

# Healers: The Role of Service Dogs in Combating PTSD in War Veterans

Raagavi S<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sonu Joseph<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Research Scholar, Department of Languages, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Padur, Chennai*

<sup>2</sup>*Associate Professor & Head, Department of Languages, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science, Padur, Chennai*

**Abstract—**Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a major mental health issue among war veterans, frequently resulting in extreme emotional suffering and social withdrawal. Although psychotherapy and medication have been traditional treatment forms, other therapeutic interventions—animal-assisted therapy, for example—are being recognized as highly effective for trauma recovery. This paper examines the crossroads of literary studies, trauma studies, and animal-assisted therapy through a reading of *A Dog Called Hope: A Wounded Warrior and the Service Dog Who Saved Him* (2016) by Jason Morgan and Damien Lewis. The memoir gives an insightful account on the psychological and emotional gains of service dogs during PTSD healing. Using literary trauma theory, disability studies, and research in animal-assisted interventions, the research shows how literature is capable of representing and arguing for other methods of healing. The research indicates that service dogs are not just therapeutic tools but also catalysts for emotional reintegration among veterans, creating a bridge between trauma and healing. The research concludes that interdisciplinary evaluations of PTSD literature make rich additions to academic scholarship and clinical knowledge of war trauma.

**Keywords:** Service Dogs, War Trauma, Literary Trauma Theory, Animal-Assisted Therapy, Disability Studies, Memoir, Narrative Healing

## INTRODUCTION

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a debilitating mental disorder found among most war veterans, defined by flashbacks, hypervigilance, and emotional withdrawal (Brewin et al. 748). The conventional treatment of cognitive behavioural therapy and medication has been found helpful but tends to fall short of addressing the depth of PTSD

fully (van der Kolk 179). Over the past decade, animal-assisted therapy in the form of service dogs has become a revolutionary intervention, lending emotional stability and companionship to impacted veterans (Yount et al. 45).

Literary work is decisive in determining the public dialogue regarding PTSD and other healing processes. Memoirs, especially, act as a conduit between individual experience and public consciousness, giving voice to first-hand accounts of trauma and healing (Caruth 4). One such book, *A Dog Called Hope: A Wounded Warrior and the Service Dog Who Saved Him* (2016) by Jason Morgan and Damien Lewis, presents a strong story of perseverance, chronicling Morgan's healing journey through his bond with his service dog, Napal. This research study analyzes the representation of recovery from PTSD in *A Dog Called Hope* through literary narrative and demonstrates the significant role service dogs play in assisting psychological and emotional recovery.

By integrating trauma theory, disability studies, and animal-assisted therapy research, this paper highlights how literature becomes both a healing device and a vehicle for advocacy. The study centers on the representation of trauma, the therapeutic process brought about by service dogs, and the larger implications of such narratives in literature and mental health.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research uses an interdisciplinary approach that combines three dominant academic fields:

1. **Literary Trauma Theory:** Investigates the ways in which trauma disturbs traditional narrative form and how narratives facilitate recovery (LaCapra 112).

2. Disability Studies: Investigates the representation of physical and mental disabilities in war fiction and the role service animals play in creating agency and empowerment (Garland-Thomson 58).

3. Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT): Examines the clinical and psychological advantages of service dogs for veterans suffering from PTSD (Serpell et al. 321).

#### NARRATIVE REPRESENTATION OF PTSD IN A DOG CALLED HOPE

##### Trauma and Narrative Structure

Caruth (14) posits that trauma modifies temporal experience and linguistic form, usually resulting in discontinuous narratives. Morgan's narrative is woven with past and present contemplations in *A Dog Called Hope* replicating the nonsequential quality of recovery from trauma. Flashbacks, rumination, and narrative descriptions of symptoms of PTSD are employed in the memoir to transport readers to the mind of the protagonist.

Morgan's early difficulty with PTSD is characterized by an overwhelming feeling of loss—physical mobility, independence, and sense of self. His service animal, Napal, slowly comes to serve as a stabilizing influence, moving him toward emotional strength. The memoir's composition is consistent with LaCapra's (126) theory of "working through trauma," whereby narrative reconstruction facilitates psychological working through and recovery.

##### The Human-Animal Bond as a Form of Therapy

Service dogs are also very important to the therapeutic process for people with PTSD, not just offering their physical support but also psychological and emotional support. They contribute to alleviating PTSD symptoms through the provision of a feeling of safety, minimized anxiety, and unshakeable companionship (Serpell et al. 330). A study conducted by Yount et al. (47) indicates that service dogs reduce cortisol levels, the primary biomarker of stress, and also the symptom of hypervigilance, which is one of the most common symptoms of PTSD. By providing a stabilizing influence, service dogs enable individuals to re-enter daily life, fostering emotional resilience and social reintegration. The relationship between a veteran and a service dog is not just companionship; it is a highly interdependent relationship of mutual dependence.

Haraway's (75) "companion species" is especially applicable here, highlighting how humans and animals co-evolve through their interdependent relationships. In *A Dog Called Hope*, Napal is more than a mere passive figure in Morgan's existence but an active agent of his healing process. Through sensitive behavioral cues, Napal senses fine changes in Morgan's emotional equilibrium, stepping in when indications of distress appear. By shattering nightmares, identifying anxiety-induced agitation, or simply offering physical solace in times of upset, Napal functions as both therapy companion and emotional balancer. This symbiotic relationship illustrates that the existence of a service dog is not solely about aid—it is about healing, supporting the notion that trauma recovery often needs more than mere human intervention.

##### Comparative Case Studies in War Literature

In order to situate *A Dog Called Hope* as part of an extended literary legacy, this article considers comparable wartime trauma and recuperation narratives found in service animal stories. Consider, for example, Luis Carlos Montalván's *Until Tuesday: A Wounded Warrior and the Golden Retriever Who Saved Him* (2011), which resonates with motifs of loneliness, injury, and latter-day emotional resuscitation brought about by a service dog. Likewise, the novel *Flash's Song* by Kay Pfaltz offers an emotional journey of healing made possible through a service dog's unrelenting companionship. These novels as a whole showcase how service animals help fill the gap between war trauma and readjustment to civilian life.

#### CONCLUSION

*A Dog Called Hope* is a powerful validation of the crucial function of service dogs in helping to heal PTSD, showing the ways that such animals contribute not just physical but emotional and psychological aid as well. The memoir is at once an extremely personal account and an overall advocacy mechanism, and it demonstrates the revolutionizing power of service dogs to aid trauma healing. By its engaging narrative, the book fills the divide between scientific and public discourse, showing how literature can serve both as psychological medicine and as an agent of social change. By combining trauma studies, disability

studies, and animal-assisted therapy, *A Dog Called Hope* provides useful insights into the convergence of human and animal relationships in therapy.

It highlights the manner in which memoirs spill over into public discourses about war trauma and how they impact veteran care policies. With service dogs increasingly being accepted as an adjunct treatment for PTSD, books such as *A Dog Called Hope* serve to promote understanding and empathy in readers while presenting a balanced view of the life-world of veterans and the psychologically damaged. Subsequent studies may enrich this discussion further through comparative readings of equivalent memoirs to investigate the variations in representations of the contribution of service animals in trauma recovery. By looking at different accounts, a broader understanding can be achieved about the psychological and social aspects of animal-assisted therapy.

More complete insight might be offered through interdisciplinary research integrating neuroscience, psychology, and literary study on the contributions of service dogs to emotional healing. By further analyzing such stories, experts can help augment the larger discussion of the importance of service animals, thereby furthering research and activism within the realm of mental health and rehabilitation.

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