



Puppies for Parole: Effect of Dog Training on Offender Behavior



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Background & Significance:

Missouri's Department of Corrections program:

- Selected inmates live with and train a dog from local shelters.
- Inmates work with certified dog trainers twice a week to train the dog to the Canine Good Citizen Level.
- Upon completion of the program, the dogs are returned to the shelter for adoption.

Possible Benefits:

- Reduction in the number of euthanized animals by producing loving, obedient, and adoptable dogs
- Offenders learn skills to encourage successful rehabilitation and societal reentry
- Gives inmates the opportunity to repay public debts caused by their crimes
- Anecdotal reports have shown improvement in offender behavior, better interaction with the staff, and increasing prison safety and security



Sample Description:

Variable		SDT N=58	C N=64
Age in Years	Mean (Range)	32.7 (20-53)	35.6 (19-66)
Gender	Males	58	64
Race	Caucasian	43	42
	African American	9	15
	Native American	3	3
	Hispanic	1	2
	Other	2	2
Marital Status	Married	7	7
	Not Married	51	57
Education	High School or Less	43	51
	College	15	13
Children	Mean (Range)	1.7 (0-5)	2.2 (0-12)

Research Questions:

RQ1: To what extent is participation in a shelter dog obedience training program associated with inmates' improved self esteem, a more internal locus of control and better self-perceived health?

RQ2: What are the inmates' perceptions of their participation in the shelter dog obedience training program?

Design & Methods:

Non-random, two-group experimental design with:

- Treatment (Shelter Dog Training, SDT)
 - Usual standard of care/activities (Control, C)
- Data collection at baseline, 8 weeks & 16 weeks

Instruments:

- Demographic Questionnaire
- Self-Rated Health questions
- The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory
- Rotter I/E Scale Locus of Control
- Dog Relationship and Perception Scale (dog trainers only)

Quantitative Findings:

No significant difference in locus of control, self esteem, or health.

- SDT Group (physical & mental health improved, LOC decreased, self-esteem decreased)
- C Group (physical health declined, mental health improved, LOC decreased, self-esteem decreased)

SDT Group had significantly improved Dog Relationship and Perception scores over the course of the program (+6.44, $p < 0.001$).

Data collection remains ongoing through September.

Qualitative Findings:

- "When I came to the program I was on anxiety meds. Now, I have quit taking them and have little or no anxiety."
- "I really dill (sic) with things a lot better ways. And I still have love in me that I didn't know I had after 22 years in hear! (sic)"
- "I've been struggling with depression lately (medical issues). My puppy has kept me focused, exercising, and positive."
- "It has been a wonderful new experience completely changing my attitude and behavior completely around. I feel like a human being again and I'm happier these days."
- "It has affected me by teaching me humility, respect and control of my emotions."
- "This program not only helps the dogs. But it helps the inmates (even the ones not in the program) with morale, responsibility and a sense of accomplishment."

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