**Attacks on guide dogs triple in just five years: One in seven assaults resulted in injuries to working animal's owner**

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* **It is not clear whether the rise reflects higher levels of reporting or a trend**
* **Blind or partially sighted owners are left shaken up and sometimes hurt**
* **1 in 7 attacks resulted in physical injuries, usually to the guide dog’s owner**

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Attacks on guide dogs by other dogs have more than tripled in five years.

Blind or partially sighted owners have been left shaken up and sometimes hurt, a study warns. On average, 11 guide dogs were mauled each month in 2015, up from three a month in 2010.

One in seven attacks resulted in physical injuries, usually to the guide dog’s owner.

They also felt anxious or upset after the attacks, the study by the University of Nottingham found.

The dogs themselves were hurt in 43 per cent of incidents and two in five dogs, their ability to work afterwards was affected.

The researchers used data provided by the charity Guide Dogs, which supports 8,750 dogs in the UK.

They said the attacks cost the charity £650,000, including the cost of dogs having to retire, while they have a ‘long-term’ impact on owners’ wellbeing.

Writing in the Veterinary Record journal, the authors say some incidents could have been avoided if the attacking dog had been put on a lead. Owners of dogs that attack a guide dog face up to three years in prison.

The authors wrote: ‘The guide dog harness is designed to be visible and should have been apparent to the owners of aggressors who were present.

‘It is feasible that a proportion of these attacks could have been avoided if the aggressor was put on a lead when the owner saw the guide dog in harness.’

The veterinary costs were estimated to be £34,514, with puncture wounds from bites the most common.

After the attacks, 40 per cent of the dogs experienced a ‘negative impact’ on their ability to work.

The authors conclude that the impacts for the owners of these guide dogs are likely to be ‘long-term and complex, affecting not only their mobility and physical health, but also their social and emotional well-being.’

Under the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Police Act passed in 2014, a dog attack on a trained assistance dog will be treated as an aggravated offence.

This means prison sentences of up to three years could be handed to the owner of the attacking dog.

The authors say it is not clear whether the rise in dog attacks reflects higher levels of reporting or a real trend.

But they found that more than 54 dogs were attacked more than once during the study - with 46 attacked twice, seven dogs attacked three times and one dog attacked four times.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3475845/Attacks-guide-dogs-triple-just-five-years.html#ixzz4BjydjMGq>   
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