

WRONG NUMBERS NOT STATISTICS

By Karen Delise

“Are ‘Pit Bulls’ Different? An analysis of the Pit Bull Terrier Controversy,”
Lockwood, R., and Rindy, K., Anthrozoos, Volume 1, Number 1, pg. 2-8.

**“Breeds of Dogs Involved in Fatal Human Attacks in the United States
between 1979 and 1998,”** Sacks, JJ, Sinclair, L., Gilchrist, J., Golab, G.,
Lockwood, R., JAVMA Vol. 217, 2000. (Centers for Disease Control or
CDC study)

Though neither was intended for this purpose, two separate studies on dog bite-related fatalities in the United States have been characterized as evidence of the dangerousness of “pit bull” dogs, based on the number of “pit bull” dogs found to be involved in dog bite-related fatalities. Politicians, editorialists and other breed-ban advocates continue to quote the tabulations in these studies in discussions on dangerous dog legislation and/or breed specific bans.

Both these studies used newspapers as their primary source for data collection on the number of dog bite-related fatalities and the breeds involved.

1 **“Are ‘Pit Bulls’ Different? An analysis of the Pit Bull Terrier Controversy,”**
Lockwood, R., and Rindy, K., Anthrozoos, Volume 1, Number 1, pg. 2-8.

The authors of this study present the data they have compiled from sources, including the “press” as:

“In 1986 we received reports of 12 fatalities from dog attacks.”

“A less comprehensive survey of fatal attacks between October 1983 and December 1984 yielded reports of 9 additional fatalities.”

However, data gathered from additional sources reveal that:

In 1986 there were 14 dog bite-related fatalities (not 12).

Between October 1983 and December 1984 there were 21 dog bite-related fatalities (not 9).

Thus, the authors failed to capture 14 dog bite-related fatalities. None were by “pit bull” dogs. Eleven of these incidents involved children.*

2

“Breeds of Dogs Involved in Fatal Human Attacks in the United States between 1979 and 1998,” Sacks, JJ, Sinclair, L., Gilchrist, J., Golab, G., Lockwood, R., JAVMA Vol. 217, 2000. (Centers for Disease Control or CDC study)

From examination of mortality tapes (death certificates), the CDC determined that at least 327 persons were killed in dog bite-related incidents during the years 1979-1998. Since death certificates do not provide information on the circumstances of the incident or the breeds of dogs involved, the CDC relied on newspaper articles to capture this data. Newspaper articles were searched for information on these incidents and provided breed information on 238 of the 327 deaths due to dogs during this 20-year period.

No newspaper articles could be located on 89 of the 327 dog bite-related fatalities during this time period, and as such these fatalities were not included in the CDC’s statistical data on breeds of dogs involved in these incidents.

Extensive additional research* has resulted in locating and documenting 40 of the 89 fatalities for which the CDC could not locate newspaper articles reporting the incident and/or the breed of dog involved. Of the 40 dog bite-related fatalities not located in newspaper reports, 37 involved dogs other than “pit bull” dogs.

Given the small study population of the CDC study (n=238), the omission of 40 additional cases is significant.

Both the CDC and Dr. Lockwood warned that their enumerations were not an argument for breed legislation of any kind. They were righter than they knew. Not only are the published tabulations under examination impossibly unrepresentative of the total dog population, the tabulations themselves are inaccurate.

The CDC stopped tracking dog bite-related fatalities by breed in 1998. They understand that such tabulations are not science and are no basis for public policy.