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A Survey of Veterans with PTSD and Their Attitudes Towards Their Service Dogs

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Overview

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Introduction

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

– The Scale of the Issue:
  • Since 2001, over 2 million troops have been deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan.
  • Approximately 10-20% of veterans experience psychological difficulties significant enough to warrant treatment
  • The US has created a new generation of veterans suffering from psychological issues

– A growing trend of civilian grassroots organizations is emerging
  • Providing veterans with support and assistance dogs
The Purpose of the Study

– Evaluate the attitudes and beliefs of military veterans with PTSD towards their service dogs.

– Do military veterans believe that their service dog is providing them with a therapeutic benefit?
Theoretical Framework

- Military has begun to develop Complementary Alternative Medicines (CAM) for PTSD.
  - yoga, art therapy, meditation, acupuncture, and animal assisted-interventions (etc.)

- A growing list of grassroots organizations are providing veterans with service dogs.
- This is despite definitive scientific findings.

- Preliminary research demonstrates that service dogs do have positive effects in reducing the symptomology of PTSD in veterans.

- There remains a gap in the scholarly literature regarding the therapeutic benefit of service dogs for veterans with PTSD.
Methods & Data Collection

– Survey:
  • Participants
  • Survey started in March 19, 2020
  • Distributed via the internet
    o Also had planned to distribute paper copies of the survey for those participants interested.
      i. This avenue of survey distribution became unfeasible given the situation with COVID-19
Data & Analysis

- Preliminary

- Participants:
  - Age range between 25 and 54.
  - All veterans having served in a combat or war zone.
  - Majority of participants first made aware of service dogs as a complimentary treatment through family and friends.
Data & Analysis (cont.)

- After being paired with their service dog(s).
  - Majority of participants (86%):
    - Felt more connected with their surroundings, other people, and towards activities
    - Had fewer nightmares towards their traumatic event(s) (if applicable to the individual)
    - Experienced a better mood throughout their days
Before Receiving Service Dog...

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

After Receiving Service Dog...

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Legend:
- Feeling detached from your surroundings, other people, or activities.
- Being constantly on guard, startled, or agitated
- Thinking about certain event(s) when you did not want to
- Having nightmares about these event(s)
- Having a worse mood as you went about your daily activities
- Feeling like you were more dependent on others for everyday tasks

Legend:
- Felt more connected with your surroundings, other people, or activities
- Had fewer nightmares about the event(s)
- Generally had a better mood as you went about your daily activities
- Felt like you have become more more independent with regard to carrying out...
Service dogs:
Improved quality of life
Extremely satisfied with their service dog
Universally agreeing that they would recommend a service dog to other veterans with PTSD.
- 71% of respondents reported that they were not receiving any support from family and/or friends for their service dog

- Those that did receive support were receiving either:
  - Monetary support
  - Training support
Data & Analysis (cont.)

- Not including their service dogs...
- 87% reported that they were seeking other forms of treatment for their PTSD
- These included:
  - Therapies
  - Medications
  - Specialists
  - Church
Limitations of the Case Study

– COVID-19

– Nature of Surveys:
  ➢ Impersonal
  ➢ Potential “real-world” inconsistencies

• Preliminary data not reflective of finished report
In Conclusion

– Veterans with PTSD indicated a strongly positive belief that their service dogs are providing therapeutic benefits.

– Service dogs were reported to ameliorate the symptoms of PTSD in these veterans.

– Several obstacles and barriers exist
Thank You!!

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Any Questions?
References