

FEBRUARY 2024

EN GHALINI SHIATSU &
HELLENIC SHIATSU FEDERATION



SHIATSU & BURNOUT SYNDROME

Overview

Burnout syndrome has become increasingly common. The World Health Organization (WHO) characterises occupational burnout syndrome through three dimensions: feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job, and reduced professional efficacy.

While burnout has been extensively studied under the perspective of Western Medicine, research investigating how alternative therapies may be potentially helpful is still limited. The following short survey was conducted as an exploratory assessment of the observation of burnout symptoms in the practice of Shiatsu practitioners of the Hellenic Shiatsu Society (HSS). The questionnaire was created in collaboration with Mazi Health Consultants. The questionnaire was distributed by email and taken through Google Forms.

Goals and objectives

The questionnaire was conducted in February 2024, aiming to learn whether or not Shiatsu practitioners of the HSS are identifying and treating burnout syndrome. It included questions regarding their level of knowledge and experience with burnout syndrome in their practice.

The following objectives were investigated:

1. Do Shiatsu practitioners consider themselves informed about burnout?
2. How often, if at all, are they treating clients experiencing symptoms of burnout?
3. Would they be interested in opportunities to learn more about burnout syndrome?

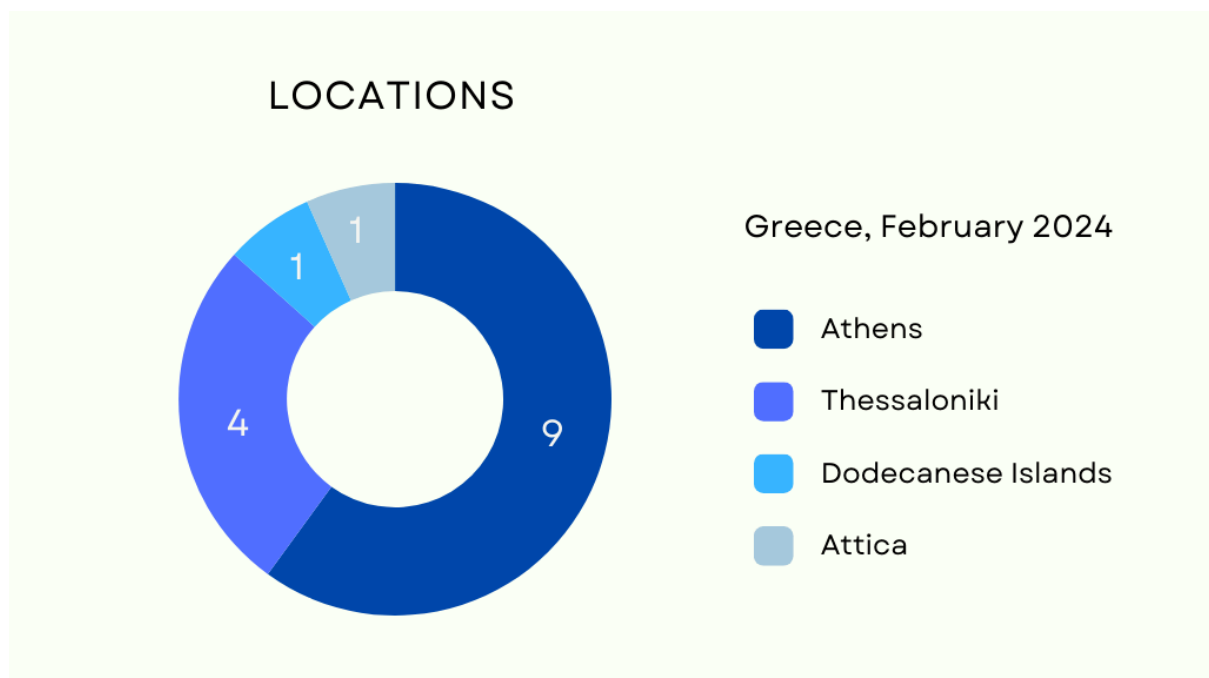
Beyond this survey's objectives, the goal of the greater project is to explore the possibility that Shiatsu as an alternative therapy can benefit a client experiencing burnout. The goal of the project is to raise Shiatsu practitioners' awareness of burnout and to develop their collective knowledge of burnout in their practice in order to improve patient outcomes.

PLEASE NOTE: The answers are based on subjective experiences of Shiatsu practitioners who participated in the questionnaire. More research needs to be done to demonstrate their correlation and possible connection with burnout syndrome.

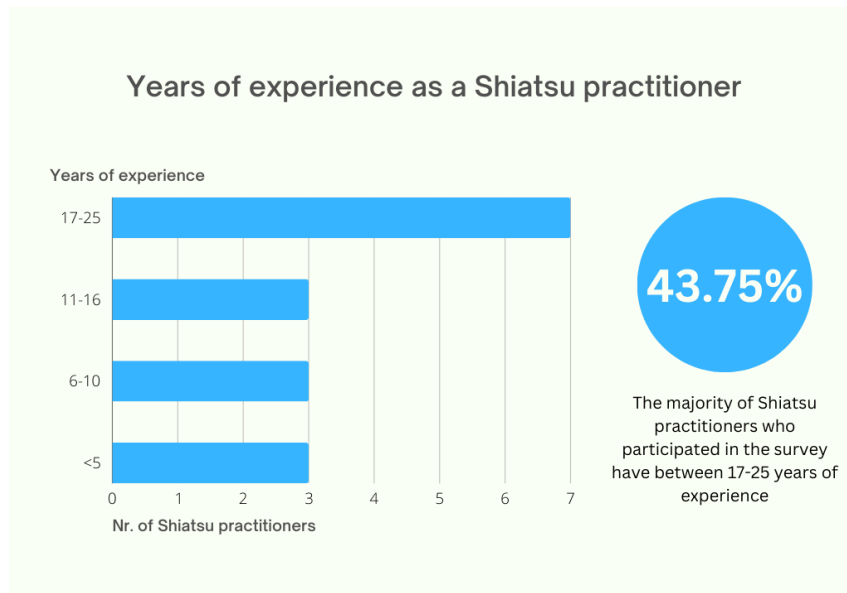
Participation, demographics & Shiatsu practice

A total of 18 Shiatsu practitioners participated in the questionnaire. Not all questions were answered by all participants.

The age group of 46-55 years represented 72.2% (13 participants) of all participants. Other age groups represented were 56+ (4) and 36-45 years (1). Most participants were women, 15 out of 18, 2 were men and 1 preferred not to specify their sex. The majority lived in Athens (9), followed by Thessaloniki (4).

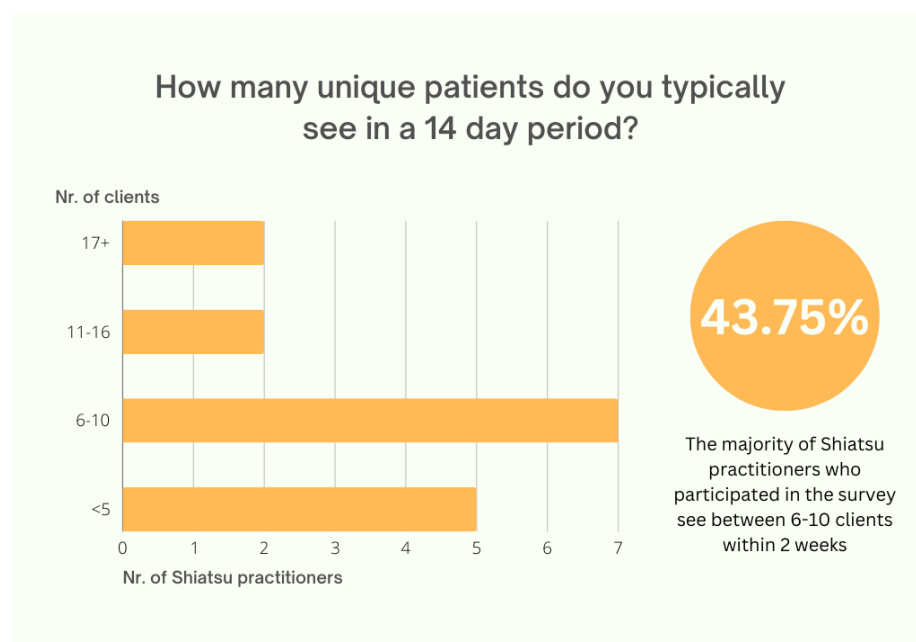


The first question asked about **the number of years participants have been practising Shiatsu**. The lowest number of years of experience was 3, the highest 25 years.



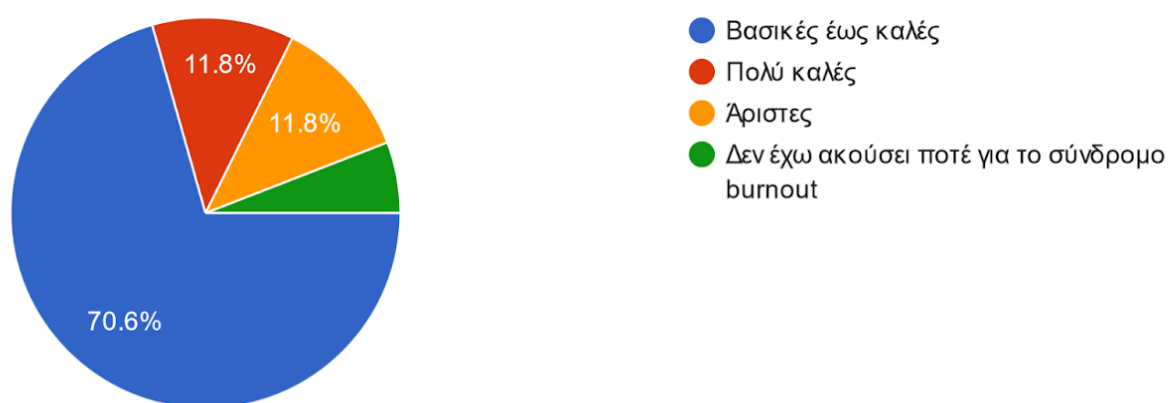
Due to a software error in the second question, only 13 responses out of 18 could be evaluated. Out of these 13 replies, 5 indicated to practise Shiatsu full-time, 6 were part-time and 2 did not practise at the moment.

The third and question aimed to learn the number of Shiatsu sessions a practitioner typically gives within a 14 day period (measured in hours). Among the 16 replies, the highest number of hours indicated was 30, with the second highest being 17 and the lowest 2 hours. The fourth question investigated **how many unique patients the practitioners see during that same time**.



Findings

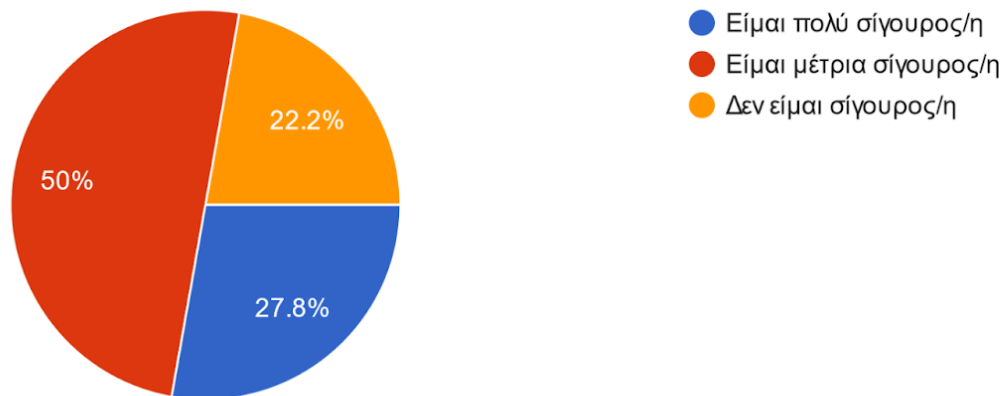
The first question of the second section concerned the **Shiatsu practitioner's knowledge about burnout syndrome**. We asked participants to self-evaluate their knowledge on the topic. Out of 17 replies, 11.8% (2 participants) indicated to have excellent, another 11.8% (2) very good and 70.8% (12) basic to good knowledge. 5.8% (1) indicated never having heard of burnout syndrome before.



How would you rate your knowledge about burnout?

Yellow: excellent / red: very good / blue: basic to good / green: I haven't heard of burnout syndrome before

The second question asked the practitioners to **estimate their confidence in recognising burnout symptoms in a patient**. All 18 participants responded and 50% (9 participants) said they were moderately confident in their ability to recognise burnout symptoms in a patient. 27.8% (5) indicated to feel very confident and 22.2% (4) not to feel confident when having to recognise burnout symptoms.



How would you describe your ability to recognise burnout symptoms in a patient?

Blue: I'm very confident / red: I'm moderately confident / yellow: I'm not confident

Burnout Symptoms

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Burnout syndrome as an occupational phenomenon is characterised by the following three dimensions*:

- feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
- increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and
- reduced professional efficacy.¹

According to the recent work led by Sergio Edú-Valsania on burnout syndrome, these three dimensions are defined through a set of symptoms, including:

- **Emotional exhaustion:** “weariness, tiredness, fatigue, weakening [...]”
- **Cynicism or depersonalisation:** an interpersonal aspect of burnout that can “translate into negative or inappropriate attitudes and behaviours, irritability, loss of idealism, and interpersonal avoidance usually towards service users, patients, and/or clients.”

¹ World Health Organization, 28.05.19:
<https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/frequently-asked-questions/burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon>
 [13.05.24]

- **Reduced personal achievement:** “translates into a decrease in productivity and capabilities, low morale, as well as lower coping skills”, among other tendencies.²

When the participants were asked **what symptoms of burnout syndrome they observed in their patients in their Shiatsu practice**, four symptoms were the most recurring: Fatigue, insomnia and sleeping problems, depression and sadness, mental confusion, including difficulties concentrating.

There were 7 symptoms mentioned 2 to 3 times: Digestive problems, eating disorders, psychological changeability, irritability, pain including headaches, panic attacks and disliking work. Other symptoms mentioned once were: low energy, procrastination, disappointment, shortness of breath, fever and infections in case of work overload, muscle stiffness, resignation, feeling useless, stress, musculoskeletal or neck or hip/leg tightness.

² National Library of Medicine, Burnout: A Theory of Review and Management, 04.02.22: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8834764/> [15.05.24]

Patterns of Traditional Chinese Medicine

A total of 16 participants answered which Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) patterns they commonly observed in patients experiencing burnout syndrome.

The most commonly observed TCM Patterns included: Kidney yin deficiency, Liver Qi Stagnation and Spleen Yang Deficiency.

Kidney Yin Deficiency	Liver Qi Stagnation	Spleen Yang Deficiency
4 times	4 times	3 times

Practitioners linked TCM patterns from all five elements (Water, Wood, Earth, Fire, Metal) to burnout syndrome. There was a high level of agreement among responses that burnout syndrome **affected the Water element**, specifically the TCM Kidneys. Also frequently mentioned were the Wood (TCM Liver and Gallbladder), Earth (TCM Spleen) and Fire (TCM Heart). The Metal element has been mentioned and was represented with just two mentions of Lung Qi Deficiency.

Separately, patterns such as Qi Deficiency, Qi Stagnation, Yin and Yang Deficiency, Blood Deficiency as well as Toxic Heat have been mentioned. The graphic below shows specific TCM patterns listed by practitioners who have described observing burnout in their practice.

TCM PATTERNS OBSERVED IN BURNOUT SYNDROME

BY 15 SHIATSU PRACTITIONNERS



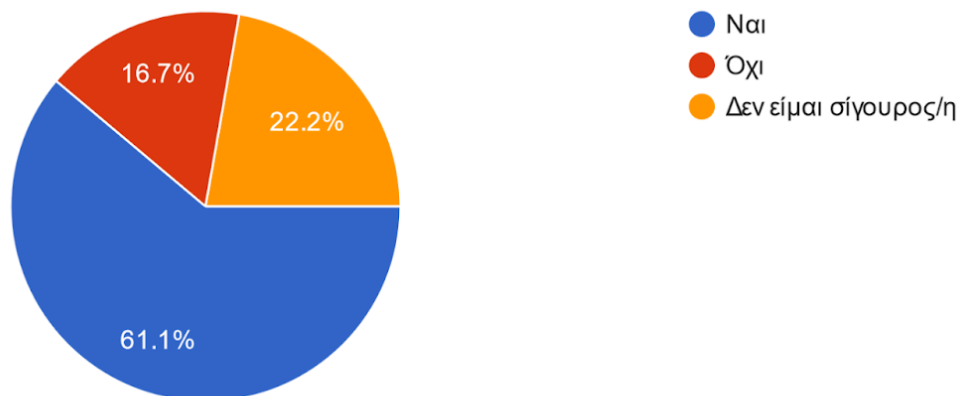
ADDITIONAL PATTERNS: QI DEFICIENCY, QI STAGNATION, YIN & YANG DEFICIENCY, BLOOD DEFICIENCY, TOXIC HEAT

These answers are based on subjective experiences of Shiatsu practitioners who participated in a questionnaire and greater research needs to be done to demonstrate their connection with burnout.

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Personal Experiences with Burnout

Over 60% (11 out of 18 participants) believe they have experienced symptoms of burnout syndrome themselves and 17 out of 18 participants expressed being interested in learning more about burnout syndrome.



I have myself experienced symptoms of burnout syndrome

Blue: yes / red: no / yellow: I'm not sure

When participants were asked if they had any comments, ideas, or questions they felt they wanted to add to their survey responses, three participants replied. One reply emphasised the importance of approaching burnout syndrome in a more holistic way, since it stems from an emotional as well as social background and not only professional.

Another reply mentioned the importance of lifestyle, apart from with or without Shiatsu treatments. The mentioned lifestyle aspects were a good quality diet, nutritional supplements, exercise, walks and rest. Last but not least, a participant kindly shared an online article they wrote on chronic fatigue syndrome, which also lists a set of symptoms and TCM patterns.

Conclusion

The main intention of this questionnaire was to gain a qualitative insight into evaluation of Shiatsu practitioners' knowledge of the burnout syndrome. When asked whether the practitioners considered themselves informed about burnout, the majority (12 out of 18 participants) believed to have basic to good knowledge on the topic. However, half of the total participants estimated to be only moderately confident in recognising burnout symptoms in a patient and 4 replies stated not to feel confident in that matter.

The TCM patterns mentioned showed **mainly Yin organs being affected** in the case of burnout syndrome, with exception of the TCM Gallbladder (Yang organ of the Wood element), mentioned just once. The **Water element** in the body, especially the TCM Kidneys, are the most affected by burnout syndrome. All Yin organs of the TCM elements are affected (TCM Kidneys, Heart, Spleen, Liver and Lungs) with the Metal element (TCM Lungs) being less affected than the others.

The questionnaire found that the symptoms observed by Shiatsu practitioners within the Hellenic Shiatsu Society were consistent with symptoms held by the World Health Organisation as well as Sergio Edú-Valsania's Burnout review. **These overlapping symptoms were fatigue, low energy, irritability and disliking work.**

The fact that more than half of the participants stated having experienced symptoms of burnout themselves seems especially striking. These findings offer an interesting opportunity for another dialogue on the topic of how Shiatsu practitioners deal with their own workload. Another question that arose through this questionnaire is: **How do Shiatsu practitioners deal with symptoms of burnout syndrome and do they believe they receive enough Shiatsu treatments themselves?**

We recognise that the field of opportunities for further research is vast. Given the qualitative nature of this questionnaire, a conversation among members of the HSS on the topic could shed further light on how burnout is perceived and coped with, as

well in patients in Shiatsu practice as in the practitioners themselves. Furthermore, exploring what makes burnout syndrome appear in the first place seems important.

For feedback or further information, please feel free to contact us at
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