

SHOULD PIT BULLS BE BANNED?



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Every time there is a report of a dog attack on a person here in Jamaica or anywhere in the world where our internet connectivity can take us, there is an explosion of discussion on dangerous dogs and the banning of certain breeds; and everyone lines up in two camps: the dog killers and the dog rescuers.

Are there really Dangerous Breeds? Should we ban some breeds? What kind of legislation do we need to address this issue? Dog aggression is considered a “serious risk to human health” and it is also a significant driver of inhumane treatment of dogs since manifestations of aggression to humans often leads to fear then to mistreatment, abandonment, isolation and euthanasia.

A recently published study by the University of Bristol, School of Veterinary Science found that: “Most dogs did not show aggression in multiple contexts, suggesting that this behaviour may be a learnt response to situations rather than a general characteristic of individuals.” Though some breeds in some situations were reported to be more aggressive further analyses “identified no specific increased individual breed risks.” More significant factors were: where owners acquired their dog, training and the training methods used e.g. “The use of positive punishment or negative reinforcement based training methods was

associated with increased chance of aggression to family and unfamiliar people outside the house," and even the sex of the owner.

In summary then it may be said that the socialization of the dog and its early interaction with humans is a major factor in determining whether that dog will behave aggressively. Therefore any future legislative or policy actions should be directed at education and awareness of the need for Responsible Dog Ownership placing the onus on the owner of the pet to ensure proper training and socialization, and attention to the basic needs of the pet and not on breed specific bans.

Reference: *Human directed aggression in domestic dogs (Canis familiaris): occurrence in different contexts and risk factors*, Rachel A. Casey, Bethany Loftus, Christine Bolster, Gemma J. Richards, Emily J. Blackwell, Applied Animal Behaviour Science, published online 11 December 2013.