Influence of living in a single or multi-cat household on sickness and behaviour at age 2.5 years

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OBJECTIVES
Living in multi-cat households has been implicated as a risk factor for various feline diseases. The aim was to identify associations between multi-cat households and feline health and behaviour.

METHODS
Data from the Bristol Cats Study, a UK longitudinal study of pet cats based primarily on owner-completed questionnaires, were used. Cats were included if questionnaires one (2–4 months) through to five (2.5 years) were completed, and they had remained in either a single or multi-cat household throughout. For owners with multiple eligible cats, one was included randomly.

Univariable and multivariable logistic regression models were used to analyse associations between single/multi-cat households and measures of health (obesity, cat bite abscesses), and behaviour (negative interactions with owner) where there was sufficient statistical power. Single cat households (SCHs) were compared with both agonistic multi-cat households (AMCHs: where agonistic behaviours occurred between cats) and non-agonistic multi-cat households (NMCHs).

RESULTS
Cats in NMCHs had decreased risk of negative interactions with the owner, compared to SCHs and AMCHs (p<0.001).

There was no evidence of a significant association between living in single/multi-cat households and the likelihood of obesity or abscesses.

STATEMENT
The health measures investigated were not significantly associated with MHCs, and the likelihood of negative interactions with the owner was influenced by the cats' relationships, rather than the multi-cat household itself. This indicates that the influence of household may be more nuanced than the categories 'single' or 'multi-cat' when considering the effects on some aspects of cats' health and behaviour.