

The article, “Impact of Changes in Owner Leaving Pattern on Separation-Related Behaviour in Pet Dogs in the UK” investigated whether the prevalence of SRB in dogs changed with changes in dog management during and after COVID lockdowns. The authors found that owners reported that nearly 10% of dogs that did not show SRB behaviors prior to lockdown were reported to show SRB after lockdown, and the greater the change in the dog’s routine, the greater chance they had of showing new SRB.

I have minor comments below and a few larger comments:

P1 L29 and P3 L112 the present tense “reduce” sounds strange to me here. I would suggest “reduced” since you are looking at changes that have already occurred.

P6 L176 I am assuming you excluded dogs that were not left alone in February (or were there none?)

P10 L307-308 Could you make this a positive statement to show highlight the impact of amount of change on SRB: Dogs whose days left alone per week *increased the most*...If the data support that angle, I think it’s a stronger statement than what is written.

Larger issues:

I would like to see the authors address a few different angles in the discussion

1. That dogs showing SRB prior to lockdown were more likely to show it after. Suggests the behavior is fairly robust and dogs having shown it at one point continue to be at risk (without knowing what interventions were taken)
2. Can you address the dogs that improved between Feb and Oct? You report the number of new dogs showing SRB but can you report on dogs that went the other way? What was the actual # and %? This comparison seems essential—if some dogs gets worse but some get better, than the argument that changes due to COVID might bring about new SRB becomes weaker. It seems you have compared within dogs that showed SRB in baseline and other models for dogs that did not. Seems a comparison between SRB- (baseline) → SRB + (post lockdown) and SRB + (baseline) → SRB- (post lockdown) dogs is critical and missing.
3. One of the challenges in this is we don’t know background rates of change for dogs with SRB. That is, would the same % of dogs changed (in either direction) regardless of changes in owner schedules? We might see some dogs become sensitized over time and develop SRB (or something else changes in their life to precipitate it), while others might habituate or their behavior undergo extinction. As such, we can’t say for certain that these changes are due to changes in owner schedule. You note that the pseudo-R2 was small but I think you could go into more details and note the possibility that it was unrelated too.

However, your results that the greater the change → the greater the new risk of SRB does lend support to the idea that this change in management might be a factor. I would suggest highlighting and discussing this outcome more.