



The Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Mood in Older Adults Residing in Assisted Living Facilities

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Introduction

- Older adults in assisted living facilities (ALFs) are more at risk for depression due to factors such as increased social isolation, declining health, and increased dependence (Sjöberg et al., 2017).
- Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) is an intervention that integrates animals into therapeutic settings to enhance emotional wellbeing and foster social interaction (Pandey et al., 2024).
- AAT gives residents in ALFs the opportunity to reminisce about past memories and interact with the animal during the visit (Chang et al., 2021).
- Research indicates that AAT can reduce depressive symptoms and improve social engagement among older adults in ALFs (Baek & Sohng, 2020).
- This study investigates the effects of AAT on mood among older adults residing in assisted living facilities in Birmingham, Alabama.

Methods

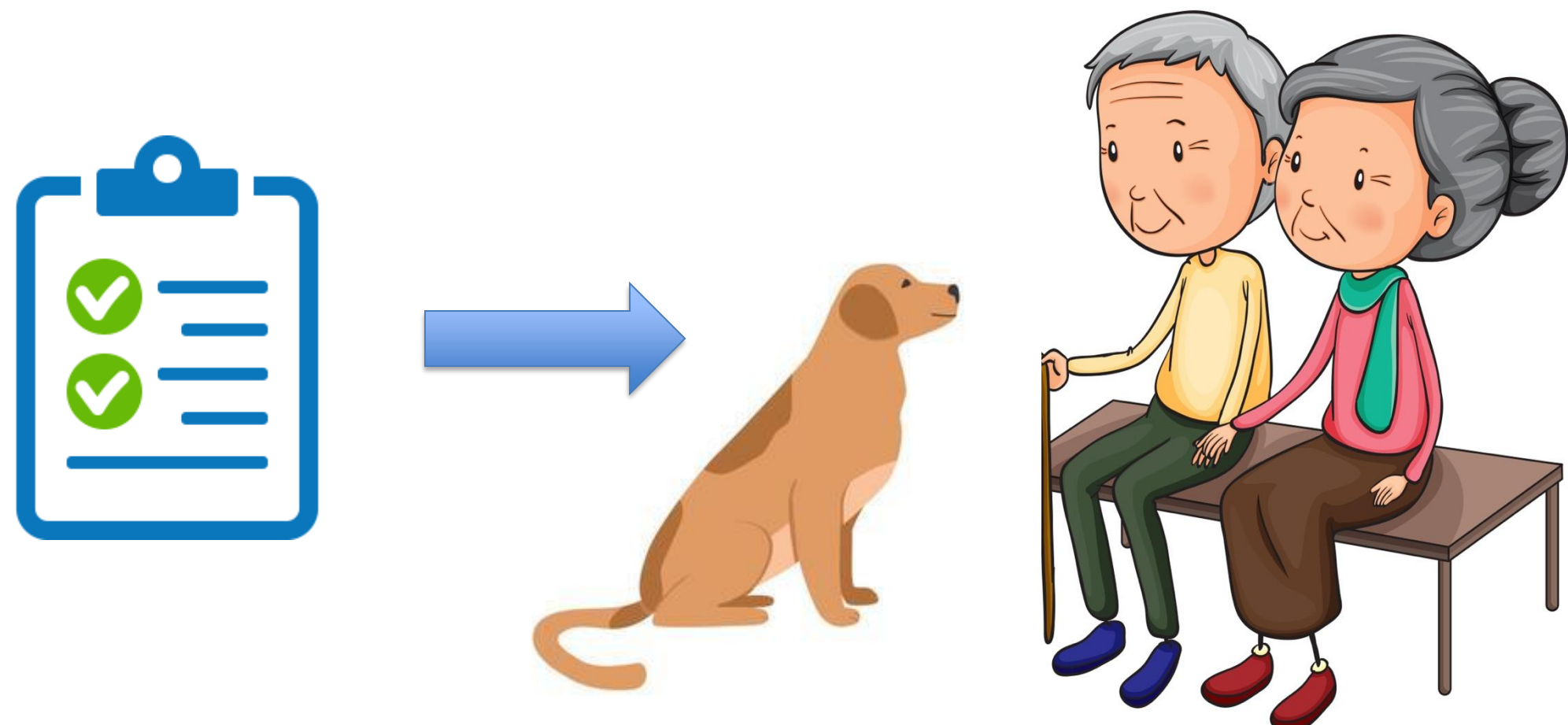
Site Description: Hand in Paw (HIP) is a nonprofit organization in Birmingham, Alabama that provides AAT training and programs for community partners across the state. HIP provides AAT to 7 assisted living facilities across Birmingham.

Population: Participants included residents at 5 ALFs partnered with Hand in Paw.

Eligibility Criteria

- 50 years of age or older
- Currently living at the ALF partnered with HIP

Data Collection and Analysis: Participants completed a survey packet that included the Coleman Dog Attitude Scale to assess attitude towards dogs and the Brief Mood Introspection Scale administered before and after each visit to measure changes in mood.



Results

Table 1. Coleman Dog Attitude Scale (C-DAS) Results. Higher score indicates a more positive attitude toward dogs.

Location	Number of Participants	Mean C-DAS Score (out of 120)	SD
ALF 1	6	110.83	13.17
ALF 2	1	117	n/a*
ALF 3	3	104	19.47
ALF 4	2	108	9.90
ALF 5	1	105	n/a*
Total	13	108.85	12.58

*not applicable due to insufficient data

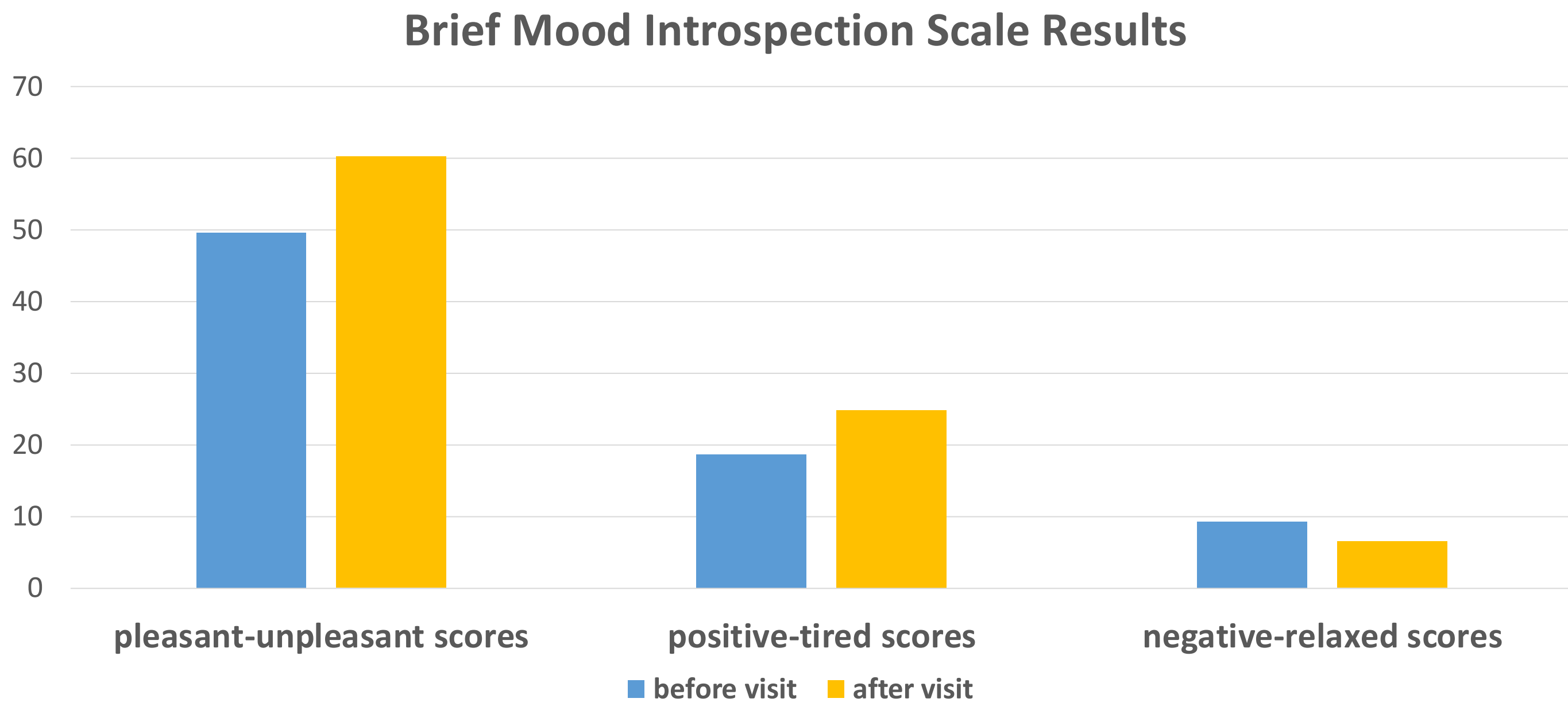


Figure 1. Changes in Brief Mood Introspective Scale subscale scores (n = 13) before and after the AAT visit. For pleasant-unpleasant and positive-tired scores, higher scores indicate increased pleasant feelings and increased energy. For negative-relaxed scores, lower scores indicate decreased tension.



Discussion

Coleman Dog Attitude Scale

- Majority of residents held highly positive attitudes towards dogs
- The high affinity towards dogs likely contributed to the willingness to participate in AAT sessions which can impact mood in older adults

Brief Mood Introspection Scale

Among older adults living in ALFs animal assisted therapy:

- Increased pleasant feelings
- Increased energy
- Reduced tension

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Lack of participant diversity (i.e., Ethnicity/race, gender)

Conclusion

Future Research

- Investigate if time of day and frequency of AAT visits affect residents' mood
- Examine effects of AAT among residents with less positive attitudes towards dogs
- Explore mood impacts on more diverse ALF populations

Implications for OT

- Positive attitudes toward dogs may increase participation in OT.** Using AAT could help residents feel more comfortable and willing to join OT activities.
- AAT may support better mood and engagement.** Improved feelings and energy suggest AAT may help older adults take part in daily activities.

References

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