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Independent Study 490A: Reasons for Giving Up a Dog at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa

A.S. Leaflet R2510

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Summary and Implications

It is important that when an owner decides to relinquish their canine that the information provided on the forms are accurate and not conflicting in detail.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were to (1) identify the top three issues for why a canine is relinquished, (2) report on the percentage of canines relinquished due to the recession and, (3) identify the percentage of canines relinquished for behavioral related issues at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa.

The top three issues for owner relinquishment for canines at the ARL were 1) too many animals (13.4 %), 2) moving (12.1 %) and 3) found-cannot keep (9.0 %) respectively. Owner relinquishment due to “cannot afford” for 2008 on average was 8.3 %. However, the second half of the year (July to December) had a much higher average percentage of relinquishments per month (10.7 %) than the first half of the year (January to June; 6%). Overall, owner relinquishment due to “cannot afford” for 2008 was 8.3 %. Of the 1,947 canine relinquishment cases that were included in this retrospective study, 96 % of those dogs were relinquished with “non-behavior related relinquishments” and 4 % were “behavior related relinquishments.” Therefore in conclusion, the top three issues given by the owners for why a canine was relinquished at the ARL of Iowa was not behaviorally related. The 2008 recession did seem to affect the number of canine relinquishments with more dogs entering the ARL of Iowa in the second half of 2008 with “cannot afford” noted by their owners as the main reason.

Introduction

It is important that when an owner decides to relinquish their canine that the information provided on the forms are accurate and are not conflicting in detail. Factors that are noted for relinquishing a canine can be either singular or multi factorial in nature. Relinquishment is associated with physical and behavioral qualities of the dog, as well as characteristics, knowledge, experience, and expectations of the owners (New et al., 2000). A previous survey conducted by Mondelli et al. (2004) reported that the top three reasons as to why a dog was relinquished were (1) **behavioral problems** (defined as disobedience, problems with other pets, hyperactivity, destructive/soils house, escapes, and

excessive vocalization), (2) **management problems** (defined as personal or family reasons, no time for pets, small house, family member- pet conflict, animal medical issues, and no apparent owner) and (3) **dog aggressiveness** (defined as aggression towards people and other animals).

Consequently, with little informative detail from the owner who is relinquishing the canine, canine adopters are given minimal information from the shelter about their adoptee and potential problems between human, canine and other animals remain unknown. Furthermore, with adult canines, adopters were not present when the canine was a puppy, so the adopters have no sentimental memories of “raising” the canine. Canine owners who report having weaker attachments for their pets are consistently less satisfied with most aspects of their canines behavior compared with those who report stronger attachments (past experience with the canine as a juvenile; Serpell, 1996). Therefore, the objectives of this study were to (1) identify the top three issues for why a canine is relinquished, (2) report on the percentage of canines relinquished due to the recession and, (3) identify the percentage of canines relinquished for behavioral related issues at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa.

Materials and Methods

Data collection: A retrospective survey was completed using 1,947 records collected at the Animal Rescue League (ARL) of Iowa for canines that were owner relinquished over 2008. A total of 48 categories for canine relinquishment are on the ARL form. Of these 48 categories, six were canine behavioral related; (1) aggression towards other animals; (2) aggression towards people, (3) behavioral issues, (4) chases animals (5) does not “like” other pets and (6) temperament (Table 1). For the interest of this retrospective study, results will be descriptively presented.

Table 1. Definitions for the six behavioral categories on the Animal Rescue League of Iowa’s canine relinquishment form.

Behavioral categories	Definition*
Aggression towards other animals	Bites/attacks dogs, cats, or other small animals
Aggression towards people	Bites/threatens people
Behavioral issues	Catch all-destructive, pulls on leash, jumps up
Chases animals	Chases livestock/cats
Does not “like” other pets	Fight over food, bones
Temperament	Other

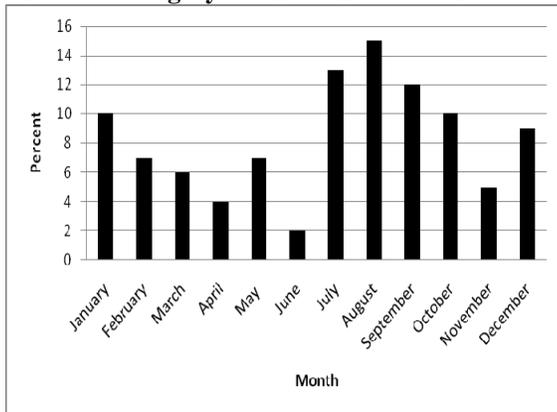
*Definitions provide by Mrs. P. Sunday Dog Behavior Counselor

Results and Discussion

Identify the top three issues for why a canine is relinquished: the top three issues for owner relinquishment for canines at the ARL of Iowa were 1) too many animals (13.4 %), 2) moving (12.1 %) and 3) found-cannot keep (9.0 %) respectively.

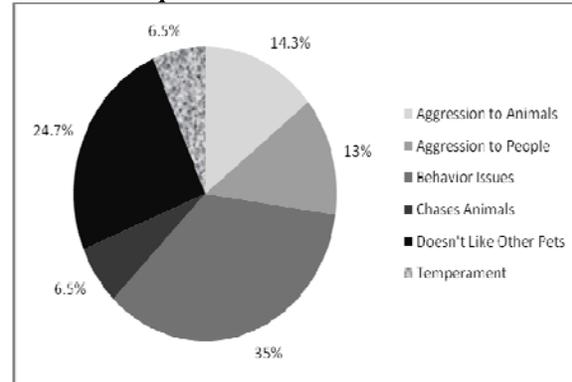
Report on the percentage of canines relinquished due to the recession: the number of owner relinquishments for canines in respect to “cannot afford” altered over 2008. August had the highest (15 %) percentage of relinquishments and the lowest month was June (2 %; Figure 1). The second half of the year (July to December) had a much higher average percentage of relinquishments per month (average; 10.7 %) than the first half of the year (January to June; average 6%). Overall, owner relinquishment due to “cannot afford” for 2008 was 8.3 %.

Figure 1. Percentage of dogs per month relinquished under the category “cannot afford” for 2008.



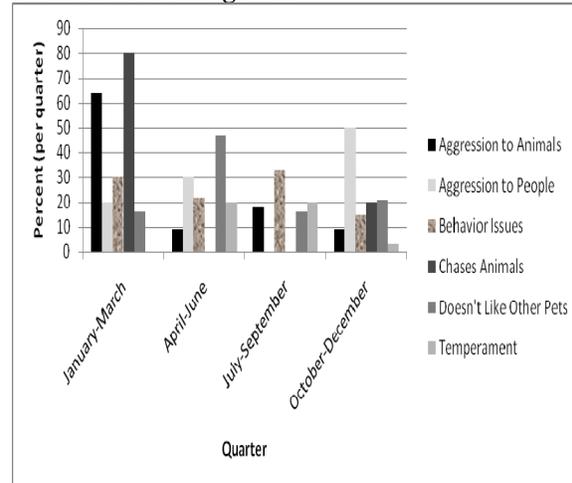
Identify the percentage of canines relinquished for behavioral related issues at the Animal Rescue League of Iowa: of the 1,947 cases that were included in this retrospective study, 96 % of those dogs were relinquished with “non-behavior related relinquishments” and 4 % were “behavior related relinquishments.” When dissecting the “behavioral related relinquishments”, the majority were classified as “behavior issues” with the next largest category being “doesn’t like other pets”; Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of dogs included in the behavior related relinquishment.



In regards to the six behavior categories previously defined, there was no clear pattern for why a dog was relinquished over each quarter of 2008 (Figure 3). Over the April to June period, the main reason for behavioral relinquishment was “doesn’t like other pets” but in July to Spetemeber this changed to “behavior issues.”

Figure 3. Percentage of dogs per quarter for 2008 in the six behavioral categories.



Therefore in conclusion, the top three issues given by the owners for why a canine was relinquished at the ARL of Iowa was not behaviorally related. The 2008 recession did seem to affect the number of canine relinquishments, with more dogs entering the ARL of Iowa in the second half of 2008 with “cannot afford” noted by their owners as the main reason.

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