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Co-occurrence of potentially preventable factors in 256 dog bite-related fatalities in the United States (2000-2009).

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Abstract

Objective-To examine potentially preventable factors in human dog bite-related fatalities (DBRFs) on the basis of data from sources that were more complete, verifiable, and accurate than media reports used in previous studies. **Design-**Prospective case series. **Sample-**256 DBRFs occurring in the United States from 2000 to 2009. **Procedures-**DBRFs were identified from media reports and detailed histories were compiled on the basis of reports from homicide detectives, animal control reports, and interviews with investigators for coding and descriptive analysis. **Results-**Major co-occurrent factors for the 256 DBRFs included absence of an able-bodied person to intervene (n = 223 [87.1%]), incidental or no familiar relationship of victims with dogs (218 [85.2%]), owner failure to neuter dogs (216 [84.4%]), compromised ability of victims to interact appropriately with dogs (198 [77.4%]), dogs kept isolated from regular positive human interactions versus family dogs (195 [76.2%]), owners' prior mismanagement of dogs (96 [37.5%]), and owners' history of abuse or neglect of dogs (54 [21.1%]). Four or more of these factors co-occurred in 206 (80.5%) deaths. For 401 dogs described in various media accounts, reported breed differed for 124 (30.9%); for 346 dogs with both media and animal control breed reports, breed differed for 139 (40.2%). Valid breed determination was possible for only 45 (17.6%) DBRFs; 20 breeds, including 2 known mixes, were identified. **Conclusions and Clinical Relevance-**Most DBRFs were characterized by coincident, preventable factors; breed was not one of these. Study results supported previous recommendations for multifactorial approaches, instead of single-factor solutions such as breed-specific legislation, for dog bite prevention.

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