

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS: ANIMAL THERAPY WITH CHILDREN AND
ADOLESCENTS

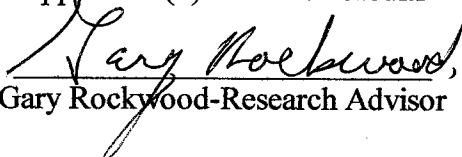
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ABSTRACT

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Animal-assisted therapy involves an interaction involving a human and an animal, along with a therapeutic professional, with intentions of assisting patients' movement toward achieving therapeutic goals. This critical analysis discusses how animal therapy can be utilized effectively in the therapeutic and emotional health care of children and adolescents. Animal therapy is defined and the history of the therapy is reviewed. An overview of quantitative and qualitative research is presented explaining how the alternative form of therapy can aid in the growth of a child or adolescent's self-esteem, empathy, nurturance, motivation and how it can provide them with companionship. The analysis also discusses how the therapy can be used with youth that have undergone

physical and sexual abuse. Animal-assisted therapy precautions and recommendations are also discussed to aid interested professionals in implementing the therapy ethically into their practices. The analysis ends with an overview of animal therapy and the implications it can have in counseling children and adolescents. The counseling implications are reflected and based on the empirical research presented throughout the critical analysis.

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Introduction

Throughout the past several decades, research has increasingly recognized the benefits of animals in the lives of humans of all ages (Fox, 1981; Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Kalfon, 1991; Stribling, 2003). Kidd & Kidd (1985) and Blue (1986) provide documentation that pets aid humans with their emotional health by offering absolute love, providing companionship, and assisting in the ability to gain trust, autonomy and compassion towards other living beings. Throughout history pets have been used as a complementary component in therapy. It has only been in the last few decades that animals have been more formally applied in a variety of therapeutic settings, including schools and prisons, hospitals, nursing homes, and outpatient care programs. Several sources of professional literature suggest that the presence of an animal in therapy (and in the home) can and has produced a variety of benefits for both children and adolescents (Guerra, 1998; Hanselman, 2001; Levinson, 1997; Reichart, 1998; Siegel, 1995). Animals are merely another instrument in the toolbox available to mental health professionals as well as parents.

There is a long history regarding the importance of animals aiding humans. Recognizing the therapeutic value of pets in 1699, John Locke advocated, “giving children dogs, squirrels, birds, or any such thing as to look after as means of encouraging them to develop tender feelings and a sense of responsibility for others” (Serpall, 2000, p.12). In 1792 farm animals formed a key component of assistance for resident patients in an England mental health residency and in 1867, farm animals were similarly used at Bethel Community in Germany (Hooker, Holbrook-Freeman & Stewart, 2002). Animals were first used therapeutically in the United States in the 1940’s at an Air Force

Recovery Hospital in New York City (Hooker, et al., 2002). Animals were utilized in these settings to provide welfare for the patients by letting them view, care for and pet the animals (Hooker, et al.).

Stribling's (2003) research shows a significant positive correlation between adults having consistent relations with pets and happiness. Those who have regular contact with a pet express more happiness than those who do not have such consistent contact with a pet. It was psychologist Boris Levinson that began to recognize the benefits of pets for children and adolescents. It was not until the early 1960's that Levinson named the therapeutic technique "pet therapy", lending credibility to the technique by promoting and developing further research (Hooker, et al., 2002). Levinson recorded his own observations of interactions between his dog and severely withdrawn children. Levinson noted that the dog served as an icebreaker, reducing the children's defenses and offering a focal point for communication. With the dog present Levinson was able to establish rapport and begin therapy with the child (Hooker et al.).

Animal-assisted therapy can be valuable in the practice of counseling children and adolescents. Fine (as cited in Chandler, 2001) points out animals have been found to lower apprehension and stimulate participation in therapy. When an animal is part of a therapy session it can assist in the development of trust between the client and counselor. The animal also provides an opportunity for a nonjudgmental companion in the course of the children and adolescents' learning and development (Chandler, 2001). The animal offers immediate sensory contact (e.g. petting, stroking) and can aid as an instrument for nurturing (allowing the individual to feel needed). Most importantly, animals provide children and adolescents with a motivational source of healthy development for their self-

esteem and emotional safety (Bierer, 2001). With this in mind a critical analysis of this subject matter can provide increased insights into a growing research area generating further studies and leading to increased practical use.

The area of animal therapy research has grown from a specialized niche to one supported by more systematic research findings. Nursing has been one of the biggest advocates in pushing the use of pets in healthcare situations (Hooker, et al., 2002). Hooker et al. state that growing reliable research results encourage much of the use of animals in physical and mental treatment settings. Nonetheless, this is still a developing field that has not yet been researched to exhaustion. With continued research, animal therapy can continue receive its support from child-adolescent specialists as well as parents.

Purpose of Analysis

The significance of this critical analysis of animal therapy is to provide supplemental information for mental health professionals working with children and adolescents. The analysis will provide professionals with substantial information regarding the use of animals in therapy when working with children and adolescents. It is important to promote animal therapy findings and to increase their practical use in mental health settings because it continues to be a less recognized form of therapy. Furthermore, the purpose of this critical analysis is to present and interpret valid research, hopefully lessening the reservations of professionals to incorporate animal/pet therapy into their practices. The knowledge can also help professionals provide parents with information to, and encourage them regarding the benefits of having pets in the home environment and where appropriate, encourage it as part of their child's therapy.

Statement of the Problem

Children and adolescents exposed to traumatic factors such as divorce, neglect or abuse may be at risk for emotional problems throughout their development. Traumatic factors come in a variety of magnitudes, as do the children's responses to them. Not all children that have been exposed personally to or witnessed traumatic events experience emotional and behavior problems. However, society should not be willing to take that risk and hope that the child that has undergone traumatic conditions will be emotionally healthy.

Greenberg, Domitrovich, and Bumbarger (1999) cite that in the most recent decade the prevention of mental disorders in children has grown to be a rising precedence for federal organizations in connection to policy, practice, and research. Awareness of emotional and psychological problems in children is reflected in the goals set for our nation's health. The intent of the organization Healthy People 2000 is to reduce the occurrence of emotional and psychological disorders (Greenberg et al., 1999).

Due to increasing recognition of this concern, rising numbers of children are facing difficulty in handling the challenges of development. This is why it is important for professionals carrying out any type of therapy with children to confidentially monitor progress, issues and concerns that come up in their practices. It is also important to report and explore what is working and not working and why in particular therapeutic approaches. Animal/pet therapy is one way to assist and support children and adolescents undergoing emotional and psychological distress leading to a healthy future.

Research Questions

There are five questions that this critical analysis will address:

1. How can animal therapy promote youth self-esteem, motivate and provide companionship, as well as encourage empathy and nurturance?
2. How can professionals and parents utilize animal therapy to promote youth self-esteem, motivate and provide companionship, as well as encourage empathy and nurturance?
3. How can animal therapy aid children and adolescents that have been exposed to abusive situations transition back into a healthy socialization and trust?
4. How can professionals and parents utilize animals to aid children and adolescents that have been exposed to abusive situations transition back into a healthy socialization and trust?
5. What are the precautions that should be taken into consideration when applying animal therapy to counseling? What precautions should parents take into consideration when choosing to get a pet for the home?

Definition of Terms

There are six terms that must be defined in order for there to be clarity in this clinical analysis.

Animal-Assisted Therapy- Animal-assisted therapy, also known as pet therapy, develops trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients in a variety of settings, both group and individual. This therapy can provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance the quality of the client's life (All & Loving, 1999).

Biophilia Hypothesis- a hypothesis brought forward by biologist, E.O. Wilson. He states, “a predisposition to attune animals and other living things is part of evolutionary heritage...”(Melson, 2001, p19).

Empathy- the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another, of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.

Nurturance- affectionate care and attention.

Self-esteem- Guidon (2002) defines this as, the “attitudinal, evaluative component of self; the affective judgments placed on the self-concept consisting of feelings of worth and acceptance...”(p.207).

Zoonotic diseases- diseases that can be passed between people and other animals.

Limitations

There 3 are limitations that are relevant to this topic:

1. Animal therapy is still lacking a significant amount of quantitative research measuring its effectiveness.
2. Children and adolescents that experience severe animal allergies are not able to seek the benefits of animal therapy.
3. The area most lacking research regarding animal therapy with children and adolescents is its use with those that have been sexually, emotionally and physically abused.

Assumptions

This researcher presumes that the more mental health professionals working with children and adolescents are informed about the benefits of animal-assisted therapy, the more they will integrate animal-assisted therapy sessions into their practice. The other assumption is that these professionals will provide the client's parents with information about the benefits of having pets in the home environment.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review significant research and literature in relation to animals in the lives of children and adolescents. Although literature in these areas continues to grow, there is a great need for further studies. An overview of animal therapy and its history will be provided. Areas of exploration include child and adolescent mental wellness along with developmental factors, and how animals can benefit them in those and other areas. Literature will be presented concerning how animals assist in promoting youth self-esteem, motivating and providing companionship, as well as encouraging empathy and nurturance. In addition, the presented literature review will look at the use of animals with children and adolescents that have been exposed to abusive situations, and how animals can aid the transition back into healthy socialization and trust. Lastly, literature concerning precautions of using animals in therapy as well as in the home will be reviewed in regards to any safety and ethical issues.

Animal therapy

Animal therapy, also known as pet therapy, develops trained animals and handlers to achieve specific physical, social, cognitive, and emotional goals with patients in a variety of settings, both group and individual. This therapy can provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits to enhance the quality of life (All & Loving, 1999). The acceptance and respect by professionals is regarding the use of animals in therapeutic settings is rising. Under supervision of proper

professionals, animal-assisted therapy can encourage physical, expressive, cognitive, and social enhancement for those who lack normalized living skills (Intermountain Therapy Animals, n.d.).

Delta Society (n.d.) is the primary global source for the human-animal bond. Delta Society has been the main influence in supporting the significance of animals in the lives of humans and their well-being by publicizing the results of research to the media and health and human services institutions. According to the Delta Society, animals can be integrated into a diversity of treatments and programs. A goal of animal-assisted-therapy with any age is being capable of aiding an individual in a physical manner by improving fine motor proficiency, wheelchair skills, or maintaining equilibrium. Psychologically, the therapy can foster spoken communication within therapeutic group dynamics and improve an individual's ability to stay on task. Motivationally, it can increase the desire to be part of a group, enhance connections with others and staff and/or increase the willingness to go out and exercise.

Animal-assisted therapy provides children and adolescents with opportunities that might not have existed for those individuals that have observed or experienced negative emotions with other human beings (Vogel, 2001). Animal companionship could help individuals in coping with stress (Lee, 1981; Edney, 1995; McCulloch, 1993).

Animal-assisted therapy has been shown to have impact in a child and/or adolescent's ability to identify with and understand the feelings and needs of another. Children can view animals as peers, making it easier to instruct children to be empathetic with an animal than with a human (McCulloch, 1993). It is easier for a child to understand what the animal is feeling by the immediate sense of gratification. Examples of immediate

gratification can be the sound of a cat's purr, the warm touch of an animal bearing fur nor just a lick or nudging of a head to the face. Animals provide a sense of acceptance without any prerequisites. For an animal it does not matter what a person's appearance is nor does it matter what a child or adolescent may say. McCulloch states their acceptance is without judgment, forgiving, and fewer complexes than games that humans may play. A presence of an animal's infinite acceptance accompanies the use of animals in therapy thus why it can enhance the way children and/or adolescents' view and feel about themselves.

Self-Esteem

The biophilia hypothesis (Melson, 2001) indicates that children are brought into the world believing they have a relationship with other living things. The sentiments and qualities of animals are instantaneous for children in a similar way that emotions and personalities of humans are. Melson (2001) emphasizes this concept with, "because of (biophilia hypothesis), animals enter the drama of a child's life in direct and powerful ways. Children readily access animals as material in the development of sense of self"(p.20).

Guindon (2002) defines self-esteem as the "attitudinal, evaluative component of self; the affective judgments placed on the self-concept consisting of feelings of worth and acceptance..."(p.207). Animals have been shown to aid people of all ages in enhancing how they feel about themselves (Sable, 1995). When children begin to develop a sense of self there are several factors that can negatively affect their self-esteem (e.g. peers, parents and authority figures). To help children establish a greater sense of security, trust, and belief in who they are, Blue (1986) suggests that more opportunities be made

available so that their relationship with nature and animals may be established and strengthened. When a child puts emotional focus on a pet it often helps the child feel needed, loved and respected leading to an increased self-esteem (White, 1984). Furthermore, Levinson (1980) says children that have a family pet can examine themselves as they genuinely are by the way they view the pet's reaction to the way they treat the animal.

Nebbe (1997) states that being able to give is beneficial for humans of all ages. She goes on to state that a socially thorough and competent person who is able to give grows to be a psychologically well-adjusted individual. That is why just the deed of giving can enable people to experience an increase in how they see themselves and help them feel like meaningful human beings. The act of helping animals that may be injured or orphaned in the wild can lead to a sense of well-being that the individual did something valuable, thus providing an increased self-esteem.

Evidence of the benefits of animal therapy comes from Law and Scott (1995), who developed a program for autistic children that used pet care to learn communication skills and self-competency. The program resulted in strengthening student assertion and comfort when caring for domestic animals. The children acquired information in how to autonomously give food to, hold, calm, and bathe a mixture of animals. Through Law and Scott's program, self-confidence and self-esteem were bolstered.

Juhasz (1983) conducted a research project analyzing the dynamics involved in adolescents' self-esteem. The subjects were males and females between the ages of twelve and fourteen. One component of the study reviewed the importance of pets in the lives of the adolescent subjects. The adolescents rated pets as less important than parents

but higher than other grown-ups (e.g. teachers) in their lives. According to Siegel (1995) pets may aid teenagers through the insecurity of the adolescent phase. Because pets provide and receive affection, they can be emotional stand-ins and increase self-esteem when individuals are lonely and/or experiencing a transition (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988).

Having a pet in the child's home proves to be significant when focusing on self-esteem according to Bierer's (2001) study on the relationship between pet connection, self-esteem, and empathy in fifth graders. All participants in this study completed a demographic survey, a self-esteem measure (Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, Short Form), an empathy measure (Index of Empathy for Children and Adolescents), as well as a pet bonding measure (Pet Bonding Scale) for dog owners. The outcome of Bierer's research was that both female and male dog owners had statistically significant higher self-esteem and empathy scores than did those without dogs. Children who were highly bonded to dogs also had statistically higher self-esteem and empathy than those who did not. The unconditional love exhibited by the dog decreased the feelings of insecurity from the child (Bierer, 2001).

Empathy and Nurturance

Pets provide the opportunity for a child to become a more caring and nurturing human-being (Blue, 1986; Melson, 1990). Melson (1990) explains that nurturance entails "fostering the developmental means of another through provision of care, guidance and protection"(p.15). Melson believes that nurturance matures and has the capability to develop into a trait that is more proficient, distinguished and proper. She supports that the ability to nurture matures through development and is imperative for optimum youth functioning and subsequently for adult functioning.

McCulloch (1993) reports that a child that has a pet is more empathetic and nurturing than a child that does not have a pet. Children can view their pets as peers and it is easier to guide a child in being empathetic with an animal than with a human. Animals are “what you see is what you get” and humans are not that straightforward. As children get older their ability to empathize with animals can carry over into their world with humans (McCulloch, 1993; Melson, 1990).

Blue (1986) finds that nurturing pets can guide a child into learning how to nurture another being who has needs different from their own. Blue says when a child can accomplish the task of training a pet to behave adequately it can help that child to achieve feelings of competence and self-assurance, as well as teach them about tolerance, self-control and delay of gratification.

Children that have been abused usually lack nurturance and a personal need for fulfillment (All & Loving, 1999). Educating a child to care for a small, vulnerable animal teaches nurturing, and in turn, the chance to nurture can be a nurturing experience for the child as well as an animal. Edney (1995) stated that it is not inconceivable that there may be potential in using animals with troubled youth and reducing antisocial behavior and crime.

The animal too provides nurturance for a child undergoing difficult feelings regarding hardships they have encountered. A 12-year-old boy had a parent that was a drug addict and the other parent gave up rights by placing him into court custody. Dr. Susan Brooks, a clinical psychologist, decided to use animal therapy in conjuncture with a llama. The llama conveyed a sense of relaxation and peace. The boy was made responsible in caring for the llama (Vogel, 2001). Dr. Brooks stated:

He can hold her, and put his arm around her and just cry. Being able to grieve and hold that llama and take it into his heart--he's being able to process all the grief he's sealed up in his heart for all those years. That child can begin to feel safe and secure and begin to trust another person in his life (Vogel, 2001, ¶1).

Companionship and Motivation

Pre-school age children through first grade see their pets as playmates and as a form of protection. By the time a child enters third through fifth grades their pets are viewed as a special friend and as a foundation of emotional support (Endenburg & Baarda, 2001). Treibenbacher (1998) reports a majority of children talk to their pets, and a sense of mutual love is communicated verbally and nonverbally involving them and their pets. A pet can display the unconditional and undeniable features of love, meaning the child experiences a sense that they are cared about by a pet without any type of judgment (Katz, 1981).

The trying periods in a child and adolescents' life may involve feelings of being unloved and/or alone. A pet can provide an emotional substitution needed at that time (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Bennet's (2001) study found that children owning a pet in the midst of parents going through a divorce scored lower on a scale of distress than did children without a pet. Her findings support that an animal can aid a child to cope with the emotional exertion of a divorce.

Rew (2000) examined the effects of pets in the lives of homeless youth and how pets help youth cope with loneliness. Thirteen of thirty-two subjects recognized their pets as companions that decreased the feelings of loneliness, offered absolute love, and enhanced their physical well-being. At-risk adolescents who are homeless often acknowledge the

therapeutic value of pets.

Triebenbacher (1998) looked at how children use pets as transitional objects and explored the assistance of pets to children's emotional welfare. The study was explicitly intended to look at the way children distinguish the function of pets in their lives including "comfort, security, and emotional support offered by their pets" (Triebenbacher, p.192). Results express that children can openly convey why their pets are so significant to them. Treibenbacher's hypothesis is supported by her findings that pets function similar to those of inanimate transitional objects (e.g. blankets and cuddly toys). He states the children associate the animal with love and affection and that pets do not "replace an 'attachment figure' but serve as a complimentary roles of in the lives of children" (p.197).

Hanseleman (2001) ran a 12-week adolescent anger management group integrating dogs used specifically to decrease the adolescents' anger. The dogs were brought into sessions intermittently to compare the variance on other sessions when the dogs were not there. *Stat-Trait Scale* (STAS-TAS) scores reflected a significant decline in state anger and trait anger after dog-integrated sessions were completed, versus their pre-session scores (Hanseleman, 2001). Observations of the adolescents interfacing with the dogs in the anger management group revealed significant positive behavior change in the group as compared to the group without dogs. The adolescents in the dog group tended to let their emotional guards down while the dogs were present. They were more expressive, more vocal, more focused on their true selves, with increased movement in therapy because they were motivated in the presence of the animals (Hanselman, 2001).

Lyons (as cited in Blum Barish, 2002) points out that pet companionship is significant

even when the pet does not reside with an adolescent. Lyons finds that allowing adolescents to train dogs during visitations provides the adolescent with feelings of achievement and control in their environment. A second benefit is that the dogs can approach the teenager with happiness and enthusiasm, encouraging a reciprocal positive response.

Davis & McCreary-Juhasz's (1985) study surveyed the male and female adolescents relationships with their family pets. The subjects were adolescents in a psychiatric hospital, students identified as delinquents, and mainstream high school students. The follow-up revealed that ninety-one percent of the adolescent subjects possessed a special pet at some time in their lives. Of those subjects, seventy-two percent loved their pet while twenty-five percent liked it (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley, & Anderson, 1983). Researchers discovered that the delinquent subjects tended to play alone with the pet as compared to the other subjects. The delinquent and psychiatric subjects were more apt to view their pets as an entity of love and an intimate friend. Based on the results, researchers suggest that the pet-adolescent bond may substitute for other societal relations (Robin, et al., 1983).

Lastly, grief followed by the death of a pet shows the importance of the pet's companionship with those who highly bonded with their pets. Adolescents experience more profound grief when a pet passes away opposed to those adolescents not highly bonded with their pets (Harvey, Butler, & Lagoni, 1999). Adolescents often feel insecure about their bodies and it is possible that pets may be the only ones they permit to be "physically close" to them. An adolescent may grieve the loss of that physical closeness when his/her pet passes away (Harvey et al., 1999). It is important to recognize any type

of loss an adolescent and a child experiences, and though a parent may see it as “just a pet,” adolescents and children can develop a far greater bond with the pet and feel as if they have lost an important companion.

Abuse

Chandler (2004) gives the following example of animal-assisted therapy in a mental health counseling session with a child that has been abused:

One example of animal assisted therapy in a mental health counseling session could involve a child victim of abuse gently petting and talking to a dog or cat to teach the concept of appropriate touch and gentle relations. The warm and caring attitude of the therapy pet and human therapist combined reinforces the child’s positive behavior. (What Is Animal Assisted Therapy?, ¶ 7)

Reichart (1998) is one of the few researchers to explore sexually abused children and the roles of animals in counseling. The purpose of Reichart’s article was to discuss the favorable aspects of animals in therapy for sexually abused children based on her own clinical experience with these children. Reichart (1998) suggests there be a preliminary dialogue concerning the child’s experience while the animal is available to hold and pet. This would allow the animal to ease the tensions and anxieties in reference to the vulnerable subject matter. This would make sense by reports made by “pet therapy” father, Boris Levinson (1981) that having a pet in their presence can relieve a child experiencing stress. The child can also concentrate on the animal if the anxiety becomes too intense. Reichart suggests that employing the animal as an “alter ego” for the child within the therapy session. This way the child can communicate what she or he is experiencing. The child could ultimately convey his or her feelings by projecting them onto an animal. The following is an example in how Reichart utilized her dog

therapeutically with a sexually abused child (Reichart,1998):

The child would hold the author's dog, Buster, while they told Buster what happened to them. One particular child initially played with Buster who then offered the child her paw to take. The child began telling Buster about how the child's uncle had hurt her private parts. Throughout the story, the child held Buster's paw. The child continued to hold and pet Buster after she finished telling her story (p.182).

Kathy Klotz, executive director of Utah-based Intermountain Therapy Animals, provides a case-study of an Intermountain therapy cat that plays a part in therapy with a 6-year-old boy who was sexually abused and neglected. The young boy has a history of acts of cruelty to animals in order to act out his anger and frustration. Klotz emphasizes that by using the cat, therapists, "help him learn to appreciate that something else feels pain and has needs and opinions to respect, as a way to ultimately help him establish a bond with human beings again." (Moria, 1998, p.34).

Klotz makes it well known that the abused children have never developed that ability to gain trust. The animals can aid them in creating a connection of trust. "Many kids shut themselves into an isolation zone, and the animal [serves] a bridging function to help them understand that trust is possible." (Moria, 1998, p.34).

Nebbe (1997) states that a particular type of child who can benefit significantly from animals in therapy are those we refer to as "at risk." These children often come from abusive families and some of these children are cruel to animals. Some children raised in abusive families are cruel to animals because it is what they have learned from family members and some children take out their anger on the animals because of the emotional and psychological pain accumulated from the abuse they have endured. Nebbe

believes abused children have not lived in households where healthy options were available from which to learn. Animal therapy can provide an opportunity for the child to observe the therapist as a great role model with the animals and a gateway to healthy choices (Nebbe, 1997).

Nebbe (1997) also found that individuals that were sexually abused with a strong human-animal bond in childhood report less abusive behavior as adults, and lower anger levels than those missing a strong human-animal bond. Individuals also reported more nurturing behaviors (e.g. caring about other's needs). The reports implied the belief that there are living creatures that will not cause pain and that animals serve as a great tool in appropriately displaying the concepts of empathy and nurturance.

Precautions

There are several areas of precaution that professionals and parents must be aware of before bringing a pet into a session or into the home. These safety measures are important to avoid any harm to the youth's health, animal's well-being, and going against any family religious or cultural beliefs. When a live animal is introduced in a session, it is important that the therapist have full comprehension of the rationale involved in animal therapy, animal management skills, and is aware of the animal's needs, as well as any client fears. In order to make use of animals in a therapeutic environment, a mental health specialist must be knowledgeable of safety, standards for putting animal therapy into practice as made available by the Delta Society (DePrekel, n.d.) The Delta Society provides rules particular to animals and supports animal therapy along with a sensible mental health practice.

The following are precautions specified by McCulloch (1983) in using animal therapy. First, professionals should have a full medical background on their client. Individuals that have suffered from a brain injury or were born with developmental disabilities may aggravate an animal without realizing it. Clients that may be unrealistic may expect too much from the animal and feel rejected; at this point a professional should go over any of these possibilities in intake.

Another reason for a full medical background on the client is the possibility that the patient suffers from allergies that might construct breathing complications, such as asthma (McCulloch, 1983). It is very important to have all up-to-date health information on the client and therapy animal due to zoonotic diseases that may be spread and people with exposed injuries or minimal resistance to disease must be sensibly monitored (1983).

Lastly, McCulloch (1983) emphasizes in a clinical setting, a client may have a great fear of particular animals, so again it is important to address any of those fears in the intake process. The intake process should also involve questions regarding how one's culture regards animals and ask if animal therapy would be appropriate to their treatment plan regarding their belief system.

Animal therapy can be a practical tool when used by properly educated and licensed professionals. It is important to keep all the precautions of its practice in awareness when using animals in a therapeutic manner with individuals of any age group. Without any ethical and safety knowledge of animal therapy the benefits discussed in the literature review (e.g. increased self-esteem, empathy, nurturance, etc...) could be bypassed and damaged if not applied properly. Continued research in the field of animal therapy is a

necessity both for support of the therapy and to provide awareness of which individuals are most likely to benefit most and how.

CHAPTER THREE

SUMMARY, ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This critical analysis regarding the benefits of animal therapy with children and adolescents has covered several areas of therapeutic value including the promotion of self-esteem, encouraging empathy and nurturance, and providing an opportunity for companionship and motivation. In addition, animal therapy has been examined as to how it can benefit children that have been exposed to abusive situations and encourage movement into a healthy socialization and trust. Literature has highlighted the slow beginnings of this therapeutic approach set in motion in 1972 when farm animals were a key component of assistance for resident patients in an England mental health residency (Hooker, Holbrook Freeman & Stewart, 2002). The method was officially made existent when Boris Levinson named the therapeutic technique “pet therapy” (Hooker, et al., 2002). Levinson named the technique after a therapy session in which he observed the interactions between his dog and a distressed child. The contact between his dog and the child led him to believe the dog served as an icebreaker by decreasing the child’s resistance to self-disclose and offered a focal point by connecting the therapist and client within the session (Hooker et al.).

Blue (1986) and Sable (1995) support that animals can play an encouraging factor when it comes to increasing an individual’s self-esteem. An animal in a therapeutic environment can provide a sense of being needed and worthwhile. The research of Law and Scott (1995) strengthened this view when the results from a program involving autistic children caring for animals led to an increase in the children’s self-confidence and self-esteem.

Animal therapy can also play a strong role in providing the opportunity to become nurturing and empathetic. A therapeutic animal can appear to be more safe and comforting than a human can. The opportunity to use a pet and animal may open a door for an abused child or adolescent by letting a living being in without feeling vulnerable. The child can begin to view the animal as a peer and a therapist can guide the individual into supplying the animal with appropriate empathy and nurturance, as well as the animal offering it in return. McCulloch (1993) and Melson (1990) state when the child matures he/she can use the learned ability to empathize with animals and convey it into their world of humans.

Companionship and motivation are two other areas that an animal can therapeutically benefit a child. The animal can exhibit the absolute quality of love and allow the child to feel cared about devoid of any judgment. The animal becomes a companion and may allow opportunity for the child or adolescent to take charge and pay attention to the animal's needs. The animal can provide a motivating factor to let down the child's emotional guards and to work on any critical issues. In addition the animal can aid in developing a healthy work ethic.

A less investigated area of animal therapy research is that of the use of therapeutic animals with children and adolescents that have undergone abuse. The fear of the abused becoming the abuser seems to be some of the reason for this. The little research available advocates that this does not have to be the case with animal therapy and the abused population. The therapist can supervise the client in session with an animal and teach the concepts of proper contact and humane interactions. The animal's presence may be less threatening than a human's, leading to an opportunity to trust again. Nebbe's (1997)

research strengthens the hope for success when using animal therapy with abused children and adolescents. She shows that individuals that were sexually abused, when provided with a strong human-animal bond in their childhood, act out less abusive conduct and lower degrees of anger as adults opposed to those who lacked a strong human-animal bond when growing up.

Lastly, research in the area of animal therapy highlights that precautionary measures must be considered when using animals in therapy, as well as parents contemplating adopting a pet into their family's home. Counselors must obtain a comprehensive medical (physical and mental) background on the client. If there are any allergies or psychological reactions to certain types of animals, this must be considered when deciding how and if animal therapy will be utilized in client's treatment. A mental health specialist should follow Delta Society guidelines. Religious or cultural beliefs should be addressed and discussed with the client and the client's guardian. Furthermore, parents should make sure that their child/adolescent is able to interact appropriately with a pet before one is adopted into the family's home.

Critical Analysis

There are several facets of animal therapy and its utilizations that remain to be explored with specific individual clients. The psychological and nursing communities have worked considerably in terms of utilizing animals in therapeutic environments but acknowledge that further research and analysis must be done. It seems that the lack of research and the deficiency of awareness for professionals and parents works against any type of advocacy for this alternative method that Levinson (Hooker, Holbrook-Freeman

& Stewart, 2002) found to be so valuable in working with children over forty years ago. Additional and further quantitative and scientific research is in great need to support the credibility of animal therapy when working with children and adolescents.

When children and adolescents have animals present in their lives, the animals can perpetuate an opportunity to feel better about themselves. The act of giving provides humans with the individual sense of accomplishment, leading to an increase of self-esteem. When a child or adolescent is given the opportunity to care for an animal and is able to assist an animal in meeting its needs, the client will begin to value who he/she is and his/her worth. Law and Scott (1995) authenticate this conclusion in their research with using animal therapy with autistic children. The programming resulted in enhanced assertion skills and increased self-esteem by caring for animals. Parents can also use pets in the home by praising their child for taking on such responsibility in caring for a living creature, thus improving how the child views him/herself.

The drawback of research in regards to animal therapy and self-esteem development is whether or not the two draw a parallel relationship and if there are external factors (e.g. parents, teachers, mentors) involved in the therapeutic process. Bierer (2001) does support that there is something about how a child bonds with the animal and that statistically significant higher self-esteem scores are present with children enduring a strong human-animal bond.

In a child or adolescent's existence there is little opportunity available for them to tend and care for others. In most cases children or adolescents are the ones being cared for. Animals and pets offer a rare opportunity for youth to learn and develop the abilities to be empathetic and nurturing in ways that are competent, prominent and appropriate.

McCulloch (1993) and Melson (1990) are in strong agreement that gaining the capability to empathize with animals can transfer over to the adult world. Edney's (1995) statement that there is promise in using animals with troubled youth and reducing antisocial behavior and crime by gaining these traits makes way for a promising research opportunity that could lead to some beneficial animal therapy preventative programming.

Research concerning animals providing companionship and motivation amongst youth may be the most significant subject matter among the topics addressed within this analysis. Treibenbacher (1998) highlights the magnitude of companionship by stating that children commonly talk to their pets, with awareness that love is reciprocated and conveyed between them and their pet. The companionship an animal can provide is one that is non-judgmental. Not only is the companionship that of an emotional connection but also involves that of a presented tactile warmth and comfort leading the child or adolescent to feel the reality of the company being provided. The companionship can develop into such a connection that a child perceives the animal as an intimate friend that would do anything it could for them and to be with them. This leads into the motivating factor of animal therapy.

Hanseleman (2001) discussed the motivation dogs provide when they are integrated into an adolescent anger management group. The group was much more genuine in letting their emotional guards down when the dogs were present in the session, compared to much less emotionality when the dogs were not present. Blum Barish (2002) finds that allocating an adolescent to train dogs during visitations can lead to a sense of achievement and control of their environment. Some of the research could lead one to believe that if the animals were presented on a consistent basis, it could provide children

with an initial motivation to work on their troubled areas and skills. Research regarding this is important so that more professionals could use animals to motivate a child to be part of the therapeutic process.

When working with the adolescent population it can be hard to motivate particular individuals due to their pubescent phases of development. Robin, ten Bensel, & Anderson (1983) point out the significance of animals in the life of delinquent and psychiatric adolescents. Robin et al. support that delinquent and psychiatric adolescents were more prone to perceive a pet as being affectionate and as a close friend. This is yet another example of a possible and realistic feature to utilize in motivating a teenager in attempts to engage them to be part of their treatment. The animal can provide them with a sense of security and love, without the fear of being judged on who they are and what problems they may have. When counseling children and adolescents, animals can be utilized in a variety of ways in the therapeutic process. The following section will review some ways an animal can be utilized and involved in a youth counseling session.

Counseling Implications

Animal-assisted therapy employs the human/animal bond in objective-focused interventions as a fundamental piece of the therapeutic process. Certified therapists must be sure to stay in their capacity of professional practice, establish and measure therapeutic goals, direct the interactions involving client and animal, and assess the therapeutic process (Gammonley, Howie, Kirwin, Zapf, Freeman, & Stuart-Russel, 1997). A counselor can integrate the animal into any proficient method of therapy the counselor already uses. Animal-assisted therapy can be used within group and/or

individual therapy (Chandler, 2004). The following are some of the ways a counselor may use an animal in a therapeutic session.

A therapist can use an animal as a stepping-stone when working with children and adolescents. When there is an animal that is suitable to a client in session, the client can experience a sense that they are cared for and accepted into their therapeutic environment. An animal can be emotionally supportive and accessible, serving as a companion providing a child's need for what is termed a "transitional object"--the bridge between oneself and the outside world (Arehart-Treichel, 1982; Levinson, 1980). With that bridge available the child or adolescent can move towards an expectation to engage with the outside world. The client's ability to engage themselves depends on what developmental stage they are at. Allowing children and adolescents to talk about their experience with the animal can lead them to recognize the applications of responsibility to the outside world.

Animal-assisted therapy can provide the opportunity to work with a therapy pet that is in need of training (e.g. fetch or sit). This is an opportunity to accomplish the task of training an animal to behave acceptably and to perform certain tasks. With their awareness of their accomplishment(s), children are able to realize their ability to think competently along with obtaining a sense of confidence.

Reichart (1998) provides counselors with the suggestion that an animal be present to hold and pet while in the child's arms as the child begins to initially discuss his/her experience of abuse. The animal allows an opportunity to reduce the tensions and anxieties in reference to the vulnerable subject matter. The child can also concentrate on the animal if the anxiety becomes too intense. Reichart suggests using the animal as an

“alter ego” for the child within the therapy session. In this way the child can share what she or he is experiencing. The child could ultimately convey his or her feelings by projecting them onto an animal.

Lastly, the animal can be used as a channel to communicate with the child. If a client is not willing to talk directly to the therapist the therapist can talk through the animal. An example could be telling the child that the animal would like to know more about them. It is less threatening to tell an animal your problems than to tell a human. The therapist can continue asking questions and processing therapeutic issues through the animal.

There are many other ways to utilize animals within the counseling environment. Research in the area is greatly needed regarding scientific evidence of success and the implications of animal therapy used with children and/or adolescents of different diagnoses and mental health issues. The last area of discussion refers to recommendations that professionals may want to keep in mind when utilizing animal-assisted therapy.

Recommendations

The physical and emotive well-being and continued care of the animals is a critical component to having an animal operate appropriately within a therapeutic setting (Fine, 2000). The animals must have their needs met by bathing and feeding them along with consistent and necessary medical visits to the veterinary clinic. Animals also need intimate contact on a daily basis to bestow them with a nurturing atmosphere that allows them to cooperate in an encouraging manner with humans.

The animal’s caretaker must learn about the character and disposition of the animal. In

a therapeutic practice animals that are composed and quite interactive appear to be the greatest match for the children (Kirk, 2002). Clients should confine animals from all abuse and the animals must be given opportunities to rest during the day. Kirk recommends that to appropriately take care of animals used within a therapeutic setting would require an obligation of an hour a day per animal. Kirk also recommend that a course be taken (one day workshop or a home study course) with the Delta Society that prepares one to utilize animal assisted therapy in a proper way to receive positive outcomes with clients.

Therapy animals must undergo several different requirements before they can be referred to as therapy animal. One animal therapy-training institute lists its provisions as the following:

- Must be at least one year of age
- Must pass an obedience regimen
- Must display obedience
- Must undergo temperament screening
- Undergo veterinary screening
- Demonstrate response to stress
- Demonstrate relationship with handler (Therapet, 1999).

As cited under the *Precautions* section of this analysis, it is important to make sure a full intake of the client's mental and physical health and history is completed. It is also important that professionals remember that animals can habitually bring out strong emotional reactions in themselves, as well as their clients. According to Hart (2002) a

practitioner will need to take into account how to have an animal easily at hand and also be able to seize the animal from the client if needed. Attending to these realistic concerns foremost is essential so that the practitioner and the clients are at ease, whether or not the animal is there.

Conclusion

Animal therapy is an effective modality that can be easily integrated into therapy sessions. When animals are assisting professionals in counseling sessions they provide an environment relating trust, nurturance and relational development. Animals actually help a person to concentrate on a task because of an interest in interrelating with the pet. The therapy animal is a non-judgmental companion in the progression of learning and self-growth. Animal therapy generates a sprawling and easily obtained effect even with severely disturbed children.

Professionals utilizing animal therapy must take all precautions and recommendations to have the utmost ethicalities present in their practices. Counselors must remember that each client is different and must use good judgment in how they are going to integrate the animal into the client's treatment plan. Animal therapy used suitably with child and adolescent clients can be very effective and aid with improving a client's therapeutic problem areas.

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