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ATTITUDES OF SOCIAL WORKERS TOWARDS THE USE OF
CANINE THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION WITH
TRAUMATIZED CHILDREN WITHIN
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

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
Cristi Maria Page

June 2012

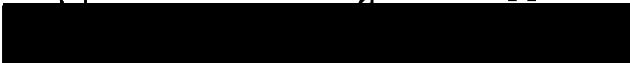
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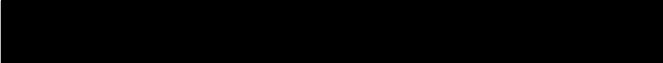
by
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June 2012

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Family Services


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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. The investigator in this study defined canine therapeutic intervention as the use of a dog's presence during face-to-face interactions with clients. This study attempted to fill the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study.

The study sample included 163 social workers currently employed at San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS). The study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using self-administered questionnaires.

The study found that social workers were aware of the usage of canines as therapy/treatment with clients and had positive attitudes towards the usage of canines with children on their current caseloads, even though they did not have current or prior experience with the usage of canines with current or prior clients. The social workers also believed that the usage of canines as therapy/treatment would improve the mental and physical health of children on their caseloads.

Major recommendations for social work practice and policy include the introduction of canine therapeutic intervention as an alternative form of intervention within the current offerings within child welfare services. Policy makers may be able to use these findings to assist them in creating new and innovative service programs and provide funding for our nation's underserved populations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter includes background information about the trauma that children utilizing child welfare services are experiencing and information about the positive affects of the use of canines in child welfare work with these children. The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. The investigator in this study defines canine therapeutic intervention as the use of a dog's presence during face-to-face interactions with these traumatized children within the child welfare system. This chapter concludes with addressing how the attitudes of social workers may affect the utilization of canine therapeutic intervention within San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS).

Problem Statement

Many children coming into the child welfare system who are receiving services have already been traumatized by an

experience of abuse or neglect. This trauma may be chronic and/or complex for a child if carried over a prolonged period of time. It is often during this same period of time when the child is looking for the protection and care from those that are also the perpetrators of the abuse or neglect. Young children, school-aged children and adolescents all experience this chronic and/or complex trauma differently based upon their developmental stages, which may affect numerous areas of performance, including self-concept, attachment, cognition, regulation of moods, behavior control and physiology disassociation. (Center for Improvement of Child and Family Services, 2008-09).

Exposure to traumatic experiences results in emotional dysregulation, the loss of safety and direction, and the ability to detect or respond to danger cues; it often triggers a chain of events leading to subsequent or repeated trauma exposure in adolescence and adulthood (National Child Traumatic Stress Network website, n.d).

Gonski (1985) found that trauma for a child carries on when they are placed into foster care, whether voluntarily by their caretakers or involuntarily through the courts due to abuse or neglect. Children agonize over their intense feelings of rejection and separation, which are further

amplified if the abuse or neglect happen multiple times, takes place over prolonged periods of time or if the child is placed in more than one foster home. When children and adolescents experience these types of traumas they "experience separation, becoming isolated and protecting themselves by adopting guarded, suspicious and manipulative behaviors" (Gonski, 1985, p. 95).

Gonski (1985) also found that the effects of a child's trauma are felt by all parties, including the child, the natural parents, the foster parents and the social workers. Of all parties, it is the suffering social worker/child relationship during the casework process that needs additional attention. A child may employ various devices to try and distract their social worker from discussing uncomfortable or painful matters with them, which in turn may affect the social worker, who may experience frustration and difficulty in forming a relationship with the child due to their hesitation or refusal to form any bond or relationship with an adult who claims to want to help them (Gonski, 1985).

It is within this important relationship between social worker and child that the utilization of canine therapeutic intervention could enter and provide possible

positive outcomes. The investigator in this study defines canine therapeutic intervention as the use of a dog's presence during face-to-face interactions with these traumatized children within the child welfare system. According to Arkow (1984), the canine would serve to act as a catalyst and bridge between the social worker and the child, with the child turning his attention towards the canine and relating to this safe and neutral third party. The canine's presence would also "engage, maintain and sustain the child's interest, which is the most basic and essential of all psychosocial casework activities" (Hollis & Lewis, 1981, p. 109).

Policy Context

Federal legislation over the last two decades has placed an increasing emphasis on measuring outcomes for children involved in the child welfare system. For example, beginning in 1997, all states are now required to measure achievement of the outcomes for safety, permanency and well-being for children. There are three stages where achievements can be measured: the individual caseworker level (including caseload), the unit level and the individual case level (Salas, 2004).

With regards to the individual caseworker level and the unit level, "many CPS agencies face a large volume of CPS reports, increasingly complex cases and strained resources" (Shusterman, Hollinshead, Fluke, & Yuan, 2005, p. 1). In Sacramento, CPS caseloads in the various programs range from an average 10.6 cases per worker each month to as many as 46.3 cases per worker each month ("Children are dying due to lack of timely intervention and oversight", 2009). In May 2000, the 500-page SB 2030 Child Welfare Services Workload Study was released, spelling out statistically what California social workers had been saying for years prior: that there were not enough social workers to protect the children, serve the families of California or fulfill even the minimal state and federal mandates ("SB 2030's findings: high caseloads are preventing social workers from helping children and families", 2000).

Practice Context

Salas (2004) indicated that other areas of achievements that are measured at the casework level include the quality of the relationship between the social worker and the child along with the quality of case plans. If social workers are finding themselves unable to handle

their achievements at the casework and unit levels, this may be an indicator that they are also unable to handle their achievements at the individual case level. A sampling of the many achievements measured at this individual case level include assessing whether the services and interventions are addressing the needs of the child, whether progress is being achieved in a timely and effective manner and whether positive outcomes for the child are being attained (Salas, 2004).

Gonski (1985) found that introducing canines may affect two of the three stages of care; the caseworker level and the individual case level, specifically addressing the quality of the relationship between the caseworker and child, the quality of the child's case plan, the services and interventions provided, as well as the progress and outcomes of the child. Through the introduction of using canines, social workers may find that their ability to perform three of their essential casework functions of engagement, assessment and maintenance may be enhanced, leading to higher levels of successful outcomes (Gonski, 1985). Canines help to restore childrens' spirits, inspire happiness in children through their interactions, and teach children what being loved

unconditionally feels like. This is because canines do not have an agenda but rather are happy to greet all children. "Canines help get children excited and look forward to groups" ("Social Work professor Tracy Dietz research's benefits of "man's best friend" as therapist", 2010, para. 8).

It is important to study the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. It is possible that if social workers in the child welfare system incorporated the use of canine therapeutic intervention in both their casework and individual levels of care, an increase in positive outcomes with the traumatized children they serve may be observed. Canines may be able to help children who have been traumatized open up to their social workers as they move through the healing process ("Strategies and tools for practice: using therapy animals to help child maltreatment victims", 2009-10). However, no studies have been found that have been conducted on social workers' attitudes towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within the child welfare system. Thus, this study

attempted to fill the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with the traumatized children within child welfare services. San Bernardino County CFS may be interested in the results of this study as they may be incorporating trauma-informed therapeutic approaches with the children they serve. Reviewing the findings of this study may assist San Bernardino County CFS when evaluating for future intervention modalities.

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using self-administered questionnaires. This quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was the most appropriate research design for this study because there was little known about and nothing clearly defined on this specific topic. The cross-sectional survey design was used to gather information on the attitudes and perceptions of social workers. Self-administered questionnaires were sent out to the entire population of San Bernardino County CFS social workers to examine their attitudes towards canine

therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services.

Significance of the Project for Social Work

The findings of this study have provided a better understanding of how the social worker population within San Bernardino County CFS believed and felt about using canine therapeutic intervention with the population of traumatized children within the child welfare system. These findings are a service to San Bernardino County CFS and perhaps other public welfare service agencies nationwide because this study filled the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study. As there were currently no therapeutic interventions using canines within San Bernardino CFS, the findings of this study may be used as an aide to their program developers as they move towards alternative forms of intervention revolving around trauma-informed therapy.

Similarly, these findings may also benefit social work practice as a whole. Canine therapeutic intervention may be seen as a choice not just for traumatized children within child welfare services, but for other populations

such as Adult Protective Services (APS) or for those individuals with mental health issues.

Through the introduction of canine therapeutic intervention, social workers may find that their ability to perform three of their essential casework functions of engagement, assessment and maintenance may be enhanced, leading to higher levels of successful outcomes (Gonski, 1985). If social workers incorporated the use of canine therapeutic intervention in both their casework and individual levels of care, they may see an increase in positive outcomes with the children they serve within child welfare services. Studies show that canines may be able to help children who have been traumatized open up to their social workers during their healing process ("Strategies and tools for practice: using therapy animals to help child maltreatment victims", 2009-10).

Additionally, the results of the study may also pave the way for policy changes throughout the nation and practice changes within agencies providing services not just to traumatized children within child welfare services but to all those in need of assistance.

This study investigated the research question which asked social workers within San Bernardino County CFS their

attitudes towards canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. Examining the answers to this question has filled the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study.

This study was relevant to the topic of child welfare because in the process of seeking to uncover the attitudes of social workers towards canine therapeutic intervention, the findings may also show San Bernardino County CFS a viable option to consider within social work practice to assist the traumatized youth they serve and receive positive outcomes through the utilization of canine therapeutic intervention.

Summary

This chapter covered the focus of the study, including both the policy and practice contexts, along with the potential contribution of this study's findings to San Bernardino County CFS social workers.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter contains literature regarding studies that share knowledge about the therapeutic relationships between animals and children in various situations. This literature review revealed that there are no empirical studies that have been conducted using rigorous study designs to reveal that canine therapeutic intervention is an effective approach for traumatized children. Due to the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study, there are scant amounts of research currently available to be reviewed on canine therapeutic intervention within child welfare service agencies. However, there are a great number of studies that share knowledge about the therapeutic relationships between animals and humans. Additionally, the literature was reviewed for ecological perspective theories which guide conceptualization.

Therapeutic Human-Animal Relationships

Although positive human and animal interactions have been documented going back to ancient times (Egyptian,

Greek, Roman), the beneficial and calming effects of therapeutic interventions with animals have only been well documented in the medical literature of the western culture in the last 50 years. Pitts (2005) found that the modality of animal assisted therapy (AAT) has grown extensively over the past five years, with the Internet yielding over 40,000 references. Existing literature finds that modalities utilizing AAT produces feelings of "love, attachment and comfort; sensori-motor and nonverbal learning; responsibility, nurturance and sense of competence; learning about life, death and grief; therapeutic benefits to psychological and physical health; nurturing humaneness, ecological awareness and ethical responsibility." (Blue, as cited in Pitts, 2005, p. 38). Additionally, "infants, pre-school and school-age children benefit and learn from interaction with domestic animals" (Pitts, 2005, p. 38).

The concept of an animal's therapeutic value has been addressed by various individuals throughout the years. In the 1960's, American child psychiatrist, Boris Levinson, recognized the benefits of having his canine present at counseling sessions with his young patients. Samuel Corson, an experimental psychologist, along with his wife Elizabeth, also recognized the therapeutic value of

companion animals and evaluated the effects of AAT in institutional settings. In the 1970's, various centers were created to study the human-animal bond and in the 1980's, the first U.S. symposium on these human-animal bonds was held. At present, even though AAT continues to grow in popularity, there are still no acceptable standards employed for clinical research. This lack of acceptable standards results in continuous doubts and the failure for physicians to routinely consider it in their protocols (Palley, O'Roarke, & Niemi, 2010).

Hanselman, as cited in Wilson (2011) noted that AAT is shown to be effective with children because they have an innate fascination and curiosity towards animals. Children seem to be better able to relate to and empathize with an animal, whose actions are simple and obvious to them. Children are more relaxed when in the company of an animal (Hanselman, as cited in Wilson, 2011). Friedmann, as cited in Wilson (2011) found that situations can seem less threatening to children if an animal is present and that this change in the child's view of their environment can make a therapist seem friendlier and easier to talk to. A bond can be formed with the therapist due to the mutual relationship with the animal because animals can help

children learn to trust, love, nurture, and to teach responsibility and empathy, helping a child learn something it seemed impossible to teach them through human interaction (Friedmann, as cited in Wilson, 2011).

White (2010) found that homeless children are often emotionally fragile because of the disruption in their lives. Adjusting to a homeless shelter can be traumatic because these children have to cope with being banished from their homes and possibly having to leave their friends, community ties and even their own pets. Most shelters do not have the room or the funding to house pets. The loss of a pet can leave children feeling confused, bewildered, and angry. Using canines with homeless children living in these shelters can bring stability and hope into their lives because they get to either connect for the first time or reconnect with a canine. These connections may help children deal with their feelings of anger and loss (White, 2010).

Gonski (1985) discovered that children who have experienced repeated rejections and separations may be the most receptive to canines. The mere presence of a canine is often all that is needed to promote laughter, conversation and excitement among even the most hostile and

withdrawn of children living in foster homes. Once children have had a satisfactory relationship with the canines, they can make a start at developing human relationships. A canine's presence within the casework relationship between social workers and children helps the children to learn to place trust in a safer, non-judgmental object, the canine, before learning to place their trust and confidence in their social worker (Gonski, 1985).

Due to the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study, there are scant amounts of research currently available to be reviewed on canine therapeutic intervention within child welfare service agencies. To date, little to no studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of or the practitioner's view on canine therapeutic intervention. This investigator was one of the first persons to study the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within the child welfare system.

Previous Study within Public Child Welfare Agencies

Risley-Curtis, Zilney and Hornung (2010) examined the extent that animal-human relationships (AHR) were included

in Child Protective Services (CPS) practice with regards to five factors: inquiry of animals in the home, assessment for animal abuse, knowledge of the link between animal abuse, child maltreatment and partner violence, existence of cross-reporting abuse and information on animal assisted interventions with the training of CPS workers and their assessments, tools and policies. They reported statistics showing that 70% of households with minors have companion animals, making it likely that child welfare workers will encounter families with companion animals on a regular basis. They surveyed CPS agencies across 50 states and the District of Columbia, of which 45 states and the District of Columbia responded and completed the survey. A 23-item survey with close-ended questions was given. The overall findings showed that CPS agencies in the study had not successfully integrated AHR into their practice, although their baseline did show that many states looked at animal abuse in the home when they were investigating for child abuse in the same home. The investigators found that despite this new knowledge they reported, there are still continuing barriers that are in the way of AHR. One journal editor stated that the role of animals in public child welfare was not conventional. However, the

investigators believe that in spite of these barriers, it needs to be recognized that animals do play a significant role in the lives of many people, and this recognition needs further attention in the social work field (Risley-Curtis, Zilney & Hornung, 2010).

Theories Guiding Conceptualization

Risley-Curtiss (2010) found that there were several theoretical models to support the inclusion of the animal-human relationship (AHR) in CPS, including the ecological-systems theory, family-centered practice and the strengths perspective. The ecological-systems theory may be the best model to use to support the canine therapeutic intervention approach with traumatized children within child welfare services.

Utilizing Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological-systems theory, a child is viewed as developing within a system of complex relationships that may be affected from settings such as home life, including family and foster family (micro), school life, including friends and peer relationships (meso) and community, which includes child welfare agencies (macro). "The forces that produce youthful alienation are growing in strength and scope and

the best way to counteract alienation is through the creation of connections or links throughout our culture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 430). Hollis and Lewis (1981) found that a child's feeling of alienation may decrease through the creation of a connection between child and animal. Research has shown that the presence of an animal tends to "engage, maintain and sustain the child's interest, which is the most basic and essential of all psychosocial casework activities" (Hollis & Lewis, 1981, p. 109).

Summary

This chapter explained that although there is extensive research that documents the powerful relationships between children and canines, and that social workers are likely to work with individuals and families who own companion animals, there is still little in the social work literature that identifies if social workers are providing any type of intervention utilizing canines within child welfare services. No empirical studies have been conducted using rigorous study designs to reveal that canine therapeutic intervention is an effective approach for traumatized children. Risley-Curtis (2010) found that

even though social workers appear to have the basic knowledge of the benefits of positive relationships with companion animals, approximately only 25% of those studied include their companion and other animals in their intervention practice. Furthermore, the vast majority of these social workers have had no special training or coursework on animal intervention (Risley-Curtiss, 2010).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter an overview is presented of research methods that were used for this study. Emphasis is on the study's design, sampling methods, data collection process, procedures, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

Study Design

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of San Bernardino County Children and Family Services (CFS) social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with the traumatized children within child welfare services. The investigator in this study defined canine therapeutic intervention as the use of a dog's presence during face-to-face interactions with clients. This research study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design using self-administered questionnaires. This quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was the most appropriate research design for this study because there was little known about and nothing clearly defined on this specific topic. The cross-

sectional survey design was used to gather information on the attitudes and perceptions of social workers.

There were numerous strengths to using survey research. Self-administered questionnaires were inexpensive to use and were useful in gathering data from the large amount of social workers who were provided the survey. The surveys were administered using inter-office mail, which made the investigator able to administer them to remote locations with ease. There was the ability to ask many questions to the participants about the various aspects of canine therapeutic intervention. By using standardized questions, measurement was more precise and ensured that similar data was collected from the participants. Investigator subjectivity was also greatly eliminated as all the participants were presented with the same set of standardized questions.

One of the limitations of this study included the use of self-administered questionnaires because self-reported data may be skewed and biased. Participants may not have understood the questions or may not have answered the questions truthfully. Participants may have been pressed for time and answered quickly with no thought or may have misunderstood the questions based upon how they were

written. The investigator kept these limitations in mind when presenting the results of the study.

Another limitation of this study included using the Likert-type scale, as distortions may have occurred. Participants may not have wanted to agree with the extreme response categories or may have wanted to portray themselves as more positive than they really were about their attitudes.

Finally, using a survey design may have inhibited participants from providing more detail around their answers about their attitudes. This survey also did not allow for the investigator to observe and evaluate any non-verbal behaviors of the participants, which may have been useful to the study.

Sampling

The sample consisted of social workers currently employed within San Bernardino County CFS. These employees represented the job titles of Social Worker II (SWII), Social Service Practitioner (SSP), and Supervisor Social Service Practitioner (SSSP) across the seven regions within the county.

Of the 403 questionnaires the investigator distributed, there was a 40% participation rate, which equated to 163 participants. This sample was chosen because the employees with these job titles were the front line social workers and their supervisors and their answers would provide the best predictors of social worker attitudes towards canine therapeutic intervention.

Data Collection and Instruments

The data for this study was collected using self-administered questionnaires. With no existing instrument available, this investigator developed the instrument and utilized additional question formats from Carpino and De La Cruz's study (2011). A focus group to check for reliability and validity was used prior to the distribution of questionnaires. Demographic information was collected that specifically pertained to the research question of the study. The specific data that was gathered through the questionnaires included information regarding participants' attitudes on canine therapeutic intervention, particularly their knowledge and beliefs on canines and their effectiveness as an intervention with traumatized children and demographic information (age, ethnicity, job title).

This study examined the attitudes of the social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention within San Bernardino CFS. Social workers' attitudes were measured using the Likert scale. This scale assigned the numerical values of 1 through 5 from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" respectively, including one response for "Do Not Know". Demographic information such as age, ethnicity and job title was also gathered.

This study used a newly created scale to measure and collect data regarding the attitudes of the participants. This scale was a 10-item instrument designed to measure the attitudes of social workers with regards to canines and their use in therapeutic intervention within San Bernardino County CFS. The investigator used a focus group to pretest the instrument.

Procedures

Permissions were obtained from San Bernardino CFS Administrators to distribute the questionnaires to the social workers. The social workers were recruited from the seven regions of San Bernardino County CFS agency. Data was collected from January 15 through February 15, 2012 during normal weekday business hours (7:30 a.m. - 5:00

p.m.). The participants were provided their questionnaires via inter-office mail in paper form, with each participant receiving their questionnaire in their personal mailbox. Participants were given the informed consent and the debriefing statement at the same time as the questionnaire, with the informed consent acting as the first page of the questionnaire packet and the debriefing statement acting as the final page of the questionnaire packet. The questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes to complete and was self-administered. Upon completion, participants delivered their completed questionnaires back to their respective regional secretaries in an inter-office envelope, and were delivered back to the investigator, with their anonymity protected. Data analysis and write up occurred during March and April, 2012.

Protection of Human Subjects

The protection of the study participants was addressed prior to the start of filling out the self-administered questionnaire by providing an informed consent form, which was used to address the protection of human subjects. Participants were informed of the overview of the study they were being asked to participate in, who was conducting

the study and under whose supervision the study was being conducted. They were advised of what would happen to the results of their survey and confirmation of the approval of this study from the Institutional Review Board of the university the investigator attended. Additionally, the purpose of the study, the estimated length of time it would take to complete the survey, participant anonymity, and any foreseeable risks to the participant were addressed. Finally, the contact information of the investigator's research advisor was included if the participants had any questions or concerns with the survey.

After completing the questionnaire, participants were provided with a debriefing statement. This statement thanked the participants for their participation, addressed the participants' confidentiality, provided the investigator's name along with the contact information for the investigator's research advisor, and let the participants know when and where the study results would be available for viewing.

Anonymity of the participants was protected since they were not asked to divulge their names or other personal information and they were able to return their questionnaires in inter-office envelopes addressed to the

investigator with no return address necessary. Data was stored in a locked desk drawer of the investigator and was viewed only by the investigator and her research advisor. Once the data was entered into the computer, the questionnaires were destroyed by the investigator. Additionally, the investigator adhered to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics.

Data Analysis

This study used quantitative data analysis techniques. Descriptive statistics including frequency distributions, measures of central tendency (e.g. mean) and measures of variability (e.g. standard deviation) were used to describe the characteristics of the participants. The chi-square test was used to assess associations and relationships between variables. A series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were conducted to assess relationships between demographic variables and the physical health improvement variable.

Summary

This chapter explained that the primary purpose of this study was to explore the attitudes of social workers

towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. A quantitative study was conducted by providing self-administered questionnaires to the entire population of SWII, SSP and SSSP social workers within San Bernardino County CFS. Potential for the skewing of participants' responses was addressed as well as anonymity and confidentiality. Data analysis was completed on the returned questionnaires. The findings of this study will provide a better understanding of how the social worker population within San Bernardino County CFS think about using canine therapeutic intervention with the population of traumatized children within the child welfare system.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will present the findings of the study comprised of the responses of one hundred and sixty-three participants from San Bernardino County CFS. These findings are represented by the following tables. A summary of results will also be included.

Presentation of the Findings

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. There were a total of one hundred and sixty-three social workers who participated in this study. Of the participants, 69% held the job title of SSP, 16% held the job title of SSSP and nearly 15% held the job title of SW II. Nearly 87% of the participants were female while 13% were male.

Participants had ages that ranged from 24 years old to 66 years old, with an average of 44.60 years ($SD = 11.07$). Nearly 29% of the participants were in their 50's, 25.3% were in their 30's, 25% were in their 40's, 10% in their 20's and 10% in their 60's.

In regards to educational achievement, 79% received a Master's Degree, 19% received a Bachelor's Degree, 1% received a PhD and less than 1% completed Some College. In terms of the ethnicity of the participants, nearly 52% were White, 20% were Black or African American, 19% were Hispanic or Latino, 4% were Other, 2% were Asian or Asian American, less than 1% were Islander and less than 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native.

Table 1. Demographics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Job Title		
SWII	24	14.8
SSP	112	69.1
SSSP	26	16.0
Gender		
Female	141	86.5
Male	22	13.5
Age		
24 - 29	16	10.2
30 - 39	39	25.3
40 - 49	39	25
50 - 59	44	28.4
60 - 66	16	10.2
Education Level		
Some College	1	.6
Bachelor's Degree	31	19.0
Master's Degree	129	79.1
PhD	2	1.2
Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	.6
Asian/Asian American	4	2.5
Black/African American	32	20.3
Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	.6
Hispanic/Latino	31	19.6
White	82	51.9
Other	7	4.4

The range of months that the participants worked as social workers ranged from 2 months to 456 months (38 years), with the mean of 140.04 months, or 12 years (SD = 96.86). The range of months that the participants worked for San Bernardino County CFS ranged from 2 months to 432 months (36 years), with the mean of 125.86 months, or 10 years (SD = 91.11).

Table 2 shows the general attitudes of the participants. When participants were asked to rate their awareness of canines being used for therapy/treatment of any client prior to their working for San Bernardino County CFS, over 71% of the participants reported that they either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement, while nearly 25% either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" with it. Four percent of the participants reported "Do Not Know".

In regards to the statement asking participants to rate their awareness of canines being used for therapy/treatment of children within CFS since working for San Bernardino County CFS, nearly 50% of participants reported that they either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree". Nearly 35% of participants reported "Strongly

Agree" or "Agree" with the statement, while 17.2% reported "Do Not Know".

When participants were asked to rate their own usage of canines as therapy/treatment with their own clients prior to working for San Bernardino County CFS, over 90% either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" while only 6.2% of participants reported either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree". Three percent reported "Do Not Know".

For the statement about rating their own usage of canines as therapy/treatment with their own clients since working for San Bernardino County CFS, over 91% of participants "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" with the statement. Only 4.3% of participants reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree", while three percent reported "Do Not Know".

When participants were asked to rate their attitude towards the usage of canines as therapy/treatment as a way to improve the physical health of children within San Bernardino County CFS, 48% of participants either "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement, while just over 47% reported "Do Not Know". Four percent of participants reported "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree".

When participants were asked to rate their attitude towards the usage of canines as therapy/treatment as a way to improve the mental health of children within San Bernardino County CFS, over 61% of participants reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree". Nearly 36% of participants reported "Do Not Know" while just over two percent either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree".

In regards to the statement about rating their attitude towards the usage of canines as therapy/treatment as an effective intervention strategy for children within San Bernardino County CFS, 60% of participants reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement, while 37% reported "Do Not Know". Only two percent of participants reported "Strongly Disagree".

When participants were asked to rate their attitude about their usage of canines with the children on their current San Bernardino County CFS caseload, 82% reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement, while 14% "Do Not Know". Only four percent of participants reported either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree".

With respect to the statement on participants rating their attitude about their San Bernardino County CFS social worker peers' usage of canines with the children on their

current CFS caseloads, nearly 65% reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" while 31% reported "Do Not Know". Three percent reported either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree".

In regards to the statement asking participants to rate the support of San Bernardino County CFS of canine usage, nearly 43% reported "Do Not Know" while almost 40% reported "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" with the statement. Nearly 18% of participants reported either "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree".

Table 2. General Attitudes of Participants

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Prior Awareness		
Strongly disagree	19	11.7
Disagree	21	12.9
Agree	54	33.1
Strongly agree	62	38.0
Do not know	7	4.3
Current Awareness		
Strongly disagree	32	19.6
Disagree	47	28.8
Agree	35	21.5
Strongly agree	21	12.9
Do not know	28	17.2
Prior Usage		
Strongly disagree	84	51.5
Disagree	64	39.3
Agree	5	3.1
Strongly agree	5	3.1
Do not know	5	3.1
Current Usage		
Strongly disagree	83	51.2
Disagree	66	40.7
Agree	5	3.1
Strongly agree	2	1.2
Do not know	6	3.7

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Usage Improves Physical Health		
Strongly disagree	3	1.9
Disagree	3	1.9
Agree	46	28.6
Strongly agree	32	19.9
Do not know	77	47.8
Usage Improves Mental Health		
Strongly disagree	3	1.9
Disagree	1	.6
Agree	49	30.2
Strongly agree	51	31.5
Do not know	58	35.8
Usage as Effective Intervention		
Strongly disagree	4	2.5
Agree	48	30.0
Strongly agree	48	30.0
Do not know	60	37.5
Usage on My Caseload		
Strongly disagree	3	1.9
Disagree	3	1.9
Agree	65	40.1
Strongly agree	68	42.0
Do not know	23	14.2
Usage on Peers Caseload		
Strongly disagree	1	.6
Disagree	5	3.1
Agree	71	43.8
Strongly agree	34	21.0
Do not know	51	31.5

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Usage Supported by CFS		
Strongly disagree	4	2.5
Disagree	25	15.4
Agree	38	23.5
Strongly agree	26	16.0
Do not know	69	42.6

No statistical significance was found when analyzing the relationships between the attitudes of canine usage improving mental health and participants' time worked as a social worker, gender, education level and ethnicity.

When looking at the relationship among participants' job title and variables of canine usage improving physical health, mental health and as an effective intervention strategy, the most positive attitudes came from the participants with the job title of SW II, while the participants with the SSP job title were the most pessimistic, although such differences were not statistically significant.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to look at the participants' time worked as a social worker and their attitudes towards using canines to improve physical health. The finding was statistically significant $F(4, 156) = 5.040, p = .001$). Participants who had spent more

time working as a social worker tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving physical health than participants who had spend less time working as a social worker.

A second ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between participants' time worked at San Bernardino County CFS and their attitudes towards using canines to improve physical health. The finding was statistically significant $F(4, 154) = 4.537, p = .002$). Participants who had spent more time working with San Bernardino County CFS tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving physical health than participants who had spend less time working with San Bernardino County CFS.

A third ANOVA was conducted to look at the relationship between participants' age and their attitudes towards using canines to improve physical health. The findings were statistically significant $F(4, 149) = 2.955, p = .022$). Participants who were older than other participants tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving physical health than participants who were younger.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the demographic data and the general attitudes of the participants that were collected during the course of the study. Statistical significance was found when performing the chi-square test and conducting a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to assess the demographic variables and the physical health improvement variable.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the major findings of the study, along with the limitations of the study and the recommendations for social work practice, policy and research. A conclusion is presented at the end of the chapter.

Discussion

The sample for this study consisted of 163 participants. The majority of the participants were female (86.5%) and held the job title of SSP (69.1%). On average, the participants worked as social workers for 140 months, or 12 years ($m = 140.04$, $SD = 96.86$) and worked as social workers for San Bernardino County CFS an average of 126 months, or 10 years ($m = 125.86$, $SD = 91.11$). The average age of the participants was 44.60 years ($SD = 11.07$). The majority of the participants received Master's Degrees (79.1%). While ethnically diverse, the majority of participants were White (51.9%).

The study found that although participants had strong awareness of the usage of canines as therapy/treatment for clients prior to working for San Bernardino County CFS, they did not have any prior usage of canines as therapy/treatment with their own clients. Another finding of the study was that although participants had a strong current awareness of the usage of canines as therapy/treatment for children within San Bernardino County CFS, they did not have any current usage of canines as therapy/treatment with their own caseload of children within San Bernardino County CFS. Because there is a current gap in knowledge regarding this area of study, there are no previous studies to compare this finding with. Participants may not have any current usage of canines as therapy/treatment with their own caseload because San Bernardino County CFS currently uses human social worker interactions with their clients rather than animal interactions.

Interestingly, participants did express a strong approval towards the usage of canines for therapy/treatment with their own caseload of children within San Bernardino County CFS (82.1%). They also expressed agreement towards their peers' usage of canines for the therapy/treatment

with their own caseload of children within San Bernardino County CFS (64.8%). Yet when participants were asked to rate their attitude on the support of the usage of canines for therapy/treatment of children within San Bernardino County CFS, the majority of participants answered "Do Not Know".

It is also notable that when participants were asked their attitudes towards the usage of canines improving the physical and mental health of children within San Bernardino County CFS, the majority of participants answered "Do Not Know". The majority of participants also replied with "Do Not Know" when asked their attitude toward the usage of canines as an effective intervention strategy for children within San Bernardino County CFS. These findings may represent the fact that participants, although having an awareness of the usage of canines as therapy/treatment of clients, do not have an awareness of any of the past and/or current studies that report on the positive therapeutic benefits that animals provide to children.

The study also found, although not statistically significant, that participants who held the job title of SW II had the most positive attitudes with regards to their

thoughts about the usage of canines improving the physical health of children within San Bernardino County CFS.

The study found that participants who spent more time working as a social worker tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving the physical health of children within San Bernardino County CFS than those who had spent less time working as a social worker. The study also found that participants who spent more time working as a social worker for San Bernardino County CFS tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving the physical health of children within San Bernardino County CFS than those who had spent less time working as a social worker for San Bernardino County CFS. Although there are no previous studies in this area of study to compare these findings with, it appears that these participants may have had the opportunity throughout their years of employment to learn about the positive effects of canines on clients either from other social workers or other professionals.

Another notable finding of this study was that participants who were older in age tended to "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" with the usage of canines improving the physical health of children within San Bernardino County

CFS than those participants who were younger in age. It is possible that this finding is due to the fact that older participants have had more time to spend on their personal and professional development and growth, which may include learning about the usage of canines as therapy/treatment for children through either observation and/or ongoing education in the field.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study was using the self-administered questionnaires as participants may have misrepresented their attitudes towards canine therapeutic intervention. One participant included comments about how they would have preferred answering questions with a "Yes" or "No" answer rather than using a scale. A few participants left items blank, which could be due to being rushed when answering or due to a misunderstanding of how the item was written. Additionally, some participants did not answer certain demographic questions, which may be due to not wanting to share information they considered irrelevant to the study.

Another limitation of this study included using the Likert scale. A few participants simply answered "Do Not

Know" to all the questions, which may be seen as a byproduct of not wanting to agree with any of the response categories.

Using this survey design seemed to have inhibited some participants from providing more detail around their answers about their attitudes. These participants volunteered additional comments in the margins of the questionnaire beside the item they answered. Perhaps if investigator had added an extra space at the end of the questionnaire for comments, more information could have been gathered about the attitudes of the participants.

Finally, due to the fact that there was no existing standardized scale to use for this study, the investigator created a new questionnaire to measure the participants' attitudes towards the usage of canines as therapy/treatment of clients. This newly created questionnaire had no proven reliability and unknown validity, which may have affected the findings of the study.

Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Because this study attempted to fill the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study,

recommendations for social work research include further studies of the social worker population. The findings of this study may benefit social work practice as a whole because it may be used as an aide to child welfare agencies as they move towards future alternative forms of interventions such as trauma-informed service. Trauma-informed service both considers and evaluates how trauma has affected a client's life. While seeking to understand this trauma and the vulnerabilities that a client now has, the end goal of the service provider is to deliver the client-appropriate services that they need in such a way that keeps the client from being re-traumatized (Regan, 2010). Canine therapeutic intervention may be utilized as one of these services, not just for traumatized children within child welfare services, but for other populations such as Adult Protective Services (APS) or for those individuals with mental health issues.

The results of this study may also pave the way for policy changes throughout the nation and practice changes within agencies providing services not just to traumatized children within child welfare services but to all those in need of assistance. Policy makers may be able to use these findings to assist them in creating new and innovative

service programs and provide funding for our nation's underserved populations.

It would be a positive step to perform additional research on the topic of canine therapeutic intervention so the gap in knowledge that currently exists can be narrowed. With more quantitative studies using experimental designs, investigators may be able to bridge the practice gap currently seen within child welfare agencies as witnessed by a lack of canine therapeutic intervention.

Conclusions

This study investigated the research question which asked social workers within San Bernardino County CFS their attitudes towards canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. This study found that the attitudes of social workers are positive towards the usage of canines as therapy/treatment for children within child welfare services. Additionally, canine therapeutic intervention may be a viable option for San Bernardino County CFS and other child welfare agencies to consider as a method to assist the traumatized youth they serve.

APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions

This survey is designed to study your attitudes towards using dogs for therapy/treatment of foster children currently receiving services from CFS. Your identity and answers will remain completely anonymous. Please circle or fill in your answers to the questions below.

Demographics

1-What is your current job title?

- 1. SWII 2. SSP 3. SSSP**

2- How many TOTAL YEARS have you been a social worker? _____years _____months

3- How many YEARS have you worked for San Bernardino County CFS? _____years _____months

4- What is your gender?

1. Female 2. Male

5- What is your current age? _____ years

6- What is your highest level of formal education?

1. Some College 2. Associate's Degree 3. Bachelor's Degree 3. Master's Degree 4. PhD

7- What is your ethnicity?

1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Asian or Asian American
3. Black or African American
4. Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
5. Hispanic or Latino
6. White
7. Other: (Specify) _____

General Attitudes

I would now like to ask you some questions about your current knowledge and attitudes towards using dogs for therapy/treatment of foster children currently receiving services from CFS. Please circle the answer that best describes your current knowledge, belief, thought or feeling about each statement.

8- Prior to my CFS career, I was aware of dogs being used for therapy/treatment of clients

- 1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

9- Since my CFS career, I am aware of dogs being used for therapy/treatment of children in CFS

- 1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

10- Prior to my CFS career, I have used dogs for therapy/treatment of clients

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

11- Since my CFS career, I have used dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

12- Using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS improves their physical health

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

13- Using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS improves their mental health

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

14- Using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS is an effective intervention strategy

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

15- I would approve of using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS who are on my caseload

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

16- I think my CFS social worker peers would approve of using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS on their caseload

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

17- I think CFS would support using dogs for therapy/treatment of children in CFS

1 Strongly Disagree 2 Disagree 3 Agree 4 Strongly Agree 5 Do Not Know

Thank you for your participation in this survey. Please put your completed questionnaire into the return envelope provided in this packet and deliver to the "Inter-Office Mail" bin.

Developed by Cristi Maria Page

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMED CONSENT

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the attitudes of social workers towards the use of canine therapeutic intervention with traumatized children within child welfare services. This study is being conducted by Cristi Maria Page under the supervision of Professor Janet Chang, Associate Professor of Social Work, California State University, San Bernardino. The study has been approved by the School of Social Work Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudes of social workers about their knowledge and attitudes towards using dogs as a therapeutic intervention with the children on their caseloads.

Description: If you take part in this study, you will be asked to fill out a brief survey that asks about your attitudes towards using dogs as a therapeutic intervention.

Participation: Participation is totally voluntary, and you are free to skip any questions you do not want to answer.

Anonymity: The information you give will remain anonymous. The anonymous data from these surveys will only be seen by the researcher; the results will be conveyed to San Bernardino County CFS and others in group form only.

Duration: Filling out the survey should take no more than 10 minutes.

Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to taking part in the study and no personal benefits involved.

Contact: If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you can contact Dr. Janet Chang at (909) 537-5184 or jchang@csusb.edu.

Results: The results will be available at California State University, San Bernardino Pfau library after December 2012.

APPENDIX C
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This survey you have just completed was designed to examine the attitudes of social workers towards using dogs as a therapeutic intervention with children. Not much is known about this topic and your survey will help to fill the gap in knowledge currently found within this area of study.

Thank you for your participation. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Cristi Page or Professor Janet Chang at 909-537-5184 in regards to the research. If you would like to obtain a copy of the group results of this study, please contact California State University, San Bernardino Pfau library at the end of Winter Quarter of 2012.

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