IMPACT OF CLASSICAL COUNTERCONDITIONING (QUIET KENNEL EXERCISE) IN SHELTERED DOGS

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A major welfare concern in animal shelters is excessive barking from kenneled dogs. This contributes to noise pollution, can cause hearing damage, and has a negative impact on all animals within earshot. This study aims to demonstrate that by implementing a simple classical counterconditioning exercise, the emotional state of dogs can be changed from negative to more positive, thus reducing fear and frustration that often leads to excessive barking.

The study was conducted in five canine adoption wards at Wake County Animal Center in Raleigh, North Carolina. The Quiet Kennel Exercise consisted of instructing ward passersthrough to toss treats to each dog regardless of behavior exhibited.

For two weeks, baseline data was collected, using a hand-held decibel meter to measure the volume of barking in each ward three times daily. Video cameras were mounted in each ward to document the number of people passing through each ward each day. Data was collected for 18 days of intervention over four weeks. During this time, people were encouraged to toss treats to each dog, using signage. Data was collected as described above, but this time the number of people who did and did not toss treats were recorded to measure compliance.

Descriptive statistics demonstrated an increase in compliance and a decrease in maximum decibel readings over the course of the intervention. Additional analysis showed that for each percent increase in compliance rate, there was an average decrease of 17.3 dB in the maximum decibel reading. Moreover, an overall positive change in attitude from most dogs towards visitors further showed the positive effects of the study.