

P01-364 - A PET THERAPY INTERVENTION ON ELDERLY INPATIENTS: AN EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Objectives: The aim of the present study is to evaluate the effects of Pet Therapy intervention on cognitive function, mood and perceived quality of life on elderly subjects (mean age 84.7 years; 95.2% women) living in a nursing home.

Methods: Participants were 21 subjects affected by mental illness including dementia, depression and psychosis (diagnosis based on the International Statistical Classification of Disease - ICD-10). The Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) and the 15-items Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) were administered to ten persons (pet-group) and eleven subjects (control-group) together with a self-perceived quality of life questionnaire. The pet-group underwent a dog-assisted educational intervention lasting 90 minutes, once a week for six weeks. MMSE and GDS mean scores were compared between and within groups by Student's t-test.

Results: The mean age \pm standard deviation of the overall sample was 84.7 \pm 9.9 years. Mean schooling level was 4.0 \pm 3.4 years. Dementia was the most frequent diagnosis (47.6%), followed by psychosis (33.3%) and depression (19.0%). Both pet-group and control-group improved on GDS and MMSE. Within the pet-group, GDS symptoms decreased by 50% (from 5.9 to 2.7, $p=0.013$), whereas mean MMSE score increased by 4.5 ($p=0.060$). The between group comparison showed positive effect of Pet intervention on GDS ($p=0.070$). Furthermore, most of the participants reported an improvement of their perceived quality of life.

Conclusions: According to the most recent literature, our findings suggest that Pet Therapy program can be efficient in improving depressive symptoms and cognitive function in residents of long-term care facilities with mental illness.