The Effectiveness of a Service Dog Training Program on Pain in Service Members diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

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BACKGROUND

➢ Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, or other violent personal assault (APA, 2017)
➢ PTSD is a serious mental health condition that affects Service Members in the U.S. Military (National Veterans Foundation, 2016).
➢ Opioid usage for pain in the military raises concerns for PTSD symptoms as chronic pain in SMs increase (Bernardy, 2019)

OBJECTIVE

➢ To examine pain levels of Service Members (SMs) diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) pre and post Service Dog Training Program (SDTP) sessions, using a mixed-methods approach (quantitative: Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale pain scale and qualitative: semi-structured interviews)

1. Determine if the SDTP is associated with improved self-reported pain
2. Determine if the SDTP sessions are useful as an adjunctive treatment of pain among SMs with PTSD

INCLUSION

➢ A population of active duty, reserve, and National Guard men and women from the Occupational Therapy unit and Warrior Transition Brigade at WRMMMC, as well as from an adult outpatient behavioral health clinic.
  ○ Must be between the ages of 18-45 years
  ○ Confirmed primary or secondary diagnosis of PTSD by a healthcare provider
➢ Score at least an 18 on the PTSD Checklist (PCL-C) using the DSM-IV-TR criteria

METHODS

Quantitative:

- Defense and Veterans Pain Rating Scale (DVPRS) self-reported pain scores pre and post SDTP session
- An average score of four and above signify that significant pain is present.
- A score of three and below indicate insignificant pain present.

Qualitative:

- Semi-structured exit interview post SDTP (end of 6 sessions)
- Transcribed audio recordings from interviews
- Phenomenological response related to pain were deduced from the transcripts obtained during the Exit Interview

RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE

Participant Characteristics

➢ n = 10
➢ Average age of participant = 30.4 years
➢ Average years of service = 11.2 years
➢ 90% are Active duty and 10% are National Guard
➢ 70% are Army, 20% are Marine Corps, and 10% are Navy

DVPRS:

➢ Decrease in average pain scores post SDTP for all sessions
➢ Increased pain score differences in averages
➢ Increased frequency of a pain score difference greater than 4

RESULTS: QUALITATIVE

Semi-Structured Interview:

➢ PTSD symptoms, such as hyperventilation and shortness of breath related to panic attacks are decreased
➢ Some participants had no pain to start with or no differences
➢ Distraction from constant pain
➢ Decrease in physical impairments, such as migraines

LIMITATIONS

➢ Sample size
➢ Gender distribution
➢ Long-term effects and future re-evaluations
➢ Self-reported pain
➢ Varying adjunctive treatment options

CONCLUSIONS

➢ Self-reported DVPRS pain scores indicate a decrease and greater difference in pain over time
➢ STDp is a distraction of pain leading to improved PTSD symptoms
➢ SDTP is potentially useful as an adjunctive pain treatment option; there is not enough evidence and requires further research

REFERENCES:

References: https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd

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