

# ADHD RESEARCH

## 7A – CANINE ASSISTED INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER; MAIN OUTCOMES FROM PROJECT P.A.C.K.

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**Introduction:** Children with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are at greater risk for functional impairment and poor outcomes. Novel approaches aimed to improve social skills and symptom management are needed. Project Positive, Assertive, Cooperative Kids (P.A.C.K.) is the first randomized clinical trial examining the safety and efficacy of Canine Assisted Interventions (CAI) for ADHD.

**Methods:** 81 children with ADHD (mean age = 8.14, 58 males) and their parents participated in a 12-week skills training, either with or without therapy dogs ( $n = 41$  “DOG,”  $n = 40$  “NO-DOG”). Parents completed the ADHD-IV Rating Scale (DuPaul et al., 1998) every two weeks and the Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham and Elliott, 2008) at pretreatment, post-treatment, and follow-up.

**Results:** Inattention symptoms were lower for DOG than No-DOG at week-4 ( $F_{(1,274)} = 4.58$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and remained lower across subsequent weeks ( $p < .05$ ). Social Skills scores were better for DOG than No-DOG at post-treatment ( $F_{(1,80)} = 4.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and follow-up ( $F_{(1,80)} = 5.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ). While Problem Behaviors were reduced at post-treatment for both groups, scores declined at a faster rate for DOG than No-DOG ( $F_{(1,80)} = 9.36$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Conclusion:** CAI for children with ADHD is a safe and effective therapy for reducing symptoms, particularly inattention, and improving social skills. Investigation into underlying mechanisms and generalizability to other populations is warranted.

### References

- DuPaul, G. J.; Power, T. J.; Anastopoulos, A. D.; and Reid, R. (1998). *ADHD rating scale-IV*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gresham, F., and Elliott, S. (2008). *Social skills improvement system (SSIS)*. Minneapolis, MN: Pearson Assessment.