

SAMPLE CRITICAL REVIEW ABSTRACT

Type: Oral Presentation

Title: A comprehensive review of dog walking correlates for increasing physical activity of both dogs and people

Authors: Carrie Westgarth¹, Robert M. Christley^{1,2} and Hayley E. Christian³

Affiliations:

¹ Department of Epidemiology and Population Health, Institute of Infection and Global Health, and School of Veterinary Science, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus, Chester High Road, Neston, Cheshire CH64 7TE, UK

² NIHR Health Protection Research Unit in Emerging and Zoonotic Infections, Liverpool L69 7BE, UK

³ Centre for the Built Environment and Health, School of Population Health, and Telethon Kids Institute, The University of Western Australia (M707), 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA 6009, Australia

Correspondence: Carri.Westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk

Introduction: Physical inactivity and sedentary behaviour are major threats to population health, with rising levels of obesity in both people and their pets. A considerable proportion of people own dogs, and there is good evidence that dog ownership is associated with higher levels of physical activity. However not all owners walk their dogs regularly. This paper comprehensively reviews the evidence for correlates of dog walking so that effective interventions may be designed to increase the physical activity of dog owners, and improve dog welfare.

Methodology: Published findings from 1990–2012 in both the human and veterinary literature were collated and reviewed for evidence of factors associated with objective and self-reported measures of dog walking behaviour, or reported perceptions about dog walking. Study designs included cross-sectional observational, trials and qualitative interviews.

Main Findings: There is good evidence that the strength of the dog-owner relationship, through a sense of obligation to walk the dog, and the perceived support and motivation a dog provides for walking, is strongly associated with increased walking. The perceived exercise requirements of the dog may also be a modifiable point for intervention. In addition, access to suitable walking areas with dog supportive features that fulfill dog needs such as off-leash exercise, and that also encourage human social interaction, may be incentivising.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: Current evidence suggests that dog walking may be most effectively encouraged through targeting the dog-owner relationship and by providing dog-supportive physical environments. Future studies must be of a higher quality methodological design, including accounting for the effects of confounding, and longitudinal designs and testing of interventions in a controlled design in order to infer causality.