



INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Animals can serve as mascots to inspire pride, reduce stress, & foster humility in challenging situations¹
- ❖ Animal-assisted interventions for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are a recent research focus, believed to effectively manage PTSD symptoms & positively impact human health outcomes²
- ❖ Incorporating animals into Occupational Therapy (OT) sessions can help veterans develop new occupational performance skills, enhance job performance, & manage symptoms associated with PTSD³

Key Definitions

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI): A goal-oriented & structured intervention that intentionally integrates health, education, & human services to achieve therapeutic benefits for individuals⁴

Quality of Life (QoL): Dynamic appraisal of client's life satisfaction, hope, self-concept, socioeconomic factors, health & functioning⁵

Research Question:

For veterans with PTSD, do AAI improve their QoL?

Aim 1 → Evaluate the effects of AAI on QoL for veterans with PTSD

Aim 2 → Provide insight into potential role & contribution of OT in AAI research

METHODS

138 articles collected through CINAHL, Cochrane Library, Medline (Web of Science), PubMed & Scopus

- Title screening
- Removal of duplicates
- Abstract review
- Dual review of full-text articles

Total of 8 articles met all inclusion & exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Veterans diagnosed with PTSD ❖ Receiving or have received treatment for PTSD ❖ Access to full-text journal articles available in English from past 10 years (2014-2024) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Veterans who have cognitive impairments, active substance use or substance abuse disorders ❖ Phobia/ allergies to animals ❖ Unstable or life-threatening medical conditions ❖ Any interactions with animals that might pose as a health risk/ hazard ❖ Unwillingness to participate in AAI

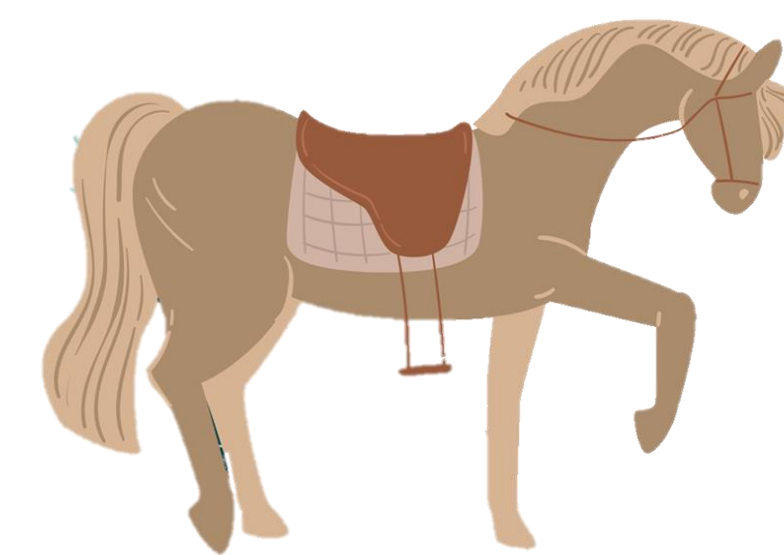
* Above criteria derived from a consolidation of inclusion & exclusion criteria from various articles

QoL Categories Identified in Included Articles:



RESULTS

Types of Animals Used in Studies Interventions:



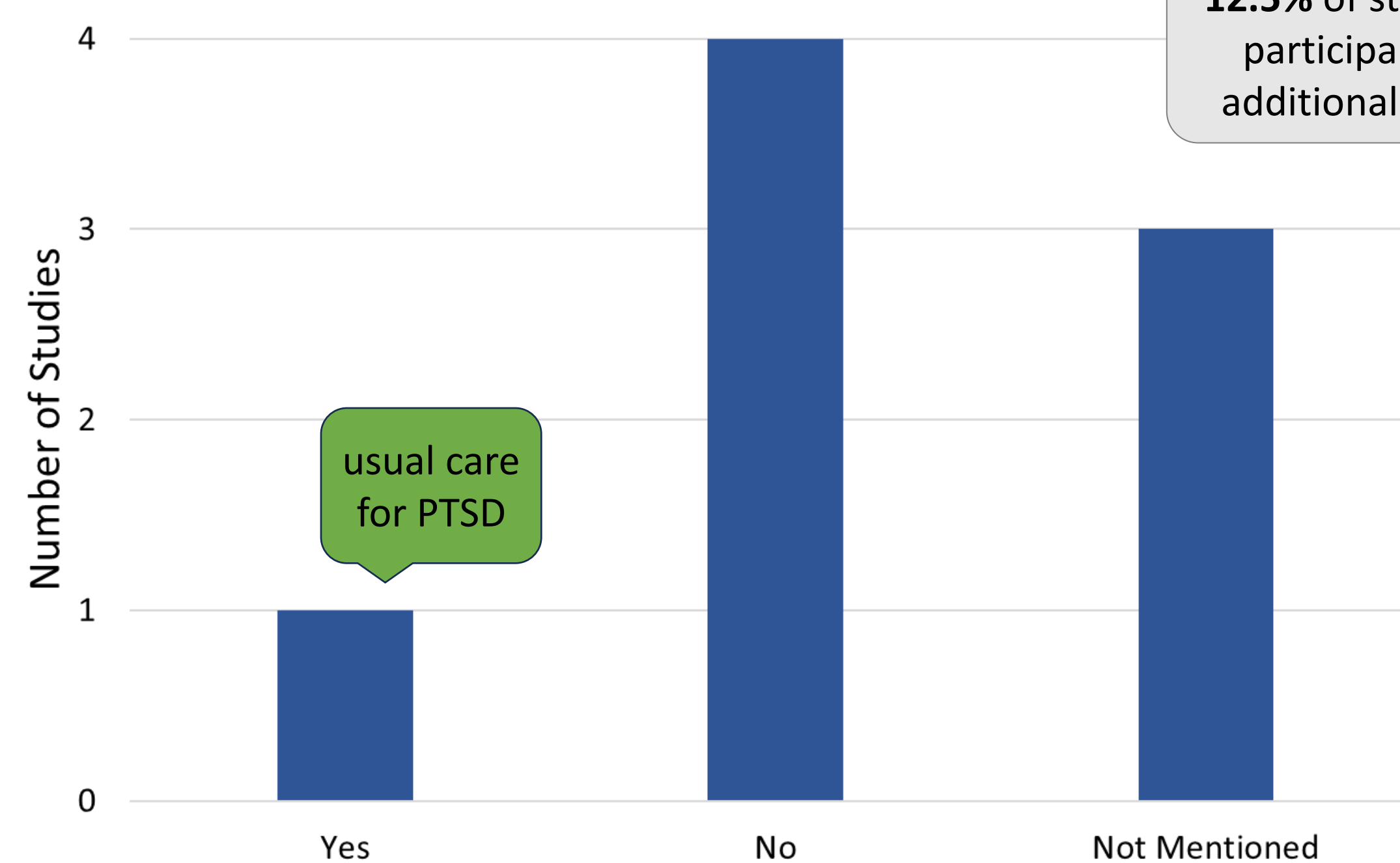
50% horse



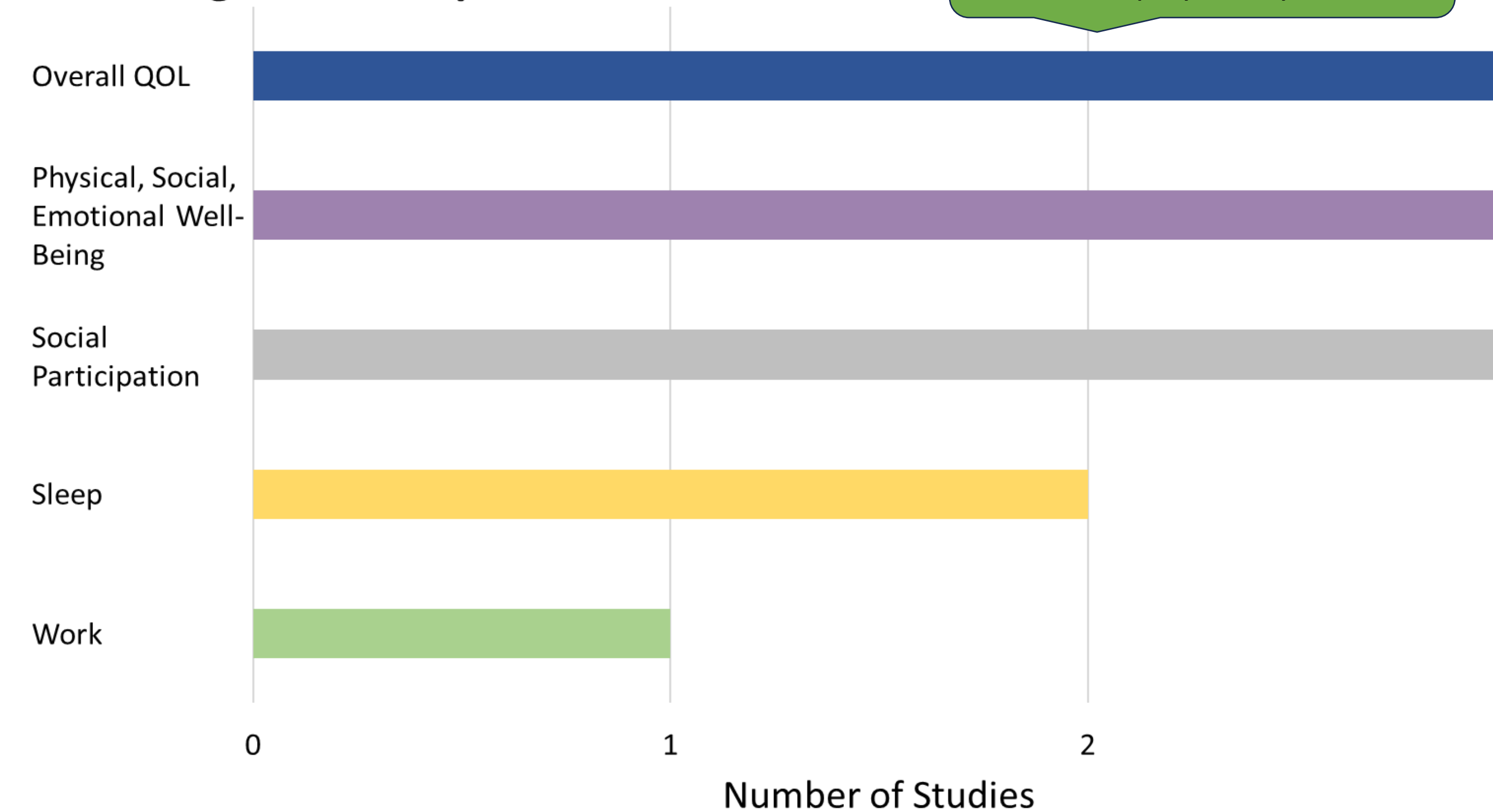
50% dogs

Heterogeneity observed in the type of support provided by the animal, ie. therapy or service animal

Other Interventions Received Besides AAI



QoL Categories To Improved With AAI



- ❖ All studies reported improvement in QoL following AAI.
- ❖ 50% of studies examined longer follow-up periods. Only one study saw sustained improvement.

DISCUSSION

Key takeaways:

- ❖ Fairly consistent reports of QoL improvements in social participation, overall QoL, physical, social, & emotional well-being
- ❖ Aligned with several other studies that have demonstrated potentially beneficial roles for AAI in addressing physical, emotional, & behavioral problems^{6,7}
- ❖ Longer-term outcomes can be maintained when animals remain with veterans post-intervention

Possible drawbacks:

- ❖ Lack of longer-term follow-up, with focus on short-term outcomes
- ❖ Withdrawal of an enjoyable intervention could be associated with worsening symptoms – development of strong attachment to animals⁸



Application to OT Practice

- ❖ OT practitioners (OTPs) can assist individuals in integrating animals into daily routines → reduces feelings of isolation & loneliness
- ❖ Facilitate interaction with others → ease transition back to civilian life → support reintegration & increase engagement in meaningful occupations → improves QoL
- ❖ AAI can be used as a modality through approaches such as create/ promote, establish/ restore, maintain, modify, & prevent⁹

CONCLUSION

- ❖ AAI shows promising results in improving QoL for veterans with PTSD, but effects varied based on duration
- ❖ Short-term effects consistently shown in improving overall QoL, but sustained long-term improvements only seen if animals were integrated into veterans' lives beyond intervention period

Future recommendations:

- ❖ AAI can be used as an adjunctive approach in OT practice to address psychological, social, & emotional well-being of veterans with PTSD
- ❖ OTPs can delve deeper into AAI research to:
 - Contribute to building research on incorporating animals as an adjunctive approach in therapy sessions
 - Facilitate skill development & occupational engagement
 - Foster therapeutic relationships

REFERENCES & CONTACT INFO



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