

## **AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFICACY OF EQUINE SHIATSU TREATMENT ON HORSES USING THE MEASURE YOUR MEDICAL OUTCOME PROFILE (MYMOP) RESEARCH DESIGN.**

### **ABSTRACT:**

This investigation is believed to be the first of its kind to measure the effectiveness of equine shiatsu on horses. MYMOP (Measure Your Medical Outcome Profile) was used to demonstrate that horses benefit positively from receiving shiatsu. The investigation concluded that horses benefit from receiving shiatsu in terms of overall improvement in presenting symptoms, improvement in the activity affected by the presenting symptom and an overall improvement in well being. The findings also highlighted the efficacy of this therapy irrespective of type of symptom, or the length of time that the presenting symptom had been experienced. This project was undertaken on behalf of tESA (The Equine Shiatsu Association.)

### **BACKGROUND:**

Shiatsu is a natural therapy that is rooted in the principles and theories of traditional Oriental medicine. The word 'shi-atsu' means 'finger pressure' in Japanese (often translated as acupressure). Equine shiatsu has developed using knowledge of shiatsu on humans and from the practice of acupuncture on horses. Basic shiatsu techniques involve sensitive pressure applied with fingers, thumbs, palms and elbows, also rotations and stretches of the limbs and tail.

Points and areas for pressure are chosen using the traditional principles of Oriental diagnosis and are located on the same meridians or energy pathways that are used in acupuncture. The purpose of shiatsu technique is to enhance the flow of energy in the meridian by releasing tight, restricted or blocked areas. It is the re-balancing of energies which in Oriental tradition, promotes a feeling of well-being.

Shiatsu does not focus on symptoms. These are seen as evidence of an energetic imbalance and so rather than treating the symptoms and fighting against illness, shiatsu is a way to promote, preserve and improve an overall sense of well-being.

To the best of our knowledge there have been no studies until now into the effects of shiatsu on horses. As we live in an age where health care providers are required to demonstrate the efficacy of their treatments via the use of reliable and valid outcome measures to measure changes in human patient characteristics following intervention, it was to this end that tESA (The Equine Shiatsu Association) undertook MYMOP for equines. The objective was to use the Measure Yourself Medical Outcome Profile for measuring clinical change in horses associated with a course of equine shiatsu treatment.

MYMOP has been developed for use in humans by Dr Charlotte Paterson to evaluate patient generated measures over time following therapeutic intervention. MYMOP is a brief patient generated, problem specific questionnaire which requires the patient to specify one or two symptoms which are concerning them most and which they are seeking treatment for. A daily activity that is being restricted or prevented by these symptoms is also documented.

The MYMOP was initially published in 1996(1) and revised to MYMOP2 after a second validation in 1999 and included another section relating to medication(2). It is a sensitive measure of change over time; capable of measuring the effects of a wide variety of treatments and is a brief and simple questionnaire that can be completed during a consultation.

MYMOP has been used successfully to evaluate patient outcomes in a number of human clinical settings including acupuncture(3). MYMOP's validity is supported by its ability to detect different degrees of change in relation to scores in acute and chronic conditions. MYMOP is capable of being responsive to changes in symptoms despite being brief.

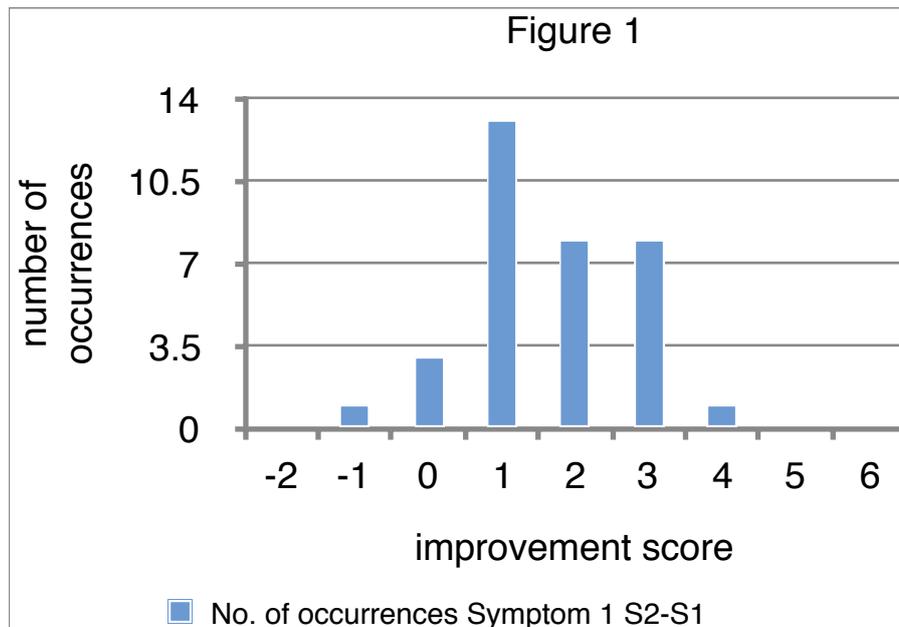
tESA adapted the MYMOP study for use on equines with owners providing the information regarding symptoms and severity, activities affected and medication if used. The objective of this study was to measure and evaluate the changes in horses regarding specific symptoms following shiatsu treatments.

## **METHOD:**

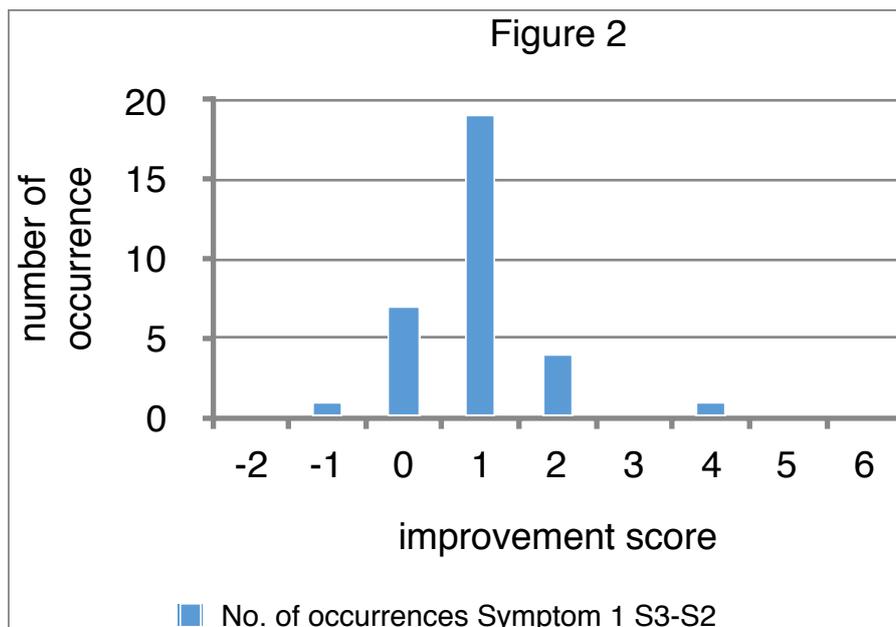
Fully qualified equine shiatsu practitioners that were members of tESA volunteered to participate in the study in the UK. 7 members took part in the research project working in total on 34 horses, each horse receiving 3 shiatsu treatments over a non-specific time period. The participating members were independent equine shiatsu practitioners who are self employed and spread around the UK geographically. Participating members invited their horse owning clients to take part in the project. Only horses that had never received equine shiatsu before were used in the study. Any type of complaint could be included in the study as long as it was clear to the owner what the problem was at the outset. Usual veterinary consent was obtained prior to the first treatment for each horse. Shiatsu was the only treatment given for the condition at the time of the study and immediately during the period leading up to participation in the study, although some horses were given either Western or complimentary medication for a period preceding the first shiatsu.

When owners had agreed to participate in the project and signed a consent form, an initial questionnaire was completed. Owners were asked to describe the most important symptom their horse was experiencing and include a second symptom but only if it were connected to the first symptom. Owners were then asked to score the severity of the symptoms on a scale of 0-6 with 6 being the worst possible and 0 the best possible. A score was also allocated to a named activity that the symptom/s prevented the horse from carrying out where this was relevant. A score was allocated for the horses wellbeing. The length of time that the horse had been experiencing the symptom was recorded. A record was made of any Western or complimentary medication administered. Owners were also asked to rate how important it was to them to reduce their horses medication or avoid it altogether. A code known only to the practitioner administering the shiatsu was allocated to the owners and horses participating in the study in order to protect anonymity. Questionnaires were completed before the 2nd and 3rd shiatsu treatments providing scores for severity of symptom, activity and wellbeing.

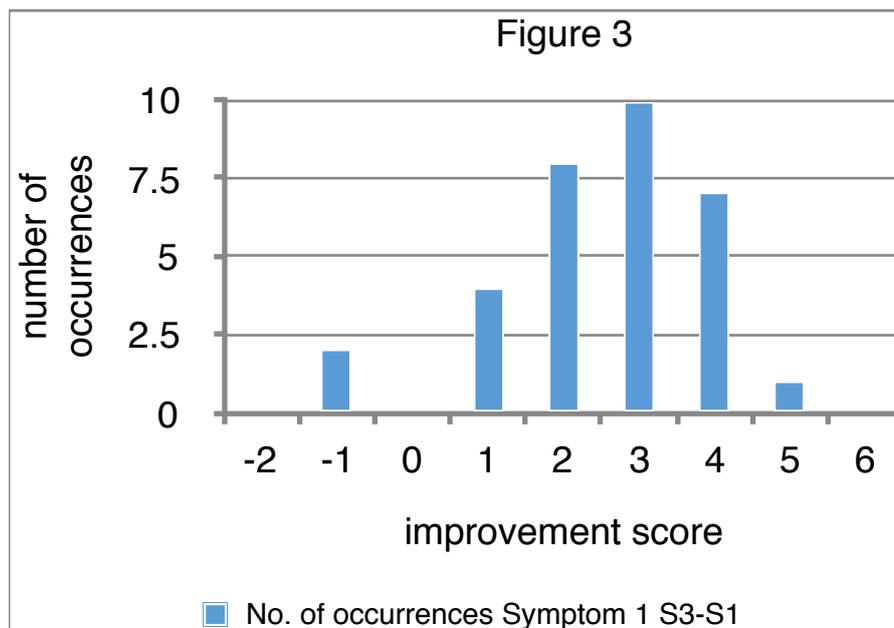
**RESULTS:**



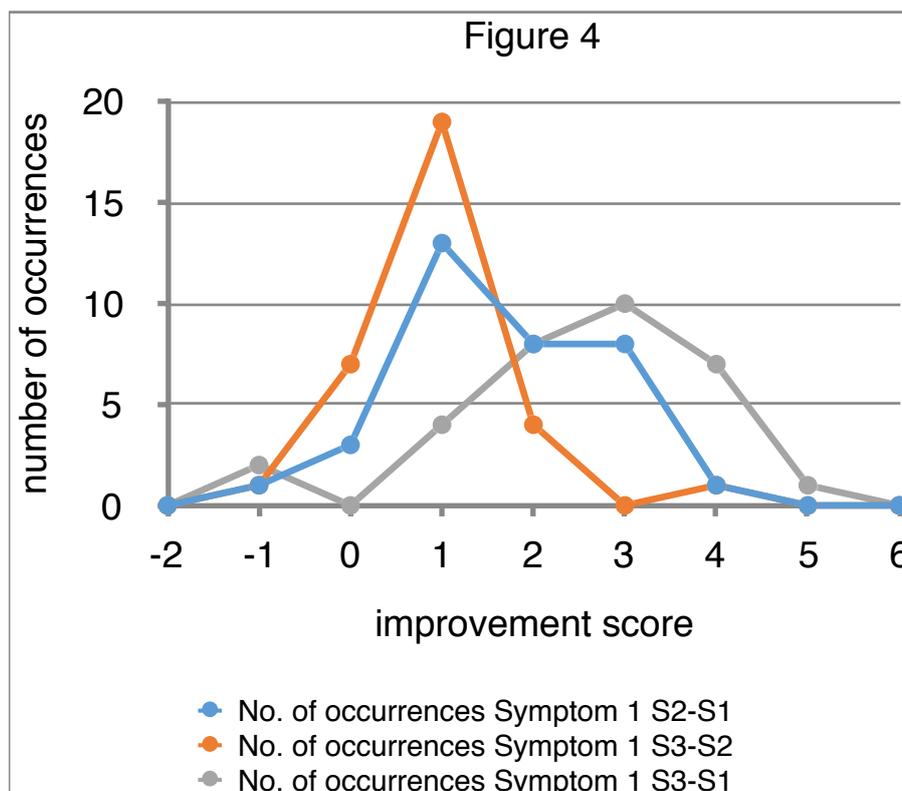
**Figure 1** shows the improvement in scores for symptom 1 before the first treatment and prior to the second shiatsu treatment. In total 29 horses saw an improvement in their symptom 1 of between 1 and 3 points. 3 horses saw no improvement and 1 saw a deterioration.



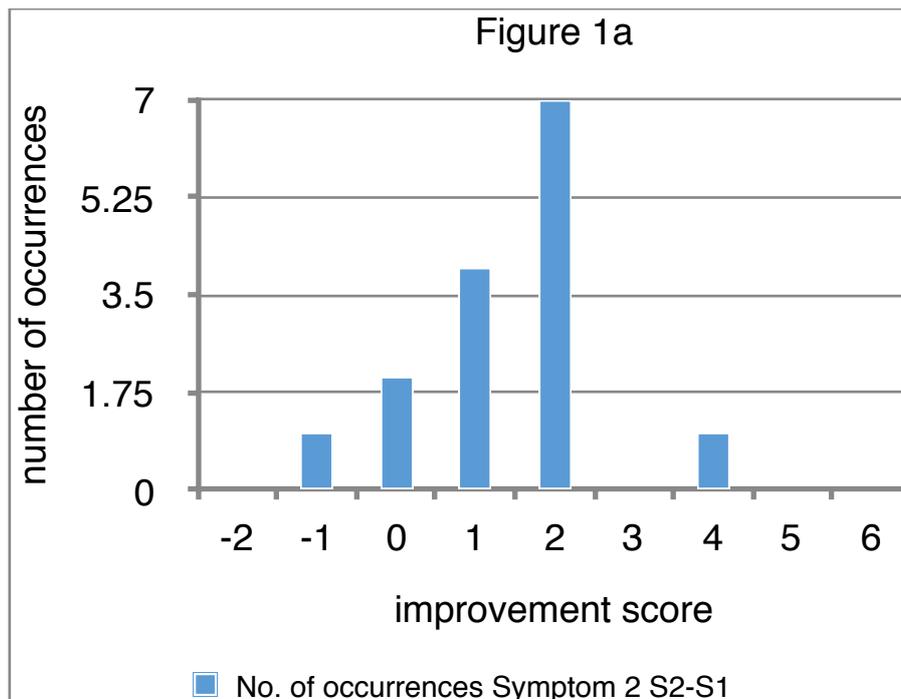
**Figure 2** shows the improvement in scores for symptom 1 between the second treatment and prior to the third shiatsu treatment. 19 horses showed an improvement in symptom 1 by 1 point, 7 showed no improvement and 1 saw a deterioration.



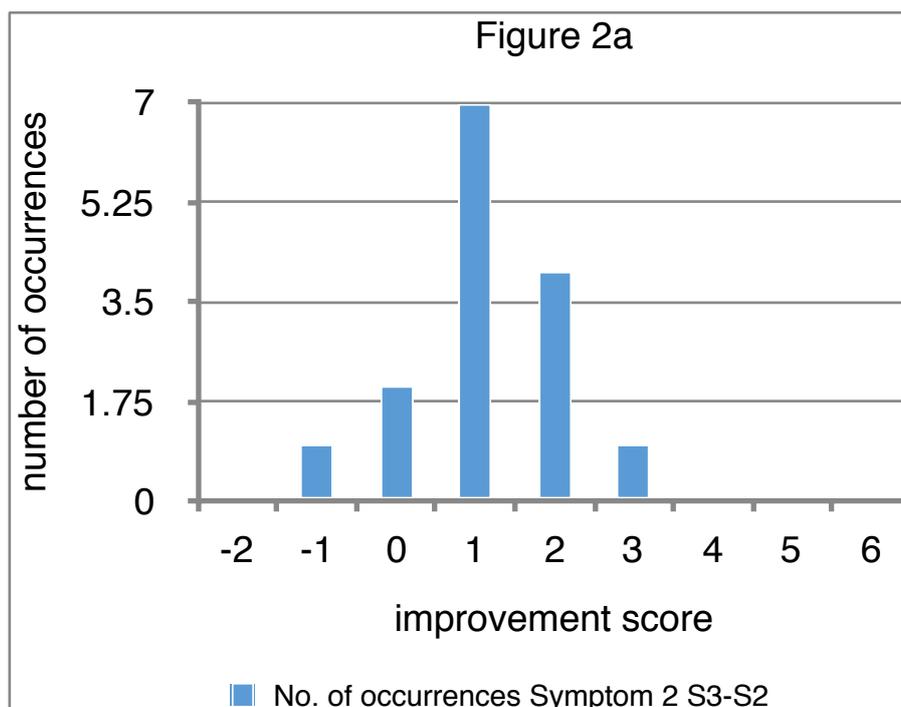
**Figure 3** shows the total improvement in symptom 1 for horses receiving two treatments. A total of 10 horses showed an improvement in symptom 1 score of 3, 8 an improvement of 2 and 7 an improvement of 4 points.



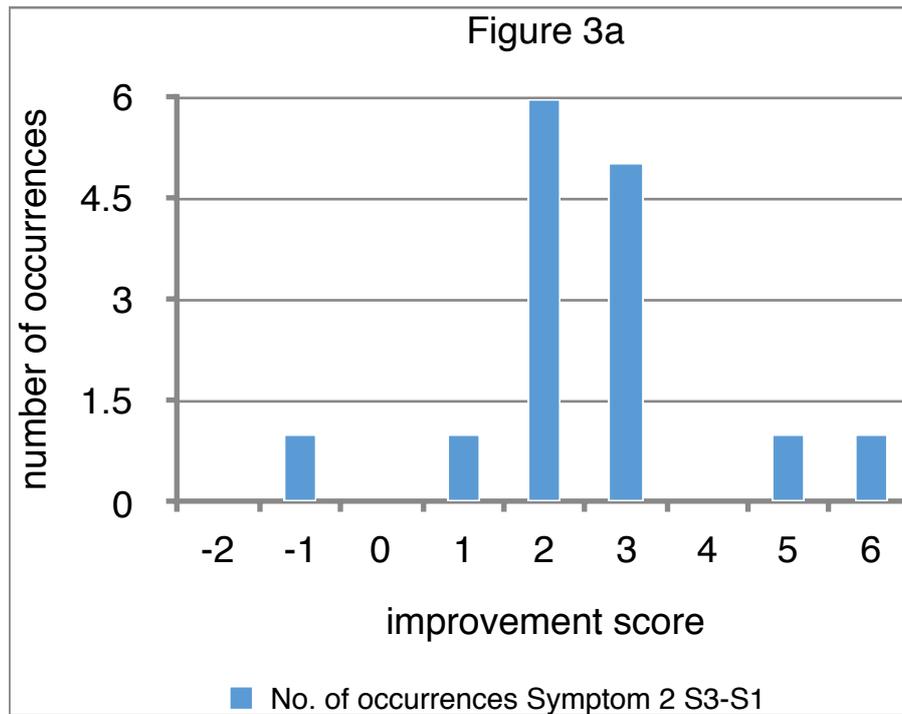
**Figure 4** data from Tables 1,2 and 3 in line format for symptom 1.



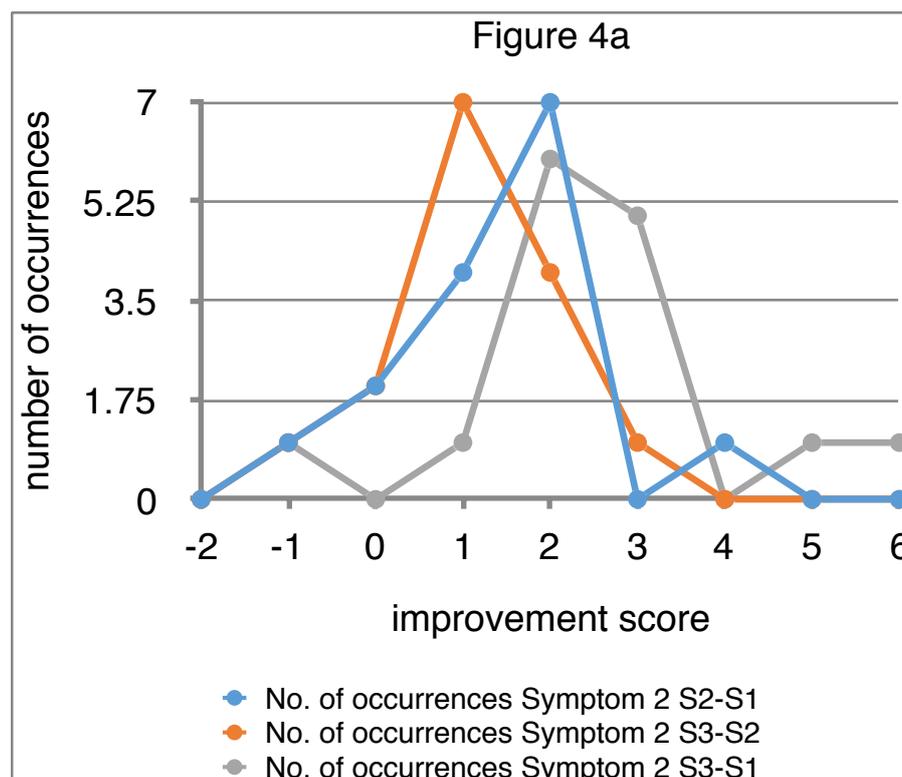
**Figure 1a** shows the improvement in scores for symptom 2 before the first treatment and prior to the second shiatsu treatment. In total 12 of 15 horses saw an improvement, 2 no improvement and 1 a deterioration in symptom.



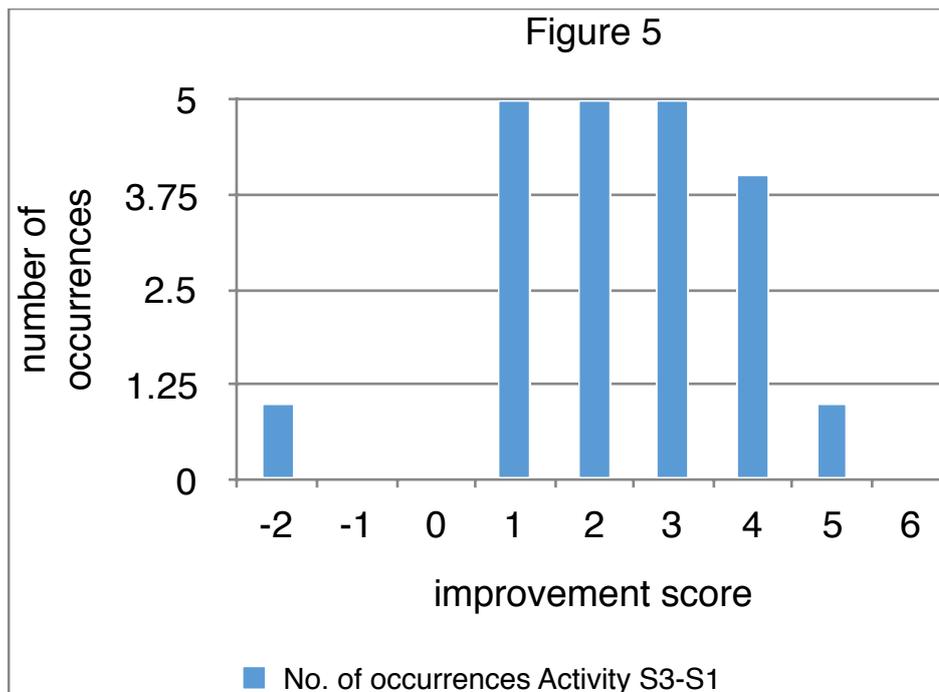
**Figure 2a** shows the improvement in scores for symptom 2 between the second treatment and prior to the third shiatsu treatment. In total 7 out of 15 horses improved by 1 point, 4 by 2 points and 1 by 3 points. 2 horses made no improvement and 1 saw a deterioration.



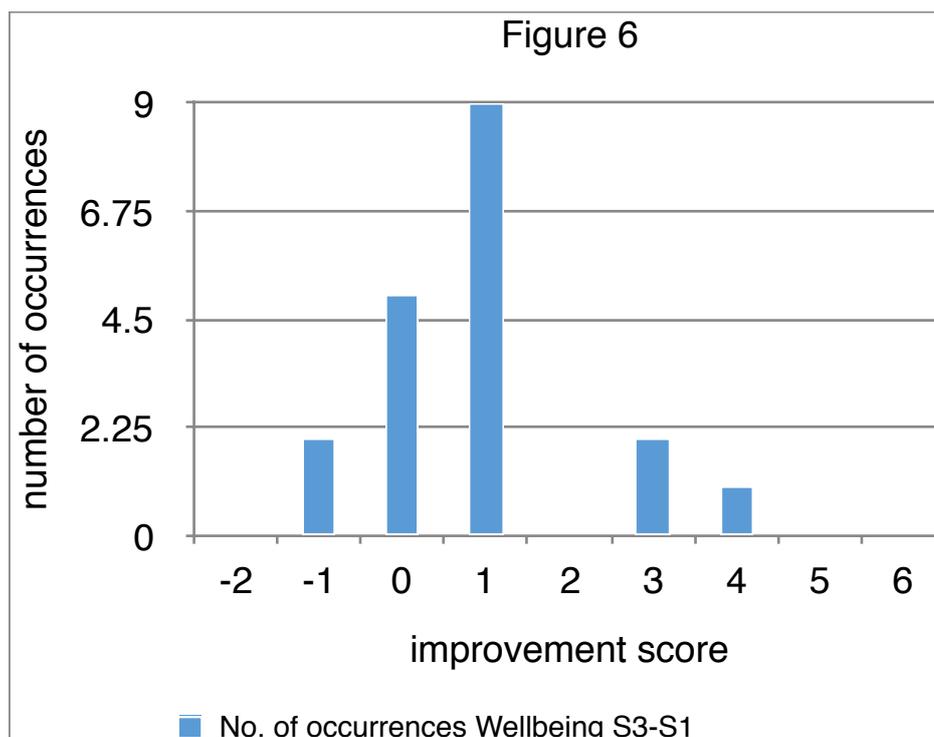
**Figure 3a** shows the total symptom 2 improvement for horses receiving two treatments. 6 horses showed an overall improvement of 2 points, 5 horses an improvement of 3 points, 1 of 5 and 1 of 6 points. 1 showed a deterioration but 0 horses showed no change.



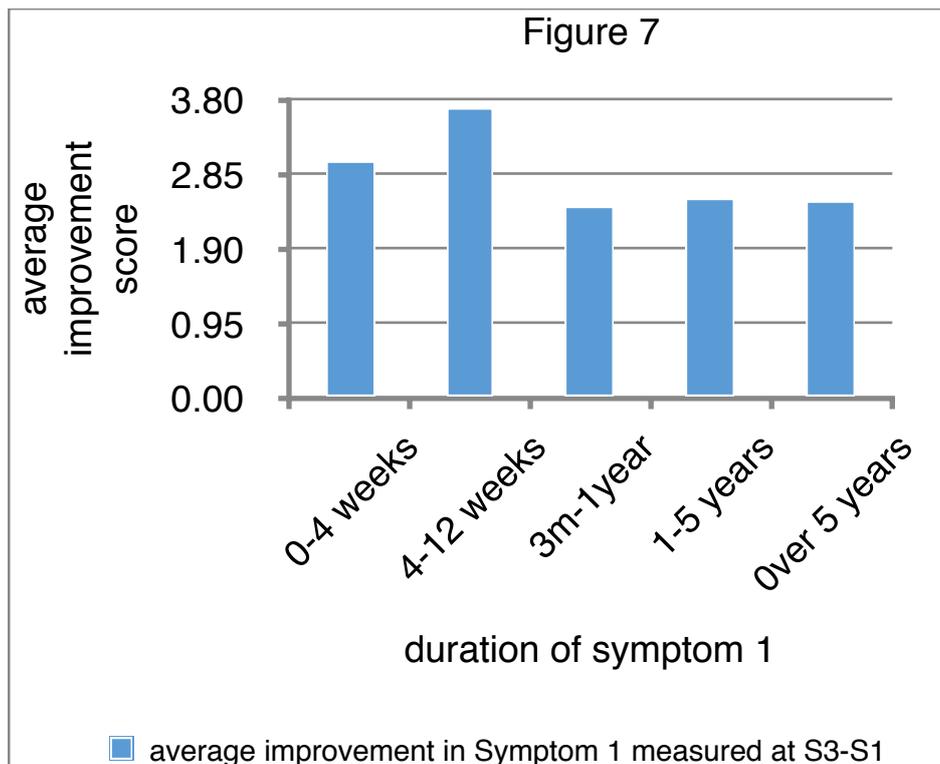
**Figure 4a** data from figures 1a, 2a and 3a in line format for symptom 2.



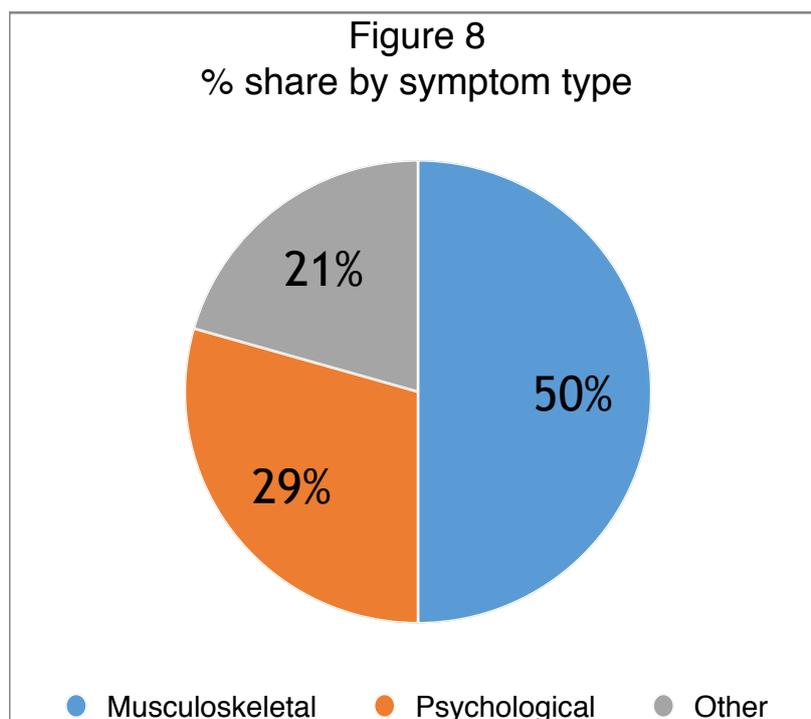
**Figure 5** shows the total improvement scores for Activity. 15 horses in total showed an improvement in score of between 1 and 3 in the activity that was being affected by symptom 1, with another 4 making an improvement of 4 points, 1 an improvement of 5. 1 horse showed a deterioration in activity.



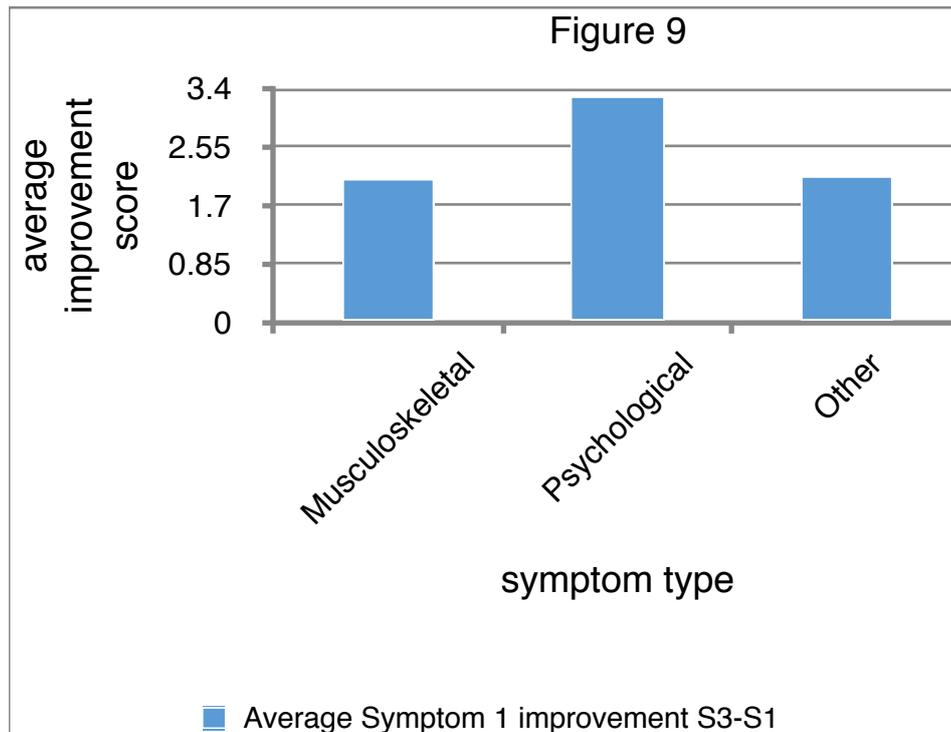
**Figure 6** shows the total improvement scores for wellbeing. 9 horses showed an increase in wellbeing of 1 point, 5 horses no change in wellbeing score and 2 horses showed a deterioration in wellbeing. 2 horses showed an increase in wellbeing of 2 points and 1 horse 4 points.



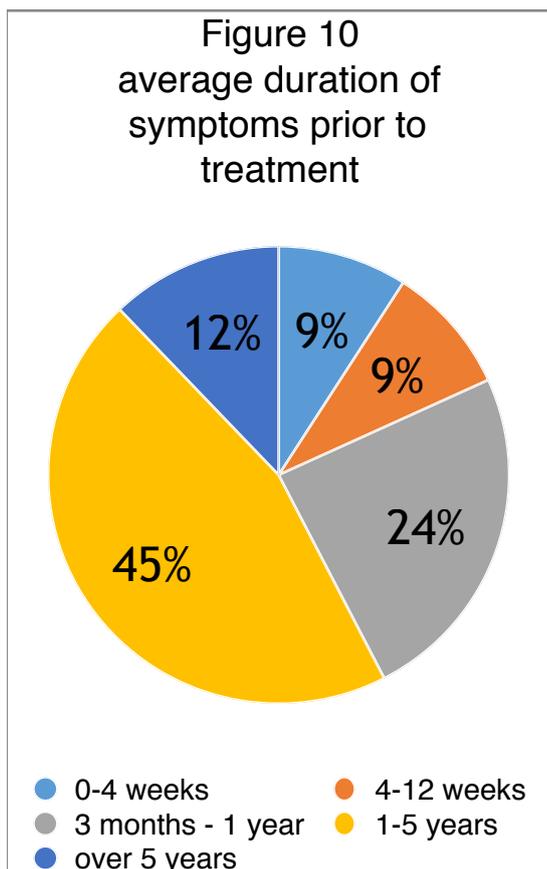
**Figure 7** shows the average improvement scores in symptom 1 according to symptom duration.



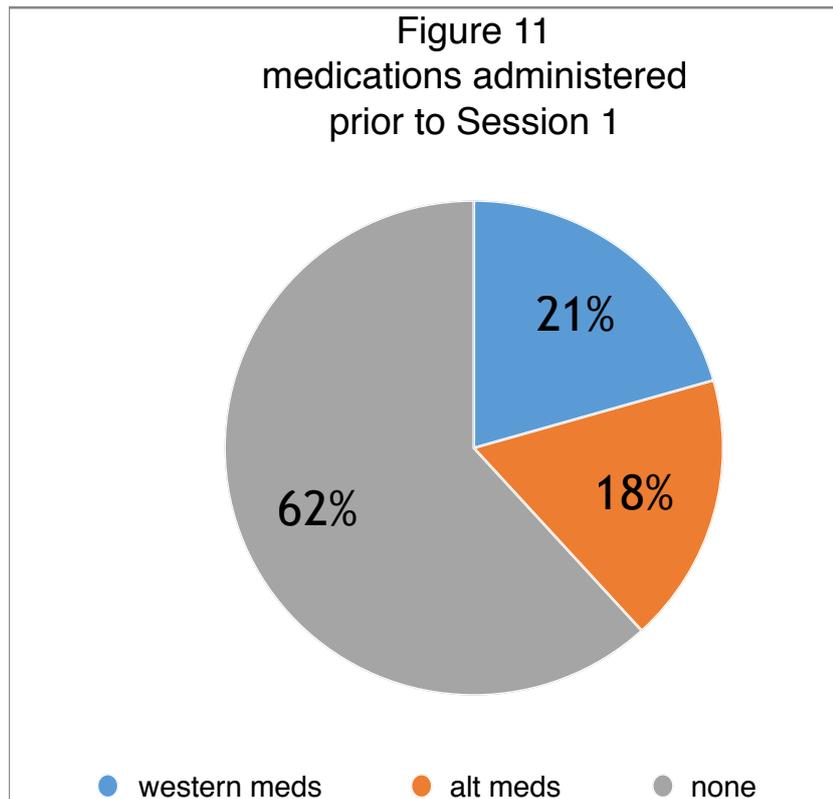
**Figure 8** shows a percentage breakdown of the symptom type prior to the first shiatsu treatment.



**Figure 9** shows the average symptom 1 improvement according to symptom type



**Figure 10** shows the average duration of symptoms prior to treatment as a percentage. 45% of horses had been experiencing symptom 1 for between 1 and 5 years and 12% for more than 5 years.



**Figure 11** shows the percentage of medication given to horses in the period leading up to their first shiatsu treatment. Most horses had not received any medication at all, with Western medication scoring 3% higher than alternative medication.

**DISCUSSION:**

Overall improvements in the occurrence of primary symptoms following the initial shiatsu treatment were recorded, with 88% of owners indicating a change in their horse. The biggest improvements were noted after the initial treatment, however, improvements in symptoms continued after the second treatment to a lesser extent (Fig 1&2). Fig 3 details the total scores given; interestingly there are no '0' scores in this table suggesting that the horses scoring a '0' for improvement in Fig 1 and Fig 2 were not the same horses, therefore at some point during their shiatsu experience they had experienced a change in the symptom score.

Activity levels were also analysed (Fig 5 ) with 20 out of 21 owners indicating that their horses demonstrated an improvement with only 1 horse showing any deterioration in activity. This suggests that owners found that their horses performance or behaviour improved following their shiatsu experience in most cases. Furthermore, owners of horses receiving shiatsu reported an overall improvement in wellbeing (Fig 6). In total, scores were submitted for 19 horses, with 12 showing an improvement for general wellbeing, only 7 horses either made no improvement in wellbeing or showed a deterioration. It is possible that owners found it easier to score improvements in specific symptoms or activities than general wellbeing. This therefore, would certainly need to be further analysed in any future study.

The biggest improvement for symptom 1 following shiatsu was reported to occur between 0 and 4 weeks and 4 and 12 weeks of symptom duration (Fig 7). Even horses that had experienced symptoms for more than 5 years saw an improvement. However, it is not known whether horses with long standing conditions have received other treatment protocols prior to receiving shiatsu making it impossible to evaluate whether shiatsu can result in improvement in conditions where other treatment methods have not succeeded. Notably the largest improvement was in behavioural symptoms e.g. anxiety, neurotic behaviour in stable etc, although 50% of horses studied had been categorised as having musculoskeletal symptoms prior to the initial shiatsu treatment (Fig 8). Further detailed investigation into the relationship of owner perceived behavioural issues and improvements as a result of receiving shiatsu would be worthwhile.

This study found that in total 57% of horses taking part in the study had been experiencing their primary symptom for more than a year although some had displayed symptom 1 for more than 5 years. This may suggest that shiatsu is requested by owners when horses have a long standing presenting symptom and less likely to be sought when a symptom is less than 3 months duration. Figure 11 shows the percentage type of medication given to horses in the period leading up to their first shiatsu treatment. Most horses had not received any medication at all, with the remaining split between Western and alternative medication separated only by 3%. A more detailed examination of this topic is beyond the scope of this investigation.

Furthermore, the results concerning the secondary symptoms, (Figs 3&4) show that overall improvement scores were higher when compared to primary symptoms. This demonstrates that shiatsu, as a holistic, whole body treatment can potentially improve more than just the target problem.

As already stated the use of non-experimental (observational) study design has well established limitations. Thus it is difficult to attribute any change solely to the shiatsu treatment, as many other variables, highlighted in this report, could have influenced the horses behaviour and symptoms.

This research project did not take into account gender or age of horses. It would be useful to further analyse the data collected according to these criteria. The time period between treatments was determined by the horse owners ultimately, although this could have been influenced by any of the following: shiatsu practitioners recommendation, affordability, time constraints etc. It would be useful to investigate further the relationship between improvement scores and time duration between treatments. Some of the owners paid for the shiatsu treatments for their horses; some a reduced 'promotional' rate and some were carried out free of charge. This was not recorded as part of this research project but may have been an influential factor in whether owners chose to participate in the project initially, the frequency of treatments etc. On reflection and as a result of analysis of the data collected, improvements could be made to the project. The MYMOP project did not make provision for collecting scores for horses following the receipt of their third shiatsu treatment. In view of this the benefit for this treatment session has not been measured and an opportunity missed.

A weakness of the MYMOP research design is that it is problem specific which makes it unsuitable for patients who cannot identify their problems. The participating shiatsu practitioners found that some horses were not suitable for inclusion in the MYMOP project because it was not possible to ascertain prior to the initial treatment clearly what the main symptom was. The owners interpretation of symptoms had to be relied upon. Clearly this could significantly affect the findings as there is no way of standardising owner opinion.

Furthermore, it was not possible to take into account owners knowledge and experience with horses. Some shiatsu practitioners felt that some owners either missed valuable observational information or were lacking in some way to understand what was affecting their horse. It was impossible to know how the horse was feeling when it came to scoring the conditions and even identifying conditions. In some cases, for example, for competitive owners, a 'presenting symptom' may have been important to the owner but not the horse at all. Where owners were giving scores based on the ridden experience, the project could not make allowances for rider ability, for example a horse described as unable to relax under saddle could be affected by rider competence.

Participating shiatsu practitioners commented that in some cases the horse owners found it difficult to allocate a score to the symptoms. A variety of factors could have influenced the scoring including: how interested the owner was in providing accurate data for the questionnaire, a genuine difficulty trying to interpret the horses behaviour/s, recall since the last treatment and difficulty trying to quantify results numerically. Some owners found it difficult to complete the questionnaires as their horse did not fit readily with the questions asked and felt that more definition in the questions would have been helpful. tESA had placed a time constraint on the collection of the data for this project, which some practitioners found a) difficult to work with as they found it hard to complete three treatments within the time frame, and b) meant that some practitioners experienced missed opportunities e.g. if a yard of horses considered suitable for this project had requested shiatsu before the official start date or close to the end date. Other problems with the data collection included some horses data having to be excluded because data was incomplete. For some horses during the shiatsu therapy period, veterinary intervention was required either for a new symptom/trauma/accident or if the horses primary symptom 1 used in MYMOP had deteriorated. For some horses hospitalisation, or long term veterinary treatment protocols were put in place which made the continued participation in MYMOP impossible. In some cases owners who were paying for shiatsu could no longer afford shiatsu as well as veterinary fees.

The purpose of the study was to document physical and behavioural outcomes performed in a shiatsu practice setting. A non-experimental, observational research design was considered appropriate for such an investigation and minimised disruption to the provision of the shiatsu treatment. A weakness of the MYMOP research design is that it is problem specific, making it unsuitable for clients who cannot identify a most important problem. It also means that treatment effects that are not related to the chosen primary symptom/s will not be measured, although they could be accommodated as an effect on wellbeing.

## **CONCLUSION:**

This study monitored changes in symptoms following shiatsu therapy on horses. Although MYMOP has its limitations, the findings suggest that horses benefit positively from receiving shiatsu, demonstrated by an improvement in symptom scores, improvement in activity performance and improvement in wellbeing. In addition to these findings, this project highlighted the type of symptoms horses were typically treated for and which of these responded best to treatment. The efficacy of shiatsu in relation to the time duration that a presenting symptom had been experienced was also highlighted. The data gathered regarding medication was not dealt with in any depth as was outside the scope of this investigation. Although this project is the first of its kind, the findings demonstrate that equine shiatsu is worthy of further research.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:**

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