

A Case of Postpartum Depression Treated by Bupleurum Decoction Combined with Yingwei Method

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Abstract: *Objective: Based on the theory of "liver depression and Ying Wei imbalance", to explore the clinical efficacy and syndrome differentiation of Bupleurum combined with harmonizing Ying Wei method in the treatment of postpartum depression (PPD). Methods: the diagnosis and treatment process of a 28 year old patient with liver stagnation and blood deficiency type of PPD was reported. The Hamilton Depression Scale (HAMD) score and TCM four diagnosis syndrome were used as evaluation indexes to record the prescription adjustment strategy and curative effect outcome of the first, second and third diagnosis. Results: the initial HAMD score of the patient was 20, accompanied by depression, irritability, chest distress, palpitation, anorexia, insomnia, constipation and other diseases. After three stages of syndrome differentiation and treatment, the HAMD score was reduced to 10 points, and the physical symptoms were significantly improved: self perspiration stopped, constipation cleared, sleep became safe, and there was no recurrence during follow-up. Conclusion: Bupleurum (soothing liver depression and resolving depression) combined with harmonizing Ying Wei method (Guizhi formula) can significantly improve the emotional disorder and physical symptoms of patients with PPD, which reflects the clinical value of the pathogenesis theory of "liver depression and Ying Wei imbalance" in traditional Chinese medicine.*

Keywords: Postpartum Depression; Xiaochaihu Decoction; Cassia twig and longbone oyster soup; Reconciling camp and guard; Treatment by stages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a common mental disorder in perinatal women, and has become an important issue in the field of global public health. According to the diagnostic and Statistical Manual of mental disorders (DSM) standard, PPD refers to the severe depressive episode of women during pregnancy or within 4 weeks after delivery, accompanied by significant emotional and physical symptoms [1]. Epidemiological studies show that the global prevalence rate is as high as 17.22% [2]. The pathogenesis of PPD is complex, involving multiple biological, psychological and social factors, including childhood trauma, intimate partner violence, family history of mental illness, substance abuse and other risk factors [3]. PPD not only significantly reduces the quality of life of patients, but also leads to a heavy social and economic burden [4]; In severe cases, suicidal ideation or behavior may even occur, endangering the safety of mother and child [5]. Modern medicine uses standard antidepressants as the main intervention means, but there are limitations such as slow onset and poor long-term efficacy [6].

The understanding of PPD in traditional Chinese medicine has a long history. According to the "synopsis of the Golden Chamber · pulse syndrome and treatment of postpartum diseases in women" [7], the "new born women have three diseases... Both of them are depressed", that is, the early description of postpartum depression. According to the theory of traditional Chinese medicine, postpartum sudden deficiency of Qi and blood and loss of liver nourishment are the pathological basis of the disease, while emotional disorder and stagnation of liver Qi are the key pathogenesis, so the core pathogenesis of PPD is "liver depression and blood deficiency, loss of Ying and Wei" [8]. PPD is also called "postpartum emotional abnormality" in traditional Chinese medicine [9]. Traditional Chinese medicine treatment of PPD has less adverse reactions, safe and stable curative effect, and can significantly improve the clinical symptoms of patients [10]. Through the systematic analysis of typical cases, this study aims to explore the clinical value of traditional Chinese medicine intervention scheme with the core treatment of "soothing the liver and resolving depression, harmonizing Ying and Wei" in the treatment of PPD, and provide practical basis for improving the comprehensive treatment strategy of PPD.

2. THE CORE PATHOGENESIS OF PPD IS "LIVER DEPRESSION AND BLOOD DEFICIENCY AND THE LOSS OF HARMONY BETWEEN YING AND WEI"

2.1 "Liver Depression and Blood Deficiency", the Root of Pathogenesis

The core pathogenesis of PPD is "liver depression and blood deficiency". Liu Wansu put forward in the collection of plainly asking about the pathogenesis, Qi and health protection [11]: "when a woman and child are young, they are all Shaoyin; when Tiangui is active, they are all discussed from Jueyin; when Tiangui is gone, it is also Taiyin Meridian", pointing out that the physiological characteristics of women of childbearing age take the liver as the hub for regulating qi and blood. The liver governs the storage of blood and the drainage of blood. On the one hand, it stores and regulates the blood volume of the whole body, and on the other hand, it dredges the Qi mechanism to promote the circulation of Qi and blood. The physiological activities of women, such as pregnancy and milk production, all depend on the filling of liver blood and the reaching of liver qi. Yetianshi pointed out in the "clinical guide medical records" [12] "women are born with liver", and outlined this physiological feature. In modern society, pregnant women are faced with multiple mental pressures, such as working for the workplace, family troubles, and pregnancy, which can easily lead to depression, anxiety and irritability. Changes in hormone levels brought about by pregnancy itself further aggravate the emotional imbalance [13]. Traditional Chinese medicine says that "anger hurts the liver". When emotions are depressed, the liver is lost and the Qi is depressed. Miao Xiyong's Shennong's herbal scriptures [14] said, "women are often worried and angry, which damages the heart and spleen, causes liver fire, and blood can't return to the meridians.". The postpartum blood chamber is empty, and the liver is out of order due to emotional disorder, liver depression turns into fire, and burns Yin blood, so it becomes a syndrome of liver depression and blood deficiency, deficiency and excess.

The female physiology has the tendency of blood deficiency and liver depression. Lingshu · five notes and five tastes chapter says, "a woman's life is more than Qi, less than blood. It's also necessary to shed blood by its number". Women's physiological activities such as menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation all depend on the movement of Qi and blood. The liver governs the release and regulation of Qi. If there is emotional failure or the influence of physiological cycle, it is easy to cause liver qi stagnation and qi stagnation, so it becomes a body of "more than Qi but less blood". Especially for women after childbirth, blood loss occurs during childbirth, lactation consumes sperm, blood deficiency causes loss of liver support, and excess Qi causes excessive catharsis. In the postpartum stage, continuous emotional disorder can cause liver loss and laxation, depression and fire, and burn Yin blood. The evolution of its pathogenesis is actually liver depression consuming blood and blood deficiency causing depression, which are cause and effect of each other.

2.2 Disharmony between Business and Health, the Symptom of Disease

The lingsu Festival annotation category [15] says: "the business owner is blood, which operates in the interior. Qi governs genitality and blood governs moistening... The operation of Qi and blood, and the continuity of meridians and collaterals, is the harmony of business and defense factors". The business Qi belongs to Yin, which runs in the pulse, depends on the blood as the Tao, and is the same as the blood, and is responsible for the role of nurturing together; Wei Qi belongs to Yang, which is distributed outside the pulse. It is mainly warm and firm, and jointly undertakes the function of nurturing the whole body. "Lingshu · camp Health Association chapter" said: "camp in the pulse, guard outside the pulse, camp week after week... The blood, look also, so blood and Qi, synonymous with the same.". Blood deficiency leads to the deficiency of Ying Yin, the insufficiency of pulse channels, and the loss of Defensive Qi. It is like passive water and trees without roots, which leads to the disharmony between Ying and Wei. Just like the evidence of "blood deficiency, tiredness, fever in five hearts, limb pain, dizziness in the head... Disharmony between Ying and Wei" in Taiping Huimin Heju prescription. After a woman's delivery, she died of blood during childbirth and consumed sperm during lactation, resulting in a void in the sea of blood. Ying Qi is derived from blood. Blood deficiency will lead to the loss of Ying Yin, while Yang will be restricted and float outside, so Ying Wei will lose harmony. Due to emotional injury, "Su Wen · Ju Tong Lun" said: "sadness makes the heart anxious, the lungs are stretched, the upper energizer is blocked, and the camp and defense are not dispersed". Postpartum women are often trapped in workplace pressure, family disturbances, emotional depression, and liver Qi is not comfortable. "Lingshu · Ying Health Association chapter" said: "people are affected by Qi in the valley, and the valley enters the stomach... All of them are affected by Qi, and the clear ones are the camp, while the turbid ones are the defense". Liver depression and qi stagnation lead to wood depression and soil suppression. The spleen and stomach in the middle energizer lose their function, and the essence of water and valley is difficult to generate Qi and blood. When the upper energizer is closed, the camp and guard cannot be dispersed; Zhongjiao lost its position in the transportation and chemical industry, while it was engaged in hygiene without any source.

The loss of peace between the camp and the guard will lead to a lot of depression and restlessness.

3. THE CORE TREATMENT OF PPD IS TO "SOOTHE THE LIVER, RELIEVE DEPRESSION AND REGULATE YING AND WEI"

3.1 Soothe the Liver and Relieve Depression, While Bupleurum Turns Shaoyang Machine

The treatment of postpartum depression should focus on soothing the liver and relieving depression. "Su Wen · Ju Tong Lun" says: "anger will make you angry, joy will make you angry, sorrow will make you angry, fear will make you angry... Surprise will make you angry, and thinking will make you angry". Postpartum women are prone to suffer from blood loss and qi stagnation due to childbirth and childbirth, which will lead to poor feelings. The liver governs catharsis and hides the soul. Patients with PPD are depressed, anxious and depressed, which is the liver disorder. Therefore, the first thing to do is to soothe the liver and relieve depression, so as to make the "wood depression reach it". Tang Rongchuan's blood syndrome theory [16] said: "the nature of wood is mainly based on catharsis. Eating Qi into the stomach depends entirely on the catharsis of the Qi of liver wood". Postpartum liver blood deficiency and abnormal catharsis will lead to stomach disharmony and poor appetite and nausea, which is the syndrome of liver depression and spleen, and Zhongzhou's loss of luck. Covering the stomach is the main way to receive, and it needs to relieve the liver qi to relieve depression; The spleen governs the transportation and transformation, and relies on the liver Qi strips to achieve the essence distribution. Therefore, soothing the liver and relieving depression, the spleen and stomach will be harmonious. Chenshiduo's syndrome differentiation record [17] said: "the husband's divine soul is unstable and startled, and the divine soul is uneasy and palpating, all of which are blood deficiency in the heart and liver". Postpartum blood sea is empty, liver depression turns into fire, and Yin blood is consumed, resulting in palpitation. However, soothing the liver is the treatment of blood, and the qi movement is the self harmony of blood, not specifically tonifying blood, but the self recovery of blood deficiency. "Synopsis of the Golden Chamber · treatment of pulse syndrome of postpartum women" contains: "the puerpera is depressed, their pulse is weak, vomiting cannot be eaten, and the stool is hard... Xiaochaihu Decoction is the master". In Xiaochaihu Decoction, bupleurum and Scutellaria baicalensis Georgi soothe the liver and clear away heat, so that the Qi and Qi can be reached, and the blood flow is orderly; Ginseng and jujube can replenish qi and blood, nourish the liver, relieve discharge properly, and heal the blood without treating the blood, so the stool will moisten and the depression will resolve itself. Pinellia ternata and ginger can reduce adverse reactions and stop vomiting, and can be combined with ginseng and licorice to prevent body fluid damage caused by warm dryness, and also help liver and gallbladder stagnant heat to dissipate by reducing turbid stomach qi. The whole recipe plays the function of soothing liver and relieving depression and harmonizing Qi and blood, so that the wood depression reaches and the earth is safe, and the Qi and blood are harmonious while the camp and Wei are adjusted, so that the depression will disappear and all symptoms will be relieved.

3.2 Reconcile Ying and Wei, Balance Yin and Yang

For the treatment of postpartum depression, Cinnamon Twig and longbone oyster soup should be used to reconcile Ying and Wei, yin and Yang of traffic, calm nerves and calm nerves, so that Wei Yang can enter Yin and sleep safely, and the essence and Qi can be kept and depressed. Lingshu · theory of great perplexity said: "a man who defends Qi will walk in the Yang every day and in the Yin at night, so when Yang Qi is exhausted, he will lie down, and when Yin Qi is exhausted, he will lie down." Lingshu · camp Health Association said: "defending Qi travels in the Yin at 25 degrees and in the Yang at 25 degrees, which is divided into day and night, so Qi starts from the Yang and ends from the Yin." Yang entering Yin is the key to sleep. Women with postpartum deficiency and depression are prone to blood loss and Qi floating. "Lingshu · evil guest": "the Wei Qi is independent of the outside, and it moves in the Yang, but not in the Yin. When it moves in the Yang, it will be full of Yang Qi, and when it is full of Yang Qi, it will sink in the Yang; when it cannot enter the Yin, it will be Yin deficiency, so the eyes will not sleep". When the camp and the guard are out of harmony, the Wei Qi moves disorderly day and night, and only moves in the Yang minute, so it cannot enter the Yin minute according to the law, so it cannot sleep. As far as constipation is concerned, Shengji Zonglu [18] said: "the stool is secret and astringent, and the cover is not a syndrome. Both the glory and the defense are not adjusted, and the Qi of yin and yang are in stalemate. The Ying Qi belongs to Yin. It mainly protects and moistens the internal body, and walks with the blood to provide body fluid for the intestines; Wei Qi belongs to Yang, which is the main external division of opening and closing, regulating the metabolism of body fluid and promoting the operation of Qi machine. Sufficient Yin fluid leads to smooth intestines, while unobstructed Yang Qi leads to strong conduction. If Yin and yang are out of balance, intestinal conduction will be abnormal. The cause of self perspiration, "Jing Yue Quan Shu" [19] said: "people strengthen their appearance by defending Qi, but if they do not defend Qi, they will express virtual self perspiration, and the body fluid will vent

for it". Postpartum Wei Qi deficiency and disheartened, unable to protect the body and Yin, so the body fluid is discharged in vain, and the body fluid is sparse. According to the medical law [20]: "use Guizhi Decoction to regulate the stagnation of Ying and Wei; add keel and oyster astringency to stop the clearing of grain, blood loss and loss of essence; use Guizhi Decoction to regulate Ying and Wei to replenish qi and blood, and add dragon oyster astringent essence to stop slippage, so as to normalize Yin and Yang and maintain essence. This prescription coincides with the purport of "Yin calming Yang secret". It is not only a palliative treatment, but also a fundamental one. Just as the "medical law" says, "one side but two outlines", it is actually a good prescription for postpartum depression syndrome.

3.3 Treat by Stages, Calm the Mind and Follow the Syndrome in Sequence

For the treatment of postpartum depression, we should comply with the purpose of "treating according to the syndrome, and changing the prescription according to the syndrome", and adjust the tranquilizing products in stages. "Suwen · Yin and Yang should be like a grand theory" says: "judge its Yin and Yang, and treat Yin and Yang with different softness and hardness. Yang disease governs Yin, and yin disease governs Yang". In the early stage of the disease, the patient had hyperactivity of liver Yang and restlessness of spirit. At this time, he was elected as the genus of keel and oyster, taking its "weight can suppress timidity" as the result. As the Shennong herbal classic said, "keel master... Startles epilepsy", "Oyster master... Startles anger", so as to calm the floating Yang and calm the spirit. When Yang qianshen is at ease, it is easy to use Polygonum multiflorum rattan and other products to nourish the mind and calm the mind. This is the ladder strategy of "convergence first and then cultivation". There are many deficiencies after the birth. If you use it to calm down, you may hurt the healthy qi. Therefore, you should follow the purpose of "urgency will cure the symptoms, and moderation will cure the root cause". First, you should focus on calming the symptoms, then nourish and consolidate the root cause, so that yin and yang can be reconciled and the spirit can be peaceful.

4. EXAMPLES OF MEDICAL RECORDS

The patient, female, 28 years old, was first diagnosed on September, 2025, 3 months after delivery. Chief complaint: persistent depression, irritability and insomnia for 4 months. Depression, depression, irritability, Hamilton Depression Scale (HAMD) score of 20 points, accompanied by physical symptoms such as chest distress, palpitation, fatigue and anorexia, insomnia, and autonomic nervous symptoms such as cold and heat, sweating (fear of cold after sweating), constipation, slightly red tongue, thin yellow fur, and thin pulse. Diagnosis: postpartum depression; Dialectics: stagnation of liver qi, disharmony between Ying and Wei, deficiency of both heart and spleen, fluid deficiency and intestinal dryness; Treatment: soothe the liver and relieve depression, regulate Ying and Wei, strengthen the spleen and calm the mind. Based on the decoction of Radix Bupleuri and Ramulus Cinnamomi plus longbone and oyster, the modified formula is: Radix Bupleuri 10g, Radix Scutellariae 10g, Pinellia ternata 10g, roasted licorice 10g, Ligusticum chuanxiong 15g, Rhizoma Cyperi 10g, ginseng 10g (decocted separately), Ramulus Cinnamomi 5g, Radix Paeoniae Alba 15g, Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae 10g, Atractylodes Macrocephalae 10g, Poria cocos 30g, yam 10g, Aucklandia 10g, oyster 30g (decocted first), longbone 30g (decocted first), hemp seed 20g. 7 doses, decocted in water, 1 dose a day, morning and evening after meals. It is advised to avoid spicy, greasy and seafood. Wait for hair to ensure adequate sleep.

Second diagnosis on September, 2025: after taking the above 7 doses, the patient reported that sweating and constipation improved (hamd=16 points), but still had insomnia, anorexia, cold and hot. Take Cinnamomum twig, dragon bone, oyster, Ligusticum chuanxiong to 15g, add 30g of floating wheat, 30g of Polygonum multiflorum vine, 6G of Polygala tenuifolia, decoct in water, 1 dose a day, take it in the morning and evening after meals, and avoid spicy, greasy, seafood and other hair products to ensure adequate sleep.

Three diagnoses on 2025: after taking the above 7 doses, the patient reported that chest tightness, poor appetite and fatigue were significantly improved, sleep was improved, and constipation disappeared (hamd=10 points). Ginseng was reduced to 5g and hempseed was removed. 7 doses, decocted in water, 1 dose a day, after breakfast and dinner. Avoid spicy, greasy, seafood and other hair products to ensure adequate sleep.

Follow up visit on mm/DD/2025: after taking the above 7 doses, the symptoms were completely alleviated, the sleep was acceptable, the two stools were adjusted, and there was no recurrence during the follow-up after drug withdrawal.

Note: the patient suffered from postpartum depression due to emotional depression, resulting in the loss of liver qi

and insufficient blood consumption, which eventually became the syndrome of liver depression and blood deficiency, and the loss of Ying and Wei, which was diagnosed as postpartum depression; According to the patient's emotional performance, physical symptoms, autonomic nerve dysfunction signs and tongue and pulse characteristics, and with reference to the Hamilton Depression Scale (HAMD) score, the patients were divided into acute phase, remission phase and late good phase for staged treatment. In the acute phase, the patient was depressed and fidgety with high HAMD score, which was the symptom of liver depression and qi stagnation, qi stagnation and fire, and disturbance of the gods; Poor appetite means that the liver and wood are rebellious, and the spleen and soil are destroyed, resulting in the loss of transportation and chemistry of the middle energizer; Cold and heat come and go without a definite time, which is due to the adverse situation of Shaoyang cardinal and the dispute between good and evil; Sweating is caused by the loss of peace between the camp and the defense, the lack of stability outside the defense, and the leakage of the camp Yin; Constipation is due to blood deficiency and fluid deficiency, and the intestines are not moistened; Fatigue refers to the deficiency of blood and blood biochemistry, and the body loses the ability to warm up; The tongue is slightly red, the fur is thin and yellow, and the pulse is thin and stringy, which is the syndrome of liver depression turning into fire injury and Yin blood, with deficiency. The prescription is Xiaochaihu Decoction Combined with Guizhi and Longgu Muli decoction. In the prescription, bupleurum can relieve the stagnant heat of liver and gallbladder, which is similar to *Scutellaria baicalensis* to clear the stagnant fire of Shaoyang; The method of *Pinellia ternata* can reduce the adverse reaction and stomach, combine with tangerine peel, reduce turbidity and stop vomiting, and aim at the anorexia of liver stomach disharmony; Ginseng, *Atractylodes macrocephala*, *Poria cocos* and Chinese yam can strengthen the spleen and Qi to strengthen the day after tomorrow; *Rhizoma Cyperi* and *Ligusticum chuanxiong* can promote qi and blood circulation, and help *Bupleurum dredge* Qi; *Pericarpium Citri Reticulatae* and *Radix Aucklandiae* regulate qi and awaken the spleen, smooth the middle energizer, and make it tonic but not stagnant; Calcined keel and oyster are important for calming the mind, absorbing the floating Yang, restraining the leaked Ying Yin, and aiming at the liver depression turning into fire and the restlessness of the mind disturbed; Hemp seed can nourish blood, moisten dryness and relieve constipation. It can be combined with *Atractylodes macrocephala* and *poria cocos* to supplement and moisturize; The roasted licorice can be used to blend various herbs, combine ginseng and yam to form the meaning of sweet, warm and nourishing the middle, and combine with white peony to form the effect of acid, sweet and Yin. At the second diagnosis, the patient's sweating and constipation were reduced, and the HAMD score was reduced to 16. He still had insomnia, anorexia, and cold and heat. So he went to *Ramulus Cinnamomi*, dragon bone, oyster, and increased the dosage of *Ligusticum chuanxiong* to enhance the ability of qi circulation and blood circulation, unblock the meridians of Shaoyang, help the spleen and stomach transport, and add wheat, *Polygonum multiflorum*, *Polygala tenuifolia*, and nourish the heart, calm the mind, and awaken the spleen. During the third diagnosis, the patient's chest tightness, anorexia and fatigue were significantly improved, sleep became safe, constipation was eliminated, and HAMD score was reduced to 10 points, so ginseng was reduced to prevent stagnation and protect Qi; Remove hemp seed to prevent excessive moistening and damaging Yang or causing slippery discharge. In the treatment process, the prescription compatibility is rigorous, and the whole process runs through the purpose of treating according to the syndrome and stages.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest relevant to this study.

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