* (steam application) and *Hijama Muzliqa* (massage cupping) are regimenal modes which are being used for the treatment of various diseases including *Waj al-Zahr*. A 23 year old female patient was admitted in the IPD of Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar, J & K, with the chief complaint of pain in lower back. She was treated by *Inkibab* (steam application) from the decoction of *Gul-e-Teesu* (*Butea monosperma* flowers) and *Hijama Muzliqa* (massage cupping) daily for six days. At the end of the treatment and post treatment follow ups, the patient got complete relief from lower back pain. Therefore, this study suggests that *Inkibab* and *Hijama Muzliqa* may be useful in the treatment of *Waj al-Zahr* (Non-specific low back pain).

Keywords: *Waj al-Zahr*, Non-specific low back pain, *Inkibab*, *Hijama Muzliqa*.

INTRODUCTION

Low back pain (LBP) is being considered as most prevailing musculoskeletal disorder and usually causes disability worldwide [1, 2]. Low back pain is a symptom rather a disease which occurs due to various illnesses. LBP is characteristically defined as pain in the lumbo-sacral region of the back. In some patients, such pain is radiated to the lower extremities including hips, buttocks, thighs and legs. The lower back pain is either caused by some general causes such as muscle strain or due to some specific diseases such as degenerative disc diseases or lumbar herniated disc [3]. Usually, the LBP is found in patients belonging to poor socioeconomic status, previous history of trauma, heavy weight lifting, prolonged static posture and awkward posture, anxiety, depression, job dissatisfaction, lack of job control and mental stress, long working hours, obesity etc [4]. It is estimated that more than 84% population of the World is suffering from lower back pain at least once in their life span. It is also reported that 23% population of the World is suffering from chronic low back pain, with 11-12% of the population being disabled [5]. Impairments of the back and spine are the chronic conditions that most repeatedly cause limitation of activity in people of 45 years or younger, and they are the third most common reason for impairment in people aged 45 to 64 years [2].

In Unani Medicine, low back pain is referred as *Waj al-Zahr* which is dealt under *Waj al-Mafasil* (arthritis). *Waj al-Zahr* is an Arabic word where *Waja* literally means 'pain' [6] and *Zahr* means 'back' [7]. The pain may occur in any part of the back; but the lower back and usually lumbar or lumbo-sacral region is mostly involved. *Waj al-Zahr* may begin from deeper to superficial muscles, ligaments around the lumbar vertebrae and lumbo-sacral region because of excessive accumulation of *buurodat* (cold) and *kham*

*Corresponding author:

Athar Parvez Ansari
Research Officer (Unani),
Regional Research Institute of
Unani Medicine, Srinagar under
CCRUM, Ministry of AYUSH,
Govt. of India
Email: aatharparvez[at]gmail.com

balgham (raw phlegm). The *zarba* (trauma), *rutubat-e-mukhatia* (abnormal chyme), *hadba* (disc prolapse), *imtal-e-urooq* (plethora), *quruh-e-nukha* (spinal abscess), *kasrate jima'* (excessive coitus), *musharikat-e-reham* (involvement of uterus), excessive physical work etc are the main causes of *waj al-zahr* [1].

According to Unani principles, the treatment of any disease is carried out by *ilaj bit tadbeer* (regimenal therapy), *ilaj bil ghzia* (dietotherapy), *ilaj bid dawa* (pharmacotherapy) and *ilaj bil yad* (surgery) [8, 9]. *Ilaj bit tadbeer* is one such core mode of treatment through which the morbid humour is diverted/ eliminated or its excessive production is checked or its spread is arrested and resolved by *tabiyat* (physic) of the body and there by restoring humoral equilibrium [10]. *Inkibab* (steam application) and *hijama* (cupping therapy) are two commonly being preferred regimens for the treatment of various illnesses in Unani Medicine. In *Inkibab* (steam application), some drugs are boiled into a vessel and the steam is applied on the affected areas [11]. Ancient Unani physicians have advised that glass cups can be used in *hijama nari* (fire cupping). Furthermore, they have advised that some oils can also be used before applying glasses [12]. *Hijama Muzliqa* or *Hijama Muhtarika* (massage cupping) is basically a Chinese origin which is commonly being used by massage therapist for the treatment of back pain, neck pain, shoulder pain, hip pain, thigh pain etc [13]. In this case, '*Roghan-e-Surkh*' (oil) which is a pharmacopoeial preparation was used for massage cupping. *Roghan-e-Surkh* acts as resolvent and is useful in the treatment of *waj al-mafasil* (arthritis), *niqras* (gout) and *irq-un-nisa* (sciatica) [14]. *Inkibab* (steam application) from the decoction of *gul-e-teesu* (*Butea monosperma* (Lam.) Taub. flower) was given to the patient. *Gul-e-Teesu* (*Butea monosperma* flower) is a plant origin drug which is commonly being used as local application to resolve the inflammation and to alleviate pain [11, 15].

CASE PRESENTATION

Brief history

A 23 year old female patient from low socioeconomic class was admitted in the IPD of Regional Research Institute of Unani Medicine, Srinagar, J & K, in the month of August 2018 with the chief complaint of pain in lower back (lumbo-sacral region) for more than 6-7 months. She had no history of trauma or any other injury in her back. The lower back pain had started gradually. The intensity of pain was mild to moderate which very often affected her routine work. Sometimes she could not even sleep due to pain. The pain was aggravated during walk, climbing stairs and heavy weight lifting. Sometimes the pain was radiated from back to both hips and thighs, but it was not so significant. The patient was also interrogated about fever, infections, menstrual disorders, burning mictrution, hypertension, diabetes mellitus etc but these were not present except hypothyroidism for which she was regularly taking thyroxin 50 mcg tab daily. She had no family history of such complaints. She had occasionally taken NSAIDs.

Examination of the patient

The general condition of the patient was good. Systemic examination of the patient was also done to evaluate any systemic illness such as cardiovascular system disorders, respiratory disorders, hepatic disorders, kidney disorders, diabetes mellitus, hypertension etc and it was found that she had no systemic illness. The patient was also examined for severe or progressive motor weakness, radiculopathy, rheumatoid arthritis, gouty arthritis etc which were not clinically present. *Mizaj* (temperament) of the patient was recorded in a proforma and found to be *balghami mizaj* (phlegmatic temperament). The disease was diagnosed only clinically.

Management of the patient

The patient was treated in IPD for 6 days. *Inkibab* (steam application) from the decoction of *gul-e-teesu* (*Butea monosperma* flower) and *Hijama Muzliqa* (massage cupping) were applied on lumbo-sacral region daily.

Inkibab (Steam application)

Inkibab from the decoction of *gul-e-teesu* was given on lumbo-sacral region daily by using specially designed steam equipment. 50 gm of *gul-e-teesu* and approximately 5 litre water put into the equipment and boiled it for approximately 1 hour at boiling point and steam produced were applied to the lumbo-sacral region for 10 minutes.



Equipment for *Inkibab* (steam application)



Gul-e-Teesu (*Butea monosperma* flowers)

Hijama Muzliqa (Massage cupping)

Hijama Muzliqa was done on lumbo-sacral region in prone position by using 4 medium sized glasses. This therapy was given daily for 10 minutes. Before applying cupping glass, plenty of *Roghan-e-Surkh* is applied over the skin of lumbo-sacral region to facilitate smooth movement. The vacuum is created by flame [13] in which the heating creates negative pressure inside the glass [16]. After that all the glasses were slightly moved in all directions.



Cupping set for *Hijama Muzliqa* (Massage cupping)

Roghan-e-Surkh

Roghan-e-Surkh is a pharmacopoeial formulation [14] which was obtained from Indian Medicines Pharmaceutical Corporation Limited (IMPCL). *Roghan-e-Surkh* was applied locally on whole back of the patient before applying the glasses.

No concomitant therapy was allowed during the treatment period.

Assessment of efficacy

The signs and symptoms were assessed according to Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) (Scale: 0 – 10).

Measures and outcome

The back pain was assessed according to Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) for 6 days including post treatment follow ups only once after 7 days of discontinuation of therapy and it was found that complete relief (Table 01). No adverse reactions of this regimen were recorded during the treatment period.

Table 1: Assessment of LBP by using VAS (0-10 scale)

Symptom	VAS on 0 day	VAS on 1 st day	VAS on 2 nd day	VAS on 3 rd day	VAS on 4 th day	VAS on 5 th day	VAS on 6 th day	VAS on 13 th day	VAS on 20 th day
Low back pain	08	08	06	06	04	02	00	00	00

DISCUSSION

Ilaj bit tadbeer (regimenal therapy) is an indispensable mode of treatment in Unani system of medicine that comprises more than 50 regimens and can be used for the management of various ailments including musculoskeletal disorders [17]. *Inkibab* (steam application) and *hijama* (cupping therapy) amongst them are being commonly practised by Unani physicians since ancient times for the management of musculoskeletal disorders including non-specific low backache. In *inkibab* therapy, some amount of vapours can penetrate into body through the skin and produce the mechanism of *imala* (diversion of morbid humours) [18]. *Hijama Muzliqa* can also divert the morbid humours from the diseased part to the healthy part. In Unani Medicine, it is hypothesized that following *imala* the disease producing substances may be detoxified either by the *tabiate mudabbir-e-badan* (medicatrix naturae) or it may be eliminated through various excretory routes of the body [17]. A study has reported that moving cupping acts principally by increasing the blood circulation on the area where it is to be applied and relieving the painful muscle tension. The circulation of micro blood vessels is improved; endothelial cells of capillaries are repaired; and granulation and formation of new blood vessels in the affected areas are accelerated, which improves normal functions and provides muscle relaxation [16]. Emerich *et al*, 2014 has observed some metabolic changes in the tissues of cupping area. The result showed that the lactate / pyruvate ratio is increased after 2 hours and 40 minutes of moving cupping procedure, which indicates presence of anaerobic metabolites in tissues under cupping area. Due to such changes the pain threshold is increased in the affected area, but, the pain threshold level was not significantly changed in the affected area after 4 hours and 40 minutes of moving cupping [19].

CONCLUSION

Waj al-Zahr (Non-specific low back pain) is a commonly occurring musculoskeletal disorder and also causes disability worldwide. In Unani Medicine, *ilaj bid tadbeer* is one of the important regimens for the management of various diseases. *Inkibab* and *hijama muzliqa* are two such regimens through which the morbid humours are diverted and

may be resolved by *tabiyat* (physic) of the body, and thereby restoring humoral equilibrium. Since *hijama muzliqa* is not described in the classical literature of Unani Medicine, it is basically of Chinese origin. But, the efficacy of *hijama muzliqa* has been proved in this case. The patient got complete relief from lower back pain after using *inkibab* with *gul-e-teesu* and *hijamat-e-muzliqa*. Hence, it is recommended that non-specific low back pain can be treated by *inkibab* (steam application) from the *gul-e-teesu* and *hijama muzliqa* along with *Roghan-e-Surkh*.

Declaration of patient consent

The written consent was obtained from the patient to publish her case in the Journal. In the consent form, the patient has given consent for publication his/ her clinical information to be reported in the scientific Journal. The patient understood that his/ her name and initial will not be published and due efforts will be made to conceal her identity, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

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