



Educational difficulties and behavioral problems in dogs: prevalence and risk factors

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Abstract: Since dog relinquishment is mostly associated with behavioral problems linked to training difficulties, the aim of this study was to evaluate the prevalence and nature of behavioral issues as well as the difficulties encountered by owners when it comes to dog obedience. Despite the increasing awareness of the importance of proper dog training, a notable knowledge gap exists regarding specific challenges faced by owners and the factors of variation, such as breed or gender, that influence these challenges.

Data were collected through an online questionnaire on 300 dogs, with an age range from 1 to 15 years.

It was found that most dogs were adopted as puppies, with 48% adopted before reaching three months of age. While 30% of dogs came from professional breeders, another 30% came from private owners. Additionally, 26% were obtained through second adoptions (e.g., from associations or experimental laboratories), and 14% came from family breeders. Most owners (95%) reported being informed about dog education.

Internet was the most commonly used source of information (51% of owners). In addition, for 57% of dogs, the owner reported the presence of at least one undesirable behavior with environment excitation which was the most common undesirable behavior (30%), followed by vocalization (25%) and dog aggression (21%). While dogs adopted between 3 and 6 months old presented fewer behavioral problems than others.

Potty training was the most easily taught learning: 69% of dogs learnt it “very easily”, followed by 44 % for separation from the owner and 39% for socialization with dogs and human beings. The “sit” and “lie down” commands were the most easily assimilated, in contrast with the recall, stay still, walking on a leash and “calm down”. Dogs adopted after 6 months old were easier to train than dogs adopted before 6 months old. Males seem to learn basic commands more easily than females and hunting dogs have more difficulties performing those commands than other breed groups.

This study evidenced the high frequency of undesirable behaviors and the difficulties of dog education. These results highlight the importance of keeping the owner informed before and during the educational process. Persistent undesirable behavior should not be considered as a failure and owners should be encouraged to ask for assistance from a canine professional.

Key Words: education, dog, behavior, questionnaire, learning.

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Introduction

In many richest countries, dogs' relinquishment is a major issue in terms of animal welfare, human psychological consequences, as well as logistical and economical management (Lambert et al., 2015). Every year, nearly 4 million dogs are estimated to enter rescue centres in the United States (Protopopova & Gunter, 2017), and more than 200,000 in Australia (Chua et al., 2017). European countries also face this problem, with about 0.6 % of pet dogs being relinquished each year in France (about 50 000 dogs), i.e., three dogs abandoned every hour on average (Fatjo et al., 2015; SPA, 2023).

Puppies typically remain in shelters for approximately 2 months, while adult or senior dogs tend to stay for around 6 months (Fatjo et al., 2015; Raudies et al., 2021). Any stay in a shelter is

a stressful experience for dogs, as they are exposed to high noise levels and, spatial restrictions, resulting in the loss of control and predictability (Taylor & Mills, 2007), which leads to euthanasia of 12.6% (Fatjo et al., 2015) to 40% (Barlett et al., 2005) of dogs, depending on the shelter's policy. In addition, shelters heavily impact public and charity finances (Reeder, 2021).

Dog relinquishment is often related to the animal's behavior. Diesel et al. (2010) reported that 34.2 % of relinquished dogs were abandoned in shelters because of behavioral problems. In addition to being the initial cause of relinquishment, behavioral problems make adoption less probable. Wells and Hepper (1992) attempted to determine what makes a dog attractive to adopters: people prefer dogs "unwanted" than "stray" ones, those that had a clean cage versus a dirty cage, those that don't bark, that come in front of the cage instead of staying in the back. Breed, sex, age, and neuter status also modify the time spent in a shelter (Svoboda & Hoffman, 2015).

In addition to their impact on relinquishment, undesirable behaviors could also lead to young dogs' euthanasia because of a dramatic degradation of the quality of the human-dog relationship (Yu et al., 2021). The most common behavioral problems reported by owners are aggression toward people and difficulties to stay alone (with destructions and barking during loneliness periods) (Salman et al., 2000).

For both dog welfare and owner quality of life, improving dog education is a crucial step. This study thus aimed to first evaluate the difficulties encountered by owners attempting to teach their dogs basic commands and some behaviors which we consider essentials for everyday life. Factors influencing the learning efficiency of various commands were also analysed. The second objective was to evaluate the prevalence of behavioral disorders and to identify risk factors for their occurrence.

Materials and methods

Data were recorded through an on-line questionnaire written in French. No ethical approval was required.

Structure of the questionnaire – After a short presentation of the study's objectives, the questionnaire enclosed 21 questions divided in six sections (for full questionnaire, see Appendix 1). The questions were either single-choice ($n=5$), multiple-choice ($n=5$) or open questions ($n=11$). Vocabulary was chosen to be understood without the need of any competence in canine education or behavior.

The first five questions were to describe the dog (sex, neuter status, age, breed, place, and age at the time of adoption). The six following questions targeted the owner's lifestyle (living place, family members, presence of other animals).

Owners were then asked about how and when (before or after adoption or because of behavioral issues) they got informed about dog's education (four questions).

The main part of the questionnaire was to characterize the educational competences of the dog. The everyday life behaviors and dog training that are necessary to ensure a good-quality cohabitation between the dog and its owner, were targeted. Commands were classified into Basic Learnings (BL: "sit", "lie down", "recall", "stay", "walking on a leash") and Social Learnings (SL: being quiet, potty training, staying alone, socialization). Commands grouped under "Basic Learnings" are simple instructions aimed at ensuring good obedience from the dog. These are relatively straightforward commands primarily focused on obedience. On the other hand, commands grouped under "Social Learnings" involve training that makes the dog acceptable within our society.

The degree of difficulty encountered by the owner to get the four behaviors and five commands acquired by the dog was evaluated on a scale from 0 to 3:

0: Very easy to learn: the learning process was completed in less than a week; the behavior is now acquired.

1: Easy: the learning process took from several weeks to a few months; the behavior is now acquired.

2: Difficult: the behavior is not fully acquired; it is not attained in some situations.

3: Impossible: the behavior is not yet acquired.

NT: Not taught: The owner did not try to train the dog to learn this behavior.

The penultimate section (two questions) listed undesirable behaviors in dogs and owners were asked whether they were experiencing them from their dog.

The last three questions were to gauge the owner's knowledge about the canine species asking them if they were working with dogs on a daily basis.

Data collection – A preliminary test on 15 owners allowed to evaluate at 5 minutes the time required to fill in the questionnaire. The survey was exclusively launched online, through public social networks and peer-to-peer distribution. The questionnaire was available from 5 April 2020 to 7 May 2020.

Answers were then anonymously transferred with the respondent's consent into a Microsoft Excel table (Microsoft Corporation, Redmond, Washington, USA) for analysis.

Data management – The ability of dogs to acquire basic and social learnings was evaluated through two global scores calculated as the average of the learning difficulty notes (from 0 to 3) given to the various commands (n=5 for BL) and behaviors (n=4 for SL).

$$\text{Basic Learnings score (BLs)} = \frac{\sum \text{Basic learnings difficulty notes}}{\text{number of commands taught to the dog}}$$

$$\text{Social Learnings score (SLs)} = \frac{\sum \text{Social learnings difficulty notes}}{\text{number of behaviours learned by the dog}}$$

Undesirable behaviors were analysed through a binary variable (presence or absence) and by the number of undesirable behaviors per dog as described by the owner.

Identification of variation factors – To explore the influence of different factors on dog behavior, four different models were fitted depending on the nature of the outcome. Continuous outcomes BLs and SLs were explored using multiple linear regressions, binary outcomes (presence or not of undesirable behavior) using a binomial logistic regression and count outcome (number of undesirable behaviors) using a Poisson regression. For all models, the explanatory variables included sex (male / female), age at adoption (before 3 months / between 3 and 6 months / after 6 months of age), neuter status (neutered / unneutered), place from which the dog was adopted (professional or family breeder / private owner / second adoption), presence of children in the family (Yes / No), owner working in a canine related area (Yes / No), breed or breed type (mixed-breed dog). Dogs were classified into 10 groups of breed or breed type: Border Collie, Australian Shepherd, German/Belgian/Dutch Shepherd, Other Shepherd dog, Hunting dog, Companion and Pet dog, Sled - Primitive dog, Retriever - Spaniel, Terrier and Other.

Starting with the full model for each of the explored outcome, a backward selection based on the Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) was applied to select the most parsimonious model. The Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test permitted assessment of the quality of the logistic model. For linear regressions, graphical evaluations of the residuals were performed and for Poisson regression, the absence of overdispersion was checked. For continuous outcomes, the least square means of the factors were obtained from the models and pairwise comparisons were performed using Tukey's Honest Significant Difference method.

Statistical analysis – All statistical analyses were performed using R software, version 4.2.1 (R Core Team R, 2022) and the following packages: *ggplot2* (Wickham, 2016) for data visualisation, *dplyr* (Wickham et al., 2022) and *tidyr* (Wickham et al., 2022) for data manipulation, *rpart* (Therneau and Atkinson, 2022) and *caret* (Kuhn, 2022) to perform Classification and Regression Tree Analysis (CART). A value of $P < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant and statistical uncertainty was assessed by calculating 95% confidence intervals (95CI). Results were expressed as mean $\pm$ SD.

Results

Population

Across the total of 379 questionnaires, only those describing a dog aged at least one year were retained for the analysis ($n=300$). The age of the included dogs ranged from 12 to 180 months (mean 57.4 ± 30.4). The age at which dogs were adopted by their owner ranged from 0 (owned since birth) to 132 months (mean 7.9 ± 8.4 , $n=295$): 48% ($n=145$) were adopted before 3 months of age, 31% ($n=93$) between 3 and 6 months, and 19% ($n=57$) after 6 months. More than half of the subjects (55%) were males; 55 % of dogs were neutered (63% of the females and 45% of the males). Only 26% of dogs were mixed breed, with Shepherd dogs representing 40% of the population studied. Dogs have been adopted from professional breeders (30%), from private owners (30%), for a second adoption (26%), and from family breeders (14%). Only 24% of dogs ($n=73$) were living in the presence of at least one child. Half (48%, $n=144$) of the participants had a professional activity related to dogs (25% of veterinarians ($n=75$), 20% of veterinary students ($n=62$), one veterinary nurse, six dog trainers). This is linked to the fact that the questionnaire was distributed by a veterinary student within various veterinary groups on social media, which could therefore represent a bias in this study.

Most owners (95%) were informed about dog training: 66% before adoption, 55% after adoption, 33% because of undesirable behaviors. Most found information from Internet (51%), or from their own experience with a previous dog (58%). Dog professionals were rarely a source of information about education: only 34% of owners asked a vet and 23% a dog trainer.

If we focus solely on the population of respondents who do not work in the canine industry, the results can be found in Comparative Table 1 below. The results are relatively similar, reflecting a slight bias due to the strong representation of individuals from the canine industry. However, it appears that owners not from this background are more likely to seek advice from their veterinarian (45%) or a dog trainer (29%), although the preferred sources remain the internet and personal knowledge acquired from a previous dog.

Table 1. Comparison of different sources and means of information based on the selected population

	Percentage in the population « All owners ($n=300$) »	Percentage in the population “Owners not from the canine field ($n=155$)”
Informed about dog training	95%	91%
Informed before adoption	66%	61%
Informed after adoption	55%	57%
Informed because of undesirable behaviors	33%	22%
<i>Source of information</i>		
Internet	51%	49%
Friends/family	31%	33%
Previous dog	58%	68%
Books	27%	25%
Dog trainer	23%	29%
General practitioner/	34%	45%
<i>Behavioral veterinarian</i>		
Dog training in club	26%	27%
Classes about dog training	25%	9%

Basic Learnings

Five commands were analysed to evaluate a dog's ability to learn basic commands. On average, 95% of respondents tried to teach their dog all five commands. Among the five commands evaluated, the lowest mean score (the easiest command to learn) was obtained for the command "sit" (0.27 ± 0.59) and the highest (hardest to learn) for the command "walking on a leash" (1.21 ± 0.93). The distribution of the learning difficulty score is presented in Table 2 for the various commands.

Table 2. Basic learnings on dogs: acquisition difficulty scores

Basic Learning	Score										Mean ± SD
	0		1		2		3		NT		
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	
Sit (n=288)	80	229	16	45	3	10	1	4	4	12	0.27±0.59
Lie down (n=276)	53	145	30	83	14	39	3	9	8	24	0.68±0.84
Recall (n=292)	27	79	33	94	38	112	2	7	3	8	1.16±0.85
Stay (n=275)	26	71	42	114	26	71	7	19	8	25	1.14±0.88
Walking on a leash (n=285)	26	74	37	104	28	81	9	26	5	15	1.21±0.93

(0=very easy to learn; 1=easy; 2=difficult; 3=impossible; NT=not taught)

The score evaluating the global ability of the dogs to acquire these five basic commands (BLs) ranged from 0 to 2.75 (mean = 0.9 ± 0.53) (Figure 1).

BLs was influenced by sex (Pvalue = 0.031), age at adoption (Pvalue = 0.002) and breed/breed type of the dog (Pvalue=0.0001), but they were not influenced by the presence of a child in the family or, by the owner's professional activity (related to dogs or not).

Explanatory variables explained only 14% of the variation in the BL score. The BLs was significantly higher for dogs adopted when they were older than 6 months (1.1, 95CI: 1-1.3) compared

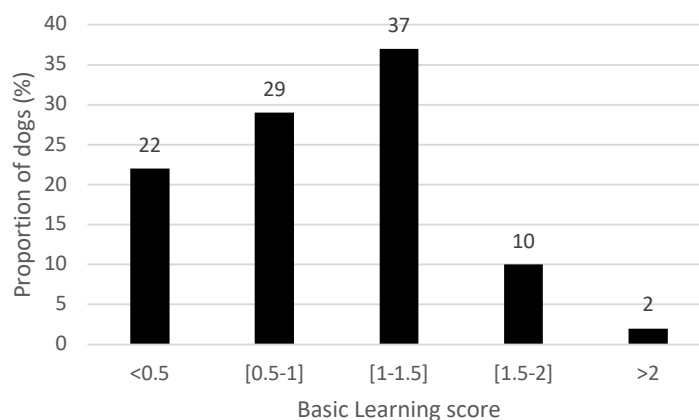


Figure 1. Distribution of Basic Learnings scores (n=300) (the number above the bars is the corresponding proportion in the global population)

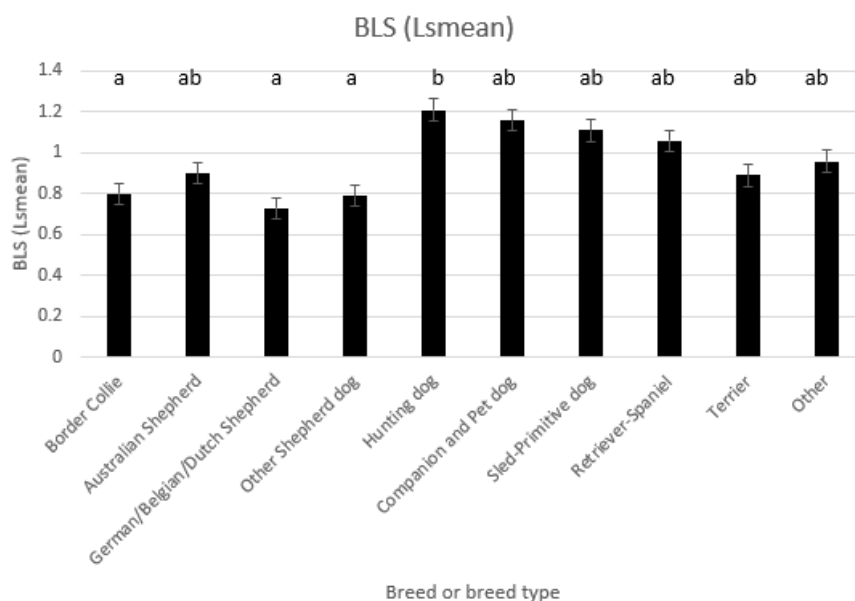


Figure 2. Influence of breed (or breed type) on Basic Learning score (BLs). Breeds sharing the same letter do not significantly differ ($p>0.05$) (Lsmean= Least square mean). Shepherd dogs are easier to train than hunting dogs

with those adopted before 3 months of age (0.9, 95CI: 0.8-1) or between 3 and 6 months of age (0.9, 95CI: 0.7-1). BLs was 0.9 (95CI: 0.8-1) for males and 1 (95CI: 0.9-1.1) for females. Owners reported an easier training of basic learnings for shepherd dogs compared to hunting dogs (Figure 2).

Social Learnings

Four different behaviors were evaluated to determine the dog's ability to live properly in the society; 92 % of respondents tried to make their dog acquire those four behaviors.

The lowest mean score (easiest behavior to acquire) was obtained for "potty training" (0.39 ± 0.64) and the highest (the hardest behavior to acquire) for the behavior "be quiet" (1.30 ± 0.96) (Table 3).

Table 3. Social learnings on dogs: acquisition difficulty scores

Social learning	Score										Mean $\pm$ SD
	0		1		2		3		NT		
	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	
Be quiet (n=230)	23	53	37	85	27	63	13	29	23	70	1.30 $\pm$ 0.96
Potty training (n=284)	69	194	26	74	4	12	1	4	5	16	0.39 $\pm$ 0.64
Staying alone (n=290)	44	129	37	108	13	37	6	16	3	10	0.79 $\pm$ 0.87
Socialization (n=290)	39	112	26	75	30	89	5	14	3	10	1.02 $\pm$ 0.94

(0=very easy to learn; 1=easy; 2=difficult; 3=impossible; NT=not taught)

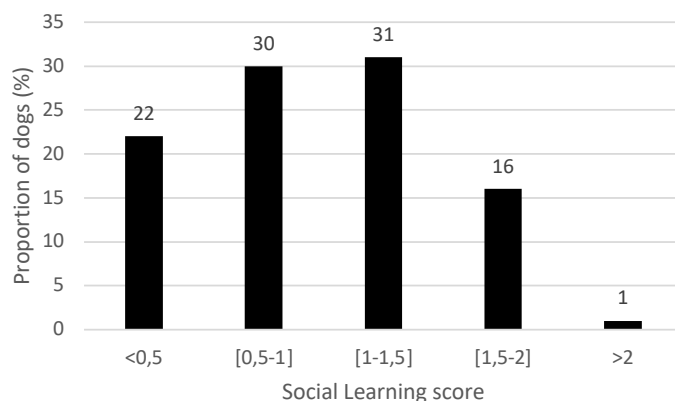


Figure 3. Distribution of Social Learnings score (n=300) (the number above the bars is the corresponding proportion in the global population)

Interestingly, 23% of owners did not try to teach this last command. Socialization with people and other dogs seems to be also a challenge for owners (mean score 1.02 ± 0.94).

The global score evaluating the ability of the dogs to acquire these four social learnings (SLs) ranged from 0 to 2.67 (mean = 0.86 ± 0.54) (Figure 3).

No influence on SLs of any of the factors integrated into the model was evidenced (sex, age at adoption, neuter status, a place from which dog was adopted, presence of a child, the owner's profession, and breed or breed type) and the explanatory variables considered explained only 4% of the variation.

Undesirable behaviors

Among the 300 dogs included, 170 - which represents more than half of dogs (57%) – displayed at least one undesirable behavior. The most frequently reported unwanted behavior (30% of the 170 dogs) was a difficulty to manage emotions, i.e., getting easily excited in response to various stimuli. Vocalizations (25% of dogs) and aggression toward other dogs (21% of dogs) were also frequent (Figure 4).

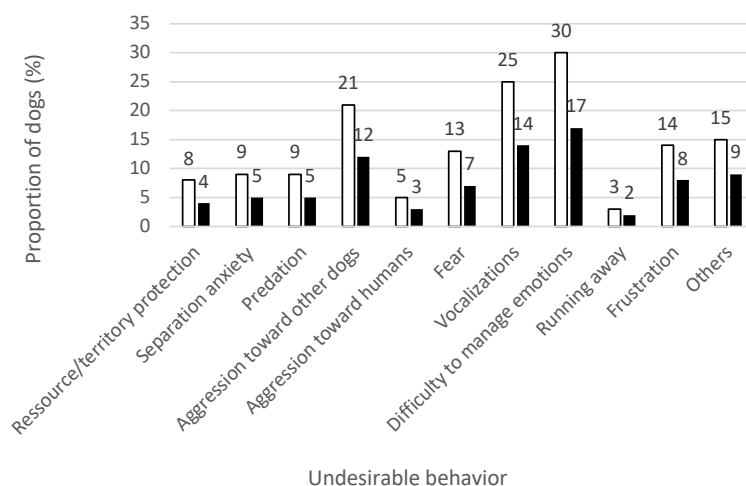


Figure 4. Prevalence of undesirable behaviors in the global population (black bars; n=300) and among dogs exhibiting at least one troublesome behavior (white bars; n=170) (the number above the bars is the corresponding proportion in the global population). Difficulty to manage emotions, vocalizations and aggression toward other dogs were the most common undesirable behaviors.

The probability of exhibiting at least one undesirable behavior was influenced by the conditions of adoption with a significantly higher frequency when the dogs were readopted (Figure 5).

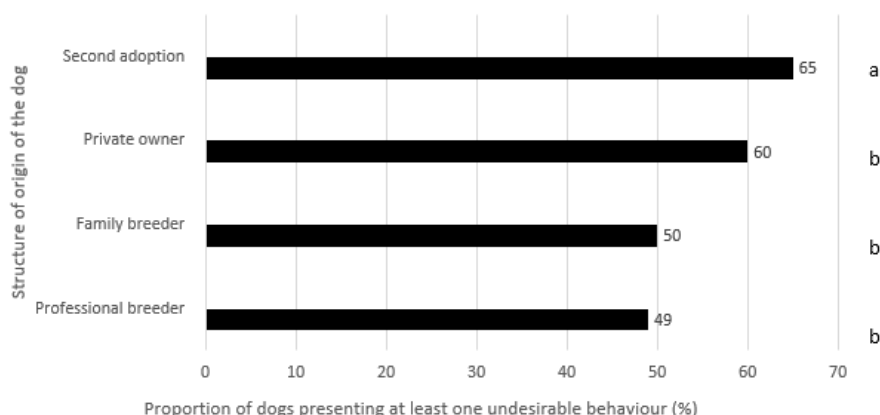


Figure 5. Influence of the structure of origin of the dog on the presence of an undesirable behavior. Columns with different letters are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Dogs that were adopted for a second time, present more frequently at least one undesirable behavior than dogs coming from other places

The number of undesirable behaviors per dog varied between zero and five (mean = 0.86 ± 0.98). In total, 111 dogs (37%) presented only one behavioral issue, 39 dogs (13%) had two undesirable behaviors, 12 (4%) had three undesirable behaviors and only eight dogs (3%) presented more than four undesirable behaviors. Among dogs displaying at least one undesirable behavior ($n=170$), dogs exhibited 1.52 ± 0.84 troublesome behavior.

The number of undesirable behaviors per dog was only influenced by the age at adoption. No influence of the other factors considered (sex, neuter status, place from which the dog was adopted, presence of a child, the owner's profession, and breed or breed type) was evidenced. Dogs adopted between 3 and 6 months had fewer (mean 0.62 ± 0.79) undesirable behaviors than dogs adopted before 3 months (mean 0.96 ± 0.97) or after 6 months (mean 1.04 ± 1.24).

Discussion

Considering the dog as an integral part of the family (Owens & Grauerholz, 2018), its education is essential to ensure a good quality of life for its owner (Merkouri et al., 2022). Any behavioral issue can cause significant discomfort for the owner, potentially leading them to abandon or even euthanize the dog (Hitchcock et al., 2024).

The aim of this study was to describe the difficulties encountered by owners in educating their dog, to identify risk factors and to determine the most common undesirable behaviors and how to prevent them.

The size of the population ($n=300$) seemed appropriate to conduct a multivariate analysis. Dog breed distribution seems to be consistent with the composition of the French canine population. Australian Shepherd, Golden Retriever, Belgian and German Shepherd and sled dogs are currently among the most popular breeds (Société Centrale Canine, 2022). Only dogs older than one year were retained in the study to ensure that owners had sufficient time to educate their dog and evaluate the education level of their dog.

Among the five basic commands, only two appear to be really easy to learn within the overall population, while three out of the four social learnings seem really easy to acquire. The learning

“be quiet” is the least taught by owners, with 23% of them having not attempted to teach it. However, one of the most common behavioral issues is the poor emotional management of dogs in response to certain stimuli, followed by vocalizations. Barking was also a common undesirable behavior observed in relinquished dogs (7.7% of 379 dogs, Salman et al., 2000). Difficulties in emotional control pose daily challenges as owners are unable to take their dogs to various locations without dogs becoming agitated. Therefore, it would be beneficial to educate owners on how to manage their dog’s emotions. Socialization with humans and other dogs is thus crucial for the comfortable cohabitation between dogs and owners. According to Salman et al. (2000) in a shelter relinquishment study, aggression (toward humans or other dogs) is the most common behavioral problem encountered by owners (17.4 %) leading to dog relinquishment. Our study provided consistent results, with 21% of dogs perceived as aggressive (among dogs presenting at least one undesirable behavior) and socialization being the most difficult competence to be acquired.

Those problems are also frequently reported by dog owners (Eagan et al., 2022) even if they don’t lead to abandonment.

More than half of the dogs (57%) exhibit at least one problematic behavior. This proportion is important, especially considering that half of the dog owners in our sample work in connection with dogs. It is possible that the proportion of dogs exhibiting behavioral issues might be even higher in the general population. It can also be supposed that educational expectations are higher for dog owners working in the canine field.

In our study, females were more difficult to train than males when it came to the basic learnings. Previous studies showed that males are bolder and more likely to develop behavioral issues (Starling et al., 2013) than females. They were also overrepresented in shelters and frequently relinquished due to behavioral problems (Diesel et al., 2010; Col et al., 2016). But, according to Wojcik & Powierza (2021) in Primitive dog breeds, females are more aggressive than males.

The breed also influenced educational competences. Shepherd dogs learn basic commands more easily than others, especially hunting dogs (Figure 2). Belgian and German shepherds are breeds of choice for police/assistance dogs because of their high aptitude for learning (Bray et al., 2021; Ridgway, 2021). They are often used in studies about different types of learnings such as brightness discrimination (Pretterer et al., 2004) or the comprehension of objects’ names (Pilley & Reid, 2011). Regarding hunting dogs, no studies about their learning abilities are available. Kim et al. (2018) showed that many abilities of hunting dogs are genetically defined, which makes them harder to train, especially when owners want to teach them “recall” while the dogs are chasing a prey.

Also, dogs adopted after 6 months old have more difficulties learning basic commands and they develop more frequently behavioral issues than those adopted before 6 months age. Dog behavioral development is influenced by the animal’s experiences during the socialization period (between 3 and 12 weeks) (Serpell et al., 1995; Dietz et al., 2018). Nevertheless, due to brain plasticity allowing easier learning and adaptability, even after this socialization period, participation in a puppy class helps to socialize the dog and create a link with the owner. Later participation in an adult class – even though it has a positive impact on the acquisition of commands - has no effect on socialization (Kutsumi et al., 2013).

In addition to the age at adoption, the origin of the animal also showed an influence on its behavior. In our study, dogs adopted for a second time (26%) (e.g., from a shelter or experimental laboratory) more often presented an undesirable behavior than dogs adopted from a private owner (30%), or a breeder (44%) (Figure 5). Staying in a shelter was already described as deleterious for dog behavior (Raudies et al., 2021). Dogs that had lived for several months in a shelter presented more often behavioral problems and were more anxious than those that stayed for a shorter period (Raudies et al., 2021). Development of behavioral problems can be increased by living conditions in the shelter, e.g., single housing versus collective or absence of visual contact with humans (Taylors & Mills, 2007).

This study highlighted a huge proportion of owners reporting a behavioral problem in their dog that was making their daily life difficult. According to Weiss et al. (2015), owners who are about to relinquish their dogs would change their mind and keep it if they received help to solve their problem.

One way to improve this situation could be increasing the owners' knowledge in terms of canine education and/or a professional guidance. In this study, most owners got informed about dog education from the Internet (51%). Similarly, half of dog owners questioned by Kogan et al. (2021) gave or received pet health advice through Facebook groups. Training videos, which are easily available online, often include unverified information (Kuhl et al., 2022), which might lead to difficulties for owners to apply recommendations to their own dog or make mistakes.

In this case, giving preventive advice and explaining to owners how to live with their dog should be the primary focus.

Conclusion

In France, as in many other countries, owners encounter a lot of difficulties in training their dog; in our study, most owners find it difficult to teach their dog basic and social learnings. More than half of them reported at least one undesirable behavior. The problem may be related to a lack of understanding on the part of the owner or to the fact that the dog has a behavioral issue for which the owner is not responsible (e.g., ADHD-like symptoms). To ensure that owners are fully informed, veterinarians should be properly trained to evaluate the owner-dog relationship. An appropriate behavioral evaluation during preventive medicine consultation would allow to early identify educational difficulties or the development of troublesome behavior. Appropriate help could be provided, improving the quality of life of the human-dog bond. A digital platform with verified advice could be created.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire for dog owners (original version made available was in French)

Your dog's education : what information sources are used ? what difficulties are encountered ?

Your dog

1/ Breed or breed type:

2/ Sexe

- Male
- Female
- Neutered

3/ Age:

4/ Place where the dog was adopted

- Professional breeder
- Family breeder
- Private owner
- Dog rescue association
- Born at home
- Other

5/ Adoption age:

6/ Lifestyle

- House
- Apartment
- With garden

Composition of the household/family

7/ Number of adults:

8/ Number of children:

9/ Age of children:

10/ Number of other dogs:

13/ If yes, through what means ?

- I have had other dogs before
- I researched through the internet
- I researched through dog training books
- Family and friends helped me
- I asked advice to a dog trainer (for this dog or the previous one)
- I attended dog training classes
- I asked to my veterinarian
- I asked to a behaviourist veterinarian
- I participated in courses/training on the subject

14/ If you get informed, when did you do so ?

- Before his adoption
- After his adoption
- After he started to present undesirable behaviours

15/ If you get informed after his adoption, how old was he ?

16/ Please indicate the difficulty your dog experienced in learning the following commands or behaviours:

0: Very easy to learn: the learning process was completed in less than a week; the behaviour is now acquired.

1: Easy: the learning process took several weeks to a few months; the behaviour is now acquired.

2: Difficult: the behaviour is not fully acquired; it is not attained in certain situations.

3: Impossible: the behaviour is not yet acquired.

4: Not taught : The owner did not try to train the dog to learn this behaviour.

- Sit
- Lie down
- Recall (he comes back to you)
- Stay (he stays where he has to)
- Be quiet (he calms down after an excited phase)
- Walking on a leash
- Potty training
- Staying alone (he can stay alone without causing any issues)
- Socialization (he is comfortable in every situation: with noises, strangers or other animals..)

17/ Today, have you noticed any undesirable behaviour ?

- Yes
- No

18/ If yes, what are they ?

19/ What information did you need to properly train your dog ?

20/ Are you a canine professional (dog trainer, veterinarian, behaviourist...) ?

- Yes
- No

21/ If yes, what are your profession ?

- Dog trainer
- Dog behaviourist
- Veterinarian
- Dog breeder
- Veterinary assistant
- Other:

Difficoltà educative e problemi comportamentali nel cane: fattori di prevalenza e di rischio

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Sintesi

Poiché l'abbandono del cane è per lo più associato a problemi comportamentali legati a difficoltà di addestramento, lo scopo di questo studio è stato quello di valutare la prevalenza e la natura dei problemi comportamentali, nonché le difficoltà incontrate dai proprietari quando si tratta di obbedienza del cane. Nonostante la crescente consapevolezza dell'importanza di un corretto addestramento del cane, esiste una notevole lacuna di conoscenza per quanto riguarda le sfide specifiche affrontate dai proprietari e le variabili, come razza o sesso, che influenzano queste sfide.

I dati sono stati raccolti tramite un questionario online su 300 cani, con un intervallo di età da 1 a 15 anni.

È stato scoperto che la maggior parte dei cani è stata adottata da cuccioli, con il 48% adottato prima di aver raggiunto i tre mesi di età. Mentre il 30% dei cani proveniva da allevatori professionisti, un altro 30% proveniva da proprietari privati. Inoltre, il 26% è stato ottenuto tramite seconde adozioni (ad esempio, da associazioni o laboratori sperimentali) e il 14% proveniva da allevatori familiari. La maggior parte dei proprietari (95%) ha dichiarato di essere informata sull'educazione del cane.

Internet è stata la fonte di informazioni più comunemente utilizzata (51% dei proprietari). Inoltre, per il 57% dei cani, il proprietario ha segnalato la presenza di almeno un comportamento indesiderato con eccitazione ambientale che era il comportamento indesiderato più comune (30%), seguito da vocalizzazione (25%) e aggressività canina (21%). I cani adottati tra i 3 e i 6 mesi di età presentavano meno problemi comportamentali rispetto agli altri.

L'addestramento all'eliminazione appropriata di feci ed urina era l'apprendimento più facilmente insegnato: il 69% dei cani lo ha imparato "molto facilmente", seguito dal 44% per quanto riguarda restare calmi durante la separazione dal proprietario e dal 39% per la socializzazione con cani e persone. I comandi "seduto" e "sdraiati" erano i più facilmente assimilati, a differenza del richiamo, del restare fermo, del camminare al guinzaglio e del comando "calmati". I cani adottati dopo i 6 mesi di età erano più facili da addestrare rispetto ai cani adottati prima dei 6 mesi di età. I maschi sembrano imparare i comandi di base più facilmente delle femmine e i cani da caccia hanno più difficoltà a eseguire tali comandi rispetto ad altri gruppi di razza.

Questo studio ha evidenziato l'alta frequenza di comportamenti indesiderabili e le difficoltà di educazione dei cani. Questi risultati evidenziano l'importanza di informare il proprietario prima e durante il processo educativo. Un comportamento indesiderato persistente non dovrebbe essere considerato un fallimento e i proprietari dovrebbero essere incoraggiati a chiedere assistenza a un professionista cinofilo.

