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Ishrat Ali

Department of Ilmul Amraz,
Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College and
Hospital, Aligarh, Uttar
Pradesh, India

Musab Siddique

Department of Moalejat,
Ajmal Khan Tibbiya College and
Hospital, Aligarh, Uttar
Pradesh, India

Subuhi Akhtar

Department of Tahaffuzi wa
Samaji Tib, State Takmeel-ut-tib
College and Hospital, Lucknow,
Uttar Pradesh, India

Badrudduja Khan

Department of Moalejat, Ajmal
Khan Tibbiya College and
Hospital, Aligarh, Uttar
Pradesh, India

Assessing the role of *Asbāb-e-Sitta Ḍarūriyya* in development of non-communicable diseases: A comprehensive review

Ishrat Ali, Musab Siddique, Subuhi Akhtar and Badrudduja Khan

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Abstract

Lifestyle Disorders (LSD) pose a widespread challenge, often stemming from poor dietary choices, insufficient physical activity, alcohol consumption, and smoking. These behaviours contribute to serious health issues such as cardiovascular disease (hypertension and heart attack), chronic respiratory ailments (COPD & Asthma), Diabetes, and cancer. These conditions fall under the category of non-communicable Diseases (NCD), as they are not directly transferable between individuals. In India, 66% of NCD-related deaths in 2019 were reported by the World Health Organization (WHO), accounting for 41 million deaths globally, or 74% of total fatalities.

According to Unani medicine, lifestyle disorders emerge from a prolonged imbalance in *Asbab-e-Sitta Ḍarūriyya* (six essential factors). Numerous factors, including unhealthy eating habits, a sedentary lifestyle, obesity, stress, anxiety, inadequate sleep, smoking, and alcoholism contribute to the development of these diseases. Unani medicine emphasizes on distinctive combination of *Asbab-e-Sitta Ḍarūriyya*, that play a crucial role in preventing and managing various lifestyle disorders. These factors include atmospheric air, dietary habits, rest and physical activities, psychological activities and rest, sleep patterns and wakefulness, and eliminations and retentions. This paper explores the pathogenesis of Lifestyle disorders produced by due imbalance in *Asbab-e- Sitta Ḍarūriyya*.

Keywords: Life style disorders, *Asbāb-e-Sitta Ḍarūriyya*, unani medicine, NCDs

1. Introduction

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs), also referred to as chronic diseases, are becoming a growing concern for societies, national governments, and the global community due to their high mortality rates. These conditions are typically long-lasting and progress slowly. Most NCDs are not contagious and arise from a combination of factors, such as genetics, physiological changes, behaviours, and environmental influences. According to WHO in India, 66% of total Deaths were due to NCD in 2019, and 74% of all deaths globally, were due to NCD. Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 74% of all deaths globally. Each year, more than 15 million people die from an NCD between the ages of 30 and 69 years. Lifestyle diseases are predominant in the middle and old age peoples. Lifestyle Disorders (LSD) are common problems produced by unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity, alcohol, and smoking, which leads to cardiovascular diseases (heart attack), chronic respiratory disease (COPD & Asthma), Diabetes & Cancer. Such types of diseases are not transmitted directly from one person to another that's why it called Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD). There are mainly 4 types of non-communicable diseases, which are the leading cause of an increase in mortality rate worldwide. These are as follows; cardiovascular diseases, (hypertension, heart attack, and stroke), cancer, chronic respiratory diseases (COPD and asthma), and diabetes [1, 2].

Hippocrates is acknowledged as the originator of preventive medicine in the Unani System of Medicine, credited for offering guidance on preventing lifestyle diseases through dietary and exercise interventions in his well-known writings [3].

2. Concept of Lifestyle Disorder in Unani Medicine

In the Unani system of medicine, lifestyle disorders are considered to be the result of an imbalance in *Asbab-e-Sitta Ḍarūriyya* (six essential factors) over a prolonged period. A balanced relationship between the six essential factors is crucial for balancing the internal

Corresponding Author:**Subuhi Akhtar**

Department of Tahaffuzi wa
Samaji Tib, State Takmeel-ut-tib
College and Hospital, Lucknow,
Uttar Pradesh, India

environment of the human body. If any deviation occurs between these governing factors, resulting in abnormal production of *Akhlat* (humors), and derangement in the normal temperament of the body. Which further affects the functions of various faculties of the body like *Quwwate tabaiya* (digestive system) *Quwwate haiwaniya* (circulatory and respiratory systems) and *Quwwate nafsaniya* (brain) resulting an imbalance in the internal environment of the body and production of various diseases. The comprehensive approach of the Unani system of medicine regarding lifestyle diseases is to cover two main pillars i.e. prevention and management by modification and moderation in *Asbab-e-Sitta Darūriyya* [4, 5].

A person's Mizaj reflects their physical constitution and inclinations. When there is an imbalance in Mizaj, it can result in various diseases by disrupting the biotic equilibrium within the body. The *Asbab-e-sitta Darūriyya*, or the six essential factors, play a role in maintaining the balance of Mizaj [6].

3. Concept of Mizaj and Akhlat

In Unani Tib, the concepts of *Mizaj* (Temperament) and *Akhlat* (Humour) have prime importance and play a pivotal role in health maintenance and disease production. The *Asbab-e-sitta Darūriyya*, or the six essential factors, play an important role in maintaining health and balancing Mizaj [7].

Ibn-e-Abbas-Majoosi (10TH Century A.D) described that maintaining a balanced proportion of humour in both quantity and quality is essential for a healthy bodily condition. Any imbalance or irregular distribution of humours can lead to specific diseases. The innate power of the body, referred to as *Tabiyat*, primarily regulates the equilibrium of humour. However, external factors like diet and environmental factors can also disrupt this balance, influencing the temperamental composition of the body and potentially causing lifestyle disorders [8].

Ibn-e-Rushd (1126-1198 A.D) highlighted the significance of factors such as variations in air quality, prolonged fatigue, and psychological elements like anger and anxiety, which can contribute to changes in temperament. Additionally, a sedentary lifestyle and insufficient physical activity may lead to an alteration in temperament and abnormal production of *Akhlat*. This alteration could become a primary risk factor for conditions like obesity and the constriction of vessels, subsequently increasing the chances of the development of diseases such as hypertension, coronary artery disease, and strokes [4].

Ibn-e-Sina (980-1037 AD) stated that every individual's life follows the course determined by their inherent temperament unless influenced by abnormal causes. Each organism inherits distinct properties from its parents, and the influence of *Mizaj-e-ula* extends from the balance of *Akhlat* to the overall functions of the body. This primary temperament is linked to an individual's genetic makeup and affects the morphological, physiological, and psychological functions. Every person is born with their inherent *Mizaj-e-ula* encoded in genes, but environmental factors, known as *Iktisabi awamil*, can interfere and lead to a transformation from *Mizaj-e-ula* to *Mizaj-e-sani*. These changes may manifest locally or affect the entire system [5, 9, 10].

Unani physicians have described the *Aadat* as *Tabi''at Saniya* which can be interpreted as lifestyle habits which means adaptation to the specific environment and changes in lifestyle habits which influence the physiological functions of the body. *Hippocrates* quoted that “Lifestyle is secondary to

Tabiyat” [8].

4. Asbab-e-Sitta Darūriyya

To maintain a healthy life and prevent diseases, Unani physicians stated six essential factors, known as *Asbab-e-Sitta daruriya*. Adhering to these factors is crucial for well-being, as they impact every individual throughout their life. No individual can escape from these factors. That's why they are called *Asbab-e-sitta Darūriyya* [11].

Sabab (cause) is an Arabic word (plural – *Asbab*), According to Unani medicine it is defined as a specific factor responsible to generate a new state (from health to sickness or from sickness to health) or to maintain an old state in human body. The six essential factors are:

- *Hawa-e-Muheet* (atmospheric air)
- *Makool wa Mashroob* (food and drinks)
- *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Badni* (physical movement and rest)
- *Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani* (mental movements and rest)
- *Naum wa Yaqza* (sleep and wake fullness)
- *Ehtibas wa Istifragh* (retention of essential and excretion of wastes) [5, 12, 13].

5. Etiopathogenesis of Lifestyle Disorder due to Imbalance in Asbab-e-Sitta Darūriyya

5.1 *Hawa-e-Muheet* (atmospheric air)

Human beings need a continuous supply of air to exist because air is a vital *Rukn* (pillar, support) of *Ruh* (pneuma) and body. The air moderate's hot temperament of *Ruh* by means of inspiration or inhalation and purifies lungs by means of expiration or exhalation. Both of these functions occur when the air is in pure form. Air performs the function of *Ta''adeel-e-Rooh* at the time of *inspiration* by exchanging the air. Simultaneously it also works as *tanqiya-e-Rooh* at the time of *expiration*. When it becomes contaminated, then it is unable to perform its function (*Ta''adeel-e-Rooh*, *Taqiya-e-Rooh*) and leads the sue mizaj (mal -temperament) of *Ruh*. When air becomes impure then it may lead to many respiratory as well as cardiovascular morbidity and mortality like COPD, asthma, hypertension etc. [5, 7]

5.2 *Makool wa Mashroob* (food and drinks)

The term *makool* means foods and *mashroob* means drinks. The foods and drinks act upon the body in three ways *kaifiyat*, *madda* and *surat-e-nauyia*. Foods can be broadly categorized into two types: (i) *ghiza-e-lateef*, which is easily digestible and readily assimilated into the body, leading to the production of thin blood; and (ii) *ghiza-e-kaseef*, which is difficult to digest and does not integrate well into the body, resulting in production of thick and viscous blood due to insufficient action of the digestive faculties (*quwwat-e-mutagayyara*). An excessive intake of *ghiza-e-kaseef* can lead to an increased production of *khilt-e-ghaleez wa lazij* (thick and viscous humor), result in disruption of body's faculties. Specially it has detrimental effect on cardiovascular system causing angina, MI and stroke. Furthermore, excess amount of food may produce conditions like indigestion, obstruction and ultimately putrefaction, whereas less amount of food may lead to emaciation, but the diet advised may vary from person to person depending upon the temperament, body power and health or diseased condition of the individual. *Mashroobat* like cold water, alcohol, sweet beverages have bad effect on human body and responsible for many diseases [5, 7, 14, 15, 17].

“The commentator of *Al-Qanoon-Fit-Tib* who had stated that “the stomach is the house of diseases and the diet is the head

of healing”

5.3 Harkat wa Sukoon-e Badni (physical activity and rest)

The Unani System of Medicine gives great importance to both appropriate movement and rest for maintaining health and for curing disease. Movement is necessary for evacuating waste products and rest is needed for getting relief from fatigue and to replenish the lost substances from the body. Exercise increases sweat through which *Fuzlat-e-Badan* gets excreted. Exercise boosts *Hararat-e Gharizia*, which is responsible for better digestion and general well-being. In recent era it is proved that exercise is beneficial in hypertension, diabetes mellitus and many other diseases.

Unani physicians advocated that physical activity is essential for the activation of *hararat ghariziya* (innate heat) and to excrete the waste products from the body, but prolonged activity of every kind leads to dispersion of the *hararat ghariziya* (innate heat). Rest is beneficial for digestion, helps to relieve the fatigue and to decrease the body temperature which is harmful to body fluids. Excess of both causes coldness of the body because motion leads in the decrease of the innate fluids, excess of rest increases the body fluid which decreases the innate heat. Both *innate heat* and innate fluid are necessary for better performance of bodily functions [5, 7, 16, 17].

5.4 Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani (mental activity and rest)

Unani scholars have explained that *Quwwat-e-Mudarika* (Sensory Faculties) and *Quwwat-e-Muhrika* (Motor Faculties) are associated with *harkat-wa-sukoon-e-nafsani* and these faculties regulate the internal and external functions of the body. *Ibn-e-Sina* was the first physician who developed the relation between psychology and medicine. *Nafsiyati awamil* (psychological factors) like Stress, fear, and anger are dependent on the dominant *khilt* and *mizaj* of the person. So, it leaves an impact on his Body and mind. Excess of *Nafsiyati awamil* (psychological factors) responsible for many diseases like anxiety, stress, depression, hypertension etc. excess of *sukoon-e-nafsani* leads to poor memory, decreased retentive power [5, 10, 17].

5.5 Naum wa Yaqza (sleep and wake fullness)

Ismail Jurjani stated that normal sleep is very beneficial to all, while sleeplessness deviates the temperament of brain. It interferes with the process of digestion and metabolism. It not only weakens the ability of thought, sense and movement but also deteriorates them gradually and renders the person to take decision [6, 7, 16].

Ifrat Naum (excessive sleep) increases coldness and wetness in temperament which cause weakness, dullness of the psychic faculties, laziness in the body, and headaches etc. *Ifrate Yaqza* (excessive wakefulness) increases hotness and dryness in temperament causing a Lack of energy, mental weakness, and digestive disturbances. According to *Allama Nafis*, excessive awakening produces dissolution of *rooh* leads to weakness and *yaboosat* (dryness) of the brain and indigestion. Inadequate and insufficient sleep is a cause for various lifestyle diseases like obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other health problems [7, 19].

5.6 Ehtibas wa Istifragh (retention of and elimination)

In Unani Tib, the balance between *istifragh* and *ihtibas* of substance is believed to be very important for the maintenance of health. If useful material excreted from the body then it will lead to cachexia, anemia, hypoproteinemia

etc. If unwanted material (urine, stools, sweat, menstrual blood) retained in body then it will lead to several diseases by one of the following;

1. *Amraz-e-sue mizaj* (e.g. infection, decrement in *hararat ghariziya*)
2. *Amraz-e-sue tarkeeb* (e.g. embolism, paralysis)
3. *Amraz-e-tafarruk ittetal* (e.g. rupture of vessels)
4. *Amraz-e-murakkabah* (e.g. inflammation, abscesses) [5, 7, 20]

6. Conclusion

Lifestyle disorders (LSD) represent a significant public health challenge, especially in the context of rising non-communicable diseases (NCDs) globally. In India, the alarming statistics of NCD-related deaths highlight the urgent need for effective prevention and management strategies. The Unani system of medicine offers a holistic approach to understanding these disorders through the lens of *Asbab-e-Sitta Daruriyya*, which emphasizes the critical balance of six essential factors that influence health: atmospheric air, dietary habits, physical activity and rest, psychological wellbeing, sleep patterns, and excretory processes.

The pathogenesis of LSD, as described in Unani medicine, illustrates how imbalances among these factors can disrupt the body's internal environment, leading to the abnormal production of *Akhlat* (humours) and resultant diseases. Each factor plays a distinct role; for instance, contaminated air can impair respiratory function, while poor dietary choices can lead to obesity and cardiovascular issues. Likewise, inadequate physical activity and sleep can exacerbate stress and mental health problems, further compounding the risk of NCDs.

To combat lifestyle disorders effectively, a comprehensive strategy that incorporates the principles of Unani medicine is essential. This involves promoting awareness of the *Asbab-e-Sitta Daruriyya* and encouraging individuals to adopt healthier lifestyle habits. By prioritizing balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, mental wellbeing, and appropriate sleep, we can significantly reduce the prevalence of lifestyle disorders and improve overall health outcomes. Ultimately, integrating these traditional practices with modern health strategies may pave the way for a more sustainable approach to managing the growing burden of non-communicable diseases.

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