



AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF DOGS AND ITS ETHOLOGICAL FUNCTION

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ABSTRACT

Aggressive behaviour is a typical feature of dogs and is important in nature for survival of individuals, their integration into pack, defence of territory, food or the young. Aggression and the related manifestations in humans and animals is an important philosophical, psychosocial, ethological and ethical issue on both human and subhuman level.

Key words: aggressive behaviour; dog; ethology

INTRODUCTION

From the ethological point of view, aggressive behaviour of dogs can be characterised as an intensive, emotional, expressive response oriented against the object of dog's frustration. Aggression is a phylogenetic, pre-domestication, instinctive state of animals of self-preservation importance (4). Dogs are carnivorous animals and as such they exhibit various forms of aggressive behaviour.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

According to whether the aggressive behaviour is directed against conspecifics or against individuals of other species, we divide aggression to *intraspecific* and *interspecific*.

Intraspecific aggression comprises ritualised (suppressed) and non-suppressed – obvious aggression oriented against individuals of the same species. It establishes social hierarchy and division of territories of respective animal species in certain area.

Interspecific aggression is oriented against different animal species and includes offensive and defensive elements. Its most frequent form is the self-protective aggression.

On the basis of studies of a number of authors (3, 6, 5) the aggressive behaviour of dogs was divided to 8 most frequently occurring forms. These eight types of dog aggression are related to *fear*, *dominance*, *possessive behaviour*, *defending behaviour* (defence of territory, humans), *predatory behaviour*, *punishment*, *pain* and *intraspecies aggression*. Such multitude of categories points to various neurobiological mechanisms of dog aggression.

Defensive aggression

Defensive aggression occurs when the dog defends itself or perceives the situation as threat or pain. Defensive aggression is related to fear, pain or threat of punishment and includes defensive or submissive signals before or during the aggression.

Dominant aggression

Dominant aggression is related to social relationships between two or more animals one of which appropriates important resources, such as food, shelter, mate, and similar. Relationships are established in the group of animals and are maintained on the basis of threat and communication signals which decreases the fighting resulting in injury.

Possessive aggression

This aggression develops when the dog appropriates some objects, for example a bone, food, a toy. Such behaviour is frequently associated with dominant aggression.

Protective aggression

Aggression of this type occurs as a result of territorial behaviour regarding humans or animals.

Intraspecies aggression

Typical intraspecies aggression includes aggression within the group of males and group of females. Less frequently it involves aggression between a male and female.

Predatory aggression

Predatory aggression is a part of feeding behaviour of carnivores. However, some dogs exhibit behaviour which is part of predatory behaviour, e.g. visual exploration, hunting small animals or even humans. The stimuli that usually induce this behaviour include small size and/or movement.

Fear and phobia

Fear affects a wide spectrum of causes (1). Stimuli that cause fear may be related to predators, intensive physical environmental stimuli and warning signals. Fear and phobias can sometimes be observed due to constitutional factors or temperament, or in other cases because of insufficient experience with fear stimuli.

Table 1. Percentage of Specific Aggressive Behaviours Occurring in Each Type of Aggressive Behaviour Problem (2)

	N	Bark	Growl	Bare teeth	Snap	Bite	Stare
Fear	86	60.5	53.5	10.5	24.4	33.7	0.0
Dominance	73	27.4	84.9	23.3	30.1	60.3	20.6
Possessive	65	7.7	69.2	12.3	20.0	33.9	0.0
Protective	63	61.9	52.4	3.2	19.1	25.4	1.6

In addition to the above mentioned forms of normal aggressive behaviour of dogs there are also aggressive ethopathies. They are conditional on predisposing factors (inherent, heritable, developing during perinatal period), immediate factors, such as traumas, infections of CNS, and can also be related to various frustrations and distress.

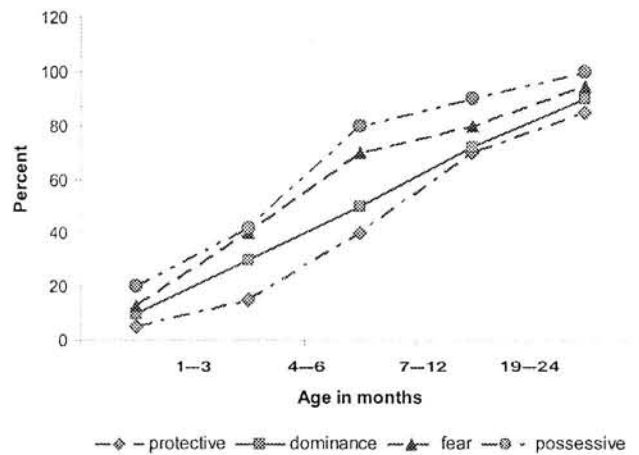


Fig. 1. Percentage of dog exhibiting types of aggressive behaviour problems at different ages (2)

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