



# What are the perceived impacts on the behaviour of XL Bullies following their addition to The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, by canine behaviour professionals?

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## Introduction

Dogs have become pivotal parts of society, their primary use as companions has strengthened the human-animal bond. However, this bond can experience conflict due to difficulties in interpreting animal behaviour. This can lead to negative interactions, perceived behavioural problems and attacks/fatalities.

A rise in dog attacks involving the Pitbull Terrier, led to the implementation of The Dangerous Dogs Act in 1991. This act bans the ownership of specified dog breeds, in order to protect the public by preventing dog attacks. After a significant increase in dog attacks involving the XL Bully in 2023, the breed was added to the act as a banned breed in December 2023.

This act is highly controversial, with numerous research studies suggesting its ineffectiveness at reducing dog bites. However, there is a lack of research into the effect that Breed Specific Legislation (BSL) has on the behaviour of the breed.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to investigate the perceived impacts that this piece of legislation has had on the behaviour of XL Bullies.

## Method

A mixed-method questionnaire was emailed to behaviour professionals. Animal behaviourists and trainers were selected from the ABTC list of accredited professionals, to ensure they had a standard of knowledge and skills.

The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions and started by asking the professionals their current profession and the length of time they have spent in the industry. Secondly, the reasons that XL Bullies were being brought to the professionals both before and after the ban. Next, the respondents perceived impacts of the ban on the behaviour of XL Bullies. Lastly, their opinions on the bans restrictions and their assessment of the breed as a whole.

Due to the sensitive nature of the project and the risk of potential bias, the questions were carefully worded to avoid leading the respondents to a specific answer (Taherdoost, 2022)

The questionnaire was emailed to 611 individuals and was closed a month later with 62 responses. The results were then analysed and statistical data extracted.

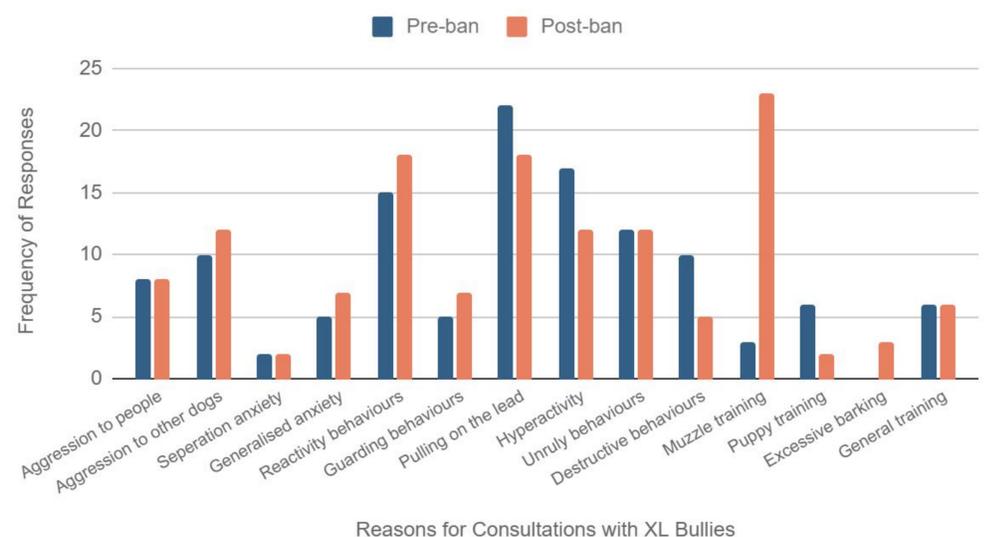
## Results

Results showed a significant difference between the reasons that XL Bullies were consulting with behaviour professionals, before and after the ban ( $p < 0.0001$ ). In particular, 'muzzle training' became owners main point of focus after the ban. 'Pulling on the lead' was highly reported both before and after the ban.

After the implementation of the ban, the majority of professionals reported an increase in frustration behaviours (55.88%). These behaviours included 'aggression to other dogs', 'generalised anxiety', 'reactivity behaviour', 'excessive barking' and 'guarding behaviour'.

The majority of respondents thought that 3 months was not long enough for owners to prepare their dogs for the restrictions without behavioural advice (87.87%), and 76.47% stated that this time was not enough for them to prepare their clients dogs for the restrictions either.

39.9% of respondents stated that they believe XL Bullies are just as compliant at training as any other breed, and 60.60% believe that XL Bullies have adapted to the bans restrictions in a comparable way to other breeds.



## Discussion

Frustration can arise from the absence of a given expectation, such as delayed rewarding, being restricted from a desired goal and barrier frustration (Notari, 2009). Studies have suggested that muzzle wearing can limit the dogs ability to investigate the environment, block facial expressions when communicating, and can induce stress and discomfort (Doring, *et al*, 2008). Therefore, it is expected that the restrictions of the ban have impacted these behaviours in XL Bullies.

There is no length of time that learning to walk on a lead or to be muzzle trained takes, instead it depends on the training techniques used (Doring, *et al*, 2008).

Without the government funding behavioural help to owners, only those that financially had the budget for this service were able to seek help. Therefore, if the government funded behavior professionals to owners, this could increase the chance of owners being educated on the ethical ways of training, potentially increasing the likelihood that the dogs could be muzzle trained within the 3 months (Dog Control Coalition, 2023).

Lastly, the majority of respondents reported that they believed that XL Bullies are compliant with training, with equal respondents adding that they are just as compliant as any other breed. These results build on existing evidence that there is no difference in the response to training in dogs perceived as 'dangerous' in comparison to other dog breeds (Petkova, *et al*, 2024).

## Conclusion

As dog-bite incidents are increasing and a fifth dog breed, the XL Bully was added to The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, further research into this area was necessary.

Results suggested that the bans restrictions have increased frustration behaviours in XL Bullies. 'Muzzle training' and 'pulling on the lead' became a priority to owners after the ban, this was expected due to the nature of the restrictions implemented. It could also be inferred that owners were worried about the way their dog would be viewed in public, with the risk of the dog being seized and potentially euthanised.

The overall stance from behaviour professionals was that the ban should not be in place, owners should have longer than 3 months to prepare and the government should increase owner education. In addition to this, suggestions were made to licence all dog owners, enforce compulsory training when owning certain breeds of dog, and the ban should not target a breed but should be based on the temperament of the individual.

Despite this, these results are only indicative of those owners who sought behavioural advice, it is a small-scale study and there is limited research to support the findings. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution. However, this study makes suggestions for future research, to reach a wider demographic and achieve higher response rates.

## References

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