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Pet therapy and institutionalized elderly: a study on 144 cognitively unimpaired subjects.

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to assess whether a **pet therapy** program had a favorable effect on psychopathological status and perception of quality of life in cognitively unimpaired institutionalized elderly. Seven elderly rest homes in Veneto Region of Northern Italy participated in the project, which was conducted on 144 cognitively intact elderly residents (97 females and 47 males). The participants were randomly divided into three groups: 48 subjects were given a canary, 43 subjects were given a plant, and 53 subjects were given nothing. The observation period (t0-t1) lasted for 3 months. At time t0 and t1 participants were administered the mini mental state examination (MMSE) to assess their cognitive status, the LEIPAD II-Short Version (LEIPAD-SV), to gauge subjective perception of quality of life in the elderly, and the brief symptom inventory (BSI), for self-evaluation of the presence of psychopathological symptoms. At the end of the 3-month trial, tests were re-administered, without removing the experimental condition. Even if the group that received a plant seemed to benefit from the experience, they did not achieve the same positive results on BSI and quality of life subscales exhibited by the group that received a pet. This study reinforces the hypothesis that **pet therapy** may have a beneficial effect on the psychological well being of institutionalized elderly, in particular on aspects related to depressive symptoms and perception of quality of life.

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