Offender Outcomes of Training Dogs in Prison: The Puppies for Parole Program

Dorothea V. Megarani, DVM, Rebecca A. Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP, George Lombardi, MS, Steven Osterlind, PhD, Hayley D. Yaglom, MS, MPH, Nicole L. Haarman, Elliot Cade

Background & Significance

• “Puppies for Parole” is a rehabilitation program based on human-animal interaction (HAI) in the prison.
• The dogs from local animal shelters live with pairs of offender-trainers, and follow basic obedience training under the guidance of a certified dog trainer.
• Puppies for Parole aims to reduce the number of homeless canines by producing loving, obedient, and adoptable dogs.
• To date, over 4,000 dogs have been trained in the Puppies for Parole program and adopted.

Benefits:
• Inmates may gain skills to support successful rehabilitation and community reentry.
• Inmates provide a service to the community.
• Anecdotal reports show behavior improvement of inmates and better interaction with staff.

Research Questions
• To what extent is participation in a shelter dog obedience training program associated with:
  • Inmates’ improved self esteem
  • A more internal locus of control
  • Better inmates’ personal factors (e.g. self-perceived physical and mental health, requests for medical and mental services, conduct violations, and grievances filed).
• What are the inmates’ perceptions of their participation in the shelter dog obedience training program?

Instruments
• Demographic Questionnaire
• Self-Rated Physical & Mental Health questionnaire
• Rotter I/E Scale Locus of Control (LOC)
• Coppersmith Self-Esteem Inventory
• Dog Relationship and Perception Scale (SDT)
• DOC derived data: Request for medical and mental health services, conduct violations, grievances filed

Design and Methods

• Non-random (N=311), two-group experimental design with:
  • Treatment Group: Shelter Dog Training (SDT) (N=137)
  • Control Group: No Dog-contact (C) (N=174)
• Data collection at baseline, 8 weeks & 16 weeks, Inmates: Identified by Correction Center staff and meet inclusion criteria.

Results

Figure 1. Self-Perceived Physical Health compared to one year ago
Figure 2. Self-Perceived Mental Health compared to one year ago
Figure 3. Medical Service Requests
Figure 4. Mental Health Service Requests

Conclusions

• Significant Findings:
  1. Improved self-perceived physical health compared to one year ago (p=0.009).
  2. Improved self-perceived mental health compared to one year ago (p=0.023).
  3. Increased medical service requests (p=0.000).
  4. Increased mental health service requests (p=0.049).
  5. Improved Rotter I/E Locus of Control (p=0.000).
  6. Increased dog relationship and perception scale (p=0.000).
• Predicted trends (ns):
  1. Self-esteem
  2. Conduct violations
  3. Grievances filed

This project was funded by: University of Missouri MIZZOU Advantage Program