

# Prevalence of Problematic Behaviors in Dogs

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## In the literature

Didehban N, Borujeni MP, Avizeh R, Mosallanejad B. Problematic behaviors in companion dogs: a survey of their prevalence and associated factors. *J Vet Behav.* 2020;39:6-13.

## FROM THE PAGE ...

Behavior problems are a leading reason companion animals (particularly dogs) are relinquished to shelters.<sup>1</sup> It can be helpful to ask pet owners specific behavior-related questions during visits to the clinic so veterinary staff can better recognize behavior problems and increase the likelihood that the behavior can be managed.

In this study, owners (representing 401 dogs) visiting a university veterinary hospital in southwest Iran for wellness care were surveyed. Thirteen problematic behaviors were identified, and owners reported  $\geq 1$  behavior problem in 86% of dogs; this is similar to the prevalence seen in a separate study performed in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Problems identified in this study included excessive activity, fearfulness, destructiveness, roaming, house soiling, excessive barking, coprophagy, withdrawal, mounting/humping, and aggression toward unfamiliar humans, familiar humans, owners, and other dogs. Fearful behavior was more common in small, adult, and female dogs. Aggressive behaviors were more likely in adult dogs and outdoor dogs, whereas indoor dogs showed more fear, withdrawal, and mounting behaviors.

## ... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** Owners should be provided with a brief questionnaire that asks about recognized behavior issues in their pet and whether they would like assistance with the problem (see *Suggested Reading*).<sup>3</sup>
- 2** Owner concerns should be addressed during routine consultation. Consult time can be increased if a behavior concern is known in advance. For concerns brought up spontaneously during the visit, a brief discussion of the problem can be held; significant concerns may warrant another visit so the issue can be more fully addressed.
- 3** Staff should be trained to handle screening and initial discussions with owners and to offer advice regarding basic behavior problems (eg, house soiling, destructive behavior). A full behavior consultation can be scheduled for more in-depth issues (eg, fears, phobias, aggression), or patients can be referred to a qualified veterinary behaviorist.
- 4** Critical behavior topics (eg, house training, puppy biting, proper play, destructive behavior), puppy class recommendations for dogs 8 to 14 weeks of age, and grooming techniques should be addressed at puppy visits.

## References

1. Salman MD, Hutchinson J, Ruch-Gallie R, et al. Behavioral reasons for relinquishment of dogs and cats to 12 shelters. *J Appl Anim Welf Sci.* 2000;3(2):93-106.
2. Dinwoodie IR, Dwyer B, Zottola V, Gleason D, Dodman NH. Demographics and comorbidity of behavior problems in dogs. *J Vet Behav.* 2019;32:62-71.
3. Roshier AL, McBride EA. Canine behaviour problems: discussions between veterinarians and dog owners during annual booster consultations. *Vet Rec.* 2013;172(9):235.

## Suggested Reading

American Animal Hospital Association. Client tools: general behavior questionnaires for dogs and cats. AAHA website. <https://www.aaha.org/aaha-guidelines/behavior-management/toolkit/client-tools>. Accessed January 26, 2021.

Cummings Veterinary Medical Center. Behavior service at Tufts: behavior service forms. Tufts University website. <https://vetmed.tufts.edu/behavior-service/forms>. Accessed January 26, 2021.