

ARTICLE

Animal Assisted Therapy: It's Implications among Disorders, for Therapeutic Practice, and in Health and Well-being

Shireen Dargan *

Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 29 April 2021

Accepted: 30 June 2021

Published Online: 10 July 2021

Keywords:

Animal assisted therapy

Well being

Therapeutic practice

Health

Disorders

ABSTRACT

Till the time one has not loved an *animal*, a part of one's soul remains unborn. Animal Assisted Therapy can be used in amalgamation with other forms of therapy. The animal becomes an assimilation of the therapeutic plan with AAT. Many psychological disorders have been shown to react well to Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT). The article is a concise literature review on Animal Assisted Therapy of database available from the studies that were integrated and provided a general understanding of the perceived benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy and includes topics that are categorised as an Introduction to Animal Assisted Therapy: how it can help people with disorders, it's utilisation in therapeutic practice and its relation to our health and well-being. Papers were considered eligible if they satisfied the following pre-determined criteria: (1) Talked about Animal Assisted Therapy in context to well-being of an individual, (2) Talked about implications of Animal Assisted Therapy in context to disorders and (3) Showed benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy in counselling. This paper further provides an overall review of Animal Assisted Therapy. Relevant data was summarized and collated to make a narrative account of the findings that animal in the therapy would not make it more difficult, but rather make it easier, the therapist be aware of any animal-related allergies when employing animals as adjuncts and animals can help have a better emotional and physical healing experience by the patient.

1. Introduction

Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) is the application of animals as a therapeutic modality to help heal and rehabilitate patients with acute or chronic diseases or illnesses. In Animal Assisted Therapy, animals are used in goal directed treatment methods or sessions. These goals can be physical, mental, emotional or social which further help in overall well-being of an individual. Positive psychological related benefits have been associated to the presence of animals for companionship. Animals have a long tradition of being used in therapies. Much work

has been undertaken to identify and explain the essence and forms of these approaches, as well as to investigate their efficacy which is ability to achieve the desired or expected outcome under a regulated testing context and effectiveness as the field has advanced and that is how the therapy works in real-life practice. The term AAT commonly refers to the companionship of an animal aiming to provide a positive impact on human health and well-being. AAT is given by a professionally trained specialist with expertise within the field of their practise, who considers optimising the participants' physical, cognitive, mental, and/or socio-emotional functioning.

*Corresponding Author:

Shireen Dargan,

Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India;

Email: shireendargan.1999@gmail.com

Newly studied and improved intervention studies, as well as an analysis of the underlying mechanism of human reaction to the companionship of friendly animals as a stimulus, are necessary to accept AAT into conventional or unorthodox treatment practises as a novel therapeutic modality (Palley, O'Rourke and Niemi, 2010) ^[18]. According to Barak et al. (2001) ^[2], further research is required to determine the fundamental causes of AAT that result in clinical improvements. The conclusions from these trials can be useful in determining how the approaches perform and implement best-practice practises.

The interaction between animals and patients creates an atmosphere that allows patients to communicate more effectively, boost their self-confidence, decrease sickness symptoms, and improve their overall satisfaction (Evans and Gray, 2012) ^[7].

The technique of incorporating animals into therapeutic contexts is evolving in animal-assisted interventions (AAs), and as a result, there has been a growing scholarly interest in human health outcomes during the last decades. Research efforts into the perspective of Animal Assisted Therapy have little consensus on the impact of such interventions in therapeutic practice. This paper aimed to contribute to the limited body of knowledge by reviewing various available studies on Animal Assisted Therapy and compiling it in one. Moreover, discussion of theoretical and methodological issues, implications for practice and suggestions for future research are provided.

1.1 Animal Assisted Therapy among Disorders

The integration of therapy dogs with people with dissociative disorders was outlined by Arnold (1995) ^[1]. The dog's soothing impact, aptitude and capability to warn the therapist early to clients' concern, and improved communication and engagement were determined to be benefits. Psychiatric patients who are reclusive and nonresponsive have been reported as smiling, hugging, and communicating to a therapy dog (Voelker, 1995) ^[24]. When a therapy dog was present, it was connected with reduced heart rates and noise levels in elderly dementia patients (Walsh, Mertin, Verlander and Pollard, 2010) ^[22]. When a therapy dog was present, patients with Alzheimer's disease had considerably enhanced sociability behaviour (Wilson and Turner, 1997) ^[23].

Children with pervasive developmental disorders (PDD) defined by a lack of social skills and abilities were subjected to three distinct situations in a research done by Martin and Farnum (2002) ^[14]. Children were exposed to three distinct situations: (a) a non-social toy(ball), (b) a stuffed dog, and (c) a real dog. Both behavioural and linguistic elements of prosocial and non-social encounters

were assessed. When a therapy dog was present, children had more lively mood, were more focused, and were more aware of their social surroundings, according to the findings. These studies imply that engagement with dogs may have special advantages for this demographic and that animal-assisted treatment may be beneficial form of therapy.

Animal-Assisted Therapy reduces state anxiety to a significant degree. Dogs may provide an extra therapeutic benefit by reducing anxiety and improving psychotherapy tactics and motivation of patients and therapists (Hoffmann et al., 2009) ^[10]. Animal-assisted treatment was linked to lower levels of state anxiety in hospitalised clients with a spectrum of medical diagnoses, while a regular therapy leisure experience was linked to lower levels only in mood disorder patients (Barker and Dawson, 1998) ^[3].

1.2 Animal Assisted Therapy in Therapeutic Practice

Animal Assisted Therapy in counselling that is AAT-C, is the confluence of pets as therapeutic medium in the counselling procedure. AAT-C has a lot of applications but the most preferred model is that for therapists to work in integration with their own pets; a pet that has been evaluated and is fit for such work because a counsellor is most familiar with his/her own pet and is very well aware of their pets' emotional and behavioural reactions. An adolescent who has been the victim of abuse might be an example of AAT in a mental health counselling session. To teach the notion of acceptable contact and delicate interactions, softly touching and communicating to a dog or cat: The combination of a warm and loving therapy pet and a human therapist strengthens the child's pleasant experience (Chandler, 2017) ^[6].

According to Kruger et al. (2004) ^[12] and Beck et al. (1986) ^[4], a practitioner who performs counselling with an animal present may feel less intimidating, and therefore the client may be more likely to reveal himself or herself. A friendly animal can make a person see the therapist in a more positive light. Peacock (1986) ^[19] confirmed this belief, reporting that when children were interviewed in the company of her puppy, they became more happy and friendly during their encounter. She came to the conclusion that the dog helped to ease the initial stress and create a positive environment. There has been a slew of experiments that have come up with comparable results.

According to Odendaal and Meintjes (2003) ^[17], animals have a soothing effect on humans and alleviate arousal. Tactile interaction with a dog was related to experimentally induced low blood pressure in their analysis. When it comes to choosing animals for therapy,

therapists must make informed decisions. Not all animals are suitable for use as adjunct therapists. When it comes to bringing animals into psychotherapy, a clinician must think carefully if the animals will serve the role in growth. This may include further research and the purchase of animals that are ideally suited to his or her needs (Fine, 2010)^[8]. However, a lack of experimental data can continue to obstruct AAT's recognition, especially as people grow more sceptical of evidence-based psychotherapy.

1.3 Animal Assisted Therapy in Relation to Health and Well-being

A study conducted by Macauley (2006)^[13] explored the effects and effectiveness of animal-assisted therapy (AAT). Three males with aphasia from left-hemisphere strokes were given one term of standard therapy followed by one term of AAT to investigate the benefits and efficacy for people with aphasia. Both methods were effective, and each participant reached his objectives, but there were no significant variations in test outcomes between those who had standard speech-language therapy and those who did not. In contrast to traditional treatment, the results of a client satisfaction investigation revealed that each participant was more motivated and calmer, liked the treatment session, and rated the environment of the sessions as light and less stressful during AAT.

Another study conducted by Roenke and Mulligan (1998)^[21] on patients of a long-term care facility and discovered that there are four criteria that contribute to the advantages gained by participants: (a) Humanity; (b) Anticipation and Consistency; (c) Reminiscence Capacity; and (d) Social Aspects. Furthermore, 6 neurochemicals were linked to a reduction in blood pressure in people (n=18) and dogs (n=18) before and after a pleasurable encounter, demonstrating that the neurochemicals implicated and attention-seeking behaviour had increased significantly in both species. This database can be used to justify the use of animals in treatment (Odendaal, 2000)^[16].

A study taken up by Richeson (2003)^[20] used the Cohen-Mansfield Agitation Inventory and the Animal-Assisted Therapy Flow Sheet to analyse the influence of a therapeutic recreation intervention employing animal-assisted therapy (AAT) on the agitated behaviours and social interactions of older individuals with dementia. 15 nursing home residents with dementia took part in a daily AAT intervention for three weeks and demonstrated statistically significant reductions in agitated behaviour and an increase in social contact from pre- to post-test. Human-animal bonding has been linked to lower blood pressure, heart rates, and stress levels, as well as increased emotional well-being and social engagement, according to

studies (Jorgenson, 1997)^[11].

2. Methodology

A comprehensive systematic review was conducted. The articles included provided experimental or review-based evidence, qualitative or quantitative psychological or psychosocial outcomes pertaining identifying studies integrating animals into mental health treatments for people with disorders, its utilisation in therapeutic practice and its relation to our health and well-being. Different data resources were combined to gain insight towards the aim of the article. The majority of the articles in this review came from peer-reviewed scientific journals, with some online resources incorporated to provide the entire scope of the subject. The following databases were searched: APA PsycNET, NCBI, Research Gate, and Academia. Outside of these databases, Google Scholar was used to explore for articles. Citations from journal studies were also examined and added if they were applicable. Papers were considered eligible if they satisfied the following pre-determined criteria: (1) Talked about Animal Assisted Therapy in context to well-being of an individual, (2) Talked about implications of Animal Assisted Therapy in context to disorders and (3) Showed benefits of Animal Assisted Therapy in counselling. The following terms were used in the search: Animal Assisted Therapy, Therapeutic Practice, AAC, Animal Therapy and Disorders, Animal Therapy and Well Being.

3. Results and Discussion

Animal encounters have been used clinically in a variety of contexts, with confirmed effects for psychiatric and other medical patients in terms of reducing affective disorders and enhancing human interactions. Few experiments of AAT for medical patients have been conducted, and the majority of these studies have focused on patients who deal with dogs. In older patients with schizophrenia, canine-assisted interactions have been linked to acute improvements in anxiety or depression, as well as increased cognitive functioning, but not with impulse control. Animal Assisted Therapy is a technique for overcoming stress and isolation brought about by staying in a residential care facility, as well as increasing pleasure and life satisfaction (Nazarian et al., 2018)^[15].

Animals can be a valuable addition to a therapist's framework when it comes to supporting people. Some clinicians may remain wary of the medicinal importance of the animal/human relationship, and may initially undervalue the therapeutic efficacy of animals. There is a wide gap in the feasibility of this method due to a

lack of documentation and rigorous review of outcome analysis. Animals can be used by interested practitioners exclusively to establish rapport with clients. A professional and well-informed clinician, on the other hand, should be able to consider a wide range of advantages that animals can have. To incorporate animals into one's therapeutic arsenal, a therapist can make certain changes to his or her treatment methodology.

Careful procurement of therapeutic animals, stringent veterinary care and supervision for the animal, and informed consent from all parties concerned are all safeguards. Allergies, zoonoses, and future injuries can be greatly avoided as proper veterinary procedures are followed by both the animals and the patients (Brodie et al., 2002) ^[5].

However various gaps could be found where further research can be done keeping in mind the implication of AAT in India as it is a relatively new therapy in India. Lack of knowledge, differentiating cultural values and fear of animals, safety risks among individuals, therapist education, and financing are all problems encountered by therapists in work, as per research. The value of education/awareness regarding this methodology, preparation criteria, reporting requirements, and outcome-based trials is important (Gayathri and Priscilla, 2018) ^[9].

4. Conclusions

The current database found pertains to effectiveness of Animal Assisted Therapy in treatment of various disorders, for utilisation in therapeutic practice and enhancing the overall well-being of an individual. This would imply that the addition of the animal would not cause the treatment to become more difficult rather would make it smoother. When using animals as adjuncts for specific clients, the clinician should be mindful of any animal-related fears or allergies. Animals can improve the healing experience mentally and physically by making it more available to clients.

References

- [1] Arnold, J.C. (1995). Therapy dogs and the dissociative patient: preliminary observations. *Dissociation*, 8, 247-252.
- [2] Barak, Y., Savorai, O., Mavashev, S., & Beni, A. (2001). Animal-assisted therapy for elderly schizophrenic patients: a one-year controlled study. *American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry*, 9(4), 439-442.
- [3] Barker, S. B., & Dawson, K. S. (1998). The Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Anxiety Ratings of Hospitalized Psychiatric Patients. *Psychiatric Services*, 49(6), 797-801. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.49.6.797>.
- [4] Beck, A., Hunter, K., & Seraydarian, L. (1986). Use of animals in the rehabilitation of psychiatric inpatients. *Psychological Reports*, 58, 63-66.
- [5] Brodie, S., Biley, F. C., & Shewring, M. (2002). An exploration of the potential risks associated with using pet therapy in healthcare settings. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 11, 444-456.
- [6] Chandler, C. K. (2017). *Animal-Assisted Therapy in Counseling* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- [7] Evans, N., & Gray, C. (2012). The practice and ethics of animal-assisted therapy with children and young people: is it enough that we don't eat our co-workers? *Br J Soc Work*, 42(4):600-17.
- [8] Fine, A. H. (2010). Incorporating animal-assisted therapy into psychotherapy. *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy*, 169-191.
DOI: 10.1016/b978-0-12-381453-1.10010-8.
- [9] Gayathri, B., & Priscilla, P. (2018). On implementation of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) in a school for children with special needs-Indian Journals. *Indian Journals*, 8(11),182-193.
- [10] Hoffmann, A. O. M., Lee, A. H., Wertenauer, F., Ricken, R., Jansen, J. J., Gallinat, J., & Lang, U. E. (2009). Dog-assisted intervention significantly reduces anxiety in hospitalized patients with major depression. *European Journal of Integrative Medicine*, 1(3), 145-148. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eujim.2009.08.002>.
- [11] Jorgenson, J. (1997). Therapeutic Use of Companion Animals in Health Care. *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 29(3), 249-254. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.1997.tb00993.x>.
- [12] Kruger, K., Trachtenberg, S., & Serpell, J. A. (2004). Can animals help humans heal? Animal assisted interventions in adolescent mental health. Retrieved from. http://www2.vet.upenn.edu/research/centres/cias/pdf/CIAS_AAI_white_paper.pdf.
- [13] Macauley, B. (2006). Animal-assisted therapy for persons with aphasia: A pilot study. *Journal of rehabilitation research and development*, 43, 357-66.
- [14] Martin, F., & Farnum, J. (2002). Animal-Assisted Therapy for Children with Pervasive Developmental Disorders. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 24(6), 657-670. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019394502320555403>.
- [15] Nazarian, Z., Armoon, B., Rezaei, O., Banihashem, S., & Hamideh M. (2018). The effect of pet therapy concurrent with common medication on positive, negative, cognitive and motor symptoms of schizo-

- phrenia: a randomized control trial. *Pol Psychol Bull*, 49(2):200-6.
- [16] Odendaal, J. S. J. (2000). Animal-assisted therapy — magic or medicine? *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 49(4), 275-280. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-3999\(00\)00183-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0022-3999(00)00183-5).
- [17] Odendaal, S. J., & Meintjes, R. (2003). Neurophysiological correlates of affiliative behavior between humans and dogs. *Veterinary Journal*, 165, 296-301.
- [18] Palley, L. S., O'Rourke, P. P., & Niemi, S. M. (2010). Mainstreaming Animal-Assisted Therapy. *ILAR Journal*, 51(3), 199-207. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ilar.51.3.199>.
- [19] Peacock, C. (1986). The role of the therapeutic pet in initial psychotherapy sessions with adolescents. Boston: Paper presented to Delta Society International Conference.
- [20] Richeson, N. E. (2003). Effects of animal-assisted therapy on agitated behaviors and social interactions of older adults with dementia. *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease & Other Dementias*, 18(6), 353-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/153331750301800610>.
- [21] Roenke, L., & Mulligan, S. (1998). The Therapeutic Value of the Human-Animal Connection. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 11(2), 27-43. https://doi.org/10.1080/j003v11n02_03.
- [22] Walsh, P. G., Mertin, P. G., Verlander, D. F., & Pollard, C. F. (2010). The effects of a 'pets as therapy' dog on persons with dementia in a psychiatric ward. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 42(4), 161-166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1630.1995.tb01331.x>.
- [23] Wilson, C. C., & Turner, D. C. (1997). *Companion Animals in Human Health (Discoveries)* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- [24] Voelker, R. (1995). Puppy Love Can Be Therapeutic, Too. *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*, 274(24), 1897. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.1995.03530240007002>.