

POSTER 58

THE EFFECTS OF THE INTERACTION OF ANIMALS WITH CHILDREN DIAGNOSED WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER AND THEIR FAMILIES

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Background: The CDC estimates that one in 110 children receive a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) annually. Pet dogs have been found to be a social catalyst and service dogs have demonstrated measurable benefits for children with ASD. Given that 39% of American households have a dog, this survey investigates the perceived benefits and barriers of having a dog in a family with a child with ASD.

Methods: A survey of parents with a child (N=22) diagnosed with ASD and health care providers (HCP's) (N=40) was completed at an Autism Conference.

Results: Sixty eight to 95% of the parents agreed that having a dog in the family of a child with ASD would be a benefit. Sixty to 83% of the HCP's agreed that having a dog would be a benefit. Fifty to 95% of the parents perceived that having a dog would be a barrier. Forty three to 93% of the HCP's perceived having a dog would be a barrier. For children with ASD who were less than eight years old, parents strongly disagreed that the dog would interfere with social interactions, be a burden, not be helpful with therapy, would put the child in danger or that the dog itself would be in danger.

Conclusion: Participants surveyed consistently reported both actual and perceived benefits to having a dog in a family with a child with ASD while disagreeing that these dogs would be a problem for the child or the family.