

Lindsey Wilson Conversations

Transcript

Speaker 1: Assistant Professor of Human Services and Counseling, Martin Wesley, you're joining us in the Brown Room of the Sue Craven-Stivers Alumni House for another episode of Lindsey Wilson Conversations. The way this works is that you get to enjoy a beverage of your choice while discussing a topic of your choice. The beverage you have chosen is a Coca-Cola, and the topic you have chosen is animal assisted therapy in the treatment of substance dependence. That is also the name of a recent article you have published in the international journal *Anthrozoos*.

First of all, what is animal assisted therapy?

Lindsey Wilson: Animal assisted therapy is when we actually use an animal to enhance some type of therapeutic outcome. For what I was looking for, it's actually to increase the therapeutic alliance with the client, but also to calm them down. That can be measured in many different ways. Other people might use animal assisted therapy to actually help them for measures as far as heart rate, to actually reduce the heart rate so they actually can improve for cancer victims, for heart, like I said, problems, for many different things. It can also be used to enhance physical abilities, HIPPO therapy, by example, using horses can actually enhance them for natural movement and being off that.

Speaker 1: How long has animal assisted therapy been a part of the counseling profession?

Lindsey Wilson: That's a good question. Animal assisted therapy has really always sort of been there. The Quakers used animals in their treatment, as far as people with mental illness and so forth, but as far as modern phenomena, it was actually used by a child psychologist actually by the name of Boris Levinson. He had a dog by the name of Jingles that he would bring to his office on occasion, and

as the clients would come in, he noticed a huge difference in the way that they would interact with him and actually even in the results of the behavioral therapy that he was working with the children. He noticed, for example, that children that would normally not talk at all with him and were very difficult to engage with him, he saw that when the dog was present, they changed. Those barriers came down and they were able to communicate better with the psychologist.

Since then, he wrote some books on the subject, but since then there's actually been a lot of research related to this phenomena, as far as involving animals in the treatment of human beings. The primary problem with animal assisted therapy is it's primarily been related to qualitative research and not quantitative. That's what I really tried to do in this article, was to try to bring in a quantitative approach to that, empirical research.

Speaker 1: What were the major findings in your research published in this article?

Speaker 2: Okay, the primary things I was looking for was ... I'm going to go back just a little bit. As far as substance abuse treatment in general, substance abuse treatment is one of those areas in which we do not have very good outcome. We're looking at ... One of the hardest things is just getting them into treatment, in especially America, and when we get them into treatment, less than half of them actually complete the treatment. Then, we're talking about less than 5%, and sometimes up to 15 - 20% actually are successful in overcoming their addiction. We have a long ways to go in the treatment of substance dependence. This is just one of those thoughts to actually bring a complementary therapy primarily to the treatment of substance dependence. In this case what I did was I put up an experiment in which we had a control group and an experimental group. The control group did not have the dog present, and of course our experimental group did have the dog present.

What I was looking for was two things. Primarily I was looking at an indicator of therapeutic alliance with the therapist. In other words, would the dog actually increase the therapeutic alliance that is going

on in that group session? The second thing I was looking at, which is really not in this article, was I was also looking at heart rate, as well as blood pressure rate. Would the dog, being in that group session with the therapist, would that actually decrease the heart rate as well as the blood pressure of the clients as well? Those are the things I was looking for.

Now, outcome, what happened was actually quite interesting, I think. There were significant differences in almost every one of the areas. When I looked at the group as whole, the dog in the groups actually made a huge difference related to the therapeutic alliance indicators that I was looking at. It also reduced the heart rate among the clients, as well as the blood pressure rates. That is ... I mean, these were statistically significant and again, could make a huge difference in the treatment of substance abuse. Let's say, for instance, my own thoughts about this is I've seen how a little baby coming into a treatment center can bring. You can have these real rough, tough guys that have tattoos all over them and you can see a significant difference in the way they interact with their environment just by bringing a baby into the facility. All of a sudden this rough voice goes into a very high pitch, and they talk completely different. The same with a puppy or an animal. You bring a dog into the setting and they change. They honestly change.

Speaker 1: Assistant Professor of Human Services and Counseling, Martin Wesley, thank you for joining us for Lindsey Wilson Conversations.

Lindsey Wilson: Thank you.