

The Pawfect Storm: High levels of problem behaviours and punishment-based training in the UK “Pandemic Puppies” cohort

- **Problem behaviours** (i.e. behaviours that owners find problematic) are a leading cause of **relinquishment** and **euthanasia** of young dogs
- **“Pandemic Puppies”** bought during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic were exposed to many **risk factors for problem behaviours**, including..
 - more likely to be **bought by first-time owners**
 - **missing out on key puppy socialisation experiences** (e.g., puppy classes)
 - more likely to be **bought from poor welfare sources**



This study aimed to explore the impact of these early-life risk factors, and owner management strategies (including training methods), upon problem behaviours in a UK cohort of Pandemic Puppies aged 21 months.

We followed a cohort of 985 puppies from when they were <16 weeks old, to when they were 21-months old, and found...

96.7% of owners reported their dog had at least one problem behaviour

5 Average number of problem behaviours per dog

MORE COMMON in dogs trained using aversive methods

The top 5 most common behaviours reported were:

- Pulling on the lead (**67%**)
- Jumping up at people (**57%**)
- Not coming back when called (**52%**)
- Chasing (e.g., cats, wildlife, traffic) (**35%**)
- Barking or howling (**33%**)

82.3% of owners reported using at least one ‘aversive’ training method

- ➔ **Aversive methods**, those that **‘punish’** dogs, and have previously been shown to be associated with increased **aggression**, **fear** and **anxiety**
- ➔ Owners using **‘aversive’** methods were **more likely to report problem behaviours** in their dogs - suggesting these methods are often ineffective
- ➔ Owners of **large dogs (30-40kg)** were more likely to use aversive methods
- ➔ Owners who **bought a specific breed/crossbreed because they thought it would be easy to train** were more likely to use aversive methods
- ★ But...**owners who attended online puppy classes** were **less likely to use aversive methods**



TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Using punishment-based training does not help to improve dog behaviour problems, could cause more problems, and can damage your relationship with them.

Owners Expectations vs. Realities of Behaviour and Training

33%
Thought training their dog was harder than expected

First-time owners were more likely to think training their dog was **harder** than they expected

15%
Thought their dog’s behaviour was worse than expected

Owners of large dogs (>40kg) were more likely to think their dog’s behaviour was **worse** than they expected

TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Dogs of all shapes and sizes are complex animals and need extensive, lifelong training to fit acceptably within our human lives and expectations. Make sure you are well-prepared, realistic and able to meet these needs when considering taking on a dog or puppy.

Recommendations for dog owners

- 📞 If you have any concerns about your dog’s behaviour, contact your vet who can physically examine your dog (*as many behaviour problems are related to health*), take a thorough history and suggest further investigations and treatment/management options as necessary
- 🎓 If your dog missed out on puppy classes, it’s not too late! Even if you are an experienced dog owner, you could benefit from the latest information on dog training from a science-based dog trainer; find one in your area via the ABTC
- 🐾 If you have more serious concerns about your dog’s behaviour, talk to your vet about a referral to an accredited animal behaviourist - many problem behaviours can be successfully managed and/or treated if approached appropriately!

[For more information visit](#)

www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/research-projects-and-opportunities/projects/rvc-pandemic-puppies-survey



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