

Rapport Building in Dog-Assisted Interviews

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AIM

- Rapport building increases the likelihood that a witness will provide detailed, accurate information in a forensic interview (Bartels, 2011).
- Dog-assisted forensic interviewing is becoming increasingly common-practice.
- Researchers have yet to empirically examine whether rapport and comfort vary as a function of dog-assisted interviewing.

THE PRESENT STUDY

- **Research Question:** Does perceived interviewer and interviewee rapport and comfort vary as a function of the presence of a dog?
- **Hypotheses:** a) interviewees would report higher levels of rapport and comfort when the dog was present versus absent; b) interviewers would report higher levels of rapport and comfort when the dog was present versus absent; and c) interviewers would report higher ratings of perceived comfort and lower ratings of perceived reluctance among interviewees when the dog was present versus absent.
- **Participants:** 101 undergraduate students (76% women), $M_{\text{age}} = 19.44$ years ($SD = 2.61$)

METHOD

- Participants were randomly assigned to dog present ($n = 50$) or dog absent ($n = 51$) interview conditions
- Participants were interviewed about positive and negative autobiographical events
- Participants rated their rapport and comfort with the interviewer while discussing the events
- Interviewers rated their rapport and comfort with the participants during the interview
- Interviewers also rated participants' perceived comfort and reluctance during the interview

Table 1
Interviewee rapport with the interviewer as a function of dog condition

	Dog absent, M (SD)	Dog present, M (SD)
Rapport	5.27 (0.94)	5.48 (1.04)
Comfort	5.63 (1.34)	5.82 (1.45)

Table 2
Interviewer rapport with the interviewee as a function of dog condition

	Dog absent, M (SD)	Dog present, M (SD)
Rapport	5.50 (1.27)	5.90 (1.25)
Comfort	6.40 (0.70)	6.42 (0.91)
Perceived comfort	6.14 (1.13)	6.14 (1.25)
Perceived reluctance	5.36 (1.50)	5.64 (1.47)

RESULTS

- As expected, participants expressed higher mean ranks of rapport when the dog was present (53.89) versus absent (48.17), however, this difference did not obtain significance, $U = 1419.50$, $p = .30$. Participants also expressed higher mean ranks of comfort when the dog was present (54.16) versus absent (47.90), although this difference was not significant, $U = 1433.00$, $p = .26$. See Table 1.
- As hypothesized, interviewers expressed higher mean ranks of rapport when the dog was present (55.49) versus absent (45.51), although this difference was not significant, $U = 1499.50$, $p = .07$. Interviewers also expressed higher mean ranks of comfort when the dog was present (52.28) versus absent (48.72), however this difference did not obtain significance, $U = 1339.00$, $p = .49$. See Table 2.
- As expected, interviewers indicated higher mean ranks of perceived comfort of the interviewee when the dog was present (51.12) versus absent (49.88), however, this difference was not significant, $U = 1281.00$, $p = .82$. Contrary to expectations, interviewers expressed lower mean ranks of perceived reluctance among interviewees when the dog was present (53.41) versus absent (47.59), although this difference did not obtain significance, $U = 1395.60$, $p = .30$. See Table 2.

DISCUSSION

- Results provide novel evidence that dog-assisted interviewing bolsters rapport and comfort between the interviewer and witness.
- Dog-assisted interviewing may increase the likelihood of witnesses providing detailed, accurate accounts of traumatic experiences

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Abstract

Establishing rapport is an essential component of forensic interviewing. Rapport building increases the likelihood that a witness will provide detailed, accurate information in an interview. Dog-assisted forensic interviewing has become increasingly common with the assumption that the presence of a dog may bolster witness rapport and comfort while discussing emotional events. However, researchers have yet to empirically examine whether rapport and comfort vary as a function of dog-assisted interviewing. In the present study, undergraduate participants ($N = 101$) were randomly assigned to dog present or dog absent interview conditions. Participants were interviewed about positive and negative autobiographical events. Participants rated their level of rapport and comfort with the interviewer while discussing the autobiographical events. Interviewers also rated their level of rapport and comfort with the participant during the interview. Participants reported higher levels of rapport and comfort with the interviewer when the dog was present versus absent (see Table 1). Interviewers also expressed higher rates of rapport and comfort with the participant when the dog was present versus absent (see Table 2). Results provide novel evidence that dog-assisted interviewing bolsters rapport and comfort between the interviewer and witness.

Table 1*Interviewee rapport with the interviewer as a function of dog condition*

	Dog absent, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Dog present, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Rapport	5.27 (0.94)	5.48 (1.04)
Comfort	5.63 (1.34)	5.82 (1.45)

Table 2*Interviewer rapport with the interviewee as a function of dog condition*

	Dog absent, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Dog present, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Rapport with interviewee	5.50 (1.27)	5.90 (1.25)
Comfort with interviewee	6.40 (0.70)	6.42 (0.91)
Perceived comfort of interviewee	6.14 (1.13)	6.14 (1.25)
Perceived reluctance of interviewee	5.36 (1.50)	5.64 (1.47)