Zoophilologica. Polish Journal of Animal Studies
Special issue/2023 *Veterinary Social Work*, pp. 1–32
ISSN 2451-3849
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31261/ZOOPHILOLOGICA.2023.S.05

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"A Part of Me." The Value of Dogs to Homeless Owners and the Implications for Dog Welfare

«Часть меня». Значимость собак для бездомных владельцев и последствия для их оптимальных условий содержания

Абстракт

Население бездомных в Великобритании растет. Владение собаками среди бездомных людей не является чем-то необычным, но положительные и отрицательные последствия этого общения как для людей, так и для животных остаются неизвестными. Авторы статьи провели частично структурированные интервью с бездомными владельцами собак, чтобы выяснить, как собака повлияла на их жизнь и как они удовлетворяют потребности собак в обеспечении их оптимальных условий содержания. Двадцать один бездомный владелец собак был выбран благотворительной организацией, занимающейся благополучием собак и сотрудничающей с бездомными и их собаками. Интервью были

"A Part of Me." The Value of Dogs to Homeless Owners and the Implications for Dog Welfare

Abstract

The UK homeless population is increasing. Companion animal ownership amongst homeless people is not uncommon, but the positive and negative consequences of this association for both humans and animals are unknown. We conducted semi-structured interviews with homeless dog owners covering how their dog impacted them, and how they met the dog's welfare needs. Twenty-one homeless dog owners were recruited via a dog welfare charity that works with homeless people and their dogs. The interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically. Dogs were reported to provide similar benefits to dogs owned in households, but additionally owner believed they helped facilitate routine, assisted them through mental health issues and provid-

расшифрованы и проанализированы по тематике. Отмечено, что собаки бездомных приносят такую же пользу, как и собаки в домашних хозяйствах, но владельцы также считали, что животные-компаньоны помогают в установлении повседневного распорядка жизни, помогают с проблемами психического здоровья и обеспечивают постоянную эмоциональную поддержку. Из-за своей собаки владельцы отметили трудности с доступом к долговременному и краткосрочному жилью, а также к услугам, таким как магазины, и, в общем, они доверяли уход за собакой только в случаях крайней необходимости. Все собаки получали необходимую ветеринарную помощь, проходили лечение от паразитов и получали соответствующий корм. Главной заботой, выраженной владельцами, было обеспечение собаке достаточно теплого и просторного места для сна, но авторы статьи предполагают, что также важен доступ к безопасному месту, чтобы избежать причин для страха. Во время интервью владельцы обращались к собаке, чтобы облегчить обсуждение о себе, что позволило многим рассказать о трудностях в прошлом и потенциальном будущем. Результаты исследований могут быть использованы, чтобы показать, как благотворительные организации для бездомных могут наилучшим образом помочь владельцам собак в будущем.

Ключевые слова: бездомность, психическое здоровье, отношения с владельцами собак, социальная защита

ed continuous emotional support. Owners noted difficulties accessing long- and short-term accommodation, and services, such as shops, due to their dog, and generally only entrusted other individuals to look after their dog in urgent cases. All the dogs were reported to receive veterinary care as needed, were treated against parasites, and fed adequately. The main concern expressed by owners was providing somewhere adequately warm and large for their dog to sleep, but we suggest access to a safe place to avoid frightening stimuli may also be important. During the interviews owners used the dog to facilitate discussion about themselves, allowing many to open-up about the difficulties of their past, and potential future. Our findings can be used to help direct how homeless charities can best help dog owners in the future.

Keywords: homelessness, mental health, dog-owner relationships, welfare

Introduction

In the UK, the population of people who do not have a home (hereafter homeless people) is growing.[1] Companion animal ownership amongst homeless people is not uncommon. Dogs, and less commonly cats, live their lives alongside their owner,

[1] "About homelessness," Crisis, accessed February 25, 2022, https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/about-homelessness/.

experiencing the same conditions and facing similar challenges. With the growing population of homeless people, there is a corresponding increase in the number of companion animals, predominantly dogs, being owned by homeless owners.[2]

There have been limited studies looking at the costs and benefits of being homeless for the dog-owner relationship, but few specifically in the UK. Most studies exploring human-companion animal relationships, and companion animal welfare focus entirely on home-owned dogs.[3] Owners of home-owned dogs may benefit from dog ownership both physically and emotionally, through increased exercise time and a reduction in health problems.[4] Dog ownership has been noted to help the homeless in a similar way.[5]

Under UK law, owners and keepers have a duty of care to their animals and must meet their five welfare needs as outlined in the Animal Welfare Act.[6] Concerns have been voiced regarding whether the welfare needs of animals can be truly met by an owner when living on the streets.[7] However, whether humans can ever fully meet the needs of a dog in a domestic setting has also been questioned.[8] It is unknown whether dogs owned by homeless people experience the same challenges as housed dogs, such as obesity[9] or whether other issues are more pertinent to this facet of the UK canine population.

Focusing on a population in contact with homeless charities, this study used structured interviews to investigate the costs and benefits of a homeless living for both the owner and the dog, and to explore each of the five welfare needs for dogs living with a homeless owner.

[2] "Welcome to Streetvet," StreetVet, https://www.streetvet.co.uk.

[3] Lynette Hart and Mariko Yamamoto, "Dogs as Helping Partners and Companions for Humans," in *The Domestic Dog. Its Evolution, Behaviour and Interactions with People*, ed. James Serpell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 247–270.

[4] Hart and Yamamoto, "Dogs as Helping Partners," 247–270.

[5] Heidi Taylor, Pauline Williams, and David Gray, "Homelessness and Dog Ownership: An Investigation Into Animal Empathy, Attachment, Crime, Drug Use, Health and Public Perception," *Anthrozoös* 17, no. 4 (2004): 353–368, https://doi.org/10.2752/089279304785643230.

[6] "Animal Welfare Act 2006, Chapter 45," DEFRA, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/45/pdfs/ukpga_20060045_en.pdf.

[7] Leslie Irvine, Kristina N. Kahl, and Jesse M. Smith, "Confrontations and Donations: Encounters Between Homeless Pet Owners and the Public," *The Sociological Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (2012): 25–43, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2011.01224.x; Louise Scanlon, Pru Hobson-West, Kate Cobb, Anne McBride, and Jenny Stavisky, "Homeless People and Their Dogs: Exploring the Nature and Impact of the Human–Companion Animal Bond," Anthrozoös 34, no. 1 (2021): 77–92, https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2021.1878683.

[8] Nicola Rooney and James Bradshaw, "Canine Welfare Science: An Antidote to Sentiment and Myth," in *Domestic Dog Cognition and Behaviour: The Scientific Study of Canis familiaris*, ed. Alexandra Horowitz (Berlin: Springer Verlag Publishing, 2014), 241–274.

[9] "PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016," PDSA, accessed January 21, 2017, https://www.pdsa.org.uk/media/2628/pdsa-paw-report-2016-view-online.pdf.

Materials and Methods

The study was approved by the University of Bristol Faculty of Health Sciences Faculty Research Ethics Committee (ID 43941), in December 2016.

Recruitment of Participants

We approached Dogs Trust, UK charity who support all dog owners but who also work specifically with homeless dog owners,[10] and they provided contact details for dog-friendly homelessness charities (day centres to accommodation). The authors contacted sixteen charities, eight of which offered to help recruit dog owners. All charities were located in South West England. To be considered a homeless dog owner for the study, the owner did not actively have a sheltering accommodation they were linked to for any length of period, hence the term "living on the streets" and had to have the dog present with them for any length of time during this. The dog did not have to be present during the interview (some premises would not allow them) or currently alive, for the owner to take part in the study. Flyers were left at the charities' reception desks, and placed on notice boards, advertising specific dates and times when the researcher would be on site. In addition, any individuals with dogs were asked by staff if they would like to participate.

Owners were informed via the posters/fliers/members of staff that their participation would be rewarded with a "goodie bag" for their dog. A small monetary voucher (£3) was also given on the completion of the interview; however, this was not advertised during recruitment. All recruited owners were asked to complete a consent form, and all agreed to being audio recorded to reduce the need for the researcher (CB) to write during the interview, which could limit participants freedom of speech.[11] Owners were informed that the aim of the study was to understand peoples' relationship with their dog while homeless, and that the charities would receive only generalised information from the study—participant's responses would be anonymised and any information which could lead to the identification of individuals removed from reports.

[10] "Hope Project: Supporting Dog Owners Experiencing Homelessness or in Housing Crisis," Dogs Trust, accessed February 25, 2022, https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-freedom-project/hope-project.

[11] Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (London: Teachers College Press, 1998).

Study Participants

Twenty-four owners volunteered, but three dropped out before interviewing took place due to trauma after losing their pet, no longer accessing the charity or being unable to attend when the researcher (CB) present. In addition, eight managers and staff, one representing each of the charities were also informally interviewed to provide contextual information.

The Interview Process

Interviews were conducted face-to-face (n=21), typically at the premises of the charities where participants had been recruited. These premises ranged from day centres to homeless support-type lodgings that dogs could be present in. Informal observations were made of the facilities and any provisions that were in place to help cater for the dogs owned by their homeless clients, and any information visible to raise awareness of places from which help with dogs could be sourced.

The interview consisted of sixty-four questions, the majority of which were open ended to elicit richer detail in participant responses. The questions covered a range of topics, including the dog's general wellbeing and how their welfare needs were met while homeless. The interviews lasted between ten and fourty-six minutes, with a mean duration of twenty-three minutes.

Data Analysis

The recordings were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer (CB) and the resulting transcripts were analysed by thematic analysis allowing important relationships within the data to be noted and highlighted.[12] Key themes were identified by the interviewer in consultation with the co-authors.

[12] Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2006): 77–101, https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa.

Results and Discussion

Twenty-one dog owners who were either currently homeless or who had owned a dog while they were previously homeless were recruited for the study from across the Southwest of the UK (Table 1).

Table 1.
Demographics of participants and dogs

		Number of participants
Area	Cardiff	3
	Somerset	5
	Bristol	4
	Bath	5
	Exeter	4
Sex	Male	16
	Female	5
Housing status	Currently homeless	10
	Currently homeless but dog no longer with them	2
	Previously homeless	9

Many of the dogs in the study had been owned by the current owner since a puppy (9/21), or juvenile (4/21) and were acquired prior to the owner becoming homeless (13/21). Most dogs that were acquired after their owner became homeless were described as being "rescued"—from "friends not having time" or the animal being beaten in their previous home, or simply found on the street.

Participants noted that one of the main reasons for owning a dog was that they "could do with the company," regardless of whether the dog was acquired before or after they became homeless. The main reasons owners stated for acquiring a dog

(regardless of their housing situation at the time) were for companionship (7/21), just wanting a dog (5/21), saving the animal (4/21), to help with mental/ill health (3/21), a friend not having time and the dog being given to the owner (2/21). Regardless of when or why acquired, there was a general sense that the dog had had a greater impact on the owner's life than has been described in the homed owned population.[13]

The interviews shared common themes, regardless of whether owners were talking about their current or a previous dog. There were four main themes that emerged for owners: benefits for the mental health of the owner, the protectiveness of owners towards their dog, the challenges of having a dog and the dog's role in their lives. It is important to note that participation in this study was voluntary and hence it is possible that the respondents represent a skewed proportion of the population. Some issues could differ or be more pronounced in the population as a whole, particularly as participants were solely recruited through dog friendly charities.

Mental Health Benefits for the Owner

Many owners mentioned benefits of dog ownership for their mental health. Some owners acquired their dog principally for this reason, stating "[I was] on a mental breakdown." Owners noted that their day would be much more difficult to cope with without their dog, using language like "depressed," or stating that they would be "be lost [without him]," "I would have been out on my own," and even that they "probably wouldn't be alive, would be so depressed." Some participants were more explicit about the void their dog had filled; "[without her I'd] be lonelier, she's family, I haven't got family, they don't talk to me. She's the only family I got."

During the interview, when asked about their dog, owners would often speak about themselves too. Typically, the dog was discussed first, but the owners would slip in information about themselves, potentially to make sure the researcher got the whole story. This usually related to the situation that the owner and dog were both in, but more detailed information was generally given than was needed to portray the dog's circumstances alone. Mentioning the dog allowed the participants to open up, perhaps because they could hide behind the dog figuratively.

[13] Carri Westgarth, Robert M. Christley, Garry Marvin, and Elizabeth Perkins, "I Walk My Dog Because It Makes Me Happy: A Qualitative Study to Understand Why Dogs Motivate Walking and Improved Health," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14 (2017): 936.

Dogs are known to facilitate improved mental health,[14] and this effect has been reported for homeless dog owners in the USA.[15] Previous studies have noted benefits to individuals who are around dogs, even if they have limited interactions with them, including promoting healthy development, cultivating reciprocal empathy[16] and increased levels of social interaction,[17] to the owner and potentially more widely. The extent to which the dog provides emotional and mental support in the homeless population has not been examined in depth but has been identified as an important role in other studies.[18]

Throughout the interviews, owners talked about themselves through the dog, recounting stories that happened with the dog to expand on their own life histories. Again, mentioning that removing animals from owners could lead to unhappiness. One owner within the study was persuaded to give up their dog by a charity manager. He notes "[my] second Christmas without him nearly killed me. I regret giving up my dog. Miss him so much." Charities, and councils should be aware of how individuals feel when they are asked to give up their dog in order to access services and accommodation.[19] At a more personal level, dogs may become critical confidantes for their owners, especially if they have few friends or individuals that they trust. Interviews suggest that the presence of the dog can provide an outlet for their thoughts and emotions.

Owners noted that having the dog increased their interaction with the public, commenting that people were a "lot calmer," "cautious of their approach," "[they] don't shout towards me." The dog seemed to make the interviewees more visible, not only to the public but also for some, to their family "got grandchildren and they love him to bits. It's not where grandad, it's where the dog?!?!?" Owners noted that often people knew the dog's name and not theirs. The dog acted as an ice breaker, as identified by Westgarth et al.[20] for home-owned dogs, as a "social lubricant"[21] and

[14] Taylor, Williams and Gray, "Homelessness and Dog Ownership," 353–368.

[15] Leslie Irvine, *My Dog Always Eats First: Homeless People and Their Animals* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2013).

[16] Rita Thomas and Jonathan Matusitz, "Pet Therapy in Correctional Institutions: A Perspective From Relational-Cultural Theory," *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work* 13, no. 2 (2015): 1–8, https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2015.1029840.

[17] Karen Thodberg, Lisbeth U. Sørensen, Poul Videbech, Pia H. Pulsen, Birthe Houbak, Vibeke Damgaard, Ingrid Keseler, David Edwards, and Janne W. Christensen, "Behavioural Responses of Nursing Home Residents to Visits From a Person with a Dog, a Robot Seal or a Toy Cat," *Anthrozoös* 29, no. 1 (2016): 107–121, https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2015.1089011.

[18] Scanlon, Hobson-West, Cobb, McBride, and Stavisky, "Homeless People and Their Dogs," 77–92.

[19] Scanlon, Hobson-West, Cobb, McBride, and Stavisky, "Homeless People and Their Dogs," 77–92.

[20] Westgarth, Christley, Marvin, and Perkins, "I Walk My Dog," 936.

[21] Wendy J. Moody, Robert K. Maps, and Suzanne O'Rourke, "Attitudes of Paediatric Medical Ward Staff to a Dog Visitation Programme," *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 11, no. 4 (2002): 537–544, https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2702.2002.00618.x.

a legitimate subject of sociological enquiry.[22] The responsibilities of dog ownership also had an impact on owner behaviour.[23] One owner noted that the dog forced her to go out (move from where she was sleeping rough). As she was scared of going out, having the dog gave her a reason to do so and therefore facilitated some routine. Another owner mentioned that feeding the dog reminded him to eat himself, again promoting routine.

Protectiveness of Owners Towards Their Dog

Another common theme raised by dog owners was their perception that they needed to protect their dogs from potential threats, even in seemingly safe locations. Owners were wary of taking dog food offered by members of the public while they were on the street, and even wary of accepting dog food from the researcher. Participants stated that they may give some or all their donated dog food to rescue charities due to fears that the food may be poisoned, as they had heard stories of this occurring. As a thank you, the researcher offered a variety of items to owners, including wet or dry dog food. Some owners would select the wet food as it was still in its original packaging, as the other was in transparent bags (for easy carrying from a 15kg bag), and some would take none. Some owners also said that they would buy their own dog food even when they had plenty of donations to make up their dog's diet. A mistrust of people may have been the main driving factor, but factors such as wanting consistency in the dog's diet may have also contributed, although these were not explicitly discussed. Some owners wished to provide for their own dog themselves, and this was a way of making such a provision. Payne et al.[24] argued that a bond is formed by the provision of food, and maybe some owners felt this.

The protective attitude may reflect the owners' emotional dependence on the dog. Many referred to their dog as one of the only constants in their life stating that their dog was "always there for me" and calling their dog their "baby" or their "best friend." Such terminology has been linked to the dog enabling the owner to survive

[22] Rhoda Wilkie, "Multispecies Scholarship and Encounters: Changing Assumptions at the Human-Animal Nexus," *Sociology* 49 (2015): 323–339, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513490356.

[23] Lara Howe, and Matthew J. Easterbrook, "The Perceived Costs and Benefits of Pet Ownership for Homeless People in the UK: Practical Costs, Psychological Benefits and Vulnerability," *Journal of Poverty* 22, no. 6 (2018): 486–499, https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2018.1460741.

[24] Elyssa Payne, Jodi DeAraugo, Pauleen Bennett, and Paul McGreevy, "Exploring the Existence and Potential Underpinnings of Dog-Human and Horse-Human Attachment Bonds," *Behavioural Processes* 125 (2006): 114–121, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beproc.2015.10.004.

life on the street.[25] Anthropomorphism of the homeless participants towards their dogs was clearly illustrated throughout the interviews, and previously described in this population by other researchers.[26] Such anthropomorphism is consistent with studies in the homed population but can lead to potential welfare issues.[27]

The dogs' personalities were acknowledged throughout the interviews; they were always reported to have likes and dislikes and characteristics that made them different as individuals. Some owners spoke of their dog's intelligence, many allowing the dog to wander in front of them on roads and in public spaces, arguably showing the dog was aware of their surroundings.

With their frequently changing circumstances, fear of losing or harming this constant in their lives was likely to be a serious concern for many owners, with one owner who had relinquished their dog "Wish(ing) I'd never given her up." Other owners suggested that being told to get rid of their animal was like being told to remove "a part of me," and they'd prefer to go without accommodation than to lose their dog.

A dog could be perceived as more constant, reliable, and accessible than a public service, because the dog was always present.[28] Owners noted that "she eats before me," and that if the owner did receive money, or additional money from begging because of the animal was present, all of it would go on the dog. One owner would buy his dog new collars, beds and food/treats as "she had earned it."

The Challenges of Having a Dog

One of the greatest challenges for owners was accessing accommodation. Most of the owners managed to access night shelters, but not always with their dogs. The fact that animals could be kept in shelters only at the manager's discretion was perceived as unfair and made owners who were not allowed to keep their animal with them feel singled out.

The relative "dog-friendliness" of the charities visited for this study was variable. Interviews with charity staff and managers revealed that of the eight charities

[25] Christophe Blanchard, "Les propriétaires de chiens à la rue: Retour sur un binôme indésirable dans la ville," *Géographie et cutures* 98 (2016): 47–64, https://doi.org/10.4000/gc.4453.

[26] Howe and Easterbrook, "The Perceived Costs,"486–499.

[27] Elizabeth S. Paul, Anna Moore, Pippa McAinsh, Emma Symonds, Sandra McCune, and John Bradshaw, "Sociality Motivation and Anthropomorphic Thinking About Pets," *Anthrozoös* 27n no.4 (2014): 499–512, https://doi.org/10.2752/175303714X14023922798192.

[28] Blanchard, "Les propriétaires," 47–64.

visited, six did not allow the dogs inside the buildings at all (with two giving permission for the dogs to be inside specifically for the study only). The remaining two charities allowed the dogs to be with the owners at all times. It therefore seemed that "dog-friendly" simply meant that dog food would be freely offered, and visitors would be given help contacting services when needed (e.g., for veterinary care). However, the staff at the majority of these charities acknowledged the importance of the dogs to their owners. But as a consequence of not being allowed to keep their dog with them, most of the owners opted to use a day centre to access hot meals, space to meet friends and a break from the cold winter's day (interviewing time was January/February), rather than seeking overnight accommodation. They preferred instead to sleep out with their dog. Housing and/or keeping warm was one of the main "challenges" noted, particularly if the participant had a dog at the time of the interview. Most owners never stated that these challenges were harder to face with a dog, until prompted with that question, but never blamed the dog for such issues.

Owners using services regularly left the premises to visit their dogs if they had to be left outside, thereby forfeiting time protected from the cold weather, hot food and (sometimes) the companionship of others they would meet there. Blanchard[29] also noted this can make owners feel guilty and saddened by their pets being left alone, and, we argue, can also have negative implications for a dog that is not habituated to being separated from its owner—cold weather may lead to distress, thermal discomfort, and potential health consequences.

The main reason given by staff for not allowing dogs in daycentres was due to food hygiene (if food was served) or space issues, but this was felt by participants to be almost given as an excuse. Charities that do offer accommodation for dog owners with their dogs, often have a limited number of spaces, as these rooms tend to have access to outside for the dog to toilet. Staff who worked at these centres had varying opinions on homeless owners; some noted the passion of the owners towards their dogs, others were more cynical saying that the owners had the dogs to increase their income. Overall, it seemed that being unable to access services, or gaining only limited access, because of their dog[30] can further marginalise homeless people and compound the social exclusion of these individuals from society.[31]

Owners generally found accessing services like shops very difficult when they were accompanied by their dog. They worried about leaving their dogs outside unattended and typically did not attempt to access these services if it meant that their dog was unguarded. A large proportion of owners had friends or family

[29] Blanchard, "Les propriétaires," 47–64.

[30] Taylor, Williams, and Gray, "Homelessness and Dog Ownership," 353–368.

[31] Christophe Blanchard. "Les jeunes errants et leurs chiens: nouvelles figures urbaines de la précarité," trans. Carole Fureix, *Enthozootechnie* 87 (2009): 169–170.

they could leave their dogs with, with some relying on these people for a few minutes at a time and others for days so that they could access services such as hospitals. However, cover was often very limited for non-vital services, with owners perceiving that they used up caretaking favours to meet their most important appointments.

The Dog's Role

The benefits of dogs for their owner's mental health were discussed previously. Additionally, some saw their dog as something in the world that would not walk out on them, run away, or that would not let them down. Owners did not often see having their dog as a challenge, and never blamed the dog for any difficulties endured, instead the owners often implied that what was society and the way that services were administered that were the problem. Many owners felt that they had been let down by the system to get to this point, and society does not seem to be helping them get back to a "normal life." Many of the individuals interviewed had some form of habit or addiction, or a mental health disorder. Allowing them a constant in their lives, such as a dog, seemed to help give them a sense of control. Research has indicated that owners having time to exercise dogs allows them time for reflection[32] and empowerment.[33] Similarly, for homeless people the dog also provides some element of structure, purpose and routine in their day-to-day lives.

Homeless owners and many of the homeless people who were met in passing through the duration of this study mainly spent time with other homeless individuals. However, the participants typically had at least one trusted individual in some form of accommodation who would look after their dog for them on occasion. We heard of people who had "turned it around" from mental breakdowns, alcohol problems and having the strength to get out of problematic scenarios when they had the support and companionship of a dog.

[32] Westgarth, Christley, Marvin, and Perkins, "I Walk My Dog," 936.
[33] Howe, and Easterbrook, "The Perceived Costs," 486–499.

The Dog's Welfare Needs

Rooney and Bradshaw[34] highlighted that it can be difficult to meet all of a dogs' needs in a domestic context, particularly given the varying environments and lifestyles dogs may cohabit with their owner. Here, we discuss the extent to which each of the five welfare needs described in the Animal Welfare Act[35] were met by homeless owners in our study.

Need for a Suitable Environment

Most dogs slept with their owners inside sleeping bags. Owners were concerned about the thermal comfort of their dogs, many making sure the dogs went near the "bottom of the sleeping bag" to keep warm. Dogs who were large normally stayed in a tent with an owner and/or had blankets. It is generally recommended that dogs are kept within a temperature range of 15–30°C and it is unlikely that dogs on the street achieve this throughout the year.[36] Owners expressed worry about their dog being comfortable during the day if they were on the streets, with many providing blankets for the dog to lie on or to "curl in my lap." Owners seemed to worry where their dog was on a day-to-day basis, as some dogs were not sociable towards other dogs, so owners would avoid certain areas. Owners noted how if they were in a public place, for example, a high street, they did not like having to have their dog's lead on. One owner noted how his dog was nearly stolen by someone trying to take the lead off him. Keeping the dog off lead could present a concern due to risk of road traffic accidents or aggression to other dogs or people, but no such incidents were reported.

[34] Rooney and Bradshaw, "Canine Welfare Science," 241–274.

[35] DEFRA, "Animal Welfare Act 2006, Chapter 45."

[36] Anne J. Carter, Emily J. Hall, Sophie L. Connolly, Zoe F. Russell, and Kristy Mitchell, "Drugs, Dogs, and Driving: The Potential For Year-Round Thermal Stress in UK Vehicles," *Open Veterinary Journal* 10, no. 2 (2020): 216–225, https://doi.org/10.4314/ovj.v10i2.11.

Need for a Suitable diet

Owners varied in how they obtained food, using either donations from charities or the public or buying food themselves. One owner noted their dogs' diet was more consistent while they lived on the street than when they were in their own home on benefits. Overall, the dog's diet seemed highly variable, ranging from human food to dog food, however, none of the participants expressed any concerns over stomach upsets which may arise as a consequence of inconsistent feeding practices. One owner reported forgetting to feed themselves and their dog and only noticing when the dog lost weight. This is a welfare concern, but appeared rare and overall, reports and observed body condition of the dogs suggest that feeding is prioritised and the dog's need for a suitable diet are met.

Need to Exhibit Normal Behaviour

Dogs were often walked all day either off or on lead, or a combination of the two. Lead use was usually determined by the area the owners were in. Mostly owners would avoid problem areas if they could, for example, high streets, but this was not always possible. Dogs were noted to be walked longer, and usually more freely, than the average household dog.[37] These walks could include interactions with other dogs as well as with people.

Allowing dogs freedom to run and play is important in meeting their need to behave normally. Dogs living on the streets may be limited in this respect and interviews revealed that some owners had to keep their dogs on leads all or most of the time.

A potential risk for a homeless dog is the lack of a safe space to go to if they felt anxious or frightened. All owners had sleeping bags and blankets for the animals during the day, but they were often placed in front of the public when out. Many housed dogs have a space to go to if anxious or frightened, if not they would be more likely to have the ability to move away from people if they were motivated to do so. Of the dogs met, only one seemed fearful of the interviewer, whilst one dog showed aggression that was likely motivated by fear.[38] Being unable to hide can be a welfare problem for dogs as they are unable to use an effective coping mechanism,

[37] PDSA, "PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016."

[38] Karen L. Overall, *Clinical Behavioral Medicine For Small Animals* (Mosby: Missouri, 1997).

it could also potentially lead to the dog resorting to an alternative strategy of showing aggression, potentially resulting in injury.

Need to Be Housed With, or Apart From, Other Animals

Most of the dogs were with their owners throughout the day. If they were not, they usually were with someone taking care of them, or if in housing accommodation or at the shelter, they were in the owner's room. One owner noted that their dog howled if the owner was in the shower and they were locked in the room, which can be a sign of separation-related behaviour,[39] although this was never referred to explicitly by owners. Within the population of home-owned dogs, there has been an increase in the number of people seeking help with behavioural problems such as separation-related behaviour.[40] Dogs owned by homeless people may be at less risk of developing some of these problems, due to their near constant proximity to their owner. Consequently, it may be argued that the homeless environment may be better suited to meeting some of dogs behavioural and emotional needs than the domestic home where dogs are often left alone and confined for long periods of the day. However, when situations change or when owners are ill or need to leave their dogs for appointments, the contrast may be so marked, that problems may arise. Owners were asked about their dog's interactions with other dogs and their reactions. For some, contact with other dogs was limited, and exposure and free interaction as a puppy may have been limited due to safety concerns (if the dog was on the streets at this critical time). Two owners noted their dogs were currently aggressive, and would "no doubt go for a nip," with two others noting their dogs were fearful. This is a potential source of stress to dogs who may regularly encounter other dogs.

Need to Be Protected from Pain, Injury, Suffering and Disease

Veterinary care seemed to be accessible to most participants. All interviews took place in homeless charities that promoted the services offered by the Dogs Trust

[39] Karen L. Overall, Arthur E. Dunham, and Diane Frank, "Frequency of Nonspecific Clinical Signs in Dogs With Separation Anxiety, Thunderstorm Phobia, and Noise Phobia, Alone or in Combination," *Journal of American Veterinary Medicine Association* 219, no. 4 (2001): 467–473, https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.2001.219.467.

[40] "Does your pet have 'separation anxiety'?" BBC News (March 23, 2015), accessed October 9, 2016, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-32014047.

Hope project,[41] which provides help with vaccinations, microchipping, neutering, flea and worm prevention (as long as the dog is neutered and microchipped within the first four months of joining the scheme). Most participants seemed to be aware of this project and of how to access free or subsidised veterinary services. All dogs received prophylactic worm treatments, whether these were traditional veterinary care or other alternatives, and most were treated for fleas. The level of participation was higher in our study population than compared to the average household owned dog population, noted by PDSA study (worming: 100% vs 87% and flea treatment: 90% vs 78%).[42] One dog once required emergency treatment, but this was accessed successfully.

In the study population, it was more common for male dogs (66%) to be neutered than females (16%); however unwanted pregnancies were not reported while the individuals were homeless. To participate in the Dog Trust Hope Project, owners are required to have or to get their dogs neutered (the charity will pay for this). Many owners did not want this as they did not feel it was needed. Some participants commented that their dog would "make a good mum" or that they were "wanting pups," however, these comments were often quickly followed by the caveat that they would not be doing this until they were in stable housing. One participant's bitch had puppies while he was homeless, but she was deliberately mated prior to the owner becoming homeless. While she was mothering her puppies, the owner gave the bitch to the stud owner to be looked after, as he felt unable to provide the care they needed at that point. Future initiatives to explain the potential benefits of neutering for health and behaviour may be useful, or adjustment to Dogs Trust's Hope Project criteria of neutering may encourage more individuals to benefit from their services.

In general, interviewees thought that getting veterinary care when required was not their biggest challenge or a challenge at all. Participants however seemed unaware of how their veterinary fees in private practice was funded (normally Dogs Trust, PDSA or another local Veterinary charity will pay or help reduce costs to owners), and potentially did not always recoup the full veterinary support that they may be eligible to access. Some individuals who are homeless are known to have problems with literacy skills,[43] so it is important that information, for example on available veterinary services, is given in multiple media, ideally including verbal delivery.

[41] Dogs Trust, "Hope Project: Supporting Dog Owners Experiencing Homelessness or in Housing Crisis," accessed February 25, 2022, https://www.dogstrust.org.uk/help-advice/hope-project-freedom-project/hope-project.

[42] PDSA, "PAW: PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2016."

[43] "Publications and Research," St Mungos, accessed April 4, 2017, http://www.mungos.org/documents/5078/5078.pdf; Crisis, "About Homelessness."

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that the relationship between dog and owner is mutually beneficial in a homeless context, with the dogs providing critical support for their owners' emotional and mental health while owners strived to protect the dog and to meet their welfare needs. The study highlighted the importance of ensuring that there are sufficient services available for homeless people with animals and that allowing dogs to remain with their owners will potentially heighten engagement with charity services. Furthermore, it is important that charities inform homeless individuals with dogs about the help and support that is available to them. It should be noted that participation in these charity schemes is likely to increase if individuals do not have to neuter their dogs to be eligible, or if attitudes towards neutering dogs in the homeless population were to change. Our findings suggest that this requirement deterred participants from using this service leading to further mistrust, and potentially affecting the veterinary care that is sought for the animal in future.

Homeless dogs compared favourably to home owned dogs in many areas when considering how their welfare needs were met. They have high levels of human companionship and access to veterinary care and flea and worm prevention. However, several potential issues were identified surrounding thermal comfort, intraspecific social contact, and the ability to avoid fear-provoking stimuli, although the latter issues are likely equally prevalent in the homed dog population. Tailor-made accessible education initiatives addressing the challenges specific to this population may be valuable.

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Questionnaire

O

Dog markings/colour:

Location:

R

Dogs' details

Dogs' BS:

Dogs Ears: Up Down Med

Tail: Up Down Waggy

Date:

Time:

Dogs' name: ……

Owners' name:

[THEY ENTER- me opening door]

- Thank you for coming
- I'm Chelsie
- Feel free to move the chair and around the room if you wish
- Different types people looked at. I think it's great you've got this dog.
- There's 2 parts to this session today.
- Dictaphone? **little bit less scribbling.**
- Listens to you – video?
- **Is it ok for … be to be let off lead in here, just let them wonder around and do their own thing? I'll pat them if they come over to me if that's ok?**

SET TIMER:

1. Sex of your dog

…… M F

2. What breed is he/she?

……
……

3. How old is she/he? Or when's their birthday?

……
……

4. How long have you had him/her?

……
……

5. Where did you get him/her from?

……
……

LL: How long lying: Bark/whine: Yawn: Paw: Door: 1

O R

6. Were you homeless when you got him/her?

……
……

7. Is she/he neutered?

……
……

7ii) Did you organise this yourself?

Yes No

……
……

8. What was your main reason for getting .. (dogs' name)?

……
……

9. Can you tell me a bit about your dog?

……
……

10. What does your dog enjoy doing the most?

……
……

11. What does your dog not like doing?

……
……

12. Is there anything he/she is scared of?

……
……

O R

13. Are there places/areas you have to avoid because of your dog?

……
……

14. Where does he/she sleep usually when you are out on the street?

……
……

15. How many dogs does she/he interact with daily?

……
……

16. How does he/she react to other dogs?

	All	Most	Some
Hide			
Runaway			
Run towards			
Go up and play			
Bark			
Bear teeth			
Sit and wait			
Slowly approach			
Growl			
Ignore			

……
……

17. How often do you play with your dog?

……
……

O R

18. What games do you usually play? (tick option)

Fetch	Rough and tumble	Tug of war	Chase	Hide and seek	Object competition (not tug of war)	Football	Search	Tricks	Other

……
……

19. How playful is … (dogs' name)?

Scale 1 to 5? (1 being not playful) 4 5

……
……

20. Who starts the play usually?

	Dog	Owner
Always		
Mostly		
Never		

……
……

21. Could you describe to me what your dog does when they want to play?

……
……

22. Does having (dogs' name) effect how the public approach and interact with you?

……
……

O R

23. If you are in a public place does … would you say what happens more…?

……
……

24. How many people do you say you meet on an average day because of … being with you, physically come up to you?

……
……

25. … was on a lead when he/she came into the room. Is he/she usually on a lead?

ii) On average how much time does your dog spend on the lead?

iii) In hours?

Hours:

……
……

26. What words or command does she/he know?

……
……

27. How obedient is your dog? On a scale of 1 to 5

……
……

28. What is the best thing about having … (dogs' name)?

……
……

O R

29. What is the hardest thing about having … (dogs' name)?

……
……

30. How did your life change when you got … (dogs' name)?

……
……

31. How do you think your dog sees you?

……
……

32. If someone was getting a dog, what things do you think they need the most?

……
……

33. Have you ever struggled to look after …(dogs' name)?

……
……

34. Are there any specific challenges of owning a dog for you right now?

……
……

O R

35. Have you the only carer of … (dogs' name)? Has anyone looked minded him/her for you for any period of time?

Yes No

……
……

36. If yes, ii) how long did/do you leave … (dogs' name) with them?

Often: Still do this:
……
……

37. If yes, iii) What do they do, the person who looks after your dog? E.g., job

……
……

38. iv) Where do you go when this other person/people look after … (dogs' name)?

……
……

39. Can you talk me through your day yesterday? Did you do anything with your dog?

……
……

40. Did having (dogs' name) make your day easier or harder yesterday?

Easier Harder

……
……

O R

41. Is this your typical day you've described? If no, please can you describe me your typical day.

……
……

42. ii) In general does (dogs' name) make your days easier or harder on a typical?

Easier Harder

……
……

43. If you didn't have … how would your day be different?

……
……

Now we are going to talk a little about … Diet

44. What does your dog generally eat? [*Do not give suggestions*]

……
……

45. Are you ever donated food by the public?

Yes No

ii) How often?

……
……

46. How much of his/her dog food do you have to buy yourself, as a percentage? *If struggling how many bowls would have a week- how many of those bowls do you buy?*

……
……

LL: How long lying: Bark/whine: Yawn: Paw: Door: 8

O R

Dog services/health

47. Do you ever worm your dog? How often?
Yes No

Often:
……
……

48. Has he … ever have a problem with fleas? How do you deal with this?

Yes No

Deal with it:
……
……

49. Does he/she ever have tummy problems? How often?

Yes No

Often:
……
……

50. Have you ever been to the vets with … (dogs' name) since becoming homeless?

Yes No
……
……

51. i) if yes: How many times have you been to the vets in the last 12 months approximately?

……
……

52. ii) Can you tell me why you went to the vets last time?

……
……

53. How easy is it for you to see a vet?

……
……

O R

54. Are there any challenges for you paying veterinary fees?

Yes No

……
……

55. Do you know about the entailment cards given by Dogs Trust?

Yes No

……
……

56. Do you know about the support PDSA can provide you?

Yes No

……
……

57. ii) If Yes to either 55 or 56: how did you learn or hear about these services?

……
……

Accommodation and using public services and owner (again)

58. Have you ever been in accommodation with … (dogs' name)?

Yes No

Dog sleeping:

ii) If yes -Where does …(dogs' name) sleep when in accommodation?

……
……

59. Which services have you accessed since having … (dogs' name)? You can be as vague as you like e.g. a hostel in Bristol, doctors in Bath.

……
……

LL: How long lying: Bark/whine: Yawn: Paw: Door: 10

O R

60. Have you ever been refused access to a service because of your dog, such as being turned away?

Yes No

……
……

61. Have you ever travelled with ... (dogs' name)?

Yes No

……
……

62. ii) If yes: What mode of transport did you use?

Car: Bus: Train:

……
……

63. Have you struggled using public transport services with having …(dogs' name)?

No Yes:

……
……

You seem to have a great friend in …..
On a scale of 1 to 10 how attached are you to …? 1 being not so attached, 10 being very attached

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

On a scale of 1 to 10 how attached do you think …. Is to you? 1 being not so attached, 10 being very attached

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Would it be ok to ask a few questions about you at all?
Owners' details

Gender of owner: Male Female Transgender Other

Age Class <25 25-39 40-59 60+

Would you consider yourself to be homeless or a sofa surfer?

Homeless Sofa surfer

LL: How long lying: Bark/whine: Yawn: Paw: Door: 11

O R

Brilliant, thank you so much. Your be glad to know that's the first part done with and if you give me two moments well move onto the next part.

Time taken to complete interview:

Dogs' BS:

Dogs Ears: Up Down Med

Tail: Up Down Waggy

How close was the dog majority of the time to the DISTANCE:
Owner: Researcher:

Activity of the dog mostly:

Did the dog try and seek attention from:
Owner: Researcher:

Did the dog do:
-Vocalisation:
-Try and play:
-Show any forms of aggression:

How much time dog spent near owner (within a metre)?

25% 50% 75% 100%

Did the observer have to move away from the dog at any point?

Yes No

Dogs Ears: Up Down Med Tail: Up Down Waggy

LL: How long lying: Bark/whine: Yawn: Paw: Door: 12

Chelsie Bailey jest studentką ostatniego roku weterynarii i posiada licencjat w zakresie Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science. Uczestniczyła w kilku projektach studenckich i z pasją zajmuje się problematyką One Health.

Chelsie Bailey, BSc Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science, is a final year veterinary science student with a first degree Animal Behaviour & Welfare Science. She's undertaken several student research projects, and has a strong passion for One Health topics.

Jo Hockenhull, doktor, licencjat w zakresie zoologii i magister applied animal behaviour & welfare, jest pracownikiem badawczym w Bristol Veterinary School, gdzie pracuje od czasu uzyskania stopnia doktora, badając dobrostan koni rekreacyjnych w Wielkiej Brytanii. Prowadziła również badania nad innymi gatunkami, między innymi nad zwierzętami gospodarskimi i końmi pracującymi, których celem było określenie, w jaki sposób relacje między człowiekiem a zwierzęciem wpływają na dobrostan zwierząt. Ponieważ zależy on w dużej mierze od decyzji podejmowanych przez opiekunów, większa część badań Jo opiera się na rozmowach z właścicielami/farmerami, weterynarzami, przedstawicielami przemysłu i innymi interesariuszami o ich sposobach rozumienia, przekonaniach i wyborach dotyczących zwierząt pod ich opieką.

Jo Hockenhull, PhD, BSc in Zoology, MSc in Applied Animal Behaviour & Welfare is an animal behaviour and welfare research scientist at Bristol Veterinary School where she has worked since she completed her PhD investigating the welfare of UK leisure horses. In her time at Bristol, she has conducted research on a range of species, including livestock and working equines, exploring how the human-animal relationship can impact animal welfare. Jo's research focuses on the welfare of domestic animals, mainly equines and livestock. As the welfare of these animals relies so heavily on the decisions made by their human caregivers, most of Jo's research involves talking to owners/farmers, vets, industry representatives and other stakeholders about their understandings, beliefs and choices when it comes to the animals in their care.

Nicola Rooney, Senior Lecturer in Wildlife and Conservation na University of Bristol, zajmuje się badaniami na zachowaniem i dobrostanem zwierząt towarzyszących i ich interakcją z ludźmi. Szczególnie interesuje się zachowaniami podczas zabawy oraz opracowywaniem sposobów pomiaru, ustalania priorytetów i poprawy dobrostanu gatunków towarzyszących. Duża część jej pracy koncentrowała się na psach domowych, co przyniosło jej międzynarodową reputację w dziedzinie sprawności i dobrostanu psów pracujących.

Nicola Rooney is Senior Lecturer in Wildlife and Conservation at the University of Bristol. Her research focuses on the behaviour and wellbeing of companion animals and their interactions with humans. She has a particular interest in play behaviour, and in developing ways of measuring, prioritising and improving the welfare of companion species. Much of her work has focused on domestic dogs, and she has a international reputation in the field of working dog performance and welfare.