



Emotional Support Animals (ESA) and Mental Health



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Abstract

Objective: Analyze the effect of ESAs on mental health
Design: Phenomenological
Setting: FHSU
Participation: Students with mental health disorders
Results: Pending results and data collection

Introduction

As the authors, Chand and Arif (2023) explained, depression and anxiety disorders have become more common among teenagers in recent years, with more than 18.5 percent of adults suffering from depression and 21% among those falling under the age of 29. Depression can cause a total disruption in a patient's everyday life (Chand & Arif, 2023). Depression can be triggered by a number of events in a person's life. Anxiety is excessive, difficult to manage, and frequently linked with multiple general psychological and physical symptoms (Munir & Takov, 2022). Depression and anxiety can be addressed using a variety of approaches, including psychiatric counseling, medications, and exercise. With the increase in prevalence of anxiety and depression disorders, the use of emotional support animals has also been on the rise. There have been several studies about the benefits of emotional support animals (ESAs). The goal of this study is to investigate whether or not the use of emotional support animals causes a sense of increase of well-being in those young adults diagnosed with anxiety or depressive disorders.

Purpose Statement:

The purpose of this study is to compare the well-being and mental status of young adults with anxiety or depression who utilize an emotional support animal.

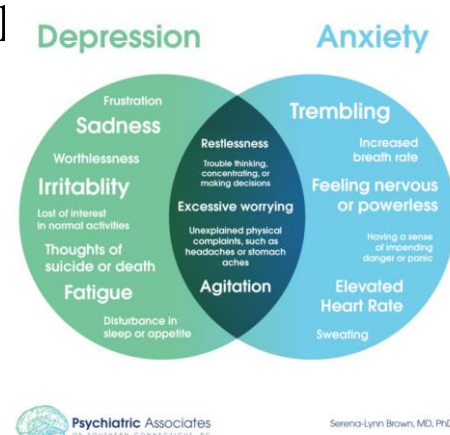
Key Terms:

Anxiety: Anxiety is defined by ongoing sensations of worry, unease, and fear (Munir & Takov, 2022).

Depression: Depression is a psychological disorder that results in persistent sorrow and a loss of enthusiasm in daily activities (Chand & Arif, 2023).

Emotional Support Animal (ESA): an animal used to provide companionship and support for a person struggling with a mental disorder (Carroll et al., 2020)

Well-being: an individual's personal and social functioning, as well as their overall quality of life (Jarden & Roache, 2023).



Brown, S.L. (2022). *Am I Depressed or am I Anxious [Infographic]*. Psychiatric Associates of South Connecticut.

Framework

The Model of Critical Thinking and the Nursing Process describes the needed judgement of the nurse including assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the patients with anxiety disorders and the utilization of therapy animals, to provide the best possible care (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

Methodology

Proposed Research Question:

How do young adults with depression and anxiety disorders experience an increased sense of well being with the accompaniment of an emotional support or therapy animal in house during the first 5 years after diagnosis?

Research Design:

Phenomenological - This research study utilizes meaningful questioning to understand the lived experiences of those patients who have utilized a therapy animal.

Interventions:

- IV: Use of ESAs
- DV: Incidence of an increased sense of well-being

Literature Sources:

An observational study, including a survey, was conducted and showed a marked beneficial effect of emotional support animals in patients with anxiety and depressive disorders (Anderson & Brown, 2021). Another study determined that the use of therapy animals can have a significant improvement on socialization and has several psychological benefits for the patient (Rosetti & King, 2010).

Data Collection:

N= 100
This study observes 100 participants in the first 5 years after diagnosis. In the first year, anxiety and depression levels are scored at FHSU's Student Counseling Center. Then, the ESA is introduced. Levels are then scored periodically and at the end of the 5 years. The data will be compared and analysed for comprehensive differences shown in a data chart concluding the study.

Sample:

100 Young adults with depression and anxiety disorders at Fort Hays State University.

Ethical Considerations:

Seeking expedited review from the Fort Hays University of Nursing, Fort Hays Student Success Center - Student Counseling Services, and Fort Hays State University.

Results/Findings

Projected Data Analysis Method:

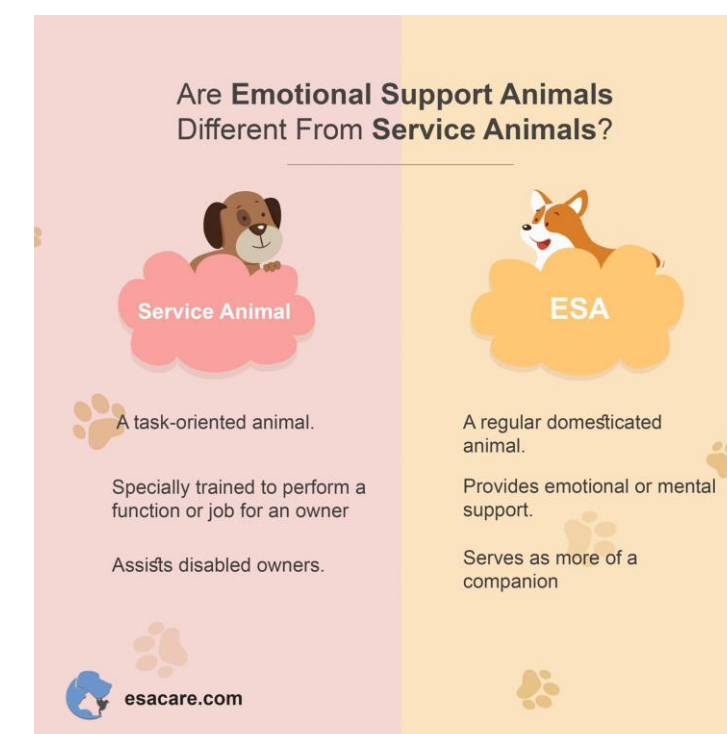
An anxiety and depression score sheet, such as the PHQ 9, DASS, or the Hamilton scale, will be used to compare the scores of students before and after the implementation of emotional support animals.

DASS21		Name:	Date:
Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.			
The rating scale is as follows:			
0	Did not apply to me at all		
1	Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time		
2	Applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time		
3	Applied to me very much or most of the time		
1 (a)	I found it hard to wind down	0	1 2 3
2 (a)	I was aware of dryness of my mouth	0	1 2 3
3 (a)	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feeling at all	0	1 2 3
4 (a)	I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1 2 3
5 (a)	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1 2 3
6 (a)	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1 2 3
7 (a)	I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)	0	1 2 3
8 (a)	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1 2 3
9 (a)	I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself	0	1 2 3
10 (a)	I felt that I had nothing to look forward to	0	1 2 3
11 (a)	I found myself getting agitated	0	1 2 3
12 (a)	I found it difficult to relax	0	1 2 3
13 (a)	I felt down-hearted and blue	0	1 2 3
14 (a)	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing	0	1 2 3
15 (a)	I felt I was close to panic	0	1 2 3
16 (a)	I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything	0	1 2 3
17 (a)	I felt I wasn't worth much as a person	0	1 2 3
18 (a)	I felt that I was rather touchy	0	1 2 3
19 (a)	I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)	0	1 2 3
20 (a)	I felt scared without any good reason	0	1 2 3
21 (a)	I felt that life was meaningless	0	1 2 3

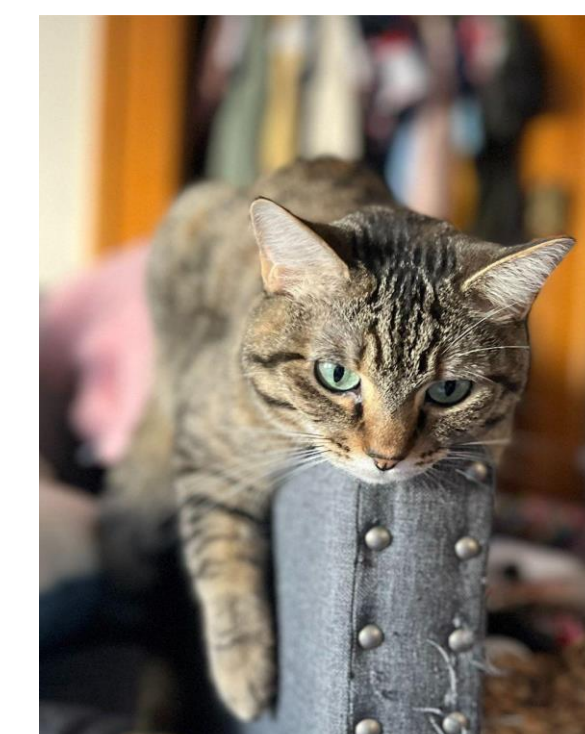
Lovibond, S.H. & Lovibond, P.F. (1995). *Manual for the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (2nd. Ed.)*. Sydney: Psychology Foundation.

Literature Findings:

When utilizing a therapy animal, there is a notable improvement in the patient's physical, psychological, social well-being (Rosetti & King, 2010). When given an emotional support animal during a high anxiety time period, there are marked decreases in the feelings of anxiety (Anderson & Brown, 2021).



Anton. (2020). *Emotional Support Animals vs Service Animals*. [Infographic] Esacare.com



Kaia Miller, 2023. *Personal ESA: Anatomy Barnett* [Photograph]

Discussion

This study has several important implications for the nursing and healthcare field. The study gives non-pharmacological options for improving mental health and providing holistic healthcare. This option may decrease mortality rates and instances of potential harm for patients with mental health disorders and increase communication between nurses and patients.

Conclusion

Currently pending study results and data collection. Literature has shown marked positive results for those currently utilizing ESAs. Depression and anxiety scores have shown significant positive change after the introduction and use of these animals. Future research should consider length and quality of time spent with ESAs for best results. Larger sample groups may provide better detail on this study.

References

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