

'Cow cuddling': psychotherapy to reduce stress and anxiety

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ABSTRACT

Therapy animals are not a new concept, but in a world where mental health is being tested by an ongoing pandemic, people are seeking calm and searching for comfort. The prevalence of mental illness is a major concern. It is estimated that globally one in four people will experience a mental illness at some point in their life. A new therapeutic trend 'Cow cuddling' is gaining global popularity now days and has become the latest wellness craze to help reduce stress and increase positivity. Studies show a good hug can have significant health benefits. Stimulating touch receptors under the skin can low our anxiety hormones and restore our anxiety levels.

Keywords: Cow Cuddling, Stress, Anxiety, Psychotherapy, Oxytocin, Therapeutic

In ancient times and in cultures worldwide, animals have been respected as essential partners in human survival, health, and healing. Many spiritual traditions have honoured the relationships of people to animal forms of life, as part of the interconnectedness of the natural world and a link to the spirit world (Serpell, 2006).

A broad range of investigations have found that animal-human interactions reduce anxiety, depression, and loneliness as they enhance social support and general well-being (Friedmann & Tsai, 2006)

Froma Walsh, a leading scholar on family resilience, writes extensively about the impact of a pet on family dynamics, arguing that an animal in the home can improve family dynamics.

'Cow cuddling' is a form of animal-assisted therapy inclusive of brushing, petting or even having a word with your new, trustworthy psychology professionals. A practice that originated in the rural town of Reuver in the Netherlands, "koe knuffelen," which means "cow hugging" in Dutch, is centered on the inherent healing properties of a good human-to-animal snuggle. The cow's warmer body temperature, slower heartbeat and mammoth size can make hugging them an incredibly soothing experience, and giving the animal a backrub, reclining against them or even getting licked is all part of the therapeutic encounter.

"Cow cuddling is believed to promote positivity and reduce stress by boosting oxytocin in humans, the hormone released in social bonding. The calming effects of curling up with a

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pet or emotional support animal, it seems, are accentuated when cuddling with larger mammals," according to the BBC.

Oxytocin: The 'love' or 'cuddle' hormone that is responsible for trust

- Oxytocin, known as the 'love hormone', engenders trust and generosity.
- The chemical is released naturally from the brain into the blood of humans and other mammals during social and sexual behaviors.
- It is produced by women during labour to help them bond with their baby, and stimulates the production of breast milk.
- The chemical is also released during lovemaking, earning it the nickname 'the cuddle hormone'.
- Other loving touches, from hugging a teddy bear to stroking your pet dog, also trigger the hormone's release.

Mountain Horse Farm in upstate New York is offering a 'Horse & Cow Experience', which promises to give farm-animal enthusiasts the chance to 'bring relaxation, healing and awareness about (their) body language' via 'cow cuddling'.

It also promotes 'comfort, mindfulness, builds assertiveness, helps with overcoming fear, builds confidence, lets you be playful and teaches you to set boundaries'.

'In order to survive in the wild, they had to become masters at reading body language,' the farm claims. 'And when you enter their space, they will read you subtly but with intent, just like they would read any other herd member. They will pick up on what's going on inside and sense if you are happy, sad, feel lost, anxious or are excited and they will respond to that without judgement, ego or agenda.' It also says that cows have a body temperature that is slightly higher than humans and their heart rate is lower than ours. 'Cuddling up with a cow, feeling that lower heart rate and higher body temperature, is very relaxing.

Significance of the study

Study was to explore participant's experiences of the benefits of interaction with animals to mental health and to show how and where human cow interaction can benefit mental health and reduce stress and anxiety. This study has showed how interaction with cow has direct and indirect benefits to mental health and wellbeing and argues that animals can play an important role in improving human mental health and stress free life. The significance of this study lies in its approach to exploring the phenomenology of the interaction between humans and cow, and this is discussed. This study will add to the knowledge on the benefits of human cow interaction to mental health and help fortify current hypotheses. This study is significant to practice because if we can understand more clearly the ways in which interaction with cow can reduce stress and may show new ways in which interaction with cow could be used to support people in their recovery from mental illness in general, and Anxiety in particular.

Aims/Objectives

The objective of this research in the therapeutic use of Cow cuddling and to present some ideas as to how we can identify and measure a potential causal relationship between cow contact in a therapeutic setting and the longer-term effects to reduce Stress and Anxiety level.

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Source of population and selection criteria

The population considered for this research fell in the age group of 20-30 and belonged to India.

Participants

Total 50 subjects participated in the research. Gender was not a parameter.

Tools and techniques

One standard questionnaire was used to measure state-anxiety and another self made questionnaire was used to measure stress.

- 1. State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI)** STAI (Spielberger et al., 1970) measured the dependent variable, using the state-anxiety part that asks respondents to indicate how they feel right now. Twenty items describing feelings of tension, nervousness, worry and apprehension are rated on a 4-point scale. This measure was found reliable and valid in numerous studies, including its Hebrew translation (Teichman, 1978). Its internal reliability in our sample ranged from Cronbach's alpha/0.86 at baseline to 0.93 after the stress manipulation.
- 2. Self-Structured Questionnaire** consisting of 25 questions to measure the stress level in individual.

Procedure

To ensure better response, co-operation, genuine interest and personal contact, I used to collect the information from a sample of 50 individual selected using stratified random sampling techniques through Google meet, Social media (Facebook and WhatsApp). The survey was conducted to assess the Anxiety and stress level in individual in current scenario by using two set of questionnaires, designed the items that meet the research goals. After interpret the data select the participant who has a high anxiety and stress level. Then suggest them to spent two hours daily with cow after 15 days the test was again conducted to assess the anxiety and stress level in selected participant. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study and always observed the privacy rights of human subjects.

50 people were given a test and after interpretation of data 47 participant out of 50 has high anxiety and stress level in their daily life. Through the Google meet, individual informed about cow cuddling therapy benefit to relieve from stress and anxiety, 45 participants follow the therapy and shared their experiences after 15 days. And then again tests were administered to assess the stress and anxiety level in the individual.

The results showed that there were significant differences in stress and anxiety level of 45 participants after taking cow cuddling session. The findings suggest that all of them feel relaxed after taking each session.

People expressed it meant more to them than they had expected it to. They feel warm, accepted and loved. It's a positive energy exchange. The individual experiences cow cuddling therapy, all of them becomes relaxed by being next to the cow's warmer body, it's a win-win situation and great experience for them.

Finally, the literature review reveals that interaction with cow can be beneficial to mental health and stress-free life.

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It was shown that interaction with animals can be beneficial in various settings and contexts including therapeutic interventions (Dell et al., 2011; Klontz et al., 2007; Yorke et al., 2008; Burgoyne et al., 2014), working with farm animals (Berget et al., 2011; Pedersen et al., 2012) or pet ownership (Wood et al., 2005; Allen et al., 2002). However, little is known about how and in what ways exactly benefits are gained from interaction with animals. Consequently, the research question posed here aims to provide some insight into the phenomenon of human animal interaction on mental health generally, and the specific factors that support mental health specifically.

Some studies shows that the majority of research on human animal interaction is from the fields of psychology, psychiatry, and zoology, and although this is important, has located the phenomenon of the benefits to mental health in a 10 narrowly psychological frame. Although there is some awareness among social workers of animal assisted interventions and the role animals can play in helping people, this is as yet an under-developed area of social work research.

The human-animal bond is, no doubt, good for our mental health. Entire books have been written on the topic by authors like Chris Blazina and his colleagues. From service dogs (or service animals) to goat yoga, many people are finding contact with an animal a therapeutically sound idea.

Froma Walsh, a leading scholar on family resilience, writes extensively about the impact of a pet on family dynamics, arguing that an animal in the home can improve family dynamics. A 2007 study by French and Austrian scientists published in *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* found that cows "show signs of pleasure and relaxation when people, rub, massage or pet them," People reported.

It added that the humans who were hugging the cows also experienced lower heart rates and showed physical signs of relaxation, which it said "could be of interest for an improvement in quality of human–cattle interactions."

A major theme that emerged from the interviews is that the company of animals was enjoyed immensely by the participants. It was described that having cow around combats feelings of stress & anxiety as animals always there, want pats, wanting to be fed or content to spend time with people.

According to the BBC, cow-hugging can reduce stress because it boosts the level of oxytocin in humans, a hormone that is secreted by the posterior lobe of the brain. It is often called the "cuddle" or "love hormone" because it gets released when people bond socially, and when they cuddle.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show that there are many direct as well as indirect benefits of individual cow interaction to mental health and stress-free life. The results from this study show how cow interaction can act as the vehicle through which social connection may also be enhanced or increased.

The findings show that the company of cow was enjoyed by participants and experienced as comforting, combating feelings of loneliness, stress and anxiety. Furthermore, session

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encouraged social interaction and working in teams to care for cow fostered a sense of belonging and helped participants develop self-confidence.

Furthermore, the participants explained how a sense of achievement, fun and enjoyment was experienced while interacting with cow and working in farms. Lastly all participants felt passionate about cow and their welfare and stated that this was the great session or therapy to reduce anxiety and stress.

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Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest. The subjects were asked to sign a consent form and after their approval, their data was used.

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