

Drug therapy for undesirable behaviours in dogs

Undesirable behaviours (UBs) in dogs carry potentially serious welfare consequences for both the dogs and their owners. This study aimed to fill data gaps on the usage of behaviour-modifying drugs to manage undesirable behaviours in dogs.



Number of dogs in study

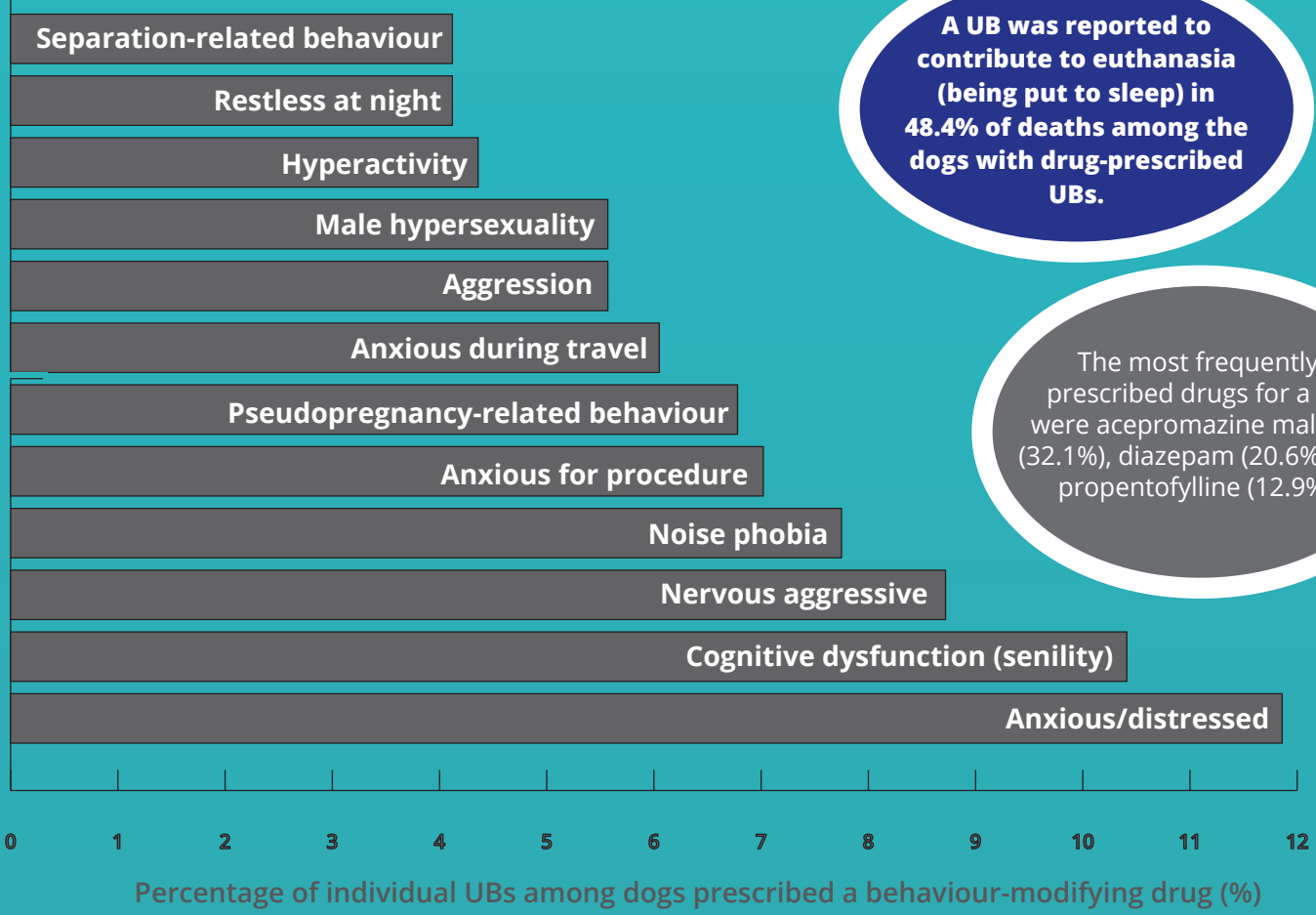
103,597

Proportion of dogs prescribed drugs for a UB in 2013

1 in 250
(0.40%)

Clinical management and outcomes

Most common undesirable behaviours diagnosed in the UK

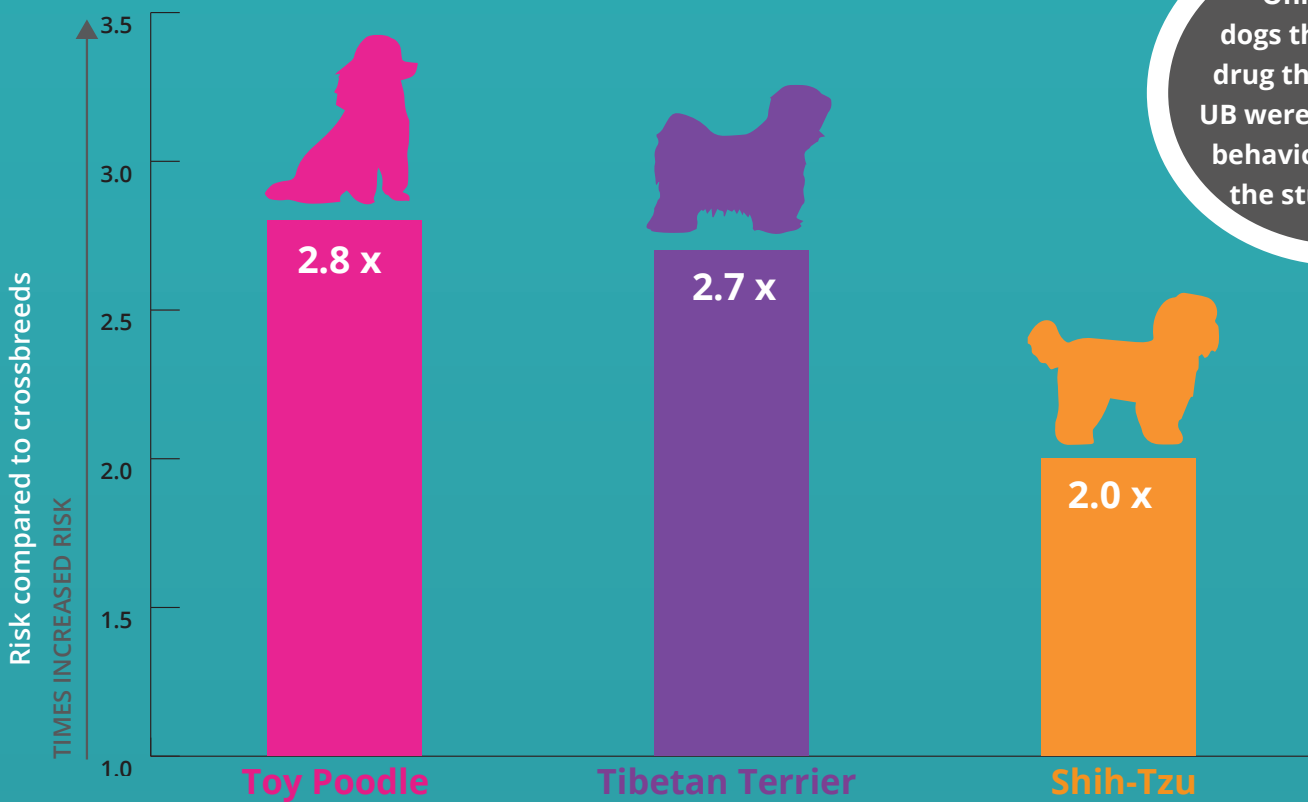


A UB was reported to contribute to euthanasia (being put to sleep) in 48.4% of deaths among the dogs with drug-prescribed UBs.

The most frequently prescribed drugs for a UB were acepromazine maleate (32.1%), diazepam (20.6%) and propentofylline (12.9%).

What are the risk factors for drug-prescribed UBs?

Breeds most likely to receive behaviour modifying drugs



Only 2.2% of dogs that received drug therapy for an UB were referred to a behaviourist during the study period.



Dogs aged over 12 years had 3.1 times the risk of receiving behaviour-modifying drugs compared to dogs aged under 3 years.



Neutered males (1.8x) and entire males (1.5x) had increased risk of being treated with behaviour-modifying drugs compared to entire females.

CONCLUSIONS:

The frequency of drug-prescribed UBs was 0.4%. This could suggest that opportunities for useful intervention with drug therapy are being missed.

There are concerns that UBs in dogs have increased since the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, it is more important than ever to ensure dog owners receive adequate behavioural support for their pets.

Veterinary referrals to accredited behavioural specialists may improve the welfare of dogs with severe UBs.

CLICK TO READ

Craven et al. (2021) "Veterinary drug therapies used for undesirable behaviours in UK dogs under primary veterinary care" PLOS One

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.