

Study suggests responsible ownership is key to preventing dog attacks

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Many attacks are preventable if dogs are properly socialised and taught appropriate behaviours - according to the study. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

A major study backed by Nottingham Trent University (NTU) has suggested that dog attacks could be reduced through promoting

responsible dog ownership.

The project, which highlighted how more than 7,000 people are admitted to U.K. hospitals annually as a result of dog bites or strikes, involved extensive consultation with the police, [local authorities](#), animal welfare organizations and [dog walkers](#). It included reviewing existing enforcement and legislation and analyzing [media coverage](#) on dog attacks.

The relevance of this research is highlighted as the Petitions Committee recently debated potential changes to legislation in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, part of the wider debate about reforming or reviewing laws and policies to deal with dangerous dogs and dog attacks.

The study suggests that many dog attacks are preventable if dogs are properly socialized and taught appropriate behaviors, and that owners are alert to problems that could occur if dogs are placed in the wrong situations and handled inappropriately. It also points to owners who unwittingly put dogs in situations where dog attacks were likely to occur and lacked the skills to deal with these incidents when they happened.

Rather than focusing on breed in relation to behavior, a range of situational factors should be considered, such as the proximity between larger and smaller dogs in [public places](#), children's interactions with poorly socialized dogs in the home, and trigger incidents including a dog experiencing fear or excitement, predatory behavior from other dogs, being in unfamiliar settings, provocation by humans, understanding the individual dog's needs and characteristics by owners and responsible persons.

The recommendations from the report include:

- Dog behavioral training similar to speed awareness courses as

part of sentencing/contingent order/community protection notice (CPN) enforcement regime which would be compulsory in the event of a destruction order or contingent order being imposed by the courts. The training is designed to support dog owners to understand their responsibilities and develop best practice in dog control

- Improved recording of dog attack data and incident characteristics
- Introduce statutory enforcement duty
- New [legal requirements](#) on dog ownership which require all people about to own a dog to have a 'clean' record, i.e. there is no evidence of complaints regarding dog ownership against them

Dr. Angus Nurse, head of Criminology and Criminal Justice at NTU's School of Social Sciences, led the research. He said: "The research evidence indicates human behavior as a key factor in dog bite incidents and that not all dog incidents should be seen as 'aggressive' behavior. If we consider a range of situational factors and focus on helping dog [owners](#) to develop skills to understand their dogs and potential warning signs for incidents, this should help prevent dog attacks."

More information: An investigation of measures to reduce dog attacks and promote responsible ownership amongst dog owners with dog control issues in the UK.—AW1410.

randd.defra.gov.uk/Default.asp...None&ProjectID=19861

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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