

Sharp rise in canine fertility clinics but not always staffed with vets

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There has been a sharp rise in the number of specialist canine fertility clinics, according to an investigation published in this week's issue of the *Vet Record*.

The journal found at least 37 clinics in operation—a rise from one known clinic in 2015.

Worryingly, many of these clinics do not appear to be run by vets and do not have a vet on site despite the fact that many seem to be offering [veterinary services](#), such as taking bloods and performing caesarean sections. In two cases, clinics have advertised canine surgical [artificial insemination](#), which is a banned procedure.

This increase has happened at the same time as the number of puppies born using artificial insemination (AI) has dramatically increased.

Kennel Club figures show there were more AI births in the past three years than there were between 1998 and 2015—a trend linked to the rise in the popularity of brachycephalic breeds—dogs with short noses and flat faces such as Pugs, Shih Tzus, and Chihuahuas.

The journal's investigative feature suggests that the rise in the number of fertility clinics could be linked to a large growth in the popularity of brachycephalic breeds, with the vast majority being born by caesarean section, and where many cannot mate naturally due to an inability to breathe properly.

From its investigation, the journal found that some of the 37 clinics identified as specialising in offering canine fertility services were recognisably veterinary clinics based at a fixed location and with vets on site, but others were mobile businesses with rudimentary websites and only offering an anonymous mobile number as a point of contact.

Of the 37 clinics, the majority (20) offered a stud dog from breeds with an 80% caesarean rate (for example, English and French bulldogs, which require a caesarean section most of the time in order to give birth).

Of these, the majority also did not appear to offer a vet on site as part of their services. However, the journal acknowledged that could still mean the clinics were potentially hiring a vet to perform surgeries.

Some of these clinics appeared to advocate 'self-whelping' - whereby the bitch is not taken to the vet in order to give birth, even where this might be advisable—as well as raw feeding.

In the journal's feature, Madeleine Campbell, a specialist in reproduction and European diplomate in [animal welfare](#) from the Royal Veterinary College, said: "Artificial insemination is, of itself, ethically permissible in many situations. Indeed, it can sometimes have positive welfare effects, for example by removing the need to transport animals over long distances or internationally to breed, or through helping to maintain [genetic diversity](#) by facilitating crosses between animals who are geographically remote from each other.

"However, if artificial insemination is being used to achieve pregnancies in animals which for heritable anatomical reasons are not capable of either breeding or giving birth naturally, then that has negative welfare implications and is of ethical concern.

"Furthermore, if *Vet Record's* investigations imply that non-vets may be

undertaking acts of veterinary surgery such as caesarian sections, then that is obviously worrying, and would be illegal.

"Concerns about non-vets undertaking acts of veterinary surgery should be reported to trading standards and the police."

In an accompanying editorial, Josh Loeb, senior news reporter at *Vet Record*, says: "Perhaps it's time the UK created its own laws to better regulate the burgeoning canine fertility and reproduction industry?"

"At very least, there needs to be greater attention paid by the profession to how these clinics are conducting themselves and whether, in some cases, they should be considered not as veterinary but rather as 'pseudo veterinary' clinics."

More information: Puppy power: fertility clinics on the rise, *Veterinary Record* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/vr.m394](https://doi.org/10.1136/vr.m394)

Josh Loeb. Who is regulating fertility clinics?, *Veterinary Record* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/vr.m393](https://doi.org/10.1136/vr.m393)

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