



BRILL

SOCIETY & ANIMALS (2019) 1-19

Animals
& Society
Institute
brill.com/soan

Companion Animals in Health-Promoting Work-Life

Komalsingh Rambaree

Associate Professor in Social Work, Department of Social Work and Psychology, University of Gävle, Sweden

kolsie@hig.se

Stefan Sjöberg

Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Direction Social Work, Department of Social Work and Psychology, University of Gävle, Sweden

Abstract

Despite a growing number of studies on human–animal interactions, empirical data focusing on companion animals within the context of health-promoting work-life are still limited. This article presents an analysis and discussion based on the perceptions of 22 students and staff from the University of Gävle in Sweden on the potential of companion animals for supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, as well as on the possible challenges of having companion animals on the premises of the University. Based on the findings, this article proposes that companion animals can indeed play vital supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, which are presented in the text as “forcing function,” “communication companion,” and “social skills.” However, this article also highlights the socio-economic, legal, and organizational challenges that need to be carefully considered and worked out for having companion animals in the workplace, such as in a university.

Keywords

companion animal – health – health promotion – work-life – social support – workplace

Introduction

Work is a source not only of wealth, but also of health. Workplaces are one of the most important determinants of health (Masanotti & Briziarelli, 2010). Within this context, several employers (such as the University of Gävle) have made a commitment to health-promoting work-life. Work-life (including study-life) and health are closely related, in that the quality of working conditions has a direct impact on an individual's wellbeing (Eurofound, 2012). In particular, wellbeing at work is often used in relation to the physical, mental, psychological, and emotional aspects of workers within a healthy workplace. Broadly, a healthy workplace is one where there is a mutual collaboration between several stakeholders for a continual improvement of the health, safety, and wellbeing of workers, as well as for the sustainability of the working conditions and environment (Burton, 2010).

Health promotion is commonly defined in relation to the provision of care and resources. It is seen as a process of support that enables people to increase control over the determinants of health (WHO, 1998; Davies & Macdowall, 2006). The theoretical and practical development of health promotion encompasses a socio-ecological paradigm informed by a more holistic understanding of the influences on, and the prerequisites for, positive wellbeing (Dooris, Dowding, Thompson, & Wynne, 1998). In this sense, health promotion is a much wider concept than illness prevention because interventions are directed at improving the general wellbeing of people by focusing on agents of diseases, as well as the broader health and environment systems (Dhooper, 2012).

Health-promoting work-life therefore needs to be focused on much more than safety issues at work. According to Raingruber (2014), programs on health promotion tend to fail mainly where not enough consideration is given to the broader environment. For instance, health promotion needs to recognize the larger socio-ecological systems (such as work, family, schools, the natural social and physical environment within which individuals are embedded) that underlie health outcomes (Golden & Earp, 2012).

In this sense, health-promoting work-life is broadly defined as an organizational practice for the provision of psychosocial services, benefits, and incentives to employees—mostly through the creation of conducive, supportive, and sustainable working conditions and environments (Tsouros, 1998). As argued earlier, the exploration and design of health promoting work-life needs to be considered from a more holistic perspective, incorporating broader socio-ecological systems. Within social sciences, systems are defined as collections of interrelated units such as individuals, families, political agents, workers, and so on that form a web of interactions to make up functional society as a whole.

In particular, the socio-ecological systems perspective is centrally focused on the connections linking human beings with their ecological systems. From this perspective, a person's wellbeing is considered to be dependent on the quality of his/her relationship with other humans, as well as with non-humans.

For instance, from the "One Health" conceptual perspective, it is argued that there is a strong interconnectedness and interdependence between the health of humans and non-humans (One Health Initiative, 2013). The One Health concept provides a better and broader systemic understanding of our wellbeing. Within social sciences, the One Health concept is often regarded as "health in socio-ecological systems" (Hanrahan, 2014). For instance, the eco-social work and the green care approaches put particular emphasis on the potential and necessity of extending relations beyond human-human to integrate ecological systems incorporating non-human beings, such as insects/non-human animals, within health-promotion theories and practices (Coates, 2003; Besthorn, 2012; Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2013; Ryan, 2014).

Social support theory is one of the most popular holistic socio-ecological frameworks for studying health promotion (Williams, Barclay, & Schmieid, 2004). The concept of social support is multi-faceted, which often makes it difficult to define and measure (Hupcey, 1998; Williams et al., 2004). In its basic conceptualization, social support can be considered an exchange of resources (both tangible and non-tangible) within a relationship that eventually results in enhancing the wellbeing of the recipient (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). It can also be the physical and emotional comfort given to someone. One major problem in the conceptualization of social support is that the term has been seldom considered within a human-animal relationship. Serpell (2010) argues that social support should be applicable to any form of relationship, including a human-animal relationship, which can provide the same supportive functions for wellbeing as those between humans only.

The stress and coping perspective of social support theory is central to the study of companion animals in health-promoting work-life. From this perspective, social support is believed to reduce stress and enhance coping through supportive functions. Companion animals can be considered supportive in health-promoting work-life through their stress-reducing capabilities. For instance, researchers have argued that companion animals in the workplace can provide human beings with opportunities for physiological, social, emotional, and psychological development; as well as for motivational, educational, social, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits which improve self-efficacy, productivity, social skills, and behavior (Miller & Ingram, 2000; Burgon, 2011; Barker, Knisley, Barker, Cobb, & Schubert, 2012; De Mello, 2012; O'Haire, 2012; Hanrahan, 2013; Hauge, Kvaalem, Berget, Enders-Slegers, & Braastad, 2013; Beck,

2014; O'Haire, McKenzie, McCune, & Slaughter, 2014). These functions could be beneficial within the context of health-promoting work-life.

On the agenda of health-promoting work-life, initiatives to tackle stress in the workplace are considered to be highly important because of the human and economic costs of stress (Noblet & LaMontagne, 2006). Stress is usually defined as the change in one's physical or mental state in response to situations (stressors) that pose a challenge or threat to overall wellbeing (Colligan & Higgins, 2005). The workplace factors found to be associated with stress often include long hours, work overload, time pressure, difficult or complex tasks, lack of breaks, lack of opportunities for interaction and emotional communication with others, and a poor physical and psychological work environment. It is argued that stress at work is made worse when employees feel that they have little support from their employers (Leka, Griffiths, & Cox, 2003). Moreover, the pressures associated with increasingly competitive and cost-conscious marketplaces will continue to place enormous demands on organizations and their members (Noblet & LaMontagne, 2006). Within the Swedish context, the Swedish Social Insurance Agency reports that the most common disorders causing sickness or absence from work are stress-related illnesses (Pálsdóttir, Grahn, & Persson, 2014).

Researchers have found that social support through companion animals in the workplace can help by lowering blood pressure related to negative stress (Chandler, 2005; Barker et al., 2012). Chandler (2005) reported a significant drop in stress hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline, and aldosterone, and an increase in health-inducing and social-feeling-inducing hormones such as oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphins, in people after 20 minutes of activities with a dog. In particular, with the presence of a companion animal, a number of people showed reductions in cardiovascular, behavioral, and psychological indicators of anxiety (Pichot & Coulter, 2007). This could be beneficial in terms of support to employees in the workplace.

Due to human-animal interaction studies supporting the role of companion animals as a form of social support in health-promoting work-life, there is a growing trend from companies to allow companion animals in the workplace (Wells & Perrine, 2001; Norling & Keeling, 2010; Barker et al., 2012; Bergen & Bressler, 2015). For instance, several universities are allowing companion animals on campus. This move is supported by clear and well-defined policies.

One website in the USA allows prospective students to check a list of schools who allow companion animals on campus (Carnegie Communications, 2017). However, given that there are many inherent challenges, the provision for having companion animals in the workplace needs to be considered carefully. In fact, it is very challenging for organizations like universities to have policies

that do not allow companion animals at their premises. Such policies could violate the rights of those who are assisted by service animals (Bergen & Bressler, 2015). In this context, the University of Gävle has clearly spelled out that it is forbidden to have companion animals on university premises, with the exception of service and guide dogs.

Within this context, this study was undertaken with the aim of exploring the potential of companion animals for supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, as well as the possible challenges of having companion animals on the premises of a university. This article presents an analysis and discussion based on the perceptions of students and staff members from the University of Gävle. In addition, this article considers some of the measures for tackling the challenges of having companion animals in the workplace.

Materials and Methods

The respondents of this study were students and staff members (5 males and 17 females) from the University of Gävle in Sweden. Most of the respondents (about 80 percent) were from the Faculty of Health and Occupational Studies, though students and staff members from all faculties were invited. The student and staff mailing lists and the notice boards of the University of Gävle were used to present information on, and call for voluntary participation in, the research. All those who responded positively to the call for participation were selected as respondents in this study, and the research aim and methodology were communicated to them.

Data for this study were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with four different categories of respondents: (a) staff members with companion animals, (b) students with companion animals, (c) staff members without companion animals, and (d) staff and students with and without companion animals. This strategy of collecting data from different groups allowed for both in-depth and broader perspectives on the subject matter from a diverse group of respondents. For instance, having groups of respondents consisting of students and staff members both with and without companion animals allowed for more in-depth and interactive discussion during the interview on whether companion animals should be allowed in workplaces like universities. Social research ethical guidelines, such as those on voluntary participation, anonymous reporting, consent for using voice-recording devices during the discussions, and so on, were carefully followed during the research process.

All the FGDs were run during the lunchtime break from 12:00 to 13:00, so as not to disturb the smooth running of normal everyday activities at the

university. All participants were provided with sandwiches and soft drinks, funded by the university, as a token of appreciation for participation in the research during the lunch hour. During the FGDs, respondents were mainly asked to discuss (a) their individual views and perceptions on having/not having companion animals, (b) companion animals as a source of social support in health promotion, (c) the potential of companion animals for supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, (d) challenges of having companion animals at the university within the frame of health-promoting work-life, and (e) suggestions for tackling challenges relating to having companion animals at the university.

This article is based on an abductive thematic network analysis (Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013) of the gathered data. The abductive approach is a pragmatic way of undertaking social investigation through the use of abductive reasoning for making exploratory inferences from new empirical findings (Haig, 2008; Rambaree & Faxelid, 2013). According to Haig (2005), an abductive approach permits researchers to go further than just making/testing theory through hypotheses/research questions. In particular, an abductive approach allows critical reasoning from the researchers to move back and forth within the process of reflexivity between the selected theory and the new empirical evidence from the gathered data (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

The researchers started by designing a theoretical framework from a literature review on social support theory using ATLAS-ti 7.2—a computer-aided qualitative data-analysis software. In designing the theoretical framework, identified literatures on social support theory were assigned to the software, and a network based on key concepts from the selected theory was developed. For example, linkages were drawn on how social support is related to concepts such as “stress and coping,” “relationship,” and “self-esteem.” This network was then used to frame questions/issues for the FGDs, with a view to contributing towards the development of social support theory incorporating findings from this study on companion animals in health-promoting work-life.

After each FGD, the data gathered through audio-recordings were assigned to ATLAS-ti 7.2 software for abductive thematic network analysis through the steps outlined in Figure 1. The same procedure was followed with each layer of data from the following FGDs. The techniques of constant comparison and reflexivity were used in analyzing the empirical findings. The results presented in this article are focused on those key themes that have a higher density of quotations and linkages compared to others.

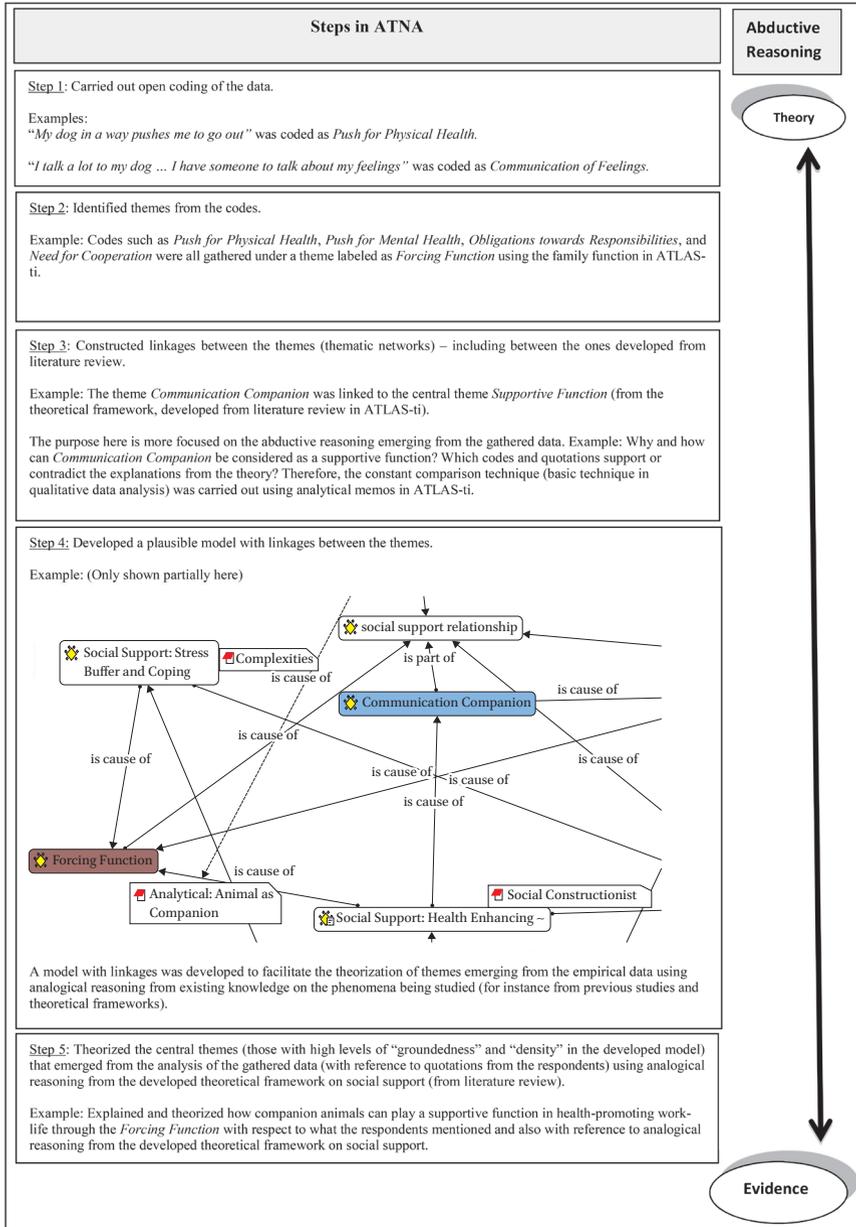


FIGURE 1 Steps in the analysis of the data

Results and Discussion

Supportive Function

Forcing Function

This study found that companion animals can play a “forcing function” as social support in health-promoting work-life. For instance, one respondent mentioned that while she was going through a period of depression, she was constantly forced out of bed by her cat. Despite her depression, she felt an obligation to take care of the cat who was solely dependent on her. She had to get up and prepare food for, and engage with, her cat. Being “forced” to get up and do things for her cat helped her to gradually deal with her depression. She also felt that the cat was more attached to her, and showed more affection towards her, during the period of depression. The respondent was of the view that cats can sense depression in human beings, and consequently react in a supportive manner towards their guardian/s.

Some researchers shared the view that social support derived from animal companionship, where a person believes in being cared for, loved, esteemed, and a member of a mutual obligation relationship, could provide protection from anxiety, depression, and other related illnesses (Berget & Ihlebæk, 2011). In this context, one can identify mutual care in the human–animal interactions as the content of the supportive exchanges that are an important aspect in health-promoting work-life. Similar findings have been reported in other studies. For instance, elderly people and people living with AIDS with companion animals were found to report less depression compared to those without (Wells, 2009).

Another example of companion animals as a forcing factor was given by a young male respondent. He mentioned the social support provided by his dog while he was suffering from study/work burnout. Given that he had shared responsibility with his ex-girlfriend for a dog, he felt obliged to take the dog for a walk on a regular basis. The respondent stated that “my dog in a way pushes me to go out.” He stated that being forced to take certain responsibilities for the dog helped him to cope better with his stressful working conditions. Healthy activities, such as a walk with a dog in nature, are an important part of supportive exchanges between humans and companion animals. The respondent pointed out: “The dog connects me to the nature.... Walking the dog makes you feel healthy and feel better inside ... you get ready to face a new day and new challenges in life.” In a similar vein, Salmon and Timperio (2011) state that having a companion animal may increase perceived social support and opportunities to learn responsibilities and participate in physical activities, which is supportive of health. Similarly, Wells (2009) opines that the increased physical activity that typically accompanies the guardianship of a dog may thus

explain, to some degree, the greater health advantages experienced by the guardians of such beings.

The forcing function is somewhat absent within discourses on both social support theory and on companion animals in health-promoting work-life. Having companion animals in the workplace can force people to take a break and get involved in health-enhancing activities, such as walking and/or playing. Such activities are crucial in countering stress at work. Companion animals have the potential to deal with various workplace stressors by pushing people towards health-enhancing behavior, such as having a break, interacting with others, and engaging in physical movements. For instance, having a break from work for a few minutes to take a dog for a walk can provide various health benefits for workers.

In this sense, companion animals at work can indeed be beneficial to the domain of health-promoting work-life through the forcing function. Having companion animals in the workplace can create a good balance between work and health. The supportive social relationship between human and companion animals has the potential to contribute to health-promoting work-life by shielding people from negative stressors, as well as forcing people towards health-enhancing behavior and practices.

Communication Companion

Several respondents pointed out that they like to vent their work-life feelings—especially anger, disappointment, sadness, and frustration—to their companion animals. By doing so, the respondents mentioned deriving some sort of emotional relief after conversing with their companion animals. In this sense, companion animals can help workers to cope better with work-life situations through the establishment of a positive interactive relationship. For instance, one of the respondents mentioned: “I talk a lot to my dog ... I have someone to talk to about my feelings ... I view my dog as someone whom I can confide in and take out everything that I have inside me.”

Another respondent reported that she was a very shy girl and had difficulties conversing with others. Having a cat has helped her to break the psychosocial barriers in initiating communication with others. She also stated: “Animals help you to start building relations, you learn how to talk, to be attentive and to listen and respond. This becomes important for building relations with other human beings.” Similarly, Wells (2009) posits that companion animals function as a “social catalyst” or “social lubricants” in facilitating social interactions and communication between human beings.

Gottlieb (2000) sees social support as an exchange process with communication being the central content. From the social support perspective, this

study therefore reaffirms the supportive function of companion animals in the workplace as communication companions who could be beneficial in health-promoting work-life. For instance, by allowing employees to bring their companion animals to their offices, companies can promote the emotional and psychological health of their workers. Companion animals in the office could be used as a means for workers to vent their feelings and emotions stemming from work during working hours. In particular, companion animals are believed to have certain distinct emotional and caring characteristics, and are considered non-judgmental and good listeners, making them suitable for consideration in health-promoting work-life (Håkanson, Moller, Lindstrom, & Mattsson 2009; Carlsson, Nilsson Ranta, & Traeen, 2014). As Mattson and Gibb Hall (2011) argue:

Communication that helps people to cope with a difficult situation, makes them feel better about themselves by raising their sense of self-esteem, reaffirms their association or sense of belonging to a group, or improves their ability or competence to perform needed tasks all are considered forms of social support. (pp. 183-184)

As part of the health-promoting work-life frame, some companies provide workplace counseling services to their employees. In such situations, counselors sometimes face enormous challenges with employees who have difficulties opening up and expressing themselves to others (Vogel, Wester, & Larson, 2007). Companion animals can therefore be beneficial in workplace counseling services for facilitating the initial phase of communication with “difficult” clients. In some conflict mediation processes, companion animals—because of their tender, loving, and caring characteristics—have been found to be very useful in providing an emotional outlet in situations that are filled with intense feelings, and in aiding in a smooth progression (Leaser, 2005). Therefore, companion animals have an important supportive function for professionals involved in the process of occupational conflict mediation.

Social Skills

Several respondents reported that companion animals have supported them in improving their social relations and competences, such as listening to, paying attention to, and caring for others, as well as being organized and responsible. One respondent argued: “You have to plan and create structure in your life when you have companion animals.... You feel more responsible ... you have to plan your days in advance. We [she and her partner] always have to talk to each other and decide upon what to do with regards to their responsibilities.”

In this study, some of the respondents put particular emphasis on how their companion animals have played a supportive role during difficult times in their lives by enhancing their social skills, which in turn helped them develop better life-coping abilities. Having companion animals requires guardians to assume various sorts of responsibilities, such as caring and looking after others. In this sense, one respondent said: "Having companion animals promotes cooperation, belonging, and helping each other to take care of.... It can be good to take care of animals, to feel responsible and also to feel good."

Another respondent mentioned that she comes from a family that has gone through difficult times and their companion animals have also gone through those difficult moments. As a child, she used to talk a lot about those problems with the companion animals. She reports that, from her interactions with the companion animals, she learns "not to be an egoist and ... to give unconditional love." According to her, she has learned a lot from companion animals and now she applies such social skills as a social worker with her clients and colleagues. Indeed, through being responsible for and taking care of an animal, people can improve their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Jackson, 2010).

Moreover, to many respondents, companion animals are important in training humans in how to deal with emotions. For instance, one of the respondents stated: "Even if you are angry at something/someone, you learn to control your emotion while interacting with your companion animals ... they are like babies, you need to be soft and gentle with/towards them." Several studies have found that people with companion animals may develop a greater sense of empathy for others (McCardle, McCune, Griffin, & Maholmes, 2011; Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, & Uvnäs-Moberg, 2013; O'Haire et al., 2014). Some studies have also found that human-animal interactions increase trust and trustworthiness, and reduce aggression and violent behaviors (Julius et al., 2013; Meyer & Forkman, 2014).

In the workplace, such social skills are essential ingredients for functioning as a team member. Absence of social skills among employees can result in conflicts between colleagues, leading to an unhealthy working environment. Within the context of health-promoting work-life, companion animals can therefore be an important medium through which employees' social skills can be enhanced with a view to facilitating team building and team spirit. In particular, companion animals can play a functional role in helping to produce a psychosocial atmosphere that is more conducive to dealing with difficult problems in the workplace.

Challenges

Discourses related to challenges for people with companion animals and a full-time occupation (work or study), especially away from home, are still only thinly covered in various literatures. In fact, having companion animals can affect the health of the guardian not only in a positive manner but also in a negative way (Herzog, 2011). For instance, respondents with full-time work/study away from home require care and security for their companion animals. Companion animals cannot be left home alone for long time, even if they have food and water at their disposal.

It is important for companion animals like dogs and cats to go outside in the open air every day for about an hour. In particular, dogs need to exercise every six hours (Svenska Kennelklubben, 2013). Having companion animals therefore requires a lot of time, energy, commitment, responsibility and planning. Some respondents acknowledged that sometimes having a companion could be stressful. For instance, one of the respondents stated: "We live in the city center ... it was difficult and stressful to take care of a baby and fulfill our obligations towards the dog."

In some cases, it is reported that people have to take leave from work in order to take care of their companion animals at home. As a result, they sometimes suffer from stress resulting from an accumulating workload. In extreme cases, where people are at work away from home for long hours, some companion animals are subjected to unintended neglect, which results in feelings of guilt, shame, and anxiety among the guardians. Those are important issues for consideration within the frame of health-promoting work-life, especially in order to avoid "presenteeism" (coming to work despite being ill/unwell) at work. However, such issues are often ignored.

Some of the respondents argued that the stress does not directly result from having companion animals, but rather it stems from the lack of adequate support services. For instance, some respondents reported that some people have difficulty getting daycare services for companion animals at a reasonable price. As a result, they reported that such circumstances create stress for them.

Despite these sorts of challenges, for many respondents' companion animals were still one of the best sources for deriving health benefits in a socio-ecological manner. For instance, a number of respondents mentioned that they would like to have a companion animal but their working/living conditions do not allow them. They reported that there are almost no work-based welfare support/services for staff members with companion animals. While work-based welfare services are available to people in relation to their human family members (childcare), almost no such services exist for the non-human members of the family. According to a number of respondents, the ideal

situation in health-promoting work-life would be to look at the concept and policies from a broad perspective and provide subsidized daycare services for companion animals in the workplace or in the vicinity.

Consideration for Others

Although companion animals can have supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, the respondents unanimously agreed that not all colleagues would appreciate having them in a workplace like a university. According to some respondents, there are people who suffer from severe allergies related to dogs and cats. Therefore, for those suffering from such allergic reactions, having companion animals in the workplace would not be health-promoting. However, one of the respondents mentioned that “in any case, people do bring an amount of allergens from their companion animals from home to their workplace on their clothes.” Nevertheless, if many companion animals are present in the workplace, the concentration of allergens from fur and feathers could become too high for people suffering from such types of allergies. Some respondents therefore suggested that such an issue could be resolved by having certain buildings (or sections) in the workplace reserved for employees who would like to bring their companion animals with them to their offices.

In addition, according to some respondents, companion animals in a workplace can cause distraction and disturbances to others. In the workplace, especially in universities, there are policies regulating levels of noise and disturbance. One respondent argued that “companion animals can attract the attention of passers-by and therefore their guardians might not be able to fully focus on their tasks.” Another respondent stated that some dogs can be very stressful to manage in public, especially if they get easily over-excited and bark continuously. This would affect work productivity in a negative way. According to some respondents, companion animals in the workplace can also be a cause of nuisance in terms of cleanliness and hygiene. To deal with such an issue, Barker et al. (2012) opine that workplace policies regarding companion animals' behavior, cleanliness, and noise are practical considerations to be explored to minimize any negative impact and maximize positive impact on productivity.

Cost and Liabilities

It is expensive to care for a companion animal in countries like Sweden. In such societies, it is highly recommended that all companion animals are insured against accidents and have regular health checkups by a veterinarian. However, some respondents pointed out that not all companion animals in Sweden have health/accident insurance. It is therefore expected that

companies allowing companion animals in the workplace have clear guidelines and proper checking mechanisms for ensuring adequate health/accident insurance coverage.

Moreover, companion animals can sometimes be unpredictable and cause injuries to others (human and non-human), which can lead to lawsuits. As some respondents pointed out, "it is very important that companies are well prepared in terms of having clear regulations and policies with special emphasis on injuries and accidents resulting from companion animals in the workplace." Such policies and regulations are often ignored in many companies that allow companion animals in the workplace.

When focusing on health-promoting work-life through the inclusion of companion animals in the workplace, the running cost of a company will have to increase in order to provide a healthy, decent, safe, secure, and clean environment. For instance, respondents stated that the workplace needs to be rearranged and structural changes have to be made for it to become more practical and convenient for both humans and non-humans to co-exist in harmony without jeopardizing work productivity. Structural rearrangements with new policies and regulations require financing. This particular type of financing could be considered a social investment that would return in the long run, since it will contribute to the psychosocial health promotion of the workers.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has certain limitations regarding internal and external validity. First, the respondents were mostly women from the health care and social work programs at the University of Gävle. Such a representation of respondents might have yielded certain gender, occupational, and/or contextual biases in the responses that can be regarded as a threat to both the internal and external validity of this study. For instance, it is commonly argued that women on average show higher levels of positive behaviors and attitudes toward non-human animals than men do (Herzog, 2011).

In fact, during reflexivity tasks, the researchers involved in this particular study noticed that most participants had positive attitudes and perceptions towards having companion animals in the workplace. Future research could therefore repeat this study with a somewhat different working population, such as with participants from construction companies, which are predominantly staffed by men. Having perspectives from different contexts and populations is important to enhancing the validity of findings, like those presented

in this study. Nevertheless, the findings from this study remain credible with in-depth and rich qualitative data on the set research aim and questions.

Second, this study only used a qualitative methodology, as the emphasis was placed on exploring issues in depth, and therefore quantitative measures were omitted. Qualitative studies tend to focus on obtaining richness in data, and the results gathered from such a methodology cannot be statistically projected across a population. The methods used to explore issues in qualitative research tend to be quite different from the designs of quantitative studies. Inferences from the findings of this study should therefore be made with caution.

One of the directions for future research on companion animals in health-promoting work-life could therefore be a methodological triangulation with multiple data collection methods involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. It would be interesting to measure and analyze attitudes and perceptions of students and staff members on this particular subject matter through quantitative methods. In addition, the plan of the researchers is to undertake an experimental study (with both qualitative and quantitative data) on the effects of companion animals in the workplace within the context of health-promoting work-life. However, the authorization for a group of staff members to bring their companion animals into their offices still needs to be sorted out with the University of Gävle.

Conclusion

This study concludes that companion animals can play important supportive functions in health-promoting work-life, such as in motivating employees to increase their physical and social activity by taking breaks from work, providing opportunities for workers to vent their feelings during working hours, and helping employees develop their social skills to create a sound working environment. This study also discussed how the outcomes of using companion animals in health-promoting work-life are dependent on the surrounding structures and systems of the workplace. While companion animals could be supportive in health-promoting work-life, their presence in the workplace needs to be supported by well-prepared policies and regulations, something that is often ignored by many companies.

Health-promoting work-life is becoming a popular concept among many companies. In particular, many employers are embarking on various initiatives and commitments to promote the health of their employees, not only for increasing productivity but also for respecting the rights of their workers. A person's health therefore also needs to be seen as an interaction of the person

within his/her socio-ecological systems, such as families, community, fellow workers, and the physical/ecological environment. Companion animals are often a key component of some people's psychosocial systems. Under the One Health concept, companies need to take into account employees' companion animals within health-promoting work-life initiatives and commitments.

References

- Barker, R. T., Knisley, J. S., Barker, S. B., Cobb, R. K., & Schubert, C. M. (2012). Preliminary investigation of employee's dog presence on stress and organizational perceptions. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 5(1), 15-30.
- Beck, A. M. (2014). The biology of the human-animal bond. *Animal Frontiers*, 4(3), 32-36.
- Bergen, C. W. V., & Bressler, M. S. (2015). Employees' best friends and other animals in the workplace. *Employee Relations Law Journal*, 41(1), 4-35.
- Berget, B., & Ihlebæk, C. (2011). Animal-assisted interventions: Effects on human mental health—A theoretical framework. In T. Uehara (Ed.), *Psychiatric disorders—worldwide advances* (pp. 123-138). Rijeka, Croatia: InTech.
- Besthorn, F. (2012). Deep ecology's contributions to social work: A ten-year retrospective. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21(3), 248-259.
- Burgon, H. L. (2011). 'Queen of the world': Experiences of 'at-risk' young people participating in equine-assisted learning/therapy. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 25(2), 165-183.
- Burton, J. (2010). WHO Healthy Workplace Framework and Model: Background and Supporting Literature and Practices. Retrieved February 19, 2016, from http://www.who.int/occupational_health/healthy_workplace_framework.pdf.
- Carlsson, C., Nilsson Ranta, D., & Traeen, B. (2014). Equine assisted social work as a mean for authentic relations between clients and staff. *Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin*, 2(1), 19-38.
- Carnegie Communications. (2017). Schools allowing pets on campus. Retrieved March 3, 2017, from <http://www.collegexpress.com/lists/list/schools-allowing-pets-on-campus/1665/>.
- Chandler, C. K. (2012). *Animal assisted therapy in counseling*. New York: Routledge.
- Coates, J. (2003). *Ecology and social work: Toward a new paradigm*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.
- Colligan, T. W., & Higgings, E. M. (2005). Workplace stress: Etiology and consequences. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 21(2), 89-97.
- Davies, M., & Macdowall, W. (2006). *Health promotion theory*. McGraw-Hill: New York.

- De Mello, M. (2012). *Animals and society: An introduction to human–animal studies*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dhooper, S. S. (2012). *Social work in health care: Its past and future*. New York: SAGE.
- Dooris, M., Dowding, G., Thompson, J., & Wynne, C. (1998). The settings-based approach to health promotion. In A. D. Tsouros, G. Dowding, J. Thompson, & M. Dooris (Eds.), *Health promoting universities: Concept, experience and framework for action* (pp. 21-30). Geneva: WHO.
- Dubois, A., & Gadde, L.-E. (2002). Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research*, 55(2), 553-560.
- Eurofound. (2012). Health and wellbeing at work: A report based on the fifth European Working Conditions Survey, Dublin. Retrieved November 12, 2013, from www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2013/02/en/1/EF1302EN.pdf.
- Golden, S. D., & Earp, J. A. (2012). Social ecological approaches to individuals and their contexts: Twenty years of health education & behavior health promotion interventions. *Health Education & Behavior*, 39(3), 364-372.
- Gottlieb, B. (2000). Selecting and planning support interventions. In S. Cohen, L. Underwood, & B. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Social support measurement and intervention* (pp. 195-220). London: Oxford University Press.
- Gray, M., Coates, J., & Hetherington, T. (Eds.). (2013). *Environmental social work*. London: Routledge.
- Haig, B. D. (2005). An abductive theory of scientific method. *Psychological Methods*, 10(2), 371-388.
- Haig, B. D. (2008). Scientific method, abduction, and clinical reasoning. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 64(9), 1013-1018.
- Håkanson, M., Moller, M., Lindstrom, I., & Mattsson, B. (2009). The horse as the healer. *Journal of Bodywork and Movement Therapies*, 13(1), 43-52.
- Hanrahan, C. (2013). Social work practitioners and the human–companion animal bond: A provincial study. *Critical Social Work*, 13(3), 63-79.
- Hanrahan, C. (2014). Integrative health thinking and the ‘One Health’ concept: Is social work All for ‘One’ or ‘One for All?’. In T. Ryan (Ed.), *Animals in social work: Why and how they matter* (pp. 32-47). NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hauge, H., Kvaem, I. L., Berget, B., Enders-Slegers, M.-J., & Braastad, B. O. (2013). Equine-assisted activities and the impact on perceived social support, self-esteem and self-efficacy among adolescents—an intervention study. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 19(1), 1-21.
- Herzog, H. (2011). The impact of pets on human health and psychological wellbeing: Fact, fiction, or hypothesis? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 236-239.
- Hupcey, J. E. (1998). Social support: Assessing conceptual coherence. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(2), 304-318.

- Jackson, S. (2010). Pets as generators of social capital: A preliminary review of primary evidence. *Resilience: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Science and Humanitarianism*, 1(1), 27-39.
- Julius, H., Beetz, A., Kotrschal, K., Turner, D., & Uvnäs-Moberg, K. (2013). *Attachment to pets. An integrative view of human-animal relationships with implications for therapeutic practice*. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe Publishing.
- Lakey, B., & Cohen, S. (2000). Social support theory and measurement. In S. Cohen, L. Underwood, & B. H. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Social support measurement and intervention: A guide for health and social Scientists* (pp. 29-52). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leaser, A. (2005). See spot mediate: Utilizing the emotional and psychological benefits of dog therapy in victim-offender mediation. *Journal on Dispute Resolution*, 20(2), 943-1026.
- Leka, S., Griffiths, A., & Cox, T. (2003). *Work, organisations and stress. Protecting workers' health series No. 3*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.
- Masanotti, G. M., & Briziarelli, L. (2010). Workplace health promotion in the context of public health. *Italian Journal of Public Health*, 7(4), 395-401.
- Mattson, M., & Gibb Hall, J. (2011). *Health as communication nexus: A service-learning approach*. Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.
- McCardle, P., McCune, S., Griffin, J. A., & Maholmes, V. (Eds.). (2011). *How animals affect us: Examining the influence of human-animal interaction on child development and human health*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association
- Meyer, I., & Forkman, B. (2014). Nonverbal communication and human-dog interaction. *Anthrozoös*, 27(4), 553-568.
- Miller, J., & Ingram, L. (2000). Perioperative nursing and animal-assisted therapy. *Association of Operating Room Nurses Journal*, 72(3), 477-483.
- Noblet, A., & LaMontagne, D. A. (2006). The role of workplace health promotion in addressing job stress. *Health Promotion International*, 21(4), 346-353.
- Norling, A.-Y., & Keeling, L. (2010). Owning a dog and working: A telephone survey of dog owners and employers in Sweden. *Anthrozoös*, 23(2), 157-171.
- O'Haire, M. E. (2012). Pets as a prescription for health: The benefits of companion animals for mental wellbeing. *Mental Notes*, 6(3), 5-7.
- O'Haire, M. E., McKenzie, S. J., McCune, S., & Slaughter, V. (2014). Effects of classroom animal-assisted activities on social functioning in children with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 20(3), 162-168.
- One Health Initiative. (2013). About the one health initiative. Retrieved May 10, 2015, from www.onehealthinitiative.com/about.php.
- Pálsdóttir, A. M., Grahn, P., & Persson, D. (2014). Changes in experienced value of everyday occupations after nature-based vocational rehabilitation. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 21(1), 58-68.

- Pichot, T., Coulter, M., & Dolan, Y. (2007). *Animal-assisted brief therapy: A solution-focused approach*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth.
- Raingruber, B. (2014). *Contemporary health promotion in nursing practice*. Burlington, MA: Jones & Barlett Learning.
- Rambaree, K., & Fixelid, E. (2013). Considering abductive thematic network analysis with ATLAS-ti 6.2. In N. Sappleton (Ed.), *Advancing research methods with new media technologies* (pp. 170-187). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Ryan, T. (Ed.). (2014). *Animals in social work: Why and how they matter*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Salmon, J., & Timperio, A. (2011). Childhood obesity and human–animal interaction. In P. McCardle, S. McCune, J. A. Griffin, & V. Maholmes (Eds.), *How animals affect us: Examining the influence of human–animal interaction on child development and human health* (pp. 139-152). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Serpell, J. A. (2010). Animal-assisted interventions in historical perspective. In H. Fine (Ed.), *Handbook on animal-assisted therapy: Theoretical foundations and guidelines for practice* (pp. 17-32). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Svenska Kennelklubben. (2013). Dog owners in the city. Retrieved August 12, 2015, from www.skk.se/Global/Dokument/Att-aga-hund/Kampanjer/Skall-inte-pa-hunden-2013/dog-owners-in-the-city_HI20.pdf.
- Tsouros, A. D. (1998). Introduction. In A. D. Tsouros, G. Dowding, J. Thompson, & M. Dooris, (Eds.), *Health promoting universities: Concept, experience and framework for action* (pp. 1-3). Geneva: WHO.
- Vogel, D. L., Wester, S. R., & Larson, L. (2007). Avoidance of counseling: Psychological factors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 85(4), 410-422.
- Wells, D. L. (2009). The effects of animals on human health and well-being. *Journal of Social Issues*, 65(3), 523-543.
- Wells, M., & Perrine, R. (2001). Critters in the cube farm: Perceived psychological and organizational effects of pets in the workplace. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(1), 81-87.
- Williams, P., Barclay, L., & Schmied, V. (2004). Defining social support in context: A necessary step in improving research, intervention, and practice. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(4), 942-960.
- World Health Organization. (WHO). (1998). *Health promotion glossary*. Geneva: World Health Organization.