



Separation related disorders in Poodles

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Abstract: Aim of this study was to verify the incidence of Separation Related Disorder (SRD) in Miniature and Toy Poodles. A questionnaire was used, divided into three sections: the first concerning the personal data of the owner, the second the dog (age, sex, castration and date of acquisition) and the last one intended to analyze the behavior of the animal.

Questionnaires received were 227, of which 124 regarding males (17 castrated) and 103 females (34 neutered). Among the owners, 44.49% of them believed their animals ($n = 101$) experience SRD. The statistical analysis revealed no significant differences between the two sexes of animals, with an incidence of separation problems of 41.7% among the males and 46.8% among the females ($X^2 = 0.576$; n.s.).

The most common behaviors encountered during periods of loneliness by animals showing SRD were vocalizations (76.24%), destruction (28.71%), inappropriate eliminations (16.83%), loss of appetite (12.87%) and lastly excessive salivation (11.88%).

Vocalizations (♀ 86.0% vs ♂ 69.0%; $X^2 = 3.977$; $p = 0.047$) and excessive salivation (♀ 17.2% vs ♂ 4.7%; $X^2 = 3.793$; $p = 0.05$) were more statistically presented by females than males.

These data represent a first analysis of the incidence of Separation Related Disorder in Miniature and Toy Poodle. A great percentage of owners said that their animals show discomfort when being alone at home: this data permit to suppose that this breed is particularly predisposed to live the periods of loneliness with difficulty.

Key Words: Poodle; separation related problems

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Introduction

The companion dogs, as every social species, form bonds with conspecifics (Mariti et al., 2014), but also strong social relationships with humans (Mariti et al., 2013; 2017; 2018). In fact, they have evolved a capacity for attachment to their owner that is functionally analogous to human infants' attachment towards their mother (Ainsworth, 1969).

The most relevant characteristics of attachment are 1) contact-maintenance with the attachment figure, 2) separation distress in the absence of the attachment figure, and 3) the secure-base effect, i.e., the activation of exploratory and play behavior in the presence of the attachment figure (the attachment figure represents a base from which to explore the world) (Bowlby, 1969).

Although most dogs experience mild levels of stress upon separation from their attachment figure, some dogs show higher than normal sensitivity to separation and exhibit severe behavioral signs when left alone, generically defined as Separation Related Disorder (SRD), (Konok et al., 2019).

SRD is characterized by a high level of anxiety occurring in the absence or perceived absence of the owner (attachment figure) (Horwitz, 2000). It manifests in many behavioral and physiological signs, such as destructive behavior displayed in the home, excessive vocalization and

inappropriate elimination (urination/defecation). Further signs include autonomic reactions (hypersalivation or hyperventilation), increased and repetitive motor activity (e.g. pacing, circling), other repetitive behaviors (e.g. over-grooming or self-mutilation), behavioral signs of depression (withdrawal, inactivity or inappetence), gastrointestinal signs (e.g. vomiting, diarrhoea) or escape behavior that can result in self-trauma (Appleby & Pluijmakers, 2004).

Poodles are a group of formal dog breeds, the Standard, Medium, Miniature and Toy Poodle. This breed descends from the Barbet of which it has conserved many characteristics. In 1743, it was called the "caniche": the female of the barbet in French. Thereafter the Barbet and the Caniche (Poodle) were gradually separated (FCI, 2016). The Poodle became very popular as a companion dog because of its friendly, joyful and loyal character and because of its four sizes and different colours which everyone can choose according to preference (FCI, 2016). The most popular varieties today are Miniature (over 28 cm up to 35 cm) and Toy Poodles (24 cm up to 28 cm).

Aim of this study was to verify the incidence of SRD in Miniature and Toy Poodles.

Material and methods

For this research was used a questionnaire divided into three sections: the first concerning the personal data of the owner, the second about the dog data (age, sex, castration and date of acquisition) and the last one intended to analyze the behavior of the animal.

The module, created through Google Forms, was posted in four different closed groups of owners of Miniature and Toy Poodles on the Facebook social network.

The statistical analysis of the data was carried out with the Chi-square test.

Results

Questionnaires received were 227, of which 124 were on male dogs (17 castrated) and 103 on female dogs (34 neutered).

The average age of the owners was 45.5 ± 11.3 years, mostly female (95.6%). The age of dog adoption, reported by the owners, was 4.4 ± 9.0 months. Fifty one percent of the poodles was purchased from professional breeders, 25% from private ones, while the remaining 24% had different origins.

As for the time spent in loneliness during the day, 58% of dogs remains alone from 1 to 4 hours a day, 23% from 4 to 8 hours and 13% less than an hour a day.

The analysis of the places where dogs are left during the moments of solitude reveals that the house is the favorite place of the owners (78%) when they must leave the dog alone. The home garden is preferred by 7% of the owners and the dog nursery by 4%.

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The most common behaviors encountered during periods of loneliness by animals showing SRD were vocalizations (76.24%), destruction (28.71%), inappropriate eliminations (16.83%), loss of appetite (12.87%) and lastly excessive salivation (11.88%).

Vocalizations (♀ 86.0% vs ♂ 69.0%; $X^2 = 3.977$; $p = 0.047$) and excessive salivation (♀ 17.2% vs ♂ 4.7%; $X^2 = 3.793$; $p = 0.05$) were more statistically presented by females than males. There were no significant differences between males and females about destructive behaviors (♂ 32.6% vs ♀ 25.9%; $X^2 = 0.541$; n.s.), inappropriate eliminations (♂ 16.3% vs ♀ 17.2%; $X^2 = 0.016$; n.s.) and inappetence (♂ 14.00% vs ♀ 12.1%; $X^2 = 0.078$; n.s.).

Destructions were directed, above all, towards owners' objects like clothes and slippers (43%); 33% of dogs destroyed their toys, walls, doors, sofas, curtains and armchairs and finally 24% of dogs the chairs.

About the presence or not of other animals in the family, 104 Poodles were the only animals present, while 42 lived with another dog, 26 with a cat and 15 with both a dog and a cat.

The incidence of animals with separation problems was greater among dogs cohabiting with a cat (15.8% vs 7.9%; $p = 0.68$), showing a near-significant trend.

Discussion

These data represent a first analysis of the incidence of SRD in Miniature and Toy Poodle. A great percentage of owners (44%) said that their animals show discomfort when being alone at home, this data permit to suppose that this breed is particularly predisposed to live the periods of loneliness with difficulty. Although genetic predispositions cannot be excluded, it is clear from previous studies that the behavior of the dogs can be influenced by the amount of maternal care it has received (Guardini et al., 2015; 2016, 2017) and by social stimulations, also of a heterospecific nature, in the first period of life (Gazzano et al., 2008a) as well as the correct management of its behavior by the owners (Gazzano et al., 2008b).

Excessive barking in left alone dogs is traditionally considered to be one of the main signs of SRD (Flannigan & Dodman, 2001) in according with the results of this study. It is interesting to note that females display more vocalizations and salivation than males.

Another result that deserves attention is the greater presence of SRD in dogs cohabiting with a cat, with a value tending to significance: further research will be needed to clarify this aspect.

In conclusion, these first data seem to make plausible the hypothesis of a great incidence of SRD in Miniature and Toy Poodles. Further studies, on a larger sample and with a balanced percentage between owners of both sexes, will make possible to clarify the results of this pilot study.

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Problemi da separazione nel cane di razza Barbone

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Sintesi

Lo scopo di questo studio è stato quello di verificare l'incidenza di Problemi da Separazione (SRD) nei cani di razza Barbone, Miniature e Toy. A tale scopo è stato utilizzato un questionario, diviso in tre sezioni: la prima sezione riguardava i dati anagrafici del proprietario, la seconda riguardava il cane (età, sesso, eventuale castrazione, data di acquisizione) e l'ultima intendeva analizzare il comportamento degli animali.

Sono stati ricevuti 227 questionari, di cui 124 riguardanti Barboni maschi (17 castrati) e 103 femmine (34 sterilizzate).

Il 44,49% dei proprietari ritiene che il loro animali (n=101) manifestino segni di SRD. L'analisi statistica non ha rivelato nessuna differenza tra i due sessi di animali, con un'incidenza di SRD del 41,7% tra i maschi e del 46,8% tra le femmine ($X^2 = 0,576$; n.s.).

Gli animali che mostravano segni di SRD presentavano soprattutto vocalizzazioni (76,24%), distruzioni (28,71%), eliminazioni inappropriate (16,83%), inappetenza (12,87%) ed infine scialorrea (11,88%).

Le vocalizzazioni (♀ 86,0% vs ♂ 69,0%; $X^2 = 3,977$; $p = 0,047$) e la scialorrea (♀ 17,2% vs ♂ 4,7%; $X^2 = 3,793$; $p = 0,05$) erano manifestate maggiormente dalle femmine rispetto ai maschi.

Questi dati rappresentano una prima analisi dell'incidenza di SRD nei cani di razza Barbone Miniature e Toy. Un'elevata percentuale di proprietari ha affermato che i propri animali manifestano segni di disagio quando lasciati soli a casa; questi dati permettono di supporre che questa razza sia particolarmente predisposta a vivere i periodi di solitudine con difficoltà.