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Title: PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF EQUINE THERAPY ON JUVENILES WITH NEUROLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS

Keyword 1: Equine assisted therapy

Keyword 2: Quantitative methods

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Abstract:

Objective: The aim of the study is to examine whether parents perceived improvement or change in their children's physical and mental development after six months of equine assisted therapy at the Hungarian Riding for the Disabled Federation, as well as to explore the relationship between parent's and therapist's opinions.

Design: Parents of the children completed two similar questionnaires voluntarily, one at the beginning and the other at end of the therapy. The parent's test assessed the children's physical, social, psychological, learning, behavioural, cognitive, and communication abilities using 5-point Likert scales. Indices were created from variables within the same category. Therapists completed a questionnaire at the end of therapy, assessing the perceived level of improvement using similar criteria on 5-point Likert scales. Difference variables were created from the two parental questionnaires. Relationships were examined by Fisher's exact test and Spearman correlation.

Results: The sample consisted of 37 children aged 7-20 with neurological impairments, out of which all three questionnaires were completed in 15 cases. There is a significant relationship between the two parental questionnaires in three pairs: improvement in communication and relationship-building, development of social skills, and psychological development. Between parental and therapist questionnaires, there is a statistically significant positive moderate correlation between therapist evaluations of compliance and the difference variable of parental questionnaires. Additionally,

statistically significant moderate correlations were identified in questions concerning extreme behaviour, both in the initial and subsequent surveys.

Conclusion: Parents perceived positive changes in psychological development, communication and relationship-building, and social skills. Therapists and parents agreed on the improvement in compliance, but perception of extreme behaviours differed significantly.