



HEALTH AND LIFESPAN OF SHAR PEI DOGS IN THE UK

The Shar Pei dog breed is instantly recognisable due to their distinctive loose, thickened and folded skin that results from a genetic mutation. 'Shar Pei' translates from the Chinese for 'sandpaper skin'. Their abnormal skin is an extreme conformation that has been linked to several severe health problems, including eyelid and ear issues.

Extreme conformation in dogs refers to a physical appearance that has been so significantly altered by mankind away from the natural canine state that affected dogs often suffer from poor health and welfare.

This study aimed to describe the demography, common disorders and lifespan of Shar Pei dogs in the UK. The study used information from anonymised veterinary clinical records in the VetCompass Programme.

The average lifespan of Shar Pei dogs in the study was 7.3 years

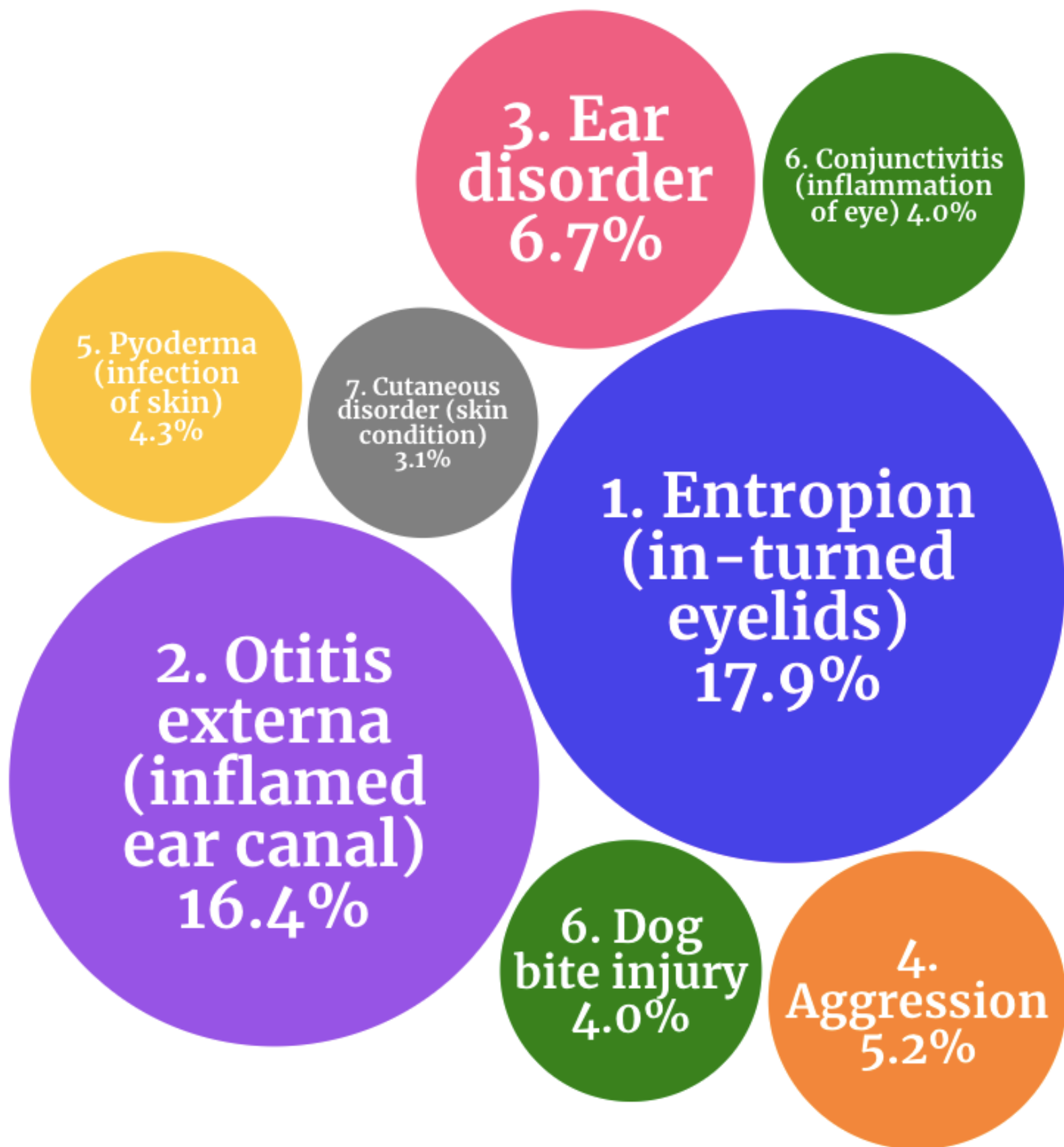
Shar Pei dogs comprised 0.42% of dogs in the UK (one in every 250 dogs).

The study included 1,913 Shar Pei dogs from an overall study population of 455,557 UK dogs

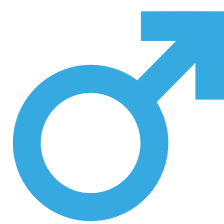
The average bodyweight of Shar Pei dogs was: Male 23.5kg Female 20.8kg

Most commonly diagnosed disorders*

*percentage of Shar Pei dogs diagnosed in 2013



Female Shar Pei had higher probability than males for entropion and conjunctivitis



Male Shar Pei had higher probability than females for aggression and pododermatitis

190/1,913 (9.9%) Shar Pei dogs died during the study period

The average age at death in Shar Pei was 7.3 years. This is substantially shorter than the 11.2 years lifespan reported for dogs overall in the UK*

The most common causes of death in Shar Pei were cancer (15.4%), kidney disorders (13.2%) and behavioural disorders (11.0%)

*Teng, et al (2022) 'Life tables of annual life expectancy and mortality for companion dogs in the United Kingdom', Scientific Reports

CONCLUSIONS

Anybody considering acquiring a dog should prioritise the welfare of the dog over our human desires to own animals with extreme conformations. This welfare message aligns with national messaging from most UK stakeholders in canine welfare.



The most common disorder of Shar Pei dogs was entropion (in-turned eyelids) which was diagnosed in one in five of all Shar Pei dogs each year. This painful extreme conformation is linked to the hereditary disease of hyaluronosis which largely defines the breed with their characteristic loose, thickened and folded skin.



Many of the common disorders of Shar Pei result from their extreme conformation of skin thickening and folding. Urgent action is needed to reform the breed to protect the welfare of these dogs and to ensure breeders and owners are meeting their legal, ethical, moral and social responsibilities.

[CLICK TO READ THE FULL STUDY](#)

O'Neill et al. (2023) "Is it now time to iron out the wrinkles? Health of Shar Pei dogs under primary veterinary care in the UK" Canine Medicine and Genetics

RVC VetCompass <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass> carries out welfare research based on anonymised clinical information shared from over 30% of UK veterinary practices. We are very grateful to the owners and veterinary professionals who contribute to VetCompass research.