

# A Study on the Views and Thoughts of Dog Owners in Türkiye on Animal Welfare

İ. brahim Şeker<sup>1</sup>, A. Köseman<sup>2</sup>, Ö. Erten<sup>3</sup>, A. Özen<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Firat University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Zootechny, Elazığ, Türkiye; <sup>2</sup>Malatya Turgut Özal University, Akçadağ Vocational School, Plant and Animal Production Department, Malatya, Türkiye; <sup>3</sup>Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Kemaliye Hacı Ali Akın Vocational School, Department of Veterinary Medicine Erzincan, Türkiye; <sup>4</sup>Firat University, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Department of Veterinary History, Deontology and Ethics, Elazığ, Türkiye

## Ansichten und Überlegungen von Hundebesitzern zum Tierschutz in der Türkei

Ziel der vorliegenden Studie war es, die Ansichten und Überlegungen von Hundebesitzerinnen und Hundebesitzern zum Tierschutz in der Türkei zu ermitteln. Daten aus persönlichen Befragungen von 172 zufällig ausgewählten Hundebesitzenden wurden analysiert. Die Hälfte der Hundebesitzenden (54,7 %) war sich des Tierschutzgedankens bewusst und knapp zwei Drittel (61,6 %) gestalteten die Haltung ihrer Hunde nach tierschutzrechtlichen Grundsätzen. Am häufigsten assoziierten die Teilnehmenden das Konzept des Tierschutzes mit der Lebensqualität der Tiere (47,7 %). Das Geschlecht ( $p < 0,01$ ) und Bildungsniveau ( $p < 0,01$ ) der Besitzerinnen und Besitzer hatten einen Einfluss auf das Verständnis des Tierschutzkonzepts; Frauen und Personen mit höherer Bildung hatten ein breiteres Verständnis. Mehr als die Hälfte der Teilnehmenden (54,1 %) informierte sich zum Tierschutz aus Print- und digitalen, nicht evidenzbasierten Medien.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Wahrnehmung, Bewusstsein, Denken, Tierwohl, Hund, Hundebesitzer

## Abstract

The aim of the present study was to determine the views and thoughts of dog owners in Türkiye on animal welfare. The research material consisted of data obtained from face-to-face surveys with 172 randomly selected dog owners. Half of the dog owners (54,7 %) were aware of the concept of animal welfare, and almost two-thirds (61,6 %) organized their dogs' living spaces according to animal welfare principles. Participants most associated the concept of animal welfare with the concept of animal quality of life (47,7 %). Gender ( $p < 0.01$ ) and education level ( $p < 0.01$ ) had an effect on the understanding of the animal welfare concept; female and higher education resulted in a broader understanding. More than half of the participants (54,1 %) obtained information about animal welfare from written and visual non-evidence based media.

**Keywords:** Awareness, consciousness, thought, animal welfare, dog, dog owner

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## Introduction

Defendable animal welfare standards require scientific knowledge about animal biology to determine their physiologic, health, environmental and behavioral requirements.<sup>8</sup> A simple definition for animal welfare is the way the animal is feeling at present.<sup>12</sup> More commonly, animal welfare is used to describe the “well-being and happiness” of an animal and refers to the state of “being in a good condition”.<sup>26</sup> One way to reduce negative impacts on animal welfare is to align animal care with environments in which the animal can perform its natural behaviors and meet its needs and to use globally accepted practices and procedures.<sup>4</sup>

The general concept of animal welfare encompasses a continuum between negative/bad welfare and positive/good welfare. The first approach to defining animal welfare was based on excluding negative situations. An animal’s welfare state is best understood from its interaction with a particular environment. Animal welfare issues cannot be addressed simply by objective biological measurements of an animal’s welfare under certain conditions.<sup>21</sup> Good well-being can be achieved by minimizing adverse effects and encouraging

positive ones. In addition, good welfare can be expressed as a necessity, as it meets the expectations of conscious, sensitive animals to experience as little pain and maximum pleasure as possible and to be interested in living.<sup>19</sup>

Currently, changes in people’s lifestyles and demands accompanied by the changing role of pets, puts the animals into risk of poor welfare. Pets are increasingly exposed to stress factors that prevent sufficient expression of normal behaviour. Fear and concern are often not noticed which in turn leads to negative emotional situations accompanied by behavioural disorders and poor well-being. Irresponsible breeding practises directly cause physical and mental deterioration in pet welfare.<sup>27</sup> Based on this information, health and welfare issues need to be determined and a training program on dog behavior and care should be made mandatory for dog owners and breeders.<sup>6</sup>

The welfare of many pet dogs is often unknown. But findings from animal welfare researchers point to a significant deterioration in some key aspects of dog welfare. For example, admissions to veterinary clinics are increasing due to anxiety, behavioral disorders such as the dog’s inability to

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of dog owners surveyed (n = 172).

Factors		Frequency	
		n	%
Gender	Female	77	44,8
	Male	95	55,2
<b>P</b>		-	
Age (year)	20 and less	19	11,2
	21–30	67	39,4
	31–40	43	25,3
	41–50	21	12,4
	51 and more	20	11,8
<b>P</b>		**	
Marital status	Married	79	45,9
	Single	93	54,1
<b>P</b>		**	
Education level	Primary education	10	5,8
	Secondary education	61	35,5
	Associate degree	36	20,9
	Undergraduate education	51	29,7
	Graduate education	14	8,1
<b>P</b>		**	
Household income (USA Dollar/month)	278,0 \$ and less	30	17,5
	278,1–881,0 \$	105	61,0
	881,1 \$ and more	37	21,5
<b>P</b>		**	

–:p>0.05, \*\*:p<0.01

socialize, obesity, health problems due to poor breeding practices, punishment, limited exercise and limited exposure to environmental stimuli. This means that some dogs suffer because of their owners' behavior and practices.<sup>22</sup>

The aim of this study is to determine the awareness, consciousness level and thoughts of dog owners in Türkiye on animal welfare, and to provide a progressive approach to combat against possible inadequacies.

## Materials and Method

This study was conducted in veterinary clinics and hospitals in four cities (Ankara, Antalya, İstanbul, İzmir) with a high number of veterinary clinics and hospitals specialising in pet animals in Türkiye. Veterinary clinics and hospitals, as well as the dog owners to be surveyed were randomly selected, and face-to-face surveys were conducted with the owners who accept to participate in the study. The study was conducted during the pandemic, between May and October 2021, and survey data obtained from a total of 172 dog owners constituted the research material. Additionally, 14 dog owners did not agree to participate in the survey for various reasons. The ethical approval necessary for the study was obtained from Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Human Researches Ethical Committee (dated: 30.04.2020, numbered: 04/15).

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**Table 2:** Dog owners' knowledge of animal welfare (n = 172).

Factors			I know	I am not sure	I do not know
Gender	Female	n	42	19	16
		%	44,7	44,2	45,7
	Male	n	52	24	19
		%	55,3	55,8	54,3
P		-			
Age (year)	20 and less	n	9	6	4
		%	9,6	13,9	11,4
	21-30	n	43	13	12
		%	45,7	30,2	34,3
	31-40	n	18	17	8
		%	19,1	39,5	22,9
	41-50	n	10	5	6
		%	10,6	11,8	17,1
	51 and more	n	14	2	5
		%	14,9	4,6	14,3
P		-			
Education level	Primary education	n	5	2	5
		%	5,3	4,7	14,3
	Secondary education	n	27	21	11
		%	28,7	48,7	31,4
	Associate degree	n	22	7	7
		%	23,4	16,3	20,0
	Undergraduate education	n	29	11	11
		%	30,9	25,6	31,4
	Graduate education	n	11	2	1
		%	11,7	4,7	2,9
P		*			
Total	n	94	43	35	
	%	54,7	25,0	20,3	
P		**			

–:p>0.05, \*:p<0.05, \*\*:p<0.01

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For ease of evaluation the questionnaire used in the study consisted of two parts. In the first part, questions were asked about the dog owner’s sociodemographic characteristics, whilst in the second part questions were about animal welfare. The research team prepared the questions by using similar questions used in other studies.<sup>9,10,24</sup>

Numbers and percentages (%) were calculated of each parameter for descriptive statistics. As the survey was conducted on a voluntary basis, participants were given the freedom to answer the questions they wished. Thus, the number of answers given to questions (frequency) is different for each question. Instead of revising the incompletely answered questions according to the total number of participants, the necessary statistical calculations were performed on the basis of actual answers.

Pearson chi square test and Fischer’s Exact Test were used to evaluate the gender, age, marital status, educational status and income status of the dog owners as demographic characteristics. Household income status was classified as low (level of hunger and below), moderate (above the level of hunger, but below the level of poverty) and high (above the level of poverty). The level of hunger was determined by taking the average values reported by three different authorised unions (Türk-iş, Kamu-sen, Memur-sen), and the level of poverty was determined in Turkish Liras according to the data obtained from the Statistical Institution of Türkiye (TÜİK). The amount determined were converted into American Dollars according to the Dollar Exchange rate reported by the Central Bank of Türkiye dated May 10, 2021. Level of significance was accepted as  $p < 0,05$ .<sup>1</sup> SPSS 22.0 program was used both in calculating and analysing descriptive statistics.<sup>28</sup>

**Table 3:** Where dog owners first heard of the concept of animal welfare/information sources (n = 172).

Factors			Radio, television, newspaper, magazine, social media etc. information and communication tools	Veterinarians, scientific meetings, etc.	
Gender	Female	n	42	32	
		%	44,8	40,5	
	Male	n	51	47	
		%	55,9	59,5	
<b>P</b>			-		
Age (year)	20 and less	n	13	6	
		%	14,0	7,6	
	21–30	n	30	37	
		%	32,3	46,8	
	31–40	n	24	19	
		%	25,8	24,0	
	41–50	n	11	12	
		%	11,8	15,2	
	51 and more	n	15	5	
		%	16,1	6,4	
	<b>P</b>			-	
	Education level	Primary education	n	6	4
%			6,5	5,1	
Secondary education		n	36	25	
		%	38,7	31,6	
Associate degree		n	16	20	
		%	17,2	25,3	
Undergraduate education		n	27	24	
		%	29,0	30,4	
Graduate education		n	8	6	
		%	8,6	7,6	
<b>P</b>			-		
Total		n	93	79	
	%	54,1	45,9		
<b>P</b>			**		

--:  $p > 0,05$ , \*\*:  $p < 0,01$

## Results

The sociodemographic characteristics of dog owners are presented in Table 1. The majority of dog owners who participated in the survey were males (55,2%). Additionally, 39,4% of the participants were of younger age (21–30 years), 54,1% were married, 35,5% were secondary school graduates and 61,0% had a middle-income ( $p < 0,01$ ).

Dog owners' knowledge of animal welfare is presented in Table 2. The majority of dog owners who thought to have basic knowledge about animal welfare had a bachelor's or higher degree, while primary and secondary school graduates stated that they were insecure or did not know ( $p < 0,05$ ). The majority of dog owners (54,7%) thought to have a knowledge about animal welfare, while 20,3% stated to have no knowl-

edge of animal welfare ( $p < 0,01$ ). Education had a significant positive effect on the perception of animal welfare. No differences were found between genders and age.

Significant more participants obtained their animal welfare information from radio, television, newspapers, magazines, or social media (54,1%) than from veterinarians or scientific publications (45,9%,  $p < 0,01$ ). (Table 3).

The majority of the participants (27,3%) expressed the concept of animal welfare with the word "health" (Table 4). No significant differences were seen between age classes and education level.

Topics that dog owners most associate with animal welfare were the quality of life (47,7%) and the health (33,1%) of

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**Table 4:** Concepts by which dog owners define animal welfare (n = 172).

Factors			Confidence	Happiness	Peace / Comfort	Life quality	Love	Health	Others	
Gender	Female	n	3	12	13	12	6	22	9	
		%	60,0	50,0	37,1	48,0	42,9	46,8	40,9	
	Male	n	2	12	22	13	8	25	13	
		%	40,0	50,0	62,9	52,0	57,1	53,2	59,1	
<b>P</b>			<b>**</b>							
Age (year)	20 and less	n	1	3	2	2	3	7	1	
		%	20,0	12,5	5,7	8,0	21,4	14,9	4,5	
	21–30	n	2	7	16	16	4	12	10	
		%	40,0	29,2	45,7	64,0	28,6	25,5	45,5	
	31–40	n	2	8	11	3	1	13	5	
		%	40,0	33,3	31,4	12,0	7,1	27,7	22,7	
	41–50	n	0	2	2	3	3	8	5	
		%	0,0	8,3	5,7	12,0	21,4	17,0	22,7	
	51 and more	n	0	4	4	1	3	7	1	
		%	0,0	16,7	11,4	4,0	21,4	14,9	4,5	
	<b>P</b>			<b>NS</b>						
	Education level	Primary education	n	0	1	1	2	2	2	2
%			0,0	4,2	2,9	8,0	14,3	4,3	9,1	
Secondary education		n	3	6	17	5	4	21	5	
		%	60,0	25,0	48,6	20,0	28,6	44,7	22,7	
Associate degree		n	0	7	7	7	4	9	2	
		%	0,0	29,2	20,0	28,0	28,6	19,1	9,1	
Undergraduate education		n	2	7	10	9	3	12	8	
		%	40,0	29,2	28,6	36,0	21,4	25,5	36,4	
Graduate education		n	0	3	0	2	1	3	5	
		%	0,0	12,5	0,0	8,0	7,1	6,4	22,7	
<b>P</b>			<b>NS</b>							
Total		n	5	24	35	25	14	47	22	
	%	2,9	14,0	20,4	14,5	8,1	27,3	12,8		
<b>P</b>			<b>**</b>							

NS: Statistical analysis was not performed as there were «0» values among the observed frequencies. \*\*:  $p < 0,01$

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the animal. (Table 5). While the majority of female dog owners associated animal welfare with animals quality of life, the majority of male owners associated it with either animal health or quality of life ( $p < 0,01$ ). Dog owners with a secondary school education associated animal health with animal welfare at the highest rate while participants with an undergraduate and postgraduate degree at the lowest rate. In contrast, quality of life was associated with animal welfare mostly by participants with a bachelor's and higher degree ( $p < 0,01$ ).

Dog owners' ignorance (54,0%) was seen as the most important welfare problem followed by economic reasons (16,3%) (Table 6).

The majority of dog owners (61,6%) optimized their dogs' living conditions to improve animal welfare. The majority of these changes were made by younger people in the age of 21 to 30 years and undergraduates. The effect of age and education was significant ( $p < 0,01$ ). (Table 7).

## Discussion

In a study conducted in Greece, Spain, and Romania participants reported that their knowledge of animal welfare was very low, while their need for information about animal welfare was high.<sup>2</sup> McKendree et al. (2014)<sup>17</sup> also found that 32% of dog owners had no knowledge about animal welfare. The current study seems to indicate that the participants from Türkiye are more knowledgeable about animal welfare than in the studies mentioned above.

**Table 5:** Topics that dog owners most associate with animal welfare (n = 172).

Factors			Animal health	Healthy animal originated food	Animal quality of life
Gender	Female	n	18	12	47
		%	31,6	36,4	57,3
	Male	n	39	21	35
		%	68,4	63,6	42,7
<b>P</b>			<b>**</b>		
Age (year)	20 and less	n	7	5	7
		%	12,3	15,1	8,5
	21–30	n	22	10	36
		%	38,6	30,3	43,9
	31–40	n	17	9	17
		%	29,8	27,3	20,7
	41–50	n	6	5	10
		%	10,5	15,1	12,2
	51 and more	n	5	4	12
		%	8,8	12,2	14,7
<b>P</b>			<b>–</b>		
Education level	Primary education	n	4	2	4
		%	7,0	6,1	4,9
	Secondary education	n	31	12	17
		%	54,4	36,4	20,7
	Associate degree	n	12	8	16
		%	21,1	24,2	19,5
	Undergraduate education	n	9	10	32
		%	15,8	30,3	39,0
	Graduate education	n	1	1	13
		%	1,7	3,0	15,9
<b>P</b>			<b>**</b>		
<b>Total</b>		n	57	33	82
		%	33,1	19,2	47,7
<b>P</b>			<b>**</b>		

–:  $p > 0,05$ , \*\*:  $p < 0,01$

In the United Kingdom, the most preferred sources of information for dog owners about animal welfare and dog care were the internet, veterinarians and books, while the most used source was veterinarians.<sup>15</sup> Veterinarians are professionals who are believed to be in the forefront of animal welfare, together with behavioural medicine.<sup>23</sup> They may provide consultations to potential future dog owners, educate them on the needs and behaviours of the dogs, and reduce the incidence of false expectations.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, they may offer solutions for problematic pet owners with insufficient knowledge about dog behaviour, care and nutrition.<sup>14</sup> Distinctive characteristics of improving animal welfare are to relieve pain, reduce stressful conditions and determine and treat problematic behaviours.<sup>3</sup> However, dog owners don't always acquire information from veterinarians. Where information resources are not sufficient, both human and animal welfare can be seriously compromised.<sup>23</sup>

When the results of this study were evaluated, nearly half of the participants reported that the source of information on animal welfare was veterinarians. More than half of the participants stated that they had knowledge about animal welfare. Results indicate that veterinary consultation provides important information source and is an important contribution to animal welfare. On the other hand, 35% of participants in a study involving EU member countries heard the concept of animal welfare on TV and the internet,<sup>2</sup> and more than half of the participants in this study. The findings in our research on the main sources of information on animal welfare were found to be similar to other literature reports.<sup>2,15,23</sup>

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**Table 6:** Dog owners' thoughts on the causes of the most important welfare problems for their pets (n = 172).

Factors			Ignorance	Lack of time	Economic reasons	Disregard	
Gender	Female	n	43	12	10	13	
		%	46,2	48,0	35,7	50,0	
	Male	n	50	13	18	13	
		%	53,8	52,0	64,3	50,0	
<b>P</b>			**				
Age (year)	20 and less	n	9	3	3	4	
		%	9,7	12,0	10,7	15,4	
	21-30	n	37	12	13	8	
		%	39,8	48,0	46,4	30,8	
	31-40	n	23	7	7	6	
		%	24,7	28,0	25,0	23,1	
	41-50	n	14	2	1	3	
		%	15,0	8,0	3,6	11,5	
	51 and more	n	10	1	4	5	
		%	10,8	4,0	14,3	19,2	
	<b>P</b>			-			
	Education level	Primary education	n	7	1	1	2
%			7,5	4,0	3,6	7,7	
Secondary education		n	36	8	10	5	
		%	38,7	32,0	35,6	19,2	
Associate degree		n	15	6	8	7	
		%	16,1	24,0	28,6	26,9	
Undergraduate education		n	25	8	8	11	
		%	26,9	32,0	28,6	42,3	
Graduate education		n	10	2	1	1	
		%	10,8	8,0	3,6	3,8	
<b>P</b>			-				
<b>Total</b>		n	93	25	28	26	
	%	54,0	14,5	16,3	15,2		
<b>P</b>			**				

--:p>0.05, \*\*:p<0.01

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These research results are consistent with the results of studies conducted in Türkiye<sup>25</sup> the UK, Romania, and Italy,<sup>2</sup> in which a significant portion of the participants associate animal welfare with health. It can be thought that this situation arises from the association of the concept of animal welfare with healthy food production, especially in the context of farm animals and products of animal origin.

In other words, dog owners with lower education levels associated animal welfare more with animal health and healthy animal production. Dog owners with relatively higher education levels associated animal welfare with the

broader definition of quality of life, which includes animal health. This can be accepted as evidence that education positively affects the level of understanding of the concept of animal welfare. This result was found to be similar to the results of some previous studies.<sup>13,18</sup>

In the study conducted by Buller and Ballantyne (2020),<sup>7</sup> a significant portion of the participants stated that they do not know how to care for their pets and that they are inadequate on how to reach the right information on this subject. Also, Blouin (2013)<sup>5</sup> and Philpotts et. al. (2019),<sup>22</sup> concluded that the lack of knowledge and understanding of animal

**Table 7:** The situation in which dog owners arrange the living conditions of their dogs in accordance with animal welfare (n = 172).

Factors			Yes	I am not sure	No
Gender	Female	n	52	16	10
		%	49,1	32,0	62,5
	Male	n	54	34	6
		%	50,9	68,0	37,5
P			-		
Age (year)	20 and less	n	14	3	3
		%	13,2	6,0	18,7
	21-30	n	45	19	4
		%	42,5	38,0	25,0
	31-40	n	20	21	2
		%	18,9	42,0	12,5
	41-50	n	12	5	4
		%	11,3	10,0	25,0
	51 and more	n	15	2	3
		%	14,2	4,0	18,8
P			*		
Education level	Primary education	n	7	1	2
		%	6,6	2,0	12,5
	Secondary education	n	28	28	5
		%	26,4	56,0	31,2
	Associate degree	n	28	6	2
		%	26,4	12,0	12,5
	Undergraduate education	n	30	14	5
		%	28,3	28,0	31,2
	Graduate education	n	13	1	2
		%	12,3	2,0	12,5
P			**		
Total	n	106	50	16	
	%	61,6	29,1	9,3	
P			**		

--:p>0.05, \*:p<0.05, \*\*:p<0.01



owners causes animal welfare problems. Therefore, it can be concluded that our study findings are also compatible with these studies.

Although the majority of the participants in this study declared that the biggest reason for the welfare problems experienced by the animals is the ignorance of the animal owners; More than half of the participants stated that they had knowledge about the concept of animal welfare by excluding themselves from this generalization. Again, nearly two-thirds of these participants reported that they arranged the living conditions of dogs according to animal welfare principles. With a superficial evaluation of these data, it can be thought that animal owners point to a positive situation in terms of understanding and application levels of animal welfare. However, the fact that almost half of the dog owners do not have the knowledge and awareness on the animal welfare concept can be considered a potential risk factor and can lead to animal welfare problems.

## Conclusion

In this self-reported study conducted with dog owners in Türkiye, the majority of the participants declared that they had a knowledge about animal welfare, although the perception of the animal welfare concept was more related to animal health. Females and dog owners with higher education had a better understanding of the animal welfare concept. The difference presented in the understanding of the concept of animal welfare in this study highlights the importance of further education in the field of dog care, owners' responsibility and dog welfare.

The sources of information that dog owners use can influence the well-being of dogs throughout their lives. Thus, dog owners should be properly informed by veterinary experts on animal welfare and all current widely used communication tools should be used more intensively by them in this context.

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İ. Şeker, A. Köseman, Ö. Erten, A. Özen

## Une étude sur les opinions et les réflexions des propriétaires de chiens en Turquie concernant le bien-être des animaux

L'objectif de cette étude était de déterminer les opinions et les réflexions des propriétaires de chiens en Turquie quant au bien-être des animaux. Le matériel de recherche se compose de données obtenues à partir d'enquêtes en face-à-face avec 172 propriétaires de chiens sélectionnés au hasard. La moitié des propriétaires de chiens (54,7 %) connaissaient le concept de bien-être animal et près des deux tiers (61,6 %) organisaient l'espace de vie de leur chien selon les principes du bien-être animal. Les participants associaient le plus souvent le concept de bien-être animal à celui de qualité de vie des animaux (47,7 %). Le sexe ( $p < 0,01$ ) et le niveau d'éducation ( $p < 0,01$ ) ont eu un effet sur la compréhension du concept de bien-être animal ; les femmes et les personnes ayant un niveau d'éducation élevé ont eu une compréhension plus large. Plus de la moitié des participants (54,1 %) ont obtenu des informations sur le bien-être animal par le biais de médias écrits ou numériques non fondés sur des preuves.

**Mots clés:** Conscience, pensée, bien-être animal, chien, propriétaire de chien

## Uno studio sulle opinioni e i pensieri dei proprietari di cani in Turchia sul benessere degli animali

L'obiettivo del presente studio era di determinare le opinioni e i pensieri dei proprietari di cani in Turchia sul benessere degli animali. Il materiale di ricerca consisteva in dati ottenuti da sondaggi in persona con 172 proprietari di cani, selezionati casualmente. La metà dei proprietari di cani (54,7%) era a conoscenza del concetto di benessere degli animali e quasi due terzi (61,6%) organizzavano gli spazi di vita dei loro cani secondo i principi di protezione. I partecipanti associavano maggiormente il concetto di benessere degli animali con il concetto di qualità della vita degli animali (47,7%). Il genere ( $p < 0,01$ ) e il livello di istruzione ( $p < 0,01$ ) avevano un effetto sulla comprensione del concetto di benessere; le donne e chi aveva un'istruzione superiore dimostravano una comprensione più ampia. Più della metà dei partecipanti (54,1%) otteneva informazioni sul benessere degli animali da media scritti e visivi non basati su prove.

**Parole chiave:** Consapevolezza, coscienza, pensiero, benessere degli animali, cane, proprietario di cani

A Study on the Views and Thoughts of Dog Owners in Türkiye on Animal Welfare

İ. Şeker, A. Köseman, Ö. Erten, A. Özen

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## Korrespondenzadresse

Ömer Erten  
Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University  
Erzincan, Türkiye  
E-Mail: oerten@erzincan.edu.tr