

Abstract

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Evaluation of owner attachment to dogs on the basis of whether owners are legally considered guardians of their pets

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Objective—To evaluate whether dog owners who are legally considered guardians are more attached to their dogs than those who are not.

Design—Cross-sectional study.

Sample Population—Dog owners from northern California.

Procedures—274 dog owners completed a standardized survey while visiting full-service veterinary and mobile vaccination clinics in a city in which dog owners were legally designated as owner/guardian and in another city in which no such designation was made. Degree of owner attachment to their dog was assessed with a standardized scale.

Results—The degree to which owners were attached to their dog was associated with city of residence, owner age, and whether owners were completely satisfied with their dog's behavior. Owners residing in the guardian city had a lower attachment score. There was no significant difference in the percentage of dogs vaccinated against rabies in each city, nor was there any difference in the percentage of licensed dogs. Attachment scores did not differ between participants who visited mobile versus free-standing clinics. Owners with > 1 dog in their household reported a higher degree of attachment to the study dog than did owners of 1 dog.

Conclusions and Clinical Relevance—Dog owners residing in a city where owners were legally designated as an owner/guardian were no more attached to their dog than those living in a city without such a designation. Although results did not indicate a negative impact of the term guardian, its use was not associated with an enhanced bond between owner and dog.