AVERSIVE TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES IN DOG TRAINING:

WELFARE CONCERNS, LEGISLATION, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVING DOG WELFARE THROUGH HUMANE TRAINING METHODS

Erica Cheung
Alberta Schutzhund Association-President
University of Alberta Senior Undergraduate Student
SOME BACKGROUND

Schutzhund (German for “protection dog”) is a dog sport consisting of tracking, obedience, and protection exercises. It was intended to test German Shepherds for police and military work.

- The dynamic exercises are meant to display the loyalty, intelligence, and endurance of the working dog.

- Many Schutzhund trainers are involved in companion dog training and owners often look to these trainers for a higher level of control of "difficult" dogs.

- Common training methods in Schutzhund present many concerns for animal welfare.

Figure 1. Tracking

Figure 2. Guarding a "bad guy"
THESE ARE THE TOOLS


• "Modern remote collars are humane and effective training tools when used appropriately, and they can enhance animal welfare" and, "Remote collars benefit dogs." (Gabi Hoffman PhD, Shepherd Sport Magazine Summer 2014 pp. 11-12)

• Both tools used for positive punishment and negative reinforcement

• These collars work based on discomfort and pain (K.Benoit DVM, 2014 Personal communication)
# Effects of Aversive Tools on Welfare

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Tools</th>
<th>Training Methods</th>
<th>Welfare Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Remote e-collar (Shock collar)        | **Positive punishment:** application of an aversive stimulus to decrease unwanted behaviour. | K. Benoit DVM (2014, personal communication):  
• Causes pain and discomfort  
• Prong collars can result in trachea (airway) damage, lacerations, skin irritation  
• Easily abused |
| Prong or “pinch collar”               | **Negative reinforcement:** remove aversive stimulus when the animal performs desired response. Increases behaviour. | Pauli et. al (2006): Prong collars...  
• Increase pressure in the eyes by restricting blood flow  
• Can cause laryngeal damage and paralysis  
• Negatively influences dog-human relationship and reduces learning ability in novel training tasks  
Schilder et.al (2004):  
• Causes pain and anxiety  
• Use of painful stimuli shown to negatively affect human-animal relationship  
• Causes stress (measured by behavioural responses) |

Cooper et.al (2014): training with a shock collar did not produce superior results
Selected organizations that oppose the use of aversive training tools and methods:

- Canadian Veterinary Medical Association: “Supports the use of humane training methods that are built on current scientific knowledge of learning theory. Methods causing fear, distress, pain or anxiety are unacceptable.” (www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/humane-training-methods-for-dogs#.Ux6jjdxa8kM)

- Alberta SPCA: “Accepts the use of animals for recreation where there is a standard of care that ensures the welfare and well-being of animals and protects them from activities, including training, that cause distress or pose a significant risk to their safety.” (www.albertaspca.org/about/positions/recreation.html)

- The UK Armed Forces: Shock collars are not used to train UK military dogs.


Legislations and regulations resulting in bans on the use of shock and prong collars:


- Animal protection laws in Denmark, Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia, Austria, New South Wales

- Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)

- World Union of German Shepherd Clubs (WUSV)

- Bill C-615 First reading June 12, 2014: proposed ban on shock collars in Canada
THE BENEFITS OF HUMANE TRAINING METHODS

Humane training methods are effective for teaching new behaviours and modifying problem behaviours.

- Builds the human-animal bond resulting in better performance and lower stress levels for working dogs *(Haverbeke et. al, 2010)*

- Improves the dog-owner bond in companion dogs and reduces handler-directed aggression *(Rooney&Cowan, 2011, Deldalle et.al, 2014)*

- Does not inflict pain or cause fear

- Positive public image
WHY DO AVERSIVE TOOLS AND METHODS PERSIST IN DOG TRAINING?

Aversive training techniques in the working dog community, dog sports, and behaviour modification continue, in part, due to a lack of humane education, understanding of dog behaviour, and knowledge of alternatives.

- Force-based methods work quickly because they are based on fear and avoidance
- Dog owners do not always correctly perceive their dog’s psychological stress (Mariti et.al, 2012)
- Humane training methods are often misinterpreted as permissive of poor performance and bad behaviour.
- Insufficient research in dog behaviour in the context of training methods (Haverbeke et.al 2010)
HOW DO WE MOVE FORWARD AND IMPROVE DOG WELFARE?

- Recognize that providing good welfare does not stop with veterinary care, food, water, and a home

- Veterinarian education in dog behaviour and training is key to informing dog owners on welfare concerns associated with training methods (K. Benoit DVM, 2014 personal communication)

- Initiating change through constructive discussion

- Dog trainer education

- More support for rescue organizations and dog owners
1. We know from extensive research that animal abuse is linked to the incidence of domestic abuse...does the use of coercion and compulsion on dogs correlate with the nature of our human interactions?

2. Do our methods of communicating with and teaching dogs reflect our progressive views of animal sentience, modern applications of learning theory in education, and ethics?

3. How do we want the next generation to interact with and perceive animals?
THANK YOU

8 weeks old

4 months old

1 year old

Email: erica@ualberta.ca or find me on Facebook and LinkedIn