

**Difficulties or Issues Existing to Improve the Likelihood that Veterans can Receive Help
from Service Dogs**

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Service dogs have been identified to provide emotional wellness, healing, and other benefits to many veterans. Many studies have found that veterans always suffer from disabilities after returning to civilian life. Many of them experience signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is from assaults and wars experienced while in service (Weinmeyer, 2015). Other veterans have been identified to have experienced serious injuries during military times, suffered hearing and vision loss, and other significant mental, physical, or mobile limitations resulting from their disabilities. Therefore, these negative impacts veterans encountered to make them qualify for service dogs for emotional, mental, physical, and psychological support while interacting and coping with their lives after and in the military. Many veterans qualify for service dogs as suitable factors for discontinuing or reducing medications for mental and physical health, sleep, or daily food. For the veterans to suppress the unwanted PTSD signs and symptoms like agitation, restlessness, and hypervigilance and reduce their emotional numbness, they need service dogs. According to Weinmeyer (2015), armed services leave military officers in traumatic states due to the chaotic incidents of exploding enemy fire, witnessing carnage, tense bomb-search patrols, and bombs, leaving them with confusion and terror, which result in shocking nightmares, sleeping problems, feeling social isolation, and other psychological challenges. Studies found that veterans in rehabilitative care should be offered service dogs to help their physical impairments hampering their mobilities. Veterans suffering from PTSD need service dogs that are focused on cognitive, psychodynamic therapy, group theory, family therapy, and antidepressants. Service dog organizations, veteran advocacy institutions, and mental health supporters have strongly supported the use of dogs to give military veterans the friendship to face their daily difficulties in postmilitary lives and their enduring recovery from

battles of traumatizing consequences (Van Houtert et al., 2022). Besides, service dogs are necessary to many cautious veterans since they help them interact better with people and strangers, interact in crowded public places, reduce hypervigilance by creating and alerting boundaries, and reduce suicidal impulses. This research paper discusses the difficulties or issues that exist to improve the likeliness of veterans to receive support from service dogs.

Literature Review

Service dogs are trained animals that aid human beings by responding to numerous non-verbal and verbal communication from their owners. According to Van Houtert et al. (2022), most military veterans suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a chronic disorder manifested in negative moods, periods of anxiety, reckless behavior, increased arousal, sleeplessness, and depression. This is one of the existing challenges or issues experienced by veterans, therefore, requiring them to receive help from the service dogs purposely to improve their living conditions. Many studies have concluded that service dogs have been identified as potential interventions to help the veterans affected by PTSD (Van Houtert et al., 2022; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021; Hansen, 2019). Service dogs respond by acting as behavioral mirrors and social support and help the handlers cope with many consequences resulting from the chronic disorder.

According to Hansen (2019), service dogs played significant roles in Iraq and Afghanistan in reducing stress during the pilot programs designed to support combating and operational stress control (COSC) and assist in reducing PTSD-related signs. This approach helped the researchers conclude that service dogs are used to support people struggling with PTSD and other related challenges. Therefore, since veterans are commonly affected by the disorder, it is necessary for the service dog organizations, veteran advocacy organizations, and

the mental health organization to recommend and ensure that they are provided with service dogs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2021). Moreover, veterans face psychiatric conditions, which are serious mental illnesses making the affected die prematurely (Vincent et al., 2017). According to Vincent et al. (2017), the additional comorbid conditions like substance abuse, generalized anxiety disorder, depressive disorders, and challenges in occupational and social domains are other common issues or difficulties that face veterans. Therefore, service dogs are considered the best alternative for improving their living conditions to help the affected veterans unable to pay for their pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy treatments.

Different studies show that psychiatric service dogs have many commonalities with the assistive technologies that are currently recommended for technological assistance of practices for people experiencing challenges while interacting within their immediate environment and with others (Vincent et al., 2017; Van Houtert et al., 2022; Hansen, 2019). According to Van Houtert et al. (2022), service dogs work as social facilitators through their presence as companion animals and learned behaviors, making them helpful to veterans with PTSD and other mental issues affecting their wellbeing. Functions of the service dogs are related to behavioral activation principles, which support service dogs' impact on veterans and have been an effective treatment for stress and depression. For the veterans encountering difficulties or issues with PTSD, which leads to substance abuse, generalized anxiety disorder, and depressive disorders, challenges in the occupational and social domain, service dogs help them in reconnecting with the community, improve their life quality, and therefore helping the affected reach the life opportunities they formerly deemed unreachable.

Methodology

For the research to be successfully conducted, four veteran groups were recognized, totaling 65 individuals. Group one had 20 participants of first aid responders and military veterans who matched perfectly with the services provided by service dogs. Group two consisted of 12 military veterans who were affected by PTSD and are currently awaiting service dogs' services that would be matched to them from service dog organizations and veteran advocacy organizations. The third group consisted of 10 participants, the veterans with PTSD and other challenges, who had companion dogs and awaited the training of service dogs (Van Houtert et al., 2022). The division between groups 2 and 3 was created to identify whether the existence of companion dogs had helpful influences on the first aid respondents and veterans with PTSD and other related mental illnesses. If there were positive influences, was it different from service dogs' influence? The final group has 23 military veterans with no signs of PTSD and other issues. Contacting the participants was done through various channels, such as finding them of personal connection mixture as well as communication canals targeting the veterans.

The research conducted in every group was done purposely to identify the difficulties or issues that exist to improve the likeliness of veterans to receive support from service dogs. Many of the participants performed frequent home measurements, including collecting salivary samples, wearing an accelerometer for a specified time of about 36 hours, and completing questionnaires (Van Houtert et al., 2022). The researcher visited all participants in their homes to ensure the given instructions were clear and explained all measurements before handing over the required equipment. After three weeks, the researcher collected all measurements and equipment and distributed them to all participants.

From the statistical analysis performed in every group, numeric variables were achieved from the four participant groups. All the variables were judged through the plotting of the histogram and observed its normal distribution status. The histogram was advantageous to the research because normality was not assumed for any variable, making the analysis simplified to arrive at conclusions. Besides, combining the data and plotting the histogram for quality analysis was not costly. All research questionnaires were filled out, making the data collection simple, and simplifying the histogram plotting (Van Houtert et al., 2022). Moreover, the researcher was able to review all the responses, which helped in identifying key areas suitable for the study. However, the methods had some disadvantages to the research, limiting the research to achieve the best solution and conclusions. Some participants recorded incorrect data, making the variable challenging to plot in the histogram.

In addition, it was tiresome for the researcher to meet all participants and explain the necessary measurements needed to perfect the research and reach the proposed solutions. Different assumptions were made during the collection of data. All participants were assumed to have met the requirement, had PTSD diagnoses, service dogs, and companion dogs, and submitted the questionnaires with correct data. Besides, the researcher assumed that doing the work using the internet could have led to different feedback for the statistical review; hence the 65 persons were optimal based on the research's power analysis carried out with the G*Power tools (Hansen, 2019). The assumptions were essential for analyzing the collected data and drawing conclusions about the difficulties or issues that exist to improve the likeliness of veterans receiving support from service dogs.

Veterans have been identified as one of the leading groups affected by Post-Traumatic Stress disorder, depression, suicidal thoughts, and high substance abuse, which leads to poor living conditions. According to various studies, the statistics of veterans suffering from those problems or issues have worsened recently, demanding suitable solutions that improve their lives (Van Houtert et al., 2022; Gillett & Weldrick, 2014; McLaughlin, 2013). These problems cause serious issues like frightening nightmares, feeling socially isolated, sleeping problems, and feeling exhausted and toughened. Many veterans experience chaotic episodes like a bomb exploding, bomb-search patrols, and enemy firms which are the condition causing serious mental challenges. Some treatments are used for veterans experiencing those difficulties like pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, which withdraw symptom intensities, reduce substance abuse cravings, and decrease the likelihood of relapsing or using drugs to block mental effects from serving the military.

Many researchers have been seeking an alternative approach that supports all veterans affected by those challenges to improve their living quality, enhance quality interaction in the community, and revive their opportunities formerly deemed unreachable (Van Houtert et al., 2022; Wagner et al., 2021; Gillett & Weldrick, 2014). Therefore, using service dogs has been identified as one of the best practices that reduce serious health issues affecting veterans. Service dogs are trained assistance animals that help in responding to both non-verbal and verbal communication given by the affected veterans. The dogs act as behavioral mirrors and social support, helping their handler (veterans) to cope with challenges from PTSD and other related mental illnesses. The mitigation of those problems encountered by veterans is mitigated by using service dogs, supporting the affected to have positive living conditions, which improves their quality of life (Porter et al., 2021). Since the dogs can communicate with their handlers, check corners, decrease hyperarousal, and help the veterans during day and night terrors, they enhance

positive sleeping patterns, reduce stress and depression, and cure PTSD. According to Hansen (2019), the alternative practice of using service dogs helps veterans with difficult situations and stress to adversity adapt to their formal environment by reducing the issues.

The additional measurements undertaken in the research in every group showed slight differences. This helped the research arrive at suitable conclusions that the existence of issues improves the likeliness of veterans to receive support from service dogs. Furthermore, various studied service dogs have been evidenced to provide economic and mental health benefits to veterans with PTSD and other life challenges (Wagner et al., 2021). Mental issues are often comorbid with PTSD and include major anxiety disorders, suicide, depressive disorder, high dementia risk, and overall mortalities. Different conclusions were made from the research, such as education on service dogs as training should be done to organization service dog providers and veterans to support the negatively affected individuals cope with better living conditions. Besides, service dogs can provide complementary skills that ensure therapeutic benefits are achieved. High unemployment rates faced by veterans result from mental and physical injuries while in military services. Therefore, service dogs act as therapeutic interventions to supplement evidence-based treatments on mental health. In addition, the dogs are trained to stay calm, focused, and confident when acting out their tasks purposely to alleviate the veterans' or handlers' disabilities in public settings. Many studies have concluded that the veterans facing living difficulties and issues and have service dogs had the lowest PTSD levels and other related mental illnesses (Gillett & Weldrick, 2014; McLaughlin, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Service dogs positively influence veterans' well-being, preventing them from experiencing serious consequences after military services (Vincent et al., 2017). Despite the limitation of the studies, the presence of service dogs increases the likeliness of veterans to reduce mental illnesses affecting their health, hence promoting quality changes to the affected

persons. Trained dogs reduce intrusive symptoms, play significant roles in trauma-related stimuli avoidance, address arousal and reactivity changes, and prevent negativity resulting from mental illness. The researcher claimed that some service dogs might realize the world is a dangerous living ground and is incompatible with promoting habituations. The analysis showed that service dogs must be trained to monitor the living environment, check dark entries and corners, and gain attention for the veterans when persons are approaching. According to Rodriguez et al. (2020), these services provided by the trained dogs ensure that veterans have better living conditions with reduced PTSD and anxiety disorder, ensure quality sleep, and reduce depression and other difficulties affecting their lives.

From the research, the presence of service dogs has been recognized as an alternative for improving the quality of life as reported, lower PTSD levels, and reduced other mental illnesses affecting veterans. Many veterans face difficulties making them likely to receive support from service dogs. PTSD causes significant issues to veterans, making them experience life challenges due to the mental and physical injuries received while in military services. Therefore, the research supports the impact of service dogs on the military due to their positive influences. Despite the other treatment like pharmacotherapy and psychotherapy, service dogs are identified as a workable alternative of involvement that assists veterans suffering from mental health issues as well as combating them when returning or coming from war. Findings have stated that returning soldiers and veterans face challenging lives while in service due to unexpected chaotic incidents of exploding enemy fire, witnessing carnage, tense bomb-search patrols, and bombs, leaving them with confusion and terror, which result in shocking nightmares, sleeping problems, feeling social isolation, and other psychological challenges. Therefore, to prevent these issues, service dogs are identified as one of the best alternatives in treatment preventing the many life challenges to veterans.

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