

Prescription of psychotropic drugs for dogs during New Year's Eve by Austrian and German veterinarians and their attitudes to noise aversion

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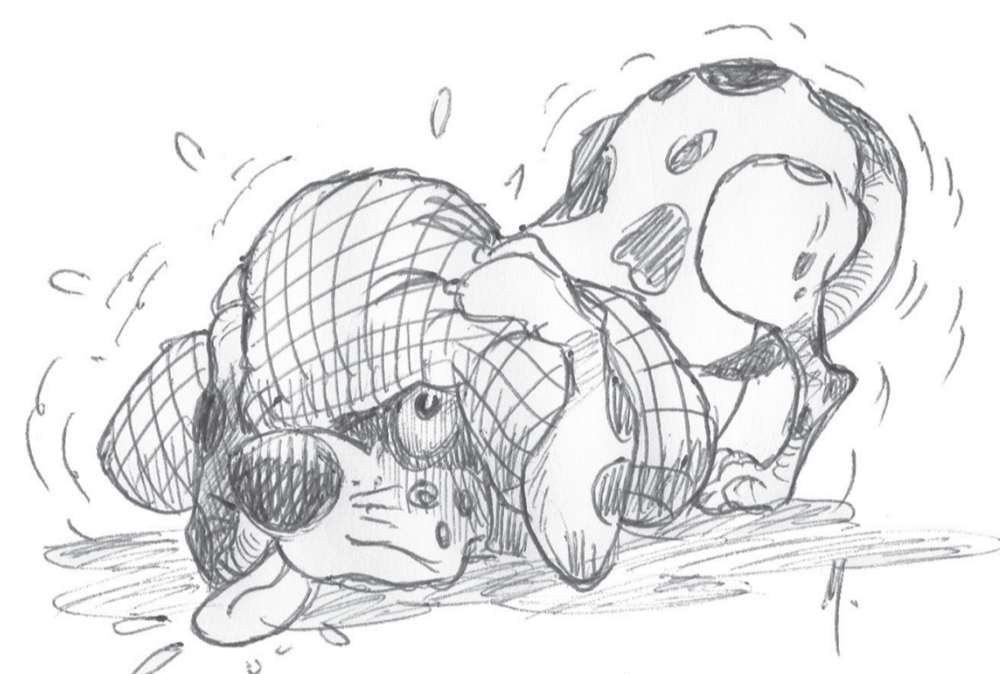


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Introduction

- Noise aversion is a common behaviour problem highly relevant to dog welfare. Attitudes of veterinarians regarding the welfare impact of noise aversion might influence choice of treatment.



Our questions

- Are drugs thought to be more effective than other types of treatment?
- Which drugs are used and how often?
- Are there differences between Austria and Germany?
- Is choice of treatment related to attitudes regarding the welfare impact of noise aversion?

Methods

- Online survey for veterinarians in German-speaking countries from January to May 2018
 - Rating of effectiveness
 - 'Most effective' = 1 to 'least effective' = 5
 - Treatment & drug use
 - 6-point scale ranges from 'never' to 'very often'
 - Attitudes to noise aversion
 - 7-point scale ranges from 'do not agree at all' to 'totally agree'

The participants

- 78% women, 22% men
- Mean age: 46 years
- 47% Austria, 48% Germany, 5% other countries

Results

- ➔ Drugs were rated as more effective than food additives/herbal drugs (N = 378; $p < 0.001$) and behaviour modification (N = 390; $p < 0.001$). Only management measures during noise events such as providing a place to hide and reducing visual stimuli were ascribed a similar effectiveness (N = 372; $p = 0.784$).

Table 1: Reported frequency of use of different drugs during New Year's Eve.

Drug	N	Never	Very seldom	Seldom	Some-times	Often	Very often
Dexmedetomidin (e.g. Sileo)	499	44.9%	11.6%	6.4%	15.6%	18.0%	3.4%
Acepromazin (e.g. Vetranquil)	498	42.4%	21.1%	7.0%	12.4%	12.2%	4.8%
Alprazolam (e.g. Xanax)	487	42.3%	7.6%	6.2%	14.2%	17.7%	12.1%
Diazepam (e.g. Valium)	485	51.5%	14.8%	9.1%	13.6%	8.0%	2.9%
Oxazepam (e.g. Anxiolit)	478	86.6%	6.1%	3.3%	3.3%	0.6%	0.0%
Trazodon (e.g. Trittico)	482	96.3%	1.7%	1.0%	0.6%	0.2%	0.2%
Selegilin (e.g. Selgian)	481	80.2%	11.0%	4.6%	3.5%	0.4%	0.2%
Amitryptilin (e.g. Saroten)	479	92.7%	3.5%	2.1%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Clomipramin (e.g. Clomicalm)	482	66.0%	13.9%	7.1%	10.0%	2.3%	0.8%
Fluoxetin (e.g. Prozac)	484	93.8%	2.7%	1.9%	1.0%	0.6%	0.0%
Fluvoxamin (e.g. Floxyfral)	480	95.2%	2.7%	1.3%	0.6%	0.2%	0.0%
Sertralin (e.g. Gladem)	479	92.3%	5.0%	1.3%	0.8%	0.4%	0.2%

Austria vs. Germany

- ➔ Dexmedetomidin & Selegiline used more often in Germany ($p < 0.001$)
- ➔ Acepromacin, Alprazolam, Clomipramin used more often in Austria ($p \leq 0.001$)

Table 2: Frequency of use of different treatments

Type of treatment	N	Mean	SD
Drugs	506	4.5	1.1
Management of environment	502	4.9	1.2
Food additives/Herbal drugs	500	4.1	1.6
Behaviour modification	497	3.3	1.6

Table 3: Attitudes regarding the impact of noise aversion on welfare of dogs

Attitude item	N	Mean	SD
Noise aversion is very stressful for dogs.	456	6.5	0.8
Noise aversion tends to worsen over time.	455	5.8	1.3
Noise aversion reduces the quality of life of the dog.	455	6.1	1.1
Noise aversion should be treated.	455	5.8	1.2
There are different types of treatment for noise aversion.	455	6.3	0.9
Affected dogs need an individualized treatment.	454	6.3	1.0
Treatment of noise aversion takes long.	453	6.2	0.9
Treatment of noise aversion is seldom successful.	453	3.5	1.4
Treatment of noise aversion is expensive.	449	3.3	1.4

Relationships between attitudes and treatment use or effectiveness

- ➔ No relationships* between use of drugs/management of environment and attitude items.
- ➔ The strongest relationships were found between more frequent use of behaviour modification and higher agreement to the items 'Affected dogs need an individualized treatment.' ($r_s = 0.29$, N = 441, $p < 0.001$), 'There are different types of treatment for noise aversion.' ($r_s = 0.28$, N = 442, $p < 0.001$) and 'Noise aversion should be treated.' ($r_s = 0.26$, N = 442, $p < 0.001$).
- ➔ No relationships* between rating of effectiveness of treatments and attitude items.

* Only correlations larger than $r_s = 0.2$ were interpreted.

Conclusion: Although discouraged, we found that Acepromacin is still one of the most common drugs prescribed, in particular in Austria. Awareness that noise aversion is a welfare problem in dogs seems to be quite high in veterinarians and found to be increased in those that report to use more often behaviour modification as a treatment. To improve dog welfare every veterinarian should be trained how to effectively treat this common problem.