

Analyzing Initial Efficacy of Animal Assisted Therapy for Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Case Study

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Abstract : Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are a growing phenomenon in India with over 10 million cases being recorded. Children with various levels and forms of ASD can be a major challenge both within the context of regular or special schooling. According to statistics by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), one in every 88 children today is born with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) against a ratio of one in 110 few years back. The growing number of children with autism spectrum disorders places greater demands on health services and necessitates the roping in of non-traditional modes of treatment to complement or even substitute traditional health care methods when possible. Research evidence, particularly from Western countries, as also some parts of Asia, suggests that animal-assisted therapy, or zootherapy, may be used as an effective individual or complementary therapeutic tool for increasing overall wellbeing and quality of life among children with Autism spectrum disorders. The paper through a case-study format seeks to evaluate the efficacy (initial stage) of animal assisted therapy (canine-therapy with visiting dog: breed-Golden retriever), as a non-conventional treatment modality for improving cognitive functioning and managing the behavioral and psychological symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorders. As a pilot study forming the basis for subsequent larger application of AAT, it analyses areas of efficacy as also the challenges faced, both with regard to the mode of therapy, as also particular to the Indian setting.

Keywords : animal assisted therapy, autism, canine therapy, analyzing initial efficacy

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