

Incidents of Dog Attacks on Humans in Urban Areas of India

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Abstract: *The frequency of dog attacks is on the rise especially in urban areas. A number of cases have been reported from cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh and Mumbai. The dogs involved were found to be normal and non-rabid. This drastic increase in the incidents can be due to inability of dogs to procure food as most of the waste material including food is being disposed off in garbage bags which are being taken outside the city and dumped in big dumping sites.*

Keywords: Dog Attack, Urbanization, Waste Disposal, Food Scarcity, Stray Dogs

1. Introduction

The frequency of dog attacks is on the rise especially in urban areas. A number of cases have been reported from cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Chandigarh and Mumbai. The recent news of dog attacks on humans in urban areas has come as a surprise for many as dogs are considered to be man's best friend. Thus it is very intriguing as to the reasons behind such attacks. Recent reports show an alarming increase in the number of cases of dog attacks.^(1, 2, 3) For instance in the year 2012 alone, the reported cases in India rose to 82247, out of which only 2000 died due to rabies. This information shows that these attacks were carried out by normal, non-rabid dogs raising a few questions about the motives behind such incidents.

2. Discussion

There are many reasons for the increased incidents of dog attacks. The most important notable factor is urbanization. Urbanization is a double edged sword, on one hand it has increased standard of living, employment opportunities, better transport and communication facilities leading to a more convenient, comfortable and sophisticated lifestyle. On the other hand it has led to overcrowding, increase in crime rates, along with negative effects on the environment, e.g., pollution and encroachment onto the natural habitat of animals. Another offshoot of this is increase in the number of stray dogs as well as the increase incidents of their attacks on humans. Some plausible causes for these incidents are being discussed below.

1) Inaccessibility of Food for stray dogs

Food, indispensable for survival of any animal has become increasingly scarce in urban areas. Because of increased awareness of cleanliness, people are not disposing food material into open environment rather they use disposable bags {polythene/plastic etc.} to discard waste household material including food items. Further dumping of these waste food materials in remote areas have made it inaccessible to the dogs, leading to their hunger and starvation.

2) Increase in hunger and dog rage

Intensity of hunger has a direct correlation with emotions like anger. Hungry dogs become more ferocious and more prone to attack humans. Few experimental evidences suggest that hunger increases rage in dogs, which could be the reason for such unprovoked attacks on humans especially children and elderly people.

3) Dogs, food availability and territorial issues

Dog population is on the rise in urban areas due to two factors

- a) Increase in the number of pet adaptation, favorite being the dog
- b) Lack of stray dog population control measures like impounding stray dogs and euthanasia thanks to animal welfare activities⁴

This increase in the number of stray dogs has led to migration of dogs from areas which are cleaner and have a good waste disposal systems to areas of the city with dense, poor quality housing and large amounts of waste which has become a source of food for such stray dogs⁵. These might be the cause leading to territorial issues among dogs, making them more aggressive towards other dogs and humans who might get caught in the crossfire and become a victim.

4) Pets Vs Stray Dogs

Another noticeable fact is that dog attacks are very rare by pet dogs as compared to stray dogs. This adds to our belief that since pet dogs are well fed and taken care off, they rarely attack.

3. Conclusion

Urbanization, food scarcity and encroachment onto canine habitations have resulted in the change in behavior of dogs, making them more aggressive. This has resulted in the increased incidents of dog attacks on humans. Since these attacks are done more by stray dogs than pet dogs it adds to our hypothesis that food scarcity for the dogs is the real cause for such attacks.

This proves the direct link between urbanization and higher rates of dog attacks in urban areas as compared to rural areas.

4. Future Scope

Further study in dog psychology regarding territorial issues and behavioral changes is suggested.

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