Cortisol Concentrations in Saliva of Humans and Their Dogs in Intensive Training Courses in Animal-Assisted Therapy. Haubenhofer, D., Möstl, E., Kirchengast, S. Veterinary Medicine Austria = Wiener Tierärztliche Monatsschrift, 92(3) 2006 Mar:66-73.

Abstract: The cortisol concentrations in saliva of dogs and their owners was measured as a parameter of disturbance while they attended the 5 day training courses of the association “Animals as Therapy” in Vienna (Austria) to become “therapeutic teams” in animal-assisted therapy.

Samples were taken from 32 humans and their dogs (18 female and 15 male animals) during 3 training courses. The concentration of cortisol in saliva was measured using an enzyme immunoassay.

Among humans, increased values of cortisol were measured on the fifth day of the courses, which was the final exams. Contrary, the levels of cortisol in saliva of the dogs did not differ significantly between individual days. The animals showed a non-significant trend to increased salivary cortisol levels during the first 3 days of the courses compared to the other days of their training and even had their lowest cortisol-median of all investigated days on the fifth day. This may be caused by the fact that the dogs got used to the new socio-ecologic circumstances that had bothered them at the beginning of their training. Neither among humans, nor among dogs significant differences in cortisol levels were measured regarding to sex and age of the participating subjects. Significantly more female than male dogs completed their training. This may lead to the conclusion that the demands on the dogs could be more easily fulfilled by females than males.

The results indicate that the training courses for working in animal-assisted therapy provided disturbance for the participating humans on the day of their exams. On average, no such disturbing situations could be detected among the dogs. We therefore conclude that this training is not stressful for the animals.