

# Perspectives of Veterans: Barriers and Facilitators Among PTSD Service Dog Handler Training

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## Background

- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is most prevalent among veterans in the U.S. The prevalence of lifetime PTSD among U.S. Veterans is 9.4% (Wisco et al., 2022).
- Service dogs assist in providing mobility and medical alert care to improve the well-being and health of their handlers. Internally, 19% of psychiatric assistance dogs for active-duty military members and veterans with PTSD serve the service dog partnership (Leighton et al., 2022).
- Psychiatric service dog training is an innovative human-animal bond intervention that stimulates obedience commands to assist veterans with PTSD. However, many veterans experience challenges in PTSD service dog handler training.
- The Donabedian's Model is an evaluating assessment framework to improve healthcare delivery (Puri & Tadi., 2023)

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to assess structure, process, and outcome components based on Donabedian's Model to:

- Understand diverse perspectives of veteran's service dog handler training process and experiences; and
- Explore the barriers and facilitators impacting the PTSD service dog handler training process and experience.

## Methodology

**Design & Sample:** Phenomenological Qualitative Study

- 42 veterans diagnosed with PTSD across 9 training organizations with greatest need of service dog assistance

### Procedures

- Semi-structured interviews given oral consent and approved by John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health Institutional Review Board (IRB)

### Inclusion Criteria

- ≥ 18 years old military member diagnosed with PTSD and enrolled in 1 of the 9 service dog training organizations

### Measures

- Structure, Process, and Outcome

### Data Analysis

- Iteratively created codebooks, emerging themes were sub-coded reflecting framework model using Atlas.ti

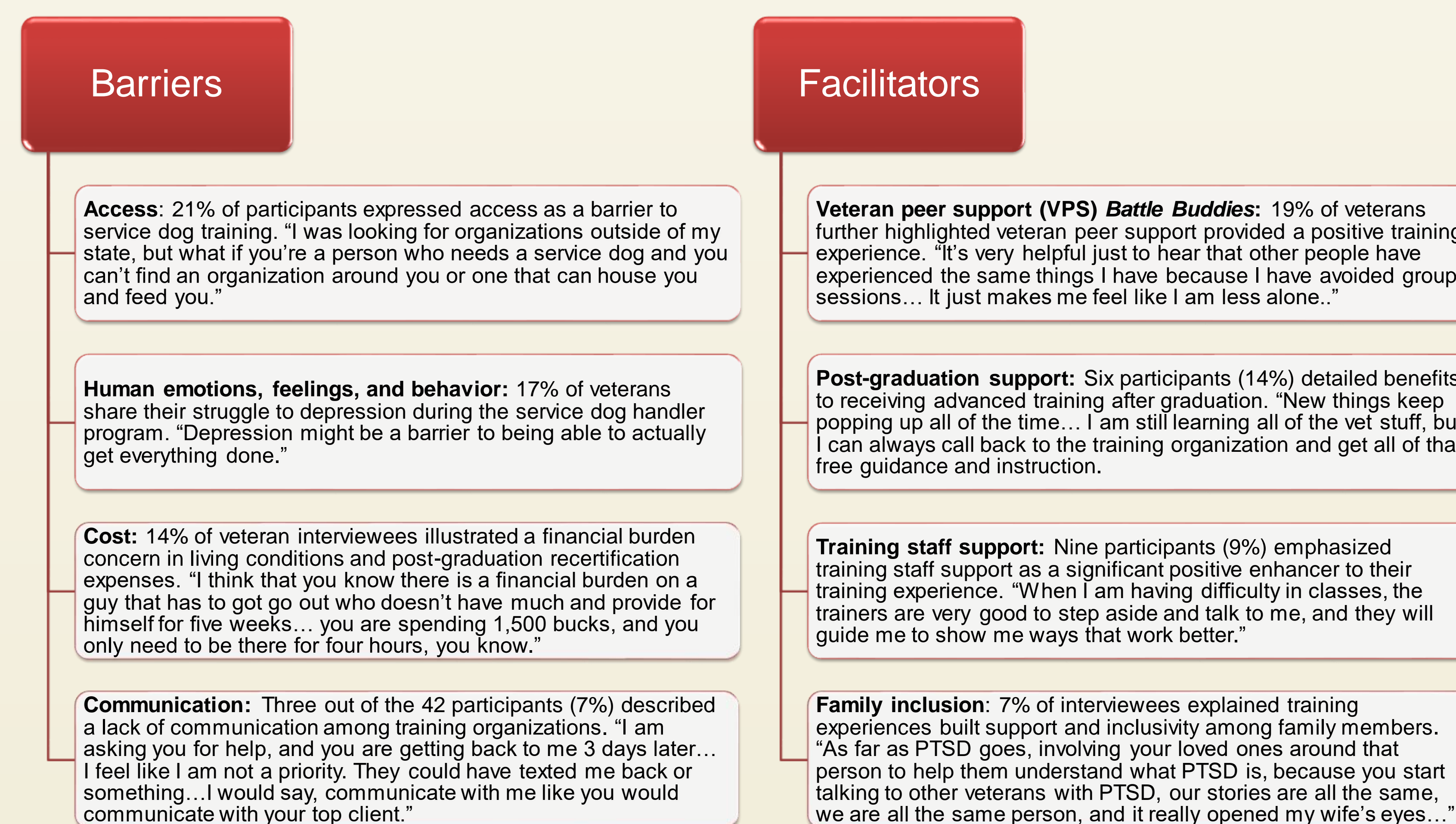
## Results

**Table 1. Characteristics of Veteran's**

Characteristics of Participants	
Characteristics	Group PTSD Veterans N = 42
Age, M (S.D.), y	42.4 (9.1)
Gender, n (%) Female	18 (42.9)
Race/Ethnicity, n (%)	
Asian	3 (7.1)
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1 (2.4)
Black or African American	2 (4.8)
Mexican or Latino	5 (11.9)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1 (2.4)
White or European American	29 (69.0)
Other	1 (2.4)
Mental Health Conditions, n (%)	
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	9 (21.4)
Military Sexual Trauma (MST)	9 (21.4)
Depression	32 (76.2)
Anxiety	36 (85.7)
Bipolar	2 (4.8)

**Thematic analysis findings indicated eight (8) major themes for barriers and facilitators related to PTSD service dog handler training.**

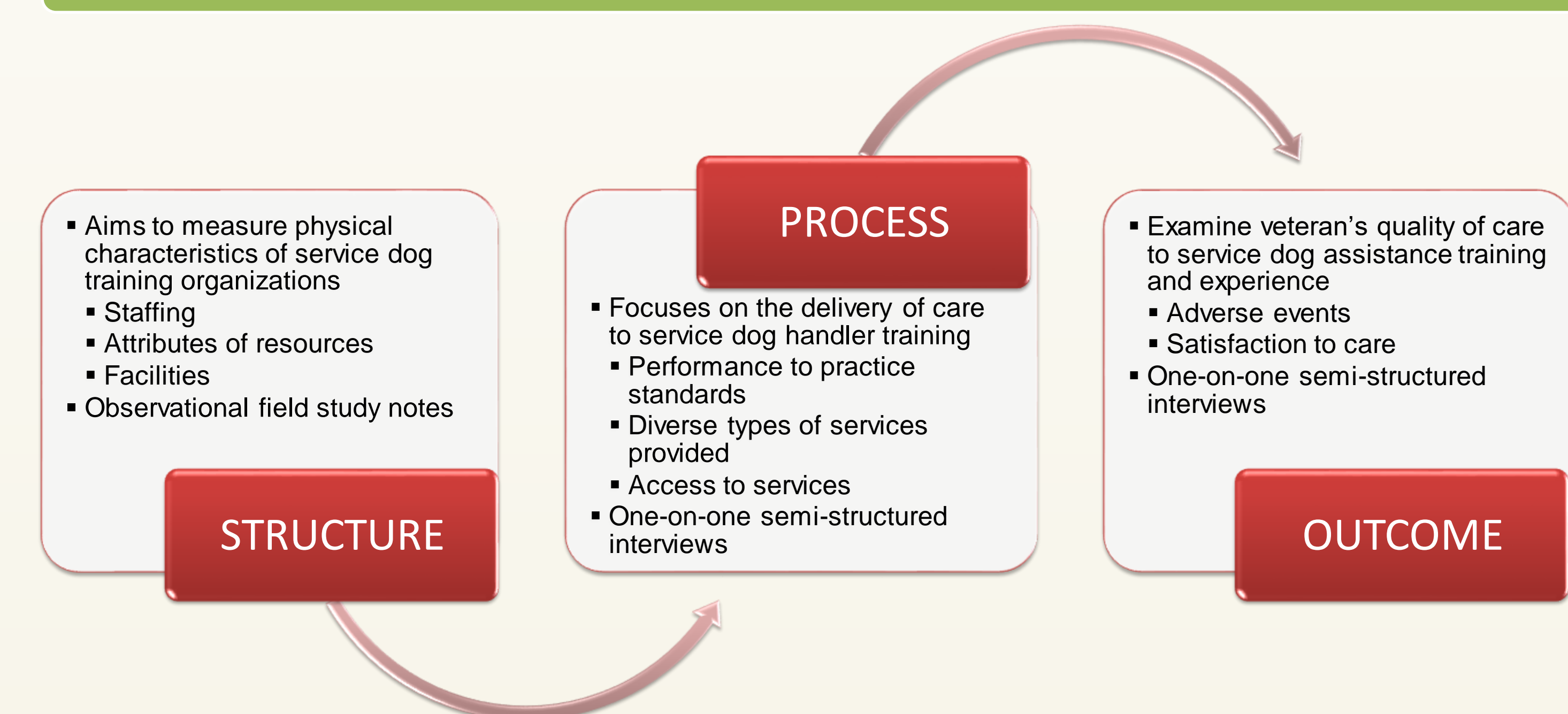
**Figure 1. Voices from Veterans: Barriers & Facilitator Themes**



## Theoretical Framework

Themes were guided by Donabedian's model constructs to evaluate and understand the experiences and perspectives of service dog handler training among veterans with PTSD.

**Figure 2. Donabedian's Model**



## Conclusion

- By introducing a participant-center approach, findings revealed barriers to access (21%) and facilitators to veterans' peer support (19%) significantly influenced veterans experiences and perspectives to service dog handler training.
- Inclusion criteria only considered veterans involved in one of the nine organizations and excluding other mental health disabilities to the enrollment of the study. Researcher induced bias may be involved, limiting generalizable findings.
- Donabedian's domains of structure, process, and outcome delivered insight in developing future measures towards considering the emotional and psychological well-being of veterans during service dog training. In the future, there is a need to develop service dog provider programs that meets the quality-of-care needs of veterans' journey to PTSD recovery.

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## References

- Scan QR code for references

