

The Effects of Animals on Prisoners and How They Affect Their Lives

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Rehabilitation programs with animals in prisons have become more popular across the United States Furst, (2006). Rehabilitation programs have been recognized for helping reduce recidivism and increase mental health (Furst, 2015; Furst, 2006; Smith, 2019; Jasperson, 2010; Cooke et al., 2014; Cushing et al., 1995; Bachi, 2013; Loeffler, 2016; Mercer et al., 2015; Ormerod, 2008) In addition, to all the mental benefits, the inmate's outlooks on life changed and gave them meaning to their lives (Ormerod, 2008; Hauge et al., 2014; Bachi, 2013; Jasperson, 2010; Furst 2006). Studies have been conducted to see how and why these programs are successful in their rehabilitation programs. In this review, the effect of the companionship of animals and inmates' wellbeing. Those inmates who participated in the rehabilitation programs will be less likely to recidivate and have a better mental mindset.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

The effectiveness of the rehabilitation can be difficult to measure; because each study had similar but different variables. Unlike most case studies when dealing with incarcerated people, countless other factors come into account—depending upon the crime committed, the inmates were selected to be a part of these programs. Mercer et al. (2015) explained that the animal rehabilitation program was used as a therapeutic tool to improve the inmate's mental wellbeing. Furthermore, the rehabilitation programs were found to increase self-esteem and improve social skills (Mercer et al., 2015; Hauge et al., 2014; Smith, 2019); lower the recidivism rates of inmates after they were released from prison (Ormerod, 2008; Loeffler, 2016; Bachi, 2013; Cooke et al., 2014; Furst, 2006); gave the inmates more meaning in life and or a sense of responsibility (Jasperson, 2010; Ormerod, 2008; Mercer et al., 2015; Hauge et al., 2014; Bachi, 2013; Furst, 2006).

Some forms of the rehabilitation process are but are not limited to these results. Throughout the various studies, researchers have found to them be generally positive. However, one study did not use any validated assessment tools to measure (Jasperson, 2010). While measuring the effectiveness of the animal programs in prisons, the inmates were less likely to commit crimes again after being released from prison. Those incarcerated were more likely to be psychologically sound (Bachi, 2013).

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOGS, HORSES, AND PRISONERS

Several studies have examined animal-prisoner relationships, focusing on dogs and horses. According to Mercer et al. (2015), dogs have a calming effect on the prisoners and anyone near the dogs, including correctional officers. The presence of dogs helps boost morale and improve everyone's mood and wellbeing. In addition, the human-dog interaction helps improve cardiovascular health and stimulates the hormones and brain chemicals related to happiness, stress, and bonding (Cooke et al., 2014). This bonding process of dogs and prisoners helps them in the long run because after these prisoners leave prison, it gives them something to look forward to doing in life. The bonding they had while in prison is desirable to replicate. So, prisoners would go home and take the things they learned and apply them at home with dogs they adopted or had at home. This outlook helped by keeping the recidivism rates low.

According to Cushing & Williams (1995), horses had improved inmates' self-confidence and allowed them to feel like they accomplished something meaningful in life. This significant experience also helped by allowing the inmates to gain new skills and bring these new skills back to the communities to give back (Bachi, 2013). Since these inmates have obtained new skills and meaning in life, they realized that it's better not to recidivate and go back to prison. As a

preventative measure, the inmates followed expectations of attachment theory and connected themselves to animals or an activity that deals with animals to avoid the chance of recidivism (Loeffler, 2016).

In addition, the suicide rates have been shown to drop with the incorporation of dog and equine rehabilitation programs in prisoners. According to Ormerod, 2008 there were no suicide attempts in the prison ward with animals. And on the other hand, the control group in the other ward had eight documented suicide attempts. Inmates who were isolated and kept locked up than most of the other inmates had a higher rate of suicidal ideas and behavior. One study found that, before being accepted into the program, some inmates had frequent suicidal behavior. After the program, they had fewer suicidal thoughts and a better self-image (Jasperson, 2010).

OTHER POSSIBLE VARIABLES

One cannot assume that correlation implies causation. Other factors may make the rehabilitation programs look successful; however, there are other variables. A prisoner could have been prescribed a new medication or lessened their medication usage, making them feel better and happier. Mercer, Gibson, and Clayton (2015) found that some inmates in the program reduced their medication by 50 percent. Smith (2015) observed that inmates had less need to take medicines that they were on before being in the rehabilitation program.

Another possible variable is that inmates could have a history of mental health issues (Furst, 2015), which could skew the results by preventing inmates from answering survey questions accurately or adequately. And it would therefore be hard to gauge how well the program worked based solely on the effect of the animals on the inmates.

LIMITATIONS FOUND IN THE LITERATURE

Most studies relied on data from observations in the reviewed literature, rather than surveys and interviews. Observations are suitable for collecting valid data because they go into depth. However, observations have problems with reliability. The people selected for these observations were not chosen randomly and cannot be generalized to the general population. Some of the literature had used surveys to measure. Surveys are fantastic for collecting specific data to help generalize the findings, but limitations exist. Some of the survey populations were very small, and there could be a sampling error due to a non-representativeness. In addition, some of the inmates could have had a problem satisficing when they didn't understand a question.

In-depth interviews are great for collecting a large amount of data from a small sample. However, interviews are not generalizable to the wider population. And the interviews are very hard to replicate if the researchers were to replicate the study. In the study by Mercer et al. (2015), they admitted that a more longitudinal approach would help them evaluate the effects of participation in the animal rehabilitation programs in terms of their longevity.

Another limitation was that most of the samples in the studies were based on availability and thus not generalizable.

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