

Dog walking as a hobby and profession: a bibliographic study of the professional activities of dog walkers

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Abstract

It is notable that physical activity has benefits for the health of the body and mind. This is no different for animals, especially those that are classified as pets. Walking and running bring similar benefits to pets and their owners. Due to this, the performance of such activities has gained great importance with the change in the view in relation to animals: before they were only work and guard instruments, today they are members of the family. A new professional modality has been developed, the dog walker, whose function is to promote animal health through work with animals, such activities that cannot be routinely performed with their owners. Therefore, a study was carried out with a bibliographic review design, using the databases: Pubmed, Scopus, PsycInfo, in addition to the Latin American databases LILACS and Scielo. The search was conducted between 2000 and 2023. The search strategy used the descriptors “dog walker” and “professional activity” combined with the Boolean operator AND, without adding search filters. Among all the databases analyzed, none of them, after the screening process, presented content that could be eligible for inclusion, proving the lack of research in the general scope of the academic environment. The term “Dog Walking” presented a large number of results found, however, even in this way, after all the filtering and analysis, it showed a lack of eligible research and content, showing, again, great possibilities for studies. The term Dog Walking proved to be more promising in an initial numerical analysis, but also zeroed its correspondents after the final screening, also proving the need and possibility of new research in the area.

Keywords: pets, walking, profession.

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1. Introduction

The practice of physical activities by human beings is already something ancient, being widely reported in Classical Antiquity, mainly in Greece, mainly due to the search for an ideal of beauty (SOUZA, 2010). In the current modernity, physical activity can be understood as any body movement, produced by skeletal muscles, which results in energy expenditure, and can be exemplified by games, fights, dances, sports, physical exercises, work activities and travel (OLIVEIRA, 2010).

In this context, it is worth highlighting that the benefits of such physical activities go far beyond aesthetics, bringing advantages to the health of the practitioner, such as, for example, taking a leisurely walk with dogs. Quality of life, physical, social and emotional well-being are greatly benefited when an analysis of these is made through their involvement in the practice of physical exercises (MACEDO et al., 2012).

Given the wide range of sports practiced, the use of animals to assist in these has also been reported, Kaushik (1999). According to Bechara (2003), humans still tend to use animals for various activities such as food, scientific research, transportation, clothing, and sports. In ancient Greece, for example, there were chariot races in the ancient Olympics where these wheeled structures were pulled by animal traction, specifically by horses, which were animals widely used in war.

However, according to Oliveira (2018), the change in the view regarding animals is impressive. Before,

animals had secular functions, such as protection, and currently they have greater bonds with their owners, even having the family's surname and great emotional importance in their lives. In relation to the elderly, companion animals and pets have shown great importance, both socially and in their health, since they generate benefits such as joy, company, security, having a pastime and distraction (HEIDEN; SANTOS, 2012).

As a result of this change in perspective, physical activities have gained importance even for the health of pets, since their benefits for humans are comparable to those for animals in terms of improving respiratory and cardiovascular capacity, reducing cholesterol, among others. In this context, where the animal ends up accompanying the family's daily life, the owners' lifestyle directly and greatly influences the animal's health.

Adequate nutrition and physical activities are very important for the pet's quality of life. Today, we are faced with an increase in cases of obesity in dogs. Many animals live in apartments and houses, do not hunt and do not exercise as they did when they lived in the wild (SILVA et al., 2017). The vast majority of health and behavioral problems in pets occur due to several factors such as an environment without stimuli, inadequate spaces and a sedentary lifestyle (LINHARES et al., 2018). Thus, it is clear that the owners' lifestyle directly reflects on the lives of the animals that live with them and, therefore, on their physical condition.

The study by Kumar and Ragini (2024) has pointed to the understanding of the term “serious leisure”, which is the constant pursuit of an amateur, hobby or voluntary career activity that captivates its participants with complexity and many challenges. It is a deep, long-lasting activity and invariably based on substantial skill, knowledge or experience, if not a combination of these three. One such form of serious leisure would be dog walking, a form of physical activity linked to animal care, as well as a structured leisure activity that aims to improve the health of the animal and human.

Dog Walker comes from English and the term means dog walker. In other words, a professional who provides the service of walking the pet in place of the owner. This profession has gained great visibility and importance throughout history, especially with the advent of globalization, where interactions have become more dynamic and free time for pets has been reduced, and, later, with the Covid-19 pandemic, which, due to isolation and distancing, has brought a significant importance to pets, since companion animals provide a significant improvement in the quality of life, as they are able to improve the states of happiness of their owners, reducing loneliness and improving physical functions and emotional health (COSTA et al., 2009).

In the context of this pandemic and quarantine, it was found that there is a great positive relationship between the adoption of dogs and the social restrictions imposed by the pandemic (MORGAN, 2020). Therefore, the well-being of pets has also become a subject of great social agenda, and with it the importance of walks and activities that stimulate animals; These are services that the Dog Walker takes on for those guardians who are unable to do so.

In view of the numerous changes in the daily habits of guardians and animals as a result of the lack of time for activities or even because they are unable to do them, it is imperative to research the advantages of taking walks for their own pets and the importance of dog walkers in this regard, since they are the ones who perform the role of walking the animals that was previously performed by the guardians.

Furthermore, since the pandemic has had a direct impact on the lives of practically the entire population, understanding how the increase in the number of pets, their growing importance and a more sedentary lifestyle can directly affect health makes this research of great relevance and importance in the public and social sphere. Thus, the objective of the study was to analyze the professional performance of dog walkers with their clients, in addition to qualifying the characteristics necessary to work as a professional dog walker and finally, quantifying the scientific evidence that can support the performance of the professional dog walker and their relationships with the areas of Physical Education and Veterinary Medicine.

2. Methods

This study was carried out as a systematic literature review, with the aim of quantifying the existing literature on the researched topic (THOMAS et al., 2007). For this purpose, the following databases were used: Medline (PUBMED), Scopus, PsycInfo, in addition to the Latin American databases LILACS and Scielo. The search was carried out between the years 2000 and 2023, covering the entire period of existence of the databases. The search strategy used the descriptors “dog walker” and “professional activity” combined with the Boolean operator AND, without adding search filters.

For the Latin American databases LILACS and Scielo, the following keywords and Boolean operator were used for the search: “AND” and “OR”, following the same criteria adopted for the other databases. The inclusion

criteria for the articles were original articles, with descriptors related to the researched topic, published in English, Spanish or Portuguese.

3. Results and Discussion

After conducting research in the Medline (PUBMED), Scopus, PsyInfo, LILACS and Scielo databases, a small number of published articles on the topic addressed in this study were found. Most of the articles found in English used the term “dog walker” in its literal sense: dog walker; that is, a person who walks their animal, and not as a profession as inferred in Brazilian terminology. The articles in both Portuguese and Spanish did not include the term as sought in this research.

The website database called PubMed presented a large number of results available for analysis. The term “Dog Walker” presented 506 matching results (FIGURE 1), but after thematic filtering and when related to the “professional activity” profile, the results found were zeroed (FIGURE 2), since the articles changed their themes to other means involving animals, analyzed the term from a perspective outside the scope of professional activity, or were not related to this research, and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

Figure 1 – Matching terms after the first search on the PubMed platform.

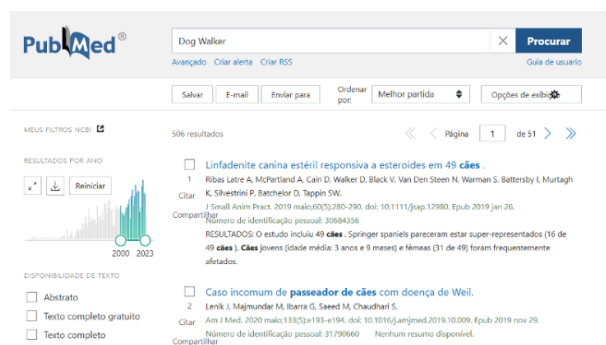
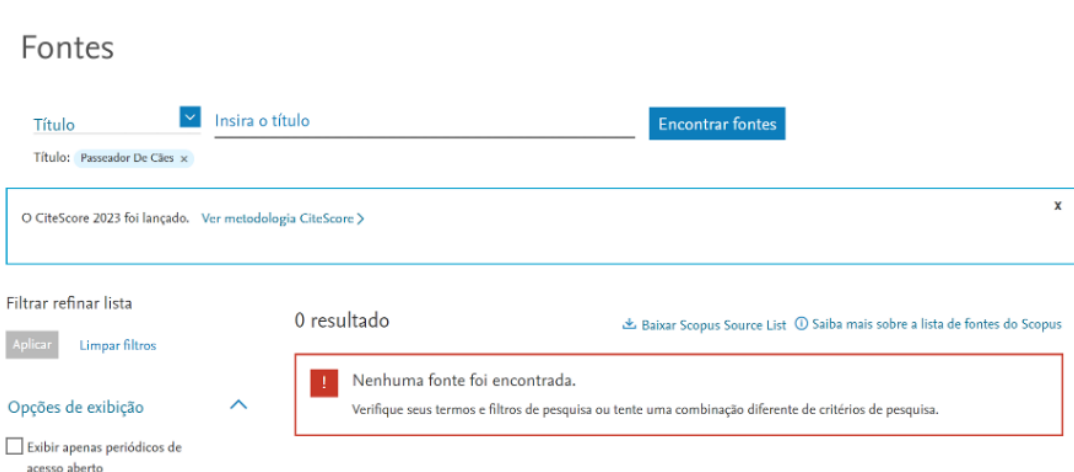


Figure 2 – Examples of results found after the first filtering on the PubMed platform.



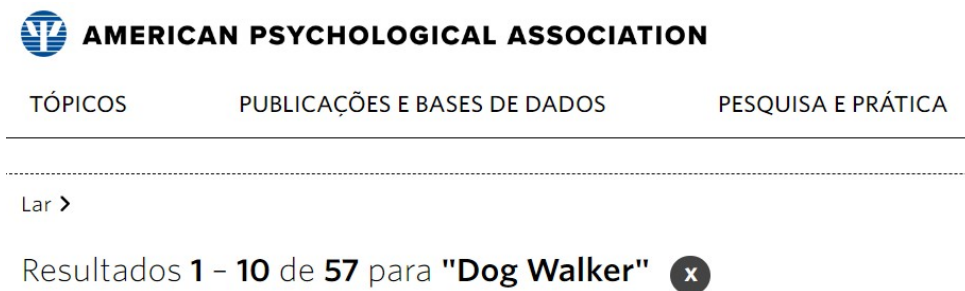
On the Scopus website, results were absent when searching for the term “Dog Walker” or “dog walker” (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Articles found in the Scopus database after initial search.



In the PsycInfo database, 57 articles were found in total (Figure 4). Of these 57, one was initially excluded because it was published in 1999, which is not included in the scope of this bibliographical review. Of the 56 older articles analyzed, only nine were related in some way to the topic of sports or exercise and none to the topic of professional activity.

Figure 4 – Articles found in the PsycInfo database after initial search.



Among the articles related to sports and exercise, seven of them corresponded to issues of the periodical newsletter called Exercise & Sport Psychology Newsletter, and did not cover the topic “Dog Walker”. The other two results found also corresponded to newsletters: “The Running Psychologist: Spring 2006” and “Exercise and Sport Psychology Newsletter: Spring 2002 - Volume 16, Issue 1”.

Only two articles were found in the LILACS database (Figure 5), neither of which fit the theme addressed by the research.

Figure 5 – Results found after searching for the term “Dog Walker” in the database.



Finally, no results were obtained in the Scielo database (Figure 6).

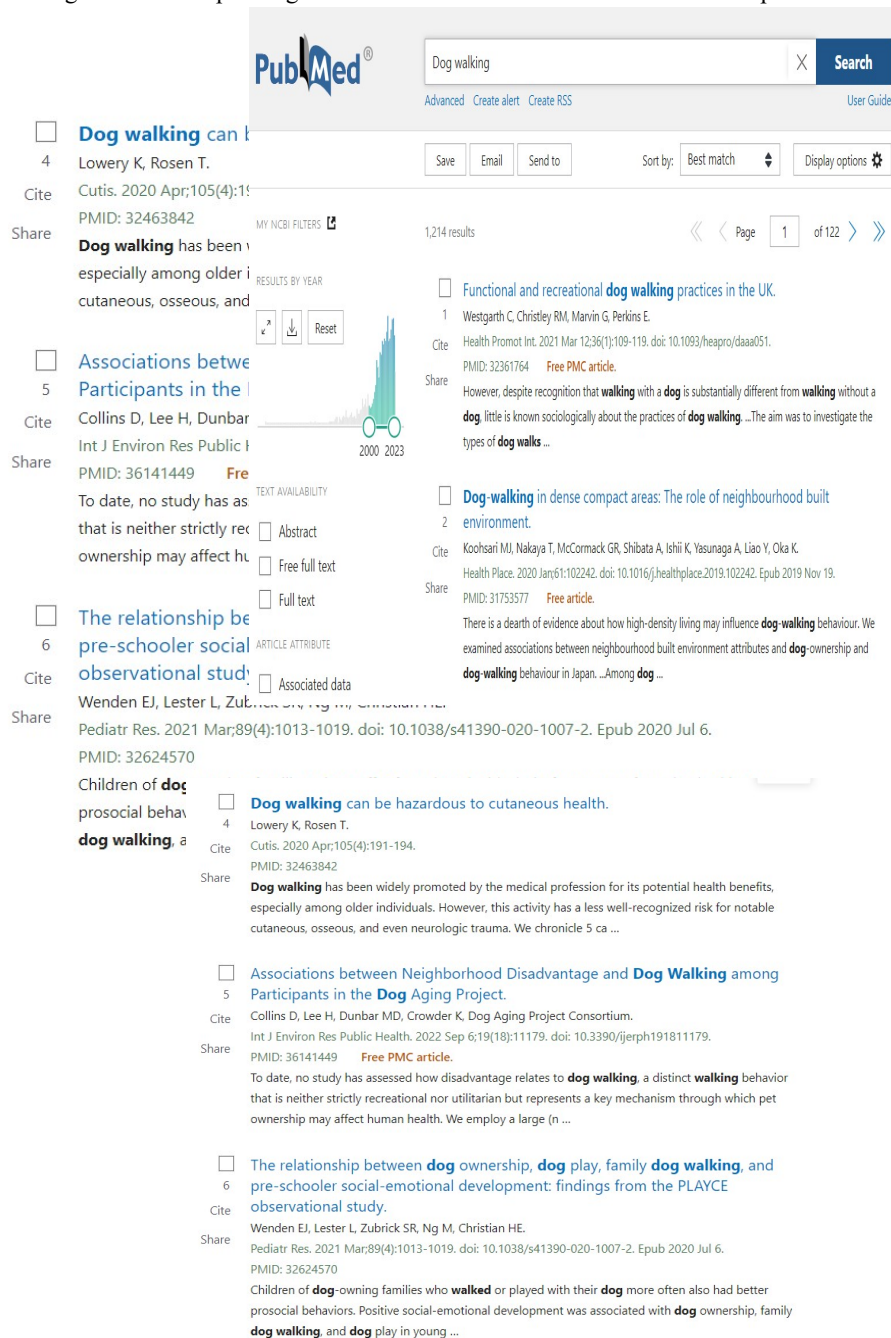
Figure 6 – Results found after searching for the term “Dog Walker” in the Scielo database.



After the initial search, the term “Dog Walking” was also included to increase the data analyzed, since when searching with this filter, the results increased considerably.

The PubMed website database once again presented a large number of results available for analysis. The term “Dog Walking” presented 1,214 corresponding results (Figure 7), but after thematic filtering and when relating to the “professional activity” profile, the results found were reset as previously analyzed, since although the corresponding results obtained presented a greater quantity, they changed their themes to other means involving animals, or analyzed the term from a perspective outside the scope of professional activity (Figure 8), or were not related to this research, and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

Figure 7 - Corresponding terms after the second search on the PubMed platform.



The screenshot shows a PubMed search for "Dog walking" with 1,214 results. The search bar includes "Dog walking" and a "Search" button. Below the search bar are options for "Advanced", "Create alert", "Create RSS", and "User Guide". The results list includes:

- 4** **Dog walking can be hazardous to cutaneous health.**
 Lowery K, Rosen T. *Cutis.* 2020 Apr;105(4):191-194. PMID: 32463842
- 5** **Associations between Neighborhood Disadvantage and Dog Walking among Participants in the Dog Aging Project.**
 Collins D, Lee H, Dunbar MD, Crowder K. *Dog Aging Project Consortium. Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2022 Sep 6;19(18):11179. doi: 10.3390/ijerph191811179. PMID: 36141449 **Free PMC article.**
- 6** **The relationship between dog ownership, dog play, family dog walking, and pre-schooler social-emotional development: findings from the PLAYCE observational study.**
 Wenden EJ, Lester L, Zubrick SR, Ng M, Christian HE. *Pediatr Res.* 2021 Mar;89(4):1013-1019. doi: 10.1038/s41390-020-1007-2. Epub 2020 Jul 6. PMID: 32624570
- 1** **Functional and recreational dog walking practices in the UK.**
 Westgarth C, Christley RM, Marvin G, Perkins E. *Health Promot Int.* 2021 Mar 12;36(1):109-119. doi: 10.1093/heapro/daaa051. PMID: 32361764 **Free PMC article.**
- 2** **Dog-walking in dense compact areas: The role of neighbourhood built environment.**
 Koohsari MJ, Nakaya T, McCormack GR, Shibata A, Ishii K, Yasunaga A, Liao Y, Oka K. *Health Place.* 2020 Jan;61:102242. doi: 10.1016/j.healthplace.2019.102242. Epub 2019 Nov 19. PMID: 31753577 **Free article.**

On the Scopus website, the results were also absent when searching for the term “Dog Walking” again (Figure 9).

Figure 9 - Articles found in the Scopus database after a second search.



The screenshot shows the Scopus search interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Title" and a dropdown arrow, followed by "Enter title" and a "Find sources" button. Below the search bar, the search term "Dog Walking" is displayed with a close button. A notification box states "CiteScore 2023 has been released. View CiteScore methodology >". On the left, there is a "Filter refine list" section with "Apply" and "Clear filters" buttons, and a "Display options" section with a checkbox for "Display only Open Access journals". The main search results area shows "0 result" and a message: "No sources were found. Please check your search terms and filters or try a different combination of search criteria." There are also links for "Download Scopus Source List" and "Learn more about Scopus Source List".

In the PsycInfo database, 75 articles were found in total with the new search. Of these 75, three were initially excluded because they were published in 2024, which is not included in the review focus of this bibliographic research. Of the 72 old articles analyzed, only four were related, according to the database, in some way to the topic of sports or exercise (Figure 10) and zero to the topic of professional activity. Although the initial filter addressed the topic of sports or exercise, in reality, the articles found were not within the topic, but rather addressed topics such as emotional health.

Figure 10 – Results found after filtering the term “Dog Walking” in the PsycInfo database

1. **Cognition: A Three-Lesson Unit Plan for High School Psychology Teachers**
This lesson plan is designed to teach a broad range of concepts related to cognition and thinking in a variety of psychology classroom contexts.
(November 2023)

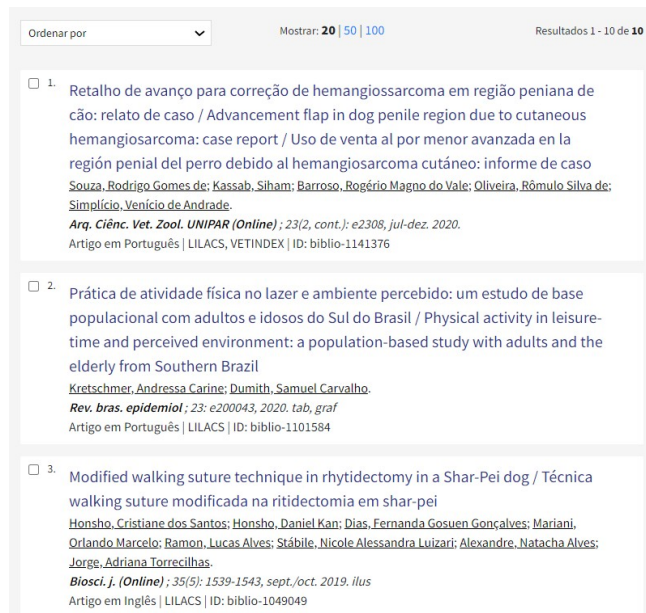
2. **Why do we love scary movies?**
Coltan Scrivner, PhD, talks about why people are drawn to horror, true crime, and other scary genres.
Podcast (October 2023)

3. **Meet the experts**
The writers of the APA Style team are all bona fide style experts who work with APA Style every day.
(April 2023)

4. **Spotlight on an Early Career Psychologist: Cindy Fast, PhD trains African Giant Pouched Rats to detect landmines and more**
Dr. Cindy Fast leads behavioral training at APOPO, a humanitarian non-profit, to work with rats to detect landmines, tuberculosis, and trapped people.
Newsletter Article (February 2023)

In the LILACS database, the second search term yielded twenty-nine results (Figure 11). Of all these articles, ten were related to physical activities in general or dog walking. The results of corresponding terms were zeroed after reading the abstracts searching for the theme of professional activity.

Figure 11 – Part of the results obtained after the second search and filtering on the LILACS website.



Finally, fourteen articles were found in the Scielo database (Figure 12). Of these fourteen articles, none effectively fit the approach of this research, presenting no relation to physical or professional activity.

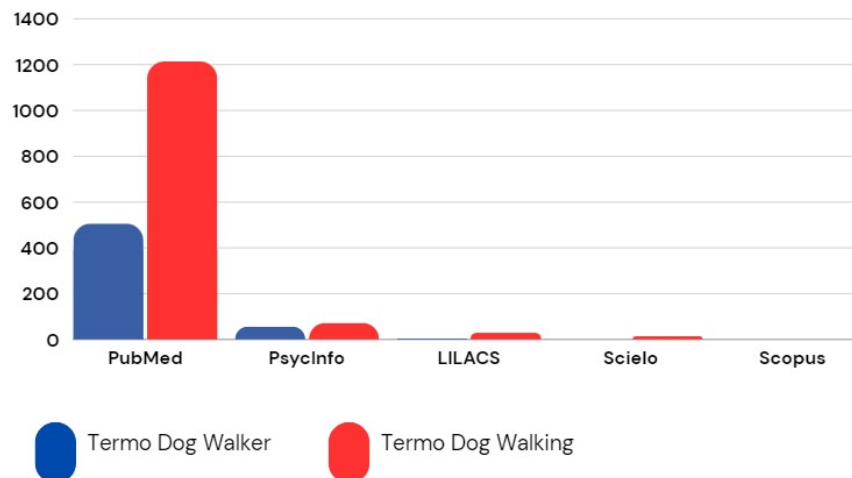
Figure 12 - Results found after searching for the term “Dog Walking” in the Scielo database.



According to the data collected, it was noted that both the research related to the term “Dog Walker” and “Dog Walking”, despite presenting a satisfactory number of initial matches, did not obtain results that could be included as effective components of this analysis. The PubMed website was the platform with the largest number of initially corresponding articles, with 1,720 articles, followed by the PsycInfo platform, with 128 articles, LILACS, with 31 articles, Scielo, with 14 articles, and finally, Scopus, with no published articles.

When associating the results obtained during the research, it was also noted that there was a majority of international articles in relation to national ones. Despite this, it was also clear that the terms researched have different references between languages, since the profession of Dog Walker known in Brazil does not present the same analogous term in the other researches, which treated this term without its literal meaning, not addressing any labor relationship in any article.

Graph 1 – Numerical result between the number of articles found in each database comparing the term Dog Walker and Dog Walking



Furthermore, reports highlight that in Brazil, dog walking services are more often called "dog walkers" or "pet walkers", and are used in the literal sense, unlike in countries such as the United States. In this sense, according to the report by Santos (2022), the profession of dog walker has become increasingly popular in Brazil, reflecting a change in the way people care for their pets. The growth of the dog walking market can be attributed to the growing concern for animal welfare and the need for socialization of pets (OLIVEIRA, 2023). Furthermore, the culture of responsible ownership and pet care has led to the popularization of various services, such as pet care and boarding, which go beyond simple walking. This demonstrates that, although the activity itself exists, the terminology and perception of the service are distinct in the Brazilian context.

4. Conclusion

It is clear, therefore, that the topic "Dog Walking" is unexplored and has great potential for research, since it relates both human and animal health, making this research pioneering on the subject and of extraordinary importance. Among all the databases analyzed, none of them, after the screening process, presented content that could be eligible and included, proving the lack of research in the general scope of the academic environment. The topic, despite its great potential and importance, has been little analyzed and is the focus of research, allowing for a wide range of possibilities to be studied. The term "Dog Walking" presented a large number of results found, however, even in this way, after all the filtering and analysis, it showed a lack of eligible research and content, showing, again, great possibilities for studies. The term Dog Walking proved to be more promising in an initial numerical analysis, but also zeroed its correspondents after the final screening, also proving the need and possibility of new research in the area. Possible studies could assess the health of both the owner and the dog. Human assessment could include estimating energy expenditure for dog walks, duration and frequency of walks. In relation to animals, the dog's state of fatigue, body temperature level and weight loss during walks could be assessed. This data could help in planning activities, in addition to being important for proposing an estimate of payment, understanding that dog walking can be a paid activity.

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