

ATTITUDE TOWARDS ANIMALS IN VETERINARY STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This study was aimed at investigating whether attending the degree in veterinary medicine affects the attitude towards animals in students.

Tab.1: items categorized as suggested by Knight et al.,2004

SUBJECTS, MATERIALS AND METHODS

A sample of 564 questionnaires was collected in three schools of Veterinary Medicine in Southern Europe (Cordoba, Spain, Pisa and Perugia, Italy). The questionnaire included personal details of respondents (e.g. age, gender, year of course) as well as items related to attitude towards non-human animals taken from available literature (Herzog et al., 1991; Serpell, 2005). Answers were transformed in scores, and items were grouped according to Knight et al. (2004; see tab. 1). Scores were analysed by Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney and Pearson correlation test ($p < 0.05$).

RESULTS

Female students (N=420) obtained higher scores than males (N=144) in all but companion animals category ($p < 0.001$) (see fig. 1).

In addition, female students scored differently in the companion animals category over time ($p = 0.004$; see fig. 2), whilst male students did not show such difference.

Animal rights category showed a positive correlation with academic year in male students ($R = 0.246$; $p = 0.006$) and a negative correlation in female students ($R = 0.349$; $p = 0.02$).

Item	Category	Item
1	Entertainment	It is morally wrong to hunt wild animals just for sport
2	Entertainment	There should be extremely harsh penalties including jail sentences for people who participate in dog-fighting, badger-baiting, and cock-fighting
3	Business	There is nothing morally wrong with hunting wild animals for food **
4	Business	I think people who object to raising animals for meat are too sentimental **
5	Research	Much of scientific research done with animals is unnecessary and cruel
6	Business	I think it is perfectly acceptable for cattle and hogs to be raised for human consumption **.
7	Business	Basically, humans have the right to use animals as we see fit **
8	Business	The slaughter of whales and dolphins should be immediately stopped even if it means some people will be out of work
9	Business	In general, I think that human economic gain is more important than setting aside more land for wildlife
10	Business	Too much fuss is made over the welfare of animals these days when there are many human problems that need to be solved
11	Cosmetic	Breeding animals for their skins is a legitimate use of animals**
12	Research	Continued research with animals will be necessary if we are to ever conquer diseases such as cancer, heart disease and AIDS
13	Companion Animals	It is unethical to breed purebred dogs for pets when millions of dogs are killed in animal shelters each year.
14	Business	The production of inexpensive meat justifies maintaining animals under crowded and often painful conditions**
15	Entertainment	The use of animals for human entertainment such as circuses is cruel
16	Animal rights	When the interests of an animal patient are in conflict with the wishes of its owner, the veterinarian's first responsibility should be to the animal
17	Animal rights	It might be interesting to cover controversial issues such as "animal rights" in the veterinary curriculum.

** Reverse score

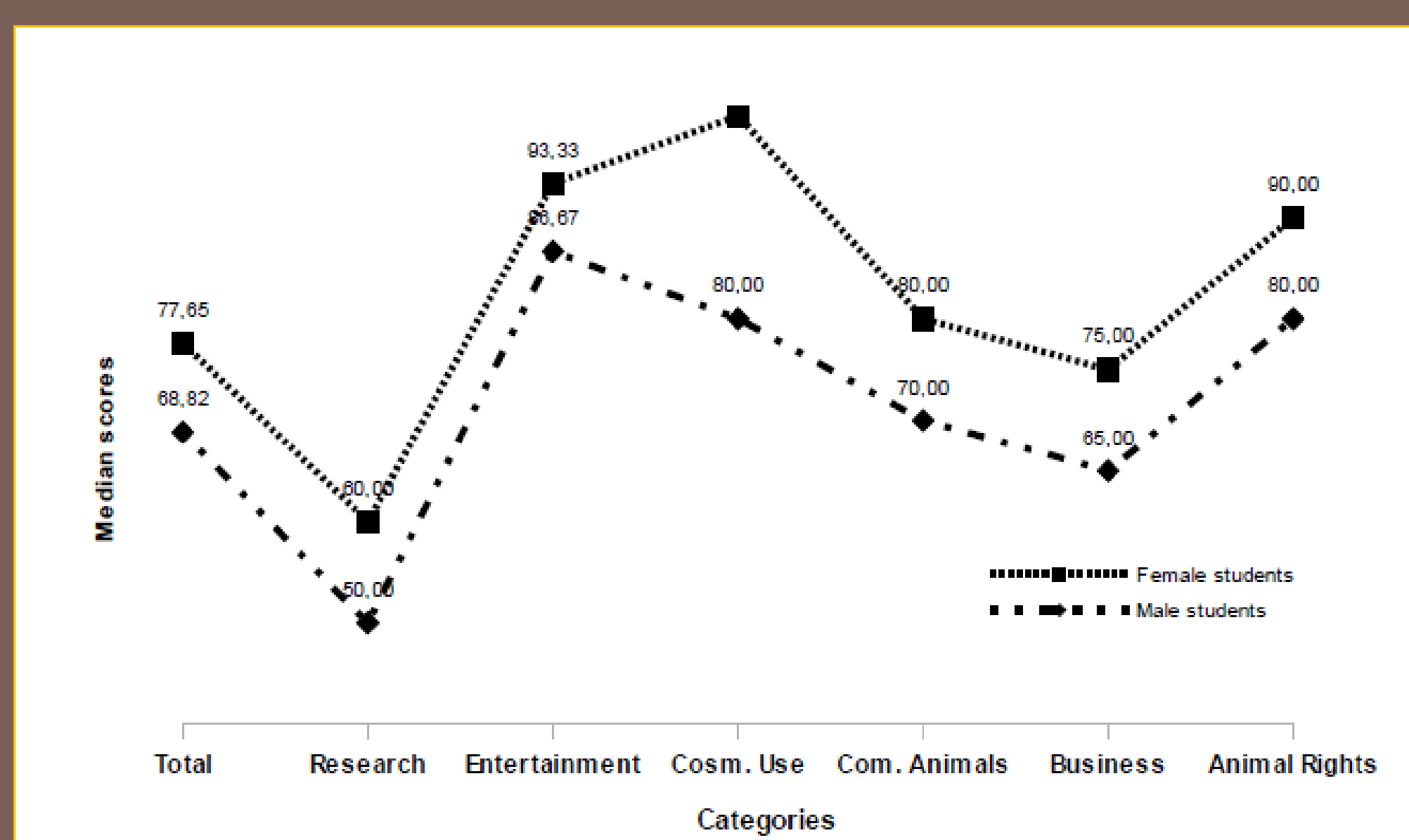
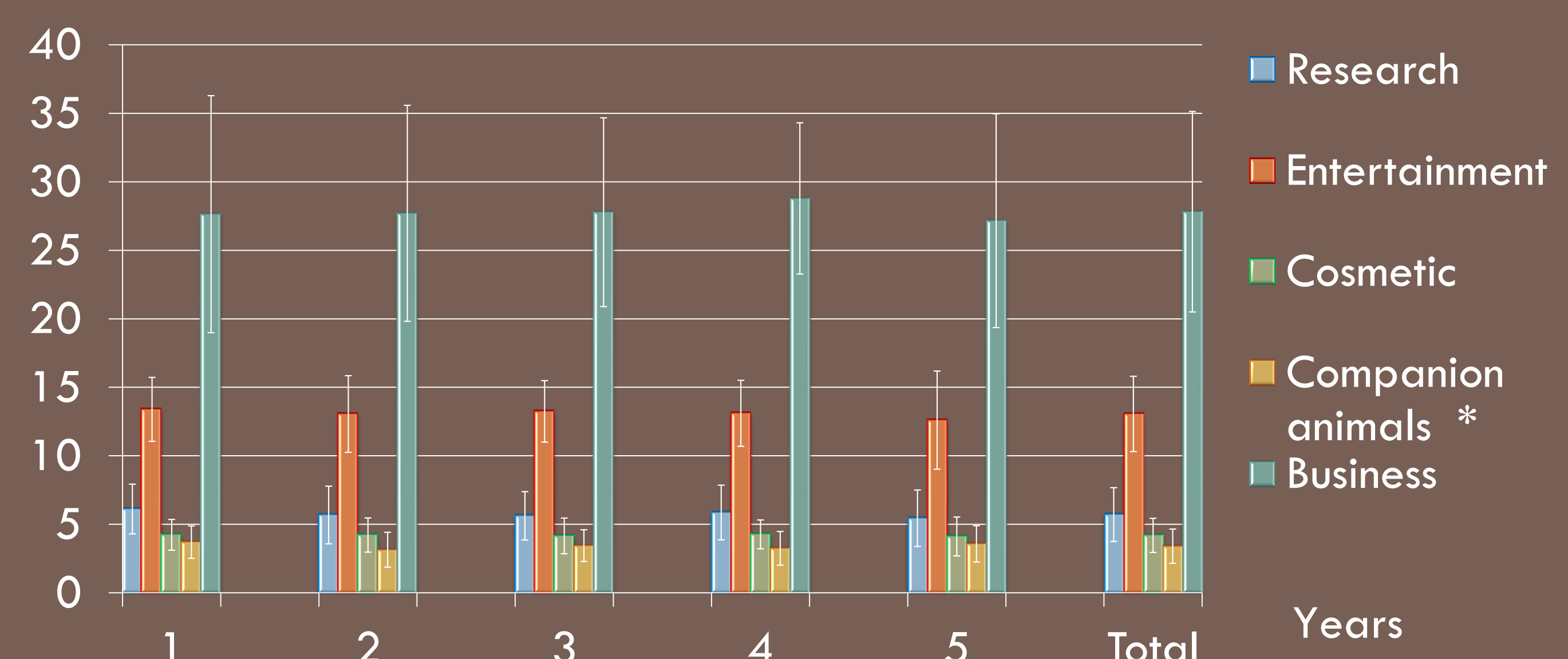


Fig.1: scores for each category and total scores divided by gender.

Fig.2: scores for each category obtained by female students for each year of course.



DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

These findings suggest that attitude towards animals can vary in the students of veterinary medicine over time, especially in women. Future research is needed for a better understanding of the specific factors that affect this attitude during the course, for its possible impact on the way future veterinarians will treat their patients.

REFERENCES

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