**Using Canines to perform Police Jobs**

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**How the local community is perceiving the use of dogs for police efforts**

## Summary

The article/newscast depicts gory details of a video where a dog is bringing serious damage to a mistaken suspect by practically chewing his leg and mutilating him. The K9 police unit of law enforcement officers have been availing service dogs as police use of force and a substitute for the duties of a police officer. Body cameras and smartphones have proved to be essential in capturing the real scenes of dogs "apprehending" the suspects. In the newscast, suspects who only indicated a minimal threat to the police officers were experiencing dog bites, resulting in long-lasting and extensive injuries. A highly experienced trainer and dog handler, Dan Lesser, told the press that he is habitual of gauging multiple factors before releasing the dog on the potential suspect who shows some resistance, but more often than not, police officers release them on the emergence of a threat which is not even real.

Two incident reports were shown in the newscast which revealed the urgency by police officers in releasing the dogs towards the suspects and dog bites are seen to last for a good 52 seconds, enough to inflict the suspect with great pain and trauma. The police officers, on the other hand, dismissed this specific characterization and also were unsupportive of the video pieces of evidence being released for public viewing. The police opined that dogs can prove to be a valuable source for restraining the suspects if the time and place are right. In the absence of rationale, there is a possibility of a prevalence of public perception against the use of dogs for "arresting" criminals.

## Research Questions

1. Will the violent apprehension of suspects by the police service dogs survive the opposing public perception in this age of smartphones and cameras?
2. Does the local community support the use of service dogs in arresting criminal suspects?

## Literature Review

Frequent use of trained dogs has prevailed as a common norm in many agencies related to law enforcement for multiple purposes. Two of the most significant purposes which these dogs serve are assistance in the detection and possible deterrence of crime. Dog deployment as police use of force has been proven to be an effective tool for enhancing the policing in many studies (Jennings, 1998). This peer-reviewed article supports the use of dogs in the apprehension of criminal suspects. Since the advent of mankind, dogs were trained by humans to fight and even die when commanded and many accounts of their military contributions can also be found in many existing studies (Murray, 1998). The first use of dogs that were reported entails canines in the pursuit of supplementing law enforcement departments and the first facility that was established for the formal training of dogs was in Ghent, Belgium (Chapman, 1979). The present-day use of dogs in the police and law enforcement departments in the United States was not reported until the latter half of the 20th century when the natural and biological science researchers began to find evidence from the olfactory senses of dogs and their ability to detect unusual activity and suspected individuals. Another peer-reviewed report also established that the perceiving abilities of dogs are far more advanced than those of humans or any extant technologies in the detection of crime (Johnston, 1999).

Currently, canines are being used in law enforcement departments for a wide spectrum of reasons. Dogs search for concrete pieces of evidence that are intentionally or unintentionally left at the crime scene, look around for explosive devices in restricted areas and also assist in catching sight of human presence in uninhabited buildings. The duties associated with dogs also include crowd control, finding any missing persons, searching or sniffing any contraband material (Hutson, 1997). The chief reason for deploying dogs as partners with the police is their cost-effectiveness and inherent courage as domesticated friends of the human race (Guzlas, 1993). In addition to assistance in the law enforcement departments, canines also help the officers to perform their jobs efficiently by increasing the morale of police officers and decrease the risk of any possible loss of human life (Mesloh, 2002). If the local community is against the deployment of dogs, this research article might be useful to convince them.

Presently, less than 10 agencies or registration boards can be identified that certify the handler dogs before sending them into the field or releasing them towards the criminal suspects. This increases the negative public perception towards dogs as the use of police force, especially after contemplating the biting incidents which were widely viewed across the social media platforms. Many studies propound that dogs are not particularly seen as tools of violence, for instance, guns or laser tags, rather they are perceived as highly trained and devoted friends of the police officers which leads to the proof of their usefulness. However, in the heat of the moment, there have been reported incidents in which the dogs have seriously injured the suspects, rendering them crippled for the rest of their lives. In another peer-reviewed article, the extreme consequence of a suspect getting attacked from the assaults of police dogs is noted as permanent injuries (Dell, 1992). In this article, the suspect has been described as prey who faces detrimental physical harm from the dog and more often than not, the injury is disfiguring. It is also witnessed in many cases that the violent dog drags the potential suspect on the ground for a short distance which paves the way for exacerbation of the injury.

Drawing a line between "necessary" and "intentional/unintentional" use of force is difficult for law enforcement agencies especially when the source is a service dog. Technically, it becomes impossible to blame the officers because unlike guns or laser tags, injuries in these cases are the doings of "trained" dogs (Westley, 1970). In sheer contrast to the civilian dogs, trained dogs in the law enforcement agencies are conditioned to practice a bite and hold technique to control freedom of the suspected individuals. These bites, which are exerted with great force elicit severely dangerous injuries and greatly elevate the risk for bacterial contamination which prolongs the healing process once the individual is out of the dog’s grasp (Bodnar, 1990).

## Research Design

### Target population and Sample

The target population of this study will be the K-9 police officers and the local community. Purposive sampling method will be used. K-9 police officers will be the target population as they spend more time with the service dogs and their knowledge of the situational arrests is more as compared to any other segment of the community.

### Variables

Following variables would be used to answer the research questions:

1. Perception of community members regarding the service dogs
2. Total count of dogs in the K-9 law enforcement department
3. Number of incidents reported as dog violence
4. Number of arrests as a result of apprehension by dogs
5. Any reported fatalities
6. The ratio of the number of police officers to several service dogs on active duty

### Data Collection

Questionnaires would be sent to the local community members and to several military dog handlers which extract a great deal of information about general response towards the deployment of dogs in the law enforcement agencies and apprehension of criminal suspects. Great care will be taken regarding the anonymity of the responses. The participants in the research design will be cordially asked to provide elaborate information on their perception towards dogs acting as cost-effective "tools" and whether the crime rate can be controlled through this use of force in their opinion. The dog handlers would be asked information about the service dogs and questions will prevail over a wide spectrum of information, for instance, periods of active duty of the dogs, and relationships between the dogs and their handlers. An adequate number of questionnaires would also be sent as an online survey to a remote unit of DEA in Florida which is currently deploying dogs for sniffing explosives, drugs and other illegal material. Surveys would be used to conduct this research to end up with a large data set to code and categorize as perceptions of the local community.

### Ethical Issues

Some of the ethical issues which can be encountered as a possible consequence of this research finding are as follows:

1. K-9 canine officers, as portrayed in the newscast, are extended legal rights which endangers human rights and can claim the life of an innocent human.
2. The police officers who initially rejected the characterization of dogs may know a lot about the service dogs and the context of the situation of the incidents but may choose to not participate in the study.
3. Issues about informed consent
4. Any incident reported being against beneficence towards dogs
5. Issues arising from extracting information from families who are directly related to the victims of the dog bites and violence

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