

The Experience and Effects of Shiatsu: a Cross-European Study

What an independent evaluation
shows about shiatsu



An Overview of the Findings
from the European Shiatsu Federation
funded study carried out by Professor Andrew Long
at the University of Leeds.

European Shiatsu Federation: Leading the development of professional shiatsu in Europe



The European Shiatsu Federation (ESF) is the Federation of national professional shiatsu associations in Europe. It is a not for profit organisation legally registered in Sweden. Its main aim is to promote the legal right to practice shiatsu throughout Europe.

The European Shiatsu Federation Research Project

The European Shiatsu Federation (ESF) aims to obtain the legal right to practice shiatsu throughout Europe, and to promote the highest standard of professional practise. Research is vital to establish the legitimacy and independence of all health professions and until recently evidence for shiatsu was almost non-existent.

The ESF sought independent scientific evidence into:

- who uses shiatsu and why
- how shiatsu can promote wellbeing and health
- its safety and effectiveness
- to show that it is not a medical practice.

A cross-European project was devised to scientifically document the experience and effects of shiatsu as experienced by both receiver and practitioner. This foundational research project was the first of its kind to study shiatsu. Phase One was an open-ended interview-based study undertaken in the UK and Germany to determine the full range of experiences and effects of shiatsu as reported by both practitioners and client. Phase One also devised a shiatsu-specific protocol to enable shiatsu to be researched as it is actually practised. In Phase Two, questionnaires created in Phase One were completed by clients in Austria, Spain, and the UK to gather data on the benefits and longer term effects of shiatsu treatment.

This leaflet aims to provide practitioners with an overview of the findings from this research study that can be used in your practice. Two information leaflets for clients are also available.

How the study was done

The research was carried out at the University of Leeds by Professor Andrew Long and his research team.

Practitioners with a minimum of two years post-graduation experience and a minimum of 5 clients per week were randomly selected from their Association's Practitioner Register in Austria, Spain and the UK. The aim was to recruit up to 40 practitioners in each

country who would each recruit up to 18 clients to the study. All clients who agreed to take part communicated directly with the University of Leeds ensuring that practitioners did not know which of their clients had agreed to take part. All data were held and processed in complete confidentiality by the researchers at the University of Leeds. The clients were asked to complete 4 questionnaires: the first one immediately after their initial recruitment treatment, the second between 4 and 6 days later, the third after 3 months and the fourth after 6 months.

A total of 85 practitioners from the three countries took part, 848 clients were recruited and 633 completed all 4 questionnaires.

The findings: who seeks shiatsu and why?

The research found that a typical shiatsu user is a 40-year old woman, in full- or part-time paid employment. She has used shiatsu before and would describe her overall health as being good or better. On average, the typical shiatsu user would have 23 shiatsu sessions during the previous 36 months and would pay for treatment rather than claiming on health insurance.

When shiatsu users were asked their reasons for having shiatsu, between 22% and 33% first tried shiatsu "out of curiosity" and a larger proportion, between 39% and 59% of shiatsu recipients used shiatsu to "maintain health". Respondents also said that they had shiatsu "to do something for oneself" or for "personal development".

During the study, shiatsu users also described the following as reasons to have shiatsu:

- Problems with muscles or joints
- Problems with body structure such as back pain or posture
- Relaxation and relief of tension or stress
- Low energy or fatigue
- Problems with digestion, breathing or blood pressure
- Menstrual pain
- Emotional support
- Self development
- Reduce use of conventional medication.

Quotes from the research

"To help me relax, disperse tension and blocked energy, and to relieve back and shoulder pain."

"Help with emotional tension and emotional stress."

"Maintaining relief from ME symptoms".

Which indications improved following shiatsu?

The ESF study shows that shiatsu helps clients feel calmer and more relaxed. Between 89% and 96% of shiatsu receivers in Austria, Spain and the UK described feeling calmer or more relaxed following shiatsu. Both new, and regular, users of shiatsu expressed feeling "physically more mobile", "more energised", "more balanced" or "more able to cope with things". Up to 60% of regular shiatsu receivers felt that they were able to sleep better following shiatsu.

During the ESF study shiatsu users symptoms were significantly reduced and these reductions were maintained throughout the 6-month study.

Across all three countries between 84% and 87% of shiatsu users felt that shiatsu had been effective in treating their symptoms at the end of the study. All of the indications that shiatsu users came with showed improvements including tension or stress, problems with muscles and joints, back pain, low energy and problems with digestion, breathing or blood pressure.

Shiatsu may also increase clients' self-awareness and empower them to take better care of themselves. More than 90% of regular shiatsu users that were surveyed in the study felt that shiatsu has helped to maintain their health. Both new and regular shiatsu users felt more aware of themselves and more able to help themselves, or more in touch with their emotions. After only 3 months of receiving shiatsu both new and regular users expressed being "more hopeful that my problems can be helped".

Could Shiatsu help clients' change their lifestyle?

The ESF study shows that in Austria, Spain and the UK between 73% and 80% of shiatsu users said that they made changes to their lifestyle as a result of having shiatsu treatments.

Many of the shiatsu users who were involved in the study found that shiatsu helped them to make time for rest and relaxation, taking exercise and improving their diet.

Between 43% and 64% of those taking part in the research took more exercise and between 45% and 58% reported changing their diet as a result of having shiatsu. Between 15% to 32% of all shiatsu users also made changes to their working patterns.

At the end of the study, between 15% and 34% of shiatsu users in Austria, Spain and the UK were using less conventional medication, (shiatsu can nearly always be used alongside conventional medical treatments), and, between 30% and 41% were using more complementary and alternative medicine.

Many of those involved in the ESF research adopted a relaxed, healthier and more balanced approach to life:

"Feel a greater sense of direction and what I want to do with the rest of my life."

"Ability to relax and approach problems more positively."

"I feel more confident and optimistic."

"Have been able to learn Tai Chi before I could not move freely enough."

"Shiatsu has affected every area of my life in a positive way."

"Feel more relaxed and happy about my life than I ever have been."

Safety findings: did clients experience any negative reactions following shiatsu?

Clients were asked in each of the questionnaires if they had any negative reactions to their treatment and if so, how long they lasted, how severe they were, and whether or not they interfered with their normal activities.

Between 12% and 22% reported some kind of negative response to treatment. The range of responses were classified by the researchers who found that 82% of the total were "transitional" effects, an initial response that seemed negative but changed to positive as part of the shiatsu healing process, normally within two days.

Practitioners know that in shiatsu and other complementary therapies it is not unusual to experience a temporary intensification of symptoms, which was categorised by researchers in the study as a transitional effect. These transitional effects are a result of the shiatsu taking effect and will pass, the body is beginning to rebalance itself.

The following were the most commonly reported "transitional" effects:

- Tiredness
- Lethargy
- Cold/flu symptoms
- Upset stomach
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Heightened emotions

Only 1.4%, which is equal to 10 client episodes, of new and regular shiatsu users experienced any negative effects which were classified as an undesired, potentially adverse event or effect that may represent a risk to client safety. For example, a worsening of a symptom, strong distress, stopping of normal activity. The study is highly suggestive of shiatsu being a safe practice.

The research report strongly recommends, therefore, that practitioners advise their clients of possible transitional effects and how best to deal with them. The ESF has produced a companion leaflet to address this as an aid to your own caretaking of your clients. A few simple suggestions are outlined below.

How should I advise my clients about possible reactions to shiatsu?

It is not always possible to predict which of your clients will experience a reaction or transitional effect following a treatment. Therefore, it is important to ensure that you explain these effects to your client.

The following are general recommendations, which you can offer your client to help manage any transitional effects that they might experience:

- Taking things easy
- Rest when tired or feeling ill
- Drink appropriate amounts of water
- Being accepting of emotions
- Getting support when needed
- Following any advice that you give your client
- Contacting you if they have any concerns.

Does shiatsu meet clients' expectations?

Across the three countries between 88% and 97% of shiatsu users felt that shiatsu either met or exceeded their expectations. The research suggests that it can take some time to adjust to receiving shiatsu, but between 74% and 92% of both new and regular shiatsu users in Austria, Spain and the UK were completely satisfied by their experience of shiatsu at the end of the study.

Respondents across all countries were also very positive about their relationship with their shiatsu practitioner:

- around 75% felt that their practitioner listened to them
- 72% felt accepted by their practitioner
- 87% felt their practitioner was trustworthy and
- 83% felt their practitioner was skillful.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The study's strengths are that it was pragmatic and researched shiatsu as it is actually practised. The questionnaires developed in Phase One were specific to shiatsu. There was a rigorous protocol that was followed by both practitioners and clients. Another of the study's strengths was that the response rates for Austria and the UK were very high. Although the response rate from Spain was lower, the collected data corresponds well with that from Austria and the UK. The ESF study was designed to show the potential effects and benefits of shiatsu, an aim which was achieved.

Policy implications of the research findings

Many of the findings from the ESF research project suggest that shiatsu can play a role in public health. Shiatsu helped to educate clients about their health and reduced a number of symptoms that frequently compromise general health and productivity. In addition, shiatsu can:

- Improve general wellbeing
- Maintain health and prevent ill-health
- Improve health awareness
- Reduce the use of conventional medicine
- Motivate clients to make healthy lifestyle changes in diet and exercise
- Reduce the symptoms of stress, tension and musculo-skeletal conditions.

Future shiatsu research

Research always suggests further research. In this case the strongest suggestion is for a study that investigates the benefits of shiatsu for the health, wellbeing and productivity of people at work. A further study could be one that compares the relative benefits of shiatsu to other treatments, be they conventional medicine or other CAMs. To enhance the professional status of shiatsu practice, ongoing audits of the effects of treatment should also be undertaken at regular intervals by practitioners.

Bibliographic details for the full report:

Long AF (2007) The Effects and Experience of Shiatsu: A Cross-European Study. Leeds: University of Leeds, School of Healthcare.
<http://www.healthcare.leeds.ac.uk/pages/research/documents/ShiatsuFinalReport.pdf>

Acknowledgments and thanks

The ESF would like to sincerely thank Professor Long and his team at Leeds University.

Thanks also to Hannah Mackay for her work on Phase One.

To Gill Hall, Marina Bilak for translation, and to David Home, Eva Krejcova, Astrid Polletin, Brian Carling, Frans Copers and Cheryl Jenkins.

To the individual members and Schools who gave money in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. Their contributions made the study possible.

To Seamus Connolly for management of the project from the start and for support to the research team throughout the project.

To all the practitioners and clients who participated.

Further information

The Executive Summary of the research Report is available at:
www.shiatsu-esf.org

The Final Report is available at: <http://www.healthcare.leeds.ac.uk/pages/research/documents/ShiatsuFinalReport.pdf>

Seamus Connolly, ESF Research Co-ordinator:
seamus_connolly@eircom.net or 00353 1 2962839

Professor A.F. Long: A.F.Long@Leeds.ac.uk

European Shiatsu Federation: Policy and Action Statement July 2008.

1 The Objectives of the ESF

The aim of the ESF is to advance shiatsu as a healing therapy throughout Europe, to establish the legal right to practice shiatsu as an independent, self-regulating health-care method, and to promote high standards of professional practise.

2 Members and Organisation

The European Shiatsu Federation (ESF) is a democratic and non profit - making organisation. The members of the ESF are national professional shiatsu associations.

The ESF is a formal membership organisation registered in Sweden with membership rules, fees, and decision making protocols. Their purpose is to facilitate agreement on and adherence to common policies and actions, and to empower the ESF to act on these policies.

3 Policy and Action.

The ESF has four broad areas of policy and action:

- political work
- research
- professional development
- promotion.

Policies and actions are geared to be mutually supportive and to further ESF's objectives.

- **The Political Work** has two broad areas of focus:

1 Support the actions in each individual member country pertaining to the legal right to practise shiatsu.

2 Act at the European level: to support action at the national level and to directly lobby all the relevant EU institutions; to network and undertake joint actions with compatible European organisations. The ESF is a founder of the European Federation for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (EFCAM), a member of the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA), lobbies the European Parliament and Commission, and participates in the EU Public Health Forum and other health and wellness related political events.

- **The Research Work** includes

- large scale fundraising for research projects
- development of contacts in the research world to inform it of the specific needs of CAM research and to carry out suitable projects
- lobbying for CAM research by the EU
- dissemination of the results of our cross-European project on the experience and benefits of shiatsu
- development of a new project to study the health and productivity benefits of shiatsu treatment for people at work
- promotion of local and international shiatsu and CAM research

- **The Professional Development** work includes

- the development of a European Core Curriculum to establish minimum professional training standards in Europe
- the development of modules of professional competency in training programmes
- to establish procedures for the mutual recognition of shiatsu professionals
- to support and facilitate educational, practical and social exchange Between shiatsu professionals in Europe.

- **The Promotion Work** includes increasing the public profile of professional shiatsu, the ESF and its work within Shiatsu and also the profile of shiatsu within CAM.



The ESF can be contacted at:
www.shiatsu-esf.org
or via your national shiatsu association.

The European Shiatsu Federation is registered at:
Aladdinsvagen 51, SE-16761 Bromma, Sweden.
Organisation Number 817605-3521

This edition is coordinated by the European Shiatsu Federation and its country members where, it is available in the national languages.



Österreichischer Dachverband für Shiatsu
www.shiatsu-verband.at



Belgische Shiatsu Federatie vzw
www.shiatsu.be



Czech Shiatsu Association
www.shiatsuasociace.cz



Ελληνική Εταιρεία Σιάτσου
www.shiatsugr.gr



Shiatsu Society of Ireland
www.shiatsusocietyireland.com



Asociación de Profesionales de Shiatsu en España
www.shiatsu-apse.org



Svenska Shiatsu Förbundet
www.shiatsuforbundet.se



The Shiatsu Society
www.shiatsusociety.org