



RESEARCH

Attitudes of children and adults to dogs in Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom

Nelly Lakestani^a, Morag L. Donaldson^b, Marina Verga^c, Natalie Waran^d

^aDepartment of Psychology, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, United Kingdom;

^bSchool of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom;

^cFacoltà di Medicina Veterinaria, Dipartimento di Scienze Animali, Università degli Studi di Milano, Milano, Italy; and

^dFaculty of Social and Health Sciences, Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

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Abstract The aim of this study was to create and carry out a preliminary assessment of an attitude toward dogs scale, for preschool children and adults, in different European countries. Attitudes to animals may differ between different cultures; however, differences in attitudes to pets between European countries have not yet been investigated. Because exchange of information between the European countries is increasing, investigating differences in cultures is important for creating an effective European dog bite prevention program.

Two short questionnaires were created, one to measure children's attitudes and another to measure adults' attitudes to dogs. These were administered to 107 nursery school children (mean age = 4.5 years) and 120 University students (mean age = 21.3 years) in Milan, Barcelona, and Edinburgh.

Reliability testing of the questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.77 for the children's questionnaire and of 0.73 for the adults' questionnaire, suggesting that the questionnaires reliably measure attitudes to dogs. Children who owned dogs were found to have a more positive attitude to dogs than children who did not own dogs ($U = 1347$, $P < 0.001$). Similarly, adults who owned dogs had a more positive attitude to dogs than those who did not own dogs ($U = 4027.5$, $P < 0.001$). No significant differences in attitudes to dogs were found between the different countries and genders. Surprisingly, adults who had been bitten by dogs had a significantly more positive attitude than those who had not been bitten in the past ($U = 770.5$, $P < 0.05$).

These results suggest that it is possible to use a questionnaire to measure attitudes of very young children to dogs and, because no differences were found between the different countries, it should be possible to use a single dog bite prevention program for Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom, rather than having to modify it to suit different cultures. In addition, the attitudes to dogs' questionnaire may be used in various other contexts such as to assess the effectiveness in changing attitudes of a welfare education program on dogs.

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Address reprint requests and correspondence: Nelly Lakestani, PhD, Department of Psychology, University of Lincoln, Brayford Pool, Lincoln LN6 7TS, United Kingdom; Tel: + 44 (0) 1522 886224; Fax: +44 (0) 1522 886026.

E-mail: nlakestani@lincoln.ac.uk

Introduction

Pets often play a very important role in the lives of their owners, and attitudes to pets have been studied on numerous occasions. These studies demonstrated the importance

of pets' role on various aspects of people's lives, such as the health benefits of owning a pet (Templer et al., 1981; Kafer et al., 1992; Munsell et al., 2004). The most popular pet is often reported as being the dog (Kidd and Kidd, 1985; Albert and Bulcroft, 1988; Hart, 1995); however, despite their popularity, there has been little research investigating attitudes of people to dogs. This is unfortunate because such research has the potential to contribute to the prevention of dog bite accidents. A person's attitude toward dogs may influence the way they behave with dogs, which in turn may be related to the likelihood of being bitten. If this is the case, then educating people about dog behavior might be expected to change their attitudes and behavior toward dogs and thereby reduce the risk of dog bite accidents. Changing attitudes is of particular importance for prevention programs because simply improving knowledge may not always result in a change in behavior. For example, it was shown that in road traffic accident prevention, increasing knowledge alone did not necessarily induce a preventive effect (Zeedyk et al., 2001; Morrongiello et al., 2010). By contrast, cognitive behavioral interventions on stockpersons' attitudes did result in a change in their behavior toward dairy cows and in better handling of the animals (Hemsworth et al., 2002). Therefore, changing attitudes may lead to a change in behavior. Because there is evidence that young children are particularly at risk from dog bite accidents (Bandow, 1996; Cornwell, 1997; Frangakis and Petridou, 2003; Ozanne-Smith et al., 2001; Savino et al., 2002; Kahn et al., 2003; Morgan and Palmer, 2007) and there has been even less research on children's than on adults' attitudes to dogs, the need to investigate children's attitudes to dogs is especially pressing. This article reports a study that aims to address this need.

Templer et al. (1981) developed a Pet Attitude Scale, which was reported to be a reliable measure of people's attitudes to pets, with a Cronbach's alpha reliability measure of 0.93 and test-retest reliability of 0.92. However, there are problems with using instruments that measure people's attitudes to pets in general rather than measuring people's attitude to a specific species. Some respondents may be thinking about dogs while they are answering the questionnaire, whereas others may be thinking about birds and this may affect the way they will answer the questions (Miura et al., 2000; Zasloff, 1996). To assess attitudes to dogs more directly, Miura et al. (2000) created a 46-question dog attitude questionnaire for adults, which was used for investigating attitudes in Japan and the United Kingdom.

Few studies have investigated children's attitudes toward their pets. One example is a study performed by Kidd and Kidd (1985), who used an open-ended questionnaire interview method. They found that most of the 3 to 13-year-old participants had positive attitudes to pets, with 99% saying they wanted a pet. Although this study investigated attitudes to pets in general rather than to dogs in particular, the findings suggest that attitudes of children to dogs are especially favorable, such that 57% said they preferred

dogs to other pets and dogs were described as playmates significantly more than cats.

The primary aim of the present study is to devise a structured questionnaire suitable for use with children and focusing specifically on attitudes toward dogs, thus extending and combining the approaches of Miura et al. (2000) and Kidd and Kidd (1985). The development of an instrument that enables children's attitudes to dogs to be measured reliably and efficiently will be useful in several ways. For example, it may contribute to creating efficient dog bite prevention programs by investigating whether these do result in a change in attitude as well as improving the children's knowledge. In addition, attitudes may influence children's attainment, consistency, and quality of learning with more positive attitudes leading to better learning (Germann, 1988; Weinburgh, 1995). This has been shown in "science education" and it may be assumed that it will be similar in the case of teaching children about dogs, whereby children who have a more positive attitude to dogs may have more interest in learning the material. Therefore, another benefit of having a measure of children's attitudes is that it may be a useful tool to assess the predisposition of children in learning about dogs, as part of a prevention program. An attitude toward dogs scale for children may also be used as a tool to assess whether dog welfare education programs are effective. In fact, in humane education an effective program is considered one that changes attitudes to animals and not the one that simply results in children learning the information included in the program (Ascione, 1992).

A second aim is to investigate whether there are cultural differences in attitudes to dogs. Previous research suggests that there are some cultural differences in attitudes toward animals in general (Kellert, 1994; Passariello, 1999; Miura et al., 2002). For example, Miura et al. (2002) found a positive correlation between childhood experience with animals and positive attitudes toward animals. They reported that British students had more childhood experience of animals (such as visiting animal shelters and livestock farms) and more positive attitudes to animals than Japanese students. In addition, British students also had greater interest in animal welfare issues than did the Japanese students. The British students' behavior and beliefs toward animals was, therefore, related to their attitude toward them.

Differences in attitudes to pets between European countries have not yet been investigated. Because exchange of information between the European countries is increasing, investigating differences in cultures is important for creating an effective European dog bite prevention program. Accordingly, this study compares attitudes to dogs between 3 different European countries – Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Although these countries are more culturally similar than Britain and Japan, there are nevertheless some difference in experiences of animals that might give rise to differing attitudes toward dogs.

Even within a particular country or culture, people's attitudes to dogs may vary in relation to specific aspects

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