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Katsuji Uetake\textsuperscript{a}, Sayoko Yamada\textsuperscript{b}, Mei Yano\textsuperscript{a} & Toshio Tanaka\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} School of Veterinary Medicine, Azabu University, Sagamihara, Japan
\textsuperscript{b} Kanagawa Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Yokohama, Japan

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A Survey of Attitudes of Local Citizens of a Residential Area Toward Urban Stray Cats in Japan

Katsuji Uetake,1 Sayoko Yamada,2 Mei Yano,1 and Toshio Tanaka1

1School of Veterinary Medicine, Azabu University, Sagamihara, Japan
2Kanagawa Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Yokohama, Japan

This study surveyed the attitudes of local residents living in an urban area in Japan toward stray cats. An anonymous questionnaire asked local residents (359 houses) about their attitudes toward stray cats. Responses were received from 126 houses (35%). Answers about nuisance, respondents’ actions, and actions to be taken with regard to stray cats did not differ by place or type of residence of respondents. More than one third (36.7 ± 16.6%) of the respondents answered that the “bad smell of the feces and urine” was a nuisance. Respondents who lived in detached houses tended to like cats compared with those who lived in condominiums. Respondents who liked cats took care of cats more frequently, whereas those who disliked cats chased cats away and prevented their intrusion into their houses and land. However, it is noteworthy that one third or more (minimum value: 37.8%) of respondents of all kinds answered that neutering is one effective way to suppress the population of stray cats.

Keywords: domestic cats, feral cat management, public attitudes, TNR program

The Japan Pet Food Association (2012) estimated that about 5 million households (10.6% of all households in Japan) were caregivers for about 9.6 million cats in 2010. On the other hand, over 150,000 cats were euthanized in 2010 (Nature Conservation Bureau of the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan, 2012), although the number of euthanized cats in Japan has diminished linearly in the last 15 years. Kittens accounted for more than 60% (over 96,000 kittens) of the total cats euthanized.

Correspondence should be sent to Katsuji Uetake, School of Veterinary Medicine, Azabu University, 1-17-71 Fuchinobe, Chuo-ku, Sagamihara 252-5201, Japan. Email: uetake@azabu-u.ac.jp
To reduce the number of euthanized stray cats, the Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan (2010) advocates a “Chiiki-neko” program, which is the internationally recognized trap-neuter-return (TNR) program. Here the term “stray” has the following meaning, as cited by Farnworth, Campbell, and Adams (2011):

Stray cat: A companion cat who is lost or abandoned and who is living as an individual or in a group (colony). Stray cats have many of their needs indirectly supplied by humans and live around centers of human habitation. Stray cats are likely to interbreed with the unneutered companion cat population. (p. 60)

Japan, like many other countries, uses TNR programs as one of the main population-management strategies (Jones & Downs, 2011; Natoli et al., 2006; Wallace & Levy, 2006). The TNR programs are intended to decrease reproduction without harming cats, which is why TNR programs are considered the most practical, effective, and humane way for controlling the number of stray cats (Levy, Gale, & Gale, 2003). However, the outcome of a TNR program depends on cooperation between the administration and inhabitants. In particular, the understanding, consent, and cooperation of local residents are essential.

The purpose of this study was to survey the attitudes of local residents of urban areas in Japan toward stray cats. The results of this study provide information that could be useful for local governments to create strategies for coping with stray cats.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Procedure

The study used an anonymous questionnaire to ask local residents about their attitudes toward stray cats. The questionnaire was sent via the district association to every household (359 houses) in Koyasudai-1-chome district in Yokohama, Japan. Yokohama is the second largest city in Japan following Tokyo, and Koyasudai-1-chome district is a commuter town for central Tokyo. Yokohama lies to the south of Tokyo, and a plane trip from central Tokyo is about 17 miles. This district was selected because it is a typical residential area in a large city in Japan, and its residents are troubled by the increase in stray cats. The district was further divided into seven residence zones by administrative districts. The number of houses in each residence zone was 34(A), 55(B), 68(C), 82(D), 60(E), 43(F), and 17(G). Responses were received by mail from 126 houses, a response rate of 35%.

Survey and Data Analysis

The survey was created by Sayoko Yamada and consisted of two sections. The first section collected demographic data about the respondents and included the following items:

1. Residence zone (A–G),
2. Residence type (detached house or condominium),
3. Respondent’s sex (female or male),
4. Age (under 30, 30s, 40s, 50s, or 60s), and
5. Attitudes toward cats (really like, like, dislike, strongly dislike, or neutral).
FIGURE 1 Nuisances that stray cats have caused to respondents (n = 126).

The second section asked three kinds of questions about (a) nuisances that stray cats have caused to respondents, (b) actions that respondents have actually taken against stray cats, and (c) actions that should be taken against stray cats. See Figures 1, 2, and 3 for subitems of each question.

Prior to statistical analysis, “really like” and “like” were combined in “like.” Similarly, “dislike” and “strongly dislike” were combined in “dislike.” Data were analyzed using the statistical software program Statcel3 (Version 3, 2011; OMS Publishing Inc., Tokyo). A chi-square test for independence assessed biases in the items in the first sections against answers to the questions in the second section. For significance, a p value of <.05 was selected.

RESULTS

There were no significant biases in residence zone distribution in nuisance (χ² = 46.523, df = 36, p = .112), respondents’ actions (χ² = 67.203, df = 54, p = .107), and actions to be taken (χ² = 29.510, df = 42, p = .927). In all residence zones, the largest number of respondents answered that “feces and urine have a bad smell” (36.7 ± 16.6%). Fewer residents reported the second (“ransacking the garden and garbage collection point”: 12.5 ± 4.6%) and third (“caterwauling”: 12.1 ± 3.8%) options (Figure 1).

There was no significant bias in residence zone distribution in attitudes toward cats (χ² = 31.384, df = 24, p = .143), although answers of like (42.5 ± 15.9%) were a little more frequent than answers of dislike (29.4 ± 11.9%). There was no significant bias distribution in liking and disliking cats (χ² = 8.230, df = 4, p = .083) by residence type, but respondents living in detached houses (“like”: 61.5%; “dislike”: 15.4%; “neutral”: 23.1%) tended to like
FIGURE 2  Respondents’ \((n = 126)\) actions toward stray cats.

FIGURE 3  Respondents’ \((n = 126)\) opinions about actions to be taken against stray cats.
cats compared with those living in condominiums (“like”: 27.9%; “dislike”: 45.6%; “neutral”: 26.5%). There was no significant bias in sex distribution in liking and disliking cats (χ² = 1.751, df = 4, p = .781), although female respondents answered more favorably (“like”: 39.2%; “dislike”: 31.7%; “neutral”: 29.1%) compared with male respondents (“like”: 29.4%; “dislike”: 36.8%; “neutral”: 33.8%).

There was a significant difference between respondents who like cats and those who dislike cats in the actions that they have actually taken toward stray cats (χ² = 66.587, df = 18, p = .000). Respondents who like cats took care of cats in many ways (“fed cats”: 16.3%; “provided sick and wounded cats with medical treatment”: 9.3%; “had cats neutered”: 9.3%; “protected cats”: 7.0%), whereas those who dislike cats chased cats away (48.8%) and prevented intruding cats (31.7%). Only respondents who dislike cats brought cats in order to cull them (2.4%). Respondents who answered “neutral” also chased cats away (39.5%) and prevented intruding cats (20.5%; Figure 2).

There was also a significant difference between respondents who like cats and those who dislike cats in actions advocated against stray cats (χ² = 37.545, df = 14, p = .001). Although more respondents who dislike cats thought that stray cats should be culled (should adult cats be culled: 32.1%; should kittens be culled: 7.5%), one third or more of respondents of all kinds (respondents who like cats: 58.3%; those who dislike cats: 37.8%; those who answered “neutral”: 38.9%) answered that neutering cats is one effective method to suppress the stray cat population. The proportion who advocated “not feeding cats” was larger in respondents who answered “neutral” (36.1%) than the other two kinds of respondents (respondents who like cats: 12.5%; those who dislike cats: 20.8%; Figure 3).

**DISCUSSION**

Responses regarding nuisances, respondents’ actions, and actions to be taken against stray cats did not differ by place or the type of residence of the respondents. More than one third of the Japanese urban respondents answered that they feel “feces and urine smell bad.” Even in the United States, excrement deposition is one of the top problems caused by roaming cats including stray cats, which is as problematic as the noise they make (Robertson, 2008).

In this study, a sex difference was not found; however, respondents varied by housing type. Respondents who live in detached houses tended to like cats compared with those who live in condominiums. A survey on the current status of owning companion animals in condominium buildings in Japan showed that 40% or more of condominium buildings still prohibit owning pets by the rules of their condominium associations (Kubo, 2007). Consequently, families who want to avoid pets may prefer living in condominiums.

Respondents who like cats and those who dislike cats treated cats in a contrasting manner. Whereas the former respondents fed cats and provided medical treatment to sick and wounded cats more frequently, the latter respondents chased cats away and prevented cats from intruding; this is what we expected. We can also understand that respondents who dislike cats were willing to accept culling stray cats. However, it is a noteworthy result that one third or more of respondents of all kinds answered that neutering is one effective step toward population suppression in stray cats. This result should encourage local administrative organizations and their staff members to promote TNR programs as one of the main population-management strategies in Japan.
CONCLUSION

The TNR programs are considered the most practical, effective, and humane way to control the population of stray cats (Levy et al., 2003). Recently, many countries have been using TNR programs as one of the main population-management strategies (Jones & Downs, 2011; Natoli et al., 2006; Wallace & Levy, 2006). The TNR programs are intended to decrease reproduction without causing harm to individual cats. Thus, local residents who like cats and those who dislike cats can compromise on TNR programs as one of the specific measures, and the results of this study support this.

One of the limitations of the study is that we received survey responses from only 126 houses in one residential area in Japan. We need to conduct similar surveys in other areas to generalize the findings in this study. Regardless of these limitations, it is a fruitful finding that both respondents who like and dislike cats recognize the effectiveness of neutering stray cats for their population suppression. Although the survey was conducted in the United States, it is encouraging that TNR was found to be a more acceptable option to reduce stray cat populations than capturing and euthanizing (Loyd & Hernandez, 2012).

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