



G18 Domestic Predation of an Elder: A Fatal Dog Attack Case

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be familiar with a case of a fatal dog attack with typical skin and bone bitemarks and the injury mechanism that occurs in such cases.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by providing an example of a lethal dog attack, which happened to an elderly person at home, with examples of the risk factors of a fatal dog attack, a previous domestic predation, and the past medical history of the victim. Furthermore, this presentation explains the legal process that occurs in France in similar cases.

Domestic animals can cause severe injuries to bone and skin during an attack. Domestic attacks are relatively common, but few of them are lethal. Presented is the case of a 91-year-old woman with Alzheimer's disease who was found dead at her home by her daughter. The decedent's body was found near her wheelchair in a supine position on the floor in a pool of blood. The woman lived alone with two domestic dogs, a Labrador Retriever and a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Shortly after the discovery of the decedent, police investigations discovered blood stains on the jawbone of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Food supplies were present in the home. The Staffordshire Bull Terrier had previously attacked the decedent two years prior, inflicting a right ear laceration and a right ocular wound. External examination, autopsy, and radiographies detected multiple skin and bone lacerations of the scalp, face, left arm, and limbs. There were complex bone fractures on the left humeral and right face. Body cavities were intact and the airway was free of blood, but exsanguination and discrete general atheroma were found. No scavenging marks were observed. The punctures and tearing of each skin wound were compatible with bitemarks. Histological analysis showed that skin wounds and bone fractures were vital lesions. Similar distances were found between the Staffordshire Bull Terrier teeth and the punctures and tooth marks of the major bitemarks. Death was attributed to an external hemorrhage due to several dog bites to the face and limbs.

Domestic animal attacks can cause slight to severe injuries, but death is rare. Epidemiological studies regarding domestic dog predation indicate that children and elderly women are most often targeted. Dog attacks are generally directed toward limbs in order to immobilize, and the incapacitation is due to neck or head injuries with unique or associated asphyxiation, exsanguination, or skull trauma. The victim was unable to move due to advanced neurological disease and could not protect herself during the attack or contact someone afterward. The cause for the dog's behavior was questioned. In the present case, food was readily available and the injuries occurred when the victim was alive. These conditions do not support the "hunger hypothesis" proposed in previous studies. A "reviving hypothesis" proposes that the dog's licks and bites are performed to stimulate the dog's unconscious owner. This is not the main hypothesis in the current case because the victim was alive during injury, and there were multiple injuries with spaced distribution of the lacerations; however, this hypothesis cannot be ruled out. A "domestic predation" hypothesis is preferred in the present case due to this dog's previous history of attack and because a "dangerous breed" such as Rottweiler or Staffordshire Bull Terrier is often involved in domestic attacks compared to other dog breeds. In France, dangerous dogs have to be reported to the authorities and the owners have to be certified to possess these dog breeds. In the case of a mild attack, the dog has to be monitored by a veterinarian for rabies. In the case of a vicious attack with severe injuries, the authorities can euthanize the dog. Despite a previous attack on the same person two years before the fatal attack, the dog was not evicted from the home.

This presentation highlights the case of an indoor domestic dog predation on a vulnerable elderly woman. The cohabitation of a potentially dangerous animal and a weakened person may have dramatic consequences, especially when the dog has a previous history of aggression to the victim.

Animal, Bite, Forensic