



Short Communication

The profiles of cat and dog tutors participating in a pet neutering campaign

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ABSTRACT

The profiles of dog and cat tutors participating in a pet neutering campaign in Teresina (Piauí, Brazil) were evaluated using questionnaire surveys. The majority of participants were observed to be people with higher levels of educational attainment who mainly decided to neuter their animals to avoid unwanted pets, prevent access to the street, and prevent disease. There was no early neutering, which is desirable for disease prevention. The majority of participants were female, with more cats than dogs represented. It was concluded that the level of education of owners is a determinant in the health and welfare of their pets, demonstrating the need for educational campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

The responsible ownership of pets is a discussion around the world with regards to protecting animals, as well as protecting the health and well-being of the humans by regulating tutors, and making them responsible when raising their pets. Some authors have suggested that responsible ownership "is to take care of the physical, psychological and environmental health of the animal, to watch over its welfare, to reduce the potential for aggression and to prevent risks that this can bring to health both individually and collectively" (WESTGARTH et al., 2010; DOWNES et al., 2011).

In the absence of legislation, a study carried out in 2015 proposed a set of necessary measures that comprise and regulate responsible ownership. One of the main behaviors in this set of measures for responsible

ownership is the neutering of animals for population control (DOMINGUES et al., 2015).

However, tutors are not always willing to neuter their animals, and neutered animals are a minority, both in highly developed and low-developing communities (CARVALHO et al., 2015).

This is one of the factors contributing to the increase in the abandonment of pets, a public health problem present in all Brazilian territories. Knowing the profile of tutors of dogs and cats can help with the implementation of public measures that can minimize such a situation. In view of the above, this work had the objective of evaluating the profiles of tutors of dogs and cats participating in a neutering campaign in Teresina (PI).

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MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (Brazil Platform Brazil) with the number of advice 2,100,103 of the Federal University of Piauí. Questionnaires were answered by 200 owners of neutered animals participating in the neutering campaign for the program called "Responsible Ownership of Domestic Animals in Teresina (PI) and Region." Questions included topics such as education, the purpose of neutering animals, the number of pets owned, and thoughts about the spreading of the program into the wider community. The statistical analysis of the collected data was performed in a descriptive way by determining the observed percentage frequencies of the categories of the variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the data were obtained in a neutering campaign, it was clear that the majority of tutors interviewed had a higher level of education (46.3%). This was probably because the neutering campaign was carried out in a remote location (university campus), preventing tutors without their own transportation from having easy access. Thus, it is likely that most tutors have their own transport, which is a characteristic of middle-class people and higher social classes (COSTA FILHO et al., 2016).

The income of people with higher levels of education is generally more than that of people with lower education levels. Thus, it can be deduced that people with more schooling and income are better informed about animal husbandry, and take better care of their pets (SILVA et al., 2014), exercising responsible ownership. This fact was recorded in another research paper, affirming that adoption of responsible ownership increases with the level of education of the head of the household (DOMINGUES et al., 2015).

The main reasons reported for neutering pets were to avoid unwanted puppies (37%), to avoid access to the street (23.5%), and to prevent the transmission of diseases (21%). In another study, the main reason for neutering pets was contraception (LANGONI et al., 2011). However, demand for the surgical method of neutering is still slow, since most of the animals are already in the active reproductive phase. Early neutering (before the first estrus) has many advantages (DIÓGENES et al., 2015), the main one being the prevention of mammary tumors, a frequent disease in bitches (MAGALHÃES et al., 2016).

Regarding the population of neutered animals, the feline species (137/200; 68.5%) was more prevalent than the canine species (31.7%), but in both cases, bitches and queens made up the majority (56.9% and 53.2%, respectively). Feline neutering was higher than canine,

probably because cats have a reproductive behavior that bothers people, and, moreover, it is more difficult to find cats a new home. In general, dogs are preferred to cats (CATAPAN et al., 2015). It can be noticed that the preference to neuter more females than males is due to the fact that males do not return home with undesirable offspring (QUESSADA et al., 2014).

The most frequent age group was 2 to 4 years for dogs (74/200, 37%) and 1 to 2 years for the cats (62/200, 31.3%). Therefore, the majority of neutered animals in the program were young. In a study about deaths in Teresina, the most represented age group were young animals (BATISTA et al., 2016). Mortality of young animals is probably high in Teresina with high replacement and low presence of older animals in veterinary services.

The program was publicized through standard means of communication (TV, radio, newspaper, posters), but propagation was greater through owners already registered and associated with the institution of animal protection. Legislation on the responsible ownership of pets is still precarious despite some state and municipal initiatives. The lack of offerings of methods of surgical neutering by the public authority, and lack of education on responsible ownership, coupled with a lack of family and financial planning, result in behavior that leads to the abandonment of pets and an increase in the population of animals on the streets (FERREIRA; FERREIRA, 2016).

Therefore, there is an urgency for national regulation on responsible ownership of animals, a tool that can contribute to the issues of individual, institutional, and collective responsibility. The effective implementation of legislation on responsible ownership of animals would prevent abandonment, maltreatment, and other actions that endanger the health of animals. In addition, population control of dogs and cats would make it possible to reduce some zoonoses, which use domestic animals as hosts, since uncontrolled populations would increase the risk of the transmission of these diseases in urban cycles (KAY et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The level of education of owners is a determining factor in achieving satisfactory levels of health and animal welfare. This should alert public managers to invest in educational campaigns aimed at raising awareness among the general population about the importance of responsible ownership and population control of animals, such as disease prevention, and animal health promotion, population, and the environment (one health).

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