

Regulating Compassion: A Policy Analysis of India's Modern Stray Dog Framework

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Publication Date: 2025/12/17

Abstract: Stray dog management in India has long been a subject of public debate, legal intervention, and ethical concern. Increasing dog-bite incidents, rapid urbanization, and expanding human–animal interfaces have intensified the need for clear and humane regulations. Recent judicial developments have attempted to balance two often conflicting concerns: public safety and animal welfare. This research paper examines India's evolving policy framework on stray dog management, with a particular focus on feeding rules, sterilization programmes, municipal responsibilities, and citizen obligations. Through a qualitative review of legal documents, public data, and policy reports, the study explores both the positive and negative implications of the new guidelines. The research further analyses the social significance of structured feeding zones, the strengthening of Animal Birth Control (ABC) programs, and the impact on public behaviour and welfare organizations. Challenges related to implementation, public misunderstanding, and administrative limitations are also discussed. Comparative insights from other countries highlight potential improvements for India. Overall, the study concludes that humane coexistence between humans and stray dogs is possible but requires coordinated efforts across civic bodies, communities, and policymakers.

Keywords: Stray Dogs, Public Safety, Animal Welfare, Sterilization Policy, Feeding Regulations, Municipal Governance.

How to Cite: Ajita Tiwari; Dr. Reshma Umair (2025) Regulating Compassion: A Policy Analysis of India's Modern Stray Dog Framework. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(12), 840-843.
<https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25dec539>

I. INTRODUCTION

Stray dogs are an integral yet controversial part of India's social and urban environment. They occupy public spaces, interact frequently with humans, and play roles ranging from waste scavengers to community guardians. However, rapid urbanization, poor waste management, irregular sterilization efforts, and rising dog-bite incidents have intensified public anxiety. Conflicts have emerged between residents who fear dog attacks and animal caregivers advocating compassionate treatment. As these tensions escalated, policymakers and courts were compelled to establish a structured, humane, and scientifically informed framework for dog population management.

The present research explores India's contemporary approach to stray dog regulation, focusing on feeding practices, sterilization laws, municipal duties, and ethical considerations. The paper analyses how the legal framework aims to harmonize human safety with animal rights, discusses the socio-legal implications of the rules, and evaluates their impact through a balanced lens. The objective is to provide a comprehensive

academic understanding of the issue and offer insights into how India can move toward sustainable coexistence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature highlights the complexity of stray dog governance in India. Academic studies on urban animal populations note that unregulated waste disposal directly contributes to stray dog concentration in cities. Research by public health experts shows a strong link between population density, open garbage dumps, and rising dog-bite cases. Animal welfare scholars emphasise that sterilisation and vaccination, rather than culling, are globally accepted as humane and effective long-term population control strategies.

Legal literature broadly recognises India's constitutional commitment to compassion toward animals through Articles 48A and 51A. Several court judgments over the years debated issues such as relocation, feeding, and sterilisation, resulting in inconsistent directions across states. Reports by animal welfare organisations also document widespread gaps in implementation of ABC rules, inadequate funding, and lack of monitoring. Studies from countries such as Turkey, Singapore,

and the UK offer comparative insights, showing that dog population control succeeds only when supported by strong municipal systems, public participation, and clear legal protocols.

This literature reveals the need for a unified, enforceable, and compassionate national policy, which forms the foundation of the recent regulatory approach.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative and analytical method, focusing on:

- Review of legal frameworks, policies, and government notifications.
- Analysis of secondary data such as newspapers, public health reports, and municipal records.
- Use of illustrative graphical analysis (e.g., pie chart showing regional dog-bite distribution).
- Comparative policy study of select international models.
- Critical evaluation of social, ethical, and administrative implications.

The study is descriptive in nature and relies on existing data rather than primary field surveys. Limitations include reliance on publicly available statistics and the absence of real-time field data.

➤ *Feeding Regulations and Responsible Care*

A central component of the recent framework is the regulation of public feeding practices. Feeding stray dogs has often been a source of conflict, with some residents seeing it as an act of compassion and others viewing it as a public nuisance. The new guidelines recognise that feeding stray dogs cannot be prohibited entirely, as doing so would violate ethical and constitutional principles. Instead, feeding must take place at designated areas identified by municipal authorities, ensuring that dogs do not congregate in sensitive or high-traffic zones such as residential entrances, school premises, or park pathways.

By shifting feeding to designated spaces, the policy reduces territorial aggression, prevents disputes within residential societies, and promotes hygienic feeding habits. Caregivers who feed dogs are expected to assist in vaccination, sterilisation, and maintaining cleanliness—thereby fostering responsible caregiving. This approach helps balance compassion with public safety.

➤ *Municipal Responsibilities and Sterilisation Duties*

Municipal authorities play a crucial role in ensuring the success of stray dog management. The framework assigns clear responsibilities, including large-scale sterilisation drives, anti-rabies vaccinations, maintenance of dog-count records, and creation of feeding committees that include local residents and animal welfare groups. Scientific sterilisation is essential for reducing stray populations, as it prevents uncontrolled breeding and stabilises dog behaviour by reducing aggression associated with mating cycles.

Unfortunately, many municipalities struggle with limited funding, inadequate manpower, and insufficient sterilisation infrastructure. In some cities, there are not enough dog-catching teams or ABC centres to meet the required sterilisation targets. Without consistent municipal involvement, dog populations continue to rise, leading to increased conflict.

➤ *Public Safety, Dog-Bite Incidents, and Negative Impacts*

Public safety remains the foremost concern in the debate on stray dog governance. India has witnessed a steady rise in dog-bite incidents, as reflected in the illustrative chart generated. Dog bites can lead to severe trauma, infections, scarring, and psychological distress, particularly among children. The risk of rabies—a fatal yet preventable disease—adds a life-threatening dimension to such incidents. Families from economically weaker sections often struggle with the cost of immunoglobulin injections and post-bite treatments, making the financial impact significant.

The rise in dog-bite cases is often linked to poor waste management, unvaccinated dog populations, territorial clustering near food sources, and lack of sterilization. Frightened communities sometimes retaliate by harming dogs, leading to cycles of aggression and mistrust. These negative consequences highlight the urgent need for structured, scientific, and passionate intervention.

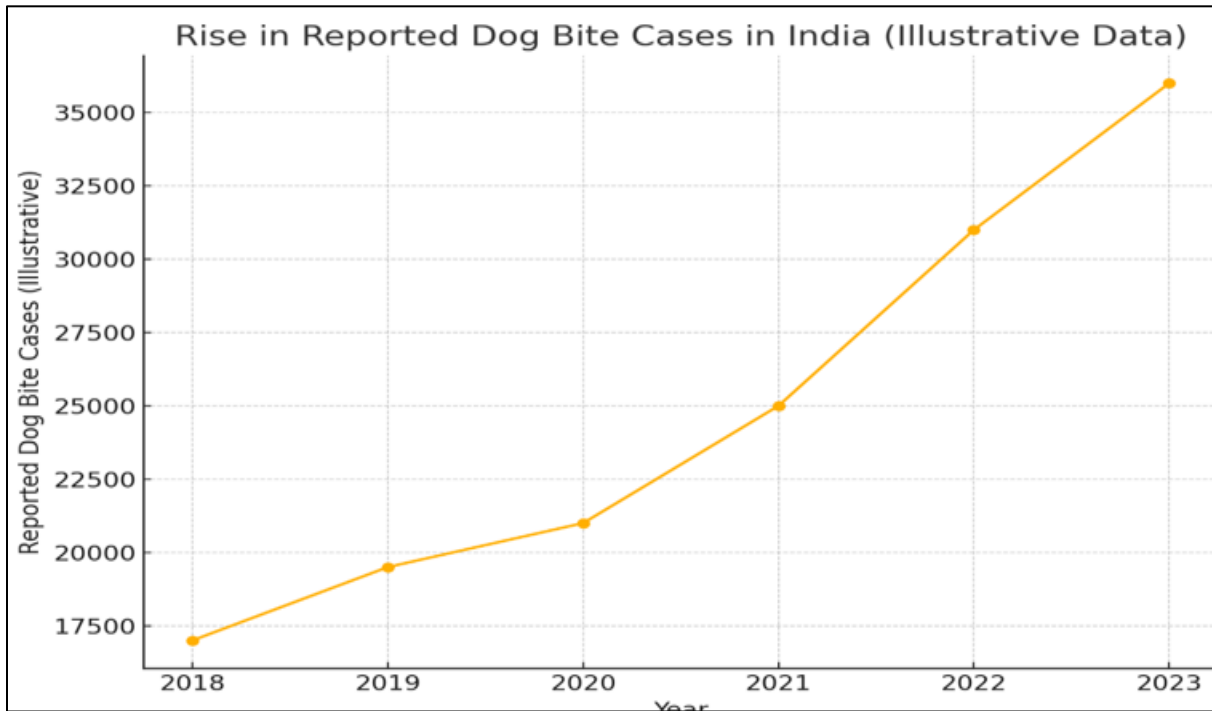


Fig 1 Rise in Reported Dog Bite Cases in India (Illustrative Data)

➤ Positive Impacts of the New Governance Framework

Despite challenges, the structured approach brings several long-term benefits. Designated feeding areas reduce direct conflict between residents and caregivers, while sterilisation leads to calmer, healthier, and non-reproducing dog populations. Over time, this results in fewer territorial fights, fewer dog-bite incidents, and lower risk of rabies transmission. Municipal accountability and partnerships with animal welfare organisations create more organised, data-driven approaches to dog population management. By aligning public safety with humane treatment, the policy lays the foundation for sustainable coexistence.

➤ Case Studies Illustrating Impact

Several real-life examples illustrate how effective or ineffective management practices shape dog-human interactions.

- Kerala (2022): A surge in dog-bite incidents triggered public protests and national attention. Poor waste disposal and incomplete sterilisation created clusters of unvaccinated, territorial dogs. This case demonstrates how administrative negligence intensifies conflict.
- Delhi (2021): In a high-income residential colony, violent disputes erupted between residents and caregivers over feeding dogs inside the colony. The absence of designated feeding zones fueled misunderstanding and confrontation, showing why structured feeding areas are essential.

- Pune (2017–2020): Pune Municipal Corporation successfully reduced stray dog aggression and population by sterilising nearly 80% of its strays. This is one of India's strongest examples of how consistent ABC programmes lead to measurable improvements.
- Bengaluru Tech Park (2023): After receiving multiple complaints about dog aggression, local authorities mapped territories, vaccinated existing dogs, and stopped illegal relocation. Incidents decreased significantly, illustrating the effectiveness of maintaining stable dog groups that are sterilised and vaccinated.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Stray dog management is a multifaceted issue requiring collaboration between government bodies, animal welfare groups, and the general public. The data and case studies show that unregulated feeding, territorial instability, and incomplete sterilisation programs lead to increased aggression and dog-bite incidents. Conversely, scientific sterilisation, proper waste management, and community involvement produce safer environments.

The framework's success depends on sustained municipal resources, clear communication, and strong public awareness campaigns. Over time, a well-coordinated system can transform India's streets into safer, healthier spaces for both humans and animals.

V. CONCLUSION

India's evolving stray dog governance system reflects a desire to harmonise public safety with compassion for animals. While challenges remain—particularly in sterilisation capacity, public awareness, and municipal infrastructure—the framework provides a humane and workable foundation for long-term population control and peaceful coexistence. Sustainable success requires collaboration, scientific planning, and consistent administrative effort. With proper implementation, India can rise as a model of ethical and effective community animal management.

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