

ANIMAL THERAPY FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM: A VIEW OF PARENTS

Luiza do Amaral Vidal

Graduated by Universidade Federal de Pelotas. Postgraduate in Nursing in Pediatrics and Neonatology by: Faculdade Dom Alberto. Currently uniprofessional resident in child and adolescent health at: Faculdades Pequeno Príncipe

Deisi Cardoso Soares

Nurse. Adjunct Professor at the Faculty of Nursing:- Universidade Federal de Pelotas. Doctor of Science

Viviane Ribeiro Pereira

Nurse. Professor of the Nursing course at: Centro Universitário da Serra Gaúcha-FSG. Doctor of Science

Célia Scapin Duarte

Professor at the Public Health Department at: Faculdade de Enfermagem-Universidade Federal Pelotas RS. Phd. PhD in Health Sciences

Ana Paula Lopes Lima

Nurse. Professor of the Nursing course at: Centro Universitário de Goiatuba, GO - Unicerrado. Master in Applied Health Sciences by UFG

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



Abstract: Objective: to know the perception of parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in relation to Animal Assisted Therapy. **Method:** qualitative, descriptive and exploratory research, carried out in an autistic care center in the south of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The sample consisted of parents who agreed to participate and who were over 18 years old. The collection consisted of interviews made with open and recorded questions. The responses were transcribed in full into Microsoft Word software for analysis and interpretation individually. **Results:** therapy provided children with improvements in affective, cognitive, social interaction and communication aspects. **Conclusion:** it is necessary that more projects and actions include children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. Parents reported that adopting pets increased the safety, autonomy, and responsibility of children with the Disorder. **KEYWORDS:** Child; Autistic Spectrum; Therapy.

INTRODUCTION

Animal-assisted therapy was first recorded in England by William Tuke, who used animals to help treat patients with mental illnesses. He observed that the contact between animal and patient transmitted human values, self-control and evidenced a probable improvement in physical and mental health¹. It was only in the 1960s, in Brazil, that therapy was empirically integrated into health services. In 1980, the first scientific evidence on animal-assisted therapy appeared. It was one of the alternatives for treating psychiatric patients.² The presence of a bond between man and animal contributed satisfactorily to the prognosis of mental health. Responding Positively to Depression, Schizophrenia, and Autism. Animal-assisted therapy, when applied to people, has a promising effect on

psychomotor and sensory development³. Helps in the treatment of physical, mental and emotional disorders, improving socialization skills and recovering self-esteem. That is, regardless of the individual's age, it is beneficial and can be applied in different types of environments, from health services to other types of open or closed establishments. The animals most used for therapy are dogs and horses, but others can be included in therapy. The *DeltaSociety*, the organization responsible for certifying therapy animals, allows a variety of them, as long as they do not pose a risk to the individual during treatment⁴. Autistic Spectrum Disorder has different etiologies and manifests itself in varying degrees of severity. In 2018 it was integrated into the new International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health-related Problems, the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems⁵. It is a disease that affects millions of people around the world, in Brazil alone, in 2020, about 2 million people had the diagnosis of the disease. Among the diversity for the treatment of the disease, animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is one of the alternatives that minimize the effects of signs and symptoms, improving the quality of life of the affected person. The therapy is configured in the use of previously trained domestic animals for coexistence in different situations, allowing to be touched, without putting the person at risk during the treatment. The versatility of animal-assisted therapy allows it to be applied to different areas of the body, especially those related to psychomotor and sensory development. The research aimed to know the perception of parents of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder in relation to Animal Assisted Therapy.

METHOD

Qualitative, descriptive and exploratory

research. Information was obtained through interviews with open and semi-structured questions. And recorded with the recording device of the mobile phone. Each interview did not exceed 30 minutes. The sample consisted of four parents, who agreed to participate in the study after authorization from the institution and signing of the Free and Informed Consent Form. The study site was at an Autistic Care Center of a state reference municipal service, in Rio Grande do Sul, for the care of children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder. The participants were identified by the initials of the names and were selected, those who were parents of autistic children being followed up at the autistic care center. And participants in a project called "Pet Therapy", from the Veterinary faculty of a university in the south of the state. Parents under 18 years of age were excluded. Microsoft Word 2013 software was used to analyze the interviews, which were transcribed in full and analyzed individually. The research followed the ethical precepts of Resolution 466/2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey participants ranged in age from 30 to 45 years. And the children who participated in the project were from two to eight years old and the degree of the disorder was mild to moderate. The children always participated in the activities, but their parents were not in the habit of accompanying them during the activities. The Parents believed that the therapy was satisfactory for the child and his family.

"When I found out that I had it and the day I got her, she was so happy, because her passion is dogs. Now it's the horses first, then the dogs. But she likes it a lot, she's happy (T.R.)."

Every Monday it seems like someone else, leave here calm, serene, peaceful. Monday is his day, he's been fighting, like, in that sense of I don't want to, but after he got in there...

(R.A.).

She is not much to show, she is very closed. But she really liked it, I don't know if she went to the room, the dogs or the activity itself, but she likes to go to the room (L.N.).

At first he felt more afraid, now he's getting better, he's different (J.S.)

The use of animals for therapies has become a method in the treatment of cases of Autistic Spectrum Disorder in children, as it improves the physical, psychological, cognitive, social and clinical aspects of the child⁶. Dog therapy awakens the child's interest and attention⁷

Regarding the child's evolution with the therapy, the participants said that the therapy was a positive alternative because the child improved the interrelationships.

He manages to have contact with other people, other activities. The evolution at the school where he studies was already better and after that it improved even more (R.A.).

He interacts with the other kids now a lot more than he did before. He didn't play with anyone, he played alone. And then that changed a lot (J.S.).

Now she is interacting more. Yes, she is better, since she started here she has improved a lot (T.R.).

Ah, it has changed, she has changed a lot, even with other children (L.N.).

Therapy improves communication skills and sensitivity. Although some people with the Disorder are unable to speak and have an aversion to touch⁸. Contact with dogs causes children to demonstrate behaviors that lessen repetitive symptoms typical of the Disorder⁹. Study carried out to evaluate the stimulation of the presence of the dog during therapy sessions with children with TEA⁹. They found that the therapeutic approach increased the child's interest, attention and motivation. Therapy socializes and improves the individual's affectivity, enabling affective bonds that stimulate the expression of emotions. Parents in this research mentioned improvements in

children's interaction with family, peers and teachers. They began to have a better quality of life because they integrated with others in their age group. During the observation of a child interacting with the dog, it was noticed that his attention was focused on him. The child with autistic spectrum disorder is directed towards thinking and acting, it requires him to make decisions even if they seem light, these are significant developments. Autistic Spectrum Disorder causes advances in other dimensions contributing to the improvement of motor coordination, stimulates memory and communication, helps the child with regard to security, confidence, socialization, motivation, decrease of anxiety and even development of feelings of compassion⁹.

In this research, there was an improvement in the attention of the assisted child, due to his interaction with animals. Children woke up to play and improved interpersonal relationships. And the adoption of animals by the parents to continue the therapy at home was significant for the evolution of the children's treatment. On the benefits of children living with animals, below are the transcripts:

"We adopted a little animal, he was a little scattered with her and now he develops everything he does here he reproduces at home. Everything, practically everything, I see, that he does when he stays with her, he reproduces faithfully, what he does here he does at home with the dog (R.A.)."

"He kept running away from the dog too much, the dog we have stays indoors and then he kept kicking the dog, wanting to hit the dog, stuff like that. He got better about it (J.S.)."

"When she's on the patio, she plays even more with her dog. She takes the string, makes the knot and puts it on. Because before she didn't play (T.R)."

"She got a kitten this week, she has a passion for cats and she is getting along well with the kitten, caresses her and everything."

After we adopted the kitten, she improved her speech, because she doesn't say anything before and now she says a few words already (L.N.)."

They described that the pet serves as an emotional refuge and integration for the child and his family. Children who had pets had a high level of cognitive, social and motor development¹⁰. Living with a pet increases the child's autonomy and improves confidence¹¹. Having a pet at home helped therapy with significant changes. For the parents, the inclusion of the child in the pet therapy project was favorable:

is of extreme importance. Very good. I think that from his age group in my view, that I see entering there, of course each one with their tolerance, it is of paramount importance (R.A.)."

For me it's totally positive, for sure. We've been expecting this since he joined. But I think it's positive. If it was possible to continue with the pet, I would continue (J.S.)."

It contributes to me. I think it must continue, there are children who like it, it's good. It's good even for children who don't like dogs very much (T.R.)."

I think it benefits a lot, because the pet is good for everyone, right? I think it's very good and I see that many children like the dog, we also feel good to see it that way. I think it brings a great benefit here, for everyone (L.N.)."

Other studies have shown the relevance of treatments for individuals with autism spectrum disorder with therapy using animals¹². The children's access to the pet therapy project and the activities carried out showed affective, autonomous, physical and motor developments. And their families improve their quality of life.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research on human-assisted therapy using animals in individuals affected by autism

spectrum disorder, in the view of parents, showed that their children showed positive, physical, cognitive and interpersonal changes. The adoption of a pet was beneficial for the child and his family, as they maintained the continuity of therapy at home, with improvements in the child's autonomy and responsibility. The study highlighted the need for more spaces, actions and projects that provide inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder.

REFERENCES

PEREIRA, V.R. Intervenções Assistidas por Animais com crianças em contextos de vulnerabilidade social: utilizando o método photovoice, 2017. Dissertação (Mestrado em Enfermagem) Programa de Pós-Graduação em Enfermagem, Faculdade de Enfermagem, Universidade Federal de Pelotas, Pelotas, 2017.

MARINHO, J.R.S.; ZAMO, R.S. Terapia assistida por animais e transtornos do neurodesenvolvimento. *Estud. pesqui. psicol.* [online]. 2017, v.17, n.3, p.1063- 1083.

NOBRE, M.O. et al. Projeto pet terapia: intervenções assistidas por animais: uma prática para o benefício da saúde e educação humana. *Expressa Extensão.* v.22, n.1, p. 78-89, 2017.

NOGUEIRA, M.T.D., et al. O cão como aspecto motivador de crianças com transtorno do espectro autismo. *Revista de estudios e investigación en psicología y educación.* 2017, Vol. Extr., No. 01. Disponível em: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fernanda_Krug/publication/321846388_O_cao_como_aspecto_motivador_de_crianças_com_transtorno_do_espectro_autismo/links/5aea62a5aca2725dabb648c6/O-cao-como-aspecto-motivador-de-crianças-com-transtorno-do-espectro-autismo.pdf>. Acesso em: 25 nov 2019.

CHELINI, M. O. M.; OTTA, E. *Terapia Assistida por Animais.* São Paulo: Manole. 2016.

OLIVEIRA, G.N. Cinoterapia: Benefícios da interação entre crianças e cães. *Teorias e Sistemas no Campo Psi.* 2017. Disponível em: <<http://www.redepsi.com.br/2007/06/23/cinoterapia-beneficios-da-intera-o-entre-crian-as-e-c-es/>>. Acesso em: 25 nov 2019.

ONZI, F.Z.; GOMES, R.F. Transtorno do Espectro Autista: A Importância do Diagnóstico e Reabilitação. *Caderno pedagógico, Lajeado,* v. 12, n. 3, p. 188- 199, 2015.

MANDRÁ, P. P., MORETTI, T. C. F., AVEZUM, L. A., & KUROISHI, R. C. S. (2019). Terapia assistida por animais: revisão sistemática da literatura. 31(3), e20180243. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2317-1782/20182018243>.

ŞAHIN, S., KOSE, B, ZARIF, M. (2018). Animal-assisted therapy in occupational therapy. In M. Huri (Ed.), *Occupational therapy: therapeutic and creative use of activity* (pp. 91-106).