

URSS: The Impact of Breed Specific Legislation on Perceptions of Canine Characteristics



RATIONALE

Breed Specific Legislation, under The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991), aims to outlaw the owning, breeding, selling and abandonment of 4 breeds: Pit Bull Terrier, Japanese Tosa, Dogo Argentino and Fila Brasileiro.

Determining whether a dog is a banned breed is by its looks, rather than name, breed or behaviour. (Gov.uk, no date).

Organisations such as the RSPCA (2022), Dogs Trust (2022) and the Kennel Club (2023) have campaigned against Breed Specific Legislation. These campaigns communicate the inappropriateness of judging dogs' temperament and behaviour based on their physical characteristics; calls for policy changes and reform.

Research surrounding Breed Specific Legislation:
Creates an effect of safe versus dangerous dogs, which dogs in the safe category are undermined in their capability to cause harm. As a result, this has the potential to increase bite hospitalisations (Súilleabháin, 2015).

Breed specific legislation as having little to no impact on dog bite injuries (Mora et al, 2018., Creedon and Súilleabháin, 2018). A focus on bite statistics does not align with Breed Specific Legislation procedure, which is by measuring its characteristics (DEFRA, 2009)

- Assess the relevancy of Breed Specific Legislation
- Explore the appropriateness of Breed Specific Legislation
- Discuss future implications for research and considerations for reform

AIMS + OBJECTIVES

My research aims to explore the relevancy and appropriateness of Breed Specific legislation by examining the impact of perceptions of canine characteristics since the introduction of Breed Specific Legislation, under The Dangerous Dogs Act (1991).

To achieve my research aim, I reached out to those holding canine related professions to complete a quantitative survey. I did this by sending invitations to canine organisations such as the RSPCA, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors and later by sharing on LinkedIn and social media sites requesting specific participants. After receiving 52 responses, I analysed my responses in SPSS using descriptive methods including averages and crosstabs.

REFERENCE LIST



PARTICIPANTS

From the organisations and selective recruitment from social media: 52 people participated in my research. This included:

- 28 Health (e.g. Veterinary)
- 12 Behaviour (e.g. Dog Trainer)
- 12 Misc (e.g. Dog Walker)

RESULTS

When answering questions related to Breed Specific Legislation's effectiveness of reducing bites and minimising risk, 28/52 (53%) participants scored 14/15 to 15/15. This may suggest that participants disagree with the appropriateness and relevancy of Breed Specific Legislation.

59.6% selected Very Dissatisfied that Breed Specific Legislation minimises risk, whilst 57.7% were Very Dissatisfied that Breed Specific Legislation is effective at decreasing bites.

Participants generally disagreed that characteristics of dogs indicated dangerousness. Dogs with cropped ears (SD: 61.5%) or boxier muzzle (SD: 39.2%) are not correlated with dangerousness by the participants. However, when answering whether breeds can have an intimidating or safe appearance, the mode is Agree.

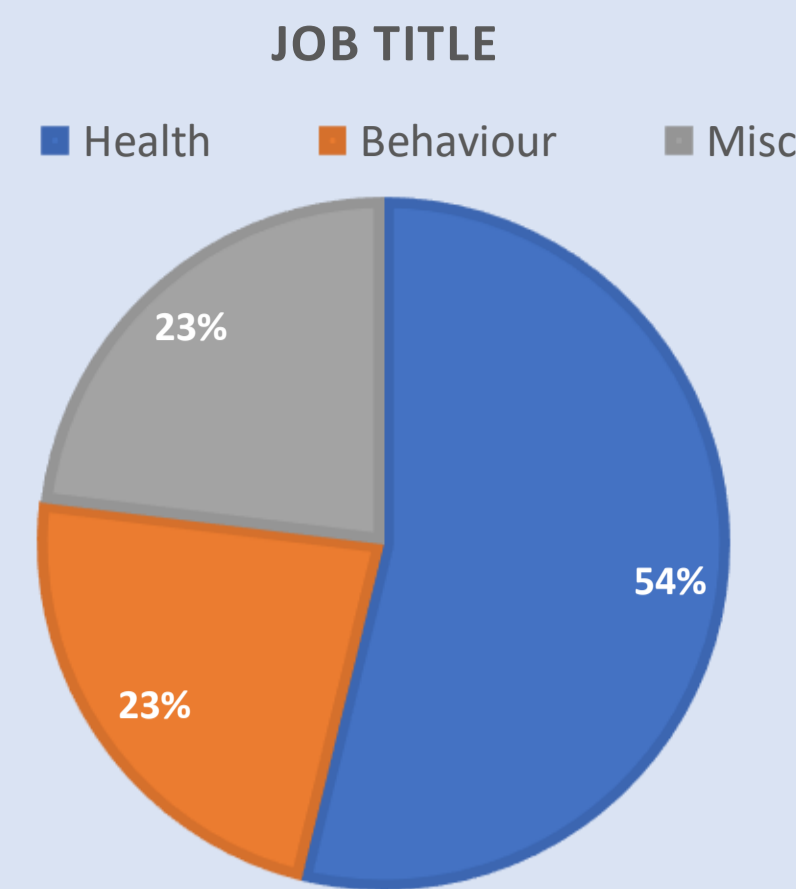
Answers surrounding breed perceptions differed in comparison to individual characteristics. 48.1% of participants agreed that some breeds require greater control in comparison to others, whilst 53.8% Agreed that dogs referred as 'Status Dogs' are certain breeds.

Participants find it important that owners are responsible for their dog/s showing aggressive behaviours, with 63.5% answered 'Strongly Agree' for each type of aggression (Predatory, Possessive, Fear and Territorial)

CONCLUSION

Overall, my research may suggest that Breed Specific Legislation is not perceived as appropriate to minimise risk and reducing bite statistics. Research by Kogan (2022; 2019) suggests further education on animal welfare and behaviour is preferred among participants to reduce the risk of dog bites. This also links into my research participants strongly agreeing that dog owners should be responsible for their dog/s showing aggressive behaviours. Responsibility towards dog aggression may be relevant to an owner's tolerance to their dog showing aggressive behaviours. Although owners may not tolerate their dog showing aggression towards themselves, there may be a greater tolerance of dogs showing aggression to strangers (Hsu and Sun, 2010). Linking to status dogs which their function, influenced by their owner, may be to cause fear and intimidation (Harding, 2012). Relating back to my research results, 53.8% of participants agreed that status dogs are certain breeds. Therefore, further research on the implications of status dogs and its relation to Breed Specific Legislation may support future policy implications.

Breed characteristics, such as cropped ears or muzzle shape, may have little impact on someone's perception of dangerousness. This is despite campaigns such as 'Cut The Crop' campaigned by the British Veterinary Association (2021), which calls it a purely cosmetic procedure which "make dogs look 'harder' or 'tougher'" (BVA, 2021, p.1). In addition, in the following question which asks participants if status dogs are a certain breed, 53.8% of participants agreed to this statement. Therefore, it may be suggested that looking dangerous and acting dangerous are separate, which looks alone are not a strong indicator of dangerousness as potentially suggested by my research results.



Breed Specific Legislation may be inappropriate at reducing risk around dogs

Perceptions differ when participants looked at Characteristics vs Breed.



Source: RSPCA (2023)

Dangerousness is possibly suggested as a responsibility of the dog's owner