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The phenomenon of animal hoarding and its effects on the behavior of a sample of cats housed at municipal shelter of Milan

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Abstract: The “Animal hoarding” phenomenon occurs when an individual, the hoarder, owns too many animals and cannot adequately provide management and care for them, resulting in the form of mistreatment [1]. The literature investigating the behavior of victims involved in animal hoarding is limited [2, 3, 4] and most studies focus on dog [5, 6, 7, 8, 9] and very few on cat [10]. The present work aims to assess the repercussions of hoarding mistreatment on feline behavior through a prospective pilot study. The behaviors of 26 cats, animal hoarding victims (case group), and 49 cats, non-animal hoarding victims (control group), hosted at the municipal shelter of Milan were collected through direct observation. A data collection form was used to register the general information about cats (such as breed, age, and sex), their postures and behaviors. Descriptive statistics were calculated, and T-test was used to investigate possible differences between groups. Cats in the case group often exhibited arched back, tails close to the body or lowered, and tremors ($p < 0.05$). Case group cats showed mydriasis and whisker forward and licked their lips more frequently than subjects in the control group ($p < 0.05$). Control group cats purred more frequently than the cases ($p < 0.05$). The case group showed more freezing, hiding/isolating, and escape attempts ($p < 0.05$). This study seems to indicate an effect of mistreatment due to hoarding on the behavior of cats: however, being a pilot work, further studies are needed to confirm and extend our results.

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