

HOW ASSISTANCE, SERVICE AND SPORTING DOGS ADJUST TO RETIREMENT AND TO WHAT EXTENT WORK-RELATED WELFARE ISSUES IMPACT THIS PROCESS

Author: Nicola Bean

ID: 19032610

OXFORD
BROOKES
UNIVERSITY

Solihull College
& University Centre



INTRODUCTION

Working dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) provide many services to people, however, some work requirements have a negative impact on the dog's physical health and wellbeing. Some work related issues might lead to early retirement. (Tiana Dodd, 2020)

Much of academic research focuses on how these dogs benefit people, yet there are very few studies on how this impacts the animals' welfare. (Ng Z., Fine A., 2019)

Increasing public awareness highlights the need for the animal welfare to be considered both during the dogs' working life and retirement. (Cobb M., Branson N., McGreevy P., Lill A., Bennett P., 2015)

For many working dogs retirement means settling into a new home and a new routine which may cause additional problems or even result in failed adoption. (Elliott R., Toribio J., Wigney D., 2010) To reduce these problems, it is necessary to investigate the factors that affect the dogs' transition into retirement. (Normando S., Bertomoro F., Bonetti O., 2021)

AIM

To contribute to a better understanding of the needs of retired working dogs and help to improve their wellbeing.

HYPOTHESIS

Retired assistance, service and racing dogs experience high number of physical and behavioural problems as the result of their working life

OBJECTIVES

- Explore reasons for retirement
- Establish how well dogs settled in retirement
- Identify work related physical and behaviour problems
- Investigate whether these problems have been resolved and how
- Highlight any patterns within different dog categories

METHODOLOGY

- Empirical research
- Survey: An online questionnaire was released on the 13th January 2023. It comprised of 24 questions split into 3 sections: general information about the respondents; the dog's working background; work-related physical and/or behavioural issues.
- Participants: owners of retired sport, assistance and service dogs; not limited to location, age, or sex. A convenience sample of 60 respondents was recruited via personal contacts and social media.
- Data was analysed using Google Sheets.

DISCUSSION

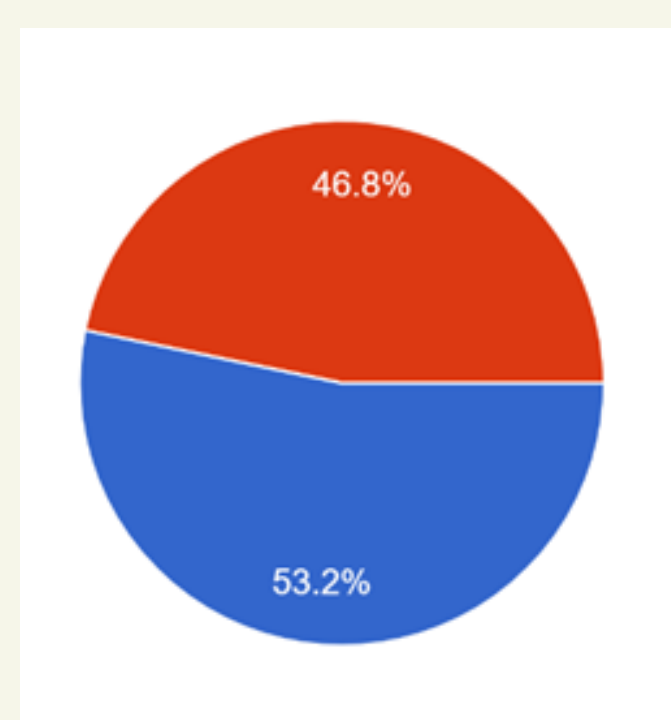
- Main reasons for retirement: injury (26.3%), unable to continue working/not meeting criteria (26.3%), old age (22.8%), illness (8.7%)
- 63.9% owners are "very satisfied" with how well the dog transitioned into retirement and most dogs settled within 2-5 months (26.2%)
- Work-related physical issues affected 53.1% dogs: arthritis (48.6%) spinal problems (11.4%) and lameness (11.4%)
- 55.6% of dogs had behavioural issues: high prey drive (40.5%), general anxiety (37.8%), separation anxiety (37.8%)
- Military dogs display the most physical problems (60.8%). Sporting dogs presented the most behavioural problems (51.9%)
- Most respondents thought the issues were "improved" (35.6%) or "significantly improved" (33.3%), mostly through vet/behaviourist advice (54.3%)

RESULTS

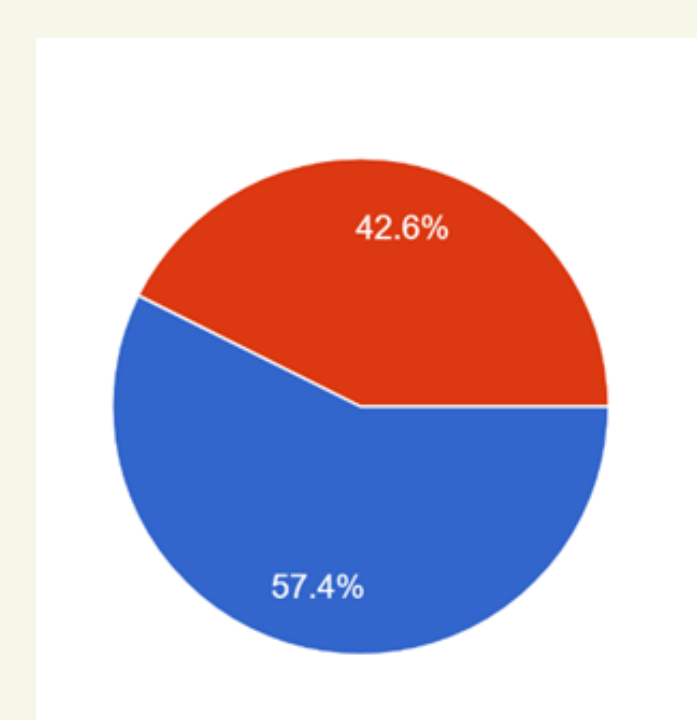
Data was collected on the 23rd January 2023 from 57 respondents

Dogs which experienced work-related health and behavioural issues

● Yes ● No

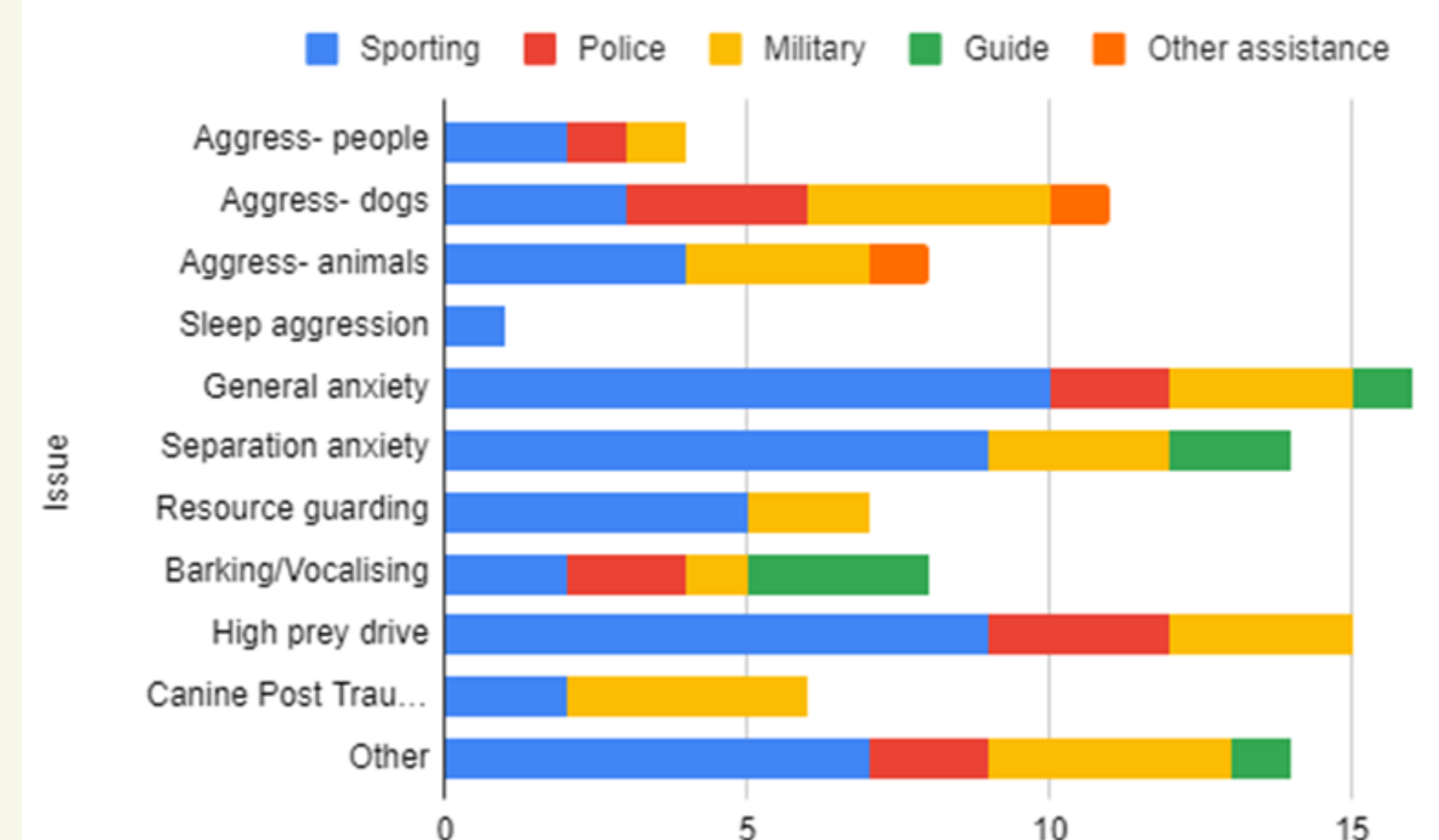


Health issues

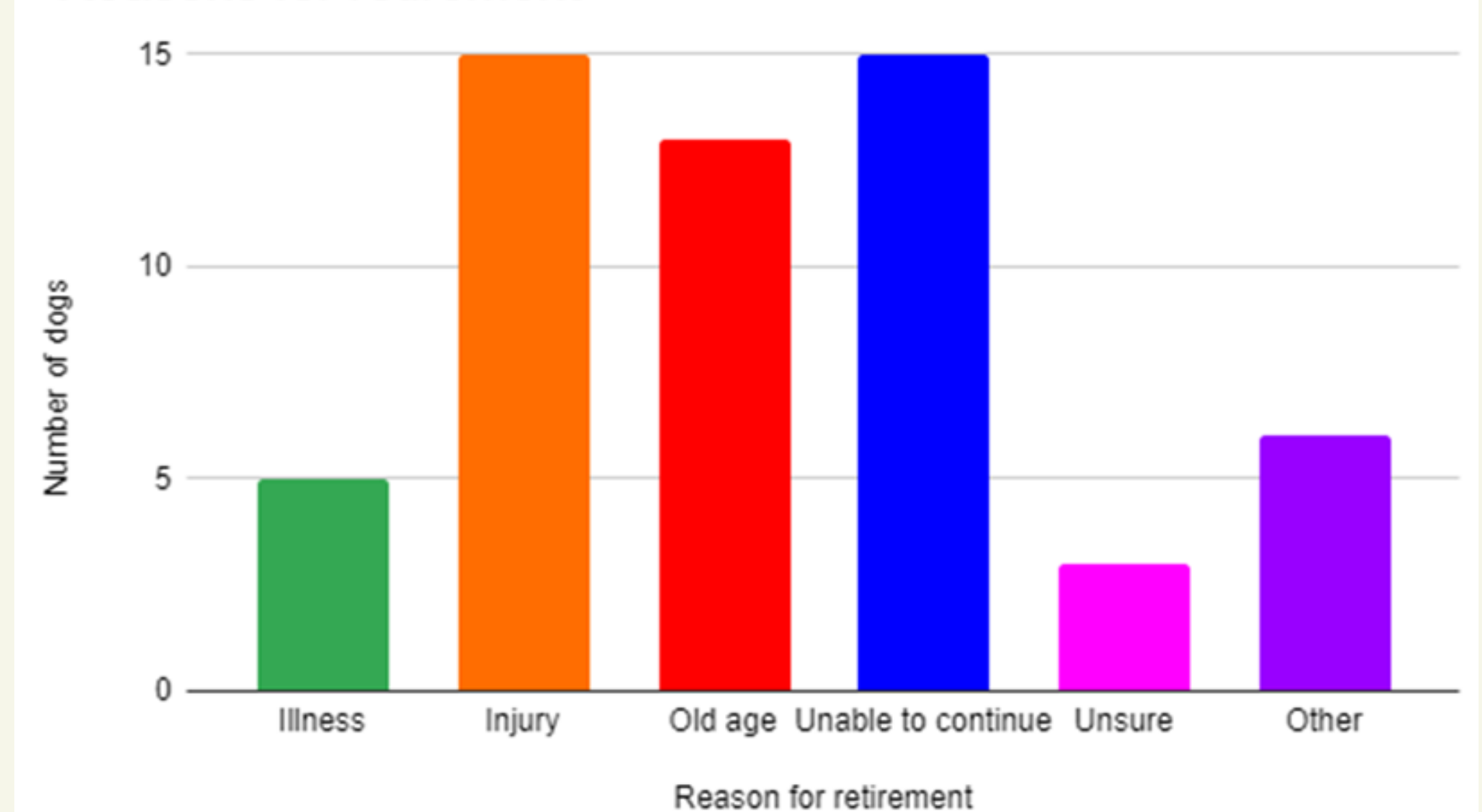


Behavioural issues

Work-related behavioural issues experienced by the dogs



Reasons for retirement



CHI SQUARE ANALYSIS

Chi squared analysis for physical problems accepts the null hypothesis: there was no statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values: ($\chi^2 = 68.77$, $DF = 68$, $P > 0.05$)

Chi squared analysis for behavioural issues accepts the alternative hypothesis: there is a statistically significant difference between the observed and expected values: ($\chi^2 = 70.23$, $DF = 40$, $P < 0.05$)

CONCLUSION

The results show that the majority of working dogs retire because of injuries, illness or being unsuitable for work. Less than a quarter of dogs retired due to old age.

This highlights the need for more support and further investigation into the welfare of all categories of working dogs both during their working life and in retirement.

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