

Tethered vs Non-Tethered Dogs and the Relation to Dog Bite Injuries

Pressure on legislators to enact laws that will restrict or ban tethering as a method of containment often follow a local dog bite injury that is given dramatic media attention. Legislators are then faced with the task of sorting fact from emotion. Attempts to retrieve data to support or oppose tethering are usually tied to articles regarding dog bite injuries and fatalities. Few studies exist regarding the disposition or well-being of non biting tethered dogs.

NCRAOA understands the concern of legislators for any impact reduced tethering could have on the welfare of the dogs themselves and for the safety of children.

We provide below information from various studies for your consideration.

STUDIES

Yeon, Golden, et al (2001)

The purpose of this study was to determine whether tethering was detrimental to the dogs' welfare. The study charted a wide range of behaviors, and noted those behaviors and the increase or decrease of such in a pen and on a tether.

Their conclusion, "There was no indication that tethering was more detrimental to the dogs' welfare than housing in a pen." Further they stated that tethered dogs did not exhibit more stereotypic behaviors, believed to be an indicator of animal welfare.

Sacks, Sinclair, et al (2000)

This study involved DBRF (dog bite related fatalities), and attempts to identify breeds of dogs involved in fatal attacks, purebred or mixed breed, if attacks occurred on or off the owner's property, and whether the dogs were restrained (eg, chained or leashed) or unrestrained. Of the 27 fatalities in 1997 and 1998, "Five (19%) deaths involved unrestrained dogs off the owners' property, 18 (67%) involved unrestrained dogs on the owners' property, 3 (11%) involved restrained dogs on the owners' property, and 1 (4%) involved a restrained dog off the owners' property." From this it is correct to assume that unrestrained dogs accounted for 23 deaths, while restrained dogs were responsible for 4 deaths. When the same criteria was used for 227 DBRF between 1979 to 1998, unrestrained dogs were involved in 188 incidents (82%), while restrained dogs were responsible for 39 fatalities (18%).

Gershman, Sacks, et al (1994)

The authors conducted a matched case-control study to determine dog specific factors associated with dogs biting non household members. Dogs were qualified, and the study contained 178 cases reported to the Denver Municipal Animal Shelter of first bite incidents that required medical attention.

The part of this report relevant to tethering states: "Several environmental factors were also associated with biting. Biting dogs were significantly more likely to reside in homes with one or

more children ≤ 10 years of age and to be chained while in the yard. Of the 83 dogs chained while in the yard (cases plus controls), 44 (53%) had growled or snapped at visitors to the house. This behavior was also reported, however, of 116 (44%) of 263 dogs not chained while in the yard.” The category “chained while in the yard” states that 55 of 174 biting dogs (32%) were chained while in the yard, while only 28 of 171 non biting dogs (16%) were chained while in the yard. The authors state that their findings of being chained in the yard as a risk factor for biting agrees with previous studies, but state “A dog may be chained as the result of having exhibited aggressive behavior which itself may be a risk factor for biting, rather than chaining somehow causing a dog to bite.” “One measure of aggressive behavior may be growling or snapping at visitors to the house. Our results, however, showed no significant difference in this behavior for dogs chained while in the yard and those not chained, suggesting that chaining was not likely to have been the result of aggressive behavior.”

AVMA Task Force on Canine Aggression and Human-Canine Interactions
Beaver, Baker, et al (2001)

This admirable report establishes ways for the community as a whole to work on dog bite prevention by identifying issues and allies, formatting an infrastructure for and model of reporting bites, as well as media and educational approaches.

The Task Force mentions tethering only in Appendix 3: Recommended data elements for reports of dog bites. This section states under dog information that in addition to sex, spayed or neutered, rabies vaccination, and microchip number that degree of confinement at time of bite be considered. The comment reads:

“Identifying different forms of confinement (eg. chaining, tethering, electronic fence,) is important if risk associated with these practices is to be assessed.”

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Perhaps the quote used most often by supporters of anti-tethering is from The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS):

http://www.hsus.org/pets/issues_affecting_our_pets/animal_abuse_and_neglect/the_facts_about_chaining_or_tethering_dogs.html
A study published in the Sept. 15, 2000 issue of the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association reported that 17 percent of dogs involved in fatal attacks on humans between 1979 and 1998 were restrained on their owners' property at the time of the attack. Tragically, the victims of such attacks are often children who are unaware of the chained dog's presence until it is too late. Furthermore, a tethered dog who finally does get loose from his chains may remain aggressive, and is likely to chase and attack unsuspecting passersby and pets.

What this fails to state is that the other 82% were unrestrained on or off their owners' property (only 1% restrained off the owner's property).

References:

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