# Chapter 36 Aggressive Behavior and Social Stress

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# Abstract

Across the animal kingdom, social interactions, ranging from affiliative cooperative exchanges to intensely aggressive contests, have a fundamental impact upon the health and wellbeing of an individual. Social life is often quite intricate, full of rewards, but also the cause of serious conflict and intense stresses. In this chapter, the sociobiology of feral rodents and their natural defense mechanisms are described as a starting point in the evaluation of the causes and consequences of aggressive behaviors and social stress in laboratory animals. The use of ecologically relevant conditions provides animal models with a high degree of face and construct validity. Considering the ecological significance of the dynamic changes in behavior and physiology of animals living in a social structure allows an answer to the fundamental question of the adaptive or maladaptive nature of the changes observed. It is important to notice that societies are by definition based on individuals, each with its own individual trait characteristics. Hence, a focus on individual differences may provide answers to the question of individual vulnerability and resilience.