



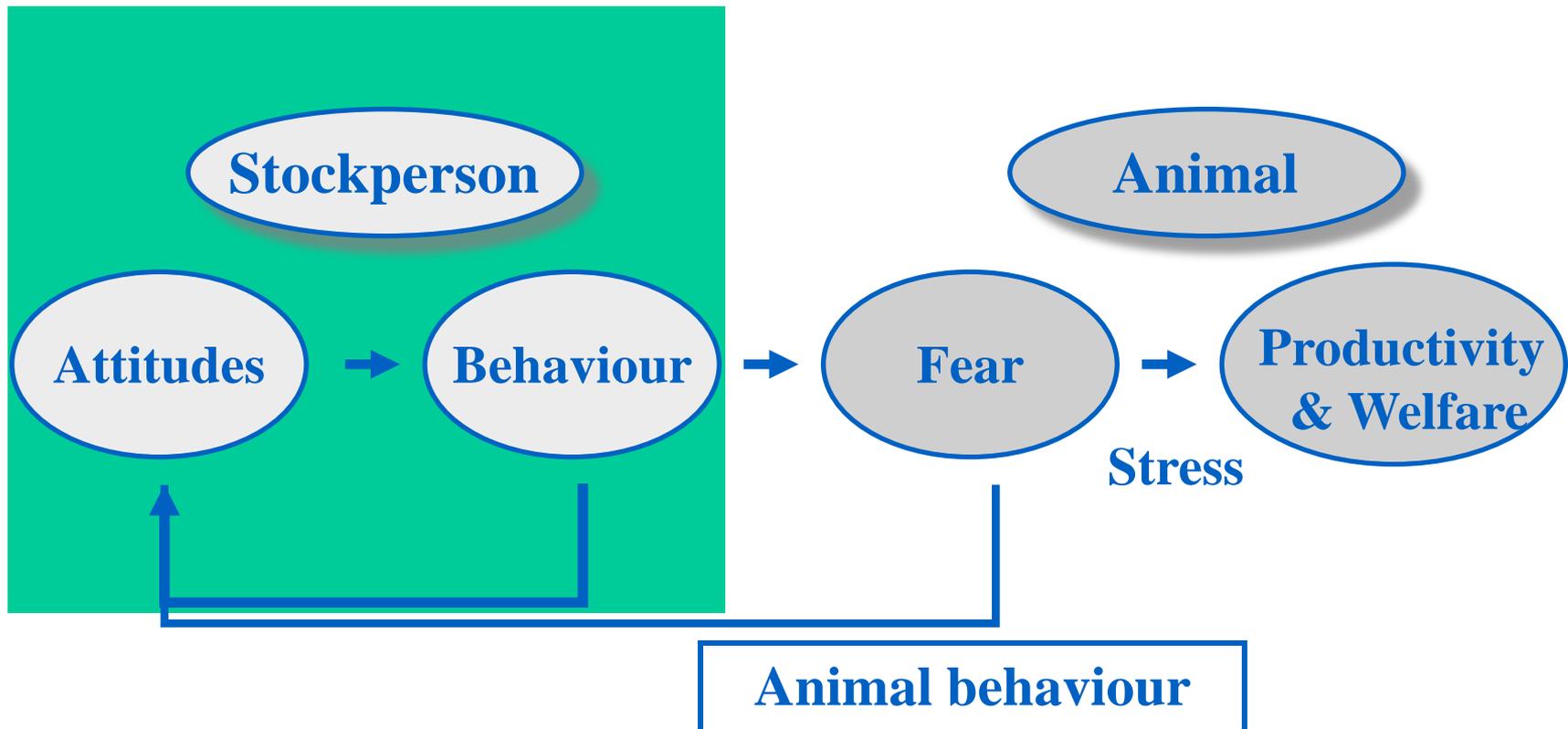
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It's a (shelter) dog's life: Just how important is human contact?

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A model of human-animal interactions in the livestock industries





Background

- ◆ Observational study of 29 handlers and 617 dogs across 4 animal shelters (Haynes, Coleman & Hemsworth 2012)
- ◆ **Dog fear behaviours**
 - Data suggest that handlers spend more time in the pen with dogs that display more fear behaviours including more initial avoidance.
 - However, there was no correlation between handler positive behaviour and these behavioural indicators of fear of humans.
- ◆ **Dog interactions with handler**
 - Increased dog interactions with handler (sniff, lick, paw, jump up) associated with increased handler positive behaviour.



WHO AFFECTS WHOM?

◆ Aim:

- To determine the effects of handler contact time (5 or 30 s) and nature of the contact (positive or neutral) on the behavioural and physiological responses of shelter dogs



Materials & methods

- ◆ US County shelter

- ◆ 64 dogs handled by the researcher (SH) only during their first 4 days in the shelter

- ◆ Each dog allocated to one of 5 treatments on Day '0':
 1. No human contact
 2. 5 s neutral contact
 3. 5 s positive contact
 4. 30 s neutral contact
 5. 30 s positive contact

- ◆ Researcher cleaned each pen once daily (Days 1 - 4) in a standard manner, imposed the treatments and left the pen: 0900 - 1200 h



Materials & methods

Observations on dog's behaviour at feeding

- ◆ Days 1 – 4 in shelter: 0630 – 0645 h

- ◆ Researcher approached the pen and delivered food into the externally accessible bowl in a standard manner

- ◆ Dog behaviours recorded within 5 s of food delivery:
 - **Fearful behaviours** - crouch, head oriented away, tail low or tucked, tail still
 - **Other behaviours** – sniff or jump up at pen door, feed
 - **Location in pen** – front or back half of pen



Materials & methods

Observations on dog's behaviour to familiar human

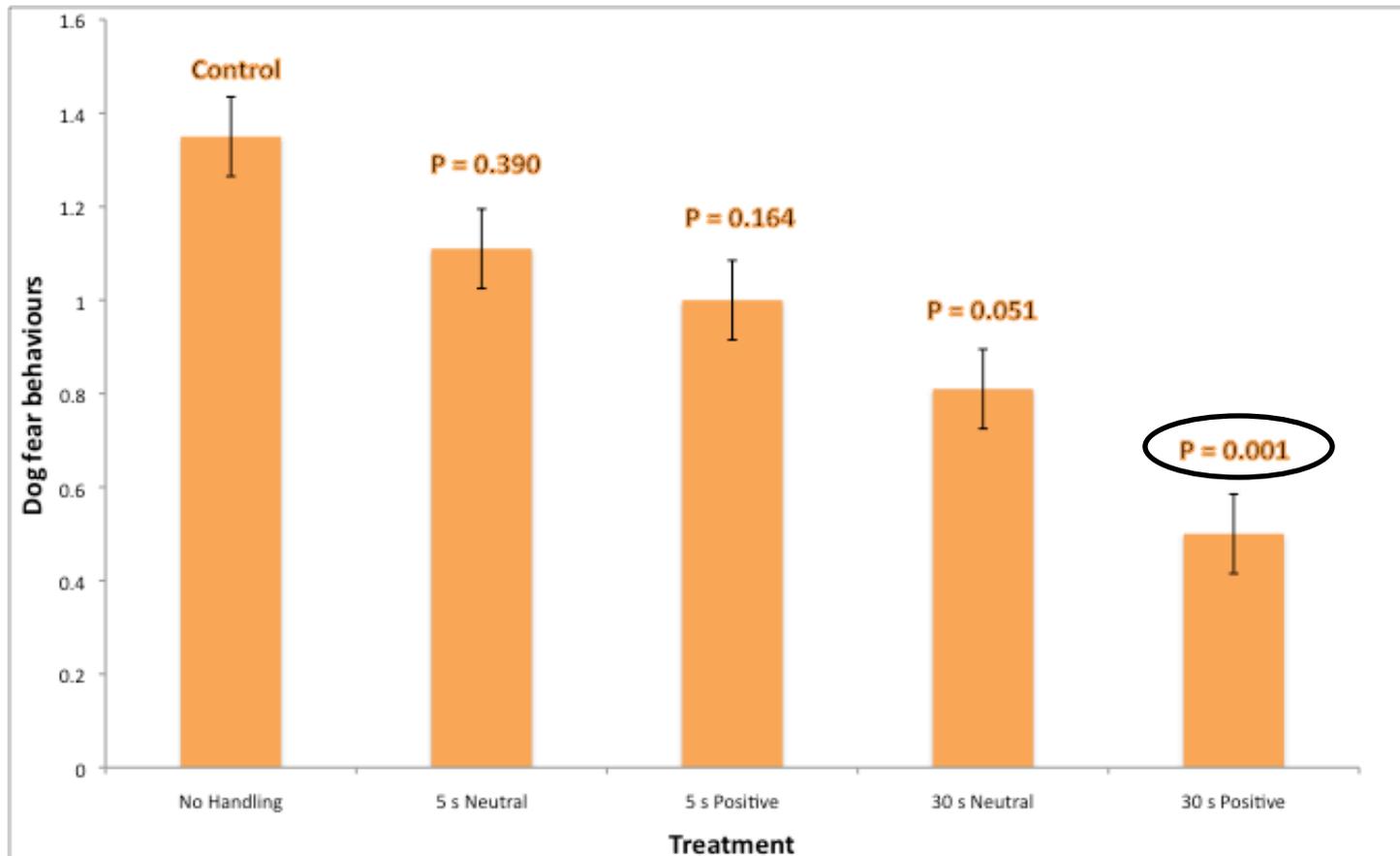
- ◆ Day 4 in the shelter: 0830 – 0900 h
- ◆ Researcher approached the pen and crouched in a standard manner
- ◆ Dog behaviours recorded:
 - **Time spent** within 1 m of human
 - **Latency to approach** within 1 m of human
 - **Latency to interact** with human (sniff, lick, paw or jump up)
 - **Interactions with human** - sniff, lick, paw, jump up
 - **Fearful behaviours** - crouch, head oriented away, tail low or tucked, tail still





Results

Treatment effects on dog behaviour at feeding

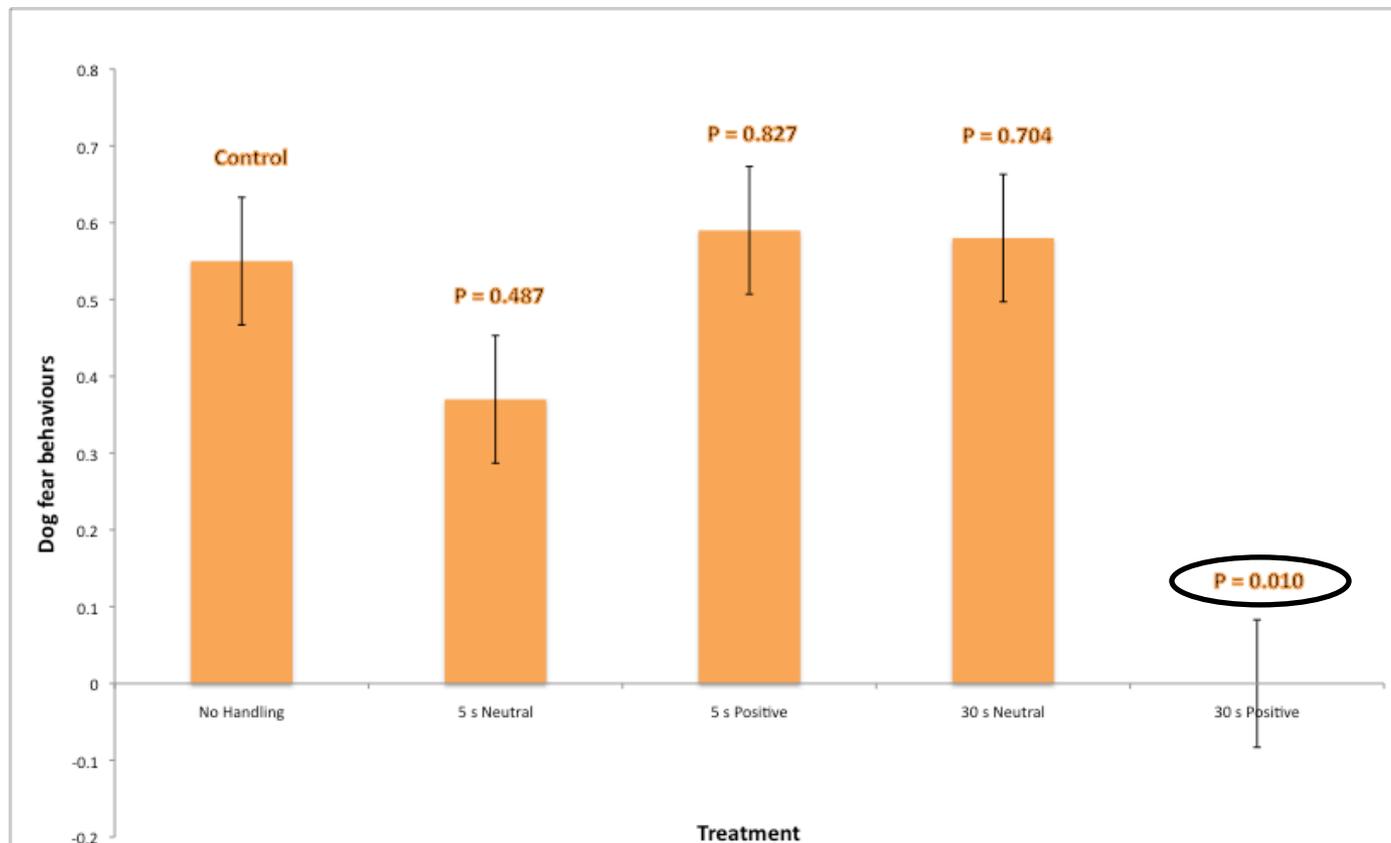


$$F_{(4,51)}=3.15, P = 0.022$$



Results

Treatment effects on dog behaviour to a familiar human



$$F_{(4,55)}=3.32, P = 0.017$$



Results

- ◆ Partial correlations (controlling for time in shelter) between dog fear and approach behaviours during familiar human test. (Degrees of freedom in parentheses.)

Variables	Behavioural response to familiar human at 0 m		
	Latency to interact with human	Total interactions with human	Time spent within 1 m of human
Fear behaviours (1 m)	0.52*** (47)	-0.60*** (47)	-0.31* (47)
Fear behaviours (0 m)	0.39** (47)	-0.53*** (47)	-0.40** (47)

* significant correlations at $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$



Results

- ◆ Dogs that received 30 s additional positive contact displayed significantly fewer fear behaviours at feeding when compared with dogs that received no contact.
- ◆ Dogs that received 30 s additional positive contact displayed significantly fewer fear behaviours in response to a familiar human when compared with dogs that received no contact.
- ◆ Data suggest both duration and the nature of human contact during routine cleaning may reduce subsequent dog fearful behaviours.



In summary

- ◆ Based on dog behaviour at feeding and in response to a familiar human, both duration and nature of the human contact during routine cleaning may reduce fearful behaviours in shelter dogs

- ◆ The provision of brief positive human contact during routine cleaning may assist adaptation

- ◆ Implications for shelter dog behaviour and welfare
 - Behavioural testing
 - Re-homing
 - Ease of handling



Acknowledgements



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