

Lasting lockdown love:

What influenced the strength of the relationship between owners and their now grown-up Pandemic Puppies? Lessons for future owners and dogs



- A weak owner-dog relationship can lead to rehoming of the dog or other welfare concerns, and affect owner wellbeing.
- Could the changes in how owners bought and brought up their puppies in 2020 weaken the owner-dog relationship?
- This study of dogs purchased during COVID-19 contributes to a better understanding of owner-dog relationships overall.

Study methods

The Pandemic Puppies project is a longitudinal study of dogs bought as puppies aged <16 weeks old during the 2020 phase of the pandemic.

This study used data from 794 owners who completed two surveys: when the dogs were puppies in 2020 and when the dogs were 21-months old.

Relationship strength was measured in the “21-months old” survey, using two scores from the Monash Dog-Owner Relationship Scale.

‘Closeness’ measured feelings of companionship, attachment and love.

‘Costs’ measured feelings that their dog was a burden, including time, emotion, effort as well as ongoing financial costs.

Key study results

After pandemic-related factors such as not being able to attend puppy classes were taken into account.

Using fewer aversive training methods* was linked to higher Closeness scores



Owners who bought puppies specifically because of the pandemic had higher Costs scores



Owners who reported problem behaviours had higher Costs scores

Aggression was the only problem behaviour linked to lower Closeness scores.



*Aversive training uses methods the dog finds unpleasant. For example shouting, pushing, smacking, jerking on the lead or ‘devices’ like spray bottles and bark collars.

Study conclusions

Problem behaviours have major negative impacts on the relationship between owners and their Pandemic dogs. Problem behaviours are very common in dogs, not only in dogs bought during 2020.

Addressing unwanted behaviour in dogs could help strengthen the owner-dog relationship:
 Choose reward-based training.
 To manage unwanted behaviours, seek veterinary advice for underlying health problems and referral to an ABTC registered behaviourist.

Anyone considering getting a dog should “stop and think” carefully about how their dog will fit in their lives - now and in the future. Given dogs live on average for 12 years, better planning could help prevent a weaker relationship with their dog that could result in relinquishment.

[CLICK TO READ THE FULL STUDY](#)



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