

MITIGATING CANINE THREATS ON CAMPUS

REFLECTION NOTE:

For our course, Introduction to Public Policy, at IIM Sirmaur, we interviewed a veterinarian as part of our group project on the issue of dog bites. This interview was the basis for gaining a deeper understanding of how public health, animal welfare, and governance come together to resolve issues related to society.

The veterinarian explained that dog bites are not random events; they are the result of many years of poor policies creating structural problems for dog bite prevention, such as high numbers of unregulated and unspayed or unvaccinated stray dogs; poor implementation of funding for sterilization and vaccination programs; and inconsistent approaches between local municipalities and veterinarians regarding animal birth control programs (i.e., spaying/neutering).

The other important point raised during this interview was that prevention works best through a concerted effort of regularly scheduled (e.g., every two months) mass sterilization events; ongoing rabies vaccine campaigns (e.g., every four months); and education campaigns to raise public awareness regarding the prevention of dog bites, rather than through a reactive response after the fact. Unfortunately, due to inadequate funding, insufficient manpower, and poor communication and cooperation between municipal governments and veterinary departments, prevention is often not applied across the board consistently.

The veterinarian pointed out that there is a disconnect between the public health system and animal welfare through a public policy lens. Most dog bite incidents occur after the dogs have bitten the person and go to a healthcare provider. There is an additional burden placed on the victims of these bites and the public health system because no action is taken until the person involved arrives at the health facility. There is a lack of proactive policy, based on data and information regarding dog populations, the locations of high-risk areas for bites, and monitoring at the community level. Therefore, there exists a gap between the policy development and implementation process of many public health and veterinary policies.

Through this interview with the veterinarian, we also learned about the vital role of street-level stakeholders in policy-making. In addition to administering government programs from the street level, veterinarians also have a large amount of information and experience at the street level. Thus, veterinarians' experiences provide evidence that well-intentioned and well-designed policy initiatives can be unsuccessful due to operational limitations rather than to a lack of solid conceptual foundations.

The reflections from interviews within the students illustrate the fact that when an environment contains fear and uncertainty being present, even well intentioned human actions can result in causing harm. As evidenced by the student's good intentions to help the dog, his actions exhibit compassion for animals, but also illustrate how animals can react defensively to stressful situations. The traumatic experience was intensified due to the lack of

access to a veterinary facility at night, which demonstrates how there are still many gaps in emergency health services. The comments of the shopkeeper illustrate the shared feeling of the community about the lack of personal power and the apparent need for shared responsibility. The overarching theme of these writings is the need for increased public education on the importance of providing access to health care services, the necessity for easy-to-access medical treatment and the need for the government to proactively implement vaccination and sterilization programs to ensure that humans and street dogs can live together safely.

CONTACTS OF PEOPLE:

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- 2) 2 students of IIM Sirmaur
- 3) Medical shopkeeper outside the campus

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