

Owner perceptions of problem behaviours in dogs aged 6 months

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Objectives

To investigate early recognition of potentially problematic canine behaviours by UK and Republic of Ireland dog owners.

Methods

Puppy owners taking part in a longitudinal study relating to canine health and behaviour completed online questionnaires detailing their dogs' responses to varied situations and experiences, and any canine behaviour(s) they found a problem.

Results

In the questionnaire for 6-month old dogs, owners reported problem behaviours in 199/636 (31.3%) dogs. Of the 199 dogs, help had only been sought for 78 (39.2%); from dog trainers (57/199;28.6%), behaviourists (22/199;11.1%) and/or vets (9/199;4.5%).

Behaviours most commonly reported as problems were pulling on lead (26/199;13.1%), jumping up at people (22/199;11.1%), mouthing people (22/199;11.1%), and separation-related behaviour (SRB) (unwanted/undesirable behaviour in owner absence) (17/199;8.5%). Elsewhere in the 6-month questionnaire, data were available as to whether 'jumping up at people' and SRB were displayed. Despite not noting the behaviour as 'a problem', a further 128/614 (20.8%) of dogs were reported to have jumped up at people and 345/619 (55.7%) had shown SRB (≥ 2 signs were considered an accurate indication of SRB). Owners were more likely to have recorded evidence of SRB than 'jumping up at people' despite not having reported these issues to be a problem, (OR=4.78, 95%CI 3.72-6.15, $P<0.001$).

Implications

This study highlights behaviour(s) that owners of 6-month old dogs find problematic, thus enabling development of specific training plans to address these problems. Future work will include analysis of risk factors for owner-reporting of specific canine behaviours and assess escalation/resolution of specific behaviours in relation to perception of a problem and help sought.

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