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Animal Assisted Therapy for Adult Domestic Violence Survivors

Kaden Flynn; Women and Gender Studies Student, Lisa Walker & Director of Women and Gender Studies Department

Abstract:

The focus for my research project for my Women and Gender Studies, Capstone course has revolved around Domestic Violence and Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT). AAT has been around since the 18th century but the benefits of it, aren't talked about enough; when looking at what it does for adult DV survivors. I will determine if AAT, in conjunction with other therapies, is beneficial for DV victims. To determine how beneficial AAT is, I will be reviewing current literature on AAT, the results of different types of therapy and how it effects the victim's PTSD, trauma, stress, and anxiety levels. If given the chance, I will hopefully be doing some primary researched as well. My initial finding suggest that AAT is an effective form of therapy for DV victims because it successfully diminishes the victim's PTSD, anxiety, and depression while also increasing the individual's self-esteem and improves their self-awareness.

Introduction/Background:

What is AAT? Animal Assisted Therapy is a form of therapy that uses animals as a form of treatment that improves a client's mental, physical, social, or cognitive function.

What is domestic violence? Domestic violence is abuse in the form of physical, mental, emotional, and sexual to gain power and control over a person in a domestic setting like a partner/spouse, girlfriend/boyfriend, or immediate family member.

What are the psychological effects of domestic violence? The psychological effects of domestic violence are anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbances, inability to concentrate, flashbacks, Low self-esteem and questioning sense of self, and suicidal thoughts.

What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? PTSD is a condition that develops after a person witnesses or experiences a traumatic event in which serious physical harm occurred or was threatened.

Types of Animal-Assisted Therapy



- Canine assisted therapy
- Equine assisted therapy
- Dolphin assisted therapy
- Bovine assisted therapy
- Rabbits assisted therapy
- Bird assisted therapy
- Elephant assisted therapy

Hypothesis/Questions/Objective:

- Determine if AAT, in conjunction with other therapies, is beneficial for DV victims ?
- How beneficial is AAT?
- Is Animal assisted therapy better at helping survivors overcome obstacles hindered by abuse?

Methods:

- Looking at current literature
- Maybe talk to a specialist

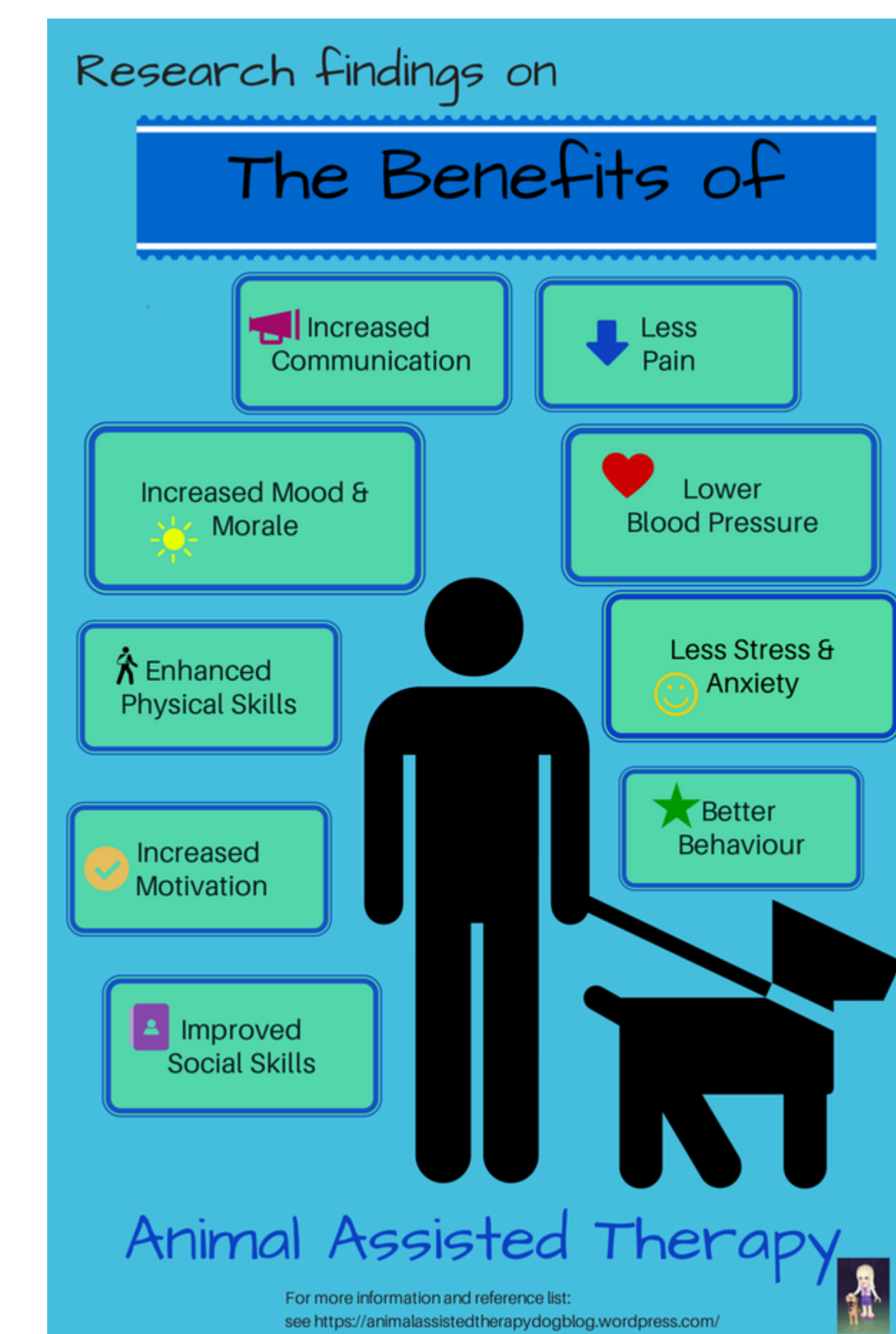
Results/Findings:

- "Human-animal interaction (HAI) research has documented cases of lowered blood pressure, improved cardiopulmonary pressures, decreased use of medicine, and the psychological benefits of reduced anxiety and stress. The human-animal bond has been credited with reducing depression and loneliness while increasing a sense of self-worth, empathy, psychological well-being and sense of purpose" (Mims and Waddell, 2016; 453).
- "The most essential and advantageous benefit to AAT over other forms of therapeutic modalities is the reciprocity that AAT provides affording the patient the much desired chance to give love and affection as well as receive it, thus providing a direction and pathway to recovery and healing." (Mims and Waddell, 2016; 455).- Dr. Andrew Weil

Discussion/Conclusion/ Next Steps:

- More research needs to be done on the topic because although there has been an increase in studies regarding AAT, there's not much on domestic violence and what there is, didn't look at male DV survivors, race, class, sexuality, or age.

These dogs work in courtrooms to help comfort victims when testifying against their abusers, and they're amazing!



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