

The importance of consistency in the training of dogs.

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Introduction

The aim was to study whether punishment was a risk factor for problem behaviours, and how reward, punishment, attitudes and rule structure (permissiveness-strictness, consistency) in combination affect obedience and specific problem behaviours. In addition, we looked at gender effects of training methods.

The concept of rule structure

Rule structure (or behavioural control) refers to dog owners' attempt to regulate and manage their dog's behaviour, and is drawn from parenting behaviour research (Rohner and Khaleque, 2005). The concept involves the extent to which parents insist on compliance with their demands and rules. However it does not imply which methods parents use for insisting this compliance, hence firm rule structure can rest on reward based methods only, and permissive owners may use punishment based methods

Materials and methods

935 replies to an online open questionnaire (217 questions) were analysed, covering four topics; demographics, the owner's rule structure (PARQ/Control; Rohner and Khaleque, 2005), the owner's training methods (physical punishment and reward) and the dog's behaviour (obedience and behaviour problems) (CBARQ; Hsu and Serpell, 2003)

Questions on rule structure:

1. I see to it that my dog knows exactly what he/she may or may not do
2. I always tell my dog how he/she should behave
3. I believe in having a lot of rules and sticking to them
4. I give my dog as much freedom as he/she wants
5. I try to insist that my dog does exactly what he/she is supposed to do
6. I tell my dog what to do all the time
7. I let my dog do anything he/she wants to do
8. I want to control everything my dog does

Results

Rule structure and reward correlates positively with obedience and negatively with training problems

Associations between rule structure, reward and obedience/training problems. Spearman's correlation; (*) $p < 0,05$;
(**) $p < 0,01$

	<i>Obedience</i>	<i>Training problems</i>
Rule structure	,16 (**)	-,13 (**)
Frequency of rewards	,08 (*)	-,18 (**)
No of rewards per week	,10 (**)	-,16 (**)
Play as reward		-,13 (**)

Punishment correlates negatively with obedience and positively with training problems

Associations between punishment and obedience/training problems. Spearman's correlation; (*) p<0,05 ; () p<0,01**

	<i>Obedience</i>	<i>Training problems</i>
No of physical punishments per week	-,13 (**)	,16 (**)
No. of punishment methods ticked off	-,09 (*)	,16 (**)
I throw things at my dog	-,08 (*)	,13 (**)
I throw/squirt water at my dog	-,11 (**)	,14 (**)
I force the dog to the ground	-,09 (*)	,16 (**)
I jerk/pull hard on the leash	-,10 (**)	,15 (**)
I pinch or squeeze the skin or a body part of the dog (the ear, tail, etc)	-,08 (*)	,14 (**)
I use electronic collar/citronella collar/antibark collar		,12 (**)
I lift the dog by the leash or the collar		,18 (**)
I force the dog into an unpleasant position		,12 (**)
I use slip collar/prong collar	-,08 (*)	,17 (**)

In the problem behaviour group, defined by scoring >1 st.dev. above mean in the C-BARQ questionnaire, increased rule structure was related to high trainability (p<0.01), decreased fear of strangers (p<0.05) and reduced non-social fear (p<0.05).

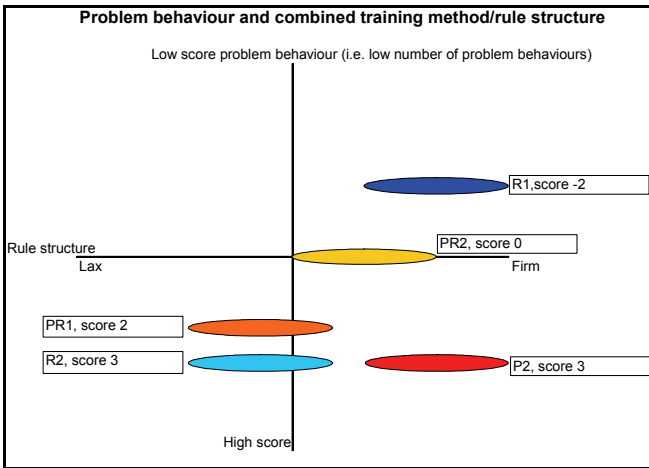
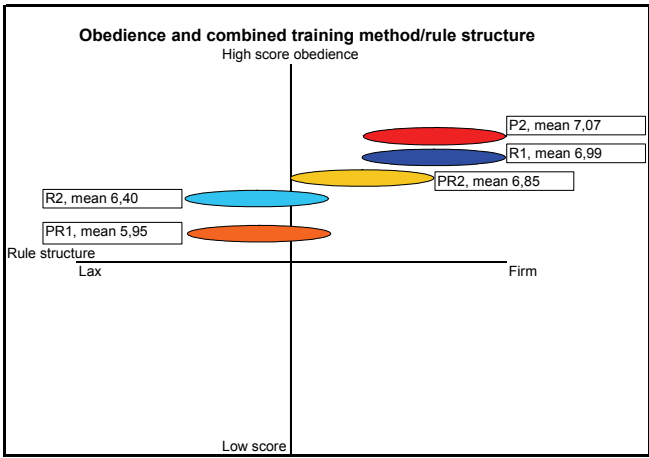
Effects of rearing method, combined

The two groups with the lowest score on rule structure (R2, PR1) is associated with lowest obedience and highest level of problem behaviours.

Summary of the training methods, rule structure and the dogs level of obedience and training problems in the six groups of training methods

	<i>N</i>	<i>Owners</i>	<i>Dogs</i>
PI	0	P-Intense High frequency Unfair Unpredictable Inconsistent R- low frequency Rule structure - low	No participants
P2	14	P-Intense Low frequency Fair Predictable Consistent R- low frequency Rule structure - firm	More Activity/Stereotypes Non-social fear Fear handling Obedience
R1	83	P-none R-High frequency Rule structure moderate/firm	More High trainability Obedience Less Stranger-directed aggression Training problems Dog-directed aggression
R2	141	P-none R-High frequency Rule structure low	More Stranger-directed aggression and fear Non social fear Attention-seeking behaviour Less Activity/stereotypes Obedience

PR1	21	P-Low Intensity Low frequency Unfair Unpredictable Inconsistent R- Medium frequency Rule structure - low	More Training problems Owner-directed aggression Less Obedience
PR2	185	P-Medium Intensity Low frequency Fair Predictable Consistent R-High frequency Rule structure -moderate	More Barking Social towards strangers Less Chasing Medium obedience

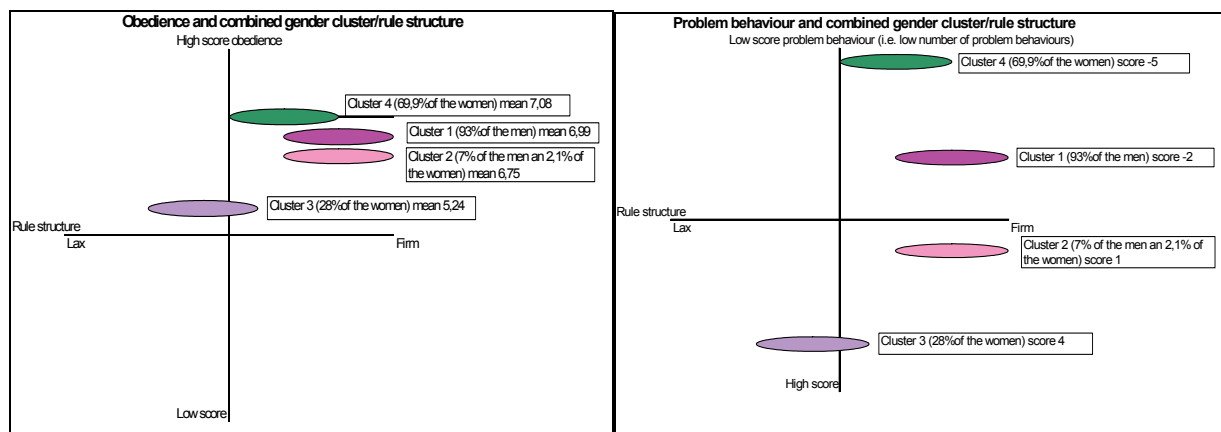


Gender effects

The men and women trained their dogs differently. A two-step Cluster Analysis revealed 4 clusters. Low score on rule structure is associated with low obedience and high level problem behaviours.

Summary of the training methods, rule structure and the dogs level of obedience and training problems in the four clusters

	<i>N</i>	<i>Owners</i>	<i>Dogs</i>
Cluster 1 <i>(93% of the men)</i>	172	High score punishment Low score reward Rule structure firm	Obedient Some less excitability Some more training problems Some less activity
Cluster 2 <i>(7% of the men and 2,1% of the women)</i>	20	High score punishment Low score reward Rule structure firm	Obedient Neutral for training problems High score on resource guarding
Cluster 3 <i>(28% of the women)</i>	92	Medium score punishment Medium score reward Rule structure low/lax	Less obedient High score training problems Some more stranger-directed aggression Some more excitability Some more separation-related problems
Cluster 4 <i>(69,9% of the women)</i>	230	Low score punishment High score reward Rule structure moderate	Very obedient Very little training problems Very little resource guarding Very little separation-related problems Some less stranger-directed fear Some less dog-directed fear and aggression



Conclusion

The study shows that rule structure and owners' consistency was correlated with higher level of obedience and less training problems and that men and women use different methods. Which factors contribute as cause and effect, are not clear. Owners with problematic dogs may feel the need for more punishment and the owners with fewer training problems and higher obedience may have "easy dogs" to deal with. In contrast, if lax rule structure is a cause of low level obedience and higher level of behaviour problems, and punishment lead to higher training problems, this has implications for how dog owners should be instructed to train their dogs from a welfare point of view, as well as to increase the quality of the human-animal relationship.

References

Hsu Y Y. and Serpell J A 2003 Development and validation of a questionnaire for measuring behavior and temperament traits in pet dogs. *Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association*. 223 (9): 1293-1300

Rohner R P and Khaleque A (Eds.). 2005 *Handbook for the Study of Parental Acceptance and Rejection (4th ed.)*. Rohner Research Publications, Storrs, Connecticut, USA.