Impact of Pet Ownership and Pet Therapies on Physical and Mental Wellness

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Abstract

Stress is a state of mental tension that leads to anxiety, worry, pessimism and lowered self-worth as well as self-esteem. It is hitting every walk of life with equal force and causing same damage. Be it a youngster, a school-goer, an adult, a young adult or any member of generation X, many are falling victims of this silent killer. Out of many stress-relief and stress management therapies which include Aroma Therapy, Counselling, Peer Therapy and Medications, one is considered to be Pet-Therapy. Various studies have revealed that Animal aided therapies and interventions have impeccable health and mental fitness benefits. However, these benefits are not only restricted to the depressed or stressed persons only, but it offers a range of benefits to the overall wellbeing of all the pet owners. The study is a platform to shed light on all the pros of keeping and petting pets. It will unveil the significant impact of pets on a person’s physical, social, emotional and mental wellbeing as a physically, mentally and emotionally sound person can gain academic, economic, personal and professional success. Hence, the objective of this study the benefits of keeping a pet in the light of literary evidences.

Keywords: Pets, Animals, Mental Wellness, Physical Wellness, Stress Management, Stress liberation

Introduction

Keeping a pet makes a person engaged and happy, but the science is proving time to time that keeping a pet can turn or keep a person healthier in all the ways: physically, emotionally and mentally. This is the reason that animals like dogs, cats, horses, birds and fish are being made to intervened increasingly in community, children and aged health settings. Even the detention homes, rehabilitation centers, nursing homes, deaddiction centers, old-age homes, orphanages are keeping pets to accompany the humans and also to heal them emotionally.

“*The use of pets in medical settings actually dates back more than 150 years....One could even look at Florence Nightingale recognizing that animals provided a level of social support in the institutional care of the mentally ill (Julie Rovner, 2012. Pet Therapy)*“

Human-Animal Companionship

The affectionate bond between humans and animals age back to thousand of years ago. Greger Larson, the director of the University of Oxford’s Palaeogenomics and Bio-archaeology Research Network, says that the archaeological and genetical records about the development of companionship between human and animals are often collected to learn about societies evolution. The bond between human and animal is not only about domestication but it is also about the way society sees the animals and out of many other roles like the role of helping in fields, the role of guarding, another role has evolved with the passage of time and that role is the role of a companion. It is often said that the dog is man’s friend. This is said because of the human’s more proximity towards a dog as compared to the other animals. Other than dogs the animals which were quite close to humans since ages are the horses. The horses have been human’s war partner since ages. All the kings,
queens, warriors, knights had their favorite horses which they loved to ride in their leisure time and also used to go on hunts.

“One study was published by University of Maine researchers in 2011 found evidence that dogs were being bred, and, eaten on occasion, by humans living in Texas some 9,400 years ago. The giveaway was a small dog bone found in ancient human fecal matter. The bone fragment provided the oldest known record of dogs in the New World ... the dog bones found in Colorado are believed to be perhaps some 11,000 years old (Alicia Ault, Smithsonian, 2016).”

This gives the archaeological evidence that since the time started, the animals have been quite close to the humans.

**Physical health benefits of owning pet**

Keeping a pet drastically affects the mood of the owner. It won’t be wrong to say that pet-ownership leads to better physical and emotional states. Pets help the owners to kill loneliness, ease stress and anxiety, to be physically active and to be playful. The unconditional love of pets heals the wounded hearts of the owners. Keeping a pet makes a person to lead a healthier lifestyle. A few of the underlined health benefits of pet keeping are as following:

*Increased Physical Activity:* Being a pet owner adds to a daily habit of taking a pet for the walk at least twice a day and if someone has more than one pets then he or she has to run a lot while those walks. This can be very much beneficial for the college students, as taking dogs for the walk can help the college goers to cope with the academic stress. The relationship between walking and stress bursting is quite direct. Many people like to ease away their stress by walking a few miles.

*Adds discipline to the routine:* Keeping a pet adds a discipline to the daily routine of many lousy teenagers and youngsters. As they have to wakeup in the morning to take their pets for walk, they have clean and maintain the house, maintain the garden and many other little household chores which often people ignore when they live alone (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991).

**Benefits to Mental Health**

Apart from making people physically healthy, the pets also play a vital role in keeping a person’s stress at bay and thus leading to a sound mind.

According to Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2000), mental health can be defined as the state of mind where successful mental functioning is leading to productivity, creativity and thus leading to happy personal and professional lives. A sound mind has the ability to adapt any change effortlessly as compared to the stressed mind.

Companions and lament partners: Pets are the companions in loneliness, one can’t be home-alone with a pet. Moreover, they are the silent listeners to all the laments. Which ultimately reduce the anxiety and stress of being lovely. Sine ages stories of people living with their pets have been heard and read (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991).

Social Support: A right and positive social support often leads to a better mental health condition. Social support is often defined as the availability of or being surrounded by those who make someone feel valued, cared and loved (McDowell & Newell, 1996a ). Pets are known for providing such support. For examples the tail waggling of dogs on the arrival of the owner often melts down the tiffs of the day.
Pets help to combat depression: According to Lasher (1998), there have been a number of theories which shed light on the human-animal bond. The bond of humans with others drastically affects the mental health. Nowadays, it has been very common for people to fall victims of depression after losing a spouse or an emotional partner, even facing loss in business, after being unemployed for long and also because of being unsuccessful academically. There are reasons which may lead to mild to acute depression.

“Depression is a mental illness that is characterized by symptoms of depressed mood, loss of interest, feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, disturbances in sleep patterns or eating habits, lack of energy, and poor concentration (World Health Organization, 2003).”

However, the companion animals or pets motivates the owners to rebuild a connection with their inner-selves and help them to build trust on themselves with their unconditional love. It has been often seen that the attachment with the pets is directly proportional to the reduction of self-harming emotions like anxiety and aggression. It can be said that animals help humans to be more humane.

According to Garrity, Stallones, Marx & Johnson (1989), the elevated attachment level with pet can be directly proportional to the surged level of amusement and thus may lead to the plummet in depression.

**Conclusion**

Be it an adult, a youngster, a young adult or an aged person, everyone needs the emotional support. Lack of Emotional support may lead to several behavioral disorders which include depression, stress, panic attacks, low self-esteemed, Fear of being left out and sense of being unwanted, all these are very fatal not only for the person himself but also for the society. As such behavioral disorders may elevate the crime in the society and many common men are turned criminals due to these issues. So, mental health is directly related to the social structure and society’s wellbeing. Similarly, one’s own health is the key to personal and professional growth. Health is not about being only physically fit or only mentally strong, it is an amalgamation of mental, physical, social and emotional fitness. Hence, keeping a pet helps a person to strengthen all these factors which ultimately leads to a quality life. A pet provides mental, physical and emotional support, it makes a person feels wanted, loved and cared, which in turn make the person being more optimistic and enthusiastic towards life, such a person is always adaptable to the change and thus proved to be an asset for the society.

**Bibliography**