

THE IMPACT OF PETS ON HUMAN PSYCHOPHYSICAL HEALTH

Tanja Šešić Zec, Adel Brčaninović

Abstract—Today's relationship between humans and pets is the result of many years of living together. Years back, that relationship has been the topic of many researches. The dog belongs to the oldest pets and has always been close to humans. He is still one of the most social animals today. There are many positive effects that have been demonstrated on both: mental and physical health. Many studies have shown that pets are responsible for higher survival rates after a heart attack, a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, and a significantly lower risk of asthma in children who have had a pet in the first year of life. This primarily affects the development of physical and psychological well-being in the community

Index terms—*pets, mental and physical health, human, impact*

1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between dog and man has not always been the same. In the past, humans could not agree on whether to give the dog much importance or still view it as a machine-like object. Morris divided the relationship between humans and animals into four categories. Human-animal relationship: aesthetic, scientific, symbolic, economic, and animals as prey, symbionts, competitors... Each of these categories has a specific meaning. The curiosity and research instinct of man can be found in the categories "aesthetic" and "scientific". The category "scientific" is fact-based, while the category "aesthetic" is oriented to colors, shapes, structures and movements (1). It should be noted that the attitude towards animals was subject to constant changes in society and had different statuses and roles, from economic to cultural. With the onset of industrialization and modern society, the animal (dog) has won the role of friend and companion, and this role has become increasingly important (2). For years, humans and pets have been very connected, and this interconnection is especially pronounced today. They have become an integral part of our lives and greatly influence the quality of our lives (3). The relationship between man and animal, as it is today, is based on the shared life that results from domestication. The dog belongs to the oldest pets and has always been close to humans. He is still one of the most social animals today (4).

2 THE POSITIVE EFFECT OF ANIMALS ON HUMANS THROUGH HISTORY

Animals and humans have been observed in

different civilizations. One example is related to Belgium, where even in the 9th century, people with developmental disabilities, primarily intellectual ones, took care of animals, which was part of a regular rehabilitation program. Also, medical records from the 17th century were found that are one of the proofs that at the time, as a form of therapy, animal care was encouraged. People with gout and those with neurological problems are usually encouraged (5). A study conducted in 1985 on a sample of 896 U.S. soldiers' families found that 68% considered pets to be equal members of their families, while as many as 70% of surveyed families perceived their pets as a factor that significantly raised overall happiness in the family. A total of 77% of families are convinced that their pets understand them, 73% believe their pets interact with them, and 50% of families say their pets have the ability to register when someone is upset or unwell (6). Authors Itkovic and Katalanic state that Levinson accidentally started the first scientific studies in the United States when he concluded that his dog had a positive effect and that he encouraged children with social disorders to interact. Levinson described the situation in which the mother and son came for therapy much earlier than the agreed time, and that at that time his pet, the dog Jingles, was also there, in the same room. The moment he saw him, Jingles ran to the boy and began licking him. The boy responded positively to this gesture and began to caress him. He came to therapy because of communication problems, often closed himself and did not express emotions. Despite her mother's attempts to separate her son and the dog, Levinson persuaded her to allow them to interact and thus began therapy. He believed that it was through this

interaction with the dog during the session that the child gained confidence in him as a therapist. The development of the therapeutic process was greatly contributed by the fact that the child communicated and expressed emotions much better in the presence of the dog (5,7).

3 THE IMPACT OF PETS ON HUMAN HEALTH

3.1 The impact of pets on physical health

According to the World Health Organization definition, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not just the absence of illness or weakness (8). McNicholas cited some of the positive effects of pets on health. This primarily refers to higher survival rates after infarction, lower risk of cardiovascular disease and a significantly lower risk of asthma in children who have had a pet in the first year of life. This primarily affects the development of physical and psychological well-being in the community (9). Michalos states that Headey, Na I Zheng 2008, by surveying the activities of pet owners and non-pet owners, found that pet owners are 36% more involved in some physical activity, have 46% less problems with insomnia and 50% less absences from work comparing non-pet owners (10). Kennedy says in 2002 that Steed and Smith observed that pet therapy in elderly patients leads to reduced heart rate in stressful situations (11). In 2008, Karen Allen was in her work „Are Pets a Healthy Pleasure? The Influence of Pets on Blood Pressure,“ described a study that offered women to do mental arithmetic first in the presence of a best friend and then in the presence of their pets. Although she assumed that dogs would calm their owners to the same extent as their female friends, she found that they viewed their female friends as someone who could condemn them if they made a potential mistake while looking at their pets amicably. This was the cause that led to an increase in blood pressure in the presence of girlfriends compared to the control conditions in which the women were alone. It is important to emphasize that the presence of pets did not lead to an increase in blood pressure when performing the tasks mentioned (12). One study found the influence of pets on the blood pressure response to stress and the endocrine hormone oxytocin, which is associated with a sense of attachment and belonging. In this study, as blood pressure decreased, oxytocin levels increased, suggesting a link between social affiliation and blood pressure response to stress (13). Kennedy states that in 2011, Gopal and the authors conducted a study in which the control group was exposed to

a stressful situation without any intervention, while the experimental group was exposed to a situation with a pet intervention. The control group had significantly higher blood pressure than the experimental group (11).

3.2 The impact of pets on mental health

In 1995, Friedman and Thomas concluded that pets provide emotional support, thus increasing the chances of a longer life after experiencing a heart attack. More effective coping with the grieving process and stress reduction have also been observed (14). When we talk about people who choose to care for a pet, we are talking about a long-term commitment that a future pet owner takes on himself. There is a “need to be needed” and to help others. Care for a pet could indeed be one way of satisfying the need to be needed in the long run, because in order to survive, the animal needs human care (15). The relationship between man and dog can also be viewed from a social point of view. Since the owner needs to provide his dog with a way out of the home up to several times a day, there is a potential possibility of contact with other dog owners. Pohlheim emphasizes the role of the dog as a social catalyst and points out that dogs are often more communicative and more easily acquainted with people who do not have a dog (16). In order to investigate the correlation between daily smile frequency and pet ownership, an interesting pilot study was conducted in 2006. 95 subjects were asked to record the frequency and source of laughter and the presence of others during a laugh during one day. It was concluded that dog owners and those who have both a dog and a cat laughed more often than cat owners and those who had neither a dog nor a cat (17).

4 ANIMAL ACTIVITY AND THERAPY

Two terms have been defined in this area: Animal-assisted activities (AAA), Animal-assisted therapy (AAT). The term "animal-assisted activity" means the companionship of man and animal without some pre-set goal. It is an interactive relationship that can be achieved through play, pampering but even as observation only (18). Animal-assisted therapy represents the involvement of animals in the therapeutic process itself. This therapy has positive effects on both body and mind. The therapeutic team consists of the therapist and the animal and represents one unity where the animal manifests its therapeutic effects through unconditional love, warmth and closeness. Part of the therapy involves communication,

interaction, and approaches to the psychology of learning (19). Animal-assisted therapy focuses on the achievement of already defined and set goals. Any changes that have occurred in the process are documented. The therapy itself can include various animals such as dogs, cats, birds, rabbits, horses and the like. However, because of their positive properties, dogs are most commonly included in therapy (20).

4.1 Application of animal-assisted therapy

4.1.1 Animals in the field of education

Personal and social development can be promoted and promoted through learning with animals. With the help of animal-assisted therapy, there is a possibility that the habit of improper learning can be corrected and replaced with a new technique of knowledge acquisition. Also, this therapy can be used for behavioral abnormalities, fears and phobias. In this way, anxiety-provoking situations try to neutralize and release through relaxation. An example of this situation would be a child who has been mutilated after a car accident. In contrast to her loved ones, she encounters various rejections and is then followed by fear of contacting others and making new acquaintances. Fear of being viewed differently by the environment can lead to social isolation. If we involve a therapy dog in his therapy, the child will gain a new experience in which the dog does not judge him based on his appearance and behave in a neutral manner. without any condemnation (21).

4.1.2 Animals and Persons of Third Age

It is often very difficult for a third age person to find a place to communicate and interact in society. What usually follows is that as such, they lose social contacts, and thus lose one form of independence. When a person is in a stable and harmonious environment, this in every sense positively reflects on his health. First of all, animals can play a very significant role when it comes to supporting an older population. The animal helps them to cope with the aging process more easily, keeps them active, and thus provides them with good circulation (22).

5 CONCLUSION

The relationship between man and animals goes back to the past. Studies have shown that having pets, especially dogs and cats, has multiple benefits. Some of the positive effects on psychophysical health are decreased blood pressure, pulse, cortisol levels in stressful situations, and less pronounced

symptoms of depression and loneliness, increased physical activity and resistance to cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, and many others. Another area in which the introduction of pets has had positive results is certainly pedagogy and upbringing, animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted therapy, and the elderly or third-person. The presence of pets also reduces the feeling of loneliness, enhances the desire for physical activity, which greatly improves mood and health in general.

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