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## The effects of animal-assisted therapy intervention program on the primary caregivers who take care of dementia patients

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In Taiwan, the prevalence of dementia for over 65 years is 3.7-4.4%, and almost 90% of patients with dementia stay in their own homes and are taken care of by their families. Heavy caring load causes caregivers' stress in physical, psychological, social, and economical levels. This research explored the effects of an Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) program on health status of dementia patients' caregivers. 12 primary caregivers who were average 51.5 years old, female (83.3%), patients' children (75%), mandarin Chinese spoken (83.3%), participated in this research. A 9-week structured AAT group program was held once a week, 2 hours per each. A well-trained therapeutic dog teams were applied every time. Blood pressure, autonomic nervous system function evaluation (frequency domain analysis of heart rate variability, HRV), caregiving loading scale, positive emotion scale, and Chinese happiness scale were used for assessing the effectiveness. The results showed that: AAT can significantly improve caregivers' feeling of care loading ( $p=0.013$ ); AAT can significantly improve caregivers' feeling of positive emotion ( $p=0.002$ ); AAT can significantly improve caregivers' feeling of happiness ( $p=0.003$ ); AAT can significantly alleviate caregivers' heart rate ( $p=0.004$ ), but no significantly influence on blood pressure; only the SD, TP, LF, Var of HRV have significant difference and; AAT can significantly improve the Parasympathetic activity, which relax people and reduce their HR. This study suggested that AAT can be prompted to improve the function of autonomic nervous system, psychological and emotional quality for the primary caregivers of patients with dementia.

### Biography

Ming-Lee Yeh is an Assistant Professor in the National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences. She is also the Founder of the Professional Animal Assisted Therapy Association of Taiwan. This NGO proposes the concept of "Golden Triangle AAT model", and also creates the first AAT specialist training program in Taiwan

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