



# AWSELVA-ECAWBM-ESVCE CONGRESS

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



## The perception of stress in cat owners

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No conflict of interest

Being responsible for care-giving, cat owners strongly influence the welfare of their pets.

The aim of the current study was to assess owner-perception and recognition of stress in their cats.

A 42-item, mostly multiple choice, questionnaire was created for this study, and was completed by 194 cat owners. Statistical analysis was performed using the Chi-square test with Bonferroni correction ( $p=0.0125$ ).

In a closed-question, the majority of owners (71.1%) correctly included both physical and psychological features within their definition of stress, whilst 15.5% considered stress to be a purely psychological phenomenon. One in ten owners (9.8%) thought that stress had no consequences for the cat.

When asked to use a provided scale to rate whether the stress level of their own cats was low, medium or high, 56.7% chose low, 38.1% chose medium and only 5.2% chose high.. Owners were more likely to rate stress as high if their cats played little or not at all (90.0% versus 33.2%;  $X^2=13.290$ ;  $p<0.001$ ), or showed over-grooming (30.0% versus 7.6%;  $X^2=4.948$ ;  $p=0.015$ ). The presence of aggression and house-soiling did not influence the rating of stress level.

When asked whether their cat was ever stressed in a situation, the majority of respondents answered affirmatively (76.6%). The remainder considered their cats never to be stressed (11.7%) or were not able to answer (11.7%). However, when those people were presented with a list of potentially stressful situations, 42 out of 44 selected at least one situation.

Owners were also presented with a list of signs and asked which might be indicative of feline stress. Mydriasis (35.6%) and recurrent cystitis (21.1%) were the least recognised signs. Around half of respondents thought that house-soiling, panting, trembling, avoiding other animals, and baldness caused by over-grooming were not signs of stress, or indicated that they could not give an answer. Owners most frequently regarded excessive vocalisation (70.1%) and ears back (66.0%) to be stress signs.

These findings suggest that owners often have a very limited knowledge about cat behaviour. This inability is likely to prevent owners from properly assessing, and intervening in, situations of poor welfare.