



Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) in the Treatment of Military Service Members with Diagnosis of PTSD and/or TBI



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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the efficacy of equine therapy on military members' psychological distress, insomnia, PTSD symptoms, feelings of well-being, heart rate and pain.

Background

Military members, whether active duty, retired, or separated from service, are at increased risk for developing physical and mental disabilities due to their military service, especially if combat was involved.

Innovative Intervention

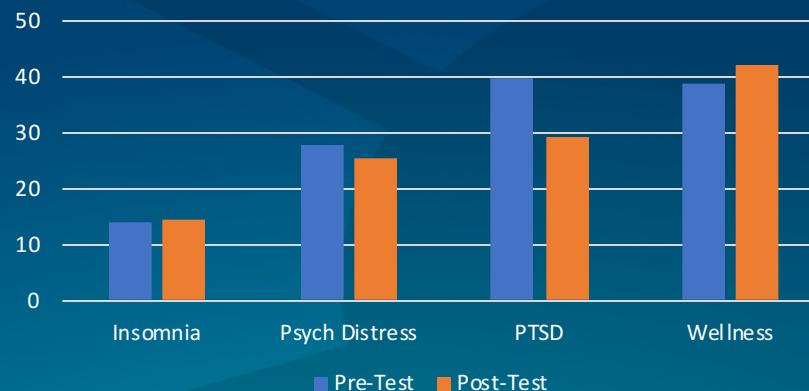
Equine-assisted psychotherapy (EAP) is a therapeutic intervention that uses horses, trained equine therapists, and mental health professionals in a non-riding environment. Horses respond to very slight changes in their environment, and these responses may help to provide insight into how EAP patients communicate, set boundaries, and confront issues created by TBI and PTSD-related injuries.



Methods

A convenience sample of service members suffering from PTSD and/or TBI that are participating in EAP completed surveys and heart rate measurement (n = 20). The intervention, EAP, is provided to service members through a nonprofit therapeutic equine program. The survey included the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10), the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), the numeric pain assessment scale (NPAS), the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI), and the PTSD checklist (PCL-5).

Pre and Post-Intervention Results



Findings

Improvements were noted in psychological distress, PTSD symptoms, and feelings of well-being. Insomnia became slightly worse. In addition, pain and heart rate were decreased as a result of EAP.

Conclusions

EAP is a therapeutic intervention that can be used in treatment of service members with PTSD and/or TBI due to reduction in heart rate, pain, psychological distress, PTSD symptoms, and increased feelings of well-being. The findings from this study support the use of EAP with people with a history of PTSD and TBI. Having another proven modality is promising for future prognosis given the treatment for PTSD and TBI has been historically difficult.



Future Directions

- Larger Sample size
- Longer timeframe
- Lobbying for utilization of different treatment modalities for PTSD and TBI
- Future funding