

Study sheds light on growing numbers of flat-faced 'designer' dogs in UK rescue centres

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The number of brachycephalic dogs—those with flat faces such as pugs, bulldogs and French bulldogs—being taken in by UK rescue and

rehoming centers has doubled over just three years, a new study suggests.

Experts in dog welfare at Nottingham Trent University have been investigating how [breed](#), age and sex of [dogs](#) in centers has been changing over time.

Focusing on online rehoming adverts for 16 Dogs Trust and RSPCA centers they found that the number of brachycephalic breeds doubled in just three years, from 24 to 48.

While brachycephalic breeds accounted for about five percent of all dogs in rescue and rehoming centers, the numbers are expected to rise further as the popularity of designer breeds in the UK continues to grow.

There are concerns that the growing financial burden of caring for and treating [chronic health issues](#) in brachycephalic dogs is being passed on to the rehoming charities.

It is estimated that in the UK about 130,000 dogs enter dog welfare organizations such as rehoming centers each year, with many relinquished by owners or taken in as strays.

Health problems, size of dog, high training costs and change of circumstances among owners are common reasons for dogs to be relinquished.

The researchers, based in the NTU's School of Animal, Rural and Environmental Sciences, found that mixed breed dogs remained the most common type of dogs in UK rescue and rehoming centers, accounting for 15% of all dogs.

Staffordshire bull terriers (10%) lurchers (8%) and Jack Russell terriers

(3%) were the next most common breeds, they found.

Those aged 3-4 years old were most common, accounting for about a third of all dogs (32%) which the researchers say is the age that dogs may start to exhibit and be diagnosed with behavioral or health problems.

Conversely, the lower numbers of dogs (15%) in the oldest bracket—over eight years of age—may be due to the fact that most health issues have already manifested themselves, and are being managed by the owners by then.

Despite rescue centers being a common means of rehoming a dog, little research has been carried out into the composition of rescue center populations.

"We have found that breeds in rescue centers appears, to some degree, to be reflecting the changing trends of breed popularity in the UK," said Dr. Anne Carter, senior lecturer in animal science at Nottingham Trent University.

She said: "The increasing numbers and rising popularity of brachycephalic breeds is already influencing the demographic spread in rescue centers. This pattern that is likely to continue, particularly as these dogs reach 3–4 years old, which we have found is the most common age for dogs being relinquished.

"Differing breeds require highly contrasting intensities of care, housing, and particularly veterinary care. Owners may often choose brachycephalic dogs with limited consideration for their potential health conditions. These dogs then enter rescue centers, placing additional strain on resources due to cost of treatment and additional length of stay for recovery."

RSPCA dog welfare expert Dr. Samantha Gaines said: "This research is really interesting but unsurprising. We know brachycephalic breeds have soared in popularity in recent years and, unfortunately, that means we've been seeing more coming into our centers when their owners can no longer take care of them.

"Unfortunately, flat-faced breeds such as pugs and French bulldogs can have chronic health problems, such as poor breathing, caused by the way they've been bred to have exaggerated features. This can cause serious problems and require expensive corrective surgery, sometimes leading to dogs being abandoned or signed over into a charity's care.

"The RSPCA urges people to stop and think if they want to buy a flat-faced dog and to consider an alternative breed or crossbreed with a lower risk of health problems. Whatever type of dog is being considered, prospective dog owners need to first do their research, speak to their vet and use The Puppy Contract to help ensure they buy a happy and healthy puppy."

Paula Boyden, veterinary director at Dogs Trust, said: "This research confirms that we have seen a marked increase in the volume of brachycephalic breeds coming into our rehoming centers. Breeds such as Pugs, French Bulldogs and English Bulldogs have grown in popularity in recent years, but worryingly this hasn't been coupled with an equivalent increased awareness of the health issues these breeds may experience.

"Breathing issues are not uncommon, sometimes requiring surgery, and many will have other associated issues such as skin and eye problems. Often it is when these issues come to light that the financial costs become too much and owners are forced to turn to rehoming charities, such as ourselves.

"The high demand of these breeds also means that deceitful sellers are

illegally smuggling them into the UK where they have often been bred in horrendous conditions with no regard for their [health](#) or welfare, before being sold onto the unsuspecting public.

"We'd urge anyone thinking of buying a brachycephalic breed to look beyond their appearance and consider whether they are emotionally and financially prepared to take on a dog that has a higher risk of [health problems](#). If you feel that a brachycephalic is right for you, do your research and use our Buyer Advice to buy responsibly."

The study is published in the *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*.

More information: Anne J. Carter et al. Demographic Changes in UK Rescue Centre Dog Population between 2014 and 2018, *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* (2020). [DOI: 10.1080/10888705.2020.1839755](#)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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