

EXPLORING FUTURE POSSIBILITIES FOR STUDIES IN CANINE ANXIETY DISORDERS

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Clinical behavior problems in dogs such as aggression, compulsive disorders and separation anxiety appear to stem from anxiety disorders. Although, unlike human research, epidemiological data in veterinary behavior medicine is scarce, making it difficult to assume this to be true. Currently, we are seeing canine compulsive disorders in genetically predisposed breeds. Based on this finding, canine compulsive disorders are one condition where biological evidence is being found such as genetic association, brain structural abnormalities in Doberman pinschers, and elevated neuropeptides in Bull terriers. However, other anxiety disorders such as social avoidance, fear aggression or separation anxiety show few breed predispositions making it difficult to travel down a similar research path. It is estimated that 29-50% of all canines have some level of separation anxiety, which is considerably more prevalent compared to canine compulsive disorders; estimated to be 20-28%. Due to this high prevalence, separation anxiety is the first disorder to have an on-label pharmaceutical treatment. Although, we still need to have a distinct biological phenotype for this anxiety disorder since, similar to human psychiatric disorders, clinical diagnosis and treatment response do not directly lead to genetic associations. Such is the case for all canine behavioral disorders. Additionally, despite having a well-known categorical guidebook, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), the psychiatric field still does not have a strong understanding of distinct pathophysiology or implications for genetics research. The most probable cause for this is the field's ingrained categorical approach to mental disorders. We need to avoid a similar categorical dead end and instead move towards advancing our understanding of biological evidence. One way is to examine recent collective literatures in canine cognition and biology to shed light on what our own next steps can be in regards to foundational research. To begin this process, relevant studies of canine anxiety disorders will be discussed in this session with the intention of stimulating future research possibilities.

Keywords: canine, anxiety disorders, compulsive disorder, separation anxiety; dog behavior, behavior disorders