

EXPLORING STRESS RELIEF FROM TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE AROMATHERAPY USING HERBAL SACHETS

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Abstract

Many people are in a state of sub-health due to social pressure in the current environment, and chronic diseases may develop over time. This study investigated the efficacy of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) aromatherapy for stress relief and the satisfaction of using herbal sachets. We adopted a pre-test/post-test experimental design with the same group of research subjects over six weeks. The stress-relieving effects were compared between a control product herbal sachet and two types of stress-relieving herbal sachets. We established a Line group to remind the research subjects to use the herbal sachet during the experimental period. An electronic questionnaire (Stress Perception Scale) was distributed to the subjects to determine the differences in stress perception before and after the intervention of TCM aromatherapy. The number of questionnaires distributed was 87, which elicited a valid questionnaire response rate of 70. The results indicate a significant decrease in stress perception when Recipe 1 ($p=0.048$) and Recipe 2 ($p=0.019$) herbal sachets were used. There was no significant difference in stress perception when using the control herbal sachet ($p=0.92$). The overall order of purchase intention for the three types of herbal sachets was: Recipe 1 > Recipe 2 > control group. This confirms that the subjects' satisfaction with the herbal sachets varied according to their stress-relieving effects. Further, among the two types of herbal sachets used, sachets with significant stress-relieving effects elicited higher satisfaction than the control. The study conclusions suggest that TCM aromatherapy can effectively relieve stress and that TCM herbal sachets can relieve stress quickly and conveniently.

Key Words: Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) aromatherapy, Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) herbal sachet, stress

Introduction

With changes and progression in current times, people's life pace is increasing significantly. This rapid life pace puts the body in constant tension, leading to stress over time (Chung, Hui Ju, 2010). In 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as physical and complete health in mental and social adaptation. Physical and mental sub-health is primarily manifested in anxiety, confusion, depression, mental fatigue, etc. If not adjusted, this will be transformed into disease over time and easily affect the body's health in all aspects (Chen Lian, 2006; WHO, 2022).

Aromatherapy is a type of aroma therapy (Lin Zong hui et al., 2018; Xuan, Wei jun and Huang, Yu you, 2004). Its primary raw materials include herbal medicines with fragrant scents, which can be inhaled or worn (Jin, Zhi jun, 2005; Chiao, Sheng Lin et al., 2015). The aromatic nature of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is refreshing to the heart and mind. This occurs through the stimulation of fragrant scents that can make one's mood more positive so that the person may enjoy a peaceful sleep and develop a stronger ability to resist disease. It has the preventive effect of "curing the disease before it occurs" (Hua, Bi chun and Du Jian, 2002; Tseng, Chun Ming and Hung, Shueh Feng, 2016). The daily use of aromatherapy products and applications such as herbal sachets, herbal strings, herbal beads, herbal pillows and incense burners are said to be a vivid portrayal of the use of aromatherapy in ancient times (Zhang, Xiao feng, 2019).

The herbal sachet is an ancient portable ornament of traditional cultural characteristics with various functions. Ancient cultures used sachets as carriers of aromatic drugs. These have continued to be developed and improved with people's understanding of the properties of aromatic drugs (Xin, Hai liang et al., 2021). The aroma in TCM herbal sachets regulates the nerves and stimulates the brain, improving the sleep quality of insomniac patients and individuals with sub-health (Tan, Ren wei, 2021). Herbal sachets exhibit various effects due to their specific contents. They can be used to treat or prevent various diseases by combining different scented medicines (Cui, Jun feng, & Zhang, Jian xin., 2016).

This study contributes to academic research by confirming the stress-relieving capabilities of TCM aromatherapy and the usefulness of TCM herbal sachets. The main research objectives of this study are as follows: (1) investigate the effectiveness of TCM aromatherapy in stress relief; and 2) investigate the satisfaction of using herbal sachets.

From archaeological discoveries, ancient people have long practiced the custom of making herbal sachets and pillows while filling them with spices and medicines for daily life use (Chen, Dong jie and Li, Ya, 2019; Tseng Yueh Hsia, 2005). Some herbal sachets were also considered wearable sachets by past cultures because they could be worn to conveniently store and carry items. The term "scent" has been used to describe the spices held within these sachets, which indicates the development of herbal sachets from wearable sachets. This means they contained fragrant spices, becoming popular and

well-accepted scenting devices in ancient times (Cui, Jun feng, and Zhang, Jian xin, 2016).

This study used TCM herbs with the effects of detoxifying the liver and relieving depression, nourishing the heart, tranquilizing the mind, warming the spleen, and regulating Qi as the raw materials to produce herbal sachets. Specifically, we included the following. Star anise fruits and their essential oils are commonly used in treating rheumatism, insomnia, and dyspepsia in medical practice (Sharafan et al., 2022). Peppermint has excellent calming and nervine-strengthening properties and was a crucial ingredient in the sacred incense “Kyphi” in ancient Egypt. It was also used as a ceremonial spice by the local people. In ancient Greece and Rome, peppermint was already a part of people's lives, used in baths or ground into powder to perfume bedding (Chen, Li fang, 2009). Peppermint has a pleasant scent and can improve symptoms of pent-up frustration in the liver, such as irritability and insomnia caused by stress. It has the effect of clearing heat and relieving fatigue to relieve stress and other negative emotions (Fu, Hua, 2012). *Acorus Tatarinowii* has a regulatory impact on the central nervous and cardiovascular systems, etc. It has the two-way regulatory role as a sedative and anticonvulsant and can facilitate consciousness-restoring and obstruction-clearing for the central nervous system (Feng, Su wen, 2018). Clove has antimicrobial and local anesthetic effects on physiology. It can boost people's complicated and uncertain moods and return them to a peaceful state (Dai, Ka ixuan, 2019). Lavender is a common essential oil for relaxation and treating insomnia and anxiety. It is often

used as a spice and ingredient in desserts and beverages (Guo, Shu juan, 1998). *Platycladi Semen* is used in ear acupressure to nourish the heart and calm the mind (Li Pin gan & Wang Hai teng, 2009). Aromatic Turmeric Root-tuber has been used to treat insomnia by calming the mind and relieving depression (Yin Xiao li and Jin Xin gyu, 2004). *Cinnamomum cassia* primarily contains components with sedative and analgesic pharmacological effects (Zhu Xiaonan et al., 2009). *Albiziae Cortex* has been clinically used to treat insomnia with the sedative-hypnotic role and the function of prolonging sleep (Pan Rong, 2014).

Research Method

This study was conducted over six weeks. After conditional screening, the final number of subjects recruited was 89, of whom two chose to decline participation after reading the consent form. Therefore, the final number of questionnaires distributed in this study was 87. After questionnaires with incomplete data and invalid questionnaires were excluded, the final number of valid questionnaires was 70.

The methodology of this study comprised the use of herbal sachet 1 (Recipe 1), herbal sachet 2 (control), and herbal sachet 3 (Recipe 2) used by the same group of research subjects. The purpose of adding a control was to compare the effects of TCM herbal sachets on stress perception. The order of using the herbal sachets was as follows: herbal sachet 1 (Recipe 1) was used during weeks 1 and 2; herbal sachet 2 (control) was used during weeks 3 and 4; herbal sachet 3 (Recipe 2) was used during weeks 5 and 6. The stress

perceptions were measured before and after the experiments (pre-experiment, week 2, week 4, and week 6) to compare whether there were differences in the level of stress perception among the research subjects (Yu, Sen Chi and Yu, Min Ning, 2006). We set up a Line group for e-socialization during the experiments to remind subjects to use the herbal sachets and to distribute an e-questionnaire on stress perception for them to complete. The subjects were reminded to use the TCM herbal sachets in the morning each day.

Based on the theoretical formula comprising the sovereign, minister, assistant, and courier, the Chinese herbal medicines selected in this study were combined according to their medicinal properties to produce two types of Chinese herbal sachets. The intended effects included relieving the liver and depression, nourishing the heart, tranquilizing the mind, warming the spleen, and regulating the flow of Qi. In herbal sachet Recipe 1, lavender was used as the sovereign, which has the effect of tranquilizing and relaxing the mind; *Albiziae Cortex* and *Platycladi Semen* were used as the minister and assistant, and *Cinnamomum cassia* and cloves were used as the courier. The overall aroma was light and elegant. Recipe 2 included star anise as the sovereign to regulate the Qi and protect the liver. Aromatic Turmeric Root-tuber and peppermint as the minister and assistant. *Acorus Tatarinowii* and clove were the couriers. The overall aroma was more intense. The weight of each herbal sachet was 20 g, and the proportions were based on the ratios of sovereign (50%), minister (25%), assistant (15%), courier 1 (18%), and cou-

rier 2 (2%) (Chen, Jun jun, and Ren, Nan nan 2013).

Research subjects were given three types of herbal sachets at the beginning of the experiment, including two traditional Chinese herbal sachets (Recipes 1 and 2) and one control herbal sachet comprising carbonized rice. The order of application was written on each of the herbal sachets. The subjects were asked to use the three herbal sachets in the order they were intended to be used. Each herbal sachet was used for two weeks. TCM herbal sachets are suitable for a wide range of people, except for pregnant women and those who are allergic to Chinese herbs and dried flowers (Jiang, Chen, 2018). The results of this study were analyzed using an independent sample T-test and one-way ANOVA, as described below.

The variables in the research structure (See Figure 1) are described as follows:

- (1) Independent variables: To explore the impacts of herbal sachets on stress perception, we used the herbal sachet of Recipe 1, the control, and the herbal sachet of Recipe 2 as the source of differences in stress perception.
- (2) Dependent variable: The summed scores of the Stress Perception Scale represented the degree of stress perception in the dependent variable.
- (3) Control variables: We also controlled the method and duration of using the herbal sachets to achieve a uniform effect.
- (4) Background Variables: This study

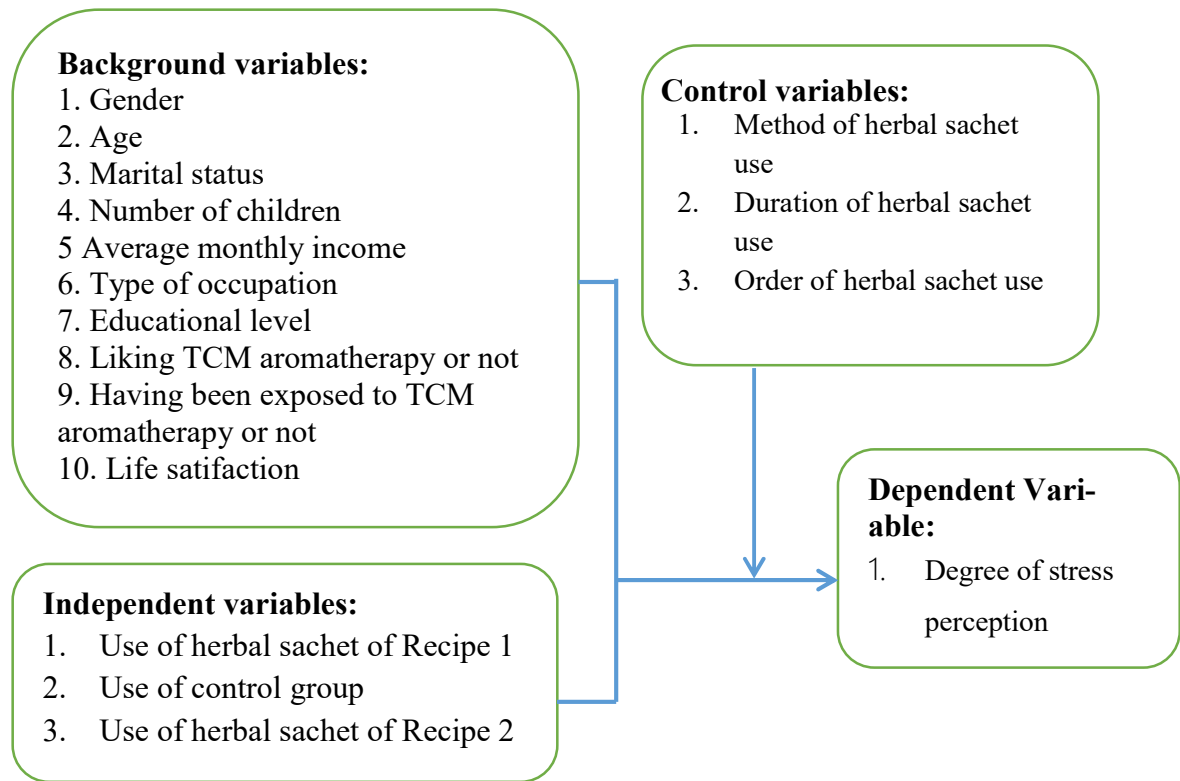


Figure 1: Research Structure

examined the differences in stress sources among subjects based on different background variables.

Based on the research objectives and structure, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- (H1) There is a significant difference in stress perception among subjects with different demographic variables.
- (H2) Stress perception scores differ significantly before and after using the herbal sachet of Recipe 1.

(H3) Stress perception scores differ significantly before and after using the herbal sachet of Recipe 2.

(H4) There are differences in satisfaction with using the three types of herbal sachets.

Research Results and Discussion

The study was conducted over six weeks, and 70 questionnaires were returned, as shown in Table 1. The gender distribution of the subjects was 51 (72.85%) females and 19 (27.14%) males. Regarding age distribution, most subjects were between 21 and 30 years old, with 36 subjects (51.42%). The number of

subjects with university education was 40 (57.14%), and the number of subjects with master's degree was 21 (30%). There were 44 students (62.85%). Furthermore, 34.28% of the subjects had been exposed to or heard of TCM aromatherapy, and 81.42% liked the smell of TCM aromatherapy. Regarding life satisfaction, 44.28% were satisfied with their lives; the

satisfaction with their life was another 40% of the subjects.

The correlation analysis results regarding demographic variables of different backgrounds and the subjects' perception of stress before using herbal sachets are presented in Table 1. The results indicate significant differences in stress perception

Table 1: Analysis of stress perception based on the demographic variables

Statistical items	Classification items	Mean	F	Significance
Gender	Male	21.53	5.883	*0.016
	Female	25.49		
Age	20 years old or younger	27.50	2.189	0.066
	21-30 years old	25.72		
	31-40 years old	23.00		
	41-50 years old	17.33		
	51-60 years old	21.13		
	61 years old and above	19.00		
Educational level	High School	29.25	2.069	0.095
	Junior college	17.50		
	University	25.20		
	Master's degree	23.90		
	Doctoral Degree	12.00		
Occupation	Students	26.45	2.890	*0.021
	Business, services	22.63		
	Military personnel, civil servants and teachers	17.20		
	Industry, manufacturing and labor	21.00		
	Freelance	21.50		
	Others	25.60		
Average monthly income	NTD 10,000 or below	26.12	3.330	*0.015
	NTD 10,001-20,000	27.00		
	NTD 20,001-30,000	23.25		
	NTD 30,001-40,000	23.55		
	Above NTD 40,000	17.20		
Marital status	Married	21.81	0.767	0.128

	Unmarried	25.19		
Number of children	None	24.89	0.503	0.681
	1	21.33		
	2	21.71		
	3 or more	24.67		
Life satisfaction	Dissatisfied	33.00	7.789	***0.00
	Fair	28.29		
	Satisfied	22.23		
	Very satisfied	18.00		

Note: * indicates <0.05, significance; *** indicates <0.001 significance.

based on "gender," "occupation," "average monthly income," and "life satisfaction." Regarding "gender," the mean stress perception of females was 25.49, slightly higher than that of males. This may be because females are more delicate and have multiple concerns when facing something, thus unconsciously exerting invisible worries on themselves, increasing stress formation. Regarding "occupation," the mean stress perception of students was higher at 26.45.

The findings align with the findings suggesting that in today's society, many students suffer from examination anxiety, study worries, and peer relationships (Liu,

Ping, 2021). Regarding "average monthly income," subjects with income below NTD 10,000 and NTD 10,001-20,000 were more stressed; their mean stress perception was 27 and 26.12, respectively. The mean stress perception decreased with the increase in monthly income. Finally, the difference in the stress perception of "life satisfaction" reached a level of significance ($\alpha < 0.001$). Those who felt dissatisfied with their lives had a mean stress perception of 33, while those who were very satisfied had a mean stress perception of 18. This finding indicates that the more dissatisfied the subjects were with their lives, the higher their mean stress perception.

Table 2: Analysis of differences in subjects' exposure to TCM herbal sachets and differences in stress perception after use

		Stress perception after using Recipe 1 (after)			Stress perception after using the control (after)			Stress perception after using Recipe 2 (after)		
		Mean score	T value	Significance	Mean score	T value	Significance	Mean score	T value	Significance
Have you ever been exposed to or heard of TCM aromatherapy?	Yes	23.72	0.477	0.635	23.76	0.717	0.477	21.35	0.105	0.917
	No	22.75			22.17			21.13		
Do you like	Yes	23.12	-0.476	0.641	22.72	-0.917	0.372	20.75	-1.055	0.306

the scent of TCM aromatherapy?	No	24.54					23.54		
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Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference between the stress perception of the subjects after using the three types of herbal sachets for the question of whether they liked the scent of TCM aromatherapy and whether they had been exposed to or heard of TCM aro-

matherapy. The stress-relieving effect of TCM aromatherapy was not affected by the subjects' preference for the scent of TCM aromatherapy or whether they had been exposed to it.

Table 3: Differences in stress perception among subjects using TCM herbal sachets

		Stress perception					
		Maximum value	Mean score	Standard deviation	Average difference	T value	Significance
Herbal sachet 1 (Recipe 1) Sovereign: lavender	Before use	42	24.41	7.758	1.114	2.010	*0.048
	After use	44	23.30	7.961			
Herbal sachet 2 (control)	Before use	44	23.30	7.961	0.086	0.100	0.920
	After use	51	23.21	8.869			
Herbal sachet 3 (Recipe 2) Sovereign: star anise	Before use	51	23.21	8.869	1.943	2.407	*0.019
	After use	38	21.27	8.403			

Note: * indicates <0.05 significance.

Table 3 shows that the change in the stress perception of the subjects using the herbal sachets of Recipes 1 and 2 reached significance. Regarding differences in stress perception before and after using herbal sachet Recipe 1, the mean score of stress perception was 24.41 before use. The score decreased to 23.3 after using herbal sachet Recipe 1 for two weeks. The mean difference was 1.114, and the t-value was 2.01 with a significance level of $p=0.048$ ($\alpha<0.05$). The mean stress score before using Recipe 2 was 23.21. The mean stress score was 21.27 after us-

ing Recipe 2. The mean difference between before and after use was 1.943, and the maximum stress score decreased from 51 to 38 with a t-value of 2.407 and a significance level of $p=0.019$ ($\alpha<0.05$). The maximum value of stress perception before using the control was 44, with a mean of 23.3. The maximum value of stress perception increased to 51 after using the control, with a mean of 23.21. The mean difference between the pre-test and post-test stress levels was only 0.086, with a t-value of 0.1 and a p-value of 0.92 ($\alpha>0.05$), which did not reach a significant

level. The findings suggest that the stress-relieving effect of Recipe 2 was better than that of Recipe 1. Regarding the proportion of herbal sachet formulas, the overall aroma of Recipe 1 was lighter and more elegant, and the aroma of Recipe 2 was more intense. Thus, we infer that the more intense herbal sachet may elicit a better stress-relieving effect for the subjects.

The analysis results regarding the number of times are presented in Table 4. The total number of subjects who would definitely purchase and would purchase Recipe 1 was 39 (55.72%). The total number of subjects who would definitely purchase and would purchase Recipe 2 was 40 (57.15%). The total number of

subjects who would definitely purchase and would purchase the control product was only 24 (34.38%). The overall order of purchase intention was recipe 1>formula>control. This differed slightly from the stress-relieving effects of the herbal sachets presented in Table 3 (Recipe 2 was more effective than Recipe 1). This may be because each individual has different feelings and preferences or because the gender of the subjects in this study is primarily female. The main herb in Recipe 1 was lavender, a light and elegant aroma that is more popular among women, thus affecting the satisfaction rate of Recipe 1 as slightly higher than that of Recipe 2.

Table 4: Subjects' purchase intention of the three types of herbal sachets

		Purchase intention					Mean score
		Definitely won't buy	Won't buy	Might buy	Will buy	Definitely will buy	
Recipe 1	Number of subjects (%)	5 (7.14%)	7 (10%)	19 (27.14%)	24 (34.29%)	15 (21.43%)	3.53
Recipe 2	Number of subjects (%)	3 (4.23%)	10 (14.29%)	17 (24.29%)	31 (44.29%)	9 (12.86%)	3.47
Control group	Number of subjects (%)	7 (10%)	14 (20%)	25 (35.71%)	20 (28.57%)	4 (5.71%)	3

This study used TCM aromatherapy to intervene in the subjects' lives. The results indicate that the change in stress perception reached significance when the subjects used Recipe 1 ($p = 0.048$, $\alpha < 0.05$) and Recipe 2 ($p = 0.019$, $\alpha < 0.05$) herbal sachets. In contrast, the change in stress perception did not reach significance when the control product herbal sachet was used ($p = 0.92$, $\alpha > 0.05$). The intervention of herbal sachets made using aromatic TCM in the subjects' lives illustrates that TCM herbal

sachets were effective in improving stress and reducing stress-induced insomnia (Hu, Bo, Chen, Xiao ling, 2021). The findings significantly contribute to a new research result: TCM aromatherapy can relieve stress.

He Qiu bai et al. (2010) suggest a positive relationship between product satisfaction and expectations. When people feel that using a product meets their needs, their purchase intention will increase. The

study subjects' satisfaction with three types of herbal sachets was primarily reflected in their degree of purchase intention. The study results indicate that 55.72% of the subjects would definitely purchase or would purchase Recipe 1, and 57.15% would definitely purchase or purchase Recipe 2. Only 34.38% would definitely purchase or purchase the control product. This suggests that the subjects were more satisfied with the two herbal sachets with significant stress-relieving effects than the control product. These findings align with Baker et al. (2000): satisfaction is an individual's feeling after experiencing a product or service, and satisfaction occurs when expectations are met or exceeded.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study examined the effectiveness of TCM aromatherapy intervention for stress relief. The results were based on the statistical analysis of 87 subjects, and the conclusions are presented as follows.

Compared to the control product (carbonized rice), the subjects' stress perception was significantly reduced after using two types of herbal sachets (Recipe 1: lavender, Albiziae Cortex, Platycladi Semen, Cinnamomum cassia and clove; Recipe 2: star anise, aromatic Turmeric Root-tuber, peppermint, Acorus Tatarinowii, and clove). This finding confirms that TCM aromatherapy effectively relieves stress and that herbal sachets are a useful aromatic tool for stress relief.

This study has demonstrated that herbal sachets with TCM aromatherapy intervention could fulfill the subjects' stress relief expectations, thereby effectively relieving stress. Additionally, since the literature suggests that aroma prefer-

ences may vary from individual to individual, the satisfaction level and stress-relieving effect of the two TCM herbal sachets in this study still differ.

We suggest that an HRV test could be added to future studies. This is because the Stress Perception Scale measures personal experiences. Data may vary depending on the situation the subjects are facing at the time the scale is used. Adding an instrument to provide more complete data would be more effective in confirming the effect of TCM herbal sachets on stress relief.

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