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Research

Prevalence of aggression and fear-related behavioral problems in a sample of Argentine Dogos in Italy

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Abstract

The Argentine Dogo breed is identified frequently as potentially dangerous in worldwide legislation. To investigate the prevalence of problem behaviors in this breed, 94 Argentine Dogo owners provided information on aggressive and fearful behaviors shown by their dogs (83 males, 98 females) in a questionnaire. The results were consistent with the origin of the Argentine Dogo (i.e., descending from fighting dogs) and subsequent selection exerted to improve hunting qualities. Common aggressive behaviors included predation on small animals (92.0%), intra-specific conflicts (69.5%), and territoriality (i.e., vigilance of territory perimeter, 61.3%; aggression toward people visiting the dog's house, 45.3%; vigilance while inside the owners' car, 33.1%). Aggression directed to the owner was marginally represented. Reactions to leashing, bathing, punishment, sleep

owner was marginally represented. Reactions to leashing, bathing, punishment, sleep disturbance, toy removal, and in other conflict situations occurred in less than 10% of the sample. Reactions to food removal (13.3%) and handling (19.8%) showed higher prevalence. Chasing cars/running people (17.6%) and aggression toward strangers, either those who were friendly (19.1%) or those who seemed threatening on approach (29.4%), were noted. Low anxiety levels reported in social situations confirmed that these reactions were not common (e.g., fear of strangers, children, and unfamiliar dogs $\approx 10\%$). Common anxious behaviors were fear of traffic (10.3%), loud noises (36.2%), startling stimuli (30.5%), destructiveness (42.9%), excessive body licking (13.6%), and shyness in novel situations (32.4%). The context and targets of aggression when exhibited by these dogs (e.g., aggression toward animals when outside the dogs' territory, aggression towards people when inside territory) suggest that the Italian law on potentially dangerous dog breeds may be ineffective in preventing Argentine Dogos' aggression to humans. Social hazards could be reduced by promoting proper social exposure and reactions toward people.



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Keywords

Argentine Dogo; aggression; fear; potentially dangerous dog breed; behavioral problems

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