BISHOP BURTON College

UNIVERSITY OF HULL

Why Welfare Concerns Do Not Impact the Popularity of Brachycephalic Dog Breeds

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1.0 Introduction

Brachycephalic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) breed popularity has increased substantially, despite welfare concerns (Fawcett *et al*., 2019). Desirable traits (appearance and temperament) are often a primary concern compared to health issues, which are often overlooked (Holland, 2019). Potential health issues have been found not to influence the breed's popularity (O'Neill *et al*., 2018).

2.0 Aim and Hypothesis

Aim To investigate if welfare issues impact the popularity of brachycephalic dogs.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant association between the awareness of health and welfare issues in brachycephalic dogs and the factors in the decision-making process pre-purchase.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is a significant association between the awareness of health and welfare issues in brachycephalic dogs and the factors in the decision-making process pre-purchase.

3.0 Method

Google Forms was used to create a questionnaire to post on brachycephalic-specific Facebook groups. Respondents were required to be aged 18 or over and be brachycephalic dog owners. Multiple dog households were asked to choose their oldest dog to answer the questionnaire on, as health issues most likely develop as dogs get older. The responses were collected by Microsoft Excel and then analyzed to determine associations on IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0. An ethics form was completed by the researcher and accepted by Bishop Burton College's ethics board.

4.0 Results

4.1 Place of acquisition

A total of 264 responses were received. Figure 1 shows the preferred places of acquisition. Like other studies, breeders are the most popular choice of acquisition.

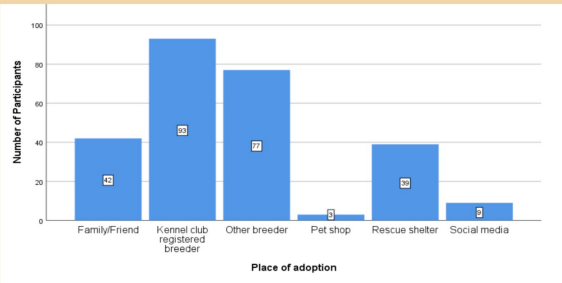

Figure 1. Participants' results of the place of acquisition (Authors Own, 2023).

4.2 Awareness of health issues

Most participants (92.4%) were aware of at least one common health issue in these breeds. Breathing issues were the most known issue (90.2%), and not many participants (27%) were aware of sleeping difficulties, see Figure 2.

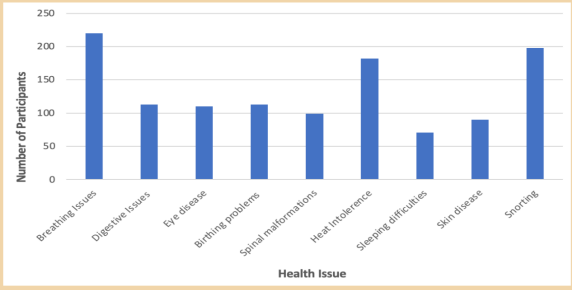

Figure 2. Participants' response to the awareness of health issues (Authors own, 2023)

4.3 Factors influencing pre- and post-acquisition

The chi-square test for influence demonstrates a significance between the preference of age before adoption and the age of the dog at adoption (P>0.04). Although many respondents stated they did not prefer the age of the dog at adoption, most still acquired a puppy (<1 year) (Figure 3).

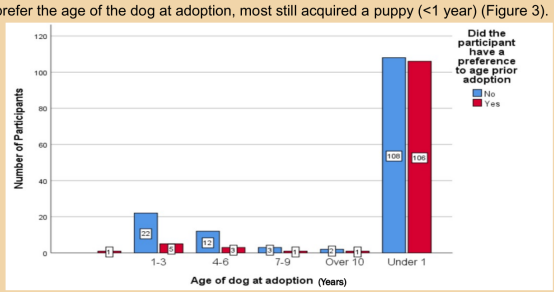

Figure 3. Participants responded to whether they had an age preference before adoption, compared to their dog's age at adoption (Authors own, 2023).

Most participants favoured appearance and size as a factor of acquisition over the possibility of health issues and cost, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pre-acquisition importance statistics on brachycephalic dog breeds (Authors own, 2023)

	Factor							
	Appearance	Size	Energy Levels	Health	Lifespan	Cost	Good with Children	Good with Other Animals
Strongly Agree	41.3%	53%	37.9%	8%	9.8%	3.8%	40.5%	40.2%
Agree	34.5%	30.3%	36%	20.1%	22.7%	11.7%	25.8%	33%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13.3%	9.8%	19.3%	47.7%	48.9%	45.8%	26.1%	20.5%
Disagree	4.2%	1.9%	0.8%	11.7%	9.5%	18.2%	1.9%	1.9%
Strongly Disagree	1.1%	0.8%	0.4%	4.5%	2.3%	11%	1.9%	0.4%

5.0 Discussion

Most participants were focused on the appearance of a dog than the potential health issues alike other studies (Holland, 2019; Weiss *et al*., 2012). There was a significant association (P<0.04) between the preferred acquisition age and the acquired dog's age as many participants stated not to have a preference, however, most still acquired a puppy. Similarly, many studies state people prefer to acquire brachycephalic puppies (Packer *et al*., 2020; Fawcett *et al*., 2019). There was no significant association between the awareness of health issues in brachycephalic breeds and the factors within the decision-making process, rejecting the hypothesis. Participants mainly acquired their dogs from Kennel Club (KC) and non-KC breeders. Increased demand has resulted in non-registered breeders breeding more brachycephalic dogs with desirable characteristics (wrinkles, short noses), despite health risks (Packer *et al*., 2021). KC registered breeders must screen, and health checks the parent dogs before breeding, to ensure the puppies are of acceptable health (KC, 2022), suggesting why many participants did not consider health a primary factor. Table 1 shows primary considerations for acquiring a dog were appearance, size, energy levels and good with children and other animals, compared to debatably more important characteristics of health, lifespan and cost, suggesting that they would rather acquire a "cute" dog than ensuring their health. Steinert *et al*. (2019) stated that brachycephalic dog breeds have "infant-like features" which make people more attracted to their "cute" and desirable looks. Education could improve welfare, however, the study found that although participants were aware of health risks, they still acquired a brachycephalic breed, suggesting that people their characteristics. The future welfare of brachycephalic breeds could be compromised unless people begin to consider their welfare more than their desires.

6.0 Conclusion

The results concluded that knowledge of welfare issues does not impact decision-making factors and the popularity of brachycephalic dog breeds. Further research is important to research the possibilities and sustainability of outbreeding limitations of brachycephalic breeds to improve the quality and quantity of life.

7.0 References

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