Shelter Dog Adoptability Through Dog Walking: A Study Benefiting Shelter Dogs and Older Adults

Rachel Ray, Student, MU College of Veterinary Medicine
Rebecca Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, Millsap Professor of Gerontological Nursing, MU Sinclair School of Nursing; Director Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, MU College of Veterinary Medicine
Charlotte McKenney, RN, BSN, Assistant Director Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction, MU College of Veterinary Medicine
Annie Chih, Student, MU College of Veterinary Medicine, Columbia, Missouri

Introduction/General Aims
- 5-9 million shelter animals euthanized every year
- Most programs are aimed at reducing the numbers of animals relinquished to shelters
- This study aims to improve adoptability of shelter dogs through an enrichment activity of walking with older adults

Hypothesis
Dogs residing at the animal shelter of a mid-sized midwestern city that participate in a walking program will have:
- Improved behavior
- Increased adoption rates
- Decreased euthanasia rates

Materials & Methods
- Dogs matched with control on age, size (small, medium, large), & breed
- Dogs matched with elderly adult for walking capability, speed
- Experimental Group walked 5 days a week with elderly adult
- Control Group did not walk
- Behaviors assessed and a behavior score assigned daily
- Days to adoption, euthanasia or to foster care recorded when animal left shelter

Experimental (n=56): Walking & adoption outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n=</th>
<th>#of Walks</th>
<th>% Adopted</th>
<th>% Euthanized</th>
<th>% To Foster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>31.57</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Adoption Outcomes of the Experimental Group

Control (n=56): Adoption Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n=</th>
<th>% Active</th>
<th>% Adopted</th>
<th>% Euthanized</th>
<th>%To Foster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>44.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Adoption Outcomes of the Control Group

Behavior Instrument

Demographic Description
- Total Number of Dog Pairs: 56
- Ages Ranged from: 4 months to 9 years of age
- Total # of Walks: 198
- Number of Walks/Participant Range: 1-18
- Ave # of walks per participant: 3.53