Animal Assisted Interventions: *Views of Social Workers from Gävleborg*

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Abstract

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This thesis was conducted in order to explore the views and perception of social workers from Gävleborg on animal-assisted interventions. This study examines the attitudes of social workers towards the phenomenon of animal-assisted interventions and the importance of the animal-human bond. During the investigation process semi-structured e-mail interviews and one face-to-face interview were used as a method to collect empirical data. The results showed that social workers have a positive attitude towards animal-assisted interventions, as well as whether social workers have any knowledge regarding animal-assisted interventions. The final conclusion of this thesis presents the social workers’ desire to gain more knowledge and training on animal-assisted interventions within the social work practice in Gävleborg.

Keywords: social work, social work practice, AAI (Animal-Assisted Interventions), Gävleborg
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1 Introduction

According to the Global Definition of Social Work, social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people (see IFSW, 2000). Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work (Ibid). Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance well-being (Ibid).

For a long time, the authors of this thesis have been interested in animal-assisted interventions further mentioned as AAI due to the fact that the authors have always been animal activists and noticed the special bond between animals and humans. In this context the animal-human bond can be interpreted into social work practice as it is common to have animals as a part of the human microsystem. Due to that it could be recommended to integrate animals into the client's intervention process as it would have a positive outcome. This has fascinated the authors and since they are studying the International Social Work programme at the University of Gävle, the combination of animals and the practice of social work was therefore an obvious choice to write a thesis about. Therefore the authors decided to explore the views, attitudes, perception and knowledge of social workers regarding AAI.

AAI is designed to improve a person’s health in both a physical and a mental way, with the help of a trained animal which is provided by a professional (Animal Assisted Intervention International, 2015). In this context can be mentioned the successful cases of horse riding therapy and swimming with dolphins. Such forms of therapy have an impact upon clients’ physical abilities, as in some cases clients who were not able to move their body – after therapy are able to do it. Thanks to the information found in previously carried studies, recent scientific findings and publications, the authors have decided that they want to gather the views on AAI of social workers in Gävleborg. Through research the authors decided to focus on the concept of biophilia and the systems theory, as in the context of this study these theories are important to mention as the main targets are social workers (humans) and animals (nonhuman beings).
The concept of biophilia is connected to this thesis in a straightforward way, as one of the ideas behind this thesis is to understand an animal’s part in a human’s life and its connection to social work in general, and whether social workers see the animal-human bond as something that needs to be put into consideration or not. Once the bond between human and nonhuman organisms has been analyzed, the systems theory needs to be investigated deeper as this theory is commonly used amongst the main target - social workers.

Systems theory allows social workers to see the connection between different systems in humans’ lives and their correlations. It also puts attention to the variety of systems and their place in an individual's life cycle. In the context of this study it is important to use this theory as it points out that animals are part of a human’s system and their importance in the system. This study will show whether social workers see animals as part of “the system” or whether they see it as something that has no place in a human’s system.

Through the e-mail interviews and one face-to-face interview conducted by the authors it was possible to explore the perceptions and attitudes of social workers towards AAI, in order to see the willingness to integrate AAI into the social work practice. After conducting the interviews, the authors have realized that the usage of AAI in the social work practice is not that common. Mills and Hall (2014) mentioned in their article “Animal-assisted interventions: making better use of the human-animal bond” that AAI can be seen as a progressive and diverse way of treating people who are suffering from different types of traumas, psychological issues and physical impairments. This previously mentioned research is the reason why the authors thought that it is important to find more information about the views and knowledge regarding AAI that social workers have, as well as to explore social workers’ perceptions and attitudes on the previously mentioned phenomenon, in order to improve the help that clients receive. The authors want to find out whether social workers have any knowledge regarding the existence of AAI and whether they are willing to implement it in the social work practice.
1.1 Aim and research questions
The aim of this study is to gather the views of social workers in Gävleborg regarding AAI, in order to understand their perception, attitudes and knowledge when using AAI in their daily practice. That is why the authors focused on social workers in Gävleborg and on their experiences and personal thoughts regarding AAI.

The aim of this thesis will be achieved with the help of the following two research questions:

1. What is the knowledge and perception of social workers in Gävleborg regarding AAI?
2. What are the attitudes and views of social workers in Gävleborg regarding AAI?

The research questions stated above will allow the authors to find out what are the views and attitudes of social workers in Gävleborg regarding AAI. It will also give a broader understanding whether social workers are willing to gain more knowledge regarding the phenomenon of AAI and its implementation in the social work practice.

1.2 Essay disposition
The first chapter will present the main background information that will be covered in order to provide the reader with a broader understanding of why the authors have chosen this theme as their thesis topic. This chapter will provide the reader with more information in order to understand what this thesis consists of and what kind of result the authors have tried to achieve.

The second chapter gives a broader understanding and connection to previous researches conducted in the field of social work and the usage of AAI. It gave the authors a greater understanding and perception of the field of social work and about AAI.

The third chapter continues on the theoretical framework or so called coupling to theory, where theories are used as an analytical tool in order to analyze collected information. This allows the authors to get a broader understanding of the connection between social work and AAI. This coupling to theories chapter of the thesis explains
the concept of biophilia and systems theory which suggests how important the interaction between humans and nonhuman beings is, as well as points out the place of an animal in a humans’ system.

The fourth chapter gives a broader understanding of the methodology part of this thesis, as well as the research design and mode of procedure. Also the fourth chapter introduces essay credibility and ethical standpoints. The preliminary understanding of the main topic is presented in chapter five. The presentation of result and empiricism analysis of the collected data is presented in chapter six of this thesis and provides interpretation of results and conclusion of the information. Chapter seven presents the discussion of previous research, coupling to theory and methodology, as well as suggestion for further research.

2 Previous research
With the help of literature review the authors will acquire a greater understanding about what the social workers’ attitudes towards AAI are, as well as point out patterns between different case examples and the outcomes that have been noticed. Intervention process is a great part of social work practice and according to Kruger and Serpell (2006:25) AAI is defined as “any intervention that intentionally includes or incorporates animals as a part of a therapeutic or ameliorative process or milieu”. In other words; the intervention process is where the authors think animals can be implemented as an alternative form of intervention method in comparison to traditional human-to-human intervention processes.

AAI can be drawn back to the late 1790s when the first notes about how efficient, for example, counseling sessions were when an animal was present in the room (Altschiller, 2011). Nowadays it has become more common to use AAI on different occasions in order to provide people with support (Ibid). This kind of therapy is used with many different age groups, involves many types of animals, and is practiced in a wide variety of institutional and other settings (Ibid). Above mentioned information leads the authors into the direction of understanding that with every day that passes by the phenomenon of AAI is put more into light and is being used in different scenarios. AAI can also be used in many different contexts whilst being in contact with clients since it provides such a broad spectrum of possibilities. The previously mentioned information can be
connected to the information that the authors received during the interviews, as the interviewees pointed out that AAI can be used in different settings and whilst working with different types of clients.

Throughout different peer reviewed articles, and more in-depth in Berget and Ihlebæk (2011), a common pattern surfaces. It has been mentioned that a mechanism often considered in the AAI literature is that animals may serve as catalysts or mediators of enhanced communication skills amongst people. The previously mentioned information points out the impact of animals and their positive perception, such as the non-verbal communication between human and animal as well as the fact that humans most of the time feel comfortable and safe with an animal’s presence.

Continuing on the same path and concentrating more on the intervention process itself, Risley-Curtiss (2010) points out the fact that having animals present in therapy sessions increases the chance of clients opening up and feeling calm. In most of the articles it has been made clear that animals are great companions and actually help the process when the most common form of therapy (face-to-face human contact) is not making any progress. For instance, Risley-Curtiss (2010) points out the importance of having an animal-human bond and mentions the fact that many people see animals as part of their ecological system and would mention them as part of the family. This points out that an animal is being seen as something more than “an animal”. The ecological system is crucial to mention in this context, as it identifies the five environmental systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem) in which both humans and animals interact (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner illustrates individual’s ecological environments with the help of groupings of different systems, in which environments those systems can be found and the way they connect at some point in an individual’s life. The main idea behind these systems is to fit into each other like a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). According to Oxford Dictionary (2015) Russian dolls are set of wooden dolls painted in bright colors and are designed to fit into one another.

The five eminent systems are the following:
- **Microsystem;** includes the relations that individuals experience in the context of interaction with peers, pets and family.
- **Mesosystem;** refers to interaction processes between more than two sceneries in a person’s life. For example: school, home and work.
- **Exosystem;** explains the interactions between two or more systems, though at least one of those systems would not directly have an impact on the individual.
- **Macrosystem;** could be mentioned as the society as whole, a central pattern of the previously mentioned systems.
- **Chronosystem;** a system that is made up of all of the environmental proceedings that might occur throughout an individual's life.

In other words, Bronfenbrenner’s system provides the authors with a framework that allows them to get an in-depth understanding of their interaction. Risley-Curtiss (2010) continues with the rather similar aspect that even though, from a client's point of view, an animal is being seen as part of the human’s system, yet when it comes to intervention – the animal usually has no place in it and is being pushed out, even though it gives the feeling of attachment, safety and comfort.

AAI are not always seen as a positive way to perform interventions, therefore the authors wanted to point out that there are some negative aspects which social workers/authors in the previous articles point out. Whilst reading articles related to the main topic of this study the authors came across some negative aspects of social worker’s perception upon the phenomenon of AAI. As it was mentioned in Risley-Curtiss (2010) animals are not always seen as primary way of helping people who are in all sorts of vulnerable situations, but things are changing and animals are being considered as part of the intervention, accompanying social workers (or people who work with clients in general). Social workers do not have that much knowledge when it comes to AAI, but they are willing to gain more knowledge about this phenomenon and integrate AAI in the intervention process.

According to Risley-Curtiss (2010) people working in the field of social work are used to working with individuals and families who have companion animals. That is why inclusion of animals in practice seems to be a natural addition of social work with humans whilst working with their challenges, resiliency factors and coping schemes.
Information found in Risley-Curtiss (2010) contains the fact that people working in the social work field appear to have a basic knowledge of the positive and negative impact in connection of relationships between humans and their companion animals, which in this context points out what can be done and what needs to be improved.

Zilney and Zilney (as mentioned in Risley-Curtiss et al. 2010:72) AAI-related research came across the fact that integration of companion animals into the present social work field might not happen any time soon, as a study based on cross-reporting between child welfare workers and humane society workers pointed out that a rather large number of social workers do think that cross-reporting is not as important and is underreported to the concern for animal well-being.

AAI is being used in most parts of the world and as such the research conducted by Hanrahan (2013) can be pointed out. This research examined how much knowledge social workers from Nova Scotia in Canada have about AAI, which is the same idea what the authors want to achieve with this study - as the aim of this study is to get in-depth knowledge about whether an average social worker in Gävleborg knows about AAI and its usage in the social work field.

In the previously mentioned research Hanrahan (2013) points out that plenty of social workers were interviewed and diverse results and conclusions were incorporated in the final results and analysis. The most common reasons why AAI is not used as much or at all was due to the fact that social workers do not have enough knowledge regarding this type of intervention process. This is due to policy restrictions, lack of training, as well as the fact that some of the social workers have never considered animals as a priority in the intervention process and due to confusion about what exactly the animal’s role in this process is. The previously mentioned research also brought up the awareness that clients can be abusive of animals and therefore considerations were important so no animal gets mistreated in the process. This questioned the knowledge of the social workers; whether they had enough knowledge when providing intervention with animals and if they considered the safety of the animal and the triggers of a client being aggressive towards animals. Previously mentioned research brings to the author's attention the fact that humans and animals share the same ecosystem. It also brings up the question why it is rather difficult to understand the role of animals, as they are part
of our life and are part of our system in general. This brings the authors back to the fact that the authors do not have enough knowledge about animals and their role in our system. This research indicates how unique the interactions between animals and humans are, as animals contribute to good health throughout the life-circle, create positive psychological well-being and help people to recover from serious illnesses. Even though there are findings which point out the importance of companion-animals, there still is too little attention given to the psychological role of having animal-companions.

Whilst reading articles the authors came across one of the most important aspects of using AAI in the context of social work: general knowledge regarding the aim. In the context of this theme, the article written by Evans and Gray (2011) can be mentioned, as he points out that it is important and necessary to have a body of knowledge (organized knowledge that is used by practitioners of a profession in order to lead their work) that is specific to the profession of social work, in order to inform and guide social workers about the best approaches and practices of AAT (Animal-Assisted Therapy) but also the other forms of intervention such as AAA (Animal-Assisted Activities) within AAI.

In the context of this thesis it was important to explain the previously mentioned terms of AAT and AAA, as they are a part of AAI. According to Altschiller (2011) AAT is a form of unique therapy where animals are offered to patients as an opportunity to peacefully interact with other creatures and focus on something outside themselves. Morrison (2007) mentioned in her article “Health Benefits of Animal-Assisted Interventions” that AAA are set of different daily activities that are conducted with animals’ presence and due to that simple daily activities had positive and healing outcomes.

In the article written by Evans and Gray (2011) it is argued that social work practitioners have a responsibility to contribute to developing the existing ethical guidelines for AAT, to extend its research base and to use theoretical perspectives of social work. This should be done in order to advance the development of the practice area in such a way that it does not ignore the needs of the animals (Ibid). When social workers are using animals in interventions, they have an ethical responsibility to address the risks for the animals and provide them with adequate opportunities for recovery and
rest (Ibid). There is an idea that social workers can structure ecologically informative AAI programs in order to provide benefits to all involved parties. However in reality it is likely that this requires considerable thoughts which could perhaps make a change in the previously mentioned theoretical perspective (Ibid).

The articles read by the authors pointed out that today it is rather common to use AAI instead of using traditional forms of therapy, which in most cases involve human-to-human type of interventions. According to Berget and Ihlebæk (2011) increasing numbers of patients are treated with pharmaceutical drugs and there are urges for other interventions and rehabilitations than what is provided by the traditional health care system. It is stated in the article that it is therefore necessary to investigate other types of complementary therapeutic approaches and interventions, which is the main focus of AAI where there is increasing proof of beneficial effects. However it is argued that the relationship between animals and people is complex and it should always be voluntarily and bi-directional, which means that it should work both ways (Berget & Ihlebæk, 2011). There are several theories that have been proposed in this article, however the theoretical framework of AAI is still not sufficient and it is argued that new theories should be developed that would generate predictions that are testable on specific impacts of animal-human interactions (Ibid).

3 Coupling to theory
According to Rubin and Babbie (2011) theory plays an important role in social work research, as it helps the authors to make sense of patterns in diverse observations as it helps to direct the inquiry of study into those areas that seems more likely to show practical patterns and explanations. The theories that the authors chose to use in this study are based on the information found in the previous researches, as well as theories that commonly are used in the field of social work. The theories that will be mentioned further down in the text will help the authors to analyze collected data and make the final conclusions.

In the context of this study, the concept of biophilia (Wilson, 1984) will be used as human beings have an innate need to approach and interact with nature and nonhuman beings. Wilson (1984) has created a hypothesis regarding the biophilia concept that points out the fact that there is an instinctive bond between humans and other living
organisms. In general according to Kahn (1997) previously mentioned concept can be explained to be an essential human need which is genetically based with its tendency to associate with life and lifelike processes. From this study it can be concluded that humans are connected to animals, and this concept puts into light the fact that animals provide a bond that is stronger than any other type of bond that exists between humans and nonhumans. Thanks to that bond, animals can be used as a “tool” in order to “fix” a problem, which in the context of this study is the process of interventions. According to Berget and Ihlebæk (2011) biophilia as a theory highlights that humans and animals, through the process of evolution, have a tendency to emphasize the meaning of nature and life. Therefore there is a beneficial bond between nature and animals, which results in reduced stress and better health. Wilson (1993) which is mentioned in Berget and Ihlebæk (2011:127) comes with the idea that emotions could differ between attraction and peacefulness but also anxiety and aversion. This is a tendency of mostly reacting positively to nature through human evolution which makes it partly genetic, but it could however make one react differently (Kellert, 1993 mentioned in Berget & Ihlebæk, 2011:127). In this study, this could be of use when acquiring a greater understanding of how reactions, bonds and emotions are developed, when interactions between humans and nonhumans, in this case animals, occur.

Since it seems to be through genetics and evolution of life that the bond and emotions between these two living organisms has developed, it is interesting to see how that bond can be used in the social work context. As stated earlier in the text, according to Beder (2015) animals and humans have a beneficial bond and this could mean that animals are a good source of help while dealing with humans, as sometimes human-to-human problem solving is not the solution. With the help of this concept the authors would gain a broader understanding of how the perspective of social workers regarding this subject is.

In consideration of this study it is not enough to only understand the bond between humans and other living organisms, in this case animals. It is also important to point out how such a phenomenon is being seen from the social worker's perspective as well as whether social workers see AAI as a part of the system. As the aim of this study is to get a broader understanding of the perception, attitudes and knowledge regarding AAI in the field of social work, it is necessary to understand how systems theory is being
implemented in the field of social work and what kind of impact it has in the context of interventions. Further in the text the authors will explain the importance of systems theory and its usage in social work practice and in context of this study.

According to Beder (2015) our life’s systems can be seen as foundations that relate and interrelate, and therefore have an impact on our ability to function. He also mentions that the utility of systems theory in social work practice can be seen within the need for social workers to look into the multiple systems in which an individual functions. He continues that such theory can function within systems of varying sizes and complexity, as it helps the social worker to intervene at multiple stages in an individual’s life. Beder (2015) emphasizes that the main focus in the systems theory lies upon interrelatedness of social phenomena and its settings. The usage of this theory would provide the authors with a conceptual framework that alternates focus from the cause-and-effect connection between paired variables, to a person or a situation as an interrelated whole. This provides social workers with a wider range of possibilities to understand and receive knowledge, in order to interact with their client and offer them the right form of intervention. The importance of systems theory within this study is crucial, as it defines that animals are a part of the human system, and by that it can be seen whether social workers see animals as part of the intervention process.

According to Beder (2015), systems theory focuses on the balance within the larger systems and tries to find explanations for behavior within the homeostasis and subsystems that are involved. This study gave the authors a greater understanding of what social workers have as a field of knowledge relating to this theory and it provides social workers with the ability to rely on this theory as support whilst working as a social worker. With the help of this study social workers might be more challenged in the field of social work whereas AAI is being brought to their attention, and due to that a new way of working might be brought into consideration.

The authors find systems theory and the concept of biophilia comparable whereas it could make the authors understand how the field of social work functions and if they are used in practice. However, the authors can also find how both of these theories differ, and as well see the point where they both are being combined in a way that creates a result where they are complementary. The concept of biophilia focuses more on the
animal-human bond and how it has been developed through time, while systems theory focuses more upon the human and the systems which are involved in their life, whereas animal is included in one way or another, in one or several systems. Since the systems are divided in human’s life as micro-, meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystem, which means that somewhere probably animals are included, it just differs in what way they are included and how much.

4 Methodology
Throughout the thesis different types of data gathering will be used in order to achieve the study’s aim and answer previously mentioned research questions. The thesis is focused on social workers in Gävleborg and their understanding regarding AAI.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) semi-structured e-mail interviews and one face-to-face interview with open-ended questions will provide the authors with in-depth data collection. As the interviewees are able to discuss the topic in a non-restrictive way and they can “talk” in written form about the topics that are relevant to their own personal experiences. It has to be kept in mind to not let one’s own perceptions alter the way interview questions are asked (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

As mentioned in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) the authors are interested to get an in-depth understanding of the subjects understanding regarding the topic and the information they feel is relevant to bring up during the interview. Therefore a qualitative research method is used, as according to Rubin and Babbie (2011) such a method attempts to tap the deeper significances of particular individual’s experiences. According to Rubin and Babbie (2011), theory has an important place in social work research, as it benefits in a way that helps the authors to make sense of and see schemes in different observations.

4.1 Research design
The authors chose to conduct an empirical study due to the fact that, in the end of the process, information provided by the interviewees would be received. The previously mentioned research method suited this thesis due to the fact that the authors were interested in gathering information based upon the interviewees’ perception, attitudes
and views on the phenomenon of AAI. The qualitative research method suits this thesis because it has to be conducted in a rather short period of time. In this case, the authors had decided to interview a rather small group of people, and by that gained the ability to gather in-depth information regarding the main topic of the thesis. As another example mentioned in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) of why such research method was chosen, was the fact that it gave the authors the ability to conduct interviews with open-ended questions. In such cases the interviewee was able to use their own words and way of telling their story without authors’ interruption.

According to Gleeson Library (2015) an empirical study has certain characteristics such as the statement that methodology is being used, the research questions are answered and the phenomenon of the study has been defined. In the context of this thesis, the qualitative research method was used, as it suited the way of how the authors had decided to conduct this study. In Gleeons Library (2015) “Empirical Research” part, it has been stated that the qualitative research method is not based upon numerical forms, which is suitable for this thesis as data collection was received through open-ended semi-structured interviews. In this context interviews cannot be measured or analyzed with the help of numerical research methods, and by that descriptive data was easily analyzed as that is the core of the empirical research method.

According to Ritchie and Lewis (2003), the core idea behind having empirical study is that such study describes what has happened, based on straight reflection upon what has been said by the interviewees. Previously mentioned authors continued that such research method includes case reports and studies that are based on a limited group of people, and in cases where the main idea is not to create statistical links between variables. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) mentioned that empirical studies have provided well balanced contextual data which helped to understand the phenomenon, but yet they continued that it is of great importance to remember that the prevalence or frequency of the phenomenon became too generalized. Previously mentioned authors added that phenomenon cannot be generalized to point out the statistical links among variables. It was also pointed out that the aim of empirical study is to highlight the statistical correlations between variables or to create the frequency of a phenomenon in order to utilize qualitative methods.
The authors have put previously mentioned points into consideration during the process of designing this thesis, whilst reflecting on what the interviewees have said and what the current situation within the field of social work in Gävleborg is. The authors did put into consideration the fact that with help of empirical study, it was possible to have an in-depth reflection regarding what interviewees have said. In this context it is crucial, because this thesis is based upon interviewees’ views and attitudes regarding the phenomenon of AAI. As previously mentioned in Gleeson Library (2015) the statement of methodology has been used, the research questions were answered whilst defining the phenomenon of this study which gave the authors the possibility to conduct an empirical study.

4.1.1 E-mail Interviewing
In the process of investigation, the participants of the interviews (except the researcher who was interviewed during face-to-face meeting) were asked to answer the interview questions through email contact. The participants were given two sets of questions, which they answered depending on whether they had any knowledge regarding the thesis subject. In the process of answering the questions, the participants were encouraged to get in contact with the authors if they had any questions regarding the interview questions and the aim of the study.

E-mail interviewing has both advantages and disadvantages, which needs to be looked at in order to get a broader understanding of how such an interview method would have an impact upon the gathered data. According to Opdenakker (2006) the disadvantages can be seen in the fact that the lack of bodily presence providing access to non-linguistic information (which is expressed through facial and gesture expressions) is not evident to the authors due to this type of method. This makes the authors perhaps miss out on important information, for example saying one thing whilst the body “says” something else. This could question the credibility of what they actually are saying. Also, their surroundings are an important aspect whilst answering the interview questions as it might cloud the interviewees’ judgement, for example it might have an impact upon the interviewee as it can make the person stressed or nervous (Opdenakker, 2006). The authors are also aware of the fact that, while using this type of interview method, it could provide the authors with lack of variation of answers. That is the reason why the authors developed the interview questions in such a way that they are open-ended,
which would give the interviewee the possibility of answering freely (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Finally it can be mentioned that the answers that the authors received where not that descriptive as they would have been in a face-to-face meeting. According to Hunt and McHale (2009) an advantage can be mentioned that, through the distance between participant and the interviewer, interviewee can freely express what he/she thinks since it is not a face-to-face interview. The participants are also able to answer questions in their own pace, as they can think freely without interruption (Ibid). The reason the e-mail interview method was chosen was due to the fact that the authors had limited time to write this thesis, as well as the interviewees themselves who have a large workload upon them.

4.2 Mode of procedure

4.2.1 The choice of literature
When choosing literature, the authors thought of the importance of literature being very much connected its relevance to AAI as well as to the aim of this study. Many articles were from across the world, written by many different researchers stating rather similar facts but also mentioning the differences. This provided the authors with an increased knowledge of AAI and how it is seen and practiced throughout the world and the aspect considered when using animals in practice of social work. Thanks to the literature review the authors gained an in-depth understanding of AAI and they would like to see the implementation of AAI in the social work field in Gävleborg.

The choice of literature was based upon articles found in several databases such as Google Scholar, SAGE Journals Online and Academic Search Elite. Whilst gathering the data, the authors used different word combinations in the search bracket in order to find relevant information such as “animal-assisted interventions” and “social work and AAI”.

4.2.2 Selections of persons to interview
The interviewees were selected according to their occupation and their involvement in the field of social work. The process of sampling is crucial in a qualitative study, as it narrows down the essence of the study and gives the authors the ability to focus upon a rather small group of people and get exact information regarding the main topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this context the snowball sampling method was used.
According to Patton (1990), it is a process of selecting interview participants (process of writing interest emails to random people found on Social Services webpages within Gävleborg). The authors asked the social workers who have agreed to participate in the interviews whether they could ask their colleagues if they would like to participate in the interview process too and share their views upon AAI. In this way, one participant uses their own contacts (acquaintances) and encourages them to be a part of the research. After the information process, the interviewees could decide without pressure whether they would like to participate in this study. It was also important that the interviewees are currently working in Gävleborg, as the authors were trying to get a broader understanding of what kind of knowledge social workers in Gävleborg have. In order to make this process easier and more narrowed down, only social workers from Gävleborg were selected. The selected social workers were people who the authors did not know, as it was important to not have a biased study. In other words; the authors were aware of the possibility that, if the interviewee knew the authors, it could have an impact upon the gathered data received from the interviewee, which could be both negative and positive. It could be negative in a way that the interviewee might want to provide the authors only with information that the authors wanted to hear. And it could be positive in a way that the interviewee might feel comfortable with the authors and provide them with a broader amount of information.

4.2.3 Description of investigation process
The investigation process began with a carefully selected list of articles and books that would help the authors to get an in-depth understanding of how AAI is perceived by published authors with broad knowledge in this area. The chosen literature was recently published and current. In the thesis-writing process it is crucial to use peer reviewed literature as it gives a sense of reliability and credibility. In the process of investigation, seven interviews were conducted. One of them was a face-to-face interview and the rest were conducted through email contact. During the interviews, interviewees received two lists of questions, based upon whether they have or do not have any knowledge regarding AAI. Afterwards the interviewees could select themselves which part of the interview they felt most comfortable with. The information received from interviews was used as a base for this thesis, as it provided the authors with great understanding of what kind of attitude, perception, views and knowledge social workers in Gävleborg have.
After the authors had received the answers of the interview questions, the authors began with the process of coding. The process of coding is of great importance as it points out the patterns found in the conducted interviews. After the process of coding, common patterns were found and later on those patterns were turned into main and subordinate themes of this thesis.

4.2.3.4 Thematic analysis

Due to the fact that interviews have provided the authors with empirical data, it seemed appropriate to use thematic analysis in order to fully understand the themes found in the collected data. According to Guest (2012), thematic analysis is one of the most prevalent methods of examining received data in the qualitative research method. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach and according to Lapadat mentioned in Mills, Durepos and Wiebe (2010: 926) it is the analysis of qualitative data which involves identifying patterns or themes of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data according to themes; and interpreting the structures of the resulting thematic by seeking relationships, commonalities, theoretical constructs, explanatory principles or overarching patterns. In order to apply this to the thesis, themes of the collected qualitative data have been presented and were analyzed by the authors.

Further mentioned themes were gathered throughout a process that consisted of six phases, which were defined in Braun and Clarke (2006:16-23) and followed by the authors. Every phase provided the authors with data and patterns that, at the end of the process, converted into themes found in the data collection analysis process. First, the authors got familiar with the collected data and created a “start list” of potential codes. Second, the authors generated the initial codes with the help of data documentation. This is where the authors saw how the first patterns appeared. In the third phase, the authors searched for themes and combined theme patterns into broader themes, which accurately presented the collected data. In the fourth phase, the authors reviewed the themes and pointed out the main ones. In the fifth phase, the authors named and defined the main themes. And finally, in the sixth phase, the authors stepped back and analyzed the overview of the themes and made an assessment of whether those themes support the collected data and theoretical perspective. After previously mentioned phases were completed, the report was written and later assessed in the thesis. According to Braun
and Clarke (2006:16-23) the authors have to define what exactly each theme is and which aspects of these themes are captured in this process. After previously mentioned phases, the authors needed to define which themes make a meaningful contribution to the thesis so they could focus on those.

4.3 Essay credibility
Reliability and validity were the core throughout this thesis. Everything within this thesis needs to be credible, because otherwise it could be questioned if it was a false thesis or an incorrectly done one. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) reliability is the trustworthiness and consistency of a research, whereas it is referred to whether a finding can be replicated by other researchers and at other times when using the same method. In the context of this thesis it was of great importance to receive reliable information from the interviewees, as this information was used as the base in the analysis process. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) validity is the soundness and strength of a statement. Within social sciences it often means whether a method investigates what it is purported to investigate. According to Guba (1981) mentioned in Grinnell (2001) it is stated that, for validity, its precondition is reliability and also that credibility is referred to as validity in qualitative research.

The authors also thought of the generalizability, as it is important to keep in mind that one cannot be too general. Since several people from very different agencies of social work in Gävleborg were interviewed, it is safe to say that in general there was not much knowledge within the field of AAI. Even if, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), generalizability is the extent that the findings made in one situation could also be transferred to another one, it would not occur in this thesis, due to the fact that the authors have interviewed different people; working at different places; being of different ages; and having different backgrounds. Due to this fact, generalizability was not an issue for the authors, since the credibility of the thesis was at all times intact. Therefore each interview kept its essence due to the individual’s opinion about AAI within the field of social work, even if they were answering very similarly.

It is possible that interviewees lied while answering the interview questions and that they did not mention everything that was needed to be said. That could have been due to several different reasons. Humans are capable of lying, perhaps one does not want to share everything since it could be too private or one just mentions whatever puts
themselves in a positive light so that he/she can uplift their self-esteem (Grinnell, 2001). However, the authors made it very clear to interviewees (before accepting them as participants) that the point with this thesis was to find out whether a social worker in Gävleborg had any knowledge regarding AAI.

The interview questions were formulated in such a way that, whether or not one has knowledge about AAI, they were able to answer specific questions by either answering “yes” or “no” on the first question of the interview. This was something the authors had to put in consideration whilst conducting this thesis, in order to separate and see more clearly if social workers in Gävleborg have any knowledge regarding AAI. It was also necessary to check the previous research for credibility, to make sure that it was reliable and valid. Otherwise, that could have concluded in this study being false because it would have been based on the wrong information (Grinnell, 2001).

4.4 Ethical standpoints
Ethical considerations are important to keep in mind, due to the fact that this thesis is of empirical base where the authors received answers from interviewees on which the result part of this thesis is based upon. It is of great importance for those answers to be truthful or otherwise it would jeopardize the validity of the entire study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interviewees received the interview questions together with an information letter that explained the aim of the interview through email. As it is presented in Patton (1990), in the accompanying letter the authors explained what the meaning of interview was, that all of the interviewees would stay anonymous and that the collected data would be treated confidentially. The authors informed all of the participants beforehand regarding the main aim of this thesis, as well as in what way the collected data would be used and analyzed. The interviewees were also informed that they have the opportunity to skip questions or end the interview at any time. According to Patton (1990) the interviewees also needed to understand the possible consequences for them after their participation in the interview; namely ramifications to the respondent and creating an overview of whether interviewed social workers have knowledge.
Another point that had to be kept in mind was how the interviewee feels regarding the topic of the thesis and how comfortable they feel to answer questions regarding the main topic. According to Patton (1990) none of the interviewees should feel forced to do or say something they do not feel comfortable with. Whilst conducting this thesis it was important to keep in mind ethical standpoints. That is why the interviewees were informed about the meaning of this thesis as mentioned in Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) “what information should be available to whom”.

It was also important for the authors to use the exact information received and that they are not allowed to misuse the collected data/information. In the process of interviewing social workers quite a few other things needed to be presented to them. According to Patton (1990) the interviewees’ knowledge and attitudes regarding AAI will be presented and this information will be available to other people than the authors. Also the fact that the authors needed to have permission from the interviewee’s side in order to be able to use all of the collected data from the interviews. In the context of this thesis the benefits and consequences might not immediately appear, as all of the information will be deleted after the thesis is conducted. Throughout the thesis itself all of the interviewees are anonymous. In the case of interviews some risks might occur, but in this case all of the risks were minimized by not asking interviewees for personally identifiable information (PII), as according to McCallister, Grance and Scarfone (2010) that could have led to actually pointing out who those persons are. Informed consent is the part where the interviewees agreed to be interviewed and by that would allow the authors to use the information gathered from interviews.

**4.5 Limitation of study**
The most significant limitation of this thesis was the framework of time and thesis size. The limitation regarding timeframe was that the field study was ten weeks and the main purpose of this thesis was to produce a bachelor’s thesis which was restricted by academic guidelines. Limitation of time had an impact upon the planning of this thesis, as a carefully made schedule had to be followed in order to have enough time to conduct every part of this thesis in academic manner. Whilst having such broad aim it can be seen as a challenge, but still the primary interest of conducting the thesis was of twofold nature, as the core of this thesis was to gain knowledge regarding AAI and the social workers views, perception and knowledge upon it. The validity and credibility of
collected data also had to be put into consideration as this was an empirical study. Due to the time limit and contact resources, it was rather difficult to find social workers that would agree to be interviewed. Nevertheless this thesis was never seen as impossible to conduct but it is a limitation that had to be considered.

5 Preliminary understanding
Before this thesis was conducted, the authors believed that in Gävleborg social workers do not have much knowledge about AAI but that they could have perception and attitudes towards it and therefore it was interesting to investigate this matter.

It needs to be mentioned that the authors did not have much knowledge about how exactly AAI can be implemented in social work practice and how such phenomenon is being perceived by social workers in Gävleborg. The authors also did not know about whether AAI is something that social workers would want to implement in their daily practice routines. The view upon this subject was rather unclear as during the lectures held at the University of Gävle the perceptions of social workers in Gävleborg and their attitude towards AAI were not mentioned.

6 Presentation of results and empiricism analysis
The authors have conducted e-mail interviews with six people who at this moment are working as social workers in different agencies in Gävleborg. And one face-to-face interview with person who works as a researcher at the University of Gävle in Sweden but has worked in the field of social work previously. The reason why the authors chose to interview a researcher from the university where the authors are students at, was to see if a university employee in the faculty of social work has any knowledge regarding AAI.

The conducted e-mail interviews and face-to-face interview provided the authors with mixed answers from both a researcher and social workers. However it did give a final result of what the social worker's perception, views, attitudes and knowledge in Gävleborg regarding AAI is, whether it is found important within social work practice and if they think it is of importance to integrate animals in their practice.
The authors had constructed the e-mail interview in the following way: the first question of the entire interview was: “Do you have any knowledge regarding animal-assisted interventions?” If the interviewee answered “yes”, the provided questions under the headline of “yes” were then to be further answered by the interviewee, likewise if the answer was “no” there were questions provided under the specific headline of “no”. Some of the interviewees did answer to the “no” part of the interview questions, which gave the authors the result/outcome that even if they did not know anything about AAI; it did give them however awareness about the phenomenon of AAI and raised their curiosity about it. The interviewees agreed upon the statement that animals provide humans with unconditional love and that animals can help humans in ways that other humans cannot. It was intriguing for the authors to see how responsive interviewed persons were to the questions since they wanted to help in the thesis-writing process, and therefore they were genuinely interested in this topic even if they did not have a broad amount of knowledge. Due to the conducted interviews, interviewees came across the thought that they all were interested to implement any kind of AAI in their practice in the field of social work.

The most common themes found in the interviews were:

- A positive attitude towards AAI,
- The lack of knowledge regarding AAI,
  - social workers’ willingness to gain a broader understanding of AAI,
- Implement animals in social work practice.

The subordinated theme to the theme of lack of knowledge was created due to the fact that during the interviews, after answering the questions regarding lack of knowledge about AAI, the interviewees directly mentioned that they are willing to gain more knowledge. This explains that in the thesis, three themes and one subordinated theme which is focused upon later in the text, can be found. These themes will be explained in more detail and the authors will provide an in-depth understanding of: if they are connected to social work, the social worker’s perspective on AAI and whether AAI can be implemented in the practice.

The data collection pointed out the pattern between social workers, which was mutual in some of the cases: they did not have an in-depth understanding of AAI and whether
AAI can be used in the field of social work. But they are interested to know more and perhaps later use AAI in their practice. However, they feel restricted since they work within social work agencies, which have specific guidelines on how to work with different types of interventions and the way interventions should be conducted.

6.1 Positive attitude
This theme was thematically analyzed in order to describe the answers the authors received from the interviewees. The interview participants were asked what type of attitude regarding AAI they have and to this question the authors received the specific answer "positive"; to use animals in practice within the field of social work. The social workers knew of cases they had read, heard about or actually seen in practice. Therefore they saw actual cases where progress in the intervention was achieved due to the fact that an animal was present in the process. The interviewed social workers had positive attitudes towards animals being present during the counseling sessions due to the fact that some of the interviewees have experienced such intervention process in their career as social worker.

The interviewees agreed that animals could be a very good “tool” to use in the process of intervention whilst working with humans, since sometimes a human-to-human intervention process is not always the right way to go. They could understand the fact that sometimes, for example, it could be easier for a client to interact with an animal instead of with another human being, whereas most of the time it involves rather talking than “feeling the emotions”. With previously mentioned “feeling the emotions”, in this context is meant that client focuses on their feelings and how those emotions affect one. When interacting with an animal, it is commonly known that this form of interaction between human and animal is more of a freer feeling since it is more focused upon the connection and bond between these two living beings. Humans tend to open up more in presence of animals rather than other humans, because in some cases the animal can give the human a feeling of a deeper understanding, rather than talking about it with a social worker.

Later mentioned theme of “lack of knowledge” brings the authors to wonder why it is not possible for social workers to use AAI in the process of intervention of a client. Also, it awakens the critical thinking of the authors - the interviewees mentioned that
they have positive attitudes due to what they have heard or seen about the practice of AAI. This brings the authors to question - what is it that they heard or saw that made them have a positive attitude, and how come that they have a positive attitude even though they do not have much knowledge regarding AAI? This was asked through the interviews and some of the interviewees replied in a way that, even when hearing things through media, they still have their own judgement regarding the subject of interest, whereas they can recall their own opinion of what they think is right or wrong. One can be affected by information in the context of their profession, but it needs to be mentioned that it is not only the profession that gives an impact on the way a person thinks. Most of the time, a social worker thinks outside their profession and therefore they can be affected by information from media just like everyone else who does not have the profession of social worker. A social worker needs to have knowledge regarding what is happening in the society and what is going on in Sweden and around the world, since they are in contact with people with all kinds of different ages, genders, ethnicity, political views, and religions on a daily basis. But also, since social workers at the end of the day are ordinary people, they are affected by everything that is going on and are therefore constantly exposed to what is occurring around them. In this context it is important to have awareness regarding AAI, as it is a form of problem solution which one day could be used in the field of social work, as nowadays it has become more common to use alternative problem solutions in the intervention process.

6.2 Lack of knowledge
A common theme presented by the interviews was the lack of knowledge regarding AAI and its impact on social work. Even if all the interviewees were genuinely interested to know more and wanted to discuss it further, all of them said that they had never received any form of education regarding AAI, not even during their studies at the university, even though they all studied during different years and at different places. It was rarely or never mentioned in course literature or by lecturers.

The authors can relate to this as well whilst studying the International Social Work programme at the University of Gävle. Usage of animals has been mentioned perhaps once or twice during lectures and in course literature, yet those were not examples of how and if one can use an animal in the intervention process. It has been mentioned that animals are good human companions (i.e. pets) but it is rarely focused upon the fact that animals can be used for more. For example, in this thesis, animals are used in social
work practice. According to Altschiller (2011) animals could be seen as a stress relief for clients, as having an animal present in the counselling sessions might ease clients’ way of opening up and freely talking about the issue.

The interviewees could agree upon previously mentioned facts, but they could not make any specific statements since several times they mentioned that they did not have enough knowledge. And that is exactly what the authors were trying to find out: whether the social workers today have any knowledge about AAI. According to one of the interviewees who had answered “no” to having any knowledge regarding AAI and answered following question ”Why do you think you do not have much knowledge about usage of animals in intervention process?”, the authors received following answer;

“I don’t believe it is that common yet. It was not included as an obligatory course within my education. I wish it was.”

Due to the fact that there is not much knowledge regarding AAI among the social workers, it could mean that the professionals do not think it is relevant enough to include it and therefore do not put much effort to think outside the box. Perhaps there have been cases throughout the years showing that clients have not improved despite the intervention and therefore the AAI process could have been the type of intervention that could have helped client in the best way.

The authors received “yes” as an answer from an interviewee when answered to the question about having knowledge regarding AAI. This particular interviewee’s previous occupation was an LSS administrator in accordance to Act concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (The Swedish Act, 1993:387). This previously mentioned interviewee stated that, during the time of having previously stated occupation, there was contact with the therapy dog within the social psychiatry. The interviewee explained further that at the workplace was a woman who visited the accommodation with her dog for rehabilitation therapy purposes. The interviewee explained through previously mentioned experience that knowledge was gained and due to that fact the interviewee thinks directed therapy dog work is an effective adjunct in rehabilitation and therapy for people with different disabilities (physical, mental), acquired brain injuries, dementia, depressed mood (anxiety, depression) and neuropsychiatric diagnoses. The interviewee explained further that the aim of the
measure is often to strengthen social interaction, bone and body function, hand and arm function, balance, memory, language, activity, concentration, motivation and mood.

When not having much knowledge regarding a subject, there could be tendency for humans to think less of it or to even have a negative attitude towards it. As an example, pit bulls: there have been speculations whether a pit bull is one of the most dangerous kind of dogs or one of the kindest ones. Even though facts states differently - the main focus is that nothing should be generalized. This is a form of metaphor, even if you hear some negative things about something, it does not mean that it is true or legitimate.

This pushes the essence of this thesis for social workers to think outside the box and try to implement new forms of interventions and perhaps AAI in Gävleborg could be a good alternative method. This is pointed out due to the fact that the interviewees mentioned several times that when hearing something even remotely close to AAI, it was through media and it does not always make everything correct just because it was presented in media, even if it was in a positive or negative way. The media has a strong impact on the society and therefore there are individuals that might see the phenomenon of AAI as something negative, just because it has been presented in a rather negative way. Lack of knowledge could be one of the reasons why people (in this case social workers and/or clients) might be against AAI as an intervention process. Nevertheless it seems unfair to not give a chance to something different just because there is lack of knowledge regarding such alternative intervention methods, in this case AAI.

As previously mentioned and further analyzed neither the interviewees nor the authors have received much knowledge, if any, during studies at the university, no matter the year nor place where they studied. This in itself states a lot, namely that animals included in practice is rarely ever mentioned whilst receiving education, even though there are plenty of researches around the world stating that animals are a good “tool” to use within the field of social work. The connection to the previously mentioned statement was found in the interview question regarding the knowledge the interviewee has about the usage of AAI. To that the authors received the answer that stated that the interviewees do not believe that it is common yet, and also that it was not included as an obligatory course during the time of studies. With this thesis, there is hope to present this newer form of addition to use within the social work practice.
Previously mentioned information was received from a graduate from International Social Work programme at the University of Gävle. This brings the authors to the conclusion that awareness has to be brought to this matter, as former and current students do think that the International Social Work programme lacks information regarding AAI and its usage in the field. In other words; the flexible social work practice does not meet its capacity. With previously mentioned information the authors are not trying to say that all of intervention methods have to be mentioned in the education process, but it seems like social work education follows only the general, most common (human-to-human) intervention processes and does not leave place for alternative methods. Due to that it can be speculated that it is one of the reasons why social workers nowadays do not have in-depth understanding regarding animal usage in the intervention process. Previously mentioned answer brings awareness to the fact that social workers are willing to receive more knowledge, as previously mentioned interviewee was not the only person who had positive attitude regarding willingness to gain more knowledge and animal usage in the intervention process.

It did however wake the interviewees’ attention and they wanted to find out more, so who knows, perhaps after some time, AAI will become much more common within the field of social work than it is today.

6.2.1 Social workers are willing to gain more knowledge
This theme is a subordinate theme distinguished from “Lack of knowledge” as a result of noticing the fact that interviewees continually mentioned that they desire to gain more knowledge regarding AAI. In this case it can be mentioned that the interviewees do think that it is important to have a broad spectrum of knowledge in this specific area. The interviewed social workers mentioned that if they would have broader understanding of such type of interventions, they might have used it in their field of practice and motivated other social workers to use it instead of human-to-human type of interventions.

The interviewees mentioned the positive aspect of animal being present during for example counselling sessions, due to the fact that clients felt calmer in the presence of an animal and became more open. The previously mentioned positive aspect can be found as well in research conducted by Risley-Curtiss (2010). Yet the interviewees
mentioned the fact that lack of knowledge does not allow them to truly understand the importance of animals and their place in the social work field. During the process of data analysis, the authors came across the fact that a part of the interviewees acknowledged that having lack of knowledge is a negative aspect. As well as the fact that interviewed social workers seemed to be disappointed about not having such intervention process taught at the university whilst they were studying.

In the analysis process the authors came across lots of information regarding willingness to implement animals in the intervention process, as the interviewees have seen cases where there was a positive outcome due to the presence of an animal. The interviewee was asked; “What do you think about AAI?” and the answer explained why that person had a positive attitude towards AAI;

“What I have seen has been positive, many introverted people opened themselves up in a way they had never done before. People enjoyed the contact with the dog, got a different body language and expressions”.

Previously mentioned interviewee also stated the belief that an animal is able to reach a human on a level that is not possible in any other way, with a powerful inwardness and connection with human's feelings and emotions.

Also, as another interviewee answered the question if interviewee believed it is important to have knowledge about AAI within social work profession and if so, why and the answer was following:

“I really think it is. I’m an animal-person and I really believe the social connection to an animal can help improve both social, physical and psychological problems one person may have. The relationship a human being can create with an animal is for me amazing. The love, understanding and comfort an animal can give... without even being able to communicate in a dialogue”.

According to the answers received from the interviewees, the authors could clearly detect that the social workers that were interviewed were genuinely interested and
passionate about this matter, even though they lacked knowledge regarding AAI. They showed compassion to the animals, the humans, the connection and bond that these two parts can make, without having dialogue of speech.

However, according to interviewees there are specific costs that social work agencies need to think about. This means that, even if the social workers that are practicing the interventions would like to use AAI, it does not necessarily mean that it is possible due to the cost of implementing a new alternative intervention in the agency. The legal part of implementing a new form of intervention was also mentioned. It can rarely be done in a heartbeat, often one needs to involve legal aspects and guidelines in order to make it ethical, to consider all kinds of scenarios and if it is a safe choice to have so there will be no issue regarding lawsuits etc. Perhaps AAI has not been implemented in social work practices due to the fact that there could be a bad outcome, such as clients being allergic or having a fear of animals. In other words, it can be said that one change might implement more negative aspects than positive. As it is mentioned previously in this thesis - every case is individual and unique. Every case needs to be carefully looked at. Animals might be the main reason why the client succeeds through intervention and does not need the service of a social worker after intervention is concluded, which could save costs in the long run. With this the authors want to create awareness about the individuality of every case and the generalization of social work whereas nowadays the most common intervention processes have their focus on human-to-human contact and interaction. In some cases animals can be looked upon as a negative implementation, due to the negative aspects of having them in the social work practice. At the same time agencies need to be reminded that in some cases it can be so that it is the animal that “saves” the client's life and is a crucial part of the intervention, whilst in other cases it is the total opposite. With this it can be concluded that if something does not help in every case - it does not necessarily mean that it needs to be taken out of the picture completely.

6.3 Implementation of animals in intervention processes
After analyzing all of the interview data, the authors noticed a pattern between answers of different interviewees which pointed out that interviewees do think that it is important to implement animals in social work practice, in cases where it is possible.
During the interviews interviewees did state that it is rather difficult to include animals in the intervention process due to fact that there are plenty of restrictions, as well as the fact that in some of the agencies, animals are not seen as a part of intervention. In this case it can be seen that the interviewed social workers did think that animals would be a good addition to the intervention process, yet their agency might disagree upon that. Continuing this theme, one of the interview participants provided the authors with following information regarding restrictions:

“I think it is important to have an overview of all the possible intervention methods. Within the public organizations we are hindered by all of the procurement laws which make us use the cheapest source of intervention which rarely gives a good quality of work. I have no idea about the financial situation regarding AAI but probably it is expensive. In the municipality of Gävle the open intervention prioritizes the purchased intervention alternatives and at our organization there are no AAI intervention programmes, in neither the open intervention care nor the purchasing alternatives (at least not within the social services regarding interventions of addiction of adults and the public health and support for youth, meaning the areas concerning my area of expertise)”.

A lot of aspects of the process need to be put into consideration as it is not an easy process of implementing animals in the field of social work practice. It raised the question of “How come that agencies do not stand on the same grounds as the social workers?” Some of the interviewees thought that it is not enough to just be willing to implement animals in the process of intervention, if at the end of the day the agency would disagree upon such change in the intervention process. The previous statement points out the importance of actually putting into consideration what the thoughts of social workers are. At the end of the day they are the ones that have primary contact with clients and they are the ones who investigate the specific cases and can withdraw what type of intervention would fit the individual. This theme can be elaborated with the help of the question that was stated in the interview question list; “Why do you include or not include animals in your intervention process?” and an interviewee provided the following answer:
"As I am an administrative manager I am not working so close in the intervention process so I cannot answer that".

Previously mentioned answer caught the author’s attention as it pointed out that this interviewee seemed to not work as closely with clients as other social workers do. Through the interview it seemed like this person did not have enough authority in this matter of actually being able to make a change. Previously mentioned information raised the author’s awareness in a way that points out the fact that even though person is an authority in the agency, it does not necessarily mean that this person can make such change. That raises the question of “How come that authorities at the certain agency cannot make a change, even though they are the ones who have primary contact with clients?"

As one of the interviewees stated, the reason to why not having any particular knowledge regarding AAI is due to the fact that it has not been credited as an evidence-based intervention method because it depends on the fact that there are other leading intervention methods which have been pioneered in recent years. There are always shifts of paradigms between different intervention methods, such as psychotherapy which was replaced with cognitive behavioral therapy. The interviewee thought the “dodo bird verdict in interventions creates space for the actions that people can make the most money out of the priority”. With the previously mentioned information, the authors have concluded that, due to the fact that AAI is not a common intervention used in Gävleborg within the field of social work, it therefore makes AAI less prioritized as an offer for clients. Also, due to the fact that there seems to be not that many social workers in Gävleborg who are able to practice AAI, this due to lack of knowledge and training.

The previously mentioned restrictions raise the question of why the client has to miss out on an opportunity to be treated with AAI due to issues that are not relevant to their case. Of course, there are cases where those restrictions might be relevant, but it does not necessarily need to be every case. As result of that, the authors have speculated upon the fact of how, for example, finances are distributed nowadays and whether needs of the clients are met. The authors have come across information of the financial part of AAI, which, according to interviewees, is one of the main reasons why AAI is not
implemented in their practice. It can be mentioned that AAI does not necessary need to cost a lot of money, but that it still can be implemented in the intervention. For example, if the client is able to visit animal shelters, he/she can take care of animals under the supervision of staff and gain positive emotions in the process. According to one of the interviewees, in the beginning of the implementation process it might be extra paperwork for social workers, but once it is implemented - it will probably be just as easy to work with it as with other types of interventions. During the analysis of the interviews an implication was noticed in the question of whether interviewee as a social worker would be interested to gain more knowledge about AAI and its usage in the field of social work. The answer was that, as a social worker in particular and a human being in general, the interviewee stated the interest of gaining more knowledge regarding alternative problem solutions. But in this case the interviewee believed that it is not enough that only social workers have knowledge as it is important also for the client to have knowledge regarding alternative intervention forms. Previously mentioned answer directs the authors into thinking about the fact that it is not enough to have educated social workers as it is of great importance to have informed clients as well - everyone needs to be involved to find the most suitable intervention process.

It can be mentioned that in the implementation process there are both advantages and disadvantages, which one of the interviewees pointed out in the following way. The interviewee was asked whether there are challenges of having animal-assisted interventions. To previously mentioned question the interviewee stated that there must be an incredibly close interaction between those who are "pet carrier" and the animal since there needs to be mutual trust between these two parts. Another challenge is that there is not always a director who appreciate and thus allow the form of working. Also, the need to consider whether there is evidence for the work. With previously mentioned answer can be pointed out that in the process of implementation it is of great importance to consider both human and animal as both of the involved parts must receive the best possible outcome.

6.4 Conclusion

It can be mentioned that being willing to gain more knowledge about AAI would improve social worker’s performance at their workplace and whilst working with
clients, as the more you know - the more you are able to do. With previously mentioned information the authors want to point out the importance of knowledge and the fact that it is important for social workers to “grow” within their profession. Because the social work practice is a developing profession where different types of interventions can be implemented, as every client’s case is unique and needs to be addressed in a specific way.

The social workers who participated in the interviews mentioned that they have noticed how the financial part of the agency is being delegated and that there is not a big interest to add another intervention example as it would add external costs. It also needs to be mentioned that the financial part of integration process is not the only restriction, as it needs to be looked upon from a legal aspect also. Therefore an animal cannot just be “thrown” in the process of intervention and expect that there will be a good outcome. To that can be added that it is important to have a sense of what type of animal would fit certain clients’ need, as well as the situation they are in.

Also, imagine if someone at the agency or a client is allergic to animals, or has an extreme fear of animals. Would that make the intervention process more successful? Probably not, as that would create other unnecessary problems that need attention. One of the interviewees actually stated that it could be negative to use AAI due to the fact of not being able to connect animal and human due to allergies or that it is prohibited to take animals into the accommodation.

As well it can be mentioned that, according to interviewees, agencies should become more open-minded regarding intervention processes and implement new types of interventions, as there are cases where human-to-human intervention process does not always give positive outcome.

As a final conclusion it has to be added that changes are not always smooth and easy, but the reward at the end of the day is most of the times worth it - imagine for example a client that no longer needs help from a social worker, and has found the solution through contact with an animal. What can be mentioned as well is the legal part of this process. It would mean more paperwork for social workers, and might cause some confusion in the beginning, but in this day and age great amount the people assimilate to
changes rather fast, especially if it is something that is being used on daily basis. It can be questioned whether it actually would mean that social workers have more paperwork or whether there would be any negative thoughts regarding it. As previously mentioned by the authors - speculations are speculations and they do not show the real situation of how social workers would actually react and whether it would be seen as a problem. Something needs to be implemented in order to argue whether it works or not - as well as - whether something needs to be kept in the process.

7 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the views of the social workers within Gävleborg regarding the intervention method of AAI. The research questions focused upon knowledge and perception of social workers as well as their attitude and views regarding AAI. In the introduction part of this thesis, the authors raised the question of AAI usage in the field of social work in Gävleborg and whether it is used at all. In the process of collecting empirical data, through the process of having semi-structures interviews, the authors acquired broader understanding about the views of social workers regarding this phenomenon, as well as how it comes that social workers do not have that much knowledge regarding usage of animals in intervention process. In the remainder of this chapter the authors will discuss the previous research, coupling to theory, methodology as well as suggestion for further research will be presented.

7.1 Previous research discussion

The information found in Berget and Ihlebæk (2011) points out rather similar attitudes among social workers, as well as it was mentioned that social workers do see animals as catalysts or mediators. Previous research also points out the same patterns as the authors received from the interviewees; such as having lack of knowledge among social workers in context of AAI client oriented interventions. As well as previous researches pointed out the positive attitude regarding AAI, just as the positive pattern that was found in analysis of this thesis. This is an example of how comparison and similarities can be found in previous research and the data gathered by the authors. However, it must be pointed out that the positive attitude was specified among the interviewed social workers in Gävleborg and due to that cannot be applied upon all of the social workers. In other words; the positive attitude towards AAI cannot be generalized.
Due to the usage of animals in the intervention process, it could have a positive outcome as there have been cases where clients have not felt that they have received the right type of intervention. Some clients have been feeling anxious around people, for example with social workers. Therefore an animal can be an addition to the human-to-human contact as it perhaps could be a good “tool” to a solution. Common similarities can be found in Morrison (2007) where the animal-human bond is being lifted and presented in a way that points out the importance of animal companions in the intervention process as they have a health enhancing effect on people. However, it can differentiate due to the fact that in some cases animals could not be used in the intervention process due to the agency restrictions, because of allergies or the simple fact that the client does not like animals. As well the authors want to note that even though there are cases where companion animal has been perceived as part of the treatment/intervention process, it does not necessarily mean that having a companion animal suits every individual case. In this case the authors would like to repeat themselves and point out that – what fits one case, does not necessarily fits other cases.

As mentioned in Risley-Curtiss (2010), a correlation between this thesis and previous research can be drawn, namely: social workers are willing to gain more knowledge regarding the phenomenon of AAI and its integration in the intervention process. According to information collected through the interviews, there was a pattern to distinguish in the answers that were given. In those answers it was mentioned that one of the main reasons why social workers are willing to gain more knowledge, is due to the fact that they think that there are other ways of helping clients than the already existing forms of intervention. Even though there are plenty of alternative intervention methods it does not undoubtedly mean that all of them need to be implemented into social work practice. With this the authors want to specify that AAI should be only implemented into social work practices where it is possible and necessary.

As mentioned in the “Previous research” part of this thesis, the authors did find out that AAI has become more usual to practice within traditional forms of therapy. A desire to use AAI has been noticed on a larger scale, especially now when pharmaceutical drugs are frequently given to patients (Berget & Ihlebæk, 2011). The authors saw previously mentioned fact as a positive matter. The authors came across the fact that, within the field of social work, AAI is beneficial to have. Information found in
articles and received from social workers state that there are urges for other types of intervention and rehabilitation to what is provided nowadays in society, which makes an interesting case of this thesis. Such information the authors were expecting to gain from this thesis; to see how AAI is viewed upon and if social workers in Gävleborg could consider it as a possible intervention alternative. In the context of what has been mentioned in the same paragraph above, the authors want to point out that even though AAI has become more common to use instead of pharmaceutical drugs, it does not mean that in all of the cases AAI would cure the problem or could be seen as a form of problem solution. As at the end of the day some clients must have pharmaceutical drugs in addition to human-to-human or animal-human intervention process.

According to Hanrahan (2013) similar restriction was discussed in this article and in this thesis, as social workers have mentioned that AAI has not been implemented into social work practice due to policy restriction issues, lack of knowledge about AAI and lack of training. This makes the authors to question the gap between social workers and the authorities, as it seems like some links in the process are missing, since both of the involved parties are not able to make any changes.

According to Beder (2015) humans and animals have a rather beneficial connection, as in the concept of biophilia it was mentioned that animals are a good source of help whilst working with humans. A similar acknowledgement was found in Altschiller (2011) where he agrees upon the statement that the animal-human bond is beneficial. AAI can be used in different institutions and other settings whilst treating people of different ages, with different animals for it to be a productive and useful way of intervention (Ibid). A common pattern was noticed in answer provided by one of the interviewees’ regarding the question of whether the interviewee believes that it is important to have knowledge regarding AAI within the social work profession, as it is crucial to have different types of solutions for one problem. With previously mentioned information it encourages the authors to discuss whether AAI is suitable for every social services institutions and that itself can be seen as a restriction. This could create the outcome of AAI not being suitable as form of solution in all of the cases/institutions.
7.2 Coupling to theory discussion
The interviewees mentioned the importance of the animal-human bond, which in this case can be connected to the previously mentioned concept of biophilia. As it has been mentioned in the “Coupling to theory” chapter of this thesis, the concept of biophilia points out the bond that exist between humans and nonhumans. In this case the positive attitudes towards animals would help to implement animals as a “tool” in the process of “fixing the problem”. This can be further discussed as one of the interviewees did mention the importance of the animal-human bond as the interviewee answered the question regarding their thoughts upon the animal-human bond in the process of interventions. To that the authors received an answer which consisted of information that stated the fact that the animal-human bond is something special that human shares with nonhuman being and that this bond is something that human-to-human contact can never replace. It was added that animals have an important place in a human’s life. However, it can be discussed if this can be effective in all of scenarios, as sometimes this practice would not work in theory as well as the other way around, the theory does not work well in practice. Due to the fact that some humans and animals do not simply feel that specific bond as previously mentioned.

Previously mentioned positive aspect of an animal's presence can be connected to Bronfenbrenner's’ (1979) eminent life systems, in the context of systems theory, as in this study mainly focused on the animal being a part of micro- and mesosystems. The correlation can be presented in a way that explains the interaction processes between humans and animals in context of interaction between more than two sceneries, which in this case results in a positive way. It can be stated that, even though previously mentioned systems are divided, they can still be connected to one another and that they are complimentary. However, even though in some cases animal is a part of person’s system it does not mean that animal is a part of every person’s life system, in person’s surroundings. By that the authors want to point out that animals are not an important life addition to everyone. In other words; just because someone needs it, it does not necessarily mean that everyone needs it. As well as just because someone has an animal in their life system, it does not necessarily need to mean that it needs to affect others, but if it does it could have both positive and negative impact.
7.3 Methodology discussion
According to Opdenakker (2006) there are several factors that have to be put into consideration as those factors could be seen as the advantages and disadvantages of using the method of E-mail interviews, in other words asynchronous communication of time and place. A great disadvantage is the complete lack of social cues since there is no face-to-face contact between the interviewer and the interviewee which means that there is no possibility to physically see how the interviewee reacts to the questions nor what the surrounding is like around them. This could hinder the interviewee to answer the questions if there is a lot going on around them as well if they are stressed, it could cloud their judgement and therefore perhaps incorrect answer will be given. However, an advantage in that matter could instead be opposite than the face-to-face meeting since during such meeting the interviewee could be stressed or the surrounding is disturbing. In other words; whilst using the e-mail interviewing method the interviewees are on their own and will be able to decide to answer the provided questions whenever they feel like doing it. Yet, the freedom of conducting such type of interviews might have an impact upon how much time the interviewee has to answer the questions. As in some cases it might seem that, as the person in not being “supervised” by the interviewer – there is space for interpretation of how much time actually the participant of the interview has to answer questions and send them to the interviewers. In such cases the interviewer does not have all of the “power” in its hands, as the interviewee can decide to answer whenever it is suitable (Opdenakker, 2006). The authors did find previously mentioned information as a disadvantage, as some of the interviewees did not put into consideration that they have limited time to answer the interview questions. Due to that the authors felt like they were restrained to continue the process of writing thesis at some times, as this thesis is based upon empirical data collected from the interviews.

According to Opdenakker (2006) there is a discussion in the article “Advantages and Disadvantages of Four Interview Techniques in Qualitative Research” of using emoticons in the text of whilst answering the interview questions in order to enhance the meaning of the answers provided by the interviewee. However a disadvantage could be that with usage of emoticons it could change the meaning of what is said in the answer due to different understandings of the meaning of the different emoticons. Nevertheless, this is discussed in the article that it could diminish the effects of this
disadvantage since it could make it more evident what is actually meant in the answer since the interviewers are not meeting the interviewee in person. Nonetheless, the authors need to be aware of that everyone’s communication styles are different and with the professionality that the authors want to have, they chose to not have any emoticons of any sorts in order to not create any confusion and to keep it strict and simple. As well as according to Opdenakker (2006) and Hunt and McHale (2009) the same advantage was mentioned in context of that e-mail interview method would not demand any costs since the authors do not have to spend finances on transportation and such.

7.4 Suggestion for further research
Further research could be conducted in order to explore the phenomenon of AAI or a different intervention method in order to get an in-depth understanding of whether such intervention process would have a positive impact upon the clients’ health and wellbeing. And by that get an in-depth understanding of what are the best ways of implementing it in the field of social work. The authors would suggest to concentrate on the benefits regarding previously mentioned phenomenon or the alternative phenomenon of choice, as well as get a broader understanding of why is it so challenging to implement an alternative form of solution in already existing intervention processes. An alternative form of solution would empower the social workers as social work is constantly evolving and studies regarding alternative form of solution cannot be redundant. The authors think that with further researches the field of social work would have a greater awareness regarding alternative forms of problem solutions and as well as it would bring social work to its full capacity. As it have come to the author's awareness, after examining previous research, that there are many people around the world who are not receiving suitable type of intervention, which might suit person with similar problem, but does not necessarily suit the individual in question. With this the authors are trying to bring awareness to the fact that the general intervention processes are becoming rather general and due to that makes a small gap to fit all of the clients’ needs. The authors do understand that AAI or other alternative of choice are very small parts of social work intervention method list, but one has to start somewhere in order to grow.
The reference list


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Abbreviation list

AAA - Animal-assisted activities
AAI - Animal-assisted interventions
AAT - Animal-assisted therapy
PII - Personally identifiable information
Appendices

Appendix I: Information letter

We, Carin Eklund and Gita Melnace, are students at the University of Gävle and we are currently writing our Bachelor Thesis in the programme of International Social Work.

The aim of this interview is to provide authors with greater knowledge and understanding about how much does a social worker in Sweden know about animal-assisted interventions.

Authors do not expect any previous knowledge from interviewees as the aim is to understand how common it is for a social worker in Sweden to have any type of knowledge about animal-assisted interventions and its usage in social work field.

The data gathered from this interview will be anonymous and will be used and accessed only by authors. Collected data will be handled with confidentiality and data will be used correctly and all of ethical guidelines will be followed.

Sincerely, Carin Eklund and Gita Melnace
Appendix II: Interview guide

Interview questions

Do you have any knowledge regarding animal-assisted interventions?

If yes, please answer following questions below, if no, please answer the questions in next paragraph

If yes;
1. Where and how did you gain your knowledge about animal-assisted intervention (further mentioned as AAI)?
2. What do you think about AAI?
3. What is your attitude towards AAI? Do you see it as something positive or negative? Why?
4. What are your thoughts upon animal-human bond in process of interventions?
5. What do you think are advantages and disadvantages of using AAI in process of interventions?
6. What do you think of animal’s involvement in human lives?
7. What do you think are the challenges of having animal-assisted interventions? Why?
8. In which case scenarios would you recommend animal-assisted interventions to clients?
9. Do you see specific pattern traits between clients who have used AAI as a form of intervention and if so, which?
10. Do you believe social workers have different perceptions of animals due to the background they have, if so why?
11. Do you believe it is common to use AAI in the field of social work? Why?
12. What are your thoughts upon how available AAI in Sweden is?
13. How exposed are you to information about animals?
14. Have you had any special training obtained for including animals in practice, if so, which kinds?”
15. Why do you include or not include animals in your interventions process?
If no:
1. Why do you think you do not have much knowledge about usage of animals in intervention process?
2. What is your attitude towards AAI? Why?
3. Do you believe it is important to have knowledge about AAI within social work profession? Why?
4. As a social worker, would you be interested to gain more knowledge about AAI and its usage in the field of social work? Why?
5. Can you say something about any awareness you might have regarding AAI at your workplace? If so, which forms?
6. How do you think you or the agency can increase the knowledge of using animals in practice?
7. What are your thoughts upon how common it is to use AAI in your field of work?
8. How does it make you react whenever AAI is mentioned in any type of media? Why?