

HEALTH AND MOOD-BOOSTING POWERS OF DOGS AS PETS**TAPAS MUKHERJEE^{a1} AND KISHAN LAL RATHI^b**^aDepartment of English, Dr. K.C.B. Govt. P.G. College, Bhilai, Chhattisgarh, India^bDepartment of Commerce, Govt. Dr. W.W. Patankar Girls' College, Durg, Chhattisgarh, India**ABSTRACT**

Animals, especially, the pet-animals pay an important role in human life. The human-animal bond and pets as companions, have great impact on the quality of people's life, physically, mentally and socially as well. Cats, Dogs, Birds, and Fish are the common pets known. Amongst these, dogs as pets, have been best known for their therapeutic roles and valued for their loyalty and companionship. Caring for a dog can help children grow up more secure and active, and also be helpful for the older adults, to keep them occupied and fit. Besides being the animals best trained to detect seizures and crime, the dogs have immense power to boost physical and mental health. Dogs, particularly, can reduce stress, anxiety, depression and ease loneliness. They encourage exercise and playfulness, thereby boosting the mind and health benefits in human life. This supports the fact that other than any animals, dogs have evolved to become acutely attuned to humans, our behavior and emotions.

KEYWORDS: Companions, Therapeutic roles, Loyalty, Anxiety, Stress, Exercise.

The best effect of human-animal interactions known till-date is the relationship of humans shared with their pets. Pets, not only provide with immense health benefits, but also improvise the spirit of positivity and socialization in lifestyle. Most people think of their pets as members of the family (Risley *et al.*, 2006). It has been reported that people who have a pet, have healthier hearts, less often are home-sick, and make fewer visits to the doctor. They get more exercise and are less depressed (American Pet Products, 2011). Pets have been recently used in 'Pet therapy', where the pets, especially cats and dogs, are commonly used not only to lessen stress and anxiety, but also to increase self-esteem and improve social skills (Anna, 2016). Perhaps most importantly, the dogs as pets are known to have the power of boosting mood and physical health.

In the present paper, the evidence for the impact of 'Dogs' as pets, on human health and mood, in general, has been assessed. Although a systematic review was not attempted. The studies considered were obtained from the additional and original articles from the available literature, mentioned in reference lists.

DOGS AS MOOD AND MENTAL-HEALTH BOOSTERS

Caring and interacting with friendly pets like 'Dogs' can help to cope with many emotional and mental issues. Dogs are able to understand many words and gestures used by humans. They are even

better at interpreting our tone of voice, body language, and all the more, even our state of mind. Like any good human friend, a loyal dog have the ability to look into your eyes to gauge your emotional state and feelings.

Providing Companionship

The dogs as the best 'companions', give pleasure of playing and snuggling. Companionship can help prevent illness, and even add years to one's life, thereby reducing the symptoms of isolation, loneliness and depression. Even hardened criminals in prison have shown long term changes in their behavior after interacting with dogs.

Researchers have also used animals to temporarily provide companionship to children and elderly adults, with health or mental health problems. Positive findings were discovered i.e., by interacting with a dog, reduced level of pain and anxiety among the hospitalized patients. More social behavior and interaction, and less loneliness was reported (Johnson, 2011).

Reducing Anxiety and Sensory Stress Relief

Stroking, hugging, or otherwise touching the dogs, can rapidly calm and soothe us when we are stressed, depressed or anxious. Touch and movement are considered as two healthy ways to quickly reduce stress. Stroking and patting a dog lowers blood pressure, thus making one feel calmer quickly and less stressed. Dogs' company offer comfort and build self-confidence for people anxious about going out

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into the world. Pet dogs help in release of andorphins that produce a calming effect. It thus alleviates pain and improves your overall psychological state. Caring for the pets releases serotonin and dopamine, which helps combat depression.

Social Connections

Dogs are known as the important source of social support that enhances well-being. Pet dogs help to maintain cordial social connections with people and children around. While on walks or hikes with dog people around are fascinated by the pet's gestures and activities, making them just stop and talk to each other.

One of the investigations from the dementia unit for US veterans, reported that the use of dogs among the elderly victims, elicited socialization. Most of the demented patients exhibited a significant social behavior, such as the smiling or speaking in the presence of the dog (Kongable *et al.*, 1989). Thus, the pet dogs act as great 'social lubricants' for their owners and people around, helping to start and maintain new friendships and acquaintance.

As Source of Meaning and Joy in Life

With the gradual process of ageing, humans realize that they are losing things that previously occupied their time and gave life certain purpose to live. Loneliness and solitude slowly clouds one's life. In such times, caring for a dog can bring pleasure, and give some meaning to lead life with optimism and sense of self worth. The dogs for company can relieve from boredom.

ROLE OF DOGS IN IMPROVING PHYSICAL HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Dogs when accompany human beings anywhere, have great impact on physical health. Heart health is improved, blood pressure and heart rate is regulated during stressful situations. Certain studies have reported that having the dog for company has more affect in lowering blood pressure than the blood pressure medication i.e., ace inhibitor (Allen *et al.*, 2001). Taking a dog for a walk or run, often are rewarding ways to fitness. 30 minutes of walking lowers the risk of many diseases. The ever remaining active state of dogs, help to lower

cholesterol and triglyceride levels of the dog owner. Walking an overweight dog helped their owners lose weight. Better recovery rates, lesser incidence of heart attacks, because of physical activities with dogs, show improved physical health impact, and hence a lower mortality rate.

Exercise capacity is observed to increase in the individuals suffering a myocardial infarction, but have walked with their dogs for fifteen minutes three times daily (Ruzic *et al.*, 2011). Those who were exposed to the dog had a lower systolic pulmonary artery or capillary wedge pressures, and reduced serum epinephrine concentrations (Abate *et al.*, 2011). Exercising and regular movement along with the activities of dogs, strengthen both joints and muscles. Thus, osteoporosis and arthritis are relieved to a great extent. The American Heart Association has released a statement acknowledging the relationship and causality of pet ownership in the attenuation of cardio-vascular disease risk (Levine *et al.*, 2013).

THERAPEUTIC IMPORTANCE OF DOGS IN PET THERAPY

Pet therapy, also referred to as 'Animal-Assisted Therapy' (AAT), is one of the latest and soothing way of treatment. It is a formal, structured set of sessions that helps people reach specific goals of their treatment of many ailments. Dog-pets are used by many counselors and therapists to help people cope with different disabilities. Pet therapy is effective in improving motor skills, joint movements, verbal communications and social skills. Stress disorders in the patients undergoing chemotherapy and chronic cardiac problems can be cured by pet therapy with pet dogs. Stroke victims too can regain motor skills.

Cancer detection

Dogs are very helpful in detection of cancer. Dogs are trained to sniff out cancer in the same way as they are trained to smell out drugs. Colorectal cases of cancer are reported to be detected by dogs.

Effective in Alzheimer's disease or Dementia

The variety of behavioral problems exhibited by Alzheimer's patients are controlled to a certain extent if there is a dog in the home. Dogs

provide a source of positive, non verbal communication. Gentle touch and playful interaction with the well-trained docile dog can help soothe the aggressive behavior of Alzheimer's disease. The main benefits of pet therapy to demented individuals is improving their ability to socialize (Bernstein *et al.*, 2000).

Sensory stimuli for Autism

Friendly dogs help the autistic child get used to feeling sensations against their skin. Dogs help autistic child to interact with people. Children, thus easily overcome with learning disabilities.

Good listeners for Aphasia

Aphasia is language disorder, where the child or patient find it difficult to speak. Dogs, for pet therapy, are trained to understand and communicate with the patient.

Less risk of Allergies and Asthma

Usually it is said that in dogs' company, children or elderly adults usually get susceptible to allergies and asthma. But the detailed studies and research show that the children who grow up with pets have less risk of allergies and asthma.

Pet dogs for Health benefits in children

The children in company of pets or pet dogs become immune to the risks of allergies and infections. They also learn responsibility, compassion and empathy from having a pet dog. Dogs are always loving and their mere presence in home can help provide a sense of security in children. Children with dogs at home, suffer less separation anxiety when parents aren't around. Having the love and companionship of a loyal dog can make a child feel important, confident, with a positive self-image. Overly aggressive or hyperactive kids are known to calm down in company of pet dogs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Dogs, as pets, are the best companions of human beings. They have created strong bonds with humans that owes to the pets immense loyalty and faithfulness. The therapeutic roles of the dogs is also quite remarkable. In a 2002 study, the people with a dog were found to have lower resting heart rates and blood pressure, when under stress (Allen *et al.*,

2002). In presence of dogs, reports showed that children had regulated blood pressure measures and less behavioral distress. However, research on the health benefits of child and pet interaction is still limited (Nagengast *et al.*, 1997). Studies report that dog walking is associated with lower complication risk among patients with cardiovascular disease. Findings suggest that the social support provided by a pet dog can make a person feel more relaxed and decrease stress. This helps in reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness (Serpell, 2011). Elderly individuals are not only able to perform actively the daily activities, but the companion dogs also have a great impact on their psychological health. Research show that a care-taking role may give older individuals a sense of responsibility and purpose for their overall well-being (Raina *et al.*, 1999). Reports from hospital nurses, show that pet dogs relieve loneliness and boredom, foster social interaction, and add variety to the lives of patients. Hence pet therapy is an upcoming and fast practice for treatments nowadays (Baun *et al.*, 2003). Thus, children and adults alike can benefit from caring and playing with dogs, which can be both a source of calmness and relaxation. The dogs as pets, so have the strong powers of stimulation for the brain and body. The dogs can add real joy and unconditional love to human life.

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