AAI TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING WITH PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

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- Social Worker since 2009
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THE WHY

- Increasing identification rates of ASD in the U.S.
- Financial impacts of ASD, growing each year
- Higher rates of psychiatric needs than compared to neurotypical peers
- Research on treatment options is controlled by able-bodied majority
- Animal-assisted Interventions (AAI) are showing promising outcomes but is not widely accessible
METHODS

Key Words
Autis* OR asperger OR “pervasive developmental disorder”
AND
“animal assisted” OR “assistance dogs” OR “canine assisted” OR “dolphin assisted” OR “equine assisted” OR hippotherapy
OR “horseback riding” OR “pet facilitated” OR “service dog” OR “therapeutic animal” OR “therapeutic horseback” OR
“therapy with animals”

Databases Utilized
Academic Search Premier, APA PsychArticles, APA PsychInfo, ERIC, Family and Society Studies Worldwide, Social Work
Abstracts, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Primary Search, MED LINE

Inclusion Criteria
Empirical Studies, Published between 2010-2021, Available in English
Records identified through database searching (n = 470)

Records after EBSCO Host Filters (n = 84)

Records screened (n = 84)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 41)

Studies included in qualitative synthesis (n = 5)

Studies included in quantitative synthesis (n = 36)

Records excluded (n = 29)

Full-text articles excluded, reason: Dissertations (n = 14)

Exclusion Criteria | Number of Articles
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Non ASD | 15
Service Dogs | 5
Pets | 4
Robotic Animals Only | 2
Non HAI | 2
Non Empirical | 1
FINDINGS

- Sample sizes have doubled in the last 10 years
- Increases in research study rigor
- 6 studies had inconclusive results
THREE AREAS OF FINDINGS

- Social
- Behavioral
- Emotional

Outcomes of Study

- Positive Social Findings
- Positive Emotional Findings
- Decreased Aberrant Bx
- No Findings
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

- Identified in 26 studies of the sample
- AAA and AAT both showed positive social impacts
- Several areas of social interaction explored
  - Theory of Mind
  - Verbal Communication
  - Non-verbal Communication
BEHAVIORAL OUTCOMES

- Identified in 15 studies within this sample
- Decreases in irritability, hyperactivity, and other restricted and repetitive behaviors
- Increases in executive functioning and activities of daily living
- Protopopova (2019) – How the canine engages in treatment impacts the outcome
EMOTIONAL OUTCOMES

- Only found in 9 of the studies
- Difficult to assess internal experiences of individuals with ASD using standardized measures
- School based programs may increase positive feelings associated with attendance
- Physiological measures gaining momentum
STANDALONE VERSUS COMPLEMENTARY TREATMENT MODELS

- Use of ASD best practices may increase the effectiveness of known treatment models
  - Social Stories
  - Social Skills Curriculum
  - Dance and Movement Therapy
“Autistic people should have the ultimate say in what autism services focus on”

-The Autistic Self Advocacy Network
**LIMITATIONS/GAPS**

- Individuals with level 3 ASD typically left out of samples
- Absence of autistic voice throughout the literature
- The why and how are still unknown
THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING!

QUESTIONS?

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