

A Case Study of the views of RVN's in one UK Veterinary Hospital on Brachycephalic welfare and breeding practices

Drew, C* and Harniman, S

Charlotte.drew@hartpury.ac.uk

Introduction: Brachycephalic welfare has become an increasing concern over the past decade due to the rise in ownership, with French Bulldogs becoming the UK's most popular dog, overtaking the Labrador Retriever with an increase in 3000% in ownership in the past 10 years (BVA, 2023). It was determined by the Brachycephalic Working Group that the high demand for brachycephalic breeds has led to a health and welfare crisis (O'Neill et al., 2023). The breeding practices and standards of brachycephalic dogs have been scrutinised in relation to animal welfare due to the concoction of pre-dispositions and disorders that are consequential to brachycephalic breeding and anatomy.

Aims and Objectives: This study aimed to establish Registered Veterinary Nurse's opinions on the welfare and breeding practices of Brachycephalic dogs in the UK. The objectives of this study were to investigate RVN's perceptions and beliefs on brachycephalic patients, interview RVN's and explore the impact of nursing brachycephalic dogs, explore and identify how we can mitigate and improve the welfare and breeding practices of these breeds.

Methods and Materials: Data were collected through anonymised in-person interviews following a case study approach, using six RVN's in one veterinary hospital. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to conducting thematic analysis. Participants who met the study's criteria voluntarily self-nominated for participation. Inclusion criteria were that participants had to have been registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons for a minimum of three years and had experience working with brachycephalic dogs.

Results: Through analysis of the transcriptions, all participants identified concerns within these areas in relation to brachycephalic welfare. Participants expressed similar views on how to improve brachycephalic welfare and breeding practices, noting that the adverse impact of breeding on brachycephalic welfare has become normalised. Limitations of this study included being conducted in one practice, meaning future research can apply this methodology and compare across a plethora of practice types such as general practice and referral.



Conclusion: Participants recommended that enhancing the education of both owners and breeders is essential for improving breeding practices and welfare standards. Participants proposed implementing new or modifying existing breeding legislation and regulations, in addition to practices routinely offering pre-purchase consultations. Further research could assess how breeding practices can be more regulated in the UK, and the implementation and benefits of pre-purchase consultations in veterinary practices.

"Dog is falling asleep when it's sitting, whereas it's actually doing that because if it lies down it can't breathe"

RVNs opinions on the breeding and welfare practices

1.0 Thematic tree of results

"I feel like we need to address why they're needing elective C-sections and work on that ... it shouldn't be happening in the first place"

Emergencies

Respiratory issues

Other prevalent issues

Obstruction

Regulations

RVN perceptions of brachycephalic dogs

Research questions

1. Please can you tell me about your experiences working with brachycephalic dogs
2. Can you tell me what issues you commonly see brachycephalic dogs come into practice for
3. How do you feel about elective c-sections specifically in brachycephalic dogs?
4. Can you tell me about your perceptions of brachycephalic dogs?
5. How do you feel about nursing brachycephalic dogs?
6. How do you feel about handling brachycephalic emergencies?
7. How do you feel about recovering brachycephalic dogs following a general anesthetic?
8. What do you think can be done to improve the welfare of brachycephalic dogs?
9. What do you think can be done to improve the breeding practices of brachycephalic dogs?
10. Are breeders and owners well educated on brachycephalic welfare?

References

- Association, B.V. (2023). BVA - Breed to breathe campaign. [online] British Veterinary Association. Available at: <https://www.bva.co.uk/take-action/breed-to-breathe-campaign/Association>.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.
- O'Neill, D.G., McMillan, K.M., Church, D. and Brodbelt, D. (2023). Dog breeds and conformations in the UK in 2019: VetCompass canine demography and some consequent welfare implications. *PLOS ONE*, [online] 18(7), pp.e0288081-e0288081. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0288081>.