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Social Work Student's Perception of Canine Therapy for Children of Trauma

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SOCIAL WORK STUDENT'S PERCEPTION OF CANINE THERAPY
FOR CHILDREN OF TRAUMA

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Gia Faith Valdez

June 2019

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ABSTRACT

The bond between animals and humans is one that has been consistent and unyielding since the beginning of time. Although animals have a long working history in assisting on battlefields and working for the police, it is only within recent decades that they have started expanding their job duties to include disaster relief, educational supports, and trauma care. This movement of training canines for specialty fields to work alongside their human companions comes at a time when the field of social work is also diversifying to a more expansive and accessible profession. This study will use interview style questions to assess the beliefs, experience and attitudes of canine assistance of eight current MSW students throughout Southern California. The research was conducted in face to face interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed word for word to examine common themes. The findings of the study may help to encourage further integration of social work and canine assisted therapies.

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Thank you to all who participated and supported this research to fight the good fight for animals and humans alike.

The biggest thank you to my Mom and many families I have had the pleasure of living with throughout my formative years who have always encouraged, supported and nurtured my love of people and animals alike. You have changed my life for the better, 1,000 fold and I hope to repay you by dedicating my life to giving others the same love and empathy you have shown me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The United States has recognized the bond between dogs and humans in several life domains such as for alerting, hunting, companionship, and more recently, detecting diseases, locating missing people and working alongside search and rescue teams. This bond has also extended to a judicial and medical recognition of assistance in human needs both physical as well as emotional. Research regarding the benefits of animal assisted therapy dates back to the 1700's in England with the field growing vastly since (Mims & Waddell, 2016). Though dogs have been working for their human companions to assist people with disabilities, there is a growing need for more service dog availability amongst children in the therapeutic service industry. The lack of research in this emerging area combined with the lack of Social Work student's preparedness to work with canines in therapeutic practices, lends to the problem of encouraging Canine assistance in more therapeutic settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study is to aid in the advancement of utilizing Canine assistance in the Social Services Industry. The proposed research will assist future researchers and proponents of the collaboration between Social Workers and Canines by demonstrating the knowledge and preparedness that future Social Workers have before graduating with their Master's degrees.

Despite the overwhelming amount of research and validation from physicians, scholars and various organizations, there is still not a significant amount of recognized research available pertaining to the efficacy and perceptions of efficacy, of service dogs in the assistance of traumatic symptoms. Utilizing service dogs in therapy practices would bring comfort, companionship, well-being, stability and joy to both clients and the dogs, as well as likely assist in reducing the number of dogs in both kill and no-kill shelters. The agencies likely to benefit from these animal services would be educational institutions, judicial systems, shelters and pounds, Foster Family Agencies (FFA), jails and hospitals. The people who would likely benefit most would be children and clients affected by more than just physical ailments but those living with emotional disturbances as well.

Providing the option for mental health professionals and Social Workers to obtain available service dogs to use in therapeutic counseling and recovery services would greatly impact social services. Children would benefit who have extenuating emotional needs by adding additional and familiar resources to a limited reach of options currently available. Canines are pets in over 44% of United States households, demonstrating an implicit level of familiarity to nearly all children who encounter them according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA, 2018). This enactment may also lead to further career opportunities in social work in an even wider variety of arenas bringing further availability of animals to more areas social workers already

employ, as well as institutions where more social workers are needed. The benefits to social workers may also extend to their well-being by interacting and incorporating animals into more of their working environments. Through providing greater research on a fairly new integration, advancement in the field of Social Services utilizing canine assistance is likely. The question regarded for further research would be “What are Social Worker Student’s Perceived Efficacy of Therapy Dogs for Children in Therapeutic Services?”

Fine (2015) indicated that mental health practitioners may find the most beneficial effects of utilizing animals in therapy through establishing rapport with clients and modeling healthy clinician-animal relationships. Since this beginning research and most prominently in the last 10-20 years, more clinicians across a variety of fields have implemented a form of Animal Assisted Therapy (AAI) in their practices. The challenges in research comes from the lack of empirical data explaining the mechanisms that create the change between the clients and the animals (Herzog, 2011). Social Work educational institutions such as University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, have been implementing AAI into their curriculum for students by offering degrees and special certifications into their Master’s programs offering the opportunity of graduating as an Animal Assisted Social Worker (AASW). This same institution also offers a certificate in “Animals and Human Health Connection” which has included nearly 300 multidisciplinary professionals from several continents to incorporate animal assistance into their businesses (Fine, 2015). This recent change in curriculum

from the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, along with others such as Michigan State University, demonstrates the high demand and interest from students, clients and clinicians in the area of animal assisted Social Work. With more education, research and awareness on this vital subject, the implications for the future of humans and animals is insurmountable.

The purpose for addressing these issues through a qualitative study is to obtain a broader amount of information through a smaller quantity of people. This type of research method also allows for more in-depth information regarding the student's perceptions and experience with canine assisted therapy.

Significance of the Project for Social Work Practice

The study is needed to serve as a starting point for further research in the area of canine assisted therapy. It is important to demonstrate the knowledge, perceptions and experience that current students majoring in Social Work have towards canine assistance for further study. The study may also prove useful in providing an advancement in the life preservation of the many dogs in the United States that are euthanized each year who may have a future in canine assistance if supported by Social Service agencies. If students demonstrate positive perceptions or a willingness to work with canines in their jobs as future Social Worker's, this may assist in the overcrowding problems experienced by many animal shelters, as well as addressing the issue of employee burn out. The other issue that will be addressed by this research will be the beginning phase of the generalist intervention process; specifically, establishing rapport. The

hypothesis is that students of Social Work will have no previous experience working with canines and will not have knowledge on their therapeutic or mental health benefits. This is relevant to child welfare since the student's going into child welfare practice may find themselves looking for alternative modalities to help their child client's feel more comfortable, supported or to aid in establishing rapport. With recent advancement in animal assisted mental health certificates and curriculum offered in graduate schools, research and preparedness into the future possibilities for animal assisted therapy in Social Services will be important.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature covered in this chapter will address the utility and availability of service dogs in mental health practices. The literature will also address the canine provided assistance in establishing rapport with clients and providing physical health and mental health benefits to both clients and Social Workers.

Literature Review

As far back as the late 18th century, animals have been utilized in mental health hospitals for increasing socialization amongst patients (Serpell, 2016). These clinicians and researchers noted a significant change in the quantity, nervousness and activity of patients before and after utilizing animals as an interactive or calming agent (Serpell, 2016). Earlier studies focused on patients who were often mute, comatose, blind, deaf or socially apprehensive while the field has evolved to now include a much wider array of therapeutic services such as for assisting with trauma symptoms. O'Haire, Guérin and Kirkham (2015) conducted a systematic review including 453 citations, and a total of 10 studies meeting inclusion criteria were utilized in the research of service dogs as well as other service animals assisting with trauma therapy services. Eight studies included continuous sessions between the animals and the clients lasting between 1 and 12 weeks in duration with a single encounter lasting 115.4 minutes as well a single lab-based study including interviews and a 20-minute

interaction. Participants ranged from less than 11 to 153 and were living with a variety of emotional trauma including physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic violence and PTSD. Results from this review indicate primarily positive results on behalf of the client's emotional well-being and symptomology (O'Haire, Guérin, & Kirkham, 2015). When evaluating animal assisted therapy in group therapeutic treatment for children who had been victims of sexual abuse, children who participated in therapy treatment involving dogs showed significant decreases in traumatic symptoms such as anger, anxiety, depression PTSD and dissociation (Dietz, Davis and Pennings, 2012). The lessening of these traumatic symptoms using dogs may hold further implications for medical social workers such as utilizing dogs as the first attempt of aid for those suffering with depression, anxiety and PTSD.

Limitations to this study include not using the same participants in each study which may have had an impact on results either positively or negatively as well as not conducting the study across varying populations. Further research in this area would further advance the study to gather more concretion.

The social aspect of dog and person interactions is not only recognized by the person directly involved with the dog but is also familiar to the public. People tend to hold positive sentiments towards people when seeing them with a dog. Not only are the perceptions more positive towards the person who is with a dog, but social interaction also increases significantly supporting healthy social inclusion. This is demonstrated in a two-part study in which social interactions

were measured and observed in a male walking around a city with and without a dog and dressed either neatly and put together or more disheveled (McNicholas & Collis, 2000). Though more people interacted with the male participant when he was dressed more neatly, the greatest difference was observed in interactions between the dog present and no dog present group (McNicholas & Collis, 2000). These social interactions are necessary for our emotional well-being, possible success in collaborations in jobs, schools and other public spaces and add support to our personal lives. Further research in the area of public perceptions of people with animals may assist the general public as well as professionals in understanding the importance of canine and human interaction.

The limitations to this study include the lack of diversity in the male participants as well as the lack of replication of this study. For purposes of validity, this study would need to be replicated and it should be observed if changes in participant's gender expression or age has an effect.

Knowledge and availability of animal assisted therapy has expanded in the last 20 years, though the research suggests that examination on the efficacy of these animal assisted therapies are still in the early stages of development (Dietz, et al., 2012). The issues addressed in their research demonstrates short term improvements in PTSD, anxiety and depression and notes that limitations of these effects include duration long-term, nature of outcomes for various types of trauma, feasibility issues, and generalizability (Dietz, et al., 2012). Dog assisted therapy showed the most significant effect potential in treatment of psychiatric

disorders involving children and adolescents as well as assisting patients with severe cognitive disorders, stress and mood as denoted in a quantitative study including 20 study subjects (Lundqvist et al., 2018). Limitations to these studies include length of time and number of participants. Through replicating similar studies, it will be possible to validate these findings and apply them to a broader audience.

Examining the impact of animal assistance effectiveness in psychotherapy, Hunt and Chizkov (2014) conducted a study to evaluate the impact of animal assistance programs on trauma symptoms, emotional arousal and cognitive changes in a randomized study. Participants in this study were assigned to either a trauma or control condition involving a writing task wherein a dog was either present or not. Participants were then prompted to write about a personally experienced trauma and impact of symptoms were observed. Results indicated that patients involved in the condition involving the dog demonstrated less distress than those in the trauma no dog condition (Hunt & Chizkov, 2014). One limitation of this study is the lack of consistency in meeting and building a rapport with the dogs. While the research attempted to control for trauma in the trauma and writing group by establishing a criterion for the trauma writing, the participants in the study only participated one time. This may have inhibited them from establishing rapport as intended. Another limitation of this study was the dog included was not interacting with the participants before, during, or after the study. The impact between humans and dogs is significantly greater with

interaction as opposed to their presence alone as petting of a dog releases Oxytocin in the brain of the human (Hunt & Chizkov, 2014).

The impact of animals on the emotional state of humans may be especially powerful to those dealing with situations in their lives that they did not choose to be in such as incarceration and detainment. Over an eight-week period, the emotional and behavioral impact was observed using unstructured animal-assisted activities on a female, adolescent residential facility center of medium security (Conniff et al., 2005). This randomized trial involved a pretest-posttest design using a random number table to randomly assign participants in either the pet visitation program or the standard facilities activities. The pet visitation program was an ongoing study involving weekly, one-hour sessions of interactions that included dog grooming, giving commands and playing fetch as well as petting and walking the dog (Conniff et al., 2005). Assessing the program's effectiveness on behavior and emotion was conducted using a resident behavior assessment (RBA) and the youth self-report for ages 11-18 (YSR) as well as a qualitative survey given to the participant's pre and post experiment. The qualitative measures of the study supported the benefits of the program for the participants in at least one of the program's aspects, but the quantitative aspects revealed no significant difference (Conniff et al., 2005). The researchers noted that there were several unexpected challenges that arose during the process that possibly affected results. The researchers also noted that

this was the first study of its kind considering this population and experiment type so further research is necessary to understand the implications and effects.

The impact of animals relationship with children has been studied to be significant and vital in several domains of a child's life including; nurturance, empathy, coping, stress and emotional regulation (Fine, 2015). According to the organization Freedom Service Dogs of America's website, the average time waiting for a service/therapy dog is between 12-18 months while other non-profit organizations such as Merlin's Kids, state on their website that estimated wait times are "2 years or more". Parents surveyed for wait times for canine assistance for their children with autism stated they were experiencing feelings of desperation, fear, anxiety and depression over the long and difficult wait times for their children to receive canine assisted services (Burgoyne et.al, 2014).

One limitation of this study is the lack of location comparison for those on the waiting list for a service dog to understand if the long wait times are due to denser populations. Another limitation of this study is it does not include a breakdown in statistics for type of assistance needed and average wait time. Integrating animals into the pediatric unit of a hospital setting may bring many benefits to children of varying degrees of trauma. The effectiveness of dogs in reducing anxiety symptoms was observed (Barker et al., 2015). A study comprised of children between the ages of 8-18 were randomly assigned to participate in either an animal assisted group, or jigsaw puzzle group with pre and post test conditions rating anxiety and pain observed. The results indicated a

significant post-condition difference between groups with anxiety but no significant within or between group changes (Barker et al., 2015). A limitation to this study was that children involved were also being treated with analgesics which may have likely influenced the outcomes. Another consideration to this study is attachment style and its influence on pain perceptions in children. Children with secure attachment styles indicated a significantly lower report of pain and anxiety (Barker et al., 2015).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization. The theories guiding conceptualization include learning theory and attachment theory, and the biophilia hypothesis. According to Bowlby (1969), social bonding is a development of the most basic social bond between mother and child. This bonding is transmitted through a combination of hormones released through mother and child contact and interaction and become the building blocks for the basis of the early stages of a child's development (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment involves bonding emotionally, goodness of fit, seeking proximity and goodness of fit (Bowlby, 1969). Attachment theory is relevant in the area of animal companionship and assistance as a bond develops between an animal and a human over time through proximity and emotional bonding.

Learning theory is relevant by reinforcing positive associations with positive interactions with a service dog as the client becomes familiar with the dog, the activity of interaction induces pleasant feelings and outcomes leading to further desire to repeat the behavior. Through the shared attachment of this primal

relationship, the child is then capable of recognizing and transmitting these feelings of connectedness and concern towards other people, thus, promoting social closeness with others. This social closeness and ability to synch up with groups is the basis for the survival of human species. Humans are not the only species to have practiced such innate and beneficial behavior, canines do as well. Since humans and canines have been working together for centuries and share many similar bonding and social experiences, it is logical to understand the connection between them.

Learning theory states that there are conceptual frameworks involved with retaining, understanding and absorbing knowledge during acquisition (Bandura, 1977). This theory is rooted in the framework of Ivan Pavlov who pioneered research in operant conditioning. This theory is used as an aid in the predictor of how people learn and how to change their behaviors. Learning theory is relevant by reinforcing positive associations with positive interactions with a service dog as the client becomes familiar with the dog, the activity of interaction induces pleasant feelings and outcomes leading to further desire to repeat the behavior. Learning theory also involves the ability to perform activities that will create desired outcomes and involves performance accomplishment and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). By interacting with dogs in various areas of therapeutic progression, the client could build a relationship with the dog which may assist in establishing confidence in the client. The biophilia hypothesis regards the importance of human interaction and relationship with nature and other life forms

(Wilson, 1984). This theory asserts that it is the building and nurturing of positive interactions with nature that is necessary for feelings of connectedness, positive well-being and good health. Dogs are well-suited based on their loyal history to humans, accessibility, low threat level and reputation. The child welfare organization handles situations that may be traumatic and overwhelming for a child to experience. Due to the sensitive nature of this type of work, children would likely benefit from the companionship and support of canine assistance.

The theories discussed assist in explaining the natural connection between humans and animals and the many benefits when collaborating between them. Choosing to have the option to work with animals in therapeutic settings may greatly benefit children in social service agencies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This section discusses the design of this study and the specific research methods and procedures employed with carrying out this study. The study design, data analysis, data collected, sampling methods, data analysis, instruments used, and protection of human subjects will all be addressed.

Study Design

With the implementation of canine assistance in therapeutic services growing and evolving, this study assessed future Social work students' perceptions and sentiments of canine assistance for children of trauma. This researcher interviewed students from various programs in Southern California who are currently getting their Master's in Social Work to assess their views and attitudes towards canine therapeutic services and implementing canines into therapy services, their knowledge of current canine services, their willingness to work with canines, their beliefs of type of impact the canines would make in services and their training, if any, with canine services. A total of 8 Social work students in a MSW program throughout Southern California were interviewed. The choice of a qualitative study was based on its practicality, feasibility, low cost, and the ability to expand on participant's answers to gather more

information. The limitations to this study include lack of access to a broader group of participants, lack of geographical comparison and lack of large quantities of the population. These limitations may account for a lack of generalizability to the population. These limitations will be minimized due to the diverse group of students with varying work history, ages, and backgrounds. It is hypothesized that Students will feel uncomfortable working with canines in therapeutic services due to lack of training and education, they will feel that canines do not make a significant differences when used in treatment services, and that they do not have any prior experience working with canines.

Sampling

Participants of this study were recruited using the snowball effect and online messaging sources to schedule in person appointments for an interview. The sampling data included male and female students of varying ages and ethnicities. The approximate time for each interview was 20 minutes and the participants had their identities protected and responses kept confidential.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data of this study will be conducted via face to face interviews inquiring about participant's history, knowledge and attitudes towards working with canines (previous experience working with canines, feelings of readiness to work with canines, canine efficacy in therapeutic settings and attitudes and knowledge of towards canine assisted therapy.

Procedures

The initial step in conducting this study was to seek approval from the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee. This researcher interviewed students from Southern California who are currently getting their Master's in Social Work to assess for attitudes towards canine therapeutic services and implementing canines into therapy services, their knowledge of current canine services, their willingness to work with canines, their beliefs of type of impact the canines would make in services and their training if any with canine services. The first form in the packet is the letter of informed consent (appendix A). This letter explains the purpose of the study, describes the process of the study and explains voluntary participation, risks and benefits, and other important aspects of the study. The participants were asked to sign on the "x" indicating their willingness to participate in the study which will hold no benefits or consequences, and will uphold complete anonymity throughout the course of the study. The second page of the packet is the "Debriefing Statement" (Appendix B). This letter explains that there is no deception involved in this study and restates the purpose and intent of the study. The study was conducted from January, 2019 to March 2019 and took place in person at a mutually agreed upon meeting place.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection for human rights and dignity is the primary concern of this researcher. The questions to be asked are neutral in nature and there is no cost or benefit from answering the questions. These questions and the feelings of the participants are also protected by the anonymity of those who have chosen to partake. The participants were assigned numbers for record keeping purposes and upon transcription of responses from voice recording software, all recordings were deleted from device and a factory reset was completed to ensure no information was stored on the hard drive. The transcription used Microsoft word and code using the participant's assigned numbers. No names of the participants were used. The packet included the letter of informed consent which stresses the voluntary nature of the study without any negative impact or benefit to those who are participating. Those who chose to engage with this study were also alerted through this packet that they were able to withdrawal at any point without fear of consequence.

The debriefing statement also helped to ensure the protection of the participant's rights and concerns and explains the intent of the study is purely to assess student's previous history, sentiments and knowledge of canine therapy, going into the Social work profession. The participants have access to where to locate the published study as well as the information of the advisor of the study should they wish to contact them. The study will mask participant identity and the information collected was destroyed upon completion of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter provides results of the study in regards to current students in the MSW program, and their experiences and perceptions of canine assistance in the field of social work. The results were acquired through the use of interview questions to assess the student's views on implementing canines into therapy services, their knowledge of current canine services, their willingness to work with canines, their beliefs of type of impact the canines would make in services and their training, if any, with canine services. The interviews will be organized into the following categories for clarity: current comfort level with dogs, experience with pets as a child, experience working with service dogs, any negative experiences with dogs, perceptions of assistance dogs in public, perceptions of canine assistance in social work and willingness to learn more and use canine assistance in your future job as a social worker. Quotes will be highlighted to demonstrate the exact sentiments of the student's feelings and perceptions as pertinent to the question.

Presenting Findings

Demographics

The study consisted of 8 current, MSW students who are all in either their first or second year, of a full time program. Each participant was assigned a number of 1 through 8, and is here in referred to by designated number. This

study included 6 female participants and 2 male participants. The self-identified ethnicities of the participants were: 4 Latinas, 2 African American and 2 Caucasian. The participant's ages ranged from 22-31 with the average age of 25.87, the median age of 25.5 and the range is 9.

Qualitative Interview Data

Participants of the study were asked a series of questions regarding their attitudes, history and beliefs of canine assisted therapy in the field of social work. The interviews ranged from 10-25 minutes with an average of 19 minutes. Participants were asked supplemental questions as needed to help clarify their thoughts or responses.

Current Level of Comfort with Dogs

All 8 participants listed their comfort level with dogs as varying degrees within the comfortable range. For instance, 5 stated they were very comfortable, 2 said they were comfortable and participant 2 seemed neutral saying

I like dogs, but I don't really think about pets or animals too much.

(Participant 2, Personal Interview, March 2019).

Experience with Pets Growing up

Regarding their experience with pets growing up, 7/8 stated they grew up with pets of some kind or interacting regularly with the pets of family and friends, and 1 stated to not have any experience explaining

We didn't really have pets as a child, I don't currently have them in my house either (Participant 2, Personal Interview, March 2019).

None of the participants had any experience working with service animals.

Negative Experiences with Dogs

When asked about negative experiences involving dogs, 6/8 had no notable negative experience, 1 reported being chased by a large dog, and 1 reported being bit by a small dog when they were younger and being scared by the event, but not enough to fear dogs growing up.

Perceptions of Service Dogs in Public

7/8 participants said they felt good or great about seeing service dogs assisting humans in public spaces with 1 participant who was neutral. Participant 1 stated

Happy to know that people who need dogs for their disabilities have them.

Knowledge of Canine Assistance

Only 2/8 participants reported having at least some knowledge of services offered through canine assistance. Both participants who had knowledge on the topic, stated they learned the information on their own due to knowing someone with disabilities who were seeking canine assistance, and wanting to educate themselves as to how that might be accomplished, and how the dogs would be able to help. When asked about their personal research, participant 5 stated

I had a fellow student in class who was working with people with disabilities and she would tell me some of the things they have on hand or services and referrals and sometimes those include animal assistance and other services depending on what the disability is or like,

what the person needs at that time (Participant 5, Personal Interview, March 2019).

Perception for Social Work Benefits

When asked what the participant's thoughts were regarding the benefit to clients and workers if they were to use service dogs, all participants stated they thought there could be uses for canine assistance throughout the social work field, from some benefit, to very beneficial. According to participant 3,

Social workers could maybe use them to calm down as well after a stressful day or something like that (Participant 3, Personal Interview, March 2019).

Willingness to Use Dogs as Social Workers

Participants were asked how willing they would feel using dogs as social workers on a regular basis, if they were given the opportunity. 6/8 were either willing or very willing and expressed excitement at the prospect, 2 were neutral and none were unwilling. Participant 1 expressed their excitement by stating

That would be so fun and make the day go more interesting I feel (Participant 1, Personal Interview, March 2019).

While another participant expressed openness dependent on the circumstance by saying

I'd be open to it depending on the situation of course (Participant 2, Personal Interview, March 2019).

Conclusion

Chapter four provided results of the study in regards to current students in the MSW program, and their experiences and perceptions of canine assistance in the field of social work. The results of this qualitative study were collected from the interviews of eight participants whose results were transcribed and organized into the categories of student's views on implementing canines into therapy services, their knowledge of current canine services, their willingness to work with canines, their beliefs of type of impact the canines would make in services and their training, if any, with canine services. The findings from these interviews will be further analyzed and discussed in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This final chapter will discuss the central themes uncovered through the participant's interviews, as well as the limitations of this study, and future implications for social work. The categories to be discussed from the participant's interviews are: participant's comfort level around dogs, their views on implementing canines into therapy services, their knowledge of current canine services, their willingness to work with canines, their beliefs of type of impact the canines would make in benefit to the field of social work.

Participant's Comfort Level Around Dogs

Since all participants stated their comfort level with dogs to be within varying degrees of comfortable, these findings align with the study of the significance and impact of animal and children relationships presented by Fine (2015). Fine proposes that when children grow up with pets, they are positively impacted by their bonding and gain further development of empathy, nurturance and social bonding (2015). Even participants that did not grow up with animals in their own homes as children, stated to feel comfortable around dogs currently, demonstrating the significant impact of the familiarity and positive affiliation of pets in our society.

Implementing Canines into Therapy Services

All eight participants stated they believed implementing canines into therapeutic services would be beneficial to varying degrees. This is a strong example of what views may be applied to a wider population of future social workers should employers choose to listen and broaden the scope of social work practice. While earlier studies focused on patients who were often mute, comatose, blind, deaf or socially apprehensive while the field has evolved to now include a much wider array of therapeutic services such as for assisting with trauma symptoms. (O'Haire, Guérin and Kirkham, 2015).

Perhaps there is a correlation between the more advanced applications of canines and social work practice, and the participant's beliefs in their therapeutic benefits. Or their positive views may be due to the advancements in accessible knowledge and research on canine assistance.

These views support the literature of the effectiveness of animal assisted therapy for children who have experienced trauma. Children were admitted to the treatment facility after displaying traumatic symptoms stemming from sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. Children who participated in therapy treatment involving dogs showed significant decreases in traumatic symptoms such as anger, anxiety, depression PTSD and dissociation (Dietz, Davis and Pennings, 2012).

The findings of the use of dogs in children's therapy extends to the aid of child disclosure rates in abuse investigations. While still in the early stages of

research, the literature found that the presence of the dog throughout an investigation process of child interviews was an effective way to establish rapport, ease anxiety symptoms and provide comfort to children involved in high stress situations (Hershkowitz, 2014).

Knowledge of Canine Assisted Services

Only 2/8 participants in this study reported to have some or little knowledge of what canine assistance is, what they can be trained to do, how they are used in some areas of social work or how they are trained. While none of the participants had ever taken a class or seminar on the topic. 6/8 participants stated they would be willing or very willing to be taught in school about the use of animal assisted therapies, including canines, if they had the opportunity to do so.

With only 7 courses offered in animal assisted therapy from private and public schools, the demand for more extensive knowledge on the subject is quite possibly, not meeting the demands of current social work students throughout California (Animal Assisted Majors, n.d.). The participant's willingness to expand their scope of practice into a more inclusive and diverse approach, may also lend itself to an opportunity for NASW and CSWE to provide more expansive learning opportunities for future social workers.

Willingness to Work with Canines

In regards to the participant's willingness to work with canines as part of their jobs as social workers, 6/8 participants expressed willingness or a high degree of enthusiasm, if they were given the opportunity. The other two

participants expressed they were neither willing nor unwilling to have canines be a part of their jobs as social workers, but rather stated that their willingness would be dependent on the situation and job type. Owning a pet is so often a part of the American childhood culture, and with more awareness that is being brought to people living with disabilities, future social workers may request more expansive services to meet the many diverse needs of the communities in which they live, and serve.

Beliefs of Benefit to Social Services

All eight participants expressed belief that implementing service dogs into social work practice would be beneficial to at least some degree, to the profession. These sentiments extended to the health and emotional benefits for the clients, as well as the workers, as expressed by one participant who stated “Social workers could maybe use them to calm down as well after a stressful day or something like that” (Participant 3, Personal Interview, March 2019).

The participant’s beliefs in the benefit of canine assistance to social work, echoes the literature demonstrating the variety of uses and situations canines are being trained for, including search and rescue in disaster relief, helping children in elementary school to retain more information, and working alongside care staff in hospitals to ease pain symptoms in ill patients (Bua, 2013). First responders who employ canines as part of their crisis response services also indicate emotional and psychological benefits from the partnership (Bua, 2013). From interviews conducted with survivors of disasters utilizing these canines such as September

11, 2001 and the tragedy at Sandy Hook, the dogs assisted in providing comfort and consistency (Bua, 2013).

The push to integrate animal assistance into more helping professions and tasks, aligns with the surge in the expansion of social work professions and the widening of their scopes of practice.

Limitations

This research project encountered various limitations including, sample size, limited participant type, and research project design. The sample size of the participants was limited to 8 total, of which, 6 were female and 2 male which is not representative to the greater population as a whole. Furthermore, the participants were a sample of current students of social work working on completing their master's degrees, throughout Southern California which is a particular sample and again, may or may not be generalized to the population as a whole.

The research design may be limited for the fact that the project focuses on student's attitudes, beliefs and personal interactions with canine assisted therapies, but responses may well have been different if interviewing students who already had previous work or educational experiences on the subject. A linear, longitudinal study may also have yielded different results.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Based on this research as well as upcoming studies in the realm of canine assisted therapy, it is recommended that social service agencies and institutions choose to diversify their education, training and tool set to become more inclusive to the changing field that social work is becoming. The need for canine assistance is becoming more prevalent as professionals and educators are starting to grasp the breadth of their capabilities, as well as the strength of the animal-human bond.

Also, University and higher education programs that offer majors in social work and similar majors, should prepare their students for a future which may include more opportunities for animal assistance. Universities may assist in doing this by providing students with classes on disabilities, trauma and how animal assistance is available and implemented to help people living with these conditions.

Another opportunity that should be considered for students, is going through an internship program working directly with animal assistance and social work. For example, if a student is pursuing a career in working with people who have autism, they may benefit from working at an equestrian center that already has a program for people with autism. If a student is interested in working with traumatized children, they may benefit from an internship training dogs to be with children during their forensic interviews.

Students may also find it beneficial to take a class or seminar, on disabilities and or trauma, and interact with a specialist or professional, who uses canine assistance in their field of work.

Another recommendation would include encouraging students to participate in, or create a program as part of their macro class requirements, which would save dogs from the kill shelters and train them to be used for children who have experienced trauma, or to help people with disabilities. This could have a huge impact towards saving the lives of many dogs who would otherwise be killed, as well as helping to progress the field of social work. Lastly, further research would provide great benefit to the field of social work and canine assisted therapy in order to provide advanced modalities for the integration of the two disciplines.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the central themes significant to the participant's interviews. The themes discussed included, participant's level of comfort with canines, previous experience and education, willingness to implement canines into social work practice, and beliefs of canine assisted therapies for benefit of social work. Limitations to the study, as well as future research were also addressed in this chapter.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine Social Worker's Perceptions of Canine Assisted Therapy in San Bernardino County. The study is being conducted by Gia Valdez a MSW student under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn McAllister, Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board Social Work Sub-Committee, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the study is to evaluate the perceived effectiveness of canine assistance with children of trauma.

DESCRIPTION: Participants will be asked of a few questions on some demographics, attitudes about canine assistance in the workplace, personal experience with canine assistance, client experience with canine assistance and perceived efficacy for social work collaboration with canines in the future.

PARTICIPATION: Your participation in the study is totally voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without any consequences.

ANONYMITY: Your responses will remain anonymous and data will be reported in group form only.

DURATION: It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete the interview.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks to the participants.

BENEFITS: There will not be any direct benefits to the participants.

CONTACT: If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister at (909) 537-5559 (email: Cmcallis@csusb.edu)

RESULTS: Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2019.

This is to certify that I read the above and I am 18 years or older.

Place an X mark here

Date

I agree to be audio recorded: _____ Yes _____ No

APPENDIX B
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate the perception of canine assisted therapy in Social Work. We are interested in assessing current MSW students' attitudes and ideas of canine assistance throughout Southern California. We are also interested in assessing MSW students' history and willingness to involve canine assistance in Social Work. This is to inform you that no deception is involved in this study. Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Dr. Carolyn McAllister at (909) 537-5559. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact the ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) after July 2019.

APPENDIX C
INSTRUMENT

Instrument

1. How comfortable do you feel around dogs currently?
 - a. In your own home or other's homes
 - b. In public such as at a park
2. What was your experience with pets as a child?
 - a. Did you have pets growing up?
 - b. Did you ever have a dog?
 - c. Were you comfortable with pets?
3. Have you ever had a negative experience with dogs?
 - a. Were you ever bit by a dog?
 - b. Were you ever afraid of a dog?
4. How do you feel when seeing assistance dogs in public?
 - a. Does it make you uncomfortable?
 - b. Do you feel comfortable?
 - c. Does it make you curious about the handler or need in which the dog is assisting?
5. What is your previous work experience with canine assistance?
 - a. Have you ever worked in a place that had this as an option?
 - b. Have you worked in a place that offered resources for animal assisted therapies?
6. What is your previous educational experiences with canine assisted therapies?
 - a. Did you ever take a class on this topic?

- b. Have you done autonomous research on canine therapy?
7. How do you think canine assistance might be helpful in Social Work if at all?
- a. Helping children who have suffered trauma?
 - b. Working in disaster relief?
 - c. Helping children with developmental delays?
8. How willing would you be to integrate canine assistance into your future job as a Social Worker?
- a. Would you feel more comfortable with more training?
 - b. Would you be apprehensive or uncomfortable?
 - c. Would you be unwilling?
9. How would you feel about taking a class or training about canine assisted therapy?
- a. Would you be interested?
 - b. Would you be disinterested?
 - c. Would you be neutral to the information?
10. How would you feel about working with canine assisted therapies on a daily basis?
- a. Would you be happy?
 - b. Would you feel apprehensive?
 - c. Would you feel disinterested?

Demographic Information

Age:

Gender:

Year in Social Work Program:

Do you have children?

If so how many?

Ethnicity:

Developed by: Gia Valdez

APPENDIX D
APPROVAL LETTER

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN BERNARDINO
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
Institutional Review Board Sub-Committee

Researcher(s) Gia Faith Valdez
Proposal Title Social Work Students' perceptions of
Canine Therapy for Children of Trauma
SW1913

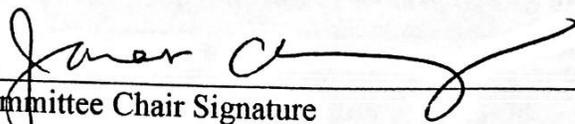
Your proposal has been reviewed by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the Institutional Review Board. The decisions and advice of those faculty are given below.

Proposal is:

- approved
- to be resubmitted with revisions listed below
- to be forwarded to the campus IRB for review

Revisions that must be made before proposal can be approved:

- faculty signature missing
- missing informed consent debriefing statement
- revisions needed in informed consent debriefing
- data collection instruments missing
- agency approval letter missing
- CITI missing
- revisions in design needed (specified below)



Committee Chair Signature

1/28/2019

Date

Distribution: White-Coordinator; Yellow-Supervisor; Pink-Student

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