



Original Article

# Constitution of traditional chinese medicine and related factors in women of childbearing age

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## Abstract

**Background:** This study investigates the constitution of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) among women who want to be pregnant in one year and explores factors related to TCM constitution.

**Methods:** This study was conducted on women who participated in free preconception check-ups provided by the Zhabei District Maternity and Child Care Center in Shanghai, China. The information regarding the female demographic characteristics, physical condition, history of pregnancy and childbearing, diet and behavior, and social psychological factors was collected, and TCM constitution assessment was performed. The Chi-square test, t-test, logistic regression analysis, and multinomial logistic regression analysis were used to explore the related factors of TCM constitution.

**Results:** The participants in this study were aged  $28.3 \pm 3.0$  years. Approximately fifty-five women in this study had Unbalanced Constitution. Logistic regression analysis showed that Shanghai residence, dysmenorrhea, gum bleeding, aversion to vegetables, preference for raw meat, job stress, and economic stress were significantly and negatively associated with Balanced Constitution. Multinomial logistic analysis showed that Shanghai residence was significantly associated with Yang-deficiency, Yin-deficiency, and Stagnant Qi Constitutions; gum bleeding was significantly associated with Yin-deficiency, Stagnant Blood, Stagnant Qi, and Inherited Special Constitutions; aversion to vegetables was significantly associated with Damp-heat Constitution; job stress was significantly associated with Yang-deficiency, Phlegm-dampness, Damp-heat, Stagnant Blood, and Stagnant Qi Constitutions; and economic stress was significantly associated with Yang-deficiency, and Stagnant Qi Constitutions.

**Conclusion:** The application of TCM constitution to preconception care would be beneficial for early identification of potential TCM constitution risks and be beneficial for early intervention (e.g., health education, and dietary education), especially during the women who do not have a medical condition and those who have related factors found in this study.

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**Keywords:** Body constitution; Chinese traditional medicine; Preconception care; Risk factors; Women

Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the subject matter or materials discussed in this article.

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## 1. Introduction

The health of women of childbearing age has been concerned for years. Prenatal care and neonatal care may be too late and insufficient to achieve primary prevention of adverse outcomes,<sup>1–3</sup> so preconception care was used to supplement and increase the likelihood of a desire and healthy pregnancy and a healthy infant by providing timely and exact information and intervention.<sup>4,5</sup> As we know, modern medicine is better at serving for people with medical conditions, and there are currently no targeted measures for sub-health. In female health care, based on the modern medicine, there are several unanswered questions: ①Why do women with similar demographic and medical characteristics, as assessed by modern medicine, have different pregnancy symptoms and outcomes? That is, why do some women maintain comfortable and favorable conditions during pregnancy while others develop uncomfortable and adverse events? ②How provide personalized health care services for women with similar demographic and medical characteristics? ③How provide personalized health care services for women do not have medical conditions? Personalized health care services would be more acceptable.

The Chinese concept of constitution (i.e., the constitution of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM)) is an indigenous construct that serves as part of an explanatory model for understanding various aspects of life, including physical well-being. Constitution (i.e., *ti-zhi*) is a widely used term in China. Literally, *ti* means body and *zhi* denotes quality or substance. TCM takes a global and dynamic view of human differences, believes that constitution is partly genetically determined and partly acquired, and classifies individuals' constitution into nine types based on Chinese medical theory, multidisciplinary studies, and clinical practice. Therefore, the results can be used in disease prevention and cure, and rehabilitative care.<sup>6,7</sup> According to the shape of the human body, function, psychology, and other characteristics, individual constitution can be assessed by the Constitution in Chinese Medicine Questionnaire (CCMQ) developed by Wang et al.<sup>8–10</sup> One type is Balanced Constitution (i.e., a normal constitution, with fine lustrous complexion, a good sleep, a good appetite, and good defecation), and the following eight types represent unbalanced constitutions: Qi-deficiency, Yang-deficiency, Yin-deficiency, Phlegm-dampness, Damp-heat, Stagnant Blood, Stagnant Qi, and Inherited Special Constitutions. Unbalanced constitution means disharmony and can be viewed as an individual's susceptibility to specific disease or symptoms. Various types of constitution show various characteristics. For example, *People with Qi-deficiency and Yang-deficient* both are physically weak with loose muscle, weak voice, easily feel tired and sweat spontaneously. Compared to Qi-deficiency, Yang-deficiency is more susceptible to getting common cold. They often have a cold sensation in part or whole body and do not like staying in air-conditioned room, and feel uncomfortable (e.g., abdominal distention, diarrhea) after eating cold food or drinks. *People with Yin-deficiency* mostly look thin and tall, often suffer from feverish sensation in the cheeks, soles and palms, aversion to summer-heat and have dry eyes and skin.

They are often thirsty and suffer from constipation and insomnia. *People with Phlegm-dampness* are usually obese especially in the abdominal area. They usually suffer from greasy swear, and heaviness of legs with a sticky and sweet taste in the mouth and phlegm in the throat. *People of Damp-heat* constitution may have oily skin particularly in the face and the tip of nose, acne, itchy skin, foul breath, sticky stools and slow bowels movement, irritability. *People of Stagnant Blood constitution* have a dark facial complexion with purplish mouth and lips, rough skin, bloodshot eyes and bruises easily. They are forgetful and impatient with a quick temper. Most of *people of Stagnant Qi constitution* are thin and often feel gloomy or depressed, easy to be nervous, anxious, and sensitive. The *Inherited Special constitution* is a quite special. These people are vulnerable to many factors and environmental changes. They sneeze very often and have a running stuffy nose, and sometimes suffer from asthma, urticaria or skin eruptions.

TCM recognizes constitution as a specific etiologic factor in many diseases. And in situations where the etiology of a perceived health problem is not clear, constitution becomes the obvious instructive explanation. The theory of TCM constitution provides personalized services for all women in the following three aspects. First, people have different constitutions even if they have similar demographic and medical characteristics<sup>11</sup>; Second, different constitutions require different treatments (i.e., different food due to different food properties, different guidance on work and rest and on exercise regimen, and different Chinese herbs)<sup>6,7,9</sup>; Additionally, different foods that provide similar nutrients may not have the same TCM natures, so due to different food properties, people should choose better foods according to their constitutions.<sup>6,7,9</sup>

According to TCM theory, women with unbalanced constitutions at higher risk of uncomfortable symptoms and adverse outcomes because they cannot adapt well to the physiological and psychological changes accompanied with pregnancy and delivery. Qi and Blood deficiency are disadvantages of menstruation, pregnancy and childbearing and influence both maternal health and foetal/new-born health.<sup>12,13</sup> It was reported that a new-born whose parents suffer from asthma, and/or have an allergic constitution are at risk to develop bronchial asthma.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Unbalanced constitution is closely related to discomfort symptoms during the first trimester of pregnancy, i.e., frequent urination, fatigue, heavy vaginal discharge, nausea, vomiting, mood swings, nasal congestion, dizziness; and breast tenderness are significantly positively correlated with the constitutions of Yin-deficiency, Yang-deficiency, and Phlegm-dampness.<sup>15</sup> And Unbalanced constitution in the first trimester was also closely related to severe nausea and vomiting and poor sleep during pregnancy.<sup>16</sup> So, the identification of TCM constitution during women of childbearing age may help to understand and find risk characteristics of uncomfortable and adverse pregnant outcomes.

As a complementary medicine, TCM, which includes diet, Chinese herbs, and acupuncture, has been widely used<sup>17</sup> and has been demonstrated to be effective in disease prevention and treatment.<sup>18–20</sup> Therefore, it is feasible to integrate the TCM constitution theory into preconception care. Seeking

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