THERAPEUTIC EFFICACY OF SHIRODHARA IN PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS

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ABSTRACT

Shirodhara is a form of Ayurveda therapy that involves gently pouring liquids over the forehead and can be one of the steps involved in Panchakarma. The name comes from the Sanskrit words shiro (head) and dhara (flow). Psychosomatic disorders may affect almost any part of the body, though they are usually found in systems not under voluntary control. Emotional stress is assumed to aggravate existing illnesses, and there is some evidence that it may precipitate illnesses not usually considered to be psychosomatic (e.g., HTN, diabetes, Psoriasis, IBS). Shirodhara facilitates to counterbalance the Manasika and shareerikadoshas which occurs simultaneously and this is potentiated by Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) mechanism, hence the effect may be seen instantly.

Keywords: Shirodhara, Panchakarma, Psychosomatic disorders.

INTRODUCTION

Shirodhara is a procedure in which certain liquids like oil, butter milk, etc. are poured over the forehead & scalp from a distance of 4 Angula for a period of 30 to 60 minutes for 7 to 21 days as per requirements. The etymology of Shirodhara is from shira = head and dhara = a steady flow. This procedure induces a relaxed state of awareness, which results in a dynamic psycho-somatic balance. A total feeling of wellness, mental clarity, and comprehension is experienced in this process. It is quite recently that Japanese investigators have initiated state-of-the-art studies on Shirodhara for its effects on psycho-neuroimmunology.[1] Psychosomatic disorders resulting from stress may include hypertension, respiratory ailments, gastrointestinal disturbances, migraine and tension headaches, pelvic pain, impotence, frigidity, dermatitis, ulcers and so on. Shirodhara is a well-established upakarma procedure for centuries. It is widely practiced in India and also in Panchakarma centres abroad. Besides its therapeutic usage and its shamana karma, its general

relaxing and calming effects are well-known and worth exploring with modern tools. However, there have been very few studies of Shirodhara in volunteers employing markers of psychosomatic relaxation [2] in some studies Shirodhara treatment showed a reduction in their anxiety levels as per the mood assessment scores. It changes in vital signs, EEG, ECG, salivary cortisol, and urinary catecholamines as putative correlates of stress [3]. The changes in the EEG records confirmed the subjective relaxant effect scored by the V.A.S. for stress relief. For example, the nature of the EEG waves changed more to alpha, and even theta waves. However, the EEG changes, the baseline values of salivary cortisol and urinary catecholamines were not significantly affected by Shirodhara in the fractional samples. There is a need to conduct the programme of several sessions of Shirodhara in a group of patients with anxiety neurosis to evaluate the effects on salivary cortisol and urinary catecholamines.

Effect of Shirodhara on body and Mana (Mind):

Dhara is not only used in psychic diseases but also used in psychosomatic diseases like IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), Psoriasis, EHT, etc. Continuous pouring of dhara on fore-head for a specific period has Tranquilizing effect & regulates rhythm Mana &Prana Vayu it also induces Sleep. In Dhara therapy, prolonged and intermittent stimulation by the dripping oil may provide afferent inputs to the cerebral cortex, leading to a tranquilizing effect.

1. Effect on Marmas

Marmas are the Pranas may be correlated with vital energy of body on stimulation they activate immune system.

2. Sthapani Marma: Just below this area inside the skull lies the venous reservoir of the brain the superior Sagittal and Cavernous Venous Sinuses.

3. Shankha Marma: It corresponds to temporal bone of the skull underneath which lies the temporal lobe of cortex arterial branches and at the base is also some of the important structures of the brain.

4. Utkshepa Marma: Intracranial cavity and venous sinuses the wall of which are made of coverings of the brain lie in this region

5. Adhipati Marma: This location is well known as the anterior fontanelle on the vertical groove of the frontal bone. Underneath this point, there is sagittal sinus of the brain and also the sulcus between two hemispheres of the cortex. Shirodhara stimulates these Marmas and improves circulation; liquid used for Shirodhara is always luke warm which causes vasodilatation of all the channels and Thereby improving their circulation which in turn improves the blood circulation of brain. This improves the higher intellectual functions also. So an improvement in psychic symptoms is achieved. Improvement in circulation to hypothalamus also improves the function of Autonomic Nervous System as its stimulation during stress causes many physiological disturbances.

6. Effect on Chakras

Shirodhara may stimulate Acharya Chakra thereby improving the functions of mind which is vitiated in Stress as it is the place of subtle mind. Structures like Pituitary gland, pineal body, subcortical structures of mid brain are related with mental functions like anger, grief, pain, fear, memory and other higher intellectual functions. Shirodhara acts at this level correcting their functions.

7. Effect on Autonomic Nervous System

Shirodhara may also have Alpha Adrenergic blocking effect and can thus block certain actions of adrenaline and nor adrena-
It may also act on the adrenergic neuron probably produce their effects by modifying the synthesis storage and uptake mechanisms of nor-adrenaline.

8. Effect on Endocrine system

The effect of Shirodhara on hormone secretion can also be postulated considering the effect on hypothalamus as hypothalamus is the main controller of endocrine secretions. The hypothalamic Neurons which secrete the regulatory hormones are themselves under the control of specialized Monoaminergic, neurotransmitter neurons which arise in the mid brain. These latter release Dopamine, nor-adrenaline and Serotonin. In turn, these mid brain nuclei are under the control of visceral brain and are responsive to stress and emotional disturbances.

Regulation of emotional and behavioural patterns

Together with the limbic system with the hypothalamic system regulates the feeling of rage, aggression, pain and pleasure and behavioural patterns of sexual arousal ultimately it can be postulated that Shirodhara may be having some effect on hypothalamus resulting in decrease of most of the psychic and somatic disorders like psoriasis. Psychoneuro Immunology Researchers have conducted two human clinical trials on the psychoneuroimmunologic effects of Shirodhara. In the first study a group of healthy females were randomly assigned to receive a Shirodhara treatment (with plain sesame oil) or remain in a supine position (control group), while being monitored for numerous physiologic, biochemical, immunologic and psychometric parameters. The second study had a similar design, with the addition of a third group that received Shirodhara with a medicated sesame oil containing essential oil of lavender. Both the treatments resulted in decreased anxiety and promoted ASC (altered state of consciousness). After the plain sesame oil treatment there was a significant decrease in plasma noradrenaline and urinary serotonin excretion vs. the control group. A correlation with natural killer cell (NK cell) activity and anxiolytic effect within the Shirodhara group was also observed [4]. The ultimate aim of the Shirodhara therapy is to restore the equilibrium of Sharira and Manasikadoshas through the psycho-somatic axis, which in turn facilitates ‘manoprasannatah’ or tranquillity of mind, a positive sign of healthy state of the body. Researchers have recently investigated the effect of Shirodhara in the psycho-physiological profile of healthy volunteers [5] and also in patients of generalized anxiety disorder [6] and found that the promising results in both the cases. In simple words Ayurveda treats the body through the medium of mind or manas. Modern drugs promote relaxation by blocking awareness of a stressful event, or by diminishing the importance one attaches to it. Under the influence of drug, one is not actively thinking about the problem for the time being. On the other hand the Ayurvedic approach makes one to realize the situation and adopt suitably to solve the stress problems in a refreshing way forever [7].

CONCLUSIONS

Shirodhara is deeply relaxing and induces a relaxant state; these effects are mediated by the brain wave coherence, alfa waves, and a down regulation of the sympathetic outflow. Shirodhara helps to heal the body at the root level of disease, by calming imbalances in our mind and disturbances in our emotions it leaves you feeling in a heavenly state. The centre of the forehead, which was evolution wise related to the third eye, is connected atavistically to the pineal gland. This spot is known as Agnya Chakra in the yoga tradition. Focusing on
agnyachakra with closed eyes during meditation leads to psychosomatic harmony. As the oil drips on the agnyachakra, it is proposed that the meditation-like effect is a consequence of stillness of mind leading to adaptive response to the basal stress. Shirodhara facilitates to counterbalance the Manasika and shareerikadoshas which occurs simultaneously and this is potentiated by Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) mechanism and shows good results in psychosomatic disorders.

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REFERENCES

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