

Homeless pet owners – how does service provision impact on the human-animal bond?

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OBJECTIVES

Pet ownership has been shown to have many positive impacts on physical and mental health. Homeless people, some of the most vulnerable in society, commonly keep pets, which act as a source of support and companionship that they may struggle to find elsewhere. The aim of this research was to look into the distribution of homeless service providers accommodating homeless pet owners, evaluate their policies and their reasons for choosing whether or not to accommodate pets.

METHODS

A database of homeless accommodation service providers throughout England was assembled using information provided by the website Homeless Link (<http://www.homeless.org.uk/>). A survey was designed using Google Forms, piloted by several homelessness service providers and distributed via email with follow up reminder phone calls. Data were collated in Microsoft Excel and descriptive statistics compiled.

RESULTS

In total, 523 service providers were identified and emailed, of which 116 (22%) completed the survey. Almost 80% of service providers reported requests for accommodation by homeless pet owners. In contrast, only 36% actually accepted pets, with the main reason for refusing pets being health and safety implications, followed by hygiene.

STATEMENT

The results of this survey have shown that there is a demand for more pet-friendly homeless accommodation provision. Many homeless pet owners would rather remain in vulnerable or potentially dangerous situations than part with their pet. This study has identified potential barriers which could be addressed by altering perceptions and policies to allow more homeless owners to remain with their pets.