

# FINAL REPORT ON DOG BITE-RELATED FATALITIES

2015

## **DOG BITE-RELATED FATALITIES ARE EXCEEDINGLY RARE.**

The interactions between dogs and humans are so numerous and complex that no one factor can be considered, in isolation from any other factors, to be the sole cause.

There were 37 verified dog bite-related fatalities (DBRFs) in the US in 2015.<sup>1</sup> They occurred within a human population of 320 million and a canine population estimated at between 70 and 83 million.

National Canine Research Council continues to thoroughly investigate DBRFs using the same methodology described in the comprehensive, ten-year study published December 2013 in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.<sup>2</sup>

## **INVESTIGATIONS TAKE TIME TO CAPTURE ACCURATE INFORMATION.**

### Number of fatalities:

In January 2016, National Canine Research Council was actively investigating 39 potential DBRFs for 2015. It has subsequently been determined that there were 37 DBRFs for 2015. National Canine Research Council investigations have found that one of the deaths initially believed to be a DBRF based on media reports was ruled by the Medical Examiner to not have dog bites as either the immediate cause of death, or as a contributory factor.<sup>3</sup>

Another death was excluded as it did not meet National Canine Research Council classification as a DBRF (i.e., fatal infection resulting from a non-lethal bite).

### Breed Identification:

In only 10.8% (n=4) of the cases of DBRFs was there any evidence that the dogs involved were purebred and/or had a known pedigree/genetics. In all the other cases, the dogs were either of unknown origins and/or genetics (n=31), or were never located or identified by authorities (n=2).

### Criminal Charges:

Criminal charges against a parent or dog owner were filed in 18.9% (n=7) of the 37 cases of DBRFs in 2015.

## **MULTIPLE FACTORS CONTINUE TO CO-OCCUR THAT ARE WITHIN THE CONTROL OF OWNERS.**

The December 2013 study is the most comprehensive multifactorial study of DBRFs to be completed since the subject was first studied in the 1970's. Covering all incidents that occurred during the ten-year period 2000 - 2009, it is based on investigative techniques and data developed by National Canine Research Council not previously employed in dog bite or DBRF studies.

The study reliably identified seven factors potentially within the control of dog owners and caretakers that co-occurred, in various combinations, in the overwhelming majority of DBRFs the authors examined:

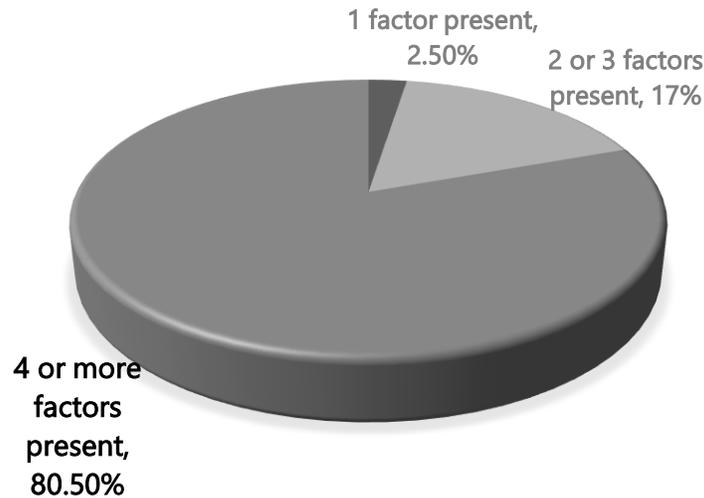
<b>Factor</b>	<b>Cases from 2000-2009 with this factor present</b>
No able-bodied person being present to intervene.	87.1%
The victim having no familiar relationship with the dog(s).	85.2%
The owner failing to neuter/spay the dog(s).	84.4%
A victim's compromised ability, whether based on age or physical condition, to manage their interactions with the dog(s).	77.4%
The owner keeping dog(s) as resident, rather than as a family pet.	76.2%
The owner's prior mismanagement of the dog(s).	37.5%
The owner's abuse or neglect of the dog(s).	21.1%

The study, as had DBRF studies published previously, found no evidence that one kind of dog is more likely to injure a human being than another kind of dog.

### **THESE FACTORS CO-OCCUR: THERE IS NO SINGLE FACTOR.**

Four or more of the factors identified co-occurred in 80.5% of the incidents during the ten-year period studied. Only very rarely (in 2.5% of the cases) was there only one factor identified. Serious and fatal dog bite incidents are complex, multifactorial events.

## NUMBER OF CO-OCCURRING FACTORS PRESENT BY PERCENTAGE OF CASES FROM 2000-2009



### **THE CONCLUSION OF EXPERTS: SERIOUS AND FATAL DOG BITE-RELATED INJURIES ARE MULTIFACTORIAL.**

Annual reports and detailed case histories considered in isolation will not enhance awareness of what the experts have agreed on. Minor annual fluctuations in co-occurrence of owner factors, or dramatic, one-of-a-kind case histories may, in fact, obscure rather than enlighten. No single factor has been shown, in isolation from other factors, to be the sole cause of a dog bite-related injury or fatality. Professionals studying dog bite-related injuries, even when venturing speculations regarding breed, have been remarkably consistent in their recommendation of pet ownership and child safety practices directly relevant to prevention, and against regulating dogs on the basis of breed or appearance.<sup>4</sup>

**Updated December 31, 2016.**

#### SOURCES and NOTES:

1. See "National Canine Research Council Protocol: Definition of a DBRF":  
<http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/injurious-dog-bites/dog-bite-related-fatalities>

2. Patronek, G.J., Sacks, J.J., Delise, K.M., Cleary, D.V., & Marder, A.R. (2013). Co-occurrence of potentially preventable factors in 256 dog bite-related fatalities in the United States (2000-2009). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 243(12), 1726-1736.
3. Case erroneously reported by the media to be a DBRF:  
Jason White Hip, 39 yrs. old, Gallup, New Mexico  
On January 5, 2015, the media reported that a man found dead in Gallup “appears to have been killed by dogs, or that he might have died of exposure after an altercation with a pack of dogs.” The Medical Examiner later ruled the cause of death to be “hypothermia and acute ethanol intoxication.”
4. American Veterinary Medical Association. (2016). *Dog Bite Prevention*. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.avma.org/public/pages/Dog-Bite-Prevention.aspx>