

# The Association between Animal-Assisted Therapy and the Reduction of Symptoms in Various Mental Illnesses

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## Introduction

- Nearly 1 in 5 Americans suffer from some form of mental illness, (~18.6% of U.S. adults).
- The prevalence of mental illness is higher in women than in men and seen more in adults ranging in ages of 18-25.
  - Older adult populations are largely affected by mental illnesses as well.
- Animal-Assisted therapy or “AAT” is defined as a form of therapy in which a trained animal is the center of the treatment process. This therapy is used to improve functioning physically, mentally and emotionally.
- AAT and other unique forms of treatment are being due to the epidemic of mental illness in 2019.
- Research Question:** Does Animal-Assisted therapy reduce the symptoms of specific mental illnesses and demonstrate to be beneficial to the patient being observed?

## Methods

- Keywords:**
- “Animal-Assisted therapy”
  - “animal therapy”
  - “mental illness”
  - “improvement”
- Databases:**
- PubMed
  - Google Scholar
  - Academic Search Complete
  - MEDLINE Plus
- The illnesses researched included anxiety, depression, PTSD, dementia, and schizophrenia.
  - There was a search period from 2006 through 2019. Most of the research found from 2016-2019.
  - Most data reported from each study was peer reviewed and qualitative, describing whether “AAT” was beneficial for patients or not.

## Results

Study Title	Population	Exposure	Outcome
<i>Controlled clinical trial of canine therapy versus usual care to reduce patient anxiety in the emergency department</i> (J. Kline et al.)	80 adults ages >18 in an emergency room setting	Dog-therapy intervention in the emergency room (a stress-inducing location)	35% reduction in patient reported anxiety after 30 min of therapy session
<i>Pet therapy in elderly patients with mental illness</i> (F. Moretti et al.) – case-control study	21 elderly patients in nursing home with diagnosed mental illness	Pet therapy intervention (Animal - Assisted therapy)	Assessment of a reduction in mental illness symptoms in elderly patients
<i>The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence</i> (H. Brooks et al.)	17 studies of individuals from a variety of countries diagnosed with serious mental health conditions	Having or owning a pet	The rate of change in mental stability and condition in these individuals after spending time with the pet
<i>Incorporating animal-assisted therapy in mental health treatments for adolescents: A systematic review of canine assisted psychotherapy</i> (M. Jones et al.)	3,985 studies (reduced to 7) of adolescents 10-19 with range of mental illnesses	AAT or CAP (“Canine-Assisted Psychotherapy”) in patient’s everyday life	Change in mental health status of the adolescent (positive or negative)

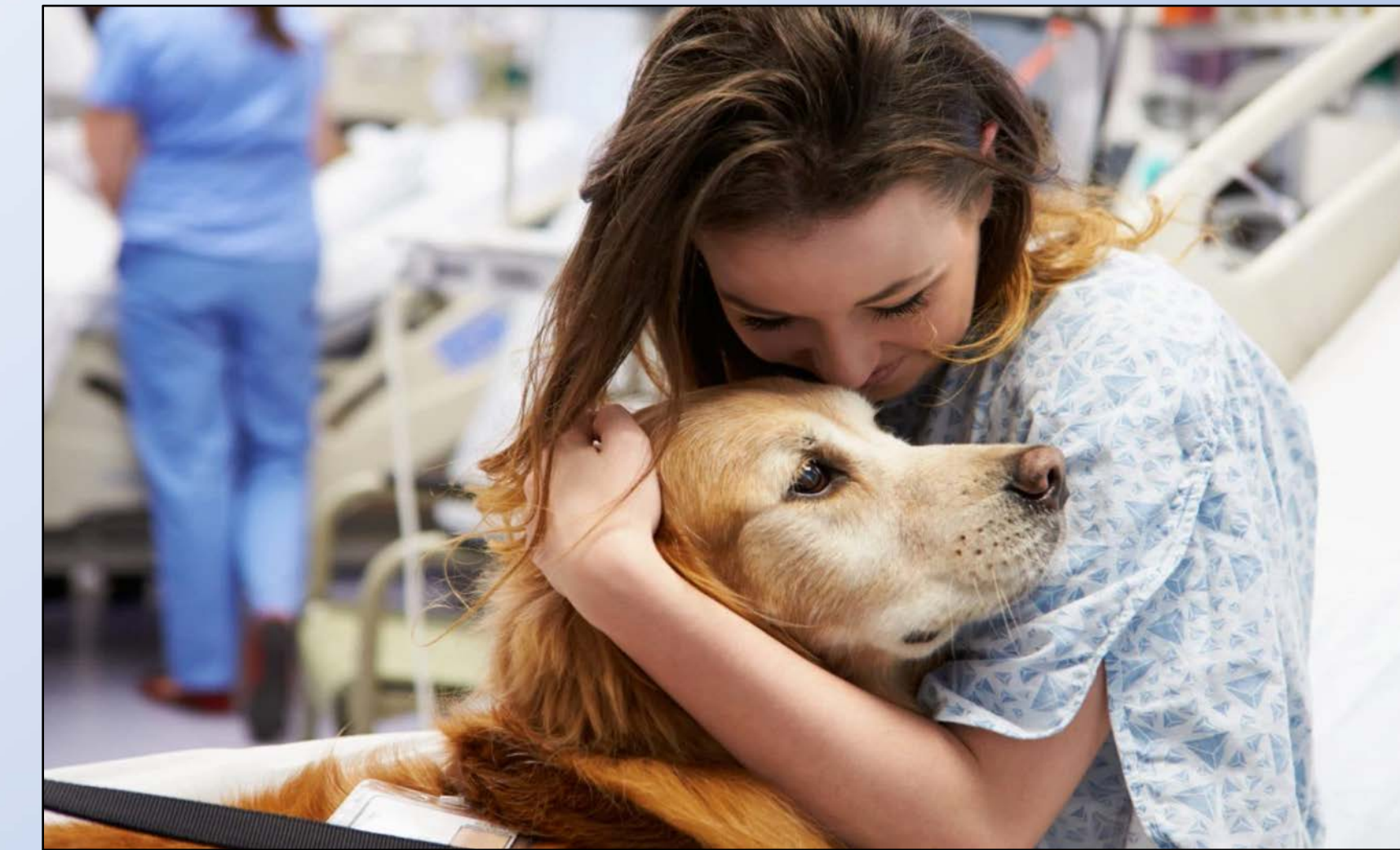


Figure 2: Healthy Paws Foundation

## Conclusions

- Through research and analysis from the studies examined, it was recognized that *AAT is more beneficial for mood-related disorders rather than memory loss or personality disorders.*
  - Mood-related disorders: anxiety and depression
  - Memory or personality disorders: dementia, Schizophrenia, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Analytical and experimental studies seem to be more beneficial in determining the effect of Animal-Assisted therapy than review/qualitative studies.
- For future research, studies that focus on case-control or cohort methods of examination are recommended.
  - With rising rates of mood disorders among the college-age population, cohort studies on this population could determine whether AAT could benefit these students over a 4-year period through their college careers.

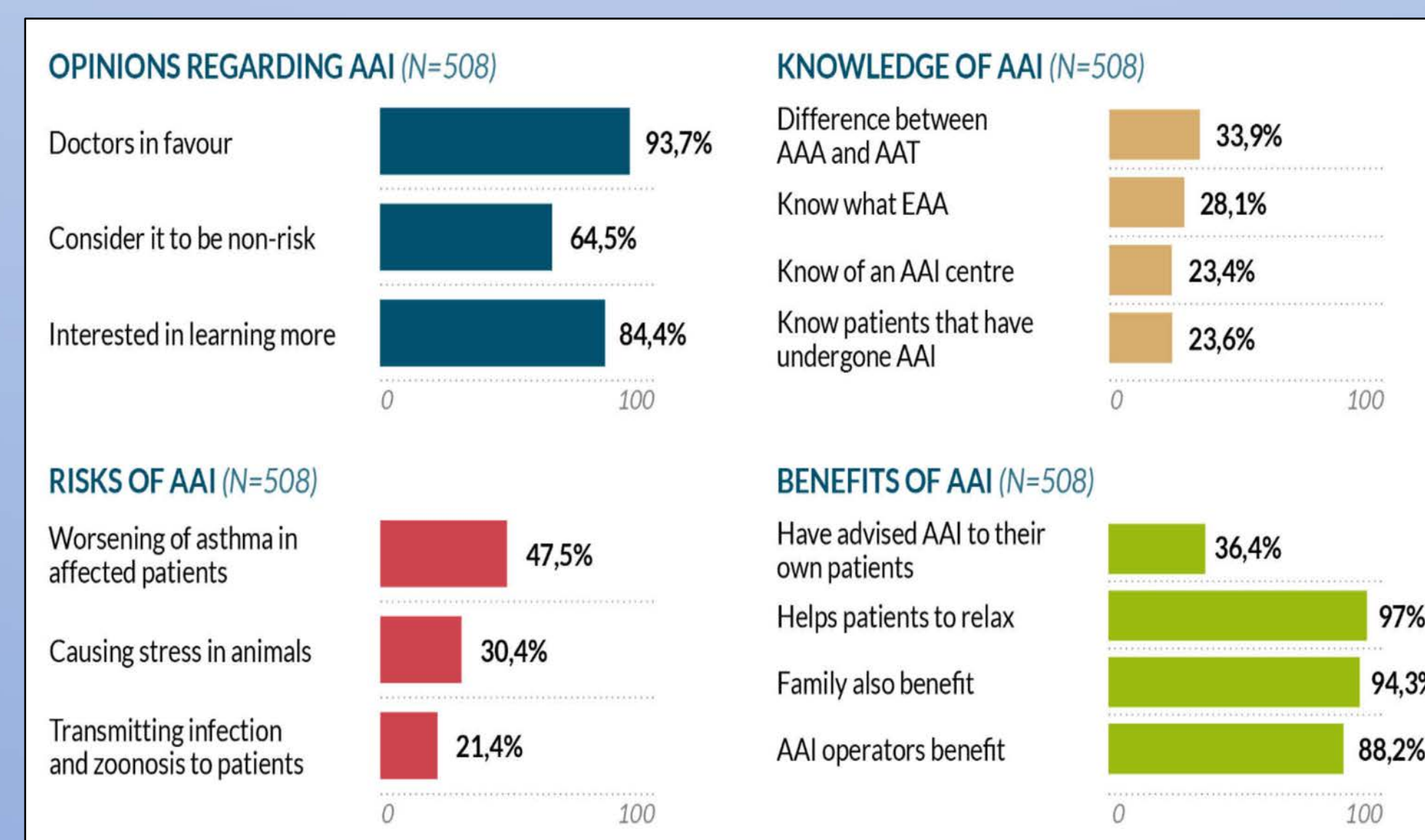


Figure 1: Doctors and Pet Therapy: Survey by National Reference Center for animal assisted interventions (AAI) on 670 doctors in Italy, 2016.