

More hope than heartbreak: A retrospective study of 461 cats from 20 hoarder environments

Linda Jacobson BVSc PhD
Jolene Giacinti BHSc, OVC 2016
Jyothi Robertson DVM



Peer-reviewed Literature

Pubmed search March 2016: (ANIMAL) AND (HOARDING OR HOARDER) title/abstract, no time limit: 69 hits

- Natural or pathological hoarding behaviour in animals: 43
- Animal hoarding reviews, editorial: 12
- Object hoarding, “animal” mentioned, usually in passing: 5
- Hoarded animals, research: 5
- Animal hoarders, research: 4



<https://colleenanderson.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/squirrel-e1334178089997.jpg>

Behavioural Health

Physical and Psychological Health Issues in Puppy Mill and Hoarding Rescues

Dr Franklin McMillan, Florida Shelter Conference 2012; Maddie's Fund Webinar

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/physical-and-psych-issues-in-mills-and-hoarding.htm>

The only study of behavioural and emotional consequences of hoarding in cats (so far).

THS hoarding study

Retrospective, descriptive study
2011 – 2014

461 cats from 20 hoarder
environments

Identified from “institutional
memory”

No attempt to classify hoarders

Often little direct information

Adoption-guarantee (no-kill) shelter



Type of Relinquishment

Route of surrender	Groups	Number
Via intermediary, from home (volunteer, rescue)	15	213
Via intermediary (from rescue hoarder)	2	182
Direct (hoarder, family member)	4	47
Seized, Shelter transfer	1	19

Often only part of a group.

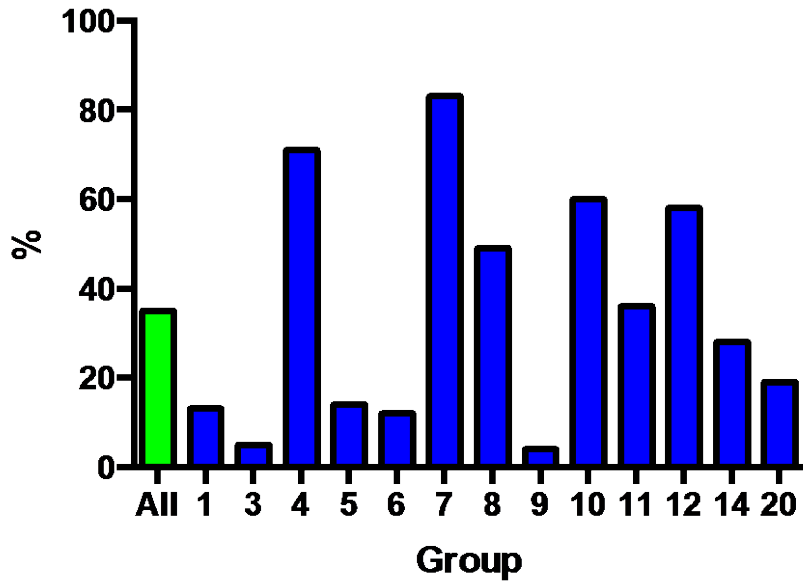
The Cats: n=461

Age	Immature: 23% Juvenile: 23% Adult: 59% Senior: 2%
Reproductive status	Intact: 88% S/N: 12%
Pregnancy rate intact adult F	28%
Body condition score	Underweight: 23% Ideal weight: 71% Overweight: 22%

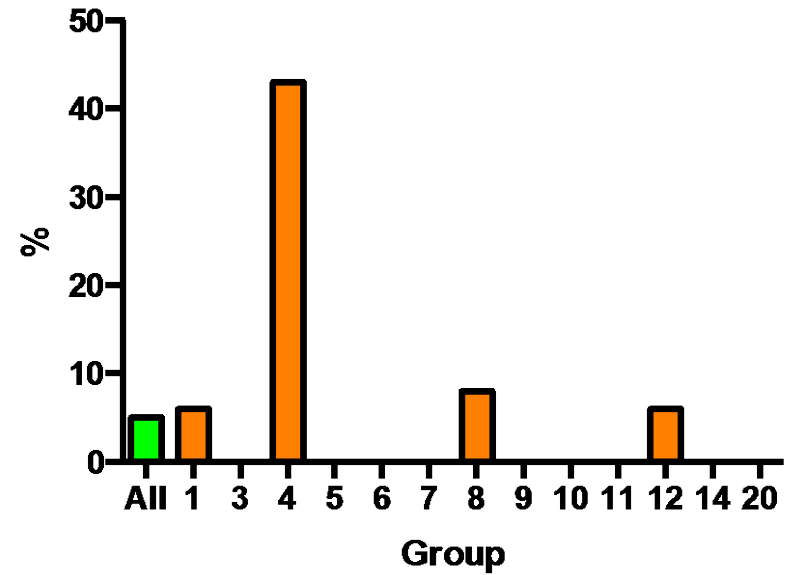
Medical Conditions

Prevalence calculated for all cats, as well as all groups > 10 cats

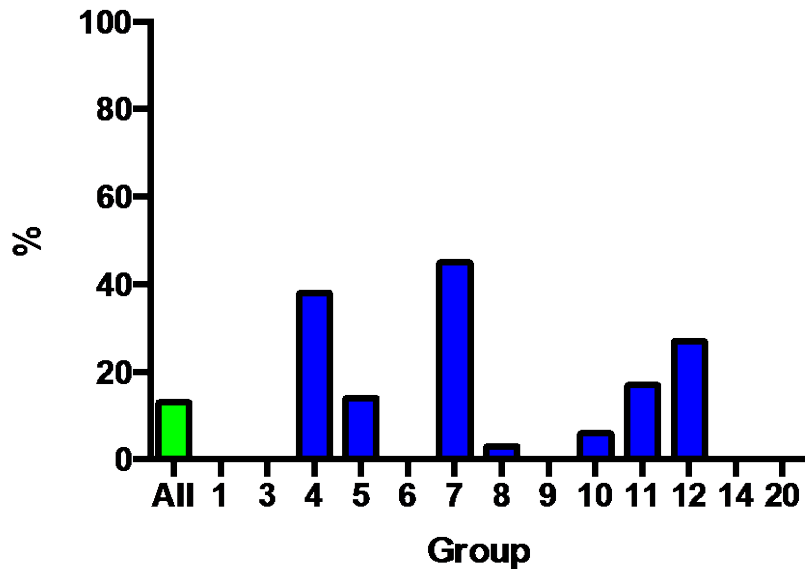
URI at intake



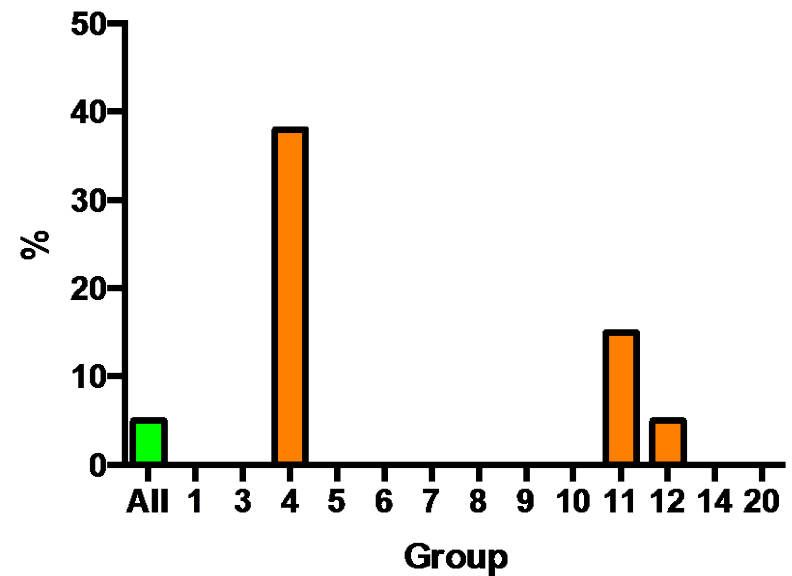
Diarrhea at intake



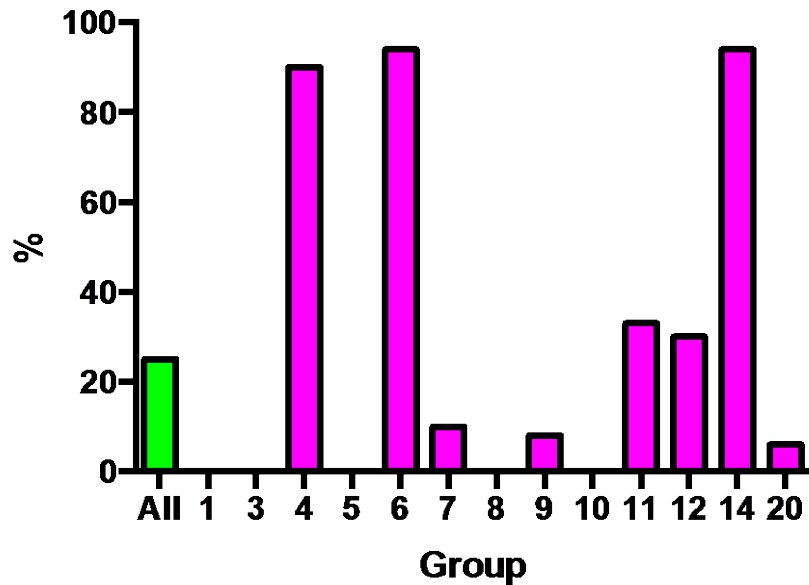
Chronic URI



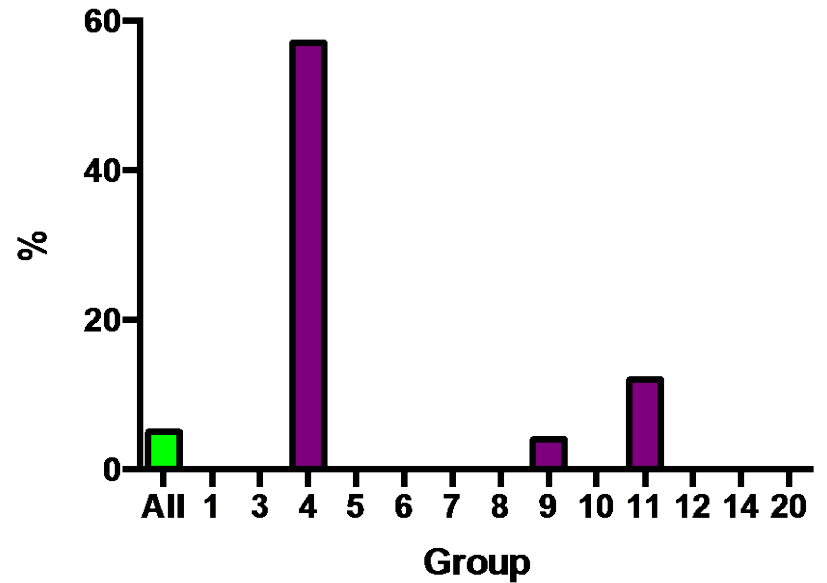
Chronic diarrhea



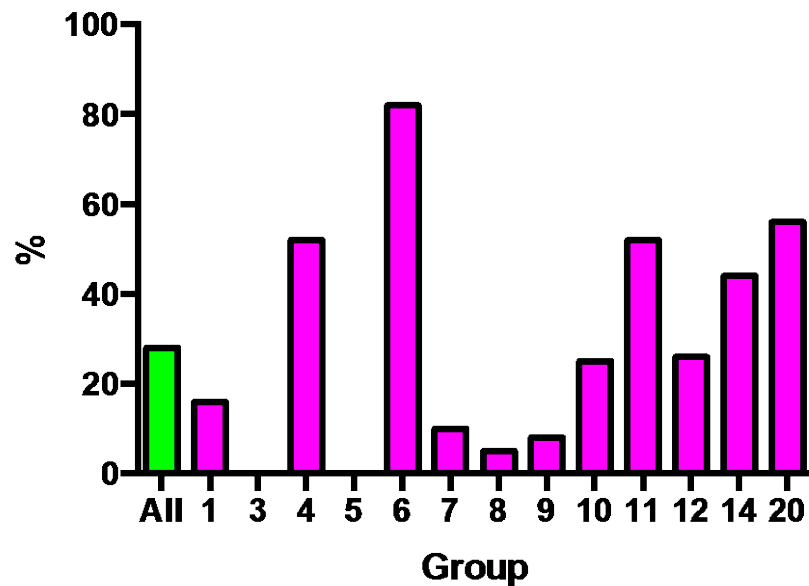
Ear mites



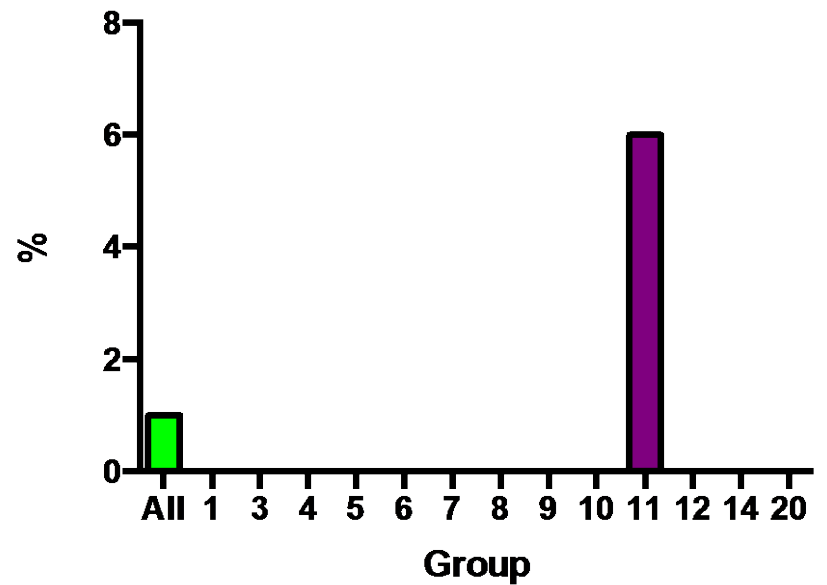
FIV-positive

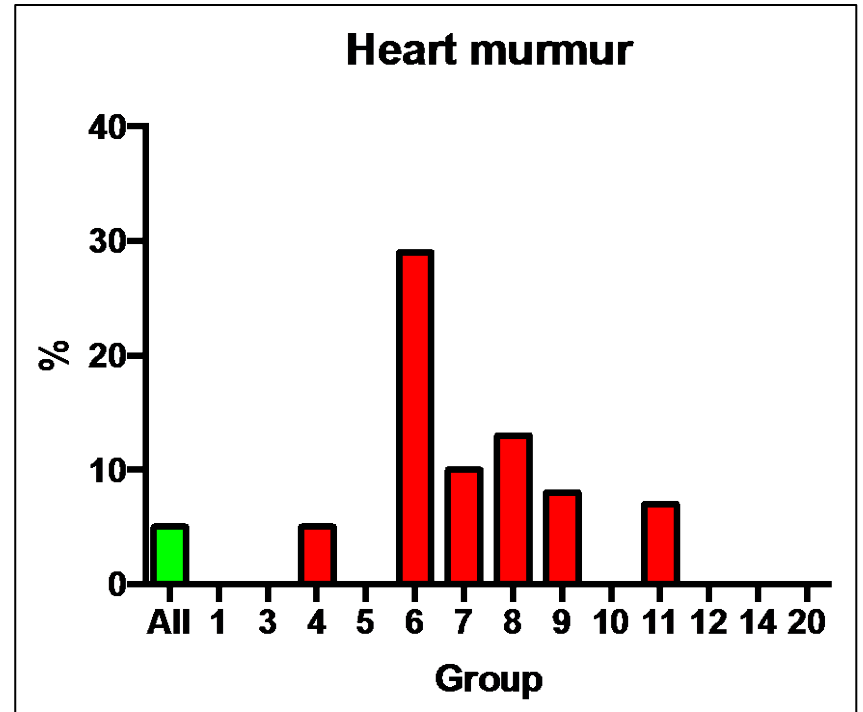
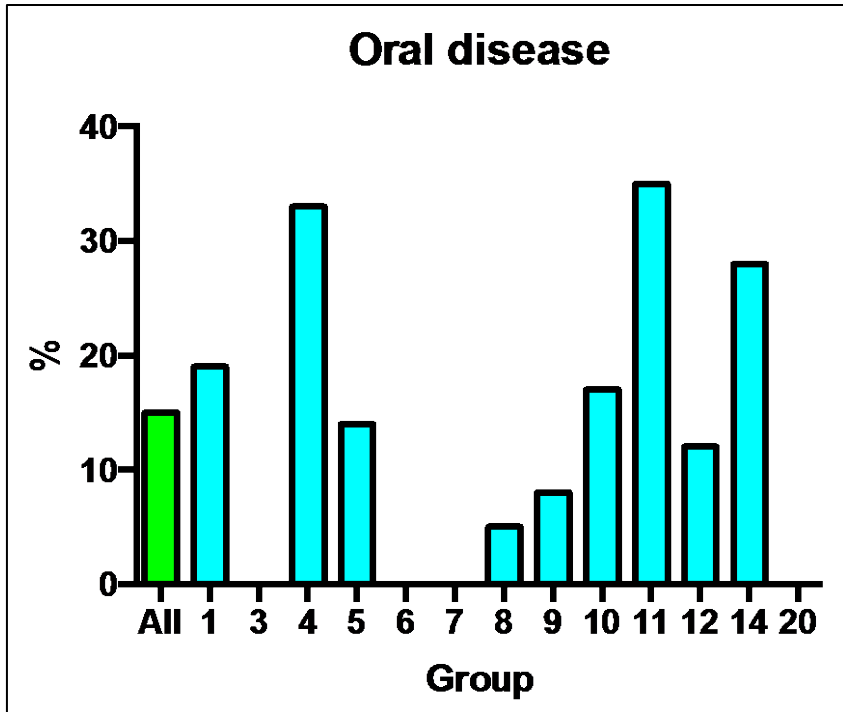


Skin lesions



FeLV-positive





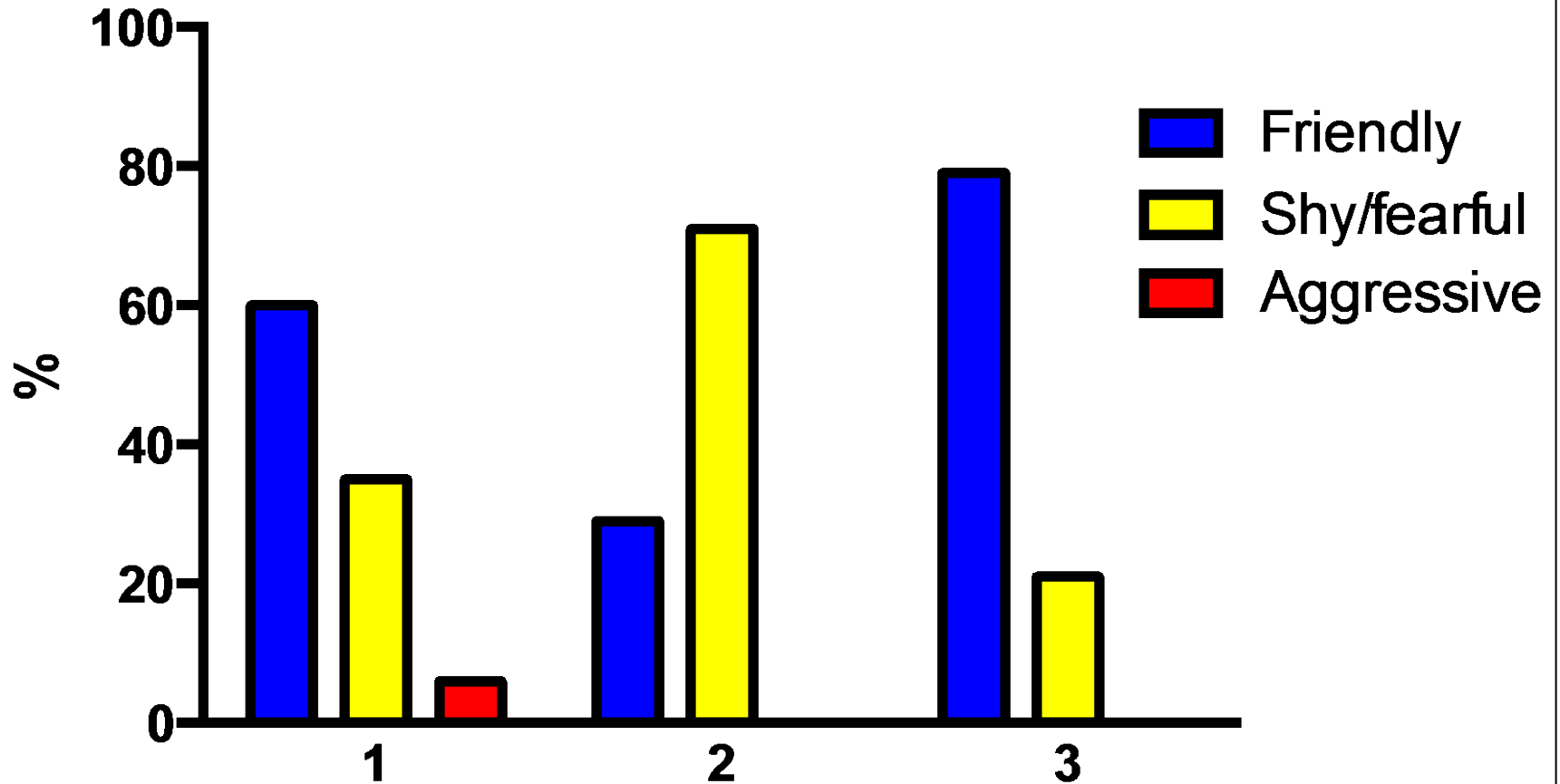
Assumptions

- High prevalence of medical conditions – YES
- Chronic, neglected conditions - YES
- High prevalence of infectious diseases, parasites, stress-related – YES
- Bizarre and severe infections – YES
(e.g. *Strep zoo* otitis and URI; severe ear mite infestation)

Behaviour

- Shelter records
- Adopter feedback
 - Behaviourally mature (≥ 20 months old) at intake and had been in the new home for at least one month : n=157
 - Survey Monkey, e-mail
 - 100 responses (64%)

Behaviour Classification

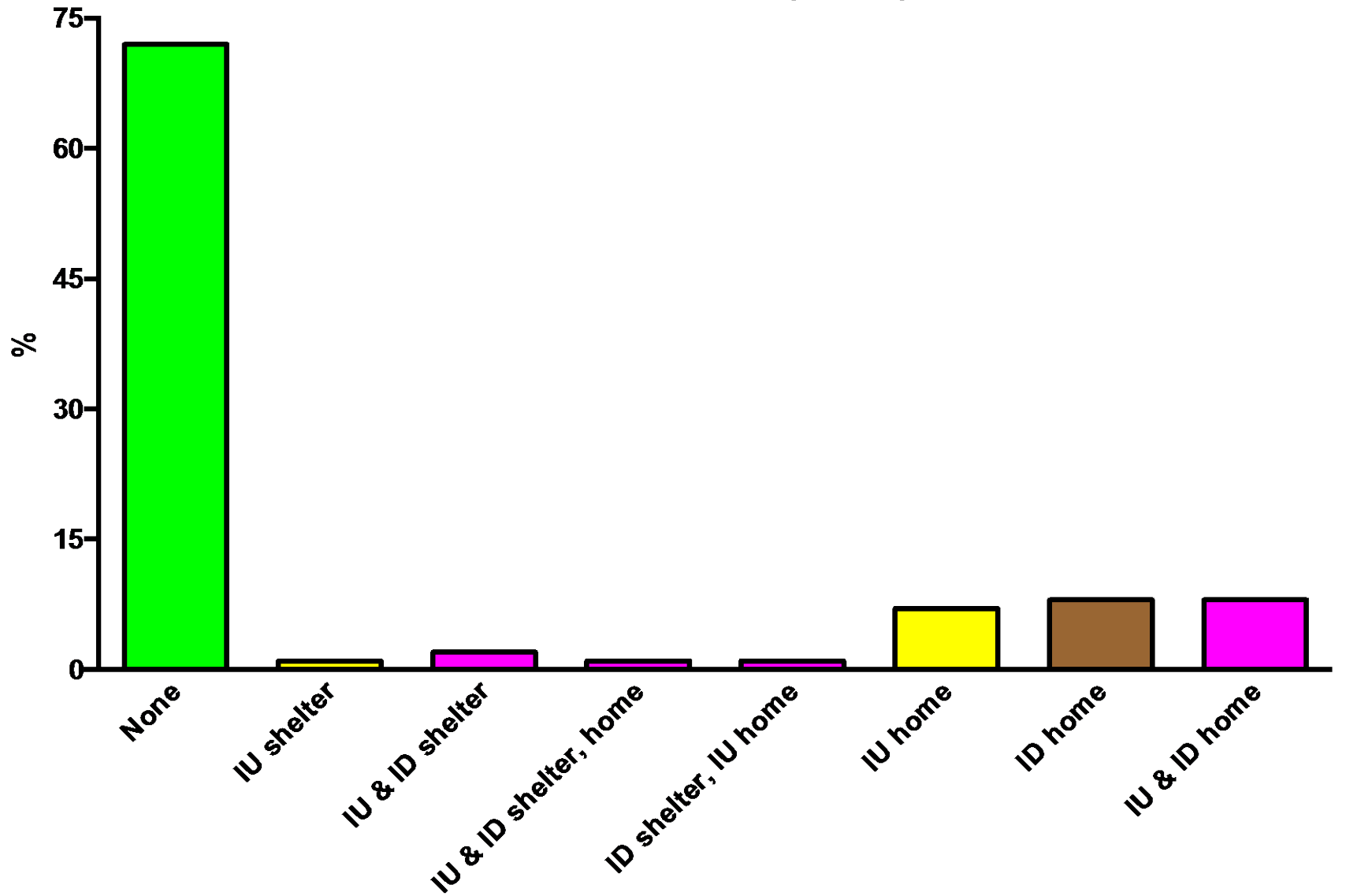


1: Intake

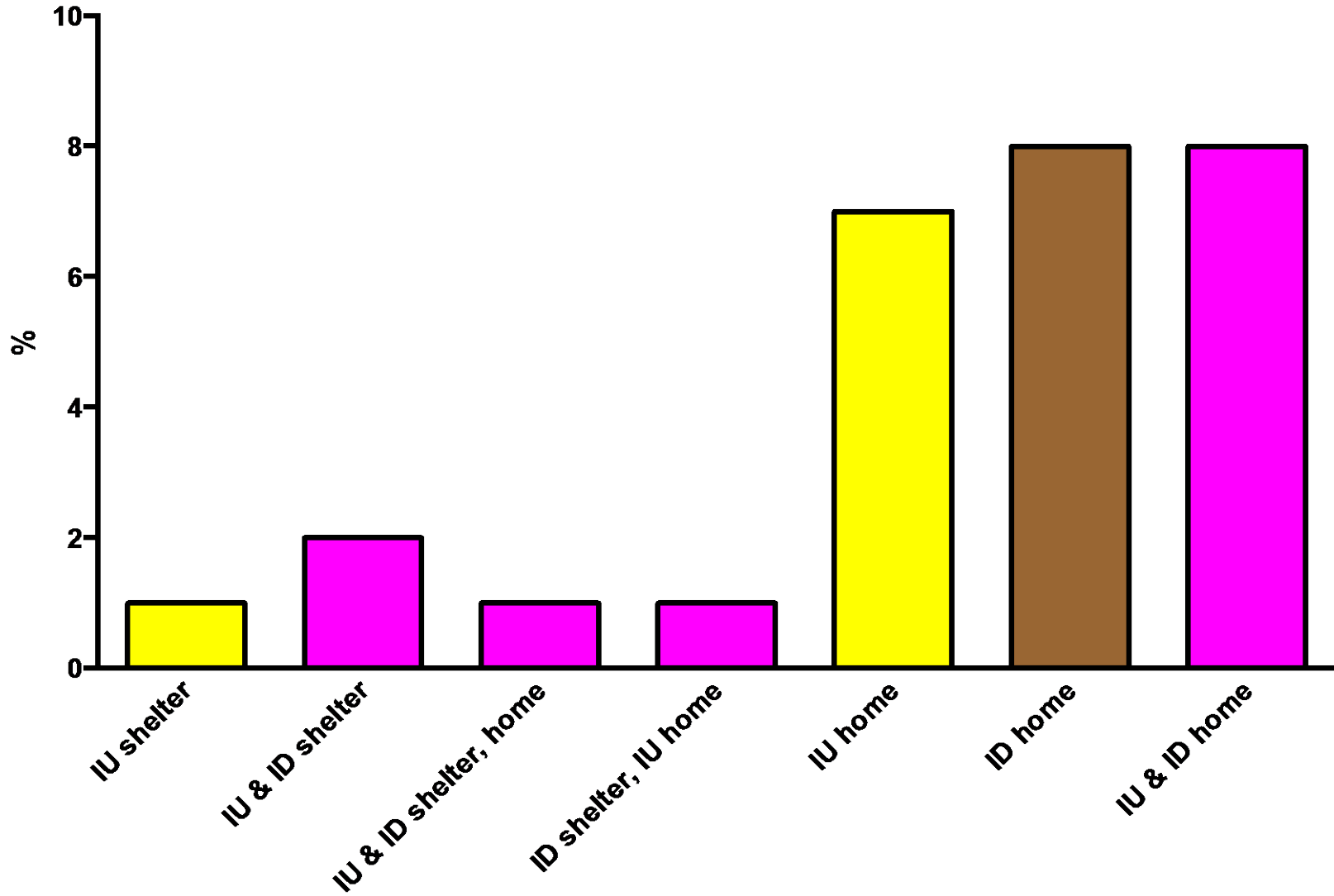
2: Immediately after adoption

3: At least a month after adoption

Litterbox use pre- and post-adoption in hoarder cats (n=100)

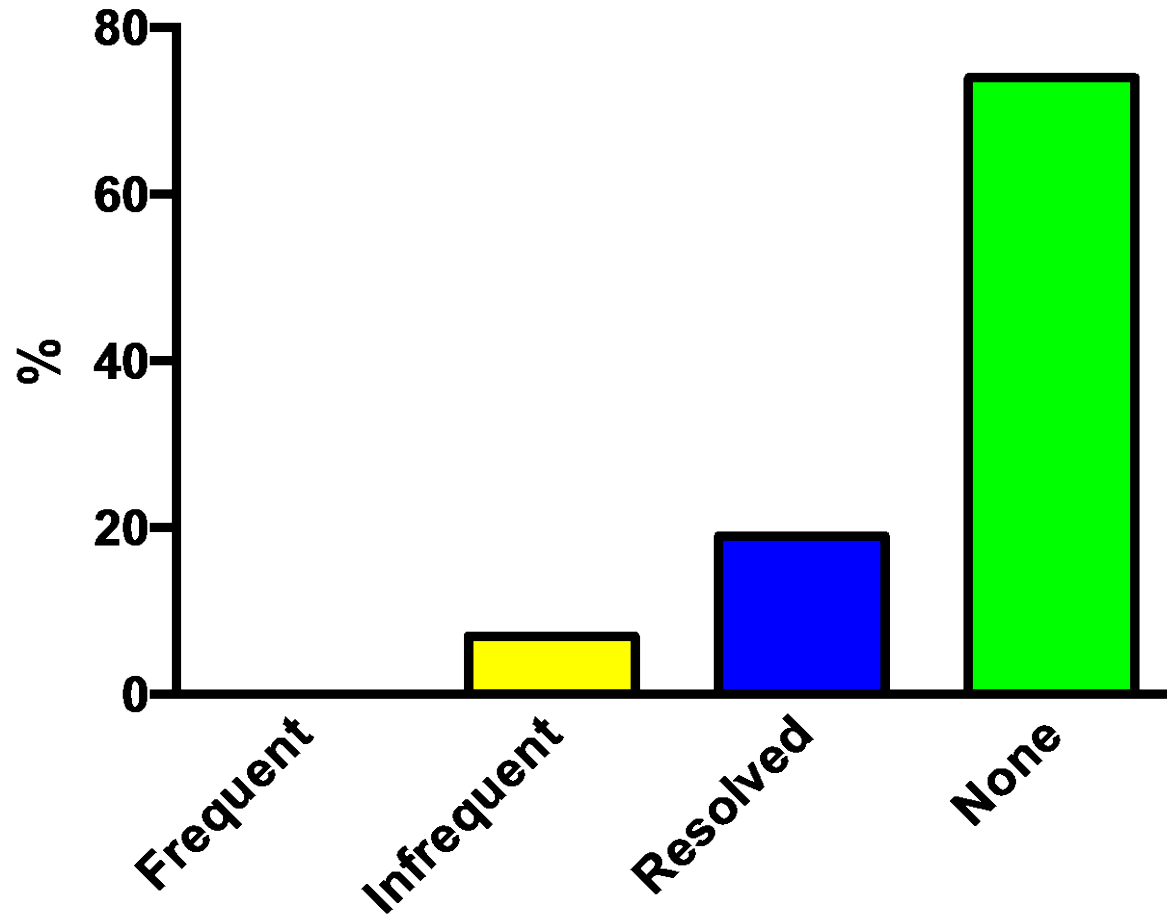


Inappropriate litterbox use pre- and post-adoption in hoarder cats (n=100)



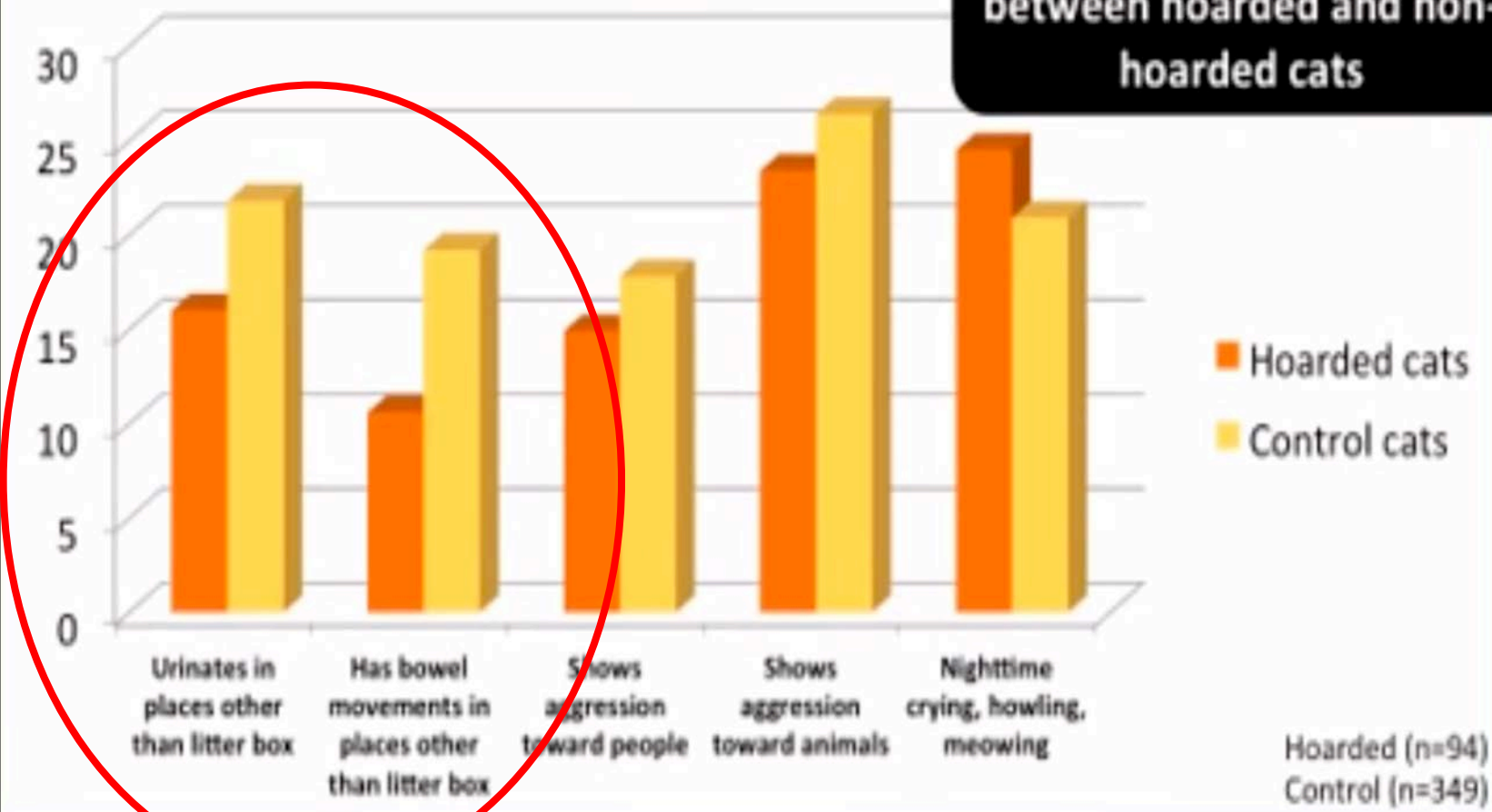
Severity of reported house-soiling problems

Adopter feedback (n=100)



Behavior problems

No significant differences between hoarded and non-hoarded cats



McMillan – Parhump study

McMillan Study

- The hoarded cats were significantly more friendly and actively sought human contact
- Friendly towards unfamiliar people
- Friendly towards other cats



Clingy, affectionate cats

“He was affectionate from the first day, which I never expected. He's like my little shadow.” (Cat 288)

“Has to always be in the same room as owners, very playful, very affectionate, energetic, always purring when being touched.” (Cat 84)

Shy, fearful cats

“We have loved seeing her come out of her shell. We look forward to the day when she is no longer afraid of us.” (Cat 102)

“It happened slowly, there were milestones and they are still happening. It took him about 4 months for him to jump on the bed and stay.” (Cat 273)

Adopters in Love

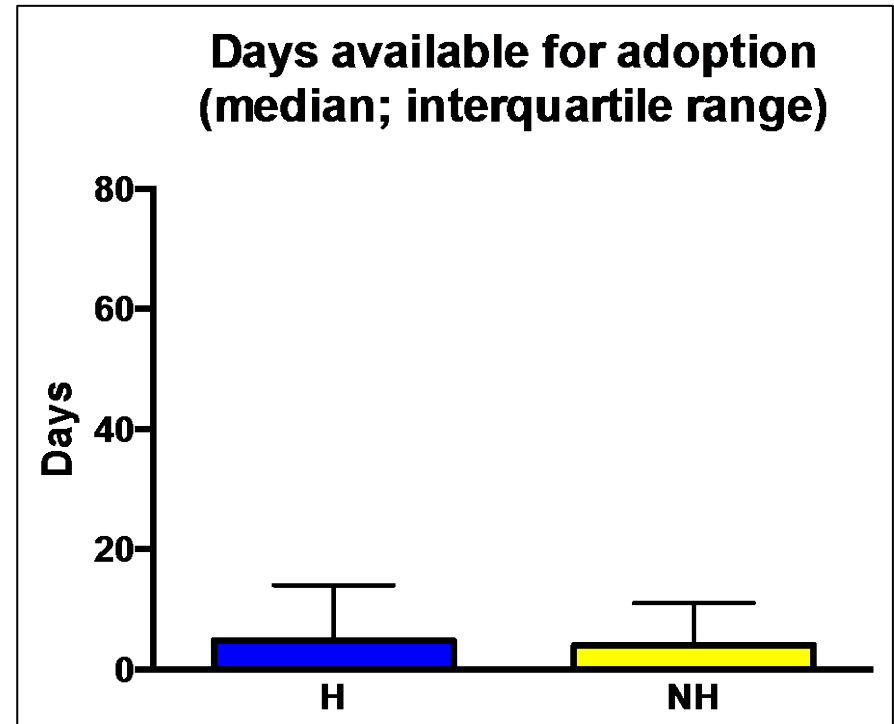
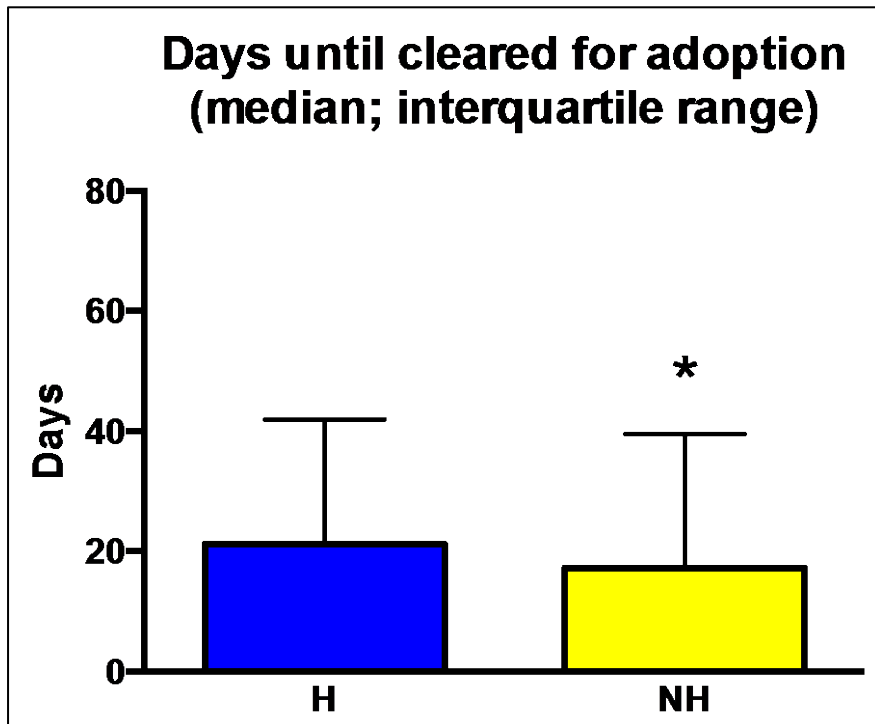
- He is incredibly kind. (Cat 218)
- We couldn't have asked for a better addition to our family. (Cat 60)
- My cat is awesome. I love my cat to death. (Cat 25)
- Our cat has a wonderful personality. She has really bonded to our family. (Cat 88)
- Disclosure is essential

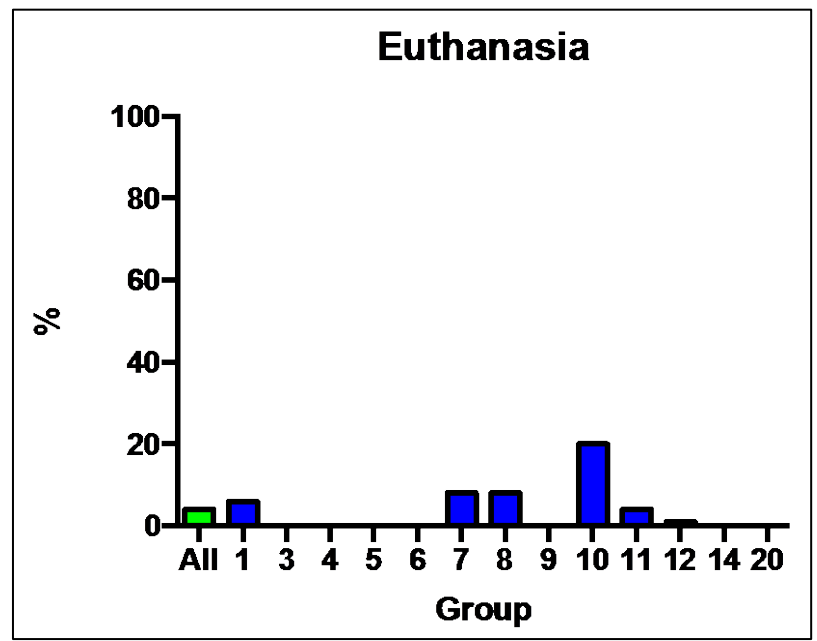
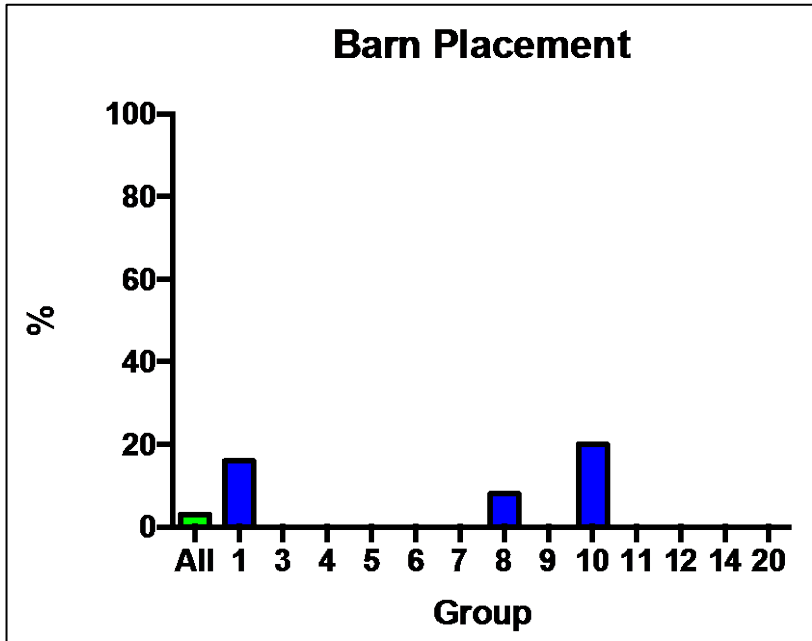
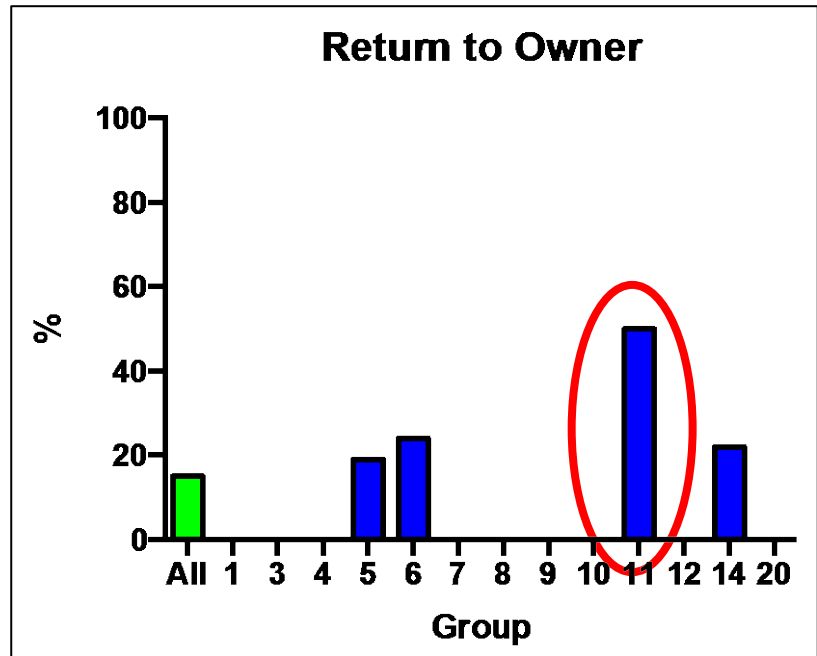
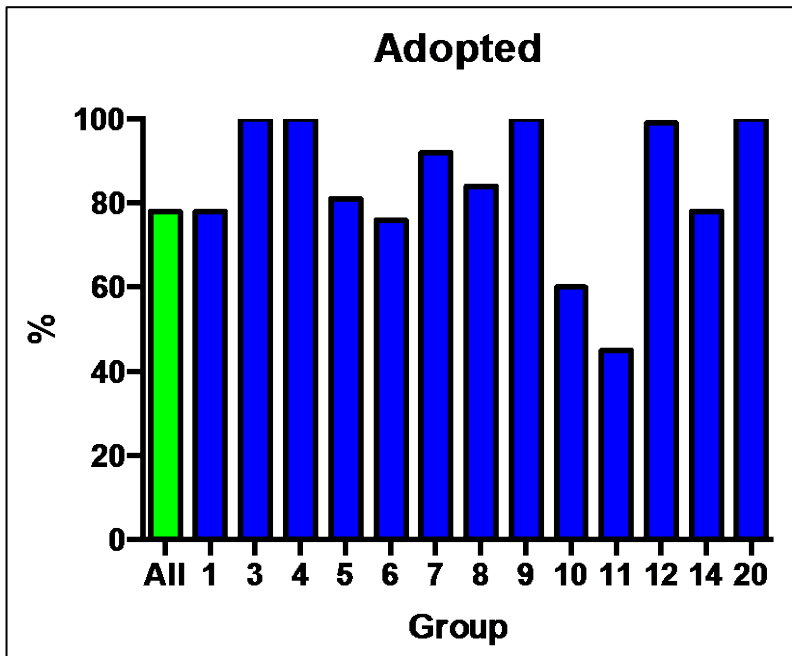
Assumptions

- Consistently fearful and undersocialized – NO
- Inappropriate litterbox use – NO
- Findings were consistent with Dr. McMillan's study.

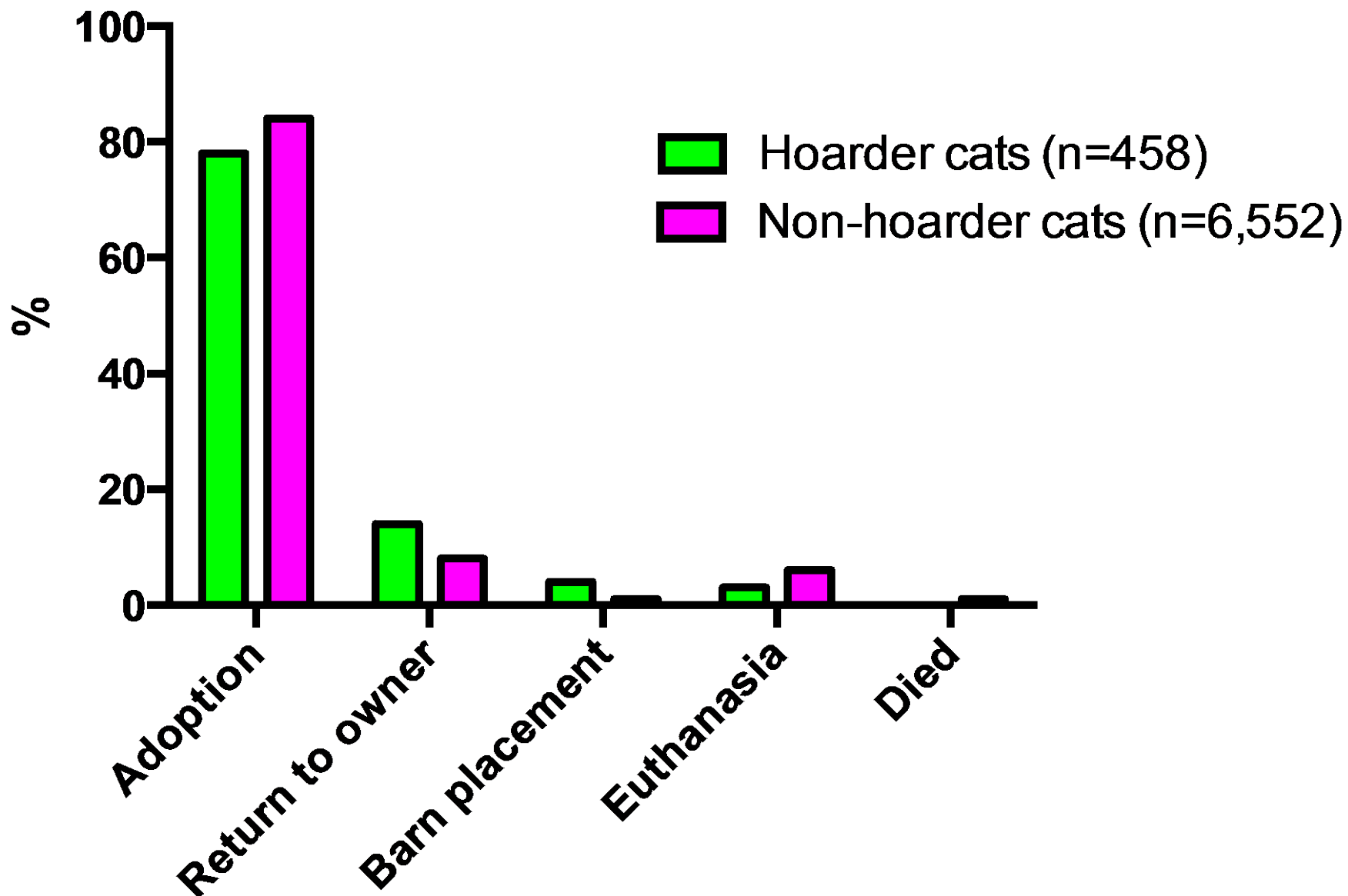
Length of Stay, Outcomes, Adopter Feedback

Length of Stay

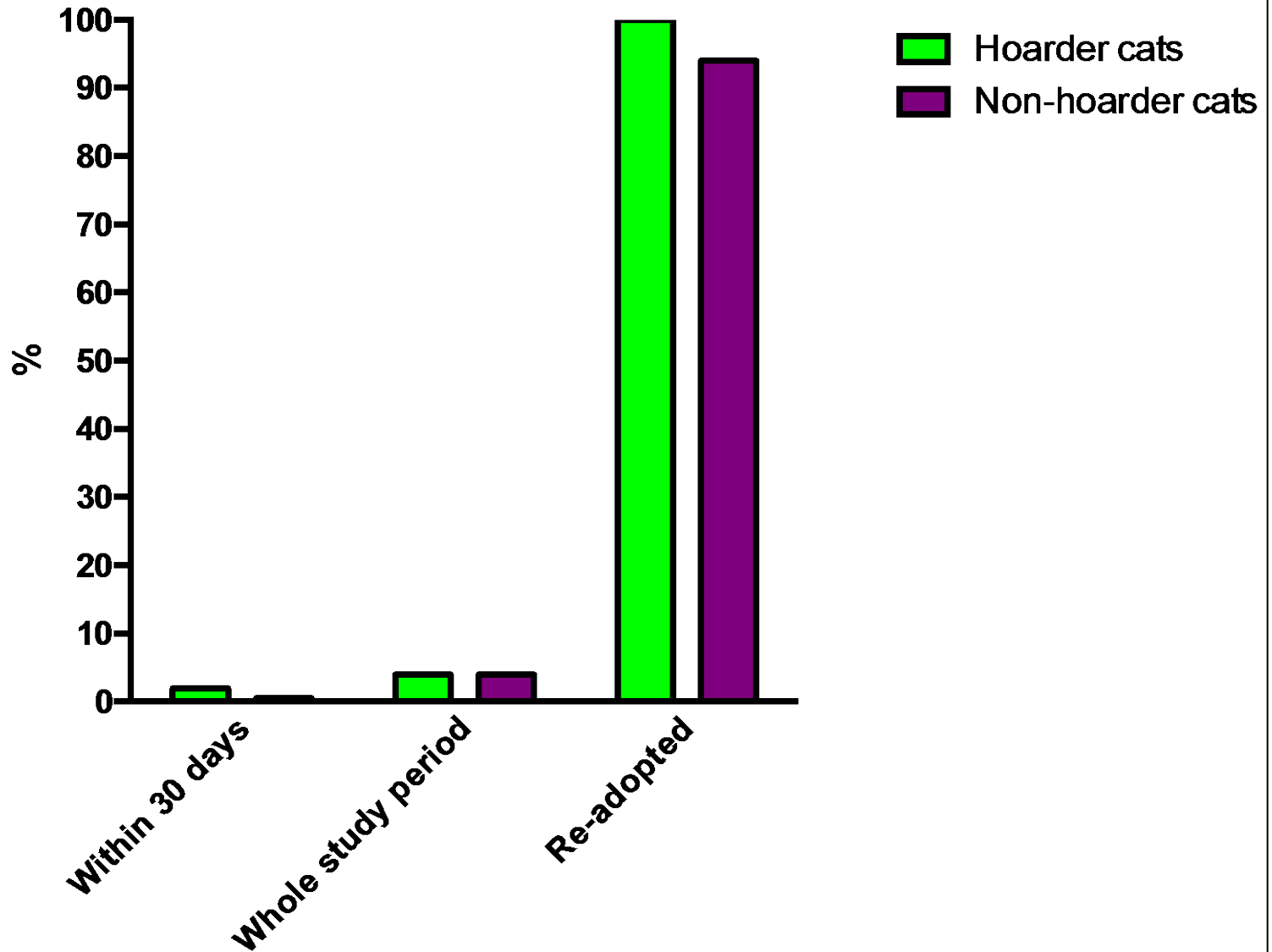




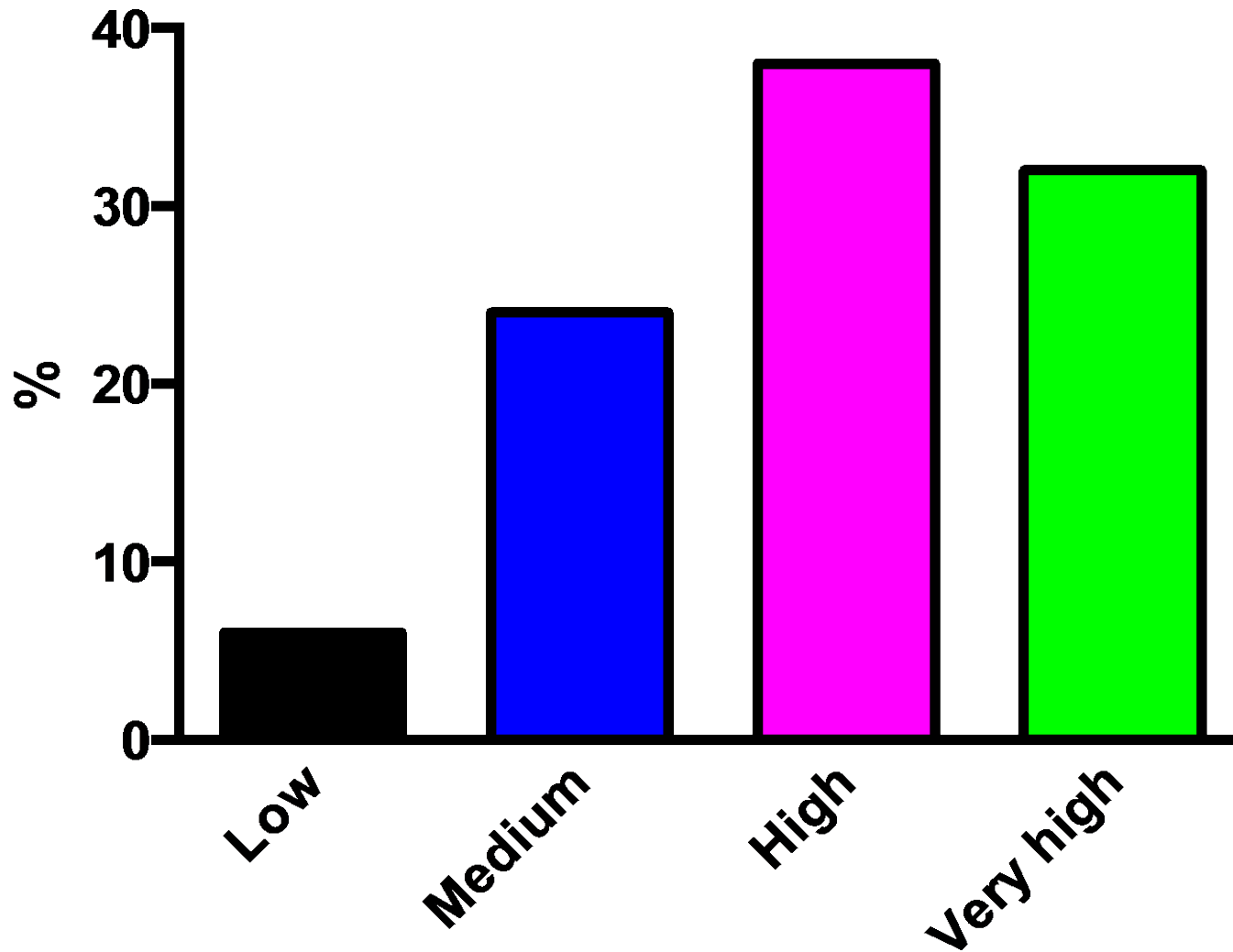
Outcomes



Return adoptions



Adopter satisfaction



Assumptions

- Longer length of stay – NO
- Less adoptable - NO
- Less favourable outcomes - NO
- More return adoptions – NO
- Low adopter satisfaction - NO

Some Conclusions

- Voluntary relinquishment is probably common (vs. seizures)
- Intermediaries were essential
- Continuum of neglect/capacity for care
- Litterbox concerns largely unfounded
- RTO in 3 groups appeared to be humane and helpful – but lack of site visits and follow-up was problematic

Goals

- Trained intermediaries
- Central hoarding coordinator in every shelter
- Targeted spay/neuter
- Consistent follow-up

Questions?