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Title: Post adoption support – why do owners decline behavioural advice for canine problem behaviours?

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## **Introduction**

Tailored post-adoption support, offered by some rehoming organisations, is aimed to provide early and preventative advice to improve adopted dog and owner quality of life, thus increasing successful adoptions. Although advice is free-of-charge, owners can decline to receive it. In this study, we investigated whether owners accepted advice after reporting specific behaviours during a post adoption follow-up call.

## **Methodology**

Telephone surveys were scheduled for owners at 2-5 days following adoption of a dog from UK Dogs Trust Rehoming Centres. Calls included questions on undesirable behaviours towards a person or dog and when left at home alone, with behavioural responses read out to owners. Pre-defined algorithms were used to trigger an offer of advice in the form of a call-back from a behaviourist.

## **Main Findings**

In total, 53% owners (1125/2124) were offered behaviour support but 68% (767/1125) declined the offer. Advice was accepted by only 30% (131/437) for behaviours towards people or dogs and 28% when left alone (96/338). For owners who reported both, 42% (104/250), accepted advice.

The behaviour and context influenced acceptance of support. For example, advice was accepted by 61% (11/18) of owners who reported their dog lunged forward whilst barking towards another unfamiliar dog, but only by 27% (4/15) when the dog was growling towards an unfamiliar dog.

Many owners who declined advice used terms including having no concerns, happy to monitor or see how they get on, or that the behaviour had only happened once or a few times.

## **Principle Conclusions and Implications**

Over two-thirds of owners declined the offer of advice after reporting specific behaviour(s). This may be dependent on the context of the behaviour. Understanding barriers to support for newly rehomed dogs could help improve rehoming, provide advice to reduce behavioural problems and improve retention of adopted dogs in the home.