



It Takes a Herd: Feasibility, Acceptability, and Preliminary Effectiveness of Equine-Assisted Program for Dementia Carepartners

Joseph Martinez, MPH, Vedant Tapiavala, BA, Karen Coppola, EAL, CDP, Jeanine McCleod, EdD, Karen L. Fortuna PhD, LICSW

It Takes a Herd (ITAH) equine program offers a feasible manualized intervention that may reduce carepartner strain and anxiety while improving psychological quality of life for carepartners of people living with dementia.

INTRODUCTION	METHODS	RESULTS	CONCLUSIONS																																													
• Dementia caregiving is associated with chronic burden, anxiety, and social isolation.¹⁻³ • Interventions that support the carepartner of a person with dementia (PWD) are limited. • Equine-assisted therapy offers a novel, non-clinical environment for relational bonding and emotional regulation.^{4,5} • Goal: To evaluate the feasibility and preliminary impact of a 4-week equine program on carepartner strain and psychological health.	• Participants: 12 carepartner of PWD recruited from the community. • Intervention: 4-week "It Takes a Herd" program; weekly 2 hour sessions comprised of ground-based activities (grooming, leading, observation). • Assessments: T1 (Baseline) and T2 (Post-Intervention). • Measures: Dyadic Relationship Scale (DRS), GAD-7 (Anxiety), WHOQOL-BREF (QoL), and Zarit Burden Interview.	Feasibility and Acceptability: Demonstrated through 86% participant retention rate. 12/14 carepartners completed full 4 week program. Relational Strain: Reduction in DRS scores (T1 M=2.48 to T2 M=2.34; d = 0.40), indicating decreased tension. Psychological Health: GAD-7 scores improved (d = -0.14) and WHOQOL psychological scores increased (d = 0.16). Stability: carepartner burden and social isolation scores remained stable. <table><thead><tr><th>Outcome (Scale) (n=12)</th><th>Baseline Mean (SD)</th><th>Follow-up Mean (SD)</th><th>Mean Change (FU – BL)</th><th>Cohen's d</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Dyadic Relationship Strain (DRS)</td><td>2.48 (0.34)</td><td>2.34 (0.36)</td><td>-0.14</td><td>-0.40</td></tr><tr><td>WHOQOL-BREF Psychological Domain</td><td>3.49 (0.82)</td><td>3.60 (0.72)</td><td>+0.11</td><td>+0.16</td></tr><tr><td>WHOQOL-BREF Social Domain</td><td>3.17 (0.75)</td><td>3.11 (0.64)</td><td>-0.06</td><td>-0.07</td></tr><tr><td>PHQ-9 Total (0–27)</td><td>5.67 (3.58)</td><td>5.92 (3.63)</td><td>+0.25</td><td>+0.09</td></tr><tr><td>GAD-7 Total (0–21)</td><td>4.67 (3.31)</td><td>4.25 (2.70)</td><td>-0.42</td><td>-0.14</td></tr><tr><td>Self-Compassion Scale–Short Form (mean)</td><td>3.38 (0.77)</td><td>3.38 (0.61)</td><td>+0.01</td><td>+0.01</td></tr><tr><td>PROMIS Social Isolation (T-score)</td><td>50.13 (9.11)</td><td>50.28 (6.11)</td><td>+0.16</td><td>+0.03</td></tr><tr><td>Zarit Caregiver Burden (12-item total, 0–48)</td><td>32.83 (8.61)</td><td>33.25 (9.57)</td><td>+0.42</td><td>+0.05</td></tr></tbody></table>	Outcome (Scale) (n=12)	Baseline Mean (SD)	Follow-up Mean (SD)	Mean Change (FU – BL)	Cohen's d	Dyadic Relationship Strain (DRS)	2.48 (0.34)	2.34 (0.36)	-0.14	-0.40	WHOQOL-BREF Psychological Domain	3.49 (0.82)	3.60 (0.72)	+0.11	+0.16	WHOQOL-BREF Social Domain	3.17 (0.75)	3.11 (0.64)	-0.06	-0.07	PHQ-9 Total (0–27)	5.67 (3.58)	5.92 (3.63)	+0.25	+0.09	GAD-7 Total (0–21)	4.67 (3.31)	4.25 (2.70)	-0.42	-0.14	Self-Compassion Scale–Short Form (mean)	3.38 (0.77)	3.38 (0.61)	+0.01	+0.01	PROMIS Social Isolation (T-score)	50.13 (9.11)	50.28 (6.11)	+0.16	+0.03	Zarit Caregiver Burden (12-item total, 0–48)	32.83 (8.61)	33.25 (9.57)	+0.42	+0.05	• Findings suggest "It Takes a Herd" is a feasible and well-accepted psychosocial intervention for carepartners of PWD. • Results suggest that the ITAH equine program may target "hidden" stressors like anger, anxiety, and resentment within the relationship which may contribute toward improved psychological health • The intervention offers a promising model for relational support outside traditional clinical settings. • Larger, fully powered studies are warranted based on these pilot trends.
Outcome (Scale) (n=12)	Baseline Mean (SD)	Follow-up Mean (SD)	Mean Change (FU – BL)	Cohen's d																																												
Dyadic Relationship Strain (DRS)	2.48 (0.34)	2.34 (0.36)	-0.14	-0.40																																												
WHOQOL-BREF Psychological Domain	3.49 (0.82)	3.60 (0.72)	+0.11	+0.16																																												
WHOQOL-BREF Social Domain	3.17 (0.75)	3.11 (0.64)	-0.06	-0.07																																												
PHQ-9 Total (0–27)	5.67 (3.58)	5.92 (3.63)	+0.25	+0.09																																												
GAD-7 Total (0–21)	4.67 (3.31)	4.25 (2.70)	-0.42	-0.14																																												
Self-Compassion Scale–Short Form (mean)	3.38 (0.77)	3.38 (0.61)	+0.01	+0.01																																												
PROMIS Social Isolation (T-score)	50.13 (9.11)	50.28 (6.11)	+0.16	+0.03																																												
Zarit Caregiver Burden (12-item total, 0–48)	32.83 (8.61)	33.25 (9.57)	+0.42	+0.05																																												
			REFERENCES AND CONTACT ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION AAIC 26																																													