



## E71 Characteristic Injuries of Organized Dogfighting

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**Learning Overview:** After attending this presentation, attendees will be able to identify dog breeds commonly utilized for animal fighting, recognize the pattern of injuries associated with organized dogfighting, and how to appropriately document dogs suspected of being exploited in the commission of this crime.

**Impact on the Forensic Science Community:** This presentation will impact the forensic science community by increasing the recognition of this clandestine crime. Animal fighting, such as organized dogfighting, represents intentional, severe abuse of animals. Animal fighting is illegal in all 50 states and the federal Animal Welfare Act prohibits animal fighting ventures. Still, this organized abuse of animals is rampant throughout the United States. Organized crimes, such as racketeering, illegal gambling, illicit drugs, and firearms offenses, are frequently associated with animal fighting. Therefore, it is critical that law enforcement possess a basic understanding regarding the animals involved, the pattern of injuries associated with organized animal fighting, and how to appropriately document these animals.

Often, veterinarians are requested by law enforcement to examine animals alleged to have been utilized in organized animal fighting. In such cases, the veterinarian must be able to identify, collect, and properly preserve evidence found on the animal(s). Though veterinarians are typically unfamiliar with the pattern of injuries associated with this crime and how to properly handle evidence, this presentation will further serve to assist veterinarians in recognizing, responding to, and assisting law enforcement in the investigation of animal fighting, while highlighting the most current research and techniques.

In the United States, higher-level (professional and hobbyist) fighting dogs are almost exclusively American Pit Bull Terriers. Research by Intarapanich et al. compared the distribution and extent (number of body zones affected) of injuries observed in Pit Bull-type dogs seized in conjunction with organized dogfighting to dogs of various breeds of the same sex and similar weight involved in spontaneous dogfights.<sup>1</sup> The five most commonly injured areas associated with organized dogfighting, in decreasing order of frequency, were the front legs, dorsal and lateral aspects of the head, muzzle and oral mucosa, dorsal and lateral neck, and ventral neck and chest. The most commonly injured areas associated with the spontaneous dog fights, in decreasing order of frequency, were the pinna followed by the dorsal and lateral neck as well as the front legs. Looking closely at the percentage of dogs in each group that sustained injury, a clear difference was appreciated, as dogs engaged in organized dogfighting were much more likely to present with multiple injuries in these areas, as opposed to those engaged in spontaneous dog fights, where there were only single or limited injuries. Therefore, when prevalence was considered along with the most commonly injured areas, there was a distinct difference in the pattern of injury between spontaneous and organized dogfighting.<sup>1</sup>

The distribution of organized dogfighting injuries were further validated by Miller et al., who found that scarring and wounds associated with organized dogfighting were primarily concentrated on the front legs, dorsal and lateral head, and muzzle and oral mucosa.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, it was found that dogs with ten or more injuries to the front legs, dorsal and lateral head, and the muzzle and oral mucosa to be a reasonable threshold for high risk of dog aggression, especially in male dogs.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, when documenting medical findings it is of the utmost importance that all wounds, scars, and lack thereof be thoroughly documented and photographed. A “scar chart” or wound-and-scar body diagram should be completed to demonstrate the distribution of scars and/or wounds. However, typically not all dogs in a dogfighting yard will have wounds and/or scars present. Some dogs may simply be too young to have yet been fought, while others may be utilized primarily for breeding purposes or may be maintained to act as a guard dogs or may serve as pets.

### Reference(s):

1. Intarapanich N.P., Touroo R.M., Rozanski E.A., et al. Characterization and comparison of injuries caused by spontaneous versus organized dogfighting. *J Am Vet Med. Assoc* 2017;251:1424-1431.
2. Miller K.A., Touroo R., Spain C.V., et al. Relationship between scarring and dog aggression in pit bull-type dogs involved in organized dogfighting. *Animals*. 2016;6.

### Dogfighting, Animal Abuse, Veterinary Forensics