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Exploring the role of dog assistance program on Negative Emotion in people experiencing Mental Health issues: Shame, Guilt, and psychological distress

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Background: In the field of mental health, guilt and shame are transdiagnostic problems. Studies have found shame, guilt distress, and guilt cognitions as relevant features of mental illnesses. Despite the argument for significant correlations addressing these issues, the evidence regarding intervention strategies for dealing these symptoms is lacking.

Importance of Dog assisted support program: The quality of the therapeutic relationship is of prime importance in working with these experiences. Individuals with mental health problems do not easily share their feelings of guilt, still less their feelings of shame. Trained animals are used to benefit patients suffering with emotional and behavioral disorders, depression, autism, substance abuse, and dementia. We examined whether dog assisted therapy could overcome shame, guilt and psychological distress in people with mental health issues.

Methods: Present study retrospectively examined the impact of dog assistance program on the shame, guilt and psychological distress in people with mental health issues. Thirty-eight participants who were supported by dog assistance program from year 2010 to 2015 in RECOVERY assistance dog, UK were analyzed. Scale assessing guilt, shame and distress used 0-10 score where lower score represent lesser severity of variable. Dogs were trained by trainers specializing in mental health and all the participants completed the assessments before and after the 12 week of dog assistance.

Results: Negative emotions and symptoms were assessed before and after 12 weeks having assistance dogs. Results revealed that Shame and guilt proneness had significant reduction ($p < 0.001$) with psychological distress ($p < 0.0001$). Our results suggest that avoidant symptoms might decrease earlier than other distress symptoms during the initial phase and acceptance play an important role in the initial change of negative emotions.

Conclusion: Dog assisted support could be an effective approach to deal with negative emotions and distress among people with mental illnesses, and is likely to be an important component of any evidenced-based approach to intervention.

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Childhood Trauma, Adult Pain

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Judith Herman first described the concept of Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in 1992 to describe a constellation of psychiatric symptoms in children exposed to repeated, severe childhood trauma. Difficulties include longterm problems with affect regulation, dissociation and chronic physical symptoms. This talk aims to explore the links between severe and repeated childhood trauma and the robust research and clinical findings of an increased prevalence of many adult chronic illnesses, including chronic pain and somatization. Childhood trauma occurs at a developmentally important time, both for the brain, but also for hormonal and immunological systems. The importance of physicians taking a developmental history, especially in cases of difficult to diagnose or manage physical illness is emphasized.

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