



# Puppies for Parole: Effect of Dog Training on Offender Behavior



Nicole Haarmann, VM-2, University of Missouri, College of Veterinary Medicine

Rebecca Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP

Professor and Director of the Research Center for Human Animal Interaction,

College of Veterinary Medicine, Millsap Professor of Gerontological Nursing, Sinclair School of Nursing

George Lombardi, MS, Director of the Missouri Department of Corrections

Youngju Pak, PhD, Assistant Professor Biostatistics

## 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 did (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 here! (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."



Contact Information:  
nlhd4f@mail.missouri.edu  
rechaj@missouri.edu

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