



ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF PET BIRD OWNERS IN THRISSUR DISTRICT

M.P Sreeshma¹, N Geetha²,
P Reeja George³, Manju Sasidharan²,
Sabin George², K.S Anil⁴ and C Sunanda⁵
Department of Livestock Production Management
College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences,
Mannuthy, Thrissur-680651

Received : 24.04.2017
Accepted : 14.08.2017

Abstract

A systematic study was undertaken in the socio economic profile of pet bird owners in Thrissur District of Kerala. A detailed questionnaire was prepared and data collected from 35 aviculturists to operationalise the study. Profile of owners such as age, gender, educational status, occupational status, marital status, social participation, years of experience in rearing pet birds, flock size and information utilization were analysed. Most of the pet bird owners were on the age groups of 31 and 40 years. Contribution of women was very less in this field. Most of the bird rearers were below graduates and reared pet birds as an auxiliary occupation. They registered their birds with different organizations. Family members have a great role in the management of pet birds with more than 10 years of experience. Majority of the owners collected information from internet. Very few pet owners attended trainings. Specialty pet services have been the fastest growing segment in the industry. This segment will continue to grow as more pet owners

consider birds to be valued as members of their families. Overall, the industry has continued to expand and is considered to be in the growth stage of its life cycle. For many pet owners, their pets also facilitated relationships from which they derived tangible forms of social support, both of a practical and emotionally supportive nature. Given growing evidence for social isolation as a risk factor for mental health and conversely, friendships and social support as protective factors for individual and community well-being, pets may be an important factor in developing healthy neighbourhoods.

Key words: Socio economic profile, pet bird owners-identification of constraints, remedial strategies

Introduction

People all over the world have been fascinated by hobby of pet bird rearing. Rearing of pet birds serves as an important societal

1. M.P Sreeshma, email ID: sreeshmaponnappan7@gmail.com, phone no: 9497869813,

Part of the M.Sc thesis submitted by the first author to the Kerala Veterinary and Animal Sciences University, Pookode, Wayanad

2. Asst Profs.

3. Asst Prof., Dept. of Veterinary & Animal Husbandry Extension, CVAS, Mannuthy

4. Prof. & Head.

5. Asst. Prof. & Head(i/c), Dept. of Statistics, CVAS, Pookode

measure for stress alleviation, besides opening up new avenues for employment and income generation among unemployed youth. For these reasons there has been an increased interest in this sector. Attractive colours and the fact that they make good companions contributed to their popularity. Moreover, there is a wide range of over 400 varieties of pet birds to choose from, the choice extends from Love birds, Budgerigars, Cockatoos, Macaws, Amazon parrots, Pigeons, Cockatiels, Finch and the Parakeet to mention a few. Quite a number of people have gradually made an entry into this segment for various reasons.

There is a growing body of research indicating a positive relationship between pet ownership and human health. (Allen *et al.*, 2001, Headey and Grabka, 2007, Wells, 2007 and Headey *et al.*, 2008). However, there is lack of information on the management practices followed by bird owners as well as the constraints faced by them. An understanding of these parameters would be beneficial in developing and designing suitable strategies for intervention in this sector which would go a long way in ensuring a sustainable livelihood option for budding entrepreneurs as well as maintaining minimum standards recommended for the wellbeing of these birds. The present study is a systematic enquiry into the subject of bird care including socio economic profile of pet bird owners. Based on the aforesaid discussion, the present study was thus undertaken with the objectives such as, analysis of the socio economic profile of pet bird owners in Thrissur District, identification of constraints in the pet bird rearing sector and designing of appropriate remedial strategies to ensure sustainable livelihood options.

Lisa Wood *et al.* (2015) reported that while companion animals have been previously identified as a direct source of companionship and support to their owners, their role as a catalyst for friendship formation or social support networks among humans has received little attention. Pet owners were significantly more likely to get to know people in their neighborhood than non-pet owners. Around 40% of pet owners reported receiving one or more types of social support (*i.e.* emotional, informational, appraisal,

instrumental) via people they met through their pet. Podberscek (2000) opined that pets act as a bridge between humans and nature. Garrity and Stallones (1998) and McNicholas and Collis (2006) studied that companion animals can also act as a social bridge between people and human inter-relatedness in a number of ways. HAI research to date has often focused on the animals themselves as a source of companionship and social support for their human companions.

Caughy *et al.* (2003) and Portes and Landolt (1996) reported that not all social interactions or relationships facilitated by pets are necessarily positive and as demonstrated in the social capital literature. Smeagal and Faye (2008) opined that common pet health problems are feather cysts, baldness, feather plucking, mites, pododermatitis, psittacosis, avian polyoma virus, salmonellosis and pox virus. Vivian *et al.* (2015) alerted that Psittacosis probably occurs more often than reported. Individuals with milder cases may not seek medical attention, and physicians may not inquire about bird exposure. There is a need for awareness campaigns directed at health workers and birds owners. Stull *et al.* (2012) recommended that successful infection prevention requires that individuals in contact with animals be aware of the disease risks. If the family had been informed earlier about the zoonotic nature of avian chlamydiosis, effective prophylactic measures could have been taken earlier. Many of the disease risks associated with pet contact can be reduced through simple measures, such as proper animal selection and changes in animal contact.

Sick birds should be treated and their handlers should wear protective clothing and a high-efficiency respirator (N95 rating) (Center for Food Security and Public Health, 2009; NASPHV, 2010). Aviary and pet shop owners should also establish programmes of avian chlamydiosis control in their facilities. Such programmes encourage disease prevention, improving animal health (NASPHV, 2010). By the time infection is recognized in a pet owner due to close contact with a purchased bird, a critical period of pathogen dissemination might already be occurred. Thus, effective

prophylactic measures taken in birds before being sold would enhance the prevention of further disease transmission among pet owners and other susceptible avian species. Improved zoonotic disease education is needed for pet owning households. Pet birds should be bought from reputable suppliers and examined by a veterinarian when they are first acquired. Birds and cages should be kept in a well-ventilated area to prevent the accumulation of infectious dust. Cages should be cleaned regularly to prevent the build-up of waste and they should first be treated with a cleaning solution to reduce aerosolization (Center for Food Security and Public Health, 2009). Furthermore, increased communication between professions is needed to improve the overall knowledge of zoonotic diseases and develop optimal approaches for reducing pet-associated pathogen transmission. Therefore, additional effort from physicians and veterinarians is required (Stull *et al.* 2012).

Materials and Methods

A study on the present management practices followed by pet bird owners was taken up in Thrissur District of Kerala. Data were collected from pet bird owners in their own premises by personal interview using a pre-tested questionnaire.

Locale of study and selection of respondents

Thrissur District was purposively selected for the study. Snowball sampling was resorted to for selection of the respondents. A total of 35 aviculturists were thus selected for the study.

Measurement of variables

Measurement of the variables was done with the help of a self structured questionnaire. Variables selected for the study were gender, age, educational status, occupational status, marital status, social participation, years of experience in rearing pet birds, flock size and information utilisation pattern. In the case of age, respondents were categorised as less than 30, 30 to 40, 41 to

50 and more than 50. Educational status was assessed by grouping the respondents into illiterate, can read only, primary, middle class, high school, SSLC, graduate and others. Occupational status was assessed in such a way that whether bird rearing is a main occupation or sub occupation. Marital status was assessed whether the respondents is married or unmarried. The experience of the respondent in aviculture was operationalized in terms of the number of years they had been rearing pet birds. Thus the respondents were classified into less than one year experience, one to five years of experience, five to ten years of experience and more than ten years of experience.

Social participation in this study referred to whether the respondent was a member or office bearer of formal organization. In case a member, the details of the agency in which they were a member is also collected.

Flock size was measured in terms the actual number of birds kept on the homestead. Then it is classified into four groups namely less than 100, 100 to 200, 200 to 300 and more than 300.

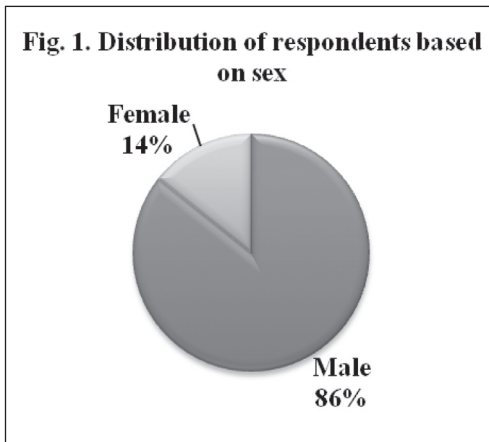
Information utilisation was assessed by assessing the frequency of using different sources. The frequency with which the respondent approached various sources of communication for obtaining information on pet bird rearing was referred to as the frequency of utilization of communication sources.

Results and Discussion

Table 1. Distribution of respondents based on age

Sl. No.	Age	Frequency	Per cent
1	<30	7	20.00
2	31-40	11	31.42
3	41-50	9	25.71
4	>50	8	22.87

The results of the socio-economic profile of owners engaged in pet bird rearing, are described below.



Gender distribution given in Fig. 1. shows that More than 86 per cent of bird owners were men and contribution of women was very less in this field, only 14.28 per cent.

About 17 per cent of pet bird owners were primary, high school and diploma holders. Only 20 per cent were graduates. Data on the educational attainments of aviculturists revealed that a significant proportion of 80 per cent owners were below graduates.

Veterinarians should educate owners about potential problems such as health problems, proper care, exotic pet trade, release of birds, owner-associated deaths due to water deprivation, unclipped wings, toxic fumes, trauma, other animals, toxic food/plants, hand-feeding mishaps, diseases caused by owners, heat exposure and sleeping with birds. (Wissman, 2008 and McKechnie, 2008).

Distribution of owners based on occupation and marital status was given in Fig.2.

Table 2. Distribution of respondents based on educational status

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Per cent
1	Primary	6	17.14
2	High school	6	17.14
3	SSLC	5	14.29
4	Secondary	5	14.29
5	Diploma	6	17.14
6	Graduates	7	20.00

It is evident from data in Table 1 that most (31.42 %) of the pet bird owners were on the age groups of 31 to 40 years. More than 48 percent of the bird owners are more than 40 years of age. Only 20 per cent were of age group of less than 30 years.

Most of the pet bird owners (94 %) reared birds as an auxiliary occupation while only very few (5.71%) possessed it as their main occupation. Nearly 77 per cent of pet bird owners were married and only 23 per cent were unmarried in per bird rearing.

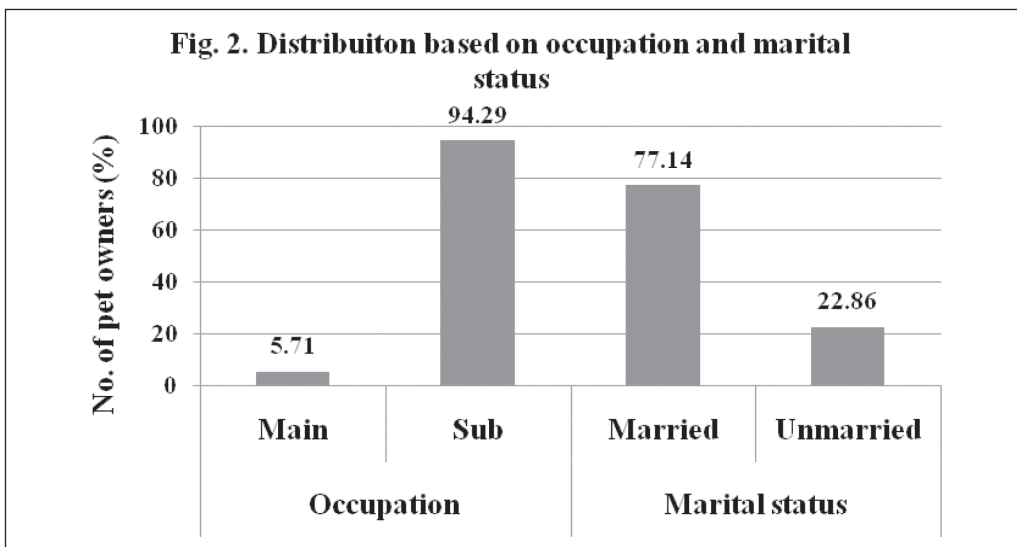


Table 3. Social participation of owners

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Per cent
1	Participated	17	48.57
2	Not participated	18	51.43

Only 48.57 per cent of bird owners had social participation and registered their birds with different organizations. But 51.43 per cent of owners do not have any contact with organization.

Walljasper, 2007 investigated the role of pets as a conduit for several forms of human social relatedness; getting to know other people, friendship formation and social support. Like many other social mammals, humans are a relational species, but the isolating and fast-paced nature of modern living tends to minimize the capacity for human-to-human contact.

Table 4. Participation of Family members in farm activities

Sl. No.	Participation in farming activities	Frequency	Percentage
1	Participated	31	88.57
2	Not participated	4	11.43

Table 7. Utilization of information

Sl. No.	Sources	Percentage of owners			
		Never	Sometimes	Often	Most often
1. Cosmopolite sources					
	a. Local veterinary doctor	68.57	20.0	5.71	5.71
	b. Para veterinary staff	80.0	5.71	8.57	5.71
	c. NGO's	100	0	0	0
2. Localite sources					
	a. Neighborhood groups	28.57	20.0	25.71	25.71
	b. Neighbors/Friends/Relatives	14.28	20.0	34.28	31.42
3. Mass media					
	a. Radio Programs	45.71	22.85	14.28	17.15
	b. TV Programs	20.0	17.14	34.28	17.14
	c. News papers	22.85	17.14	25.71	34.28
	d. Farm magazines	42.85	11.42	11.42	34.28
	e. Internet	11.42	2.85	11.42	74.28

Family members had a great role in the management of pet birds. About 88.6 per cent of aviculturists were supported by their own family members and only 11.43 per cent of family members do not involve in farming activities.

Table 5. Years of experience

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-5	8	22.86
2	5-10	12	34.28
3	>10	15	42.86

Considering the years of experience of rearing pet birds all had more than one year of experience. About 42.86 per cent had more than 10 years of experience, 34.28 per cent had 5 to 10 years of rearing experience and only 22.86 per cent of the bird owners had 1 to 5 years of previous experience in bird keeping.

Table 6. Flock size of owners

Sl. No.	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	<100	23	65.72
2	100-200	4	11.43
3	200-300	5	14.28
4	>300	3	8.57

The number of flock size in pet bird owners surveyed revealed that 65.72 per cent of owners reared less than 100 numbers of birds, 11.43 per cent of owners had 100 to 200 number of birds, 14.28 percent owned between 200 to 300 numbers and only 8.57 percent reared more than 300 birds.

Only 5.71 per cent of owners utilized the service of veterinary doctors and 68.57 per cent of owners never consulted any veterinarian. Nobody consulted NGO's. 25.71 percent of owners never discussed with neighbourhood groups about birds while 31.42 per cent collected information from friends and relatives. Majority of the owners, about 74 per cent collected information from internet very frequently to rear their pet bird.

Conclusion

A detailed study was carried out in the socio economic profile of pet bird owners in Thrissur District of Kerala. A detailed questionnaire was prepared and data collected from 35 aviculturists to operationalize the study. Profile of owners such as age, gender, educational status, occupational status, marital status, social participation, years of experience in rearing pet birds, flock size and information utilization were analysed. Most of the pet bird owners were on the age groups of 31 and 40 years or more. Contributions of women were very less in this field. Most of the bird rearers were below graduates and reared pet birds as an auxiliary occupation. They registered their birds with different organizations. Family members have a great role in the management of pet birds with more than 10 years of experience. Majority of the owners collected information from internet. Very few pet owners attended trainings. Specialty pet services have been the fastest growing segment in the industry. This segment will continue to grow as more pet owners consider birds to be valued as members of their families. Overall, the industry has continued to expand and is considered to be in the growth stage of its life cycle. For many pet owners, their pets also facilitated relationships from which they derived tangible forms of social support, both of a practical and emotionally supportive nature. Given growing

evidence for social isolation as a risk factor for mental health and conversely, friendships and social support as protective factors for individual and community well-being, pets may be an important factor in developing healthy neighbourhoods. Further interventions in the present study may give more light in almost all areas like socio economic profiles of pet bird owners, the constraints in bird rearing and suitable remedial strategies to be followed in rearing pet birds. Future Research 'Pet culture' differences may also have a bearing on some findings.

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Department of Livestock Production Management and Department of Veterinary & Animal Husbandry Extension, College of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Mannuthy, Kerala and also the Department of Statistics, COVAS, Pookode for the assistance provided.

References

- Allen, K., Shykoff, B. and Izzo, J. 2001. Pet ownership, but not ace inhibitor therapy, blunts home blood pressure responses to mental stress. *Hypertension* 38: 815–820. PMID: 11641292
- Caughy, M., Campo, P. and Muntaner, C. 2003. When being alone might be better: neighbourhood poverty, social capital and child mental health. *Social Science and Medicine* 57: 227–237. PMID: 12765704
- Center for Food Security and Public Health. 2009. Avian chlamydiosis. http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/Factsheets/pdfs/chlamydiosis_avian.pdf.
- Garrity, T. and Stallones, L. 1998. Effects of pet contact on human well-being. In: Wilson CC, Turner DC, editors. *Companion Animals in Human Health*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc. pp. 3–22.
- Headey, B. and Grabka, M.M. 2007. Pets and human health in Germany and Australia: National longitudinal results. *Social Indicators Research* 80: 297–311.

- Lisa Wood, Karen Martin, Hayley Christian, Andrea Nathan, Claire Lauritsen, Steve Houghton, Ichiro Kawachi, Sandra McCune. 2015. The Pet Factor - Companion animals as a conduit for getting to know people, friendship formation and social support. *Pets as a conduit for social interaction and social support (PLOS)*. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0122085 April 29, pp:1 – 17
- McKechnie, A.E. 2008. Phenotypic flexibility in basal metabolic rate and the changing view of avian physiological diversity: a review. *Journal of Comparative Physiology*. 178(3): 235-247.
- McNicholas, J. and Collis, G. 2006. Animals as Social Supports: Insights for Understanding Animal-Assisted Therapy. In: Fine AH, editor. *Handbook on Animal-Assisted Therapy: Theoretical Foundations and Guidelines for Practice*. pp. 49–71.
- NASPHV. 2010. Compendium of Measures to Control *Chlamydia psittaci* Infection Among Humans (Psittacosis) and Pet Birds (Avian Chlamydiosis), 2010. National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians. <http://www.nasphv.org/Documents/Psittacosis.pdf>.
- Portes, A. and Landolt, P. 1996. The Downside of Social Capital. *The American Prospect* 26: 18–21. *Pets as a Conduit for Social Interaction and Social Support (PLOS)*
- Smeagal, L. and Faye. 2008. Pet bird care: Common diseases and illnesses affecting pet birds. *Veterinary Record*. Helium.com. <http://www.helium.com>. Accessed 25 March 2008.
- Stull, J. W., Peregrine, A. S., Sargeant, J. M. and Weese, J. S. 2012. Household knowledge, attitudes and practices related to pet contact and associated zoonoses in Ontario, Canada. *BMC Public Health* 12, 553.
- Vivian Lindmayer Ferreira, Marcos Vincius Silva, Rodrigo Delfino Nascimento and Tania Freitas Raso. 2015. Psittacosis associated with pet bird ownership: a concern for public health. *JMM Case Reports*. pp:1-5
- Walljasper, J. 2007. *The Great Neighborhood Book*: New Society.
- Wells, D.L. 2007. Domestic dogs and human health: An overview. *British journal of health psychology* 12: 145–156. PMID: 17288671
- Wissman, M.A. 2008. Top ten bird killers. *ExoticPetVet.net*. <http://www.exoticpetvet.net>. ■