

Study on Temperament Leads to the Repeal of Breed Specific Law

INTRODUCTION

On July 5, 2000 the government of Lower Saxony, Germany ruled that 14 breeds of dogs were especially dangerous and placed restrictions on the ownership, management and breeding of dogs of these breeds. The breeds cited included Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Pit bull Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, Rottweilers and Dobermans. Exemption required the passing of a standardized temperament test by both dog and owner, administered by veterinary behaviorists at the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover, Germany. A passing score required that the dog displayed no exceptional aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

415 dogs of the targeted breeds were tested in 21 situations of dog-human contact and 14 situations of dog-environment contact. The dog's behavior in each situation was scaled from 1 to 7.

1	No aggressive behavior
2	Visual or acoustic threat behavior while backing away or remaining stationary
3	Bite movements while backing away or remaining stationary
4	Bite movements while moving forward but stopping at some distance
5	Bite with preceding threat signals
6	Bite with no preceding threat signals
7	Bite with no preceding threat signals and unable to calm within 10 minutes

347 of the targeted breeds were tested in situations of dog-dog contact.

70 Golden Retrievers were used to administer the same standardized temperament test.

RESULTS

Targeted Breeds (Dog-human contact, dog-environment) n=415

1	158	38.07%
2	201	48.43
3,4	18	4.34
5	37	8.92
6	1	.24

86.5% of the 415 dogs of the targeted breeds either showed no aggression or minimal non-dangerous threat behavior

- **395 (95%) of the 415 dogs of the targeted breeds reacted appropriately in all test situations.**
- **20 (5.0%) displayed exceptional aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations.** Dogs were reacting to unusual, fast or abrupt movements by the tester. The owners were also more likely to use aversive training techniques and misinterpret their dog's behavior.

Targeted Breeds (Dog-dog contact) n=347

1-5	337	97.12%
6-7	10	2.88

- **Of all 347 dogs, 334 (92.25%) reacted appropriately in the test situation**
- **Only 13 dogs (3.75%) showed aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations**
- **There was no significant differences between breeds.**
- **No specific dangerousness of any of the breeds**

Golden Retrievers n=70

1	41	58.57%
2	28	40.0
5	1	1.43

- **98.57 % of the 70 Golden Retrievers reacted appropriately in all test situations.**
- **There was no significant difference between Golden Retrievers and the targeted breeds in the occurrence of exceptional aggressive behavior in inappropriate situations.**

CONCLUSIONS

- **Dogs of the targeted breeds signal their intent just like other dogs.**
- **Dogs of the targeted breeds are statistically no more likely to show inappropriate aggressive behavior toward humans or dogs than are Golden Retrievers.**

This study contributed to the repeal of breed specific legislation in Lower Saxony.