

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Workshop Evaluation, Reflection, and Theory Building

This study exposed counseling graduate students to an Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy (i.e., EAP) Workshop, and encouraged them to reflect on both their personal growth, as well as to facilitate the estimation of the personal growth of future counseling students/clientele. EAP Workshops are emerging into the mental health scene as a viable modality for enacting positive emotional and behavioral change as reported by practitioners and clients alike, although at present most of the information within the research community is anecdotal. Hence, the purpose of this project sought to empirically examine the benefits of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy Workshop utilizing the knowledge and perspectives of 30 students enrolled in a graduate-level counseling program. Before the workshop, each student filled out a survey that contained both qualitative and quantitative questions. The qualitative questions required students to identify an issue that they personally struggled with (e.g., depression, anxiety, relationship problems), and list what methods, if any, they had used to resolve their issue, whether these methods were helpful, and whether they anticipated that the EAP Workshop would be helpful. The quantitative questions came from the Adult MHC-SF (i.e., Mental Health Continuum Short Form). During the EAP Workshop, students participated in a mindfulness activity and had the opportunity to role-play the issues they identified (e.g., depression, anxiety, relationship problems) with horses alongside a licensed EAP Workshop provider/Psychologist, as well as observe their classmates participate in role-plays. Immediately following the EAP Workshop, students filled out a post-survey that contained both qualitative questions about both the efficacy of the EAP Workshop as applied to their own issues, how it would be useful to their future clients/students, as well as the MHC-SF again. A third post-survey was administered three months after the EAP Workshop, which contained identical post-survey questions, and was intended to assess the long-term effects of the EAP Workshop. Student reflections will be analyzed and published, and contribute toward the theoretical development of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy as a viable counseling therapeutic framework. Critical thinking skills were a pivotal portion of this study, as participants were required to apply their personal experiences toward their hypothetical roles as future counselors, which mandated that they create abstract client needs, judgments, decisions, treatment options, and behavioral determinations that were purely theoretical. The conference presenters will depict the findings from this research study via a Poster Session, and engage the audience with various implications that emerged. These implications include a discussion about clients/client issues that would fare well with an EAP treatment modality (e.g., people with emotional and intellectual disabilities, people who have undergone trauma, and veterans who struggle with PTSD), as well as other variables (e.g., appropriate setting, credentials, and limitations).