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Cat management in an unregulated shelter environment: Relationship between care provision and cat health in Hong Kong

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Abstract

Cat (Felis silvestris catus) shelter practices may have important implications for cats' health and well-being. This study explored the relationship between husbandry practices and cat health in Hong Kong's shelters which are unregulated. Cat health was measured via body condition score (BCS), coat condition and signs of oculo-nasal discharge. A total of 314 cats in 24 cat shelters were assessed. A satisfactory BCS was associated with regular veterinary input, more than once per day disinfection and more than once per day change of water. The presence of oculo-nasal discharge — as a marker for upper respiratory tract infection — was associated with a lack of regular veterinary input and less frequent change of water within the shelter. A lack of regular feeding was the only factor associated with a dull coat. In summary, this study showed that certain husbandry practices had important associations with different aspects of cats' health for cats housed in an unregulated shelter environment in Hong Kong. These findings provide evidence-based support for husbandry guidelines or regulations for cat shelters which could have a positive impact on shelter cats' health and welfare.

Keywords: animal welfare, cat health, cat shelters, feeding regime, husbandry, regulation