

**Do Animal Based Prison Programs In The United States Have a Positive Psychological
Impact On Prisoners In Order to Reduce Recidivism?**

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Introduction

At the end of 2019, the population of prisoners in United States federal and state prisons combined was 1,430,800. (Carson, 2020). That is 419 people per 100,000 U.S residents (Carson, 2020). Incarceration prevents criminals from their bad behavior. As well as punishment for the crime they committed whether it was murder, drug related, rape or any other act. While undergoing their sentence, rehabilitation programs are available to help reduce their criminal acts in order to reduce recidivism once paroled. These programs include education, vocational training, recreation, religion, substance abuse counseling, mental health, and prison work. This paper along with several scholarly sources are studying prison-based animal programs (PAPs). Prison based animal programs are programs which allow inmates to be assigned to neglected animals, mainly dogs, to care for and teach them how to assist people living with disabilities, getting them ready for adoption. There are different types of PAPs: Visitation programs, Wildlife Rehabilitation programs, Livestock Care programs, Pet Adoption programs, Service Animal Socialization programs, Vocational programs, Community Service programs, Counseling programs, and Multimodal programs (Jones, 2018). The purpose of this paper is to better understand how these animal programs work, how they affect prisoners and if those effects are beneficial to the prisoners. Authors from the scholarly sources use different methods to answer several questions about these programs, which are: What is the structural involvement of organizations who participate in these programs?, What barriers do these organizations encounter during the process of implementation of the program?, What is the observed impact that these programs have on participating inmates?, and Should more of these programs be available to inmates?. With these sources, I will be studying if there are positive psychological impacts on ex convicts who have been in the program in order to stop them from re-entering prison.

Literature Review

In 2006, a national survey of state correctional systems indicated that 159 prison had implemented a PAP (Jones, 2018). Birds were the first animals to be in the animal programs. In the article, "Inmate Perceptions: The Impact of Prison Animal Training Program", a qualitative study was done on inmates who participated in the Paws and Stripes College program at the Brevard County Jail Complex in Florida. This particular program allows inmates to train dogs from local humane shelters to be obedient and to become emotional- support animals (ESAs). During this study, self-report questionnaires, asking open-ended questions, were given and anonymously completed by nine participants eighteen and older, of all ethnic groups and who have a history of direct human or property violence (Mims, 2017). The questions revolved around how they felt before, during and after the program. When the questionnaires were then collected and analyzed. Results showed that participants had an increase in employment and communication skills and their emotional states were improved: less anxiety and depression from being incarcerated, boosts in self confidence, and more patience. One inmate wrote: "This program has absolutely changed my life. I have learned to love myself and other people, realizing none of us are perfect and if we fail, you pick yourself up and try again. I have developed patience and tolerance and a willingness to overcome them. I have learned to be victorious rather than defeated." To the inmates, this experience in the program ultimately led to better behaviors exhibited. They learned to respect and to be respected and to have trust in people and animals (Mims, 2017). In conclusion to this article's research, the Paws and Stripes College program does have therapeutic benefits which positively impact inmates participating.

According to Loe in “PRISON-BASED ANIMAL PROGRAMS: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS”, the rehabilitation aspect and recidivism rates of these programs still need to be established. Though prison-based animal programs have been around for many years, only one national study has been done (Loe, 2015). In this study, stratified random sampling was used to select both federal and state facilities in the United States. Questionnaires were sent asking about the characteristics of the PAPs, then were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The study found that these programs are in fact helpful in many ways. Three dog training programs from two Kansas prisons, two service animal socialization programs and a community service program, were studied. Researchers interviewed a total of seventy people: thirty eight inmates who participated in one of the programs, seven staff members, and twenty eight recipients of the trained dogs. First, eighteen participants from the male prison were asked questions on their motivations for involvement, challenges and benefits of the program. The men’s results were changed behaviors. Second, twenty participants from the female prison were asked the same questions. The women experienced personal changes which led to better relationships. These programs allowed the inmates to do good for the community. Loe found many limitations to the study like not having approval from the prison to do the research, and not establishing reliability and validity of the measurements. Jones notes that females tend to be more unstable compared to males. But males are more likely to enroll in the programs. Jones writes that once the prisoners leave prison they are most likely to get a job being a dog trainer due to great social behavior.

Methodology and Proposed analysis

Reading through the studies done, this proposed study will be done in a Quasi-Experimental method. First, a multistage cluster sampling would be done to identify prisons with animal programs, then those prisons would be randomly selected. I will then get a list of each prisoner in

the program and mail each a survey. For every prisoner in the program, a random non-programmed prisoner will receive one as well for each prison. The same amount of surveys will be sent out to ex convicts who participated in the program. Each survey will consist of open-ended questions. To the inmates in the programs (Independent variable) I will ask: How was your life before the program? How did you feel about entering the program? Do you like the program? Is the program difficult at times? What animals do you work with? To the ex convicts (Dependent variable) I will ask: How was your life as an inmate before the animal program? How did you feel being in the program? Were there any challenges you faced? How has it impacted your life? To the inmates not in the program(control group) I will ask: How is the prison environment for you as an inmate? I could also ask the program and prison personnel questions as well about the prisoners behavior in the programs. This study will use both quantitative and qualitative methods. I will do a quantitative method to calculate the survey's: Response rate ($\text{response/number in sample} * 100$), Cooperation rate ($\text{number completed/ number successfully contacted} * 100$), Refusal rate ($\text{number refuses/number in sample} * 100$), and Constant rate ($\text{number successfully contacted/ number in sample} * 100$) Because qualitative questions were asked, I will then code, categorize and make themes out of the responses.

Discussion

With every study there will be issues like limitations. First, more research needs to be done on the recidivism of the programs. The studies found were solely about the prisoners lives in the program but not about the ones who have left prison. Second, mail survey responses are not always dependable. There needs to be reminders to send back the responses. A better way to do this study could be through observing the field in study. Going to the prison and being in the environment can allow a researcher to be more understanding of the behaviors of the prisoners

and animals. Face to face surveys with voice recordings can be more sentimental to the ones in the research. But with this, less people are interviewed because of time and money restraints. In the proposed study there needs to be a better way of grouping like, ages or reason for imprisonment. A better background maybe on the prisoners. As a conclusion to this research, there is an assurance in the outcome of PAP's having positive psychological impacts on prisoners in the program. These programs give prisoners a " second chance" at life (Jones, 2018). The community appreciates these programs because of the cost effectiveness. Recidivism rates are lower among populations that have been exposed to prison based animal programs (Jones,2018).

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