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The aetiology of dog bites in New Zealand

A thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis looks at factors associated with dog bites to people in New Zealand. It focuses on the causes of dog bites, the characteristics of both the dogs involved in bite incidents and the people bitten, and opinions on issues related to dog control.

This information was collected through two separate surveys. The first was a survey of veterinary and veterinary nursing students at Massey University. Students were included in this sample regardless of whether or not they had been bitten by a dog or how minor their injuries were. This study provided an insight into how many people had been bitten by a dog as well as factors associated with an increased risk of being bitten. Males, people in rural areas and people with a longer history of living with dogs were more likely to have been bitten by a dog. Many respondents had been bitten while between the ages of 5 and 10 years.

For the second study, surveys were sent to people who had made claims to the Accident Compensation Corporation because of dog bites. People in this sample had sustained injuries that required medical attention. More people were bitten by male dogs than female dogs. Protection of territory, accidental bites, fear, and pain were considered to be the most common reasons for dogs to bite. The victim's home was the most common location for attacks, although many bites took place in public areas. Almost half of all respondents said it was either very or somewhat likely that their bite would have been prevented by a law requiring dog owners to fence their houses so visitors can access a door without coming into contact with a dog.

This research highlights the need for more data on the causes and circumstances of dog attacks. This information is extremely useful for formulating effective dog control legislation and making recommendations aimed at reducing the incidence of dog attacks.

Thesis format and Authorship

Each chapter is written as a stand-alone paper. Consequently, there will be some repetition of material and the references are at the end of each chapter.

I am the principal author of each chapter/paper. I carried out the research and analysed and wrote up the results for each chapter. Ed Minot and Kevin Stafford both provided editorial advice and Ed also provided statistical advice. Paul Perry assisted in survey design and provided editorial advice.

Approval for this research was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

Chapter 1 Introduction

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Chapter One will be submitted to an as-yet undecided journal.

Chapter 2 Dog bites in New Zealand: A survey of veterinary students

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Chapter Two will be submitted to the New Zealand Veterinary Journal.

Chapter 3 A survey of dog bite victims in New Zealand

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Chapter Three will be submitted to the New Zealand Medical Journal.

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Paul Perry also acted as an unofficial supervisor. Paul's expertise in the fine art of survey design was invaluable and, having a background in sociology, he was able to look at the results from a slightly different angle.

This research would not have been possible without the cooperation of the ACC and, in particular, Peter Larking in the ACC research department. The ACC were responsible for drawing the sample from their records and were kind enough to organise and pay for the mail-out of the surveys.

Thanks to Suzanne Young and Kiryn Weaver who helped take some of the pain out of entering data from hundreds of surveys. To the students in the Community Lab who answered calls from some of the participants trying to get hold of me, thank you. I know some of the calls were interesting, to say the least!

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