

## A survey of animal welfare needs in Soweto

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### ABSTRACT

The diagnostic phase of an interactive research evaluation model was used in the investigation of the animal welfare needs of a low-income urban community in South Africa. Data were gathered by means of a structured interview and direct observations by animal welfare officers. During the survey of 871 animal owners in Soweto, it was found that dogs were owned by 778 households and cats by 88 households. The dog to human ratio was estimated at 1:12.4. Respondents were asked whether they enjoyed owning animals and 96.1 % said that they did. Only 26.3 % mentioned that they had problems with their own animals and 16.6 % had problems with other people's animals. Treatment of sick animals (29.7 %) was seen as a priority. However, less than 1 % ( $n = 6$ ) used the services of private veterinarians. Others took their animals to welfare organisations or did not have them treated. Perceptions of affordable costs of veterinary treatments were also recorded. In addition to treatment, respondents indicated a need for vaccination (22.5 %), sterilisation (16.5 %), control of internal (3.7 %) and external (8.8 %) parasites, education and extension (6.6 %), prevention of cruelty to animals (3.2 %) and expansion of veterinary clinics to other parts of Soweto (1.3 %).

**Key words:** animal welfare, Soweto, survey, veterinary needs appraisal.

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### INTRODUCTION

The Soweto branch of the Johannesburg Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) requested assistance with a survey to determine the animal welfare needs of Soweto in a structured fashion so that they would be better able to design cost-effective and affordable methods to meet these needs. Soweto is a sprawling urban metropolis founded during the apartheid era to house black people working in Johannesburg<sup>9</sup>. Soweto SPCA was originally started as a branch of Johannesburg SPCA in 1988. Residents of Soweto fall into a category in which the mean monthly income of more than 60 % of households is estimated to be below R850.00<sup>3</sup>. Primary animal health care activities and veterinary extension are possibly more cost-effective than curative veterinary medicine and therefore

may be useful for an SPCA that must rely on public funding to service almost two-thirds of its target population.

Much of the work done by an SPCA, although it is directly aimed at the welfare of animals, also benefits the community. Stray animal control is an example. In most of the major cities in South Africa, including Johannesburg/Soweto, the SPCA has amalgamated with the city pound<sup>4,6</sup>. This has meant that stray animal control can be taken beyond the merely preventative to the palliative by promoting the sterilisation of animals. Such extension messages, in order to be effective, must be specifically designed to meet the needs of the target population<sup>1</sup>.

Animal welfare strategies and extension used at Soweto SPCA to date were based on experiences with animal owners from a different cultural and socioeconomic background who lived in greater Johannesburg. It has been suggested that, to develop sustainable veterinary and animal welfare interventions, human needs, both perceived and actual, should be appraised<sup>7</sup>. The Soweto SPCA therefore requested a quantitative appraisal of animal welfare needs within its own target community. The interactive veterinary research evaluation model had been

used previously to quantitatively assess veterinary needs in a resource-poor semi-rural community and was considered to be suitable for use in an urban setting as well<sup>8</sup>. The results of the diagnostic phase of this investigation, a structured interview, are reported in this paper.

### METHODS

A method for selecting, ranking and evaluating animal welfare objectives is illustrated in Fig. 1.

The situational analysis reported in this paper was based on a quantitative veterinary needs appraisal<sup>6,7,8</sup>. Once the veterinary needs of a community have been appraised using qualitative or quantitative participatory methods, the results of the situational analysis are reported back to all stakeholders. In Soweto, this took the form of a written report. Ranking and scoring of data was done statistically. The costs of possible solutions to problems brought forward during the situational analysis will be estimated by stakeholders, including the community, and implementation should follow and be evaluated. Situational analysis forms part of the diagnostic phase of an interactive veterinary research evaluation method that was previously used at Rietgat, North West Province<sup>8</sup>. Data were gathered from respondents representing 900 households in Soweto, Gauteng, by means of a structured interview and direct observations by animal welfare officers. The unit of measurement was taken as a single household. The Economic Situation Score (ESS) described by McCrindle *et al.* 1994<sup>8</sup> was used to estimate the relative socioeconomic situation of respondents on a scale between 1 and 5. A random sample consisting of 200 households was surveyed for animal ownership so as to calculate the dog-human ratio in Soweto. Simple descriptive statistical methods such as frequency tables were used in data analysis<sup>2,11</sup>.

### RESULTS

Of the 900 questionnaires, 29 were discarded as they could not be deciphered. It was found that the mean number of persons per household surveyed

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(*n* = 871) was 5.2 (SD 2.1, range 1–16, but 95.4 % of households consisted of between 2 and 9 people, modal class was 5). The dog to human ratio was calculated from the random survey as 1:12.4 or 0.42 dogs/household.

Respondents were mainly animal owners, as non-owners were not interested in answering the questionnaire. Only 77 of the people interviewed had no animals. Of those interviewed, 778 (89.3 %) owned dogs. Amongst dog owners, the majority (60.7 %, *n* = 472) owned only one dog, with 23.8 % (*n* = 185) owning 2 dogs. The range was 1–11; however, larger numbers of dogs probably indicated the presence of puppies. Cats were owned by 88 respondents. The majority of cat owners had one cat, the range was 1–7. Fowls were owned by 41 respondents, the numbers owned ranging from 1–150.

The languages spoken by animal owners are important because extension messages should be comprehensible to the recipient. Cost factors are also involved, as the the cost of printing a pamphlet increases with the number of languages used. The 3 languages preferred by respondents were Zulu (23.6 %), English (21.3 %) and Sotho (14.7 %).

In Soweto, as described previously for the North West Province<sup>8</sup>, the majority of respondents (55.1 %, *n* = 480) indicated that the father owned the animals in the household.

Respondents were asked whether they enjoyed owning animals and 837 (96.1 %) said that they did, 27 (3.1 %) said they did not. Respondents to this question included the 77 who did not own animals, and even a majority of these (65.0 %) enjoyed ownership of animals. Respondents were also asked whether they had problems with their own animals or those of other people. Only 26.3 % (*n* = 229) of those sampled had problems with their own animals (Table 1). Of the respondents, 16.6 % (*n* = 145) had problems with other people's animals (Table 2).

The next question asked was 'Where do you take your animals if they get sick?' Of the 717 replies, 69.5 % (498) used Soweto SPCA, 13.7 % (98) used the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), 10.5 % (75) said their animals did not get sick, only 0.8 % (6) took their animals to private veterinarians. The rest used other SPCAs or SPCA mobile clinics, did not take them anywhere (*n* = 6) or treated the animals themselves. Taxis (60.5 %) were the main form of transport used to get animals to the clinics, 7.8 % walked to the clinic and 30.5 % relied on the SPCA

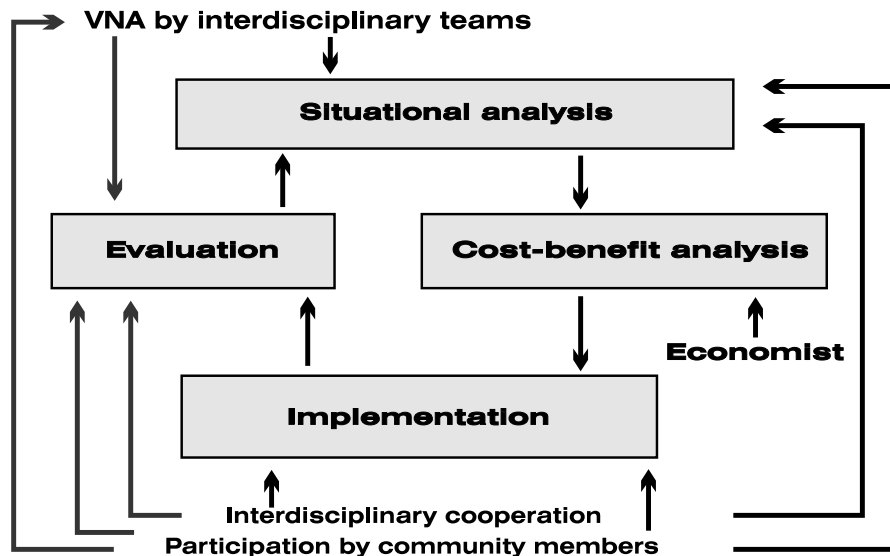


Fig. 1: Diagram showing a method for appraising and evaluating animal welfare objectives after situational analysis in consultation with the target community and with interdisciplinary cooperation (VNA = veterinary needs appraisal).

Table 1: Problems that respondents had with their own animals.

Problems	Frequency ( <i>n</i> = 265 <sup>a</sup> )	Relative frequency (%)
Animals sick or injured	196	74.0
Management of animals	29	10.9
Behaviour problems	24	9.1
Overpopulation of animals	10	3.8
Other	6	2.3

<sup>a</sup>Number of complaints by 229 respondents, some of whom gave more than one answer.

Table 2: Problems with other people's animals.

Problem	Frequency ( <i>n</i> = 164 <sup>a</sup> )
Animals (strays) in the road	27
Dogs coming into yard	29
Fighting with their dogs	10
Stray cats	6
Killing chickens	7
Noise	9
Biting children	7
Dog faeces	5
Bitches in season	16
Tearing open rubbish bags	34
Uncontrolled breeding	4
Welfare of other people's animals	5
Not specified	5

<sup>a</sup>Number of complaints by 145 respondents, some of whom had more than one complaint.

mobile service to get the dogs there. Less than 1 % had their own transport.

The average ESS was found to be 2.73 with only 1.5 % (*n* = 12) having an ESS of

5. The modal class was 3. From Fig. 1 it may be noted that cost-effectiveness of proposed interventions is important for animal welfare planning. Perceptions of

Table 3: Perceptions of affordable prices for veterinary interventions and procedures.

Procedure	Free	R1-5	R6-10	R11-20	R21-30	R31-50	R51-99	>R100
Sterilisation (n = 773)	3.4 %	7.9 %	22.1 %	<b>29.2 %</b>	13.6 %	20.2 %	2.5 %	1.2 %
Vaccination (n = 773)	2.2 %	17.2 %	32.6 %	<b>39.2 %</b>	6.1 %	2.3 %	0.3 %	0.1 %
Deworming (n = 771)	2.1 %	28.7 %	<b>41.2 %</b>	23.5 %	3.0 %	1.4 %	0.1 %	0
Treating disease (n = 828)	1.2 %	14.7 %	29.0 %	<b>28.7 %</b>	9.7 %	14.1 %	2.1 %	0.5 %
Treating fractures (n = 820)	1.3 %	14.1 %	26.7 %	<b>27.9 %</b>	10.1 %	16.1 %	2.1 %	1.6 %
Treating wounds (n = 822)	1.5 %	20.9 %	<b>36.9 %</b>	30.7 %	6.6 %	3.0 %	0.2 %	0.2 %
Euthanasia (n = 717)	30.7 %	19.0 %	<b>29.8 %</b>	13.1 %	3.8 %	2.8 %	0.4 %	0.4 %

affordable prices for the veterinary procedures requested, such as sterilisation, vaccination, deworming, medical treatment and surgery (fractured leg taken as an example of a common result of motor vehicle accidents involving dogs and cats) were investigated. The results are shown in Table 3, with modal values highlighted.

Respondents were asked the open-ended question 'If the SPCA could do only 3 things for you, what would they be?'. The replies (n = 1991) indicated that treating sick animals was definitely a priority (29.7 %). Vaccination of dogs and cats (22.5 %), preventing puppies and kittens (16.5 %), controlling external parasites by dipping and powdering (8.8 %), promoting animal health by education/extension (6.6 %), deworming animals (3.7 %), preventing cruelty by rescue or inspection (3.2 %), expanding the clinics to their parts of Soweto (1.3 %) and collecting strays (1.2 %). Other suggestions had a value of less than 1 %.

## DISCUSSION

The dog-to-human ratio and dog-to-household ratio are lower than those reported in the literature<sup>5</sup>. This may be because Soweto is a densely-populated urban area rather than a rural or semi-rural area. The percentage of animal owners is nevertheless high enough for them to have a say in municipal planning and the formulation of municipal regulations that have a bearing on animal welfare and public health such as dog control and disposal of dead animals.

Languages spoken have considerable relevance for posters and pamphlets and it appears from the results of this survey that the majority of animal owners would be covered if these were to be printed in Zulu, English and Sotho. A problem may

arise where there are large differences in the vocabulary use between Northern and Southern Sotho, but this could be overcome by restricting the vocabulary used in extension materials to words common to both languages. In any case it is suggested that vocabulary be limited in Zulu and English as well so that the extension messages are easily understood.

The fact that the father is considered to be the owner of an animal should be taken into account in the management of cases presented for treatment or prosecuted for neglect or cruelty. This matter should perhaps be further investigated and discussed with community members by welfare personnel.

It is encouraging that 96.1 % of respondents (77 of whom did not own animals) enjoyed owning animals. This should be considered when designing extension materials, since positive aspects of animal ownership (e.g. a smiling child playing with a puppy, an old man with a dog asleep next to his chair) could be used in posters to promote the welfare of animals.

With regard to the cost-effectiveness of services and primary health care it must be noted that perceptions of the value of veterinary interventions are low in relation to the list of charges suggested by the South African Veterinary Association<sup>10</sup>. Yet treatment of sick animals was perceived as a priority by respondents during the survey. The socioeconomic consequences of these perceptions and the possibilities for veterinary service provision in Soweto need further investigation.

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