

An Exploratory Study of the Effect of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Nonverbal Communication in Three Schizophrenic Patients. Kovács, Z., Bulucz, J., Kis, R., Simon, L. *Anthrozoös*, 19(4) 2006:353-64.

Abstract: Animal-assisted therapy has been used in the treatment and rehabilitation of several physical and mental disorders, but its effectiveness for chronic schizophrenic patients has been evaluated in only a few studies. Our purpose was to introduce animal-assisted group therapy in the rehabilitation of severely disabled chronic schizophrenic patients, in order to enhance their communication skills. Five patients diagnosed with schizophrenia (three females, two males, ages ranging from 32 to 71 years), four human members (one therapist, one co-therapist, and the owners of the dogs) and two therapy dogs (a five-year-old, female Boxer and a two-year-old, female Bichon Frise) participated in the therapy on a weekly basis, for a six-month period. The therapy was oriented toward improving non-specific (i.e., general well-being) and specific (i.e., communication patterns) areas of the patients' daily activities. The outcome measure was the change in the patients' nonverbal communication, as measured by an analysis of standardized, video-recorded scenarios registered at the beginning of the therapy, and six months later, at the end of it. Because two patients completed less than half of the sessions, we analyzed the data of only three patients. Positive changes occurred in some post-treatment nonverbal parameters compared with pre-treatment parameters. All three patients improved in the usage of space during communication, while partial improvement in other domains of nonverbal communication (anatomy of movements, dynamics of gestures, regulator gestures) was also observed. Animal-assisted therapy can improve certain aspects nonverbal communication in schizophrenic patients. The results of our exploratory study show a need for further investigation, using controlled studies with a larger number of patients.