Offering female cat neutering assistance to cat hoarders as a tool to improve the welfare of the colony in 10 multicat households

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OBJECTIVES

Animal hoarding is a recognised human psychiatric disorder defined by accumulation of large numbers of animals and failure to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation, and veterinary care. Hoarding is a particularly challenging scenario for the RSPCA Inspectorate, with high levels of recidivism following intervention, typically confiscation. The aim of this study was to determine if offering female cat neutering assistance to multicat owners significantly improved colony health.

METHODS

Case definition included five or more cats of breeding age, at least one entire female, and a public complaint. Inspectors referred cases of concern to an RSPCA vet, who initially conducted a welfare assessment and microchipping of all cats present. All entire females aged over eight weeks were neutered and basic animal care education provided. A follow up visit was completed two months later to reassess welfare parameters and population numbers.

RESULTS

The total number of cats was 176 in ten households (range 7–33, mean 18). All owners consented to having all entire females spayed. In 8/10 houses, the mean welfare score was significantly improved at the two monthly revisit. In one house, there was a slight deterioration, and in the final house, the cats were all voluntarily signed over into RSPCA care following the initial visit.

STATEMENT

Animal hoarding has previously been an intractable welfare concern with little evidence informing intervention techniques. These results show that positive veterinary engagement on site can have beneficial effects on animal welfare. Further evidence is required to determine if changes are sustainable over a longer period.

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