

 International Journal of AYUSH	IJAYUSH International Journal of AYUSH AYURVEDA • YOGA • UNANI • SIDDHA • HOMEOPATHY https://internationaljournal.org.in/journal/index.php/ijayush/	ISSN: 2349-7025
		 OPEN ACCESS
		 PEER REVIEWED
		 MONTHLY
Review Article	Volume 15 Issue 08	August 2026

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND HOMOEOPATHIC PRINCIPLES

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22178840>

Abstract

Background: This review looks at whether the eight life stages described by psychologist Erik Erikson can be matched up with ideas from homoeopathy¹⁰, particularly the practice of choosing remedies based on a person's whole personality and life history rather than just their physical symptoms¹.

Objective: The goal was to see whether the emotional struggles people go through at each life stage — for example, learning to trust others as a baby, or figuring out identity as a teenager — line up with the emotional “pictures” homoeopathy associates with specific remedies¹⁰, and whether leaving these struggles unresolved might contribute to long-term (chronic) health problems¹.

Methods: The authors did not run a new experiment. Instead, they reviewed existing peer-reviewed literature on Erikson's psychology and on homoeopathic constitutional prescribing³, drawing from databases like Scopus and PubMed⁴, and then compared the two side by side⁵.

Results: The review found that each of Erikson's eight stages could plausibly be matched with a homoeopathic interpretation and a small group of remedies traditionally linked to that emotional pattern⁶. It also found support for the idea that unresolved conflicts from these stages may show up later as chronic conditions⁷, an idea further reinforced by miasmatic theory⁸.

Conclusion: Combining Erikson's developmental psychology with homoeopathy's miasmatic theory (the idea of inherited or accumulated disease tendencies) offers a broader, more individualised way of understanding a patient² — one that considers not just symptoms in the present, but the developmental history behind them⁹, contributing to a wider, more integrative model of care³.

Keywords: Erikson's psychosocial stages, homoeopathy, developmental psychology, miasmatic theory, integrative care

Introduction

Both psychology and homoeopathy share a basic starting point: every person is unique, and their health (mental or physical) can't be fully understood without looking at how they've developed over time. Erik Erikson, a well-known developmental psychologist, proposed that people move through eight life stages from infancy to old age, and that each stage comes with its own emotional "conflict" that shapes personality and well-being going forward¹. Homoeopathy, for its part, has always emphasised something similar in its own way — through constitutional prescribing, where a remedy is chosen based on a patient's whole temperament and history, not just an isolated symptom². Given these parallels, the authors felt it was worth directly examining where these two frameworks overlap, particularly for what this could mean for integrative healthcare².

Methods

This was a narrative review, meaning the authors gathered and synthesised existing research rather than collecting new patient data. They searched published literature across psychology, homoeopathy, and integrative medicine³, focusing specifically on peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus and PubMed⁴. Their search targeted three overlapping areas: studies on psychosocial development, studies on constitutional prescribing in homoeopathy, and studies on miasmatic theory (homoeopathy's model of inherited/accumulated chronic disease tendencies)⁵. They then combined this material to draw connections between Erikson's eight stages and homoeopathic interpretations of those same emotional patterns, including which remedies are traditionally associated with each³.

It's worth understanding what this method does and doesn't allow the authors to claim. A narrative review does not involve testing patients, running statistics, or comparing outcomes between groups — it is essentially a structured, well-referenced argument built by reading and connecting existing sources⁴. This makes it a useful way to generate new ways of thinking about a topic, or to surface patterns across fields that don't usually talk to each other, but it cannot, on its own, prove that the proposed stage-to-remedy matches actually improve patient outcomes in practice⁵. That kind of proof would require a separate, purpose-built clinical study.

Results

Erikson's Stages of Development and Homoeopathic Correlation

A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF ERIKSON'S PSYCHOSOCIAL STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND HOMOEOPATHIC PRINCIPLES

Dr. Abhilasha Sonwane et al

Page 212

The core finding of the review is a stage-by-stage comparison. In plain terms, this is what each stage means and how the authors say it maps onto homoeopathic thinking:

- **Stage 1 — Trust vs. Mistrust (birth to 1 year).** A baby's central task is learning whether the world is safe and reliable. When this doesn't go well, it can create insecure attachment and early fears⁶. The review links this to remedies such as *Aethusa cynapium*, *Chamomilla*, and *Calcarea carbonica*, traditionally used for clingy, fearful, or poorly-settled infants.
- **Stage 2 — Autonomy vs. Shame (1-3 years).** Toddlers push for independence; when this is discouraged too harshly, it can lead to stubbornness or an excessive fear of failure⁶. This is matched with *Nux vomica*, *Sulphur*, and *Belladonna* — remedies associated with irritable, willful, or intensely reactive temperaments.
- **Stage 3 — Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6 years).** Young children start planning activities and using their imagination through play; too much restriction can create guilt⁷. This links to *Stramonium*, *Medorrhinum*, and *Pulsatilla*, remedies tied to vivid imagination, fears, and guilt-driven emotional patterns.
- **Stage 4 — Industry vs. Inferiority (6-12 years).** In the school-age years, children begin comparing themselves to peers, which can foster either confidence or feelings of inferiority, including school-related anxiety⁷. The review connects this stage to *Lycopodium*, *Baryta carbonica*, and *Silicea* — remedies often linked to low confidence and performance anxiety.
- **Stage 5 — Identity vs. Role Confusion (12-18 years).** The classic teenage search for identity; struggles here can look like rebellion or confusion about self-image⁸. This is paired with *Natrum muriaticum*, *Ignatia*, and *Calcarea phosphorica*, remedies associated with emotional withdrawal, grief-like sensitivity, and restlessness.
- **Stage 6 — Intimacy vs. Isolation (18-40 years).** Early adulthood centres on forming close relationships; difficulty here can show up as fear of commitment or isolation⁸. The review links this to *Sepia*, *Phosphorus*, and *Staphysagria*, remedies tied to emotional detachment, relational sensitivity, and suppressed resentment.
- **Stage 7 — Generativity vs. Stagnation (40-65 years).** Midlife is about feeling like you're contributing meaningfully — through work, family, or mentorship — versus feeling stuck⁶. This is matched with *Sulphur*, *Aurum metallicum*, and *Lachesis*, remedies associated with burnout, internal pressure, and depressive tendencies in midlife.
- **Stage 8 — Integrity vs. Despair (65+ years).** In old age, people look back and feel either satisfied or regretful about their life⁷. This is linked to *Carcinosin*, *Conium*, and *Agnus castus*, remedies tied to themes of regret, hopelessness, and decline.

Across all eight stages, the review's central claim is that these matches are not coincidental: unresolved psychosocial conflicts, the authors argue, can present clinically as chronic conditions that closely resemble the profile of a particular homoeopathic remedy⁸.

Discussion

The authors argue that pairing Erikson's model with homoeopathic principles allows a more complete case analysis — one that reads a patient's current symptoms in light of their developmental history, rather than in isolation⁶. They bring in miasmatic theory to deepen this idea: in classical homoeopathy, a miasm is thought of as an underlying predisposition that drives

a person toward certain chronic disease patterns over a lifetime, rather than a single symptom appearing on its own⁷.

Put simply, the review suggests that unresolved conflicts from early life stages (like the trust-vs-mistrust struggle of infancy) tend to resemble what homoeopathy calls a psoric pattern — a relatively straightforward tendency toward insecurity and vulnerability⁸.

Unresolved conflicts carried forward from later stages, on the other hand, tend to resemble more complex sycotic or syphilitic patterns — deeper, more entrenched coping mechanisms or destructive behaviours that build up over time¹.

Practically, this means a homoeopath shouldn't only prescribe based on what a patient reports today. Instead, understanding which stage of life still holds an unresolved conflict could help guide a more precisely matched remedy — one addressing the developmental root of a symptom, not just its current expression.

There's also a broader theoretical point being made here about why these two systems might overlap in the first place. Mainstream medicine has increasingly accepted that emotional history and physical health are closely linked — chronic stress and unresolved psychological patterns are well-documented risk factors for physical illness. Homoeopathy has made a related claim from its own tradition for much longer: that a person's constitution, meaning their overall temperament, sensitivities, and history, shapes which illnesses they become prone to and how those illnesses present. Erikson's model gives this claim a more structured, widely recognised psychological scaffold to sit on, since it is already used extensively in counselling, education, and social work¹. In the other direction, homoeopathy's miasmatic theory offers psychology a way to think about how unresolved developmental conflicts might not simply sit passively as isolated stage-specific issues, but instead layer and compound with each other across a lifetime⁷ — potentially explaining why some people accumulate increasingly complex, treatment-resistant patterns of illness as they age⁸.

Clinical Applications

The review translates this into three practical recommendations for practitioners:

- Developmental and psychosocial milestones should be systematically incorporated into case-taking, not treated as a side note.
- Life-stage conflicts should be cross-referenced with constitutional patterns to help narrow down remedy selection.
- Follow-up care should track more than physical symptoms — it should also monitor resilience and social functioning over time.

Conclusion

The review's overall argument is that Erikson's psychosocial model and homoeopathy's underlying philosophy tell a similar story from two different angles: both view health and personality as something that develops dynamically across a person's entire life, shaped by how well they move through a series of emotional challenges. By mapping psychosocial conflicts onto remedy profiles, the authors suggest practitioners can take a more holistic view of patients — one that considers not just "what symptom needs treating" but "what unresolved life chapter

might be driving this pattern”². They argue this integrative lens can improve both psychological resilience and physical well-being⁹, while broadening the therapeutic scope of homoeopathic practice more generally³.

It’s worth keeping in mind, though, that this is a conceptual, narrative review rather than a clinical trial. It proposes a framework for linking psychology and homoeopathy — it does not present new patient data proving, for instance, that someone with an unresolved Stage 6 conflict responds better to Sepia than to any other remedy.

Homoeopathy itself remains without strong support in mainstream evidence-based medicine, and Erikson’s stage theory, while influential, is a psychological model rather than a fixed biological law. The real contribution of this review lies in the conceptual bridge it builds between the two fields — a lens for practitioners to think through, rather than a proven clinical protocol.

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How to cite this article:

Sonwane A, Sharma D, Joshi N. A Comparative Review of Erikson's Psychosocial Stages of Development and Homoeopathic Principles. *International Journal of AYUSH*. 2026;15(08):211–215.