



Department of social work and psychology

Therapists working together with Horses

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy: Treating youths with addiction

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Author: Jannicka Bark

Supervisor: Birgitta Berg Wikander

Exmainator: Ted Goldberg

Author: Jannicka Bark

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to understand equine assisted psychotherapy and whether this treatment is effective for drug users by asking the question “Is equine-assisted psychotherapy beneficial for young people suffering from drug addictions?” To answer the question, a qualitative method was used. Interviews were conducted at care homes in Sweden with 6 participants. Interviews lasting for four and a half hours are presented. The result shows how they overcame their drug abuse by participating in equine assisted psychotherapy. By using Cognitive Behavioural Theory and Systems Theory as analysis tools, a good understanding of what happened during the treatment is provided.

Keywords:

Youths, Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, Animal Assisted Therapy, drugs, treatment, horse

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1 Introduction

Throughout my journey to become a social worker, I have worked with people who suffer from psychiatric and drug problems. For several years, I worked in a clinic and I felt that something was missing. Today, patients basically live within the sheltered four walls of a clinic and then, after some time, are thrust back out into the real world. I felt they should have something transitional between the four walls of the clinic and the real world and that's when I discovered Equine Assisted psychotherapy (EAP) which is used by social workers, treatment homes, and clinics as they integrate horses and other animals into the treatment process with adolescents. EAP can be used with people suffering from feelings of rejection, confused sense of personal identity, fears of inadequacy, depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), drug- and alcohol addictions, anorexia etc. These are all issues that we as social workers encounter and I was curious to learn more about how EAP is conducted in the course of treatment for these maladies.

Animals are easier to understand and relate to since, unlike humans, they generally exhibit unconditional love. In a horse's life, what happened yesterday is forgotten today whereas we humans are always inserting our own values and thoughts into everything. Thus, EAP is a good way to help youths and social workers should utilize treatment involving horses for the very reason that they do not talk. Furthermore, could social workers have something to learn from horses as they seem to be good social workers without even speaking to the youths or is it only when you combine horses and humans in the treatment course that you will see results? I strongly believe if we find a way for social workers to use animals as a source in working with people, groups, and societies, we will see great results.

1.1 Description of the problem

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) and Equine Assisted Therapy (EAT) can be combined with other treatment for drug addictions "One factor that may affect the addict to stop using drugs is different types of influence from their surroundings". (Berglund et al, 2007, p. 9) This influence could be the horse as "horses have the ability to mirror exactly what human body language is telling them. Many people will complain "the horse is stubborn. The horse doesn't like me" but the lesson to be learned is that if they change themselves, the horse responds

differently. Horses are honest, which makes them especially powerful messengers.”

(Mandrell, 2006, p. 29)When drug addiction and EAP are combined, amazing results can be achieved.

2 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Equine Assisted Psychotherapy can help youths with drug addiction.

2.1 Research question

The research question for this study is:

- Is equine-assisted psychotherapy beneficial for young people suffering from drug addictions?

2.2 Disposition of the essay

Each and every chapter in this study is designed to easily be understood by the reader. In chapter one, a brief introduction to why the research was conducted as well as the aim and research question is presented. Chapter two provides useful background information regarding the field study locations and a short presentation of previous research. In chapter three, the theoretical framework of the research, Cognitive Behavioural Theory and Systems Theory, are introduced to the reader. Chapter four is an explanation of the methods used in the process of the research, the ethical considerations, and the reliability and validity are also presented. The results of the interviews are presented in chapter five. In chapter six, the theoretical framework is used to analyze the results, and finally in chapter seven, the author concludes the report, discusses its connection to social work, and remarks on the relevance of further research.

The theoretical framework of the research, Ecological Systems Theory, is introduced and this chapter will serve as a tool to interpret the analysis of the findings.

3 Background

3.1 Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP)

Throughout history, there has always been a bond between horses and humans. No one knows when or how the bond between these species developed. Humans have used horses to travel from place to place. Horses also have been a food source for many years and a tool for nurturing other animals. Numerous fairytales have been told about mysterious horses and their wonderful bond with humans. Furthermore, “The ancients called them messengers between ourselves and the divine, companions to the gods” (McCormick, 2007, p.3) The horse has become a friend and companion in so many ways and humans have accepted horses instincts on an equal level with human instinct and have started to combine the two as a unit. The relationship has proved therapeutic and they have played a key role in human psychological and spiritual path in life and development and, thus, Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) has become an amazing tool to work with. Mandrell, (2006), defines EAP as follows:

“EAP is a drawing approach to professional counselling that helps clients of all ages address behavioural, emotional, spiritual, and relational issues using horses as an intervention tool.”

Much research has been done in the area of using horses as a form of treatment. Morrison (2007) came to the conclusion that “Animal-assisted interventions, which include both animal-assisted activities and therapies, have historically been beneficial to human health. AAI’s are modalities that offer an integrative approach to enhance the treatment of various health concerns.” (P. 60) and Pugh (2010) came to the conclusion in her study conducted at a program in Boulder, Colorado called Hope Foal Project “that there is a strong need for further research in EAP. In particular, their suggestion of a project that studies a control group of regular horseback riding as compared to an EAP group is appealing” (p.51).

However, there is a misunderstanding that EAP is the same as hippo-therapy and therapeutic riding which actually focus on the physical side whereas EAP’s focus is the human mind, feelings and soul. It “...utilizes the horse as a tool that provides an experience for clients to learn about themselves and how they impact the world around them” (Hallberg, 2008, p.329) Furthermore, EAP does not utilize horse riding, but rather emphasizes work from the ground

as EAP practitioners' belief is that this will promote a better outcome as "riding necessitates more emphasis on the counsellor's instruction and direction" (Shultz 2005, p.12) than the horse's reaction. Moreover, a part of EAP is the process of talking about what is occurring. The processing is not only in the moment, but also it is before, during, and afterward as the "participants are encouraged to reflect and express the thoughts and feelings that they are experiencing" (Mandrell, 2006, p.6) It goes beyond riding the horse and instead utilizes caring for horses to create bonds and establish trust, respect, and responsibility.

Ewing et al (2007) in their study *Equine-Facilitated Learning for Youths with Severe Emotional Disorders* found that "By incorporating the equine theme into the classroom, the students become active participants in their education. For perhaps the first time in their lives, they have knowledge of a subject that they can pass along as well as show pride in their academic success" (p.71) Being around horses gives the adolescents the freedom to speak without using words. They then become more aware of their own body language and how it reflects their mood and the horse will react to this. Horses can sense through the smallest of actions, body pressure, smells, and tones of voice how the approaching human is doing emotionally and physically. Hallberg (2008)

"Participants learn that if they want to change a horse's behavior, they have to first change their own behaviors, thoughts, and feelings". (Casey et al, 2005, p.269) They also found in their study *New Age or Old Sage A review of Equine assisted psychotherapy* that "EAP works well because it gives prominence to the establishment of relationships both with therapists and horse with the one mirroring the other" (p. 12) However working with horses is not an easy job and all therapists or other practitioners need to be professionals. As Pyle (2006) defines,

Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy denotes an ongoing therapeutic relationship with clearly established treatment goals and objectives developed by the therapist in conjunction with the client. The therapist must be an appropriately credentialed mental health professional to legally practice psychotherapy and EFP.(p.8)

Furthermore, not all horses are suited for helping people. The age of the horses used in EAP vary. However, an inexperienced horse is not suitable for this kind of work. The horses should be in good health and not be too nice or too strong mentally. “Horses also need to have a positive attitude, good manners, be reliable, be adaptable to different situations, and has had previous training with varied experiences” (Pyle, 2006, p.9) To ensure the reliability of this study, I have chosen to focus on two earlier studies to address similarities and differences in countries around the world.

The first study was done by Shultz (2005) *Equine assisted psychotherapy with at-risk adolescents*. The purpose of that study was to fill the research gap by examining the therapeutic outcomes of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) in treating at-risk youths. The study was conducted in the United States and concentrated on adolescents of ages 12-18. The sample was collected by using two groups: those who received EAP (treatment group) and those who did not (control group). Five clients participated in individual EAP and ten participated in group EAP. There were eight males in the treatment group and nine in the control group. There were seven females in the treatment group and five in the control group. To measure the therapeutic change in psychosocial functioning elicited by EAP, an instrument called the Youth Outcome Questionnaire (Y-OQ) and the self-report version of the Youth Outcome Questionnaire (Y-OQ-SR) were used in the study. They measured Intrapersonal Distress, Somatic, Interpersonal Relations, Critical Items, Social Problems, and Behavior Dysfunction. Shultz (2005) found that

“...Horses can also be used as a poignant metaphor for substance abuse. One way this can be done is for the client to attempt to get the horse to participate in an activity when food is a distraction. Horses are “addicted” to food; when food is within reach, even the most amenable horses can focus on little else. As adolescents seek to help a horse with this “addiction,” they will often gain insight into their own addictive behaviors.(p.58-59)

This study serves as my guide with the focus on why horses are a preferable method in treatment of addiction. The basic principle of EAP is that the mind of both horses and humans are vulnerable tools. The presence of a therapist to guide and motivate the adolescents to open up and become more in touch with their feelings is critical. “The horse is a large, powerful

animal that commands respect and elicits fear. Overcoming these obstacles and building a relationship promotes confidence, relationship skills and problem-solving skills” (Schultz, 2006, p.266)

I will also refer to a study by Cuffari Toukonen (2011)“ *The relationship Between adolescent girls and horses: Implications for Equine Assisted Therapies*” This study contributes newer research conducted in Kent State which shows the similarities and differences in Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) conducted in Sweden versus the rest of the world and, in that way, examines international and global attitudes toward EAP. His study investigated what the essences are in the relationship between adolescent girls and horses. “Based on these findings, professionals may want to consider incorporating work with horses into their therapy practices or referring their clients to equine assisted therapy practices”. (ibid, 2011, P. 94)

3.2 Drug addiction

The terms “drug abuse” and “addiction” were first coined in the early twentieth century. Today’s children are surrounded with impressions of both how to use drugs and how not to. As Zinberg (1984)States “Few children grow up without an awareness of the wide range of behaviors associated with alcohol use, learned from most pervasive of all media, television.” (p.9)A child who sees his or her parents struggle with alcohol addiction has a 50% chance of becoming a drug user him/herself when he/she grows up. Addiction is a very complex disease. However, it is important to understand that there are two different kinds of users – those who can control their use and those who cannot. Drug addiction is when a person repeatedly uses drugs and has no control over it. The result is that they develop a tolerance to, and need higher and higher doses to get the same feeling. Drugs such as narcotics and alcohol and also sex and smoking are today misused by humans.

EMCDDA (2006) defines the term “Narcoholic” to describe a person who uses a combination of different drugs and alcohol, often with one drug as a base or a primary drug and others as a complement. Narcoholics are common among heavy drug users as a clear majority of heavy users make use of several drugs. The majority of drug users who are administratively visible

(arrested by the police or who have contact with health care or social services) are addicts. Clinical experience shows that it is more difficult to treat than other abuse categories. Interventions such as detoxification become more problematic when several drugs must be considered. Drug users often use drugs as a way to make problems “disappear” as all the problems feels easier as the drug causes “...a series of temporary changes in the brain that produce a “high” a rush of euphoria” (Baker, 2004, p.4). Often it starts as a fun thing and the rush makes the user want more and more. However, with time, the drug becomes a form of self-medication for psychiatric or mental health issues. The most common drugs to be misused are alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, ecstasy, and prescription drugs.

A Person is not an addict merely because he or she is a heavy user of alcohol or drugs. Addiction should be distinguished from heavy, ill-advised, or socially unacceptable use /.../ Addiction has two distinct features /.../ loss of control over addictive behaviour /.../denial and dishonesty. (Baker, 2004, p.24)

Research shows that individual go through three critical stages before admitting that they have a problem controlling their use of drugs. The first stage is honeymoon stage where they start using drugs and the euphoria is strong and satisfying. Some people may have a bad experience at this stage and stop immediately. The second stage is falling in love and become hooked on the drug. The third stage is reaching rock bottom. “What it takes to evoke the feeling that one has hit *rock bottom* differs from individual to individual, and is presumably dependent upon how negative the self-image is.” (Goldberg, 1999, p.149) However, this often involves the addict experiencing consequences that are painful and cause a mental breakdown. “No magic bullet can eradicate drug abuse overnight, but treatment does bring sustained reduction in drug use” (McCaffrey, 1997, p. 6) and they should combine their treatment as Stimmel (2002) writes “Treatment is also accompanied by a considerable reduction of criminal activity as well as hospitalization for illness” (p.73). Saed Jayousi (2003) conducted a study in North Palestine, *Drug Addiction in North Palestine*, which aimed at defining the drug problem in northern Palestine. One of the many theories he used was Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in the treatment of drug addiction. He states that:

“C.B.T. can be thought as a training program that helps drug abusers to give up old habits associated with drug abuse and learn healthy skills and habits. When drug

abuse is severe enough to warrant treatment, patients are likely to be using drug as their single means of coping with a wide range of interpersonal and intrapersonal problems.” (P. 49)

As a drug addict recovers, it is extremely difficult not to fall back into old habits. They no longer have structure in their lives and often they stay at specialized clinics to get the help needed and then return back out into the real world and start to socialize with the same people and before they know it they are back in the addiction. “In leaving behind one addiction, the person may simply adopt another one, or may retain a simultaneous addiction” (Peele, 1985, p.126) One of the reasons for this is that they have lost their families, jobs, and good friends along the way and the old way is what is familiar to them. He also highlights some steps addicts consider before leaving their life in addiction as:

1. *Believe an addiction is hurting them and wish to overcome it*
 2. *Feel enough efficacy to manage their withdrawal and life without the addiction*
 3. *Find sufficient alternative rewards to make life without the addiction worthwhile*
- (Ibid,P.156)

“Whether in therapy or not, addicts improve when their relationships to work, family, and other aspects of their environment improve” (ibid, p.154) However, a person who wants to take drugs or wants to drink will do so. This is not something that family members can prevent. Furthermore, addiction is a very complex disease that requires both emotional and the physical components of treatment. “Drug addiction treatment can include behavioural therapy (such as counseling, cognitive therapy, or psychotherapy), medications, or a combination of these.” (Leshner, 1999, P.1315)

4 Theoretical framework

This chapter will provide the reader with the theoretical framework used in this study. The two chosen theories are essential to analyze the results. The selected theories, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Systems Theory (ST), offer a theoretical understanding of why using equine assisted psychotherapy is successful in the treatment of drug addiction.

4.1 Cognitive Behavioural Theory

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapy that helps explain more about the unconscious bonds between horses and humans. It gives an opportunity for deeper analysis. “Cognitive theories also offer us a reason to be circumspect in our enthusiasm about the benefits of animal-assisted interventions that aim to ameliorate feelings of helplessness or inferiority” (Kruger et al, 2006, p.32) With CBT it is possible to approach human problems using theoretical, philosophical, technological, and methodological perspectives. Using CBT can “... increase insight into the developmental origins of unconscious conflicts. By rendering the unconscious conscious, unacceptable drives and fantasies become acceptable to the ego” (Fisher et al, 2009, p.102) This theory is essential in treatment of drug abuse, as the cognitive approach gives the therapist the tools to address the root problems leading a person to misuse drugs. It gives both a broader understanding of why a person are uses, whether for pleasure or as a means to escape unpleasant thoughts? “A defining feature of this method is that the client must present with cognitive process abilities to make insight-based work possible” (Hallberg, 2008, p.276)

“Many patients who suffer from difficulties in asserting themselves in an appropriate way are likely to be dominated and even exploited by other people.” (Beck et al, 2001, p.28) If rather than exposing these vulnerable people to other people but instead put them in a environment with horses, using equine assisted psychotherapy, it “allows people to build their mental structure and a healthy foundation and also allows reconstruction and restoring of a cracked and crumbling foundation” (Mandrell, 2006, P.31) Furthermore, offering addicts the “...benefit of using horses in their therapy is that EAP assists clients in identifying and accessing their own inner capabilities” (ibid, p. 32)

4.2 Systems Theory

All people have a life built on a system. As applied in EAP, Systems Theory can be explained as the relationship between the human and the horse which includes communication which leads to the addict making a change in his/her life. The social aspect of human life consists of relationships with people. “The social worker addresses the family or general support system, as well as issues such as housing, income, transportation, health and health care resources” (Greene, 2008, p. 189) Everything we do, whether internally or externally, will effect change in different directions. “In systems theory there is no cause and effect. Relationships are circular, not linear. It is does not make sense to focus solely on a person's behaviour. Everything exists in a context.” (Eriksson, 2003, p.2)

Systems Theory provides a basis upon which to investigate human behaviour. Its focus is on the environment and the interaction between different variables rather than focusing merely on the explanations of a specific behaviour. It draws attention to importance of investigating the multiple systems within which people live. Luhmann (1996) states that we “...must investigate more closely how it is nevertheless possible to use the complexity of other systems to construct one’s own” (p. 229) and by this discover the underlying cause of problems. By not excluding any of the systems affecting a person’s life, the quality of life will be improved. “Systems Theory offers a sorely needed broad view, but does not preclude the development of other, non-systems, alternative broad perspectives” (Bailey, 1994, p. 40)

Systems Theory is the critical theory in my analysis as it explores the possibility that perhaps originally everything is not within a system, and Equine Assisted Psychotherapy brings the distinct parts in an individual’s life together so that they can function as a system. Looking beyond the obvious, Eriksson (2003) explains that every variable affects every other variable all the time, in a circular manner. Is it the woman in the relationship always talking because her husband is quiet? Or is the man quiet because the woman is always talking? By looking at the analysis in this way, I will be self-critical and become more objective in drawing conclusions.

4.3 Summary

The importance in Systems Theory is placed upon the relationships between the service user and the social worker as well as between the service user and the horse and also between the different social systems in the youth's life. Work can be done on different social constructions and should be done in such a way that the client and the worker are on an equal power level. By using CBT, the youths are empowered and the level of power is equal. When understanding what impact their social systems have on their life, they will rise above the micro-level and become more in harmony with society as the aim of the research is to investigate how EAP is beneficial for drug users and to do that we need to show how changes in systems surrounding them could affect elements they have close to them as well as their own lives.

5 Methods

In this chapter methods used during the whole process of research are presented. The ethical considerations taken during the process and the reliability and validity of the research are also accounted for.

5.1 Design of the study

Robson, (2007) explains that the structure of the design of this research was flexible and stayed open for change and great focus was placed upon the interviews. The language was the guide throughout the process of interviewing as the analysis was done based on transcriptions and notes from the interviews. All the interviews were conducted at 3 different places, all of which used EAP in Sweden. The interviewees were with 2 staff members in all three places. The interviewees included both males and females and were selected by staff members. They chose those they felt were most appropriate as the youths living at these homes are underage so the procedure and ethical considerations are more demanding. I was given the opportunity to see and observe some small parts of the treatment with the horses.

5.2 The Equine Assisted Psychotherapy homes

This chapter will give a small insight in the 3 different care homes that the study was conducted at. The information will be briefly summarized and will not give away identities (see more in the chapter four under ethical consideration) However, enough information is provided for the reader to easily understand the result and analysis.

5.2.1 The selection of care homes

The care homes were found through the internet and from some personal contacts of the author. A list of 7 care homes was made, all of them are using horses in their treatment of youths. After that, they were each contacted by phone. During the conversation, the aim of the research was explained as well as where the author was studying. Then, the question of participation was posed. Several care homes gave a negative response and then were taken off the list. What happened was that those care homes that said yes were those which were

selected to be interviewed. After the first contact, a place and time was decided for further discussion and to conduct the interviews. They were given an information letter (see Appendix A) to read and for the second time, they had the option to withdrawal their participation(nobody did).

5.2.2 Care home number 1

Care home number 1 (CH1) is located in the Sweden. They treat girls between the ages of 13-18 years with not only Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), but also in combination with Animal Assisted Therapy. They treat different kinds of illnesses including mental disorders, eating disorders, depression, and the after treatment of drugs. The staff are all trained in EAP and use this in their everyday work. At the time of the study, there were six girls living there with different diagnoses. The girls are responsible for all the chores that come with the daily care of horses. CH1 has been using EAP for 2 years and are very satisfied with it. The staff is mixed gender and the age of the staff is 22-53 years.

5.2.3 Care home number 2

Care home number 2 (CH2) is located in Sweden. They work with teenagers between 15-20 years of age with Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). This is actually not a care home more like day center where teenagers who are having trouble in society can come and get structure and treatment. They have the ability to place the most vulnerable girls in foster care. This gives the girls a normal environment to live in with the support of parents and then the structure of going to the day center. This is a fairly new project and the idea is to only have 4 clients at once to concentrate on them and make sure all the time necessary is given to the each of them.

5.2.4 Care home number 3

Care home number 3 (CH3) is located in Sweden. Using Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP), their focus is with girls who have been sexually abused and are depressed. These girls are between the ages of 12-18 years. They are placed there by social services an arm of the Swedish government Swedish law. The concept of this care home is that the girls go there and choose the horse they are going to work with during their stay. They believe that this method

will give the girls a sense that they have choices in life and then work with that choice. The staffs are trained in EAP and are all female as the girls have been abused by men. Many of the girls struggle with drug abuse as they try to suppress their feelings.

5.3 Collecting data

This is a qualitative study conducted using postmodern thinking upon the basis that it is the experiences and awareness the staff that is important, giving priority to the descriptions given and how their focus is interpreted and negotiated in the social world. The knowledge was validated by social and linguistic construction of its practice. To collect the material of earlier research Höskolan in Gävle Sweden databases PsycINFO and Sage Publication and Google search were used to find scientific articles and studies using the key terms *animal-assisted activities, animal-assisted psychotherapy, animal-assisted interventions, drugs, addiction + youths*, to retrieve relevant research literature. I chose not to use studies older than 1995.

The interviews were semi-structured and flexible as the focus was on the specific theme but allowed the author to ask questions to open up the discussion and get more information from the interviewee (Robson, 2007). The questions asked were short and simple with a wide range of information collected to give rich data. Furthermore, by using specific and structured indirect questions the interview could follow up with interpretive questions to ensure validity. All interviews were face to face in three different places in Sweden that are using Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) in their treatment of youths with different mental problems as well as drug abuse.

5.4 Interviewees

Three interviews were conducted with two people from each EAP location. There were 2 males and 4 females in total. 1 male and 1 female was responsible for the program at their workplace. The other 3 females and one male were working with the youths within the program. The interviews were with two persons at once and lasted for approximately one and a half hours and in total approximately four and a half hours. Before the interviews the interviewees were well informed about the aim and the research. They were well versed in the procedure. Time and space for questions were given before the interviews where held so the

interviewees were ready and felt relaxed. Two of the care homes refused recording as a result of earlier misbehaviour from researchers and notes were carefully taken instead. The third place was recorded and with a good result.

5.5 Transcribing and analyzing the interviews

Kvale et al (2009) state that to secure recorded interview accuracy it should be thoroughly transcribed and time was given so the transcribed text would be correct. The transcriptions were made by the author of the essay then read at the same time the tape was playing to make sure everything was on paper and in order to save the author from mistakes. For the interviews that were not recorded, the notes were discussed with the interviewee before leaving the care homes and also rechecked within the interview by interpretive questioning. Furthermore, after the transcribing and rechecking of the notes, three themes were identified with the aim and questions in focus. The themes were horse communication, addiction Treatment, and teenage development

Before analyzing all transcriptions and notes, the data was reduced down step by step and all unnecessary information outside my research question and the aim of the study was deleted. Thereby all rich and good information was left and quotations and statements were separated under each theme. Thematizing the collected data made it possible to be organized and no important information was lost as the results were collated. All interviews were analyzed with from the perspectives of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Systems Theory. The results of this are presented under chapter five results. The analysis is done from a hermeneutical perspective.

5.6 Reliability, Validity

Ensuring reliability and validity is challenging when it comes to a qualitative study because the instrument is the researcher. “Validity pertains to the degree that a method investigates what it is intended to investigate” (Kvale et al, 2009, p.246). The aim and research question has been the guide through the study and has kept the focus clear. The second problem was to be sure of the method. Is the right method used in this study or should it have been combined? To ensure the reliability of the study, triangulation was used.

Triangulation of Cognitive Behavioural Theory and Systems Theory are used to secure the reliability of the analysis. Furthermore, the participants were well informed, the transcriptions were carefully and thoroughly read and analyzed. All this strengthens the reliability of this report (Kvale et al, 2009).

5.7 Ethical considerations

The choice not to interview under aged youths was based on the fact that they are under treatment and are mentally occupied with becoming a healthy teen. Furthermore, there is no good reason to risk harming the teenage participants by asking the wrong questions; this research should be of advantage to them in the future. Kvale et al (2009) wrote: “Ethical issues go through the entire process of an interview investigation, and potential ethical concerns should be taken into consideration from the very start of an investigation to the final report” (p.62). The interviews included informed consent between the interviewer and the participants. All participants were informed of all ethical considerations made by the author and had time to ask questions and also the right to not participate or at anytime leave the interview if they wanted. “Informed consent further involves obtaining the voluntary participation of the people involved, and informing them of their right to withdraw from the study at any time” (Ibid, 2009, p.70)

5.8 Limitations of the study

The limitation of this study was that this field of Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is fairly new in Sweden so there are very few care homes using this method. I had to narrow down the aim and research question to fit the field and requirements of an academic timeline.

6 Result

This chapter will present the findings of the three interviews. During the data collection, three themes connected to the aim were identified to answer the research question. These themes are horse communication, addiction treatment, and teenage development. Horse communication and teenage development overlap each other so I will gain some reliable answers. The focus was to understand how EAP could be beneficial for young people with drug addictions.

To get a good result, consideration was given to the interviewees' beliefs, expectations, and experiences of the topic of EAP as beneficial for drug treatment and also to understand the importance of this kind of treatment. Much consideration was given to how to reach the core of the question in the best way. All results are based on the staff's experiences and their views of different situations that occur during their working days. Hopefully this result will lead to more questions in the area and more researchers will investigate the topic. In this chapter the care homes will be referred to as (CH 1,2,3) The explanation of the different homes can be found in chapter 5 (method).

6.1 Horse communication

In this section, the focus during the interviews was to find out more about the horse and how the communication with the girls functioned. CH 1, 2, 3 all had the belief that the horse is a good method of gaining the trust of a teenager. The horse is always there for the teenager and the teenager will get the sense that they are listening and understanding them. The horses are not paid a salary and are not waiting to go home when the day is over. The horse will be there twenty-four hours a day to listen at the teenagers and whatever the teenager tells them or have done during the day, they never judge. As the women at CH 2 said;

You can have dirty old clothes and act out on the floor in the stable and just have a very bad day. And at the end of the day no horse did judge you, they still like you, but if a friend saw that girl acting out on the floor she would judge her and change their behaviour against her. That is what makes horses so special.

Responses from CH 1 and 3 also echoed the theme that the horse never judges a person and if the teenager starts to understand this kind of acceptance from the horse, they slowly change their behaviour with people. When new youths arrive at the home, the youths who have stayed the longest will help the new arrival settle in as they know how to behave. This is learnt from the horse that you have to be nice to gain respect from others and all the CH are of the opinion that horses are unique in their communication as they respond as a mirror to the mood the teenager is in.

be angry and go in to a horse in their box and they will turn you their back and if you go out and come back with a different mood and says hi to the horse it will come to you immediately(CH 3)

CH 3 discussed that this is a way for the youths to change their attitude when they need help or when something is up for discussion. Furthermore, if you are acting in the wrong way against a person who has done you no harm, the response will be negative. Horses always reflect bad behaviour and to earn their respect, you need to treat them with respect. They function as a mirror and that gives the youth the time to reflect and try to move their way forward in solving a conflict between the horse and the person. They will then use the same techniques to solve minor problems in their social life. Sometimes the youths feel so much respect for themselves that some friendships are terminated as they come to realise that those friendships have a bad influence on them;

Many girls are distancing themselves from old friends as they learn to respect the horse. The friends are not treating them with respect and their immediate response is to not want to be treated in that way and so the friendship weakens. This shows how much self respect the horses give the girls (CH 1)

The opinion of all the CHs were that the higher self-esteem gained from the horse helps the teenagers to speak and become more secure in conflict situations as they now know how to handle them. They also agree that it could be a downside if they come to the point where they only trust the horse and nobody else. The youths feel that nobody else could ever understand them and this builds up a defence against the persons around them. The youths often choose the horse based on how they see themselves. One girl came to a home and chose the crankiest

horse she could find and one of them asked her why and she said that this horse would understand her. A lot of our communication with each other is conveyed by using different tones in our voice and the horse does not use its voice at all:

The horse are better than humans at communication as they only use their body language while people use a tone of voice that all teenagers are analysing to understand the message (CH 3)

If you take away the voices you will see a different person in your friend. Some of the youths start to talk more with their body. They begin to feel more comfortable with crying in front of another person as that is just a way of expressing how they feel and if they show those around them that right this moment that person is sad about something. They also express other feelings that come up during conversations and walk away when they feel that something is taking the wrong turn.

6.2 The Teenager

The teenager was the focus during this part of the interview and what happens to the teenager in the process of their treatment. As mentioned above, their skills in communication became much better in the treatment with Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, but the results also showed things like teenagers who were strongly depressed started wearing clothes with more colour as their mood changed. The following situation also occurred:

We started wondering where one of the girls had disappeared and we found her sleeping in the upper section of the stable where the grass is kept. We asked her why she was sleeping up there and the answer was -my anxiety disappeared for the first time in 4 years and I became so tired. (CH 3)

She had been using drugs for her anxiety that she could not handle and working in the stable all day gave her structure in her life so she could relax and express herself and the anxiety disappeared for a while. To always know what to do is a good feeling and you have no need to perform; you can just be who you are. In the schools, there is a need to perform well as the

grading is the foundation of education. To not have this pressure gives inner peace. A girl was asked why she preferred to be in the stable instead of school and her answer was:

- *When I have done one thing then that thing is done and I can continue with the next thing and when that is done its done. As in school we always have something more to do at home with the same topic studied in school.*

All three CHs mentioned that the teens become calmer and more focused in their work. Some of the teenagers go back to school as their ability to concentrate returns. The teenagers also like to get up in the morning having someone waiting for them in the stable and wanting to be fed. Their life joy slowly returns. Their social system around them starts to come back and the security net also develops. During a conversation with one of the girls after her mother visited her she sad this:

- *I was proud to show my mother that I could do better and that I knew much more about horses and I showed her my horse. (CH1)*

A simple thing such as feeling proud is essential in every human life. CH 1 saw big differences in how the girls handled new situations and experienced that while in the past a simple task could become a problem the use of the horse helped the teens to easily resolve it. Their relationships with the people around them started to become more mutually beneficial. Instead of not understanding each other, they were able to put words to their feelings directed toward the people closest to them. Sometimes going out to the stable could stir up that which you are trying to hide:

a day in the week one of the girls was going out to her horse and made it ready for some back riding. But suddenly from nowhere when she was lifting the horses back hoof she screamed;

-The horse tried to kick me in the face he is dangerous.

But as the observer I could see that the horse was as calm as he always is so this was a way for the girl to express that something was wrong.

Working with youths, sometimes you have to read between the lines and the stable is an environment of safety to them so this behaviour from the girl was a cry for help. The youths always have people around them in the stable and when they enter the stable they become calm. No pressure is put on the youths other than doing what the scheme for the day says. In this age of life, things happen in their bodies and sometimes that is good, but sometimes that is bad as well.

One girl and one boy experienced the wonderful things when hormones are kicking in. We had to watch them carefully otherwise they will go up on the upper section on the stable make love. What happened was that we had to relocate the boy as they became too focused on each other rather than on recovering from their addiction. Today they are a couple and drug free even though we did separate them.

In this kind of situation, there is always a risk to let one leave as their trust is fragile and may not come easy. However, they have to focus on getting free from the addiction and this kind of relationship could jeopardise their recovery as they are very fragile at this stage.

6.3 The Addiction

This theme concentrated on the addiction and how they improved the use of drugs with help of the Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP). CH 1,2,3 all agreed on that as a pure treatment for addiction, EAP is not the right method, but if you combine it with something else you will see results.

The positive influence EAP could have on the drug problem is on the structure of the day. To have a purpose of the day and a horse to care about is good, but it is not a treatment for drug addicts. (CH 2)

CH 2 had the belief that if they come directly from a treatment home for addicts this will have a tremendously good effect on the teenager's life.

As a preventative method for drugs this should be successful as they are learning to deal with problems and learning coping strategies. Their social network

develops and the support from family and friends should be enough for the teenager.

CH 1 and CH 2 both used the same twelve step programme as Alcoholics Anonymous. But often when they come to the care homes, they are already clean from drugs. What they then work with is to turn the bad things into good. This, along with Cognitive Behaviour Therapy helps to keep them free from drugs. One of the boys at the CH 2 met his father after a long time and told him;

- *All the pain you caused me was not fair to me. All the nights you were drunk and abused mom was not fair to her. I do not blame you for my drug addiction but I see you as a reason that caused me to do it, and that makes me sad.*

He could understand that it was his own choice to take drugs but that the home situation was out of control and so his environment become too much and one way to deal with that was to take drugs and run away. This boy had significant challenges to building trust in others as his social systems around him were not functioning.

The question of why people use drugs is one of the most essential questions in the whole recovery process. If you do not know why, what should you then treat? What do you need help with? Everyone can stop using drugs but as soon as they do the same problems causing them to take the drug will come up to the surface and the craving for drugs comes back.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy has become a good working tool in relation to the Equine Assisted Therapy. The youths are given tasks that scare them and then the tools to handle them. That could be a girl walking to the stable in the dark as she is afraid of the dark. When she is alone in the dark, all the bad memories come to the surface and instead of pushing them away, she faces and overcomes them. However it is important to realise that all treatment takes place over a long period and problems are not fixed overnight. A girl that had agreed to move to CH 1 came in and said:

- *I no longer have a drug addiction so I will stay for a week to satisfy my parents and then I will go home. She lived at this home for 9 months without once wanting to go home as she felt much better dealing with the problems.*

If you take a ball of yarn that became tangled and begin to untie one knot after another, this is similar to what the youths do in treatment. They are so tangled up in their emotions that the knots are just getting harder and harder to untie. When they untied one knot they get a sense of relief, then they realise that the hardest knot to untie is the identity of being an addict. Some of them have used drugs for several years and it has become a part of their personality and that knot is often the last one to be untied.

7 Analysis

The aim of chapter six is to analyze the results presented in chapter five. Perspectives from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Systems Theory are used as the tools for the theme analysis and the holistic analysis will be connected back to earlier research. The two perspectives are presented in chapter four under Theoretical frameworks. Earlier research is found in chapter two. The results shows that the staff working at CH 1, 2, 3 all believe that the interaction with horses strengthens youths in many different aspects. Findings show that incorporating horses in therapy gives good results in the youth's recovery. The youths learn to treat the horse with respect and learn to value themselves better. With that self value, their personality changes and they can overcome obstacles and start building their social life again.

7.1 Theme Analysis

7.1.1 Horse communication

From a cognitive way of looking at communication with horses, that is what happens unconsciously in the interaction between the horse and the youth. They communicate with each other without using words and rely on body language. Also cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is about turning something bad into something good just as the horses are doing. The results shows that the horse is the mirror and if the youths come in to their box with a bad mood they will react and make that mood change to a calmer mood just as the therapists do using the CBT. The therapist's job has been to guide and motivate the youths, but actually it is the horse that opens the youths up. Furthermore, the staff found that many youths are tired of the people in their social systems such as parents, friends, family and staff and their speeches about how important it is to stop talking drugs. From the system theory (ST) perspective you need to investigate these different systems and in collaboration with CBT they will instead let the youths find trust in the horses that never judge them for taking drugs or try to convince them to stop. When they started communicate with the horses they will integrate the horses as an important piece in their social system. As discussed earlier in chapter four ST could start from youths starting to communicate with their horses and then parents and from that the whole system will change.

From the CBT perspective these homes are not efficient for the treatment to get off drugs but to prevent teens from continuing with an addiction. After a while when the horse is a part of the youths social systems, and if the horse stops eating the youths have to help the horse and by using this metaphor youths gained insight into their own social systems and gains understanding why people around them reacted in the way they did to their own addiction. As CBT is about changing some behaviors they need to overcome the obstacle of abstinences from drugs and learn to solve their problems with the skills learned from their time with the horses. Something that the results shows very clearly is that they are proud of the horses and themselves and how important that feeling is for the youths.

To be in the stable in a calm mood, they could lose some of their anxiety and pressure to be something they are not. Using their body most of the day gives the mind something else to think about other than all the bad things that are happening around them. Some have gone from addiction to returning to school and rebuilding their social lives as they learned to control their emotions and discovered who they really are. Most of the youths that created a good security net around them got the help to continue being around horses and by that stay away from drugs. The relationship with the horse is almost more therapeutic than what a human could provide. The youths are focused on how we talk and the horses do not talk at all and come to play a key role in the youths' psychological and spiritual path in life.

7.1.2 The Teenager

This study was about why horses are a preferable method in treatment of addiction and it is because with Equine Assisted Psychotherapy, the youth's behaviour becomes calmer and more focused and their coping skills helps them tackle the problems in their social systems. As mentioned in chapter four, I discussed that Systems Theory is an approach to investigating human behaviour as a result of the interaction between different social systems. The results then showed that many youths have two personalities in being an addict - the side where they are on drugs and the one where they are off drugs; they in effect have two social systems, looking on the side where they are on drugs they feel like they have an identity and they are happy as their social system feels balanced. They have friends and belong to a group of people doing the same thing and they are getting away from their problems. However if you then look on the side without drugs, the findings can be everything from being depressed and

without friends to not wanting to live anymore. They lose their identity and feel uncomfortable around people. To understand this, the results show how important it is to look at their social systems starting with the family and then going further with school and friends and so on to identify where the most problems are. Most of the youths coming to the care homes have lost their connection with their social systems and society as a result of their drug abuse. So from a cognitive way this makes it very important for the staff to find and strengthen youths and what creates harmonious feelings in the youth's life so they are strong enough to avoid drugs in the future. Systematic transactions and integrations between different systems affect many parts of the youth's social life. From the staff's point of view, it is the relationships between the youth and the horse that expands the youth's social skills and thereby their social network and helps them find new ways to deal with their addiction. Furthermore, addiction is a very complex disease so the staffs need to always consider both sides of drug abuse, the emotional and the physical, in order to use cognitive methods to create a safe environment in the future.

7.1.3 The Addiction

When changes occur in the youths' systems surrounding them, it has an effect influencing their recovery from addiction or becoming addicts. I found that by addressing Equine assisted psychotherapy successfully as a drug treatment, you have to focus on the emotional and behavioral part of the youths' lives, not that they are taking drugs. As the cognitive perspective gives an understanding to the findings, the staff find it most important to understand the underlying cause of why they are taking drugs and treat that part of their life, rather than concentrating on getting them off drugs per se. Looking at the problem from a system theory perspective the results shows that for addiction the family can be an underlying cause of use of drugs in the youth's life as he or she attempts to create a space where he/she can escape to when the reality becomes too much to handle. Then the focus needs to be the family to create the balance in their social systems again. The horses seem to create the same space of happiness as drugs. By using CBT in their treatment, many drug users give up their old habits and start to care for the animal and its safety and can then understand and relate to their parents concern for them.

However it is important to realise that all treatment occurs over a long period and problems are not fixed overnight. You need to earn its respect and how to talk with the horse using your body and this gives the youths the skills to face a new challenge and that without drugs. But as discussed they have two different personalities and those have to be understood and worked with one by one. If they are coming with drugs in their system, the horse will show them fear and this is how the youths understand that they just push away the horse as they push everything else away. But if they are clean from drugs and calm they will have a horse that is willing to work with them and the trust between them builds up. The staff's point of view is that this is the tipping point for youths is if they can overcome their fear and let it go and just deal with the emotions, then they will have an experience for life. The study shows that Equine Assisted Psychotherapy is effective treatment for youths who have suffered from drug addiction and have a genuine interest in horses. However, the staff do not believe in this treatment for youths coming with abstinence, as the horses will react to the youths strange behavior.

7.2 **Holistic Analysis**

Okay, so is this actually the best way for youths to overcome their addiction? It showed in the results that they first need to have a genuine interest in horses so that will narrow down its usefulness for many addicts. Secondly it is most efficient to come to this kind of care home a couple of weeks after getting off drugs so why have this treatment for addicts? I mean they have to first go to one place and get off the drugs and then move to this kind of home to receive horse treatment. It feels very complicated to use this method with addicts. At the same time if they first go to one place receiving help with their abstinence the results can be amazing when following the abstinence with Equine Assisted Psychotherapy. Zinberg (1984) did find that many children who grow up in families with addiction problems are influenced just as much by the media. The horses cannot help the youths overcome the influence from the media and family so what does one do? Or should the parent with an addiction be integrated into the process as well? Of course he/she may not have an interest in horses, so what then?

Throughout the results it shows that this kind of treatment should avoid concentrating too much on one area only - you always have to have in mind the other aspects of the treatment.

The teenager is a TEENAGER with an ADDICTION that needs the HORSE COMMUNICATION to become more in tune with their feelings and understand why they use drugs. But the horse is both treating the addiction as well as the youth's emotional side. However, the results showed that while it is an effective form of treatment, it does have some small problems to consider including how attached the youths become to their horses and the fact that they could close their feelings towards people but not horses. Also this study has shown how important for youths to have some kind of "high" rush of euphoria, and how can they create that with the horse? Horses may become their new addiction and to leave the care home and their "addiction" the horse creates feelings of helplessness and this may be a trigger for them to start using drugs again as their social systems are affected when removing the horse. Furthermore, the relationship to the horse becomes very strong and is the reason that the youths relax because they have learned to be a certain way around the horse. As most things in this treatment method happen unconsciously as they react as soon as the horse reacts, I found that it works as long they have horses around them but what happens when they are removed? It is not easy to get out into the real world again. The results also show that their need for horses becomes so strong that if the therapist doesn't know how to work with that, they will create a damaging path for the youth.

So is it really a good method? Yes if you are only looking at the result from the youth's perspective. They have had a lot of positive things happening in their lives. Many youths experience the feeling of how their underlying anxiety disappears. Some are able to put words to their feelings and many of them never touch drugs again. The horses help them change their social systems and help them figure out the underlying cause of the addiction. Why could it be a problem? Because they could have an addiction in their family that will be there when they come home. Furthermore the horses become a very important piece in their life and that will be taken away. However I believe that it is a good way to help youths with an addiction who also have an interest in horses, however I do not feel that this is a more efficient method than all the alternative addiction treatments out there. And as all other treatment options, it has its positive and negative aspects

8 Concluding Discussion

The aim of the research was to investigate the question “Is equine-assisted psychotherapy beneficial for young people suffering from drug addictions?” I chose to use qualitative interviews and came to the conclusion that it is beneficial for those youths that are in a preventative stage in their treatment. My belief as the author was before that if the focus was not on the addiction but on the underlying cause of the addiction then this method could be wonderful to use. The results showed that while they have come far in getting off the drugs now they need help to stay off them. Everybody I interviewed was of the same opinion that it is a preventive method. It was outlined that it is important to see the person as a person, not as a person with the addiction and to recognize how their social systems contributed to their addiction. I found before doing this study that Equine Assisted Psychotherapy was successful in many areas in the United States. I feel that my pre-understanding of this research was quite correct that it is a useful method in drug addiction but not in the way I originally thought.

The data from the interviews was put together in chapter five where it showed how different social factors in life of the youths would be helped with EAP and provides a good base for further development. The choice to use qualitative interviews was good as I wanted to get deep and rich information from the interviews to get the best result and be able to analyze it in the best way. I believe that using quantitative methods with the youths would provide an even richer description and also offer different views. I could then have chosen to investigate the contradictions between the actors and ultimately have a better result in arriving at a better understanding of the youths. The reason not to use quantitative measures is because of my personal skills in using quantitative methods. I am more experienced in the field of interviews and it was most appropriate as the process has been free from obstacles and our participants seemed to be in agreement with me. I feel that I made the right choice and that the interviewees felt comfortable with the questions asked and that it would be totally confidential. As they were relaxed I felt that the answers given were carefully thought through and honest and my impression was that they wanted to contribute as much as possible.

When it comes to the choice of theories, I found in earlier research that CBT is most effective when trying to analyze drug addiction and the more I read about it, the more certain I became that it was the best and most effective way for me to analyze their way of turning negative emotions toward something productive. The Systems Theory was not my first choice but as I collected the data, I saw a pattern and that was that many drug related studies presented in chapter three showed that the many social obstacles were contributing factors in their addiction, so I used it.

I have been very careful with ethical considerations and I also believe this report has a high degree of reliable and valid information as presented in chapter four. My view as the author after doing my research is that EAP is successful in many aspects and almost every mental illness and addiction could be treated by EAP. Furthermore, this is a big social problem in the field for social workers and we need further research in how we could help the youths in the best way and this has shown to be an efficient way for boys and girls with an interest in animals. If we could understand the treatment method better, then we could expand the field. Sometimes during the study, it felt hard to get a grip around what EAP really is and how it is effective as horses cannot speak to give us further insights.

8.1 Further research

I positively recommend further research in this area in Sweden. I believe that more research should be done regarding the questions that arose during the research:

- Is it possible to expand social networks with horse therapy as it is big underlying cause in order to empower youths?
- And also how does a youth consider EAP effective to their own social situation?

And most of all, it should become evaluated so we could understand how many youths are actually getting the help.

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10 Appendix

10.1 A-Information letter

You are being asked to participate in research a study in the field of Equine assisted psychotherapy. This study is a part of my education at Högskolan in Gävle it will be open for everyone to read. I want with this letter to ensure that you understand the reason for the study and feel comfortable in participating.

Researcher:

Jannicka Bark

Purpose of Research:

Is to understand how the equine-assisted psychotherapy is beneficial for young people suffering from drug addictions.

Procedure and time.

You will participate in interviews that are approximately 40-60 minutes long with another person from the staff. I will ask questions about the procedure in the treatment using Equine Assisted Psychotherapy and you are free to not answer the questions and leave the room at any time. This is not a binding agreement that forces you to answer questions, it is totally voluntary.

Confidentiality:

There will be no names mentioned in the results of the study.

I will present the caring home as a home for youth somewhere in Sweden so no location makes it possible to track results back to you. All my recordings will be deleted so no one could listen to them and all transcriptions will be carefully done without names.

I hope you will participate and as mentions above make sure you understand the options you have and feel free to ask me questions about the study.

Thank you

10.2 B-Interview guide

- Tell me about this Caring home
- Tell me about your expertise in the area of EAP
- Describe the relationship the youths have with the horses.
- How is EAP helping the teenagers overcome their drug abuse
- How do the youths react when they are around horses?
- How do the youths act in the stable?
- How is the horse affecting their youth's life?
- How is a horse a tool for solving drug addiction?
- How does the youth react when negative things happen around the horses?
- What is the responsibility of the staff working here?