

The Evidence Is Overwhelming – Or Is It?

A Review of Dog Training Tools and Methods Research

Analysis

³ Makowska I. Review of dog training methods: welfare, learning ability, and current standards. <https://spca.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/dog-training-methods-review.pdf>. Published 2018. Accessed September 1, 2020.

Is the study Correlational Research or Causal Research?

Correlational Research – As the title states, this is a “Review of dog training methods.” Additionally, this is not a research paper from a scientific journal. It was prepared for the BC SPCA.

“This document was prepared by Dr. Joanna Makowska for the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) to support the development of AnimalKind dog training standards. The final standards and more information about the AnimalKind accreditation program can be found online at www.animalkind.ca.”

Which sub-type of study best describes the research?

This appears to be a hybrid of meta-analysis (helps researchers compile the quantitative data available from previous studies) and systematic review (examines all the literature related to a specific research question in a standardized way).

Are there any potential problems with the study?

Yes. Although the document includes some of the caveats with the cited research (e.g. “1.2 Interpretation of scientific evidence, 1.2.1. Surveys: “Moreover, such surveys generally reveal associations between factors rather than causality. For example, a finding that dog guardians who report using more positive punishment also report having more aggressive dogs does not imply that dogs who are trained using positive punishment become more aggressive.”, there is bias evident against aversive tools and methodology. For example (**emphasis added**):

- 1) The document was prepared for the BC SPCA, where it is posted on the AnimalKind web site. Under FAQ (<https://animalkind.ca/faq/#::~:~:text=AnimalKind%20standards%20require%20dog%20trainers,Aversive%20methods%20are%20not%20permitted>), “Do AnimalKind dog training standards ever allow aversive training methods to be used? Answer: “Science has shown that reward-based training methods are more effective and better for dogs than methods that cause pain or fear. AnimalKind standards require dog trainers to use positive, reward-based training methods. **Aversive methods are not permitted.**” Thus, the paper was written to support the prohibition of PEC.
- 2) In the introduction, there are eighteen organizations listed in “Table 1: Names and acronyms of organizations with existing standards or positions on animal training.” Each one is classified as a PO or BD organization, with evidence for the classification:

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Animal Behaviour & Training Council - PO

Evidence for classification: FAQs Section (<https://abtc.org.uk/about/faqs/>) – Question: *“Do You Think Animals Are Being Put In Danger By Some Practicing Trainers?”* Answer: *“There are some practising trainers/instructors and behaviourists who use methods and techniques which can cause pain and fear and may compromise welfare. These methods are not only unacceptable but unnecessary. Long term changes in behaviour can be achieved through use of reward based methods which the Council strongly advocates.”*

American College of Veterinary Behaviorists - PO

Evidence for classification: How to Hire a Dog Trainer document (<https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.dacvb.org/resource/resmgr/docs/How-to-select-a-trainer-owne.pdf>) – *If the trainer you are considering using falls into any of these categories, you should pick another trainer. “1. The equipment recommended for basic obedience includes or is focused on choke collars, prong collars, or shock collars.”*

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statements (under LIMA, Conclusions) (<https://apdt.com/about/position-statements/>) – *“APDT takes the stance that there are no training or behavior cases which justify the use of intentional aversive punishment-based interventions in any form of training ranging from general obedience and tricks to dealing with severe behavior problems.”*

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers UK – PO

Evidence for classification: Code of Practice (under Appendix 1) (<https://apdt.co.uk/code-of-practice-apdt/>) – *“The following list gives examples of some of the equipment and training methods which are covered by the Code of Practice 5.2 not to be used in the course of delivering dog training instruction. 1. EQUIPMENT Check/choke chains; Prong, spike or pinch collars; Electric shock devices in any form;”*

The Association of Professional Dog Trainers Australia – PO

Evidence for classification: Code of Ethics (<https://www.apdt.org.au/code-of-ethics>) – *“Actively reject the use of harsh, physical, psychological, coercive and aversive methods in the training of dogs including the use of electric shock collars, pinch or prong collars.”*

Australian Veterinary Association – PO

Evidence for classification: Policies by Species/Groups [Companion Animals – Dogs & Cats; Companion animals behavior; Use of behaviour-modifying collars on dogs (2022)] (<https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-dog-behaviour/use-of-behaviour-modifying-collars-on-dogs/>) – *“Policy: Collars designed to inflict pain, discomfort or fear to achieve behavioural change should not be used on dogs. Examples include electronic collars, citronella and choke collars. Positive reinforcement training of dogs renders the use of such equipment unnecessary.”*

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British Veterinary Association – PO

Evidence for classification: BVA and BSAVA policy position on the use of aversive training devices in dogs and cats (<https://www.bva.co.uk/media/1156/full-bva-policy-position-on-the-use-of-aversive-training-devices-in-dogs-and-cats.pdf>) – “Defra’s Code of Practice for the Welfare of Dogs also advises that ‘good training can enhance a dog’s quality of life, but punishing a dog can cause it pain and suffering ... All dogs should be trained to behave well, ideally from a very young age. Only use positive reward-based training. Avoid harsh, potentially painful or frightening training methods.’”

Note: They do recommend more research – “We note the current lack of research and evidence regarding the welfare implications of the use of other aversive methods of training and control which may be equally stressful for a dog. We recommend that further evidence is collected on their use and effectiveness.”

British Small Animal Veterinary Association – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statements (under Aversive Training Methods) (<https://www.bsava.com/position-statement/aversive-training-methods/>) – “The BSAVA recommends against the use of aversive methods for training animals.”

Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers – PO

Evidence for classification: Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) Effective Behavior Intervention Policy (under “What Do You Want the Animal to Do?”) (<https://www.ccpdt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/LIMA-Policy-2021.pdf>) – “These LIMA guidelines do not justify the use of aversive methods and tools including, but not limited to, the use of electronic, choke or prong collars in lieu of other effective positive reinforcement interventions and strategies.”

Canadian Federation of Humane Societies – UNKNOWN

Evidence for classification: There is no mention of dog training tools or methodology on their web site. The position statements were reviewed, and a web site search was performed using “training” and “collar” as search terms, individually. Via the contact form on the web site, the organization was asked if their was a policy or position statement on dog training tools and methodologies (May 23, 2024). (<https://humanecanada.ca>)

Calgary Humane Society – PO

Evidence for classification: Training Resources (under The Humane Way to Train, #3) (https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/The_Humane_Way_to_Train.pdf) – “It has zero negative side effects. On the other hand, training methods that use physical corrections, leash corrections, choke chains, prong collars, shock collars or the balanced style training (stops or reduces the frequency of a behaviour by doing something the dog must find aversive and painful), can have detrimental effects on dogs. These methods mask the

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underlying behaviour issues and cause long-term side effects such as increased fear, pain, stress, and “shut-down” dog in addition to the onset of aggression.”

Canadian Veterinary Medical Association – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statements (under Humane Training of Dogs) (<https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/policy-and-outreach/position-statements/statements/humane-training-of-dogs/>) – *“Similarly, the use of aversive devices such as choke, pinch, spray, prong or shock collars are strongly discouraged in favour of more humane alternatives.”*

Edmonton Humane Society – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statements (under Humane Training Methods for Dogs) (https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/6_5aHumane-Dog-Training-PS_Aug21.pdf) – *“The Edmonton Humane Society supports the humane training of dogs which includes force-free, evidence-based techniques that foster the human-dog relationship. The Edmonton Humane Society opposes the use of aversive techniques and devices that cause fear, anxiety, stress, pain or injury in dogs.”*

European Society of Veterinary Clinical Ethology – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statements (under Electronic Training Devices) (https://esvce.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/esvce-position-statement-e-collar_2019.pdf) – *“Hence, ESVCE encourages education programmes which employ positive reinforcement methods (while avoiding positive punishment and negative reinforcement) thereby promoting positive dog welfare and a humane, ethical and moral approach to dog training at all times.”*

International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants – PO

Evidence for classification: IAABC Statement on LIMA, excerpt from Addendum Section (<https://iaabc.org/lima>) *“Our goal is to eliminate the use of shock devices from training and behavior work, and to do so by modeling, educating, and providing members with effective alternatives.”... “Members will work to eliminate the use of shock completely from their practice.”*

The Kennel Club (UK) – PO

Evidence for classification: IAABC Statement on LIMA, excerpt from Addendum Section (<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/about-us/campaigns/electric-shock-collars/>) *“We are firmly against the use of any aversive training devices. Instead, we recommend that pet owners and trainers use positive, rewards-based tools and methods when training their dog.”*

New Zealand Veterinary Association – PO

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Evidence for classification: Policy: Behaviour modifying collar use on dogs (<https://nzva.org.nz/policy-advocacy/policies/collars/>) “The NZVA does not support the use of electronic behaviour modifying collars (e-collars) that deliver aversive stimuli for the training or containment of dogs.”

Pet Professional Guild – PO

Evidence for classification: Position Statement: The Use of Choke and Prong Collars (<https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/resource/the-use-of-choke-and-prong-collars-position-statement/>) “Consistent with this effort, it is the position of the Pet Professional Guild (PPG) that the use of collars and leads that are intended to apply constriction, pressure, pain or force around a dog’s neck (such as choke chains and prong collars) should be avoided.”

Evidence for classification: Position Statement: The Use of Shock (<https://www.petprofessionalguild.com/resource/the-use-of-shock-position-statement/>) “It is Pet Professional Guild’s (PPG) view that electric shock in the guise of training constitutes a form of abuse towards pets, and, given that there are highly effective, positive training alternatives, should no longer be a part of the current pet industry culture of accepted practices, tools or philosophies.”

Seventeen of the eighteen organizations are classified as PO, and one did not have any information on the web site related to tools/methodology. Two organizations, the National Association of Obedience Instructors (NADOI) and the International Association of Canine Professional (IACP) do not prohibit the use of PEC, and both of these organizations are international. They may have been inadvertently overlooked for Table 1, or it is possible that they were omitted because they do not support the PO ideology. Because of explanatory text in the introduction regarding the organizations in Table 1, the latter is more probable. The text reads (**emphasis added**):

1. Introduction

2. 1.1 Background

“...followed by a review of existing standards and positions by various **relevant expert and regulatory organizations** (including Government, humane societies, and veterinary associations; see Table 1).”

IACP and NADOI are expert organizations that were omitted from the table.