

Impact of Human Presence and Visual Access on Barking Behavior in Shelter Dogs

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Shelters can be stressful for dogs due to lack of predictability and control, social isolation, and busy environments. Providing dogs with more social opportunities and environmental predictability may improve their welfare. Barking may indicate stress and contribute to noise levels that are harmful to dogs and people. We investigated the impact of human presence and line of sight on barking. We manipulated line of sight by partially removing a crate barrier to allow the dogs visual access to other dogs and a better view of the room. We collected data on barking on 17 focal dogs as well as overall barking in the room during pre-treatment (no visual access), treatment (visual access), and post-treatment (no visual access) and noted if a person other than the observer was in the room. We found that in-room barking was significantly higher when a person was in the room (Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test, $Z = -4.048$, $p < .001$). Based on these results, shelters should consider limiting the human activity in the room to reduce noise levels. Since barking did not significantly increase with the addition of visual access, shelters may also consider providing the dogs visual access as a way to allow beneficial social interaction.