

OWNER-REPORTED BEHAVIOUR OF REHOMED DOGS IN THE FIRST 14 DAYS OF ADOPTION.

JL Woodward¹, EL Buckland¹, REP Da Costa¹, JK Murray¹ and RA Casey¹

¹ Dogs Trust, London, United Kingdom

joshua.woodward@dogstrust.org.uk

Behavioural problems are commonly reported when returning adopted dogs to rehoming organisations. Supporting owners in managing their dogs' behaviour after adoption is of importance for welfare. This study aimed to investigate reported occurrences of behaviours in dogs in the first weeks after adoption.

Adoptions for 1419 dogs from 20 UK Dogs Trust rehoming centres were analysed. Adoptions were included if the owner opted into, and completed, two telephone calls at approximately 2 days (T1) and 14 days (T2) after adoption and answered standardised questions on specific behaviours of the dogs towards people, behaviour when left alone and other behaviours reported to be a problem. Adopters were offered support if specific behaviours were reported. McNemar tests with exact binomial probability calculations were used to test against the null hypothesis of marginal homogeneity in reports of five behaviours at T1 and T2 using paired data.

Snapping/biting/nipping towards the owner or adult household member was reported significantly more in dogs at T2 only ($P = 0.001$; not reported T1 or T2 = 1269, T1 only = 42, T2 only = 81, T1 and T2 = 27), as was scratching or damage to the doorway or non-toy and non-food items when left alone or separated from the adopter in the house ($P = 0.038$; not reported T1 or T2 = 1295, T1 only = 45, T2 only = 68, T1 and T2 = 11). No within-dog differences were found for difficulty walking on the lead, e.g. pulling or reluctance to walk ($P = 0.871$; not reported T1 or T2 = 1380, T1 only = 18, T2 only = 20, T1 and T2 = 1), barking excessively or barking at dogs, people, or inanimate objects ($P = 0.230$; not reported T1 or T2 = 1394, T1 only = 16, T2 only = 9, T1 and T2 = 0), or toileting inside the home ($P = 1.000$; not reported T1 or T2 = 1387, T1 only = 15, T2 only = 16, T1 and T2 = 1).

The results highlight the importance of extending behavioural support to owners beyond the first few days of adoption. In this study, behavioural motivation or context was not assessed, therefore, not all reported behaviours may have been problematic (e.g. snapping could have occurred during play). Supporting owners over time may help identify problems early on and help reduce the risk of dogs being returned for a behavioural reason.