

Are cats (*Felis catus*) from multi-cat households more stressed? Evidence from assessment of fecal glucocorticoid metabolite analysis

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Highlights

- Feline stress was investigated in terms of fecal glucocorticoid metabolites.
- Cats were selected from multi-cat and single-cat households.
- Fecal glucocorticoids did not vary as a function of feline housing condition.
- Fecal glucocorticoids did not vary as a function of feline personality.
- Young cats in multi-cat households had lower glucocorticoid metabolites.

Abstract

Given the social and territorial features described in feral cats, it is commonly assumed that life in multi-cat households is stressful for domestic cats and suggested that cats kept as single pets are likely to have better welfare. On the other hand, it has been hypothesized that under high densities cats can organize themselves socially thus preventing stress when spatial dispersion is unavailable. This study was aimed at comparing the general arousal underpinning emotional distress in single housed cats and in cats from multi-cat households (2 and 3–4 cats) on the basis of fecal glucocorticoid metabolites (GCM) measured via enzyme immunoassay (EIA). GCM did not significantly vary as a function of living style (single, double or group-housing); highly stressed individuals were equally likely in the three groups. Young cats in multi-cat households had lower GCM, and overall cats that tolerate (as opposed to dislike) petting by the owners tended to have higher GCM levels. Other environmental aspects within cat houses (e.g. relationship with humans, resource availability) may play a more important role in day to day feline arousal levels than the number of cats per se.

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Keywords

Feline; Housing; Non-invasive; Enzyme immunoassay; Cortisol