



JUSTICE HEALS: A ONE WELFARE APPROACH TO ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL TRAUMA

MICHIGAN STATE
UNIVERSITY

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BACKGROUND

While Michigan State University (MSU) has been devastated by sexual misconduct, national statistics reflect a crisis of campus sexual assault.

1 in 5
Women

1 in 4 Transgender or
Gender Nonconforming

1 in 16
Men

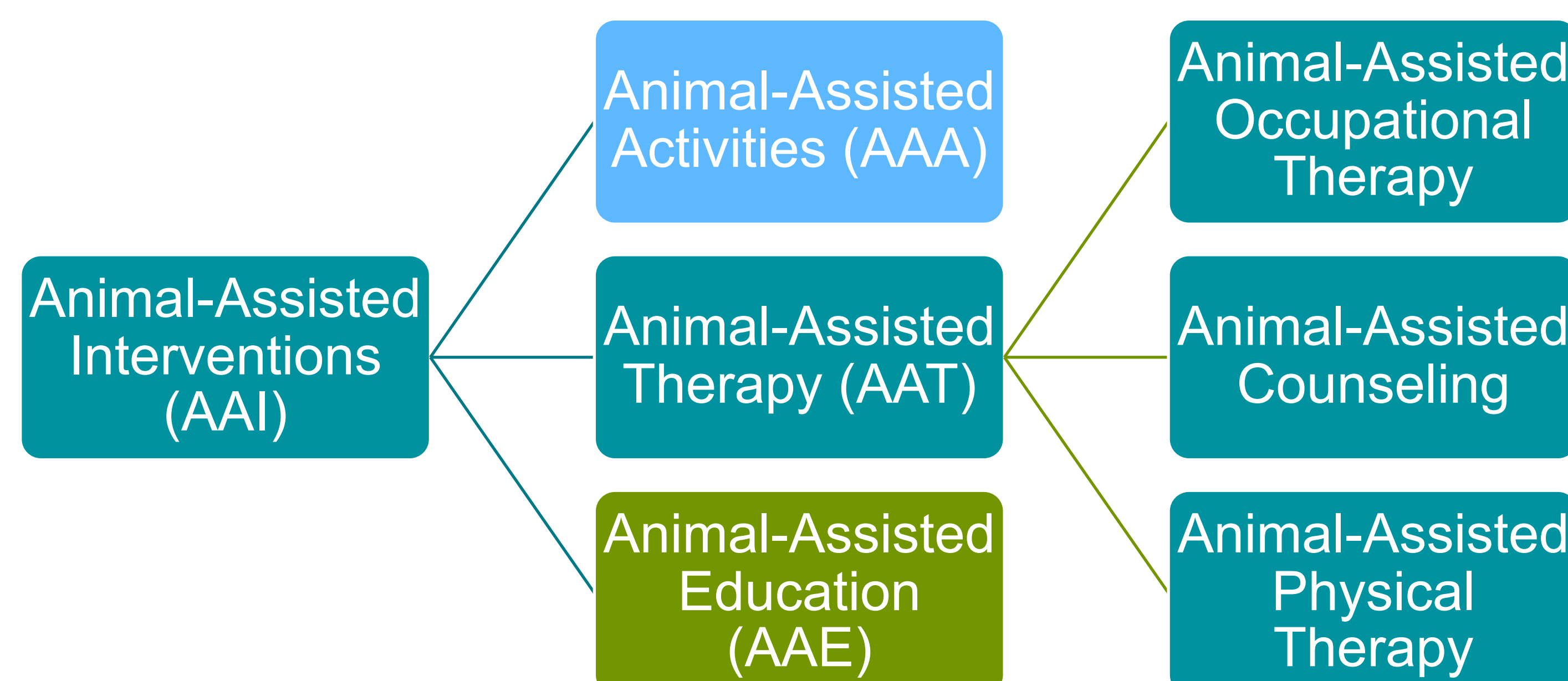
Experience Sexual Assault During College

Survivors of sexual crimes experience greater risks for depression, anxiety, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide.



3.3 million dogs enter U.S. animal shelters each year and 670,000 are euthanized. Problem behavior is the #1 reason for relinquishment of dogs and dogs adopted from shelters have a higher risk of certain anxiety issues.

Animal Assisted Interventions (AAI) have been evaluated as therapeutic or supportive modalities for health-related issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD.



Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) falls under umbrella of AAI but involves a human healthcare provider.



MISSION

Justice Heals believes in the capacity for healing: for survivors, animals, and the MSU community, and we strive to engage and support survivors and animals on a mutually beneficial healing journey.

RESEARCH

The term One Welfare has emerged to acknowledge the interconnectedness between human and animal wellbeing; this is a novel approach that evaluates outcomes for both human and animal participants.

Our team is developing a One Welfare AAT program Justice Heals to serve both our survivor and shelter dog populations. The animal behavior team has developed a screening protocol intended to identify dogs who may be both capable and comfortable working in AAT, based upon the following candidate attributes:

- Socially flexible
- High levels of social cognition
- Non-impulsive
- Empathetic

A pilot project is underway:

- Screened dogs will participate in simulated AAT sessions with undergraduate students.
- Participating students will complete surveys before and after sessions, including a validated questionnaire (HAIS) about their interactions with the dogs.
- Evaluation of the dogs' experiences will be via behavioral and physiologic indicators, including heart rate variability, locomotor activity, and pre- and post-salivary oxytocin levels.

SUMMER PILOT

Justice Heals will pair survivors and dogs for 6-week, skills-based AAT programming. Our animal behavior and human mental health teams collaborated to create curricula for both survivors and dogs:

- Survivors will participate in an intake/screening session with Justice Heals social workers.
- Dogs will be screened by the animal behavior team for fit in the AAT pilot Group.



The trauma-informed content for survivors will include skill building and psychoeducation with the intention of empowering participants.

NEXT STEPS

- Enhance Social Media Presence
- Engage Stakeholders
- Finalize Evaluation Plan
- Funding/Sustainability Strategies
- Considerations for Replication



The catalyst for this program was the impact of Justice, a canine advocate with generalized anxiety disorder, on the survivors of sexual assault at MSU's Center for Survivors.



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