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Title: Choosing My Dog: understanding the sourcing of dogs using a large-scale study into acquisition behaviours

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Introduction: The factors influencing why and how people decide to get a dog are not well understood. There is an urgent need to understand this process so that strategies can be developed to promote responsible acquisition behaviours. The 'Choosing My Dog' project aims to understand how potential owners identify their preferred source from which to acquire a dog, and the motivations and influences affecting their choices.

Methodology: This project used a mixed methods research design. An online survey of current (n=8,262) and potential (n=2,833) dog owners collected predominantly quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a total of 28 current and potential owners. Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS (v.26) and R (v.3.5.1). Transcribed interviews were coded in NVivo (v.12) utilising inductive thematic analysis.

Main results/findings: Of the current owners surveyed, the most commonly reported sources for acquiring a dog were rehoming centres (39%, 95% CI [38%, 40%]) and dog breeders (37%, 95% CI [36%, 39%]). However, this contrasted with where the same owners had reported considering acquiring a dog from: 71% (95% CI [70%, 72%]) considered rehoming centres and 45% (95% CI [44%, 46%]) considered breeders. Interviews with current and potential owners suggest the reasons for this discrepancy include: potential owners' perceptions about whether rehoming centres might judge them unsuitable, e.g. due to working full time or having children; the lack of 'suitable' dogs within rehoming centres; and the time spent waiting for a 'suitable' dog.

Principle conclusions and implications for field: Differences between considered and utilised source of dog acquisition suggest real and perceived barriers to adoption faced by potential dog owners. Findings will inform the design of interventions to encourage responsible dog selection and purchase decisions. The study also highlights the need for education around dog ownership, in particular, about the rehoming process.