

White Paper: Poorly Trained Service Dogs – The Impact on Trained Service Dog Teams

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Abstract

The negative impact of poorly trained service dogs and pet dogs has been described anecdotally by service dog users for decades. While task-trained service dogs have legal access to places of public accommodation under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, in practice, access issues are more complicated due to misinformation, societal norms relating to dogs, and misrepresentation of untrained dogs as service dogs. Through previous, small-scale surveys by Canine Companions, the impact of these misbehaving dogs on Canine Companions' clients became apparent.

With strong data to suggest that poorly trained service dogs and fraud was impacting Canine Companions service dog teams, the question arose as to whether our organization was unique in these issues, or whether all service dog users across the globe were subject to these impacts.

Canine Companions spearheaded the collection of data from service dog users whose dogs were trained by Assistance Dogs International (ADI)-accredited training programs. It was hypothesized that service dog users are negatively impacted by poorly trained or misrepresented service dogs in places pet dogs are not permitted.

Through surveying these service dog users, data supported the hypothesis, finding poorly trained dogs to have a negative impact on people who rely on service dogs for independence.

Problem

Poorly trained service dogs and untrained pet dogs in places of public accommodation where pets are not permitted may be impacting the access rights and safety of service dogs and their handlers.

Has the problem changed over time? It is important to consider the impact of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic on the extensive restrictions in public places and on the population that utilizes service dogs, who may have immune suppression or be medically fragile.

Is this problem of poorly trained service dogs universal across the world for ADI-accredited program service dog users, or variable in comparison to service dog users in the United States?

Background

Service animals provide physical, psychological and emotional benefits for people with a variety of disabling conditions (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Canine Companions conducted two surveys in 2015 and 2020 to assess impacts of having a service dog on clients, and our results further support the findings in Rodriguez et al. (2020)

From our 2015 survey, key findings include:

- 94.5% of service dog and hearing clients report increased sense of safety and peace of mind.

- 91% of service dog clients report increased independence.
- 94% of adult and child service dog clients report increased emotional wellbeing.

Our 2020 survey specifically targeting Canine Companions clients who are veterans also found significant benefits to partnership with a service dog, including service dogs for physical disability, deafness and PTSD.

- 100% report an increased emotional wellbeing since receiving their service dog.
- 100% report increased independence.
- 88.6% report increased feelings of safety.
- 74.2% of veteran clients with PTSD report decreased frequency and/or severity of PTSD symptoms.

Service dogs provide multiple benefits to clients, with many lines of evidence showing the positive impacts of service dogs, from psychosocial to physical (Hart LA, 1987; Valentine et al. 1993; Whitmarsh 2005; Winkle et al. 2012). However, the impact of poorly trained dogs in public can limit a person with a disability's ability to take advantage of these important benefits. Fraudulent service dogs and untrained pets in public places has been an issue for clients of Canine Companions. In 2018, the ongoing severity of the problem triggered the creation of our first client survey on the topic of service dog fraud. We conducted two surveys focused on Canine Companions clients in 2018 and 2019. These surveys revealed the severity of the situation, so in 2022, we designed and administered a survey to service dog users covering three continents.

For the purposes of this paper, we utilize the definition of a service animal as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act Titles II-III. A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2011)

We are defining fraudulent service dogs as dogs that are intentionally or unintentionally misrepresented as having the training and access rights of a service dog. (See Appendix I)

In 2010, the Department of Justice updated the definition of a service animal in the Americans with Disabilities Act to be limited to dogs and miniature horses. While this change limited the number of species permitted in public, it has not limited the number of pet dogs or poorly trained service dogs. Unsafe interactions with poorly trained service dogs and untrained pets have continued to be reported by Canine Companions clients internally. While this qualitative information is vital, quantitative data was critical to determining the scope of the issue. Our 2018 survey on fraudulent service dogs elicited data from 973 respondents: Canine Companions clients including service dog teams for adults (41.1%) and children (28%), hearing dog clients (14.8%), service dogs for veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (1.1%) and facility dog users (15.1%).

Key findings from the 2018 survey:

- 86.5% of respondents had encountered a fake, questionable, or uncontrolled service dog in their time as Canine Companions clients.
- 66.2% had experienced an uncontrolled dog snap at, bitten, vocalize at or interfere with their service dog.
- 70.4% reported feeling that fraudulent service dogs had negatively impacted their independence and quality of life.

- 41.3% feel that the questioning of their service dog's legitimacy has increased in recent years.

With the aggregation of data from Canine Companions clients in 2018, it was important that our next survey in 2019 included service dog users beyond just our clients. In 2019, we distributed a similar survey with minor changes to questions and question order through [Assistance Dogs International](#) (ADI), the worldwide governing body for accredited service dog programs.

Clients from ADI-accredited programs in North America received the new survey, resulting in 1395 individual respondents from 41 programs. Respondents included guide dog, hearing dog, service dog for physical disability, medical alert service dog, psychiatric service dog and facility dog teams.

Key findings from the 2019 ADI-North America survey:

- 92.6% of respondents encountered fake, questionable, or uncontrolled service dogs in their time as a service dog user.
- 78.8% of respondents had experienced an uncontrolled dog snap at, bitten, vocalize at or interfere with their service dog.
- 66.0% reported feeling that fraudulent service dogs had negatively impacted their independence and quality of life.
- 50.0% encountered fraudulent service dogs in grocery stores and airports.

These findings may indicate a disconnect between federal and state laws in place to protect service dogs and the inadequate enforcement or understanding of these laws by the public. (Zier, E.R., 2020)

Methodology

To assess the impact of fraudulent service dogs more broadly, in 2022, we created four surveys based on the survey questions from the prior 2018 and 2019 surveys. The surveys, each targeted based primarily on geographic location, were sent to ADI-accredited programs through ADI's North America Chapter (ADINA), European Chapter (ADIEu), and the Oceania Chapter (Oceania). The surveys were delivered by ADI through a weblink provided with ADI's quarterly e-newsletter in April 2022. The fourth group of survey participants were Canine Companions clients who received the survey electronically directly from Canine Companions to follow our client communication policies.

The audience was limited to guide dog users, hearing dog users, medical alert service dog users, mobility disability-related service dog users, and those who utilize service dogs for psychiatric disability. Additionally, facility dogs were surveyed, but we excluded facility dog users from most analyses because these placements only encounter public places in which they work. All dogs trained to assist with physical, medical or psychiatric disability were combined under the label "service dog" to best match the terminology used by laypersons. Facility dogs, guide dogs for the blind and hearing dogs for deaf people were called out individually. All respondents received their dogs through an ADI-accredited member program.

Each survey, created through [surveymonkey.com](#), was 27 comparable questions made up of multiple choice, check box and open-ended questions. For respondents in ADINA and Canine Companions, additional language was added to reflect the U.S. Department of Transportation's updated Air Carrier Access Law. (U.S. Department of Transportation, 2021) Questions did not require an answer and could

be skipped by the respondent. The surveys were written in English with changes made for the ADIEu and Oceania surveys to use more well-known terms for places of public accommodation.

In order to account for the possibility of bias during analysis based on type of service dog placement or visibility of disability, the findings included the breakdown of results by type of placement.

The four surveys remained accessible for a four-month period, with an additional reminder during the four-month period to fill out the survey sent by ADI to member organizations in Europe and Oceania.

Data from the four surveys were weighted and combined to account for the number of responses received from ADINA, the largest chapter of ADI, compared to the smaller ADIEu and Oceania chapters. Statistical analysis was left for future surveys, relying on weighted percentages only for the results.

Results

Across the four versions of the 2022 surveys, 1503 responses were received during the collection period. Questions where analysis required the exclusion of facility dogs reduced overall responses to N=1360.

ADINA N=938 Canine Companions N= 474 ADIEu N=37 Oceania N=54

The category of placement was broken down into service dog (assisting with a physical disability or PTSD), guide dog, hearing dog and facility dog (Fig. 1). The majority of respondents reported being partnered with service dogs (54%).

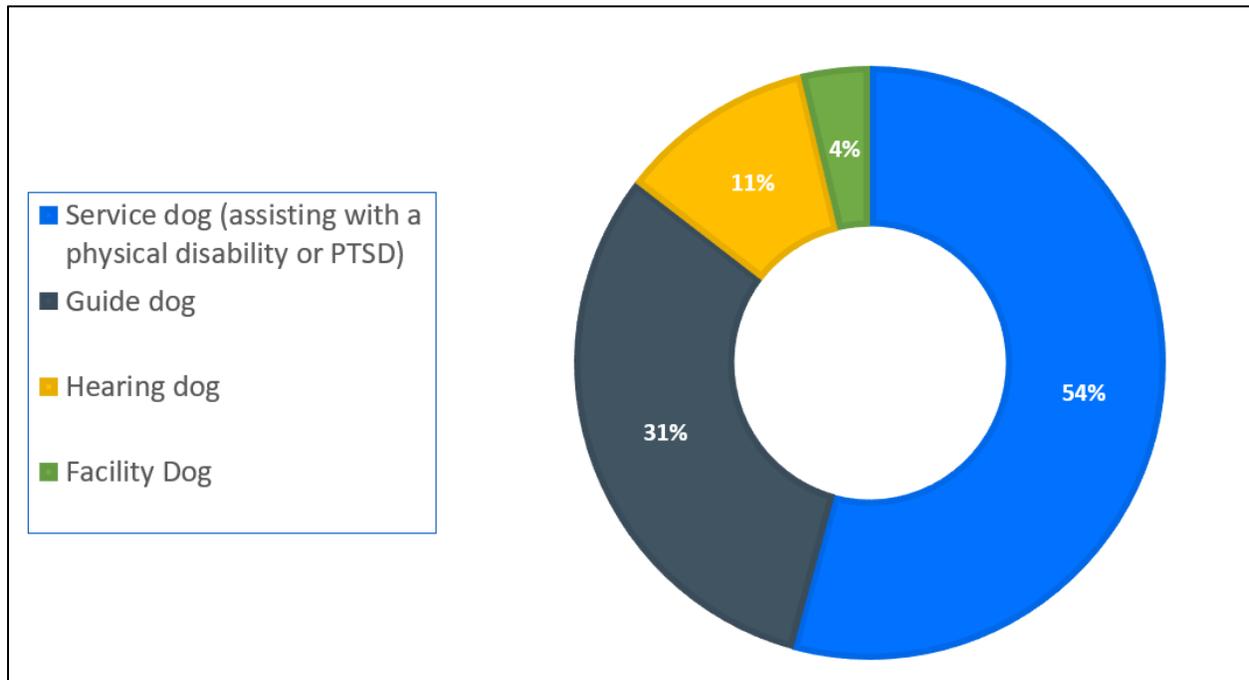


Figure 1. The pie chart shows the breakdown of service dog, guide dog, hearing dog, and facility dog from 1503 survey responses.

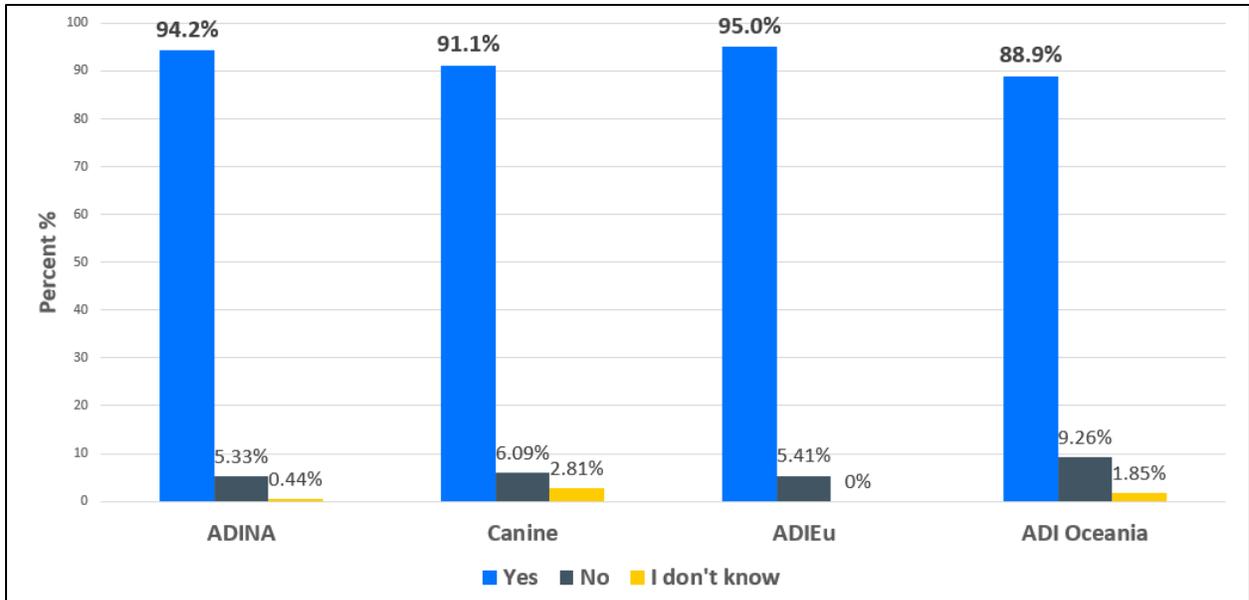


Figure 2. The bar chart shows the comparison between location and the presence of encounters with poorly trained dogs. Findings are consistent across North America (94.2%), Canine Companions (91.1%), Europe (95.0%) and Oceania (88.9%). This result was unweighted to compare the impact in each location.

Quantitative Results

As we examine the problem of service dog fraud and poorly trained service dogs, diving into both quantitative and qualitative results gave insight into the impact this problem has on service dog users in real life. The quantitative questions helped establish a solid foundation of data about the problem.

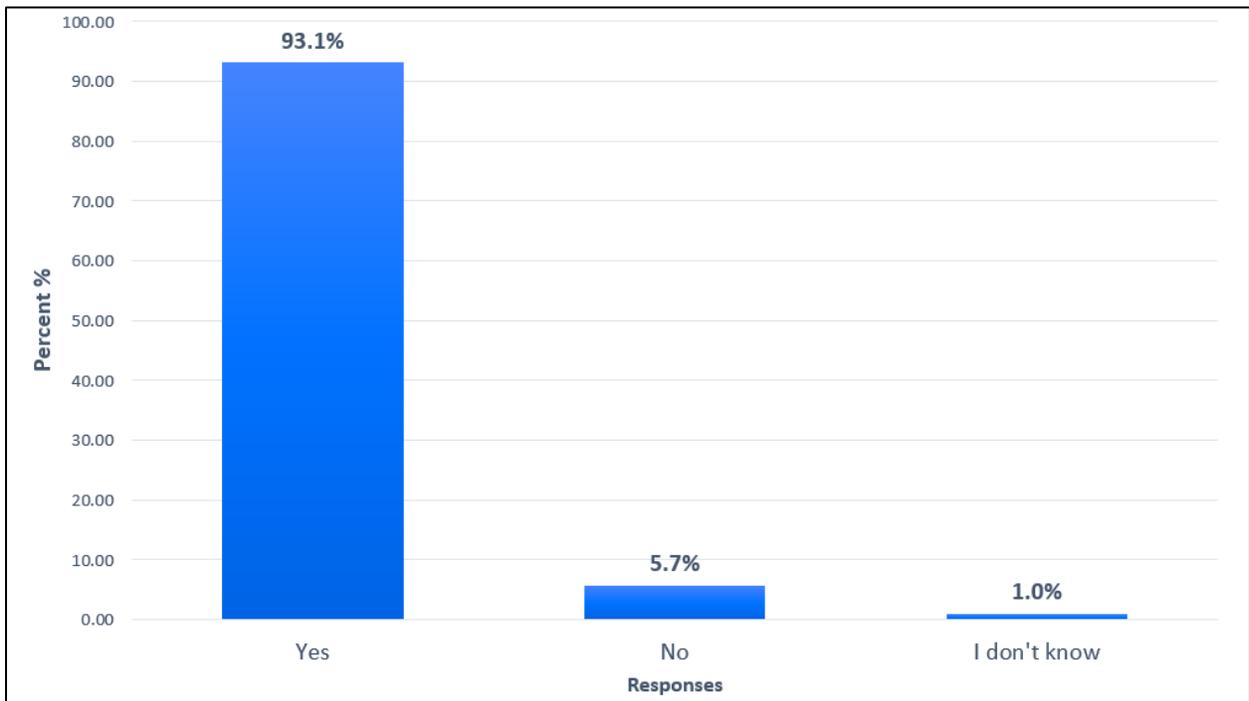


Figure 3. The bar chart shows whether service dog users have encountered an uncontrolled or poorly trained dog in public at any point during their time as a service dog user. 93.1% of respondents have encountered uncontrolled or poorly trained dogs.

Where have you come into contact with these dogs? (Top 5 from survey)	Europe	Oceania	North America
Shopping Centers	37.14%	53.06%	56.53%
Grocery Stores	34.29%	30.61%	58.49%
Restaurants	34.29%	18.37%	46.93%
Airports	0%	0%	34.33%
Other places pets are not permitted	40.74%	71.43%	44.43%

Figure 4. This visual compares the top five locations where poorly trained dogs are reported to be encountered compared to location. While service dog users in Europe and Oceania are less likely to encounter poorly trained dogs in some locations compared to North America, there was overlap, particularly in grocery stores (56.58%) and shopping centers (55.87%), where respondents had encountered out of control dogs.

Where have you come into contact with these dogs? (Top 5 from survey)	Combined Results
Shopping Centers	55.87%
Grocery Stores	56.58%
Restaurants	45.10%
Airports	32.12%
Other places pets are not permitted	44.63%

Figure 5. This visual shows the combined results from North America, Europe and Oceania for each of the top 5 public locations from the survey options. Of note, the option of “other places pets are not

permitted” was high for all surveys despite having a list of 14 common public locations including doctor’s offices, airports, hotels and workplaces.

Qualitative Results

Survey questions also explored the emotional impact of the problem using more qualitative questioning. As discussed below, the qualitative impact can be a limiting factor for independence and quality of life with a service dog, possibly as much as quantitative impact.

In open-ended comments, the primary theme that emerged was that respondents limited where they went in public with their service dog out of fear, anxiety or frustration with previous encounters in places of public accommodation.

A small number of respondents (n=100) reported needing to permanently retire their service dog or limit public outings with their service dog.

Additionally, 80% of respondents feel that the issue of poorly trained service dogs has increased in recent years and 79.5% report that poorly trained service dogs have negatively impacted their independence and quality of life.

Results by placement type

Our results were additionally analyzed through the lens of placement type, specifically for four quantitative measurements: encountering the problem, denial of public access, questions of service dog legitimacy, and encounters with poorly trained dogs. These analyses were included to determine if visible disability was a factor as part of the problem. Visible disabilities can be seen with the naked eye and can include using a wheelchair, a white cane or other assistive devices. However, millions of Americans live with invisible disabilities which are not easily identifiable to an outside observer. Some examples of invisible disabilities include PTSD, deafness, autism, diabetes or seizure disorders.

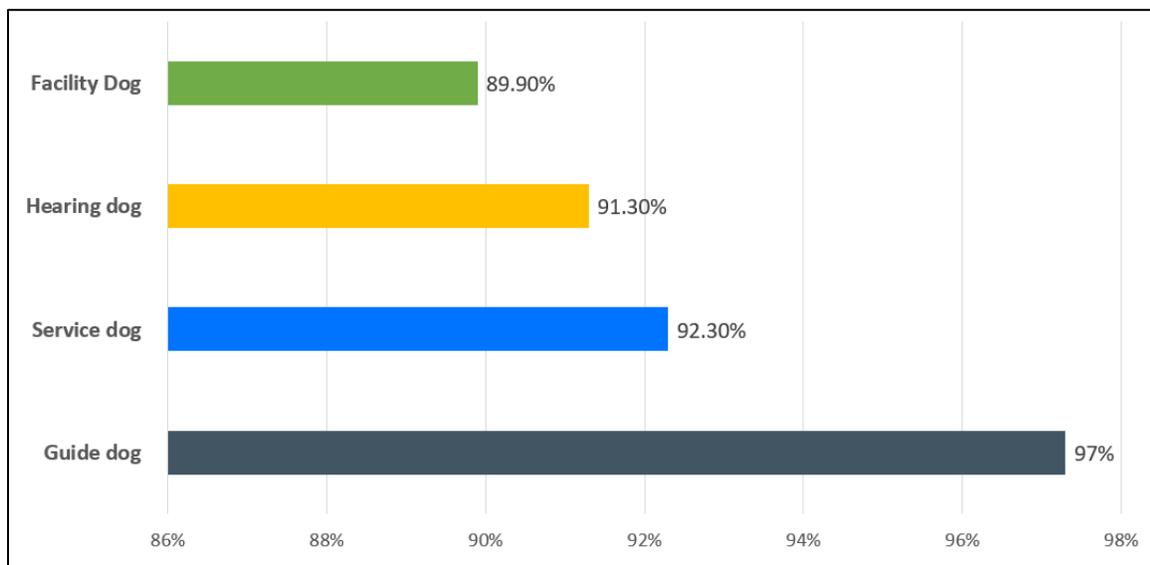


Figure 6. The bar chart shows the breakdown of the 93% of respondents who encountered poorly trained dogs in places where pets are not permitted, by placement type.

Our analysis of the respondents who had encountered poorly trained dogs included those partnered with facility dogs, which only have access to places where they perform their job, not full public access. Interestingly, 89.9% of facility dog teams report encounters with poorly trained dogs (Fig. 6). 97% of guide dog teams reported encounters, the highest percentage of all respondents.

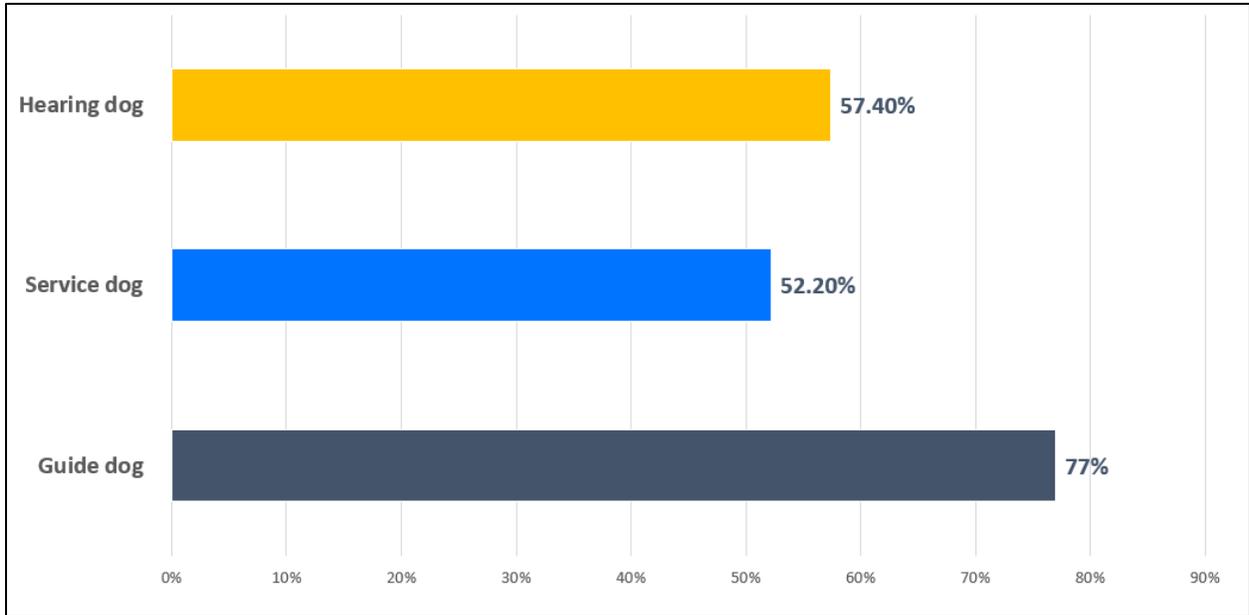


Figure 7. The bar chart shows the breakdown of the 59% of respondents who have reported access denial or removal by placement type.

In fig.7, facility dogs were suppressed because they do not have legal access rights in public places. Service dog users reported fewer instances of access denial than hearing dog and guide dog users. Guide dog users reported the highest amount of access denial or removal from places of public accommodation. Service dog users tend to have a greater likelihood of visible disabilities compared to those with deafness or blindness, which could account for these findings. (Mills, 2017)

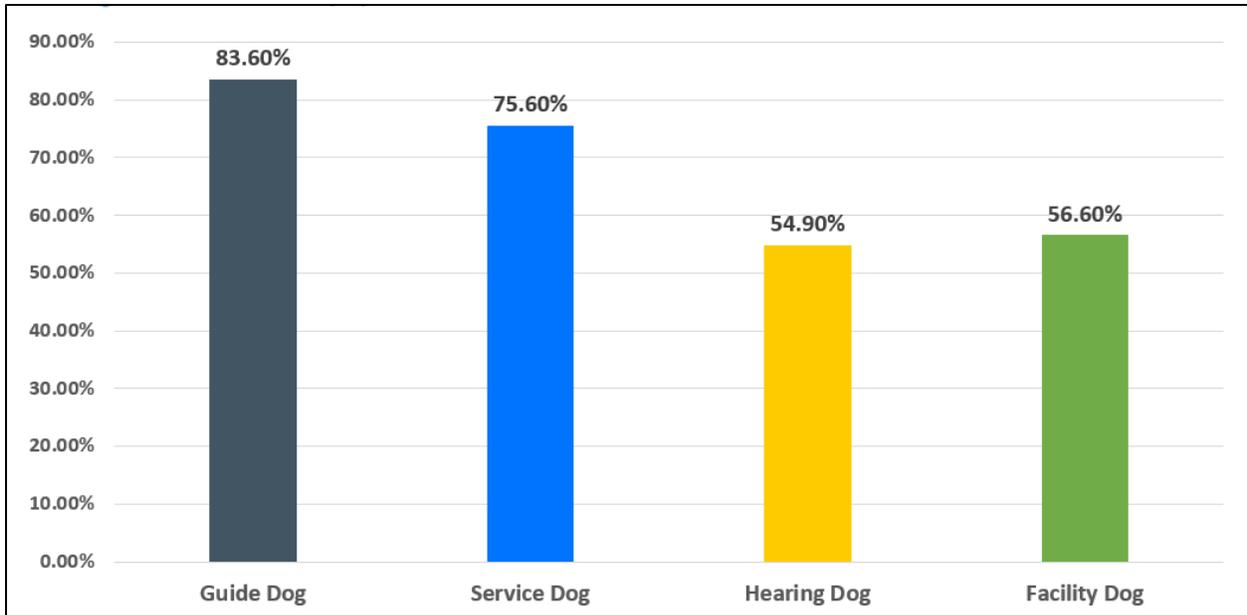


Figure 8. The bar chart compares type of placement and the reported negative interactions with poorly trained dogs. Within the 79% of respondents who reported that their service dog was subjected to a negative encounter in public places, guide dog and service dog users were 20-30% more impacted than hearing dogs or facility dogs.

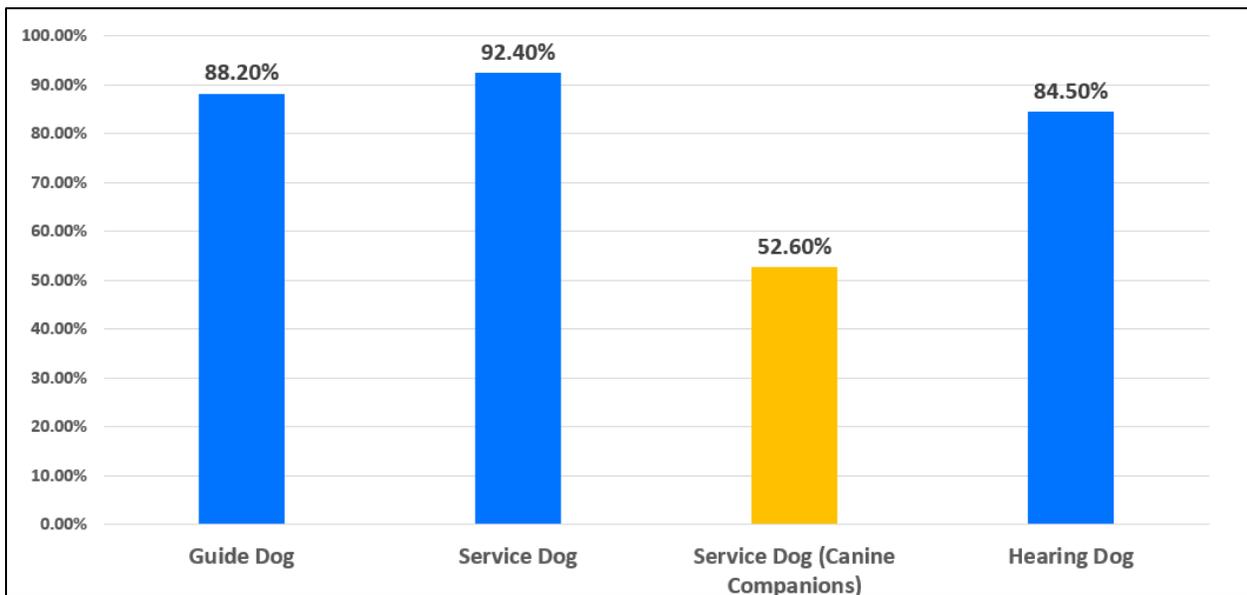


Figure 9. This chart examines the differences between placement type and instances of questioning of the service dog's legitimacy. Data from Canine Companions service dog teams was extracted and compared to respondents in general.

Examining situations where the dog's legitimacy as a trained service dog functioned as both quantitative and qualitative measures of impact. Service dog users were more likely to experience questioning about their dog's legitimacy as a service dog (Fig.9).

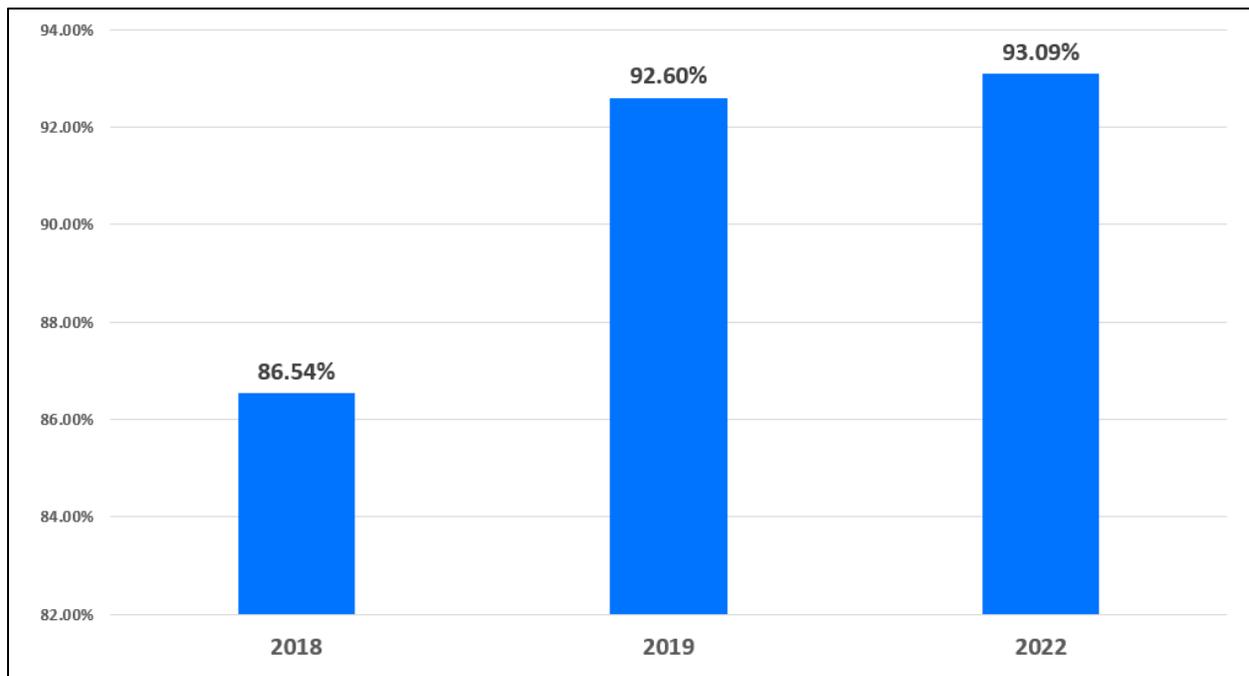


Figure 10. The bar chart shows the percentage of respondents that reported encountering poorly trained dogs in 2018, 2019 and 2022. Poorly trained dog encounters are approximately the same between 2019 and 2022, with an increase compared to 2018.

Discussion

Poorly trained service dogs and pets are universally present. At least 88.89% of service dog users in North America, Europe and Australia report having encountered poorly trained dogs, as shown in Fig. 2.

Referring back to the problem, we were able to perform a limited longitudinal analysis to determine if the presence of poorly trained dogs in places pets aren't permitted has changed over time. Fig. 10 compares this data from the 2018, 2019 and 2022 surveys. While the data shows a plateau between 2019 and 2022, it is important to consider the impact of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic on the extensive restrictions in public places. It is likely that the pandemic influenced the behavior of service dog users as it relates to going into public venues. It is also worth considering whether the pandemic changed the behavior of pet owners, eliciting higher or lower numbers of untrained or poorly trained dogs in places pets are not permitted.

Of note, the survey contained both objective and subjective question prompts in order to determine the effect of subjective feelings about untrained dogs in public on service dog users. Interestingly, objective findings tended to show a lower level of impact than those questions geared toward a respondent's perception of the problem. Objectively, we can see that service dog users frequently encounter poorly trained dogs (Fig 2). We can also objectively determine that service dog teams have been denied access to public places with their service dogs (Fig. 7). When compared to Fig. 9, a mostly subjective question, data shows that service dog users perceived that their dog's legitimacy is often questioned. In fact, 78% reported that they had been questioned about legitimacy. However, while fewer respondents' have

been denied access than had their legitimacy questioned, a majority of service dog users (59%) have been denied access to public places which also poses serious harm. It may be true that in some cases after one's legitimacy was questioned, the service dog user was permitted to enter the business, but it could also be said that service dog users feel that their dog's legitimacy was questioned far more frequently than objectively occurring. This warrants further investigation.

The challenges associated with public access and interactions with fraudulent service dogs are pervasive issues for current service dog users, but this aspect is generally not known before getting a service dog. Rodriguez et al. (2020) found that only 15% of people waiting for a service dog had concerns about issues with bringing a service dog into places of public accommodation. Only those respondents already partnered with a service dog expressed concern about "fake" service dogs, with no concerns from people still waiting for a service dog partner (Rodriguez et al., 2020).

Despite concrete barriers to accessibility, the subjective experiences can have profound impacts and may be more effective in changing the behavior of service dog users. If a service dog user feels they will be denied access or that there are more poorly trained service dogs in public, they may opt to avoid public places with their service dog. This ostensibly has an impact on the service dog user's independence and quality of life if doors are being shut, figuratively, before service dog teams even leave their homes. In fact, this has been described in scientific literature on service dogs.

Zier (2020) concludes that inconsistencies among current state and federal policies around service dogs create confusion and ultimately deter individuals with disabilities from receiving the full benefit of their service dog. Zier finds state and federal laws are contradictory as they relate to fraudulent service dogs and there is variable success with the enforcement of these laws – all of which contribute to inadequate management of poorly trained dogs in public and resultant negative psychological impacts on service dog users (Zier 2020).

It is prudent to examine the psychological effects of untrained service dogs in public places on those who rely on service dogs for their independence and access to the greater world. This also makes a case for increasing education for business owners, corporations, agencies managing public transportation and travel, and people with disabilities to reduce the impact of poorly trained service dogs on legitimate service dogs. With greater education about the role of trained service dogs, as well as the appropriate behavior required and the legal rights of both service dog users and business owners, the number of out-of-control dogs in public could be reduced. Bringing awareness to the important roles of service dogs into the forefront of the conversation would ideally help people understand the impact of poorly trained dogs on people with disabilities with legitimately trained service dogs.

As demonstrated in the provided data, service dog fraud has had a profound impact on numerous service dog teams, including increased skepticism around the legitimacy of service dogs and actual injury or career-ending behavioral changes in service dogs. While only a few respondents reported needing to retire a dog from its working role completely, dozens reported no longer feeling comfortable bringing their service dog in public, instead only using the dog in the home.

Fig. 7 shows an intriguing outcome relative to access denials and Canine Companions service dog teams. When analyzing results from the Canine Companions survey, we found that service dog teams from Canine Companions working with those with physical disability or PTSD experienced legitimacy concerns at 52.6%. Compared to service dog teams from organizations excluding Canine Companions, 92.4%

reported this issue. Further analysis is needed to determine potential factors that resulted in 40% fewer legitimacy issues for Canine Companions service dog teams, including organization name recognition, training standards, the influence of subjective recollections, and more.

Limitations

We recognize that there are limitations to our research that may impact the interpretation of the results of our data and analysis.

- Multiple surveys: As terminology can vary from state to state and country to country, it was necessary to have multiple surveys that reflected colloquialisms and terms for each region. Additionally, wording reflecting specific regions' laws were required to investigate areas of the public sector where service dogs are often located, like airplanes.
- Language: All four surveys were disseminated in written English only. Recognizing that there are dozens of ADI-accredited service dog programs in countries whose primary language is not English, it is possible that respondents who didn't feel comfortable with the English language were dissuaded by the language of the survey. In the future, consideration should be given to providing surveys in multiple languages.
- COVID-19: The presence of a global public health catastrophe occurring prior to and during the survey data collection period should not be discounted. Whether considering psychological impacts, physical impacts or financial effects, the many unknowns of this period in history likely influenced data self-reporting to some extent. This includes the sharp decrease in people going into public places, especially those with medical complications, as well as the impact the shelter-in-place period had on accurate recall of events.

Conclusion

Across three continents, people who rely on task-trained service dogs for independence appear to be encountering poorly trained service dogs and pets in places of public accommodation where pets are not permitted. 93.1% of surveyed service dog users report these encounters.

We previously found survey data showing that poorly trained service dogs and fraud were negatively impacting Canine Companions service dog teams. Here, we aimed to answer the question of whether the problem of poorly trained service dogs was impacting the larger service dog community.

This study presents evidence that service dog fraud and poorly trained service dogs pose a wide-spread and serious problem regardless of location and have a powerful negative impact on legitimate service dog teams.

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Appendix I – Definitions

Assistance dog: An umbrella term that covers all types of service dogs.

This term is more common internationally and was used in our surveys for respondents outside of North America. Interchangeable with “service dog” as an umbrella term.

Assistance Dogs International (ADI): a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place assistance dogs. Founded in 1986 from a group of seven small programs, ADI has become the leading authority in the assistance dog industry.

Facility dog: A dog trained in specific tasks to work alongside professionals in a healthcare, educational, criminal justice or rehabilitation setting to improve client outcomes. Facility dogs do not have the same rights to public places as service dogs but are permitted by agreement with the professional’s employer to serve as a therapeutic treatment modality.

Public accommodation: Generally, any place where members of the public are permitted to be, with few exceptions.

Service dog: Any dog trained in specific tasks to mitigate a disability.

Used as a general term for all types of trained dogs, including guide, hearing, medical alert and service for physical disability. (See assistance dog)

Also used in this publication to describe the category of trained dog that works with a person with a physical disability specifically.

Service dog fraud: When a person brings a dog in a place of public accommodation where pets are not permitted that is not trained in specific tasks to mitigate a disability.

This includes intentional misrepresentation of a dog as a service dog or non-malicious fraud where a pet owner brings a dog into public places without the intent to misrepresent the pet as a service dog. Can occur due to lack of education about the rights of service dogs vs. pets.