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PRELIMINARY RESULTS ON FREQUENCY OF AGGRESSION IN SHEPHERD DOGS AND THE CHARACTERISTICS THAT SHEPHERD DOGS SHOULD HAVE

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The aim of the survey study was to determine the opinions of shepherd dog owners regarding the frequency of aggressive behaviours expressed by their dogs and the characteristics that shepherd dogs should have.

The survey was conducted with sheep breeders by face-to-face interview in Kirklareli province of Turkey. The survey consisted of three parts. Part one covered demographic variables of breeders including age, gender, educational status, number of owned dogs, and information about the dogs including breed/genotype, gender and age. In part two, dog owners were asked about aggression frequency of their dogs in 14 different situations using a 5-point likert scale (1: never; 2: rarely; 3: occasionally; 4: usually; 5: always). In order to calculate the percentage of dogs, which expressed aggression in each of the 14 situations, the likert scale was reduced to a 'never' (score 1), 'sometimes' (scores 2, 3 and 4) or 'always' (score 5) scoring system. The aggression frequencies of 151 dogs were evaluated in part two. In part three, 21 sheep breeders were asked to list the characteristics a shepherd dog should have. Chi-square test was used to determine the effects of dog's gender, breed and age on proportion of dogs, which expressed aggressive behaviours in different frequency groups.

As a result, the median values for the questions about aggressive behaviours of dogs; aggression if an unfamiliar dog approaches to the sheep in the rangeland / pastureland (Q1), aggression if an unfamiliar person approaches (Q2), aggression if an unfamiliar person approaches to the sheep in the sheepfold (Q3), aggression towards the other dogs in the farm (Q6), aggression towards the other dogs or people when the owner gives the order (Q7) and growling / barking when interfered during eating (Q12) were found 5 (always). The median values for the questions about aggressive behaviours of dogs; aggression if an unfamiliar person approaches to its owner at a long distance from the sheepfold (Q4), aggression towards farm workers and family members (Q8), aggression towards lamb / sheep (Q14), aggression when punished (Q9) and aggression when tied with a short rope (Q11) were found 1 (never).

Gender of dog had no significant influence on frequency of aggression in situations investigated in the study. On the other hand, age of dog had significant influence on "aggression towards the other dogs in the farm (Q6).

The owners stated that the dogs at the first year of age showed less aggression towards the other dogs in the farm than older dogs.

When the question of "which characteristics should a shepherd dog have?" was asked to the owners, the answers; "should not leave the flock" 76.2%, "should be strong, hard, stately and good looking" 71.4%, "should guard the flock against wolves and other dangers" %38.1 and "should watchguard the strayed sheep/lamb, wounded or newly lambed sheep" 38.1%, were given.

In this presentation, the preliminary results of a survey study aiming to investigate certain characteristics of the shepherd dogs which are among the irreplaceable parts of the sheep breeding practices in Turkey, were presented. Determination of the detailed behavioural characteristics of the shepherd dogs would be possible by wider ranged survey studies, which will be supported by behavioural observations.