

# **Massage as a Profession for Blind People in Indonesia**

## **A Country Report**

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Massage is the most common occupation for the blind in Indonesia. In fact, there is a false image in the Indonesian society that identifies blindness with massage; that is, people think that all blind people are good at massage, and that all blind people are masseurs. To some extent there is a truth in this belief. Massage training is almost always available as one vocational training in rehabilitation centres for the blind in Indonesia, and very often it is the only vocational training programme available, and thus it becomes the only choice for the clients.

Massage is very well-known and practiced in the Indonesian tradition. However, massage as a modern profession was not existent until 1959 when Ernst Tils of Germany introduced it to blind rehabilitation clients in Indonesia. In the rehabilitation centre of Solo, Central Java, for two years he was teaching sport massage to blind trainees based on a book written by Prof. Thomson. Since then the German sports massage has become a popular training course in rehabilitation centres for the blind throughout Indonesia with the first students of Mr. Tils as instructors.

Shiatshu was introduced to Indonesia in 1993 by a Japanese Tetsuo Uno who was teaching in the rehabilitation centre for the blind in Bandung, West Java. Then a number of Indonesian rehabilitation instructors for the blind have been invited to study shiatshu in Japan, and thus this type of

Japanese massage has become an alternative training course in some rehabilitation centres for the blind in Indonesia.

There are about 100 rehabilitation centres and special schools for the blind all over Indonesia. Because shiatshu is a relatively new type of massage in Indonesia, the majority of the rehabilitation centres and schools for the blind provide sports massage training course and only a few provide shiatshu training. The training period varies from six months to two years. Shiatshu is generally given in a longer training period. The curriculum includes anatomy, physiology and pathology in addition to the massage techniques. Input to the training course must have at least primary education certificate to take sport massage, and secondary education certificate to take shiatshu.

Currently there are about 10,000 blind massage practitioners all over Indonesia, and the majority of them are practicing sport massage. Generally they open their own clinic or are employed in such clinics. Their income varies greatly depending upon the area where the clinics are (large urban areas are generally good marketplace for massage), their business management (business management is normally not included in the massage training course), and their "flight hours".

As mentioned earlier, the Indonesian society seems to identify massage with blindness. That is, they seem to think that massage profession belongs exclusively to blind people. In a way this is positive, but since blindness is regarded as unrespectable, massage is also generally not regarded as a professional occupation. Blindness organizations are campaigning to promote the status of this profession in the Indonesian society. The exchange of ideas and experience among blind massage practitioners from different countries such as in this seminar will hopefully accelerate this effort.