



Herbs To Treat Female Sexual Dysfunction (*Mati Putik*) In Malay Medical Manuscripts

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Abstract:

Introduction: Lack of libido is one of the most common symptoms of female sexual dysfunction among women in the global community. In Malaysia, low levels of libido have been demonstrated in women experiencing *mati putik* or female sexual dysfunction (FSD). Due to the lack of awareness about FSD, people commonly misunderstand that the signs and symptoms are due to the aging process. The most common signs of *mati putik* or FSD are fatigue and no desire or interest in engaging in sexual activity. To date, there has been no comprehensive review of the practice of Malay ancestors regarding FSD. Thus, the aim of this study was to document the formulations and practices recorded in Malay medical manuscripts for enhancing female sexual libido. **Methods:** The secondary texts of Malay medical manuscripts were reviewed to discover the ingredients used as aphrodisiac agents in the Malay Archipelago. The Malay term *shahwat* was the keyword used to describe sexual libido in the Malay community. A comparative analysis was then conducted to evaluate the materia medica found in the academic literature. **Results:** Four formulations were found that comprised four different aphrodisiac ingredients, including cabbage, fenugreek, kati, and honey. From all the ingredients, only fenugreek has found clinical evidence in the academic literature. **Conclusion:** Therefore, it is suggested that the materia medica found in the study be further explored to demonstrate its relationship with libido. This study is important as a part of preserving Malay medical knowledge and heritage, as well as providing insight into information on aphrodisiac plants for enhancing women's libido that can be applied in conventional medicine.

Keywords: Hypoactive sexual desire disorder, Malay medical manuscripts, Malay traditional medicine, *mati putik*



Introduction:

Mati putik or female sexual dysfunction (FSD) is more frequent among women who are married and have children (Shahimi, 2017). The most common symptoms of *mati putik* among Malay women are low libido or a lack of interest in engaging in sexual activity, as well as extreme fatigue (Shahimi, 2017). It is believed that *mati putik* can be treated by Malay traditional practices such as *bertangas* (vaginal steam), *berurut* (massage), and consuming or using herbal-based products (Shahimi, 2017; Ahmad Zaidi, 2022). Although *mati putik* is common in the society, only a few are really concerned about the method of treating this problem. Some people prefer to keep it to themselves because they are ashamed and fear the treatment will hurt them (Shahimi, 2017; Ahmad Zaidi, 2022). According to a recent cross-sectional study by Malaysian researchers, the prevalence of FSD among women aged 50 years and older attending the outpatient clinic was 68.8 percent. The women appeared to have problems in all six FSD subdomains, including sexual desire, satisfaction, arousal, lubrication, pain, and orgasm and desire disorder, which is the most prevalent at 85.2 percent (Tey et al., 2022).

Low libido is defined as hypoactive sexual desire disorder In Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5 this disorder is classified in the first class of Female Sexual Dysfunction (FSD), which is the Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder. Flibanserin is the first FDA-approved drug for hypoactive sexual desire disorder. Bremelanotide is the most recent drug for enhancing female libido in evidence-based medicine. It is a successful drug that has passed all the clinical trial stages. It has proven the ability to increase libido, physical arousal, and sexual satisfaction (Koochaki et al., 2021). The current clinical trial studies provide some alternatives for enhancing female sexual libido. Vitamin E, ginseng, and Tribulus terrestris are found to be effective in improving sexual desires among women (Ghamari et al., 2020; Vale et al., 2018). The use of zinc supplementation is positive for increasing testosterone levels and improving sexual function in women. Free testosterone and estradiol (E2) are important hormones for regulating sexual desire and arousal in women (Mazaheri et al., 2021).

The Malay medical manuscript (MMM) is a wonderful treatise that portrays the high intelligence of our Malay ancestors in grasping myriads of medical knowledge. Like other races in Malaysia, the Malay community also have their own traditional beliefs and practices on medicine and health, which have been

practiced and passed down from generation to generation either in the form of writings or verbally (Abd Aziz & Yunos, 2019). Studying MMM is crucial for research on its accessibility and usefulness in Malay society, known for its reliance on non-allopathic medicine (Sidik & Baharuddin, 2010). The study on MMM may provide information on the signs and symptoms of *mati putik* and potential treatment options for women suffering from FSD. Thus, the aim of this study is to document the formulations for enhancing female libido in the Malay medical scriptures.

Materials and Methods:

Reviewed Materials

The secondary texts of Malay medical manuscripts were reviewed to discover the ingredients used as aphrodisiac agents in the Malay Archipelago. The Malay term "shahwat" was the keyword used to describe sexual libido in the Malay community. To differentiate between "shahwat" for men and women, the study retrieved information that contained the benefits for women in the same formulation and discarded all formulations that had descriptions for men and women in general. From all the reviewed references, only three publications were selected that contained the intended information, including Kitab Perubatan Melayu: Khazinat al-Insan (Sarah Syazwani, 2017), Kitab Perubatan Melayu: Rumah Ubat Di Pulau Penyengat (Mohd Affendi Mohd Shafri, 2018), and Tib Ilmu Perubatan Melayu (Harun Mat Piah, 2019). In Kitab Tib Ilmu Perubatan Melayu, the book itself comprised of three fragments of manuscripts from MSS 2515, MSS 1292, and Hikayat Nurul Al-Lisan Menjawab Masalah (MSS 1792). Other publications were completed transliterated manuscripts.

Comparative Analysis of the Content of the Manuscript to Contemporary Scientific Reports

Comparative analysis is a method in which the use of individual herbs, animals, or minerals in a traditional formulation in a text is compared to published papers in modern scientific databases. The presence of papers of related use or in support of the use in the manuscripts is an indication of verified use. However, the absence of the papers does not necessarily mean that the traditional use is unverified, as many of the traditional Malay formulations, or even the individual ingredients from the Malay world, have not been studied by modern scientists (Mohd Shafri, 2021). The study used two search engines, PubMed and Google

Scholar, to retrieve peer-reviewed journal articles and both peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles from a vast range of medical and science sub-disciplines. The scientific evidence search strategy used in this study includes: (a) In vitro study OR In/ex vivo study OR Animal study OR randomized controlled trial study OR human case study; and (b) Any parts of the materia medica that were used in the clinical study. The search strategy was established to ensure that the scientific evidence retrieved for any materia medica is reliable and relevant.

Results and Discussion:

Formulation of Herbs to Treat *Mati Putik* or Female Sexual Dysfunction

The results of the study discovered four formulations for enhancing female sexual libido in the Malay medical manuscripts from three different references. The formulations were depicted below with translations:

(1) *Yang kedelapan halba, maka kequwatannya hangat darjah yang kedua, dan kering darjah yang pertama. Fa'idahnya membantutkan bengkak yang baharu, dan menyegerakan pecah bengkak yang lama. Maka, jika dimasak dengan manisan lebah, diminum, menghilangkan penyakit sejuk dan segala yang bertakung di dalam dada, dan menguatkan shahwat, dan membaikkah rahim perempuan, dan menyempurnakan 'aql, dan;*

Eight is fenugreek. Its strength is hot on the second degree and dry on the first degree. Its benefits are to prevent new abscess; and treat chronic abscess. If cooked with honey and drink, this will get rid of cold diseases and all diseases that are located in the chest; and increase sexual desire; and improve womb; and increase the intellect.

(Kitab Perubatan Melayu Khazinat Al-Insan, Sarah Syazwani, 2017, p. 33)

(2) *Adalah fa'idah ini ma'jun menyembuhkan penyakit angin; dan mengeluarkan sekalian penyakit daripada sejuk; dan memberi quwwat akan shahwat; dan memberi sembuh sakit berdebar; atau sakit duka cita; dan sangat memberi manfaat perempuan, dan mantapkan 'aql iaitu dimakan pagi, petang; sekali makan satu butir, kira-kira besar ibu tangan tiap-tiap sebutirnya, in sha' Allah Ta'ala, mujarrab dengan sebabnya adanya. Tamm.*

The benefits of this electuary [fenugreek] are to heal diseases related to imbalance in the wind element; and to get rid of all cold diseases; and increase desire for sex; and to resolve nervousness and grief; and this is

especially beneficial to women; and to enhance the intellect. Eat one thumb-size piece in the morning and evening.

(Kitab Perubatan Melayu Rumah Ubat di Pulau Penyangat, Mohd Affendi Mohd Shafri, 2018, p.

(3) *(Kata tabib), "Daripada kurnub (kubis)". Jawabnya, "Panas kering lagi lembut isinya dan daunnya panas lembut. Dan penggunaannya jika dimakan akan dia nescaya menambahi syahwat jimak dan jadi daripadanya angin. Dan menghilangkan berat lidah jika selalu memakan dia dan molekkan suaranya dan jika diasap di bawah faraj perempuan nescaya keluar uri-uri; dan demikian bijinya memudahkan keluar uri dan jika diminum air perahan daunnya nescaya keluar uri dengan mudah dan jika dimakan oleh perempuan kemudian daripada beranak nescaya menyucikan peranakan akan sebagai cuci yang elok. Dan jika dihantarkan daunnya pada tempat disengat oleh kala nescaya mengisap ia akan bisanya kepada luar dan jika dimakan akan dia nescaya menghilangkan penyakit safara dan dapat tidur; dan jika selalu meminum air rebus daunnya nescaya melicin akan suara serta moleknnya".*

Said physician, "From kurnub (cabbage)". Her replies, "Its flesh is hot, dry and soft whereas the leaves are hot and soft. Its usage is if eaten, it will increase desire for sex and cause angin. If consumed regularly, it will reduce heaviness in the tongue; and smoothen the voice; and if smoked over her vagina, it will remove the lochia; and the seed eases the process of removing lochia; and if consumed the juice from the leaves, the lochia will be removed easily; and if consumed by woman after giving birth, it will cleanse her womb, which is good as cleansing. And if the leaves are applied on the site stung by scorpions, it will take out the venom; and if consumed, this will treat safara diseases; and aid sleeping. If the boiled water is taken regularly, this will smoothen the voice.

([Hikayat Nurul Lisan Menjawab Masalah (MSS 1792)] Kitab Tib Ilmu Perubatan Melayu, Harun Mat Piah 2019, p. 289)

(4) *(Kata tabib), "Daripada karfaf (kati). Jawabnya, "Panas kering; penggunaannya menghilangkan bengkak dan membukakan lubang urat yang tersumbat dengan balgham dan membaikkah bahu mulut dan menghilangkan sebak nafas dan membanyakkan air kencing serta memudahkan keluarannya dan membangkitkan syahwat jimak daripada laki-laki dan perempuan. Dan jika dimakan akan dia nescaya menghilangkan air titik air kencing".*

Said physician, "From karfaf (kati)". Her replies, "Its nature is hot and dry. Its usage is to reduce swelling; and to remove the blockage in the vein caused by phlegm; and improve bad breath (halitosis); and treat

sebak nafas; and increase the amount of urine; also ease in urination; and initiate the desire for sex in both men and women. If consumed, this will treat dribbling”.

([Hikayat Nurul Lisan Menjawab Masalah (MSS 1792)] Kitab Tib Ilmu Perubatan Melayu, Harun Mat Piah 2019, p. 289)

Comparative Analysis with Scientific Literatures

In this study, four different ingredients were discovered from the formulations. The use of a single ingredient is more preferred than preparing in combination with other material. The prescription of the formulation is either by drinking the boiled remedy, eating as an electuary, or eating the leafy parts of the plants. All the ingredients discovered in the study do not only boost up the women’s arousal, but they have more than one medicinal benefit.

Table 1: Summary of the findings (the ingredients, part or form used, and prescription)

No.	Ingredient	Part/ Form used	Direction of usage
1.	<i>Halba</i> (Fenugreek)	Seed	Drink the cooked mixture of fenugreek and honey
2.	Manisan lebah (Honey)	Liquid	
2.	<i>Halba</i> (Fenugreek)	Seed	Eat one thumb-size piece of fenugreek electuary in the morning and evening
3.	<i>Kubis</i> (Cabbage)	Flesh and Leaf	Eat the flesh and leaves of the cabbage
4.	<i>Kati</i>	Not stated	Not stated

Fenugreek is a bitter, strong-scented spice (Omar, 2018) used to enhance the flavour in some Malay dishes. This herb has been utilized in the treatment of uterine infections, vaginitis, induce childbirth and lactation in the Middle East (Shahrajabian et al., 2021). In Malay traditional medicine, drinking the pounded seed of fenugreek is good for breastfeeding mothers to improve lactation (Mohamed Rehan et al., 2021). Clinical evidence supported fenugreek could increase women’s sexual libido by increasing the level of circulating hormones and sexual function in healthy

menstruating women (Rao et al., 2015). The study administered 600 mg of *Trigonella foenum-graecum* seed extract (Libifem) to 80 women in the age of 20 and 40 years old, and the results revealed a significant increase in free testosterone and estradiol (E2) and improvement in sexual desire and arousal among women compared to the placebo (Rao et al., 2015). In the study, the Malay medical manuscripts described the use of *halba* or fenugreek, in combination with honey for drinking and *halba* electuary for women’s libido.

Table 2: Clinical Evidence of The Materia Medica in the Scientific Literatures

No	Vernacular Name	Scientific Name	Scientific literature evidence
Plant-based			
1.	<i>Kubis</i> (Cabbage)	<i>Brassica oleracea</i>	Not found
2.	<i>Kati</i>	<i>Aganosma marginata</i> ¹ <i>Ligusticum acutilobum</i> ²	Not found
3.	<i>Halba</i> (Fenugreek)	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i>	Influence of a Specialized <i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i> Seed Extract (Libifem), on Testosterone, Estradiol and Sexual Function in Healthy Menstruating Women, a Randomised Placebo Controlled Study (Rao et al., 2015)
4.	<i>Manisan lebah</i> (Honey) -	-	Not found

¹ *Kati* may refer to *sekati lima* plant (<https://prpm.dbp.gov.my/>)

² *Kati* may refer to *ganti* plant (MSS 1292)

Kubis or cabbage is a traditional salad food (*ulam*), not only among Malay community but all races in Malaysia. It can be found in many cultivated forms such as cabbage (*kubis*), broccoli (*kubis bunga hijau*), cauliflower (*kubis bunga*) and brussel sprouts (*kubis brussel*). They are also being called cruciferous vegetables. By applying the leaves of cabbage on the mother's breast, this will help relieve breast engorgement during the postpartum period (Muhammad Rehan et al., 2021). Cabbage is among the food that is prohibited to be consumed among women after childbirth due to its cold nature. In the Malay traditional view, these mothers should always remain in the hot condition to ensure the recovery process runs smoothly (KKM, 2017). Cabbage is high in sulfur and enriched with vitamins and has medicinal benefit in the treatment of scurvy in Mediterranean (Stefan & Andreaa, 2021). The seed from spring cabbage (*Brassica oleracea* L. var. *capitata* L.) has been traditionally used as an aphrodisiac in Turkey (Tufan et al., 2018). Fenugreek and cabbage are found to be effective in the alleviation of breast engorgement among breastfeeding mothers (Hassan et al., 2020). However, there was no scientific evidence that relates between cabbage as aphrodisiac herbs.

The next herb that was recorded to be used as ingredients to treat *mati putik* is called *kati* in the manuscripts. There are two types of plants referred to as *kati*. The first plant is *Aganosma marginata*, or called by its local name as *sekati lima*. In MSS 2515, the leaves and roots of *sekati lima* are used as remedy for coughing. By drinking the boiled water of the stem, flowers and pulur of teberau, leaves of *sekati lima*, fenugreek, garlic and onion, this will relieve asthmatic coughs (Raja Perdaus et al., 2021). The second plant is *Ligusticum acutilobum* or called by the local as *ganti*. It is one of the ingredients used in a remedy for typhoid fever as chronicled in MSS 4106. By mixing the grounded leaves of climbing ferns and *susuk baju*, *costus*, *kanti* and massoy bark with water and sprinkle over the whole body, this formulation is believed to heal typhoid fever (Ruzaidi et al., 2021). This plant is well known in Chinese medicine and called as *dang quai*, it is an essential ingredient for anaemia and gynaecological conditions (Dennis et al., 2007).

Based on the findings, it has been observed that only one ingredient, which is fenugreek, has been scientifically proven for their ability in enhancing libido. The remaining ingredients may not yet be explored as female aphrodisiac agents. Consumption of these herbs often may increase the

libido in women. Therefore, it is suggested for women experiencing low libido to add this herb into their daily intake, although their effectiveness is still not proven in the academic literatures.

Conclusion:

Low libido is one of the reasons why married couples experience less satisfaction in their sexual experience which may lead to marital dissatisfaction. Besides the awareness regarding the signs and symptoms and modern medicinal treatment, a complementary study on the practices of Malay ancestors could be one of the initiatives which need to be highlighted. It has been shown in this study that medical manuscripts have shown the practice of our ancestors in preserving their libido by consumption of certain ingredients accessible to their home. However, most of the herbs found in the study has no scientific evidence on the treatment for female sexual dysfunction except fenugreek. Therefore, further investigation of those herbs such as cabbage, *kati* and honey is warranted in order to establish a proper formulation of the ingredients which will be effective for the FSD treatment.

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