

Low health literacy about dirofilariasis in a community from an endemic region from Portugal

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BACKGROUND

Dirofilaria immitis is one of the most frequently diagnosed mosquito-borne zoonotic nematode in mammals in Europe and is considered as an emerging zoonosis. In Portugal, dirofilariasis has been identified in several different animals. Previous studies revealed the existence of dirofilariasis across the country in dogs with an overall prevalence ranging from 2.1% to 24.8%.

AIM

The main objectives were to: assess the population awareness of, and attitudes towards parasitic zoonosis and dirofilariasis; determine the prevalence of known risk factors related to animal health and to assess the best ways to transmit information.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A questionnaire was constructed, tested and administered to the costumers of the veterinary hospitals and clinics and to people from a community in an endemic area in Portugal (Fig. 1). Statistical analysis was done using IBM® SPSS® Statistics vs.24.0.

RESULTS

A total of 316 persons were surveyed, 49% of them with ages between 31-50 years and 81% owning a pet. Most of them live in a high risk exposure area (53%) (Fig. 2) and affirmed to use flea, tick, mosquito, sand fly preventative and dewormer (88%). The majority (58%) choose the tick and only 27% considered the mosquito, as the most dangerous vector. Only 34% recognize the term dirofilariasis, but 61% recognize the term heartworm. Only 13% recognized the disease as a zoonosis. Half of the respondents would like to receive more information about dirofilariasis, mainly via email or by their veterinarian.

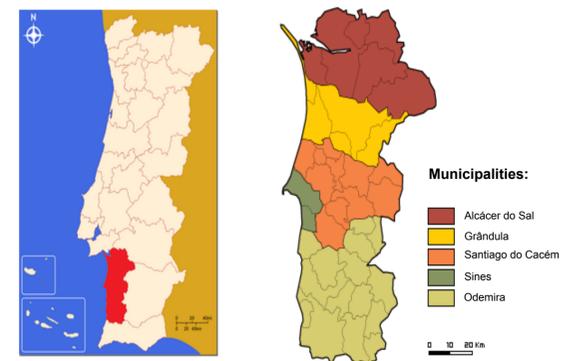


FIGURE 1. Geographical location where the surveys were applied, Municipalities of the Alentejo Coast. (Adapted from <http://www.adl.litoralalentejano.pt/associacao/zona-de-intervencao>)

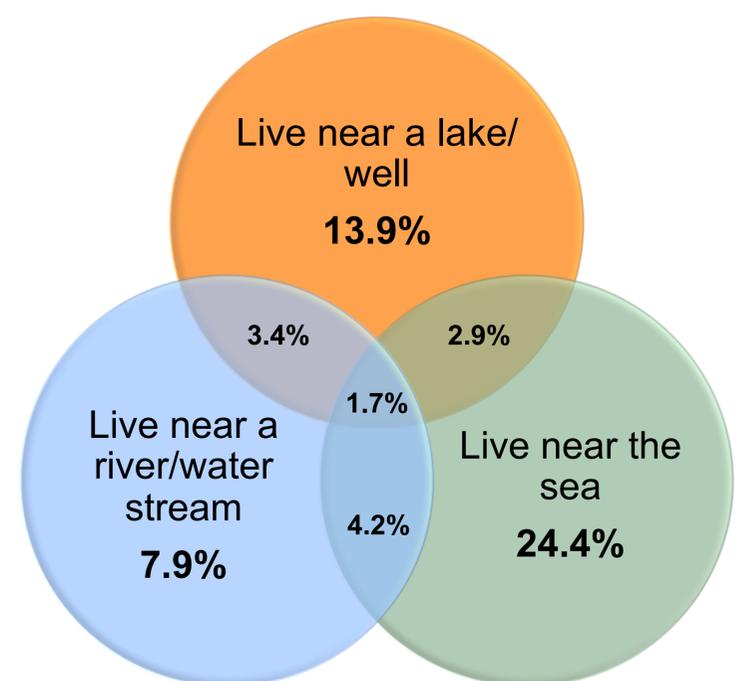


FIGURE 2. Percentages according to residential area of the respondents that considered living in a higher prevalence area for mosquitoes (n=139)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Beside the need to inform about dirofilariasis, it seems that there is also the need to communicate as even those who seem to have knowledge, adopt risk behaviours. The veterinarians may have an important role in public health education.

PERPECTIVES

It is necessary to raise awareness amongst the community but also for veterinarians to promote public health education.