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# Philosophy Of The Legality Of The Use Of Dogs In Psychotherapy

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## Abstract

At present, psychotherapy has become a necessity in life. Islamic Sharia takes care of people suffering from mental illnesses by referring them to medication in the hope that they will recover from it. Modern applied studies and researchers have focused on studying different groups of people with mental illnesses to diagnose their condition and find ways to help them overcome it through therapeutic medication or therapy with pets, especially dogs. The present study is based on two studies by Janet Kemp and Robert Bossarte and Moretti, Francesca, as well as on the comprehensive classification carried out by the "Liverpool Institute" on a wide range of applied studies on psychiatric patients. These studies concluded that dogs are psychotherapists and not treatment providers. The positive effects generally observed in the studies are special cases that cannot be compared to others, and the human environment plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of therapy with dogs or pets. With respect to the Islamic Sharia, it permitted that people can own dogs when they need them, but a person with a mental illness should look for other ways to recover rather than relying solely on pet therapy, as there are many other medical options.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of Legislation, Treatment, Disease, Pets, Dogs.

## Introduction

Pets, including dogs, have been subjected to human beings by Allah the Almighty as they benefit from them in their livelihood. Human beings obtain knowledge of the type of benefit using several methods, including observation and experimentation, and they know, through the course of life, that dogs have many benefits, such as hunting and guarding, in addition to loyalty, obedience, and the ability to distinguish smells. The ruling on Islamic Sharia is related to this.

The present research is concerned with the issue of "canine psychotherapy" and asks questions like: is it a treatment that is a must for the patient? Or is it an external factor whose benefit is determined by human convictions and emotions? Hence, the effects differ from person to person. They are two different situations. The legal study and the logical analysis of the observations provide us with a clear definition upon which the legal ruling falls.

## Research Problem

From my point of view, the main problem lies in the following question: what is the legal position of owning dogs for psychological treatment, and is it a drug for the mental patient or an external therapist that can be dispensed with?

## Research Objectives

The most important objectives of the research are:

1. To identify the legal position of owning dogs in general.
2. To state the medical opinion on psychological treatment using the dogs.

## Research, Significance, and Reason

The research significance is manifested in the following points:

1. The novelty of the study and its connection to human health
2. It will contribute to enrich the human knowledge with applied and religious studies.

The reason I chose this topic for the study was because a student asked me a question about the psychological treatment of dogs and Shariah's position on it. So I decided to give him an answer with this study.

## Literature Review

From an Islamic Shariah point of view, there are a number of previous studies that have addressed the issue of dealing with dogs, including:

- The Work of the Veterinarian in the Treatment of Dogs: a Comparative Study in Islamic Jurisprudence, Muhammad Abdel-Fattah Muhammad. Published (2021).
- Contemporary Jurisprudential Issues Related to Dogs, Majd Ahmad Al-Amarna, Al-Quds University, (unpublished Master's Thesis).
- The Ruling on Owning Dogs in Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and Law, Al-Hasan Muhammad Farouk Issa, Journal of the College of Sharia and Law in Tafahnah Al Ashraf, Issue (23) for the year 2021 AD, second edition "Part IV". P. 3242.

The above studies have dealt with the subject theoretically, but there are also practical studies on the same subject, on which the present study is largely based:

**First:** A study by Janet Kemp & Robert Bossarte, which highlights the effectiveness of service dogs as a complementary treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). (Kemp & Bossarte, 2013).

**Second:** The study of Moretti, Francesca, which is a clinical study that focused on the effect of pets, especially dogs, in the treatment of dementia, depression, and psychosis in a group of elderly patients, along with a questionnaire about the self-perceived quality of life before and after the pet therapy. (Moretti & et al, 2011).

**Third:** The comprehensive classification was carried out by the "Institute of Psychology, Health and Society" at the University of Liverpool in 2018, through which a comprehensive review of studies that had dealt with the use of pets, especially dogs, in psychotherapy was conducted. (Brooks & et al, 2018).

## Research Methodology

The research is dependent in its achieving its objectives on the "descriptive approach" to identify the cases that were treated, and then take advantage of the deductive approach in presenting the evidence, clarifying its objectives, and then reaching the results.

## Introduction

Before jumping into the research, I deem it appropriate to define the term "psychotherapy."

The website of the "Mayo Clinic," defines it as "psychotherapy, a general term for treating mental health problems by talking with a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other mental health providers" (Mayo Clinic website). Dr. Asmaa Al-Hussein defined "psychotherapy" more broadly: "the solutions, techniques, and skills offered by the psychotherapist to influence the psyche of the patient in order to achieve the desired compatibility and health safety through conscious practise and specialised training based on science, particularly the humanities that deal with behaviour and human awareness and what affects both of them." (Al-Hussein, 2002).

Dr. Asmaa Al-Hussein defined the "psychotherapy" in a more comprehensive term: "The solutions, techniques and skills offered by the psychotherapist to influence the psyche of the patient in order to achieve the desired compatibility and health safety through conscious practice, and specialized training based on science, especially the humanities that deal with behavior and human awareness and what affects in both of them" (Al-Hussein, 2002, p 143).

## Medical Opinion on Psychotherapy by Dogs

This topic will deal with the issue of psychotherapy by dogs, in addition to remarks obtained on it.

### **First: Scientific studies on the psychological treatment of dogs:**

Several studies have been conducted on the psychological effects of keeping or owning dogs, and a number of them have been relied upon. Also, a number of in-depth applied studies have been done on the subject. Here are some of them:

1. Janet Kemp and Robert Bossarte's study concluded that the dog has an effective role in the treatment of the group studied, but only as a complementary treatment. (Kemp & Bossarte, 2013).
2. The Study of Moretti, Francesca showed that pet therapy is effective in improving the depressive symptoms and cognitive function of long-term residents with mental illness in care facilities. (Moretti & et al, 2011).
3. The study, conducted by Helen Brooks and her colleagues They presented a medical and scientific evaluation that included most of the experiences and studies that had dealt with dogs as a therapist for psychiatric patients in most psychiatric societies, such as the American Psychiatric Association, the Institute of Psychology, Health and Society at the University of Liverpool, and the University of Manchester. (Brooks & et al, 2018).
4. This study was characterized by its review, evaluation, and discussion of the statements of people with mental illness and explanation of the scientific conclusion.

The findings of the above studies can be presented by following two axes:

### **First axis: The positive or negative role of the dog in the field of mental health:**

The study of Helen Brooks and her colleagues (Brooks & et al, 2018). The study showed that the dog has several roles in the field of mental health, according to the following:

#### **a) The role of the dog emotionally:**

- Studies have not provided a definitive opinion on the need for dogs emotionally, but there are important indicators about the benefits of contact of psychiatric patients with dogs as it reduces the sense of loneliness, depression, anxiety, and irritability as well as increases a sense of calm and improves the mood of patients. This can be attributed to the fact that dogs provided a safe and secure environment, which enabled the dogs' owners to:
- Talk to pets without fear of being judged.
- They feel satisfied that they are not a burden to others, as pets do not insinuate to their depressed owners that they are bored with them.
- Feel safe talking to dogs because they won't cut you off when you're telling them how you feel or what you're thinking, and they won't tell anyone your secrets.
- On the other hand, some results revealed that dogs are neutral and do not affect their owners emotionally, showing that pet owners, like others, are prone to depression, anxiety, and low mood.

#### **b) The role of the dog in strengthening physical activity and relieving confusion**

Quantitative data indicated the effectiveness of the dog in strengthening physical activity in psychiatric patients because the studies confirmed the positive impact of dog ownership on their physical activity as their physical health improved and thus their lives improved in general. Some members of the group were more willing to refer to the ambulatory mental health care system and work according to its directions and instructions. In addition, the dogs helped their owners, who suffered from mental illness, with various life-related problems, including the following:

- Creating "self-readiness" to manage their own affairs efficiently.
- Encouragement to think and stay in the present, not to recall the painful events of the past or to live the fears of the future.
- Reduce the effects of constant vigilance caused by mental illness and disorders.

On the other hand, studies have shown that there is a group of psychiatric patients whose feelings remain the same about the painful memories and disturbing thoughts that haunt them from time to time.

These two results show, first, the inability to generalize and, second, the inability to interpret the psychological effects of dogs.

### **c) The role of dogs' owning in enhancing self-confidence:**

The studies do not provide a conclusive opinion on the issue of enhancing self-confidence, but there are two results which are as following:

1. The first result showed a decrease in the influence of pets on people at a personal level and an increase in self-confidence. Nevertheless, the performance of the owners of these animals was significantly higher than that of others in the measurement of self-confidence.
2. The second result revealed that individuals who own their pets feel some improvement in themselves, and their self-confidence has increased. This is explained in the following:
  - The pets have provided their owners with a sense of life and that they are able to achieve their goals.
  - The pets contributed to helping their owners control and overcome the symptoms of mental illness, which gave them hope in life and provided a reason to live.
  - The pets directly helped the owners maintain a stable sense of self.

However, this self-confidence also exists among those who are not diagnosed with mental illnesses, such as the mother who manages the affairs of her children. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized here.

### **Second Axis: Burdens on Dogs' Owners (Brooks & et al, 2018):**

- The above results accompany the emergence of negative aspects resulting from the burdens of owning the dogs, which are as following:
- Financial obligations such as providing a home for dogs in the event of their ownership
- The burden of unruly behavior of dogs worsens the patient's condition.
- Dogs are an obstacle to ambitious goals related to patient recovery, such as travel.
- Psychiatric patients are getting more anxious because they worry about how to protect dogs and keep them safe.

### **Remarks on the Scientific Studies**

The findings of the above medical research and studies are inconclusive, as they hold true for one condition rather than another. Also, they revealed that relationships with pets are not taken into account or cannot be integrated into health care plans or into the broader health discussions for counseling. Rather, it seems that what is happening is just the opposite as we notice that health professionals advise individuals not to own pets, or not to have a negative experience with their pets, and this has been indicated by several studies such as: (Brooke & et al, 2016), (Siegel & et al, 1999), and (Carmack, 1991).

Moreover, these studies did not prove that a reputable medical authority approved the treatment by owning the dogs, as well as did not mention the opinion of a specialist (doctor) confirming the need for it. Rather, many psychiatric groups, organizations and institutions stress that the dog is not a main treatment to be prescribed for psychiatric patients, but an alternative and assistant therapist for patients that may alleviate the severity of the disease. A dog is similar to other pets that comfort a person and relieve him of psychological injury. Although this result is not constant, there is a segment that has never benefited from its acquisition of dogs. In addition, the different customs and traditions prevailing in each society make it difficult to achieve accurate results about the impact of dogs on their owners who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses that can be generalized to all societies and communities (Brooks & et al, 2018).

In fact, the positive results of owning a dog in improving the mental health of its owner are related to the extent of the dog's relationship with the psychiatric patient, and therefore the results of those studies are not a general rule that include all patients.

### **The Sharia perspective related to the use of dogs in psychotherapy**

The scholars of Islam suggested that legality of keeping a dog is related to need as evidenced by the saying of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "If anyone keeps a dog that is neither for guarding farm nor for guarding livestock, their reward (for good deeds) will be reduced by one Qirāt per day". (Al-Nasser, 2001), (Al-Zayali), (Ibn Abd al-Bar, 1967), (Al-Mawardi, 1998), (Al-Ayni), (Al-Khatib, 1986), (Al-Nawawi, 1972), (Al-Iraqi).

### General rule that includes all patients

It has not been scientifically proven by medical experiments and research that keeping or owning a dog is a basic treatment, but rather a therapist. Therefore, owning a dog for psychological treatment is prohibited in Islamic Sharia but the psychological cases where a reliable specialist (doctor) determines that they need treatment with the use of dogs are excluded from the prohibition, but they are subject to the following rules:

1. Follow-up care from a psychiatric doctor to make sure that the dog is helping the patient.
2. Beware the health damage that may arise from the ownership of dogs.
3. Making sure that owning a dog does not cause harm to others, such as bad barking, intimidation, and so on.
4. The dog should be trained in the field of psychotherapy so that the desired treatment is achieved.
5. Other permissible alternatives are unavailable.

### Conclusion

This research relied on the legal facts as well as the medical data on the issue of using dogs in psychological treatment. The findings of the research are as follows:

1. According to the results of medical studies, the legality of keeping or owning dogs is based on "necessity", which is not present in dog psychotherapy.
2. The study took into account the objective of preserving the "soul" and protecting society from harm, which takes precedence over protection of money and property. Also, it emphasized the interest in hunting if it requires keeping or owning a dog. So, the same applies in the case of "psychological treatment" if the need for it is proven.
3. The persons in the societies (the study was conducted on) are the ones who establish the relationship with dogs and not the other way around which means that if they did not buy a dog, the psychological relationship between them would be lost and they could seek treatment in something else such as a wife or friend, and perhaps by owning a bird or a kitten or the like..
4. The benefits of keeping or owning dogs for psychological treatment varied as there was a group that had benefited from it, unlike another group that had not benefited at all, but rather some individuals from that group had their condition worsened with the presence of dogs. This result confirms that psychological treatment with dogs is a personal case and not a therapeutic phenomenon that can be suitable for all similar cases.
5. Legal texts and medical facts confirm that there is psychotherapy that dispenses with the need to restore dogs for the treatment.

### Recommendations

- Further studies should be conducted on psychiatric patients in different settings to determine the efficacy of treatment with dogs.
- Sharia researchers should be encouraged to conduct interdisciplinary studies that are based on the objectives of Sharia and achieve societal interest.
- More Scientific seminars and workshops should be organized to discuss therapeutic developments in psychological aspects as well as in other fields.

### Acknowledgement

This project was supported by the Deanship of Scientific Research at Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University under the Research Project NO.17740/02/2021

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