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An exploratory study of dog ownership history: Can owners be typified?

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Statement of the Problem: The human-dog interaction has a 16000-year history. Within a functional human-dog dyad both the human and the dog benefit from the relationship. Nevertheless, some dyads are dysfunctional, normally due to irresponsible behavior displayed by owners, such as allowing their dogs to roam in public spaces and/or denying them veterinary care, which can be a danger to the dog and society. The study of these dysfunctional dyads has received attention in recent years, specially within the context of dog aggression. However, these dysfunctional dyads are difficult to study since unmotivated owners are unlikely to volunteer personal information, so alternative methods are needed to better understand why human-dog dyads fail. This study analyses owners' history of dog health care to find patterns that could help clarify what is at the core of these troubled relationships.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A questionnaire was distributed throughout the Lisbon Area to animal hospitals, clinics, anti-rabies vaccination programs, and made available online for 8 months. Owners were asked forced questions regarding the existence of specific occurrences in their history with dog health care (figure 1). MCA and chi-square analysis were completed.

Findings: 1385 valid questionnaires were completed. MCA analysis revealed 3 clusters with associations between chronic illness and hospitalization ($\chi^2=122.131$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$), vehicular trauma and unspecified trauma ($\chi^2=127.310$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$) and caring for more dogs and having a dog bite another ($\chi^2=85.236$, $df=3$, $p<0.001$).

Conclusion & Significance: In this population, owners of dogs with chronic illness could represent function dyads since this was associated with hospitalization, while those who report trauma (vehicular or not) may indicate dysfunctional dyads, where the dog is not adequately controlled. In this study, through the use of a questionnaire focused on owners' history with dog health care, patterns were recognized which could signal dysfunctional dyads.

Biography

Rute Canejo-Teixeira is a PhD candidate with CIISA at the faculty of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Lisbon in Portugal. After first completing a BScH in Biology and a BEd at Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada, she returned to her native Portugal to pursue her DVM. Ruth completed her MIVM with the study of *Helicobacter* spp. in the dog and cat, having identified *H. pylori* in a cat (Irish Veterinary Journal 2014 67(1) 4). Before securing a scholarship through the FCT, Rute was a member of the clinical staff at the Veterinary Teaching.

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