

Society For Companion Animal Studies Annual Conference – Annual SCAS Conference.

Theme: Are Pets Really Good For Us? The role of mental and physical health.

Report presented by Praise Akobo.

It was a huge learning experience on Sunday, 17th September, 2023. Beginning with the introduction, as the SCAS chairperson, from Dr Elizabeth Ormerod, especially stating the mission of SCAS, “To promote one health, one welfare, recognizing the connections between animal welfare, human well-being and the shared environment and at the end stated an amazing call to action, “join us make a difference to people and animals”. This served as a call unto more for me.

The Key Note Address was an amazing dive into Dog Walking and exercise, with explanations on the benefits of dog walking concerning physical exercise while enhancing health habits like adherence and motivation to exercise program, and it’s worth noting that, physically active people have better health including higher functioning health, better health-related quality of life, and lower risk of developing a variety of chronic diseases.

And, quoting ‘if physical activity were a drug, we would refer to it as a miracle cure due to the great many illnesses it can prevent and help treat, this inspired my walk into physical exercise, it was stated that, the reasons people don’t walk their dogs could be as a result of weather, priority, health etc.

Furthermore, an understanding of the social support from dogs in daily life and times of crisis was rewarding, they are perceived as being always available with few social skills required to get the animals' attention, exhibiting qualities such as not being judgmental, no consequence of sharing thoughts etc.; and the case studies shared from children, the homeless, reflected how dogs have prevented suicide and, are generally beneficial and this was ended by saying, “social support from dogs is ubiquitous but grossly underestimated”.

It was interesting seeing the PET@home toolkit, where the pet owner receives long-term care at home. With this working group, the toolkit when made available would be an enhancer to aiding people build social connections and meaning with their pets. For instance, somebody to care for as well as cuddle and interact with.

In learning from people’s lived experiences and research on mental health, with the scientific evidence that pets are good for us; plays an important role in the management of symptoms while 3 studies were shared with online surveys reflecting words like ‘If I am upset and crying, my dog is there to lick my tears

reminding me that, I will be fine. This was re-assuring to the point, pets are good for us despite other concerns shared.

The funded SCAS projects, from different speakers deserved to have been funded, beginning from Chronic Pain and Animal Assisted Therapy reflecting pets as providing distraction and encouraging routines while exploring the impact of puppy acquisition during the pandemic which influenced their decision to get puppies. The amazing video clip from an Animal Assisted Activity Session states that the presence of the pets created more opportunities for students and staff to engage, e.g. people who don't know themselves. Then, an important role is in the self-management of mental health. The poster presentations brought light to the statistics of persons who are accepting to own pets while comparing dogs with cats and rabbits, stating positive and negative effects and impacts.

It was generally enlightening to see different researches carried out so far, and as I build on this field, I am more than challenged to include data and researches from the communities and country – Nigeria. Lastly, despite Autism being a Neurodevelopment and lifelong spectrum, 62% of parents with pets said their child experiences less likely meltdowns, this was specific to the light I am beginning to experience, as I put in more work.

I am working to incorporate Animal Assisted Interventions to close the gaps in education, sustainability and quality of living of children and young adults living with disabilities, chronic health issues and mental health disorders in rural environments in Nigeria through our eco-friendly library, which is at its onset phase.

Thank you for the opportunity to grow, Society for Companion Animal Studies sponsored by VetSkill.