

Causes of Relinquishing the Dogs Adopted from Animal Shelters in Taiwan

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Abstract

This study investigated the causes of relinquishing the dogs adopted from animal shelters. The subjects were the adopters of public animal shelters in Taiwan in 2003~2005. Random sampling was conducted upon 10% of the population. This study collected data by telephone survey, and 1,185 calls were made, with 626 valid samples. According to this investigation, when being adopted, most of the animals were below one year old (71.7%; 449/626); among 626 dogs investigated, 229 were relinquished (36.6%; 229/626). They were mostly relinquished within half year after the adoption (45.4%; 104/229). The main cause of abandonment is "behavior" (31.9%; 73/229); "barking" is the most (72.6%; 53/73). Based on the results, the findings are as follows: 1) dogs below one year old are easily adopted; 2) "within half year" after the adoption is the critical period of abandon; 3) the dogs' behavior is the main cause of abandon. Among varied behaviors, barking is the major cause.

Keywords: abandonment, adoption, animal shelter, relinquishing, Taiwan

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บทคัดย่อ

สาเหตุของการปล่อยสุนัขจากสถานพักพิงสัตว์ในไต้หวัน

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การศึกษานี้เป็นการศึกษาสาเหตุของการปล่อยสุนัขที่นำมายังสถานสงเคราะห์สัตว์ ในไต้หวันในปี 2003-2005 ทำการสุ่มตัวอย่างร้อยละ 10 ของประชากร โดยการสำรวจทางโทรศัพท์ โดยโทรศัพท์จำนวน 1185 ครั้งกับกู้มตัวอย่าง 626 ราย ผลการสำรวจพบว่า สัตว์ที่มีอายุต่ำกว่าหนึ่งปี 71.7% (449/626) ถูกปล่อย 36.6% (229/626) สุนัขถูกปล่อยภายในระยะเวลาหนึ่งปีครึ่งหลังจากการรับเลี้ยง 45.4% (104/229) สาเหตุหลักของการปล่อยสุนัขคือ พฤติกรรม 31.9% (73/229) สุนัขเห่าเสียงดัง 72.6% (53/73)

คำสำคัญ: การละทิ้ง, การยอมรับ, ที่พักพิงสัตว์ปล่อย, ไต้หวัน

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Introduction

The problem of stray animals is caused by the excess of pets. After Animal Protection Law of Taiwan was announced in 1998, the governments of the counties and cities have to establish animal sheltering according to the law. However, if the sheltered animals cannot be adopted, they usually end up in euthanasia which is not expected by the public. Related researches suggest that the causes of abandon include relocation, landlords' prohibition, financial difficulties, busy lifestyle, improper domestic facilities, owing too many pets, pets' sickness, personal factors, behavior, etc. (Arkow and Dow, 1984; Patronek et al., 1996; Scarlett et al., 1999; Salman et al., 2000). However, the studies rarely explore the abandon of the adopted dogs from animal shelters. This study collected samples from telephone survey in order to find the percentage and risks of relinquishing the adopted dogs, and to develop a measure to save the innocent animals.

Materials and Methods

This study treated the adopters of public animal shelters of cities and counties in Taiwan in 2003~2005 as the population of sampling. Random sampling was conducted upon 10% of the population. The researcher collected data by telephone surveying. As to the application of program, SAS 9.1 was adopted for statistical analysis.

Results and Discussion

Preference of adoption: Among 626 valid samples, when adopted, the dogs were mostly below one year old (71.7%; 449/626), 11.2% were 1~2 years old (70/626), 5.8% were 2~3 years old (36/626) and 11.3% were above 3 years old (71/626), as shown in Table 1.

Risk of abandon: Among 626 valid samples, 229 responded to the causes of adoption and the outcomes are shown in Table 2. According to Table 2, 45.4% were relinquished within half year after the abandonment (104/229), 7.4% were relinquished within half year ~1 year after the adoption (17/229), 5.7% were relinquished within 1~1.5 years after the adoption (13/229), 1.7% were relinquished within 1.5~2 years after the adoption (4/229) and 1.3% were relinquished within 2~3 years after the adoption (3/229).

Table 1 Ages of dogs when adopted

Ages	Dogs	Percentage
< 1 year	449	71.7%
1 to 2 years	70	11.2%
2 to 3 years	36	5.8%
> 3 years	71	11.3%
Total	626	100.0%

Table 2 Numbers and percentages of dogs relinquished in different adopted

Period for adoption relinquished (year)	Numbers of dogs relinquished	Percentage
<0.5	104	45.4%
0.5~1	17	7.4%
1~1.5	13	5.7%
1.5~2	4	1.7%
2~3	3	1.3%
Missing data	88	38.4%
Total	229	100.0%

Table 3 Frequencies and percentages for the causes of abandonment

Causes of abandonment	Frequency	Percentage
Dogs' behavior*	73	31.9%
Owners' busy lifestyle	24	10.5%
Dogs' sickness	23	10.0%
Relocation	10	4.4%
Owners' allergy	3	1.3%
Causing too many problems	2	0.9%
Too many dogs	2	0.9%
Considerable expensive	0	0.0%
Others	92	40.2%
Total	229	100.0%

Analysis of causes of abandon: According to the questionnaires of 229 cases of abandonment, results are as follows: 1) the adopted dogs' behavior (31.9%; 73/229); 2) lifestyle busy (10.5%; 24/229); 3) owners' sickness 10.0% (23/229); 4) relocation 4.4% (10/229); 5) owners' allergy (1.3%; 3/229); 6) causing too many problems 0.9% (2/229); 7) owning too many dogs 0.9% (2/229), as shown in Table 3. In addition, the researchers investigated 73 families who relinquished their adopted dogs due to "behavior" and realized that those behaviors were: 1) barking 72.6% (53/73); 2) biting 15.1% (11/73); 3) destroying furniture 13.7% (10/73); 4) careless urination 6.8% (5/73), as shown in Table 4

According to this study, the citizens of Taiwan prefer adopting the dogs below one year old (71.7%; 449/626). The risk of abandonment is the highest within half year after the adoption (45.4%; 104/229) and the main cause of abandon is the dogs' behavior (31.9%; 73/229). Among varied behaviors which cause them to be relinquished, barking is the major cause (72.6%; 53/73).

It is a fact that people prefer purchasing or adopting small pets. Lawrence (1986) suggested that human beings tended to have anthropomorphism of animals. They particularly love the animals' childlike qualities which are called neotenization. Pets' neotenous trait is especially noticeable on small dogs. In addition, pet reproducing industry tames the pets in order to make them neotenized and more popular. The main reason is human beings' need to nurture and dominate other species. It can possibly explain the reason that 71.7% dogs adopted in the investigation were below one year old.

Table 4 Frequencies and percentages of different behavioral causes of abandonment

Behavioral causes of abandonment	Frequency (n=73)	Percentage
Barking*	53	72.6%
Biting	11	15.1%
Destroying furniture	10	13.7%
Careless urination	5	6.8%
Others	11	15.1%
Total	Multiple responses	Multiple responses

According to the investigation, 31.9% dogs were relinquished due to behavior (73/229). In the studies on cases of abandonment due to behavior, Salman et al. (1998) suggested 26%, Arkow and Dow (1984) indicated 26%, Line (1998) suggested 28% and Salman et al. (2000) suggested 40%. The figures are lower than the authors' investigation. The possible reasons of the difference as follows: 1) the four studies are from US and the reasons can be in different backgrounds and conditions; 2) dogs investigated in the four studies were dogs with owner; however, dogs studied by the authors were adopted from animal shelters. Arkow and Dow (1984) found that percentage of relinquishing dogs adopted from animal shelters is higher than that of ordinary dogs. The reason is that some dogs that relinquished due to behavior are recycled by animal shelters. Once they are re-adopted, they are more likely to have problematic behaviors.

Dogs' barking: Among all animals of *Canidae*, dog (*Canis familiaris*) is the only species with continuous barking behavior. Although wolf (*Canis lupus*) barks, it is temporary (Cohen and Fox, 1976; Yin, 2002). Reasons why dogs bark are as follows: 1) social facilitation: dogs will follow other dog's bark (Lindsay, 2000); thus, in crowded community with bad sound insulation, dogs can be easily influenced by the bark of neighboring dogs; 2) drawing the owners' attention and expressing their needs; owners might consciously or unconsciously enhance the dogs' bark (Molnar et al., 2006); 3) separation anxiety; it usually happens to busy owners who leave their dogs locked at home, making them anxious about the owners' long-term leave. Symptoms include extreme agitation, barking, whining, repeated barking at the door or window, destruction of furniture, self-mutilation, careless urination and bowel movement, etc. (Takeuchi et al., 2000; Schwartz, 2003; Webster, 2005); 4) watchdog barking; stimulus such as visitors, postmen, neighbors' walking with dogs, etc. (Bradshaw and Nott, 1995); 5) breeds: German Shepherd, Rottweiler, Mini Schnauzer, Doberman, Scottish Terrier, Pomeranian, Australian Shepherd and Chihuahua are quiet watchdogs; however, Mini Schnauzer, Chihuahua and Pomeranian sometimes bark overly (Hart et al., 2006); 6) excitement and happiness: for instance, sled dogs, such as Husky, which do not bark often, will be excited and bark when they enjoy exercises like after wearing the harness of sled vehicle (Coppinger and Schneider, 1995). Causes of barking are complicated and barking suggested by this study might be related to the above.

Crucial cause of the problem: In recent years, licensed veterinarians and animal welfare organization regard people as the crucial cause of the excess of pets (Arkow, 1991; Arluke, 1991; Moulton et al., 1991; Miller et al., 1996). They suggest that because of people's improper behavior, numbers of animals exceed. In order to solve the problem, human beings must change current measures and inappropriate demands for animals. For instance, "behaviors", such as urination, bowel movement, barking and biting which cause them to be relinquished, are the dogs' normal behaviors. Owners should train the dogs to adapt to people's lives. In addition, human beings should treat dogs according to their behavior and needs. For instance, owners should provide appropriate living space for animals instead of leaving them on the street. Dogs should have proper exercises matching their physical needs every day instead of being locked in the cage all day.

In addition, before adopting the dogs, owners must recognize their time, environment and financial capacity. If the above issues of animal welfare are improved, the animals will not cause problems (Fournier and Geller, 2004). It is "responsible pet ownership" emphasized by World Organization for Animal Health and the concept which the veterinarians should actively promote to the society and potential owners.

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