Service dogs and veterans: A systematic review

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PTSD Service Dogs and Veterans

Madie Sanford and Ali Hance
What is a service dog?
(U.S. Department of Justice, 2011)

- Under the Americans with Disabilities Act, a service dog is individually trained to mitigate a disability
- Emotional Support Animals are not service dogs
- Trained in one or more tasks
  - Picking up objects
  - Alerting to low blood sugars
  - Alerting deaf handler when a fire alarm goes off
- Allowed anywhere general public goes
- Air Access Act and Fair Housing Act
What is the definition of PTSD?

- Mayo clinic defines PTSD as “a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it”
- A person suffering from PTSD then can experience flashbacks, severe anxiety, and nightmares. They also may have emotional changes, negative thoughts, and relentless unwanted memories (Post-traumatic, 2018)
What are current coping mechanisms for PTSD?
(Reisman, 2016) (Tull, 2018)

- Natural
  - Exercise
  - Journaling
  - Counseling
  - Mindfulness
  - Lifestyle Changes

- Pharmacotherapy
  - Antidepressants
  - Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)
  - Anticonvulsants or Anti-epileptic

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
  - Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
  - Prolonged Exposure (PE)

- Eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR)
The VA currently avoids…
(Reisman, 2016)

- Second Line Therapies
  - Less supported by evidence with more side effects
- Benzodiazepines
A New Coping Method: Service dogs  (O’Haire, 2018)

- While not fully recognized by the VA, anecdotal and recent research points to a service dog being a great complementary coping mechanism for veterans.
- Reduction in PTSD symptoms following recipient of service dog; however, no reduction in standard treatment
- While it doesn’t rid of the diagnosis, it proves more effective when coupled with other treatments
- Anecdotal: improvement of social life, ability to go into public, happier, healthier (physically)
Bill Austin  (Austin, 2019)

“I was broken.”
Results (O’Haire, 2018)

- Typical treatment effectiveness
- Effectiveness of typical treatment and service dogs
  - “Those with service dogs showed differences with respect to depression (lower symptomology), quality of life (increased mental, but not physical, quality of life; increased psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and resilience), social functioning (increased ability to participate in social activities, lower social isolation, greater feelings of companionship), and some differences with respect to work functioning (no differences in employment level or impairment at work, but lower absenteeism and activity impairment because of health)”
### Efficacy of Service Dogs (O’Haire, 2018)

#### Table 5
Comparison of Outcomes Between Groups at a Cross-Sectional Time Point

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Group difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Waitlist (n = 66), M (SD)</td>
<td>Service dog (n = 75), M (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMIS depression-SF 8a</td>
<td>28.8 (7.4)</td>
<td>22.1 (7.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHQ-9</td>
<td>17.9 (5.3)</td>
<td>14.0 (5.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VR-12 mental health</td>
<td>24.6 (9.7)</td>
<td>31.1 (10.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VR-12 physical health</td>
<td>37.1 (12.2)</td>
<td>36.7 (10.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSPW</td>
<td>-2.7 (2.0)</td>
<td>-8.8 (2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>15.0 (5.8)</td>
<td>19.1 (8.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDQRS</td>
<td>18.6 (7.3)</td>
<td>23.0 (8.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMIS ability to participate in social activities-SF 8a</td>
<td>16.4 (5.7)</td>
<td>20.8 (6.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMIS social isolation-SF 8a</td>
<td>30.6 (6.3)</td>
<td>26.6 (6.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROMIS companionship-SF 6a</td>
<td>19.0 (5.3)</td>
<td>22.0 (6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI–Employed, n (%)</td>
<td>18 (24.7%)</td>
<td>22 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI–Absenteeism</td>
<td>27.6 (35.2)</td>
<td>5.0 (8.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI–Impairment at work (Health)*</td>
<td>52.7 (30.9)</td>
<td>44.4 (25.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI–Impairment at work (OverAll)*</td>
<td>64.4 (29.7)</td>
<td>44.8 (27.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WPAI–Activity impairment*</td>
<td>62.9 (27.6)</td>
<td>55.5 (26.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  
*b* = standardized regression coefficient (reference category: service dog);  
d = Cohen’s d effect size;  
PCL = PTSD Checklist;  
PROMIS = Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System;  
SF = short form;  
PHQ-9 = Patient Health Questionnaire–9;  
VR-12 Mental Health = Veteran’s Rand 12-Item Health Survey;  
BSPW = Bradburn Scale of Psychological Well-being;  
SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale;  
CDRS = Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale;  
WPAI = Work Productivity and Activity Impairment Questionnaire: General Health Problem, V2.0.

*Among veterans who are employed.

\(^{\dagger}\) p < .10.  
* p < .05.  
** p < .01.  
*** p < .001.
Psychiatric Service Dog Tasks
How will Major go on to help his veteran
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