Reviewer’s report

Title: The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: A systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence

Version: 0 Date: 26 Oct 2017

Reviewer: Lian Hill

Reviewer's report:

I really enjoyed reading this article manuscript and think it gave a very good overview of what is in the literature in terms of the impact of pet ownership for those with diagnosed mental health conditions.

There are clear, well stated research questions, with a well documented methodology and analysis process. There are also some very relevant and interesting observations made within the discussion.

I have a few comments as listed below; I have organised this feedback by providing the line number which the comment is relevant to:

64 - comma missing after the word 'relationship'?

96-97 - It would be interesting to read how these figures translate to the percentage of ownership within the population (i.e. 11.5 million dogs, 10 million cats; what percentage of the population own pets?)

99 - "...specifically to health..." - might be better to specify here "mental" health as there is quite a body of research looking at pets and health (i.e. with physiological outcomes).

103-105 - The statement here about there being no systematic review of the role and effects of the pet-human relationship is quite broad. There are a couple of other "systematic reviews" that have been conducted, despite some methodological issues with them or not exactly the same as this current study, this statement could be more specific about what is unique to this systematic review (Please see papers: Islam, A., & Towell, T. (2013). Cat and dog companionship and well being: A systematic review. International Journal of Applied Psychology, 3(6), 149-155; Beetz, A., Ulnas-Moberg, K., Julius, H., & Kotrschal, K. (2012). Psychosocial and psychophysiological effects of human-animal interactions: the possible role of oxytocin. Frontiers in Psychology, 3, 1-15).

128 - the section on "underlying theoretical framework" might be better placed within the Introduction (i.e. around the information presented in lines 77-82 discussing approaches to self-
management/care) as it more so defines the theory as opposed to a description of the methodology used within the study.

421 - Within this quote, (Ford) is referenced at the end, every other quotation a number is used, is it is not consistent with the format of other quotes. I think this could be an error?

429 - I think this should read "...sense of preparedness...", not "...sense a preparedness...

527 - Extra ] at the end of the reference [38,39].

609-610 - Similar to line 99 (and previous feedback provided about information provided in lines 103-105), if this is the case and there are no other systematic reviews, it might be good to make it clear that this a first attempt at a systematic review looking at benefits of pet ownership for those with a "diagnosed mental health disorder" (as stated in line 653).

709 - I think it would also be worth noting why there is a lack of randomised trials on this area of research.

722-723 - I think a comment about this reason for excluding a paper could be in the Methodology section, and present it as part of reasons for exclusion (as presented in PRISMA flowchart).

Other comments:

There was no discussion about the quality or rigor of the studies that were included in the analysis. It was stated within the 'Methodology' that 'Quality Assessment' was undertaken, and how this was done, but how the scores assigned to each paper was not clear aside from referring to the table. Possibly some of the information presented in the Discussion about quality (i.e. 645-646 discusses a little about the rigor of the quantitative studies) may be better placed within the Methodology? As well as the information presented in lines 707-708? Line 683 refers to the "...low quality of evidence identified within the review.", but how the evidence is of low quality and why this might be is not discussed elsewhere.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes
Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

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