

SHELTER ANIMALS AS THERAPY ADJUVANTS



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1. INTRODUCTION

This report aims to make a bibliographic review about animal therapies and, after participating in several sessions with different users, investigate if there are scientific evidences that support its utility. We will focus on therapies assisted by shelter animals.

There are two kinds of intervention. The simplest, called "Animal Assisted Activities" (AAA) focuses on enjoying the company of the animal and its benefits. The second one, the "Animal Assisted Therapy" (AAT), includes the animals in a rehabilitation protocol, coordinated by a doctor and a multidisciplinary team. Both are included in what is called "Animal Assisted Interventions" (AAI). The difference between them lies in the supervision and the previous preparation of the activities by the health staff. (Oropesa Roblejo et al. 2009; Vásquez Duque 2011; Muñoz Lasa et al. 2015).

Several theories support the benefits of AAI. Some examples of that in the literature are the "biophilia hypothesis" (E.O. Wilson, 1984) and the "learning theory" (Brickel, 1985). Authors such as Levinson (1969) and Fine (2000) suggest the role of animals as social mediators. In practice, a lot of studies show their positive effects in different collectives (Kruger and Serpell 2010; Palley et al. 2010; García-Mauriño et al. 2018).



Figure 1. Users from ARAL designed a circuit in which they themselves were the cones.

2. ASSOCIATIONS WHICH PERFORM AAI WITH SHELTER ANIMALS

Table 1. Associations which perform Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) in Spain. AAA: Animal Assisted Activities. AAT: Animal Assisted Therapy

Association	Staff involved	Cotherapists	Users	Kind of AAI
APATA	Volunteers	Dogs and cats from the shelter	Retirement homes, schools	AAA
Curecan®	Specialists in AAI, health workers	Dogs, cats, guinea pigs adopted from a shelter	Retirement homes, day centers, occupancy centers, individuals	AAT
Projecte "Mans i Potes", Lliga Protectora d'Animals de Sabadell	Volunteers	Dogs from the shelter	Retirement homes, day centers, occupancy centers, autism centers	AAA
Fundación Affinity	Specialists in AAI, health workers	Dogs and cats from a shelter or from a breeder	Retirement homes, schools, penitentiary centers, individuals (victims of gender-based violence)	AAT
Teanima	Volunteers	Horses, birds of prey, dogs and little mammals and other birds provided by other associations, neighbours or bought	Individuals, occupancy centers	AAT
Alperverde	Volunteers, dog trainers and ethologists	Dogs that look for an adoption	Different collectives	AAT

3. KINDS OF ACTIVITIES DEVELOPED IN AAI. BENEFITS

Table 2. Summary of the most common AAI according to the animal used.

Intervention	Requirements of the cotherapists	Activities	Benefits	
			Physical	Psychological
Equinotherapy	Good character (quiet, predictable, don't bite, no-kick...) good predisposition, basic training, cadence and way of walking	Riding, walking, brushing, cleaning and feeding the animals. Therapeutic riding and adapted riding	Coordination, balance, strengthens muscle tone (especially the back and the legs), fine psychomotor skills	Self-esteem, feeling of equality, confidence and empowerment, motivation, socialization, empathy, concentration, memory
Birds of prey and little animals	Difficult to value. Character. Training and habituation	Catching and petting the animals. Perform different exercises. Feel the touch of the plumage and the fur of the animals	Fine psychomotor skills, coordination, control of movements. Postural and balance control	Motivation, curiosity, socialization, empathy, attention, concentration, memory, selfcontrol
Dog therapy	Good character (quiet animal, predictable, don't bite, not aggressive towards people or other animals) good predisposition (the dog has to look for human contact, interaction, game...), basic training	Depending the users: from petting the animals, catching and brushing the animals, dress them up, put them in the harness or collar, interactive games with photographs and the intervention of the cotherapists... To collaborate in training with <i>walker</i> , design agility circuits and classes, design exercises in groups, walks, performing plays	Fine psychomotor skills, coordination, control of movements. Postural and balance control. Strengthens muscle tone	Self-esteem, motivation, feeling of equality, socialization, empathy, awareness, concentration, memory, selfcontrol

4. ETHICAL CONFLICTS

Not every animal can do AAI → requirements

Users can get the most benefit

Less stress for the animal

Selection and training (pure breeds)

Is ethical to breed and train animals only to perform AAI?

Is the benefit reciprocal?

5. REGULATIONS

As long as there are no specific laws in Spain, therapy animals must follow the regulations governing assistance animals (Ley 19/2009, 26 de noviembre, del acceso al entorno de las personas acompañadas por perros de asistencia). It is necessary to define the concept of "therapy animal", the different species used, their needs and requirements and the staff formation (Romea Robledo 2012).

6. CONCLUSIONS

There is evidence about the benefits of AAI, however, further research is required to understand the mechanisms by which they occur and to standardise these methods as adjunctive therapy.

Global population is aging. It is likely that we will need new complementary treatments to improve people's quality of life. AAI are a viable option. The potential increase in demand for this type of alternative therapy and a general increase in the population's sensitivity to the abandonment of animals, would open the door to associations that develop AAI with shelter animals.

Nowadays, therapy animals are covered only by ethical codes and protocols that help to perform an effective therapy within the framework of animal welfare. AAI are a rising therapeutic tool, and it is important to support and regulate them as soon as possible, according to ethics and current regulations on animal welfare.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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