

Fields of Application, Indications and Effects of WATSU

A Pilot Survey

Introduction and Aim

Water Shiatsu, WATSU for short, is a form of passive aquatic bodywork, utilizing different properties of water and has been practiced almost forty years. A systematic review conducted by Schitter et al. (submitted) implies various aspects of WATSU in its fields of application, indication, and effects. Chances are assumed to be high that across the world WATSU is being used to treat additional disorders and to achieve diverse effects. Our thesis intends to contribute to Schitter's studies, by validating and supplementing the findings of the systematic review in Switzerland.

The aim of this pilot survey is to identify the definite content and develop the optimal structure for an international survey on WATSU, as well as collect data on a Swiss-wide base and thus assess the survey for international purposes.

Methods

The content of this survey was derived from the systematic review (Schitter et al. (submitted)). It included all conditions, effects and contraindications / precautions found in the literature which stood in relation to WATSU-treatment. The survey was realized in MicrosoftWord forming the structure for the international survey questioning Swiss WATSU-practitioners. Each condition, effect or contraindication / precaution was evaluated with the numeric rating scale on agreement, commonness and effectiveness. Additional quantitative and qualitative data was collected on a Swiss-wide base. Quantitative analysis of data was performed with the use of MicrosoftExcel and the qualitative data was summarized and categorised with the use of different aspects of the model of triangulation by Mayring [1].

Results

Table 1: Conditions confirmed by at least 80% of the practitioners, ranked according to the percentage of agreement, median commonness and median perceived effectiveness; (N=20); IQA: interquartile range

Condition	% (n)	Commonness Median (IQA)	Effectiveness Median (IQA)
Stress	100% (20)	8.5 (6.8 / 10.0)	9.0 (7.8 / 10.0)
Low back pain	100% (20)	7.5 (6.0 / 9.0)	9.0 (8.0 / 9.0)
Neck pain	100% (20)	7.0 (5.8 / 9.0)	8.0 (8.0 / 9.0)
Healthy individuals	95% (19)	7.0 (5.0 / 9.0)	9.0 (8.0 / 9.5)
Sleep disorder	95% (19)	6.0 (3.5 / 7.5)	8.0 (7.0 / 8.8)
Pregnancy	95% (19)	6.0 (3.0 / 7.5)	9.0 (8.0 / 10.0)
Depression	95% (19)	5.0 (3.0 / 9.0)	8.0 (7.0 / 8.8)
Joint pain	90% (18)	5.0 (3.3 / 6.0)	8.0 (7.0 / 8.0)
Head ache	90% (18)	3.0 (2.0 / 6.5)	7.0 (6.0 / 8.0)
Fatigue	85% (17)	7.0 (3.0 / 9.0)	8.0 (6.5 / 8.3)
Myofascial pain	80% (16)	5.0 (3.0 / 7.3)	7.0 (5.3 / 8.0)

Table 2: Effects confirmed by at least 85% of the practitioners, ranked according to the percentage of agreement, median commonness and median perceived effectiveness; (N=20); IQA: interquartile range

Effect	% (n)	Commonness Median (IQA)	Effectiveness Median (IQA)
Increased mobility and flexibility	100% (20)	6.0 (3.8 / 7.3)	8.0 (8.0 / 9.0)
Facilitated physical relaxation	95% (19)	10.0 (9.0 / 10.0)	10.0 (9.5 / 10.0)
Relief of physical tension	95% (19)	9.0 (7.0 / 10.0)	9.0 (8.0 / 10.0)
Improved respiratory function	95% (19)	8.0 (5.0 / 9.0)	9.0 (7.0 / 9.0)
Decreased pain	95% (19)	7.0 (5.0 / 8.5)	8.5 (8.0 / 9.0)
Increased psychological health	95% (19)	6.0 (4.0 / 8.0)	8.0 (6.0 / 8.8)
Spiritual experience	95% (19)	5.0 (3.0 / 8.0)	8.0 (7.0 / 9.0)
Improved quality of life	90% (18)	8.0 (7.0 / 9.8)	8.5 (8.0 / 10.0)
Reduced symptoms of depression	90% (18)	5.5 (3.3 / 7.0)	8.0 (6.0 / 8.0)
Reduced anxiety	90% (18)	3.5 (1.3 / 5.0)	7.0 (5.8 / 8.3)
Harmonization of abnormal muscle tone	85% (17)	5.0 (2.0 / 7.0)	8.0 (7.0 / 9.0)

A total of twenty practitioners participated in the survey. All are certified by IAKA Switzerland and have been practicing WATSU for an average of 14.75 years.

For all of the conditions and effects identified in the literature at least one or in case of effects six practitioner agreed to have treated or observed it in practice. WATSU appeared to be a common treatment for stress issues and furthermore seems to be an effective treatment for pregnant women and palliative care, resulting in various effects. Additionally, the results suggest WATSU as a possible treatment for patients suffering from selected cardiac conditions. Furthermore, 27 additional conditions and 40 additional effects were identified by the practitioners. Additional conditions identified for which WATSU appears to be effective were Bechterew syndrome, epilepsy, asthma and multiple sclerosis. The additional effect which, was most observed by the practitioners was to increase trust. Only two contraindications, diseases that are transmissible in water and fever above 38° C / 100.4° F, were agreed upon by all practitioners. Additional 14 contraindications / precautions have been mentioned, such as acute suicidality, borderline syndrome or hallucinations.

Conclusion

Overall it can be concluded that all conditions and effects identified in the systematic review by Schitter et al. (submitted) were confirmed by the practitioners. Psychosocial / psychosomatic issues as well as pain issues were the field of application for which WATSU seems to be a common and effective treatment. Furthermore, WATSU appears to have relaxing effects on a physical as well as a psychological level. However, in order to give clinical advice for patients and therapists, specific research on the individual conditions and effects has to be conducted.

[1] Mayring, Philipp, 2016, Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung, 6. Auflage, Beltz Verlag, Weinheim und Basel, Weinheim, ISBN: 978-3-407-25734-5