



Quality of Life of Adopted Ex-Racing Greyhounds

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Introduction

Awareness surrounding inhumane treatment & high death rates in the greyhound racing industry led the New Zealand government to introduce a no euthanasia mandate^{1,2}, increasing the number of greyhounds (*Canis lupus familiaris*) available for adoption. Ex-racing greyhounds have been described as 'companions in waiting'³; however, these dogs may be inadequately prepared for a companionship lifestyle. Adopting dogs with limited early life experience has challenges, such as poor social & behavioural skills⁴. The special needs of these animals therefore need to be met or the failure to do so could reduce welfare.

Given this, we were interested in the quality of life (QoL) of ex-racing greyhounds post-adoption. This study also investigated physical & behavioural welfare concerns in the greyhounds post-adoption, & if the welfare needs of the greyhounds were being met by the adopters.

Method

An anonymous online survey was distributed by Greyhounds As Pets (GAP) via their social media on a private group page; targeting GAP's adopters enabled this study to provide GAP with valuable knowledge on their adoptions. The survey took roughly 15 minutes to complete. The Five Domains model was used to determine the QoL with the questions focussing on the transition period, as well as the current housing, husbandry, health, nutrition & behaviour of the dogs. To analysis the data descriptive statistics was used.

1. Knight, A. (2018). *Injuries in racing greyhounds*. Competitive Animal Racing Collection. <https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10048&context=comarac>
2. Robertson, H. S. B. (2021). *Review into Greyhound Racing in New Zealand*. https://www.beshive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-09/Review%20into%20Greyhound%20Racing%20New%20Zealand%202021_0.pdf
3. Stevens, E. G., Baker, T., & Lewis, N. (2021). Dealing with sentient surplus: A moral economy of greyhound rehoming. *Environmental and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 0(0), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211054843>
4. Dietz, L., Arnold, A.-M. K., & Vinke, C. M. (2018). The importance of early life experiences for the development of behavioural disorders in domestic dogs. *Behaviour*, 155(2), 83-114. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1568539X-00003486>

Results

Behaviour indicative of separation anxiety (Fig 1) were noted; however, 90% of adopters were not particularly concerned. Our results found that 51% of greyhounds had an injury or illness requiring long-term management; however, 69% of adopters did not believe it affected their greyhound's QoL (Fig 2). Common injuries: toes amputations, arthritis, broken bones & corns.

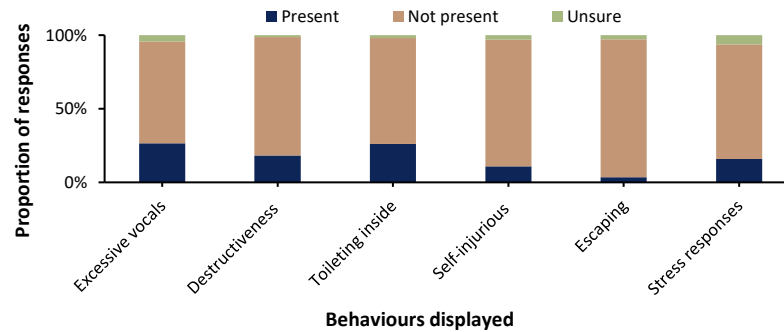


Fig 1. Does your greyhound show any of the following behaviours when he/she is left alone, or about to be left alone?

On a positive note, 89% of participants indicated that their dog transitioned into the companionship lifestyle easily: scored seven to ten (Fig 3). Furthermore, 88% of the adopters provided enrichment, which is essential for maintaining health & mental welfare. The adopters indicated that food-based enrichment was most preferred by the greyhound but only 22% offer this on a daily basis (Fig 4).

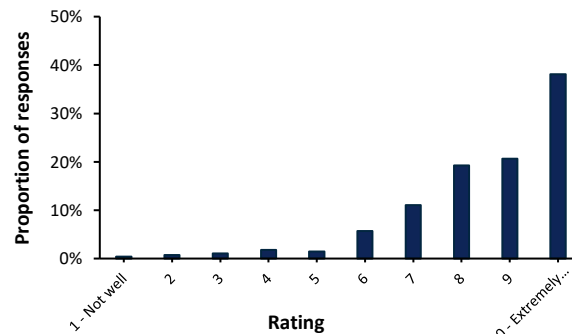


Fig 3. How easily do you think your greyhound has integrated into the companionship lifestyle after being the racing industry?

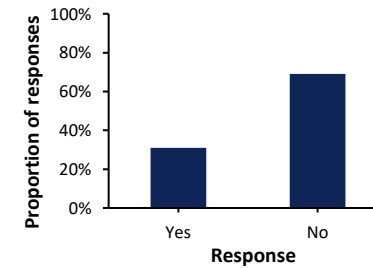


Fig 2. Does your greyhound show any of the following behaviours when he/she is left alone, or about to be left alone?

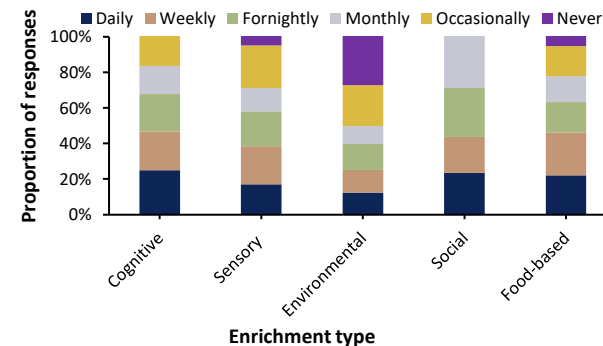


Fig 4. How easily do you think your greyhound has integrated into the companionship lifestyle after being the racing industry?

Discussion

Our results suggest that adopted greyhounds through GAP do seem to transition reasonably well into the companionship lifestyle. Furthermore, GAP provides their adopters with useful information regarding the care of these dogs. However, there was a concerning number of dogs which displayed behaviours indicative of separation anxiety; this may result in negative impacts on their well-being & welfare⁵. Furthermore, this result implies that the dog's transition into a companionship lifestyle may not be as smooth as adopters believe. We recommend that GAP provides further resources on behaviours of concern.

Our study also found that over half of adopted dogs have long-term injuries or illnesses. Studies have portrayed that soft-tissue injuries, fractures, & lacerations are common racing career injuries for greyhounds⁶. Injuries requiring long-term management do have the potential to impact an animal negatively⁷. However, adopters did not seem overly concerned by these issues and accepted them as a matter of course with greyhounds.

Overall, adopters portrayed a good QoL for their greyhound through GAP's programme, despite the apparent challenges due to the animals' early life experiences in the racing industry. However, QoL assessment is subjective & depends on how perceptive owners are, and what they may or may not perceive to affect their animal and to what degree⁸. We recommend that observational studies are carried out to conduct a quantitative assessment post-adoption.

5. Knight, A. (2018). *Injuries in racing greyhounds*. Competitive Animal Racing Collection. <https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10048&context=comarac>
6. Robertson, H. S. B. (2021). *Review into Greyhound Racing in New Zealand*. https://www.beshive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-09/Review%20into%20Greyhound%20Racing%20New%20Zealand%202021_0.pdf
7. Stevens, E. G., Baker, T., & Lewis, N. (2021). Dealing with sentient surplus: A moral economy of greyhound rehoming. *Environmental and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 0(0), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/25148486211054843>
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