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Aggression, behaviour, and animal care among pit bulls and other dogs adopted from an animal shelter

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Abstract

Pit bull dogs are a focus of concern because of their reputation for aggression toward people and because they may be mistreated by owners who try to promote aggressive behaviour. This study followed 40 pit bulls and 42 similar-sized dogs of other breeds at an animal shelter. Three pit bulls and two dogs of other breeds were euthanised because of aggression toward people at the shelter, and the remaining 77 dogs were re-homed. Of these, one pit bull and ten dogs of other breeds were returned to the shelter because of alleged aggression. For the dogs that were retained for at least two months, owner reports of aggression in various situations (to strangers, to other dogs, etc) were similar for the two groups. Reported care of the two groups was also similar except that pit bulls were more likely to sleep on the owner's bed and more likely to cuddle with the owner. Pit bull adopters were more likely to be under the age of 30, to rent (rather than own) their home, and to be adopting their first dog, perhaps because of a bias against pit bulls among older adopters. The study provided no evidence of greater aggression or poorer care among adopted pit bulls compared to dogs of other breeds.

Keywords: aggression, animal shelter, animal welfare, breed, dog, pit bull