

Influence of Animal Assisted Activity with Cat on Emotions of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Preliminary Study

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Abstract : Intellectual disability (ID) affects approximately 1.55% of children and adults in the society of developed countries. Depending on the ID degree, the patient is burdened with additional disease entities. Intellectual disability does not only limits a person's opportunities to participate in social life but also affects whole families. People with ID belong to the group of risk of mental illnesses, they are less emotionally stable, while families are predisposed to depression. The study was held in a day care center for people with intellectual disabilities (of various degrees of disability) on 26 people. Nurses and carers also took part. The age range of study groups ranged from 22 to 67 years. Therapeutic classes were held for four independent mixed groups (sex and intellectual disability degree) from 6 to 7 people each, lasting no more than 30 minutes. They were created by the facility's staff to make sure that a group is stable. The animal assisted activity took place with a 2.5-year-old Ragdoll cat. The animal has passed the exam (certificate entitling her to take part in felinotherapy) and had 1.5 years of work experience. Due to the different degrees of ID, an individual emotional state survey was conducted among the caregivers of those who were involved in the activity, to assess the impact of animal assisted activity with a cat on patients. A positive effect on the emotional state of people with different types of intellectual disability was observed. Caregivers and nurses of those participating in the study express willingness to continue these types of classes and consider them necessary for this group of people.

Keywords : intellectual disabilities, animal-assisted activity, cat, feline, emotions

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