Animal-Assisted Therapy for Military Veterans with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: An Investigation on the Positive Effects of Attachment and Affiliation Behaviors

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**Introduction**

PTSD is a chronic disorder and is associated with impaired quality of life. PTSD develops in people who have experienced a traumatic event. Symptoms associated with PTSD include re-experiencing feelings related to traumatic event, avoidance of specific places and/or people associated with the event, and hyper arousal. Other Symptoms include social isolation, depression, fear, anxiety, and irritability. A specific population at high risk for developing PTSD is military veterans. AAT has been shown to promote relaxation, calmness, and optimism. In psychiatric patients, AAT has been shown to decrease fear and anxiety.

**Statement of Purpose**

The aim of this study is to explore the benefits of animal-assisted therapy for military veterans with documented PTSD and investigate the positive effects of attachment and affiliation behaviors.

**Literature Review**

**Quality of Life**

- AAT increased veterans sociability, reduced feelings of isolation, and improved trust in others (Lanning & Krenek, 2013).
- AAT improved veterans general health, increased in energy levels, and decreased interference of emotional health (Lanning & Krenek, 2013).
- AAT created feelings of calmness and showed improvements in work performance (Beck et al., 2012).

**Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

- AAT improved the severity of PTSD symptoms (Earles et al., 2015) (Hamama et al., 2011) (Stern et al., 2013).
- Veterans reported having a canine improved stress levels, irritability, anger, and loneliness (Stern et al., 2013).

**Attachment and Affiliation Behaviors**

- After the human-canine interaction, neurochemicals in both humans and canines increased (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003).
- Both had an increase in B-endorphin, oxytocin, B-phenylethylamine, and dopamine (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003).
- Humans also had an increase in prolactin and a decrease in cortisol, suggesting a reduction in stress (Odendaal & Meintjes, 2003).
- Human-canine relationship is a special bond, which cannot be recreated in human relationships (Maharaj & Haney, 2015).

**Depression**

- AAT improved depressive symptoms (Penderson et al., 2012) (Barker et al., 2003).

**Acknowledgements**

I dedicate this project to my loving boyfriend Michael, who is my constant source of strength and support. Secondly, to my mom… without her, none of this would be possible. Lastly, to Dr. Luaine Linnard-Palmer for encouraging me to step outside of my comfort zone.

**References and Contact Information**

References are available upon request.

Photos downloaded from googleimages.com

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