

# Once Bitten Twice Shy - Bite/Near Bite Job Stress Survey

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## INTRODUCTION



### It can happen in a second – literally. German Shepherd dog bite to experienced DVM

As a presenter in low stress veterinary care, I was often approached by veterinary professionals who were anxious after bite/near bite events in practice. I searched the veterinary literature on job stress rates related to bite injury. I found one study of Minnesota certified technicians ( JAVMA Aug 15 vol 245 #4, 2014) surveying work related injury. Of all work injuries, bites and lacerations were the most common. For this survey, I decided to gather information about the situation, work stress level and what reduced bite risk and related stress.

## AIM

The aim of the survey was to gather data on the situation of the bite risk, veterinary professional experience, level of work related stress, and how the responded resolved that stress. The analysis of the survey data will provide information on how to reduce injury and resulting job stress in veterinary practice.

Every question was open for commenting. The intention for comments was to allow a deeper understanding of injury related stress, bite risk situations and solutions to reduce risk.



### Feline handling bites – hand/arm injuries are common with aggressive felines

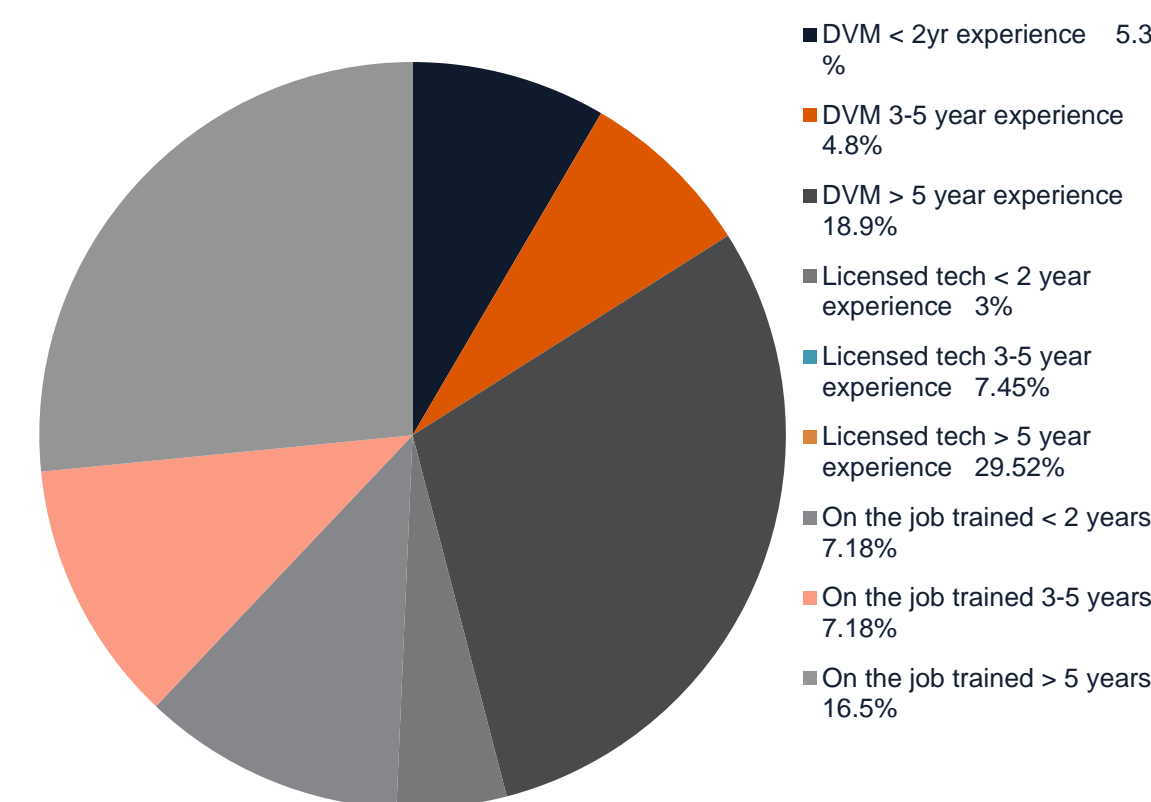
## METHOD

A 10 question survey was offered through Survey Monkey from June 6 to Sept 9 2016. <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LZNKYQ5>

The survey announcements and links were sent out electronically through my personal newsletter list, various veterinary Facebook groups, veterinary associations and personal veterinary networks. Any veterinary professional ( DVM, licensed tech, non licensed tech) who worked in a clinic or shelter providing veterinary care could participate. There were approximately 382 individual anonymous respondents.

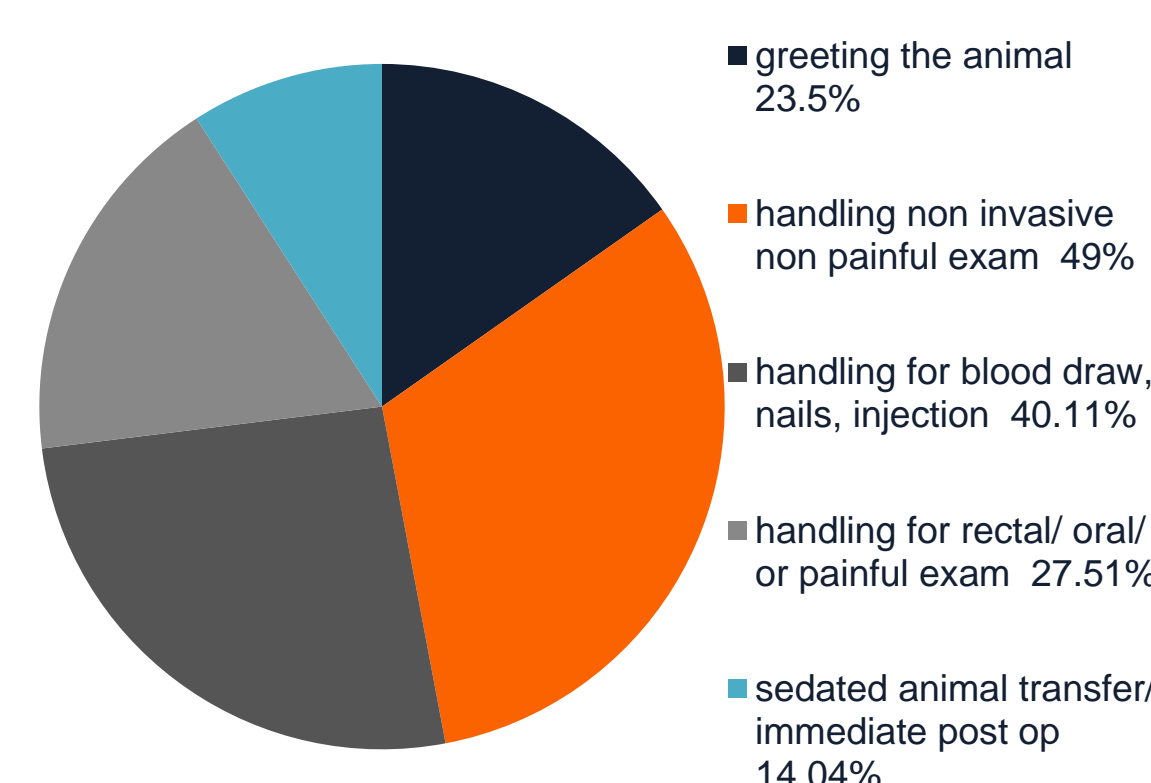
## RESULTS

### What position and length of experience do you have at your clinic?



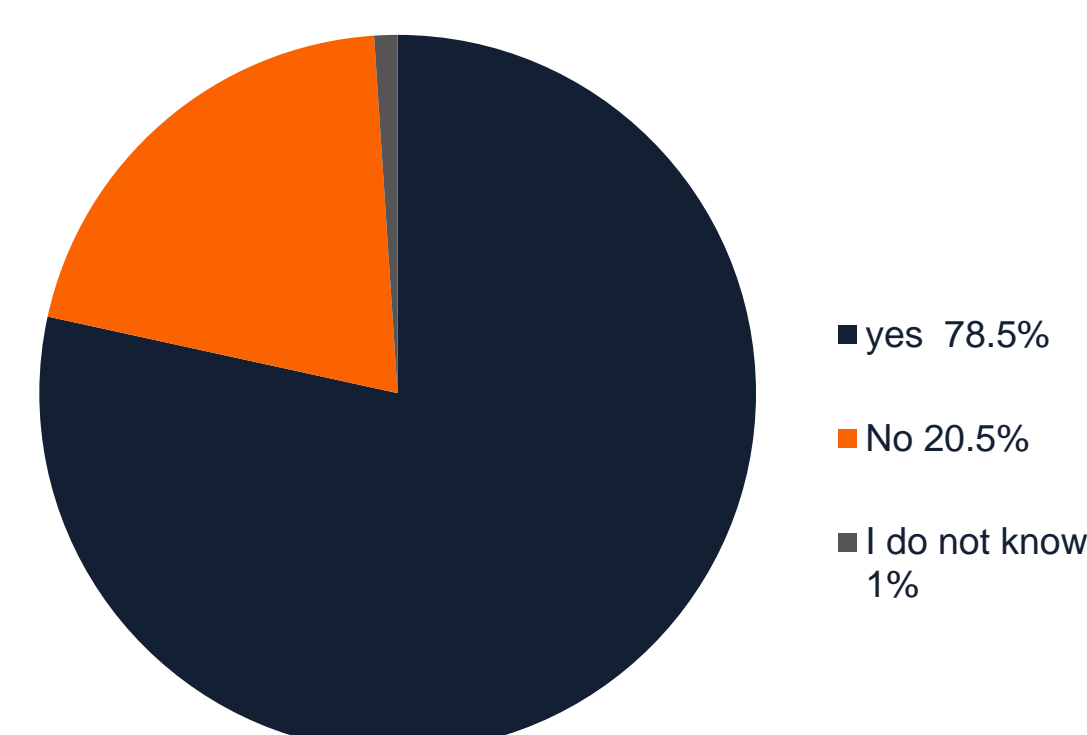
The majority of responders had more than 5 years of professional experience

### What was the situation for the injury?



From comments - some injuries happened when walking in exam room - or after releasing an animal from restraint. There was often no growl just lunge - bite.

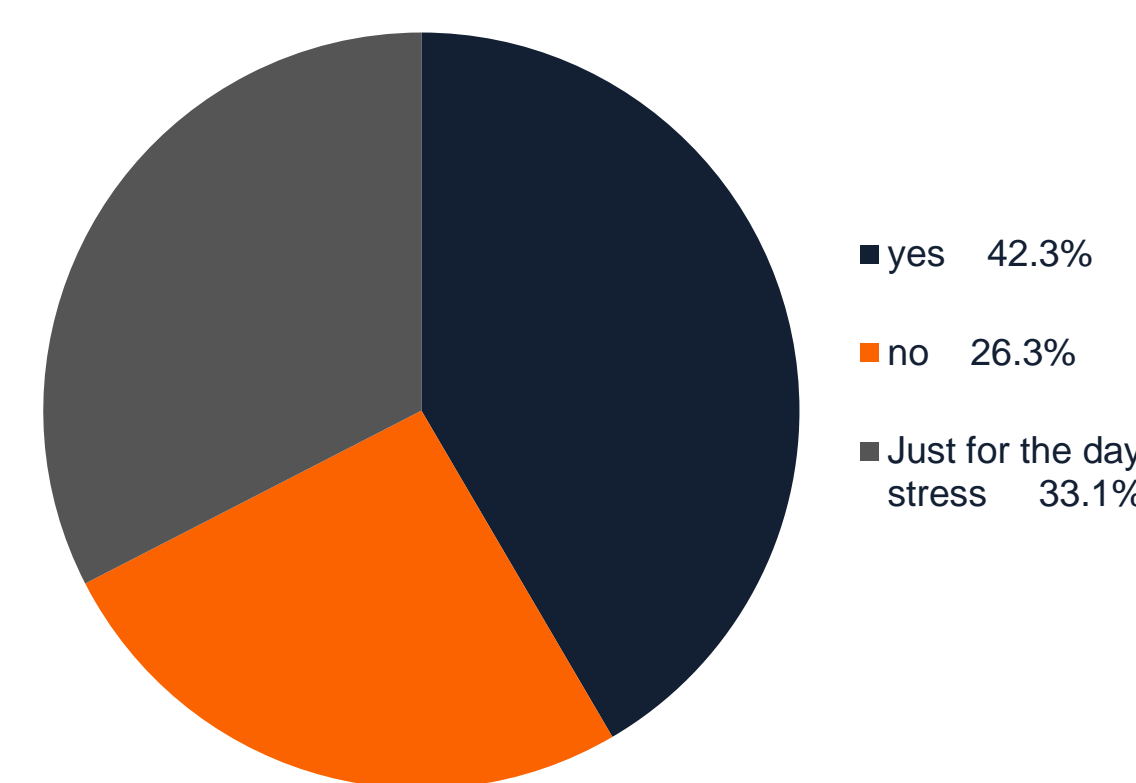
### Have you ever had a bite that came without warning?



In the majority of bite incidents, the signs of escalating anxiety to aggression were present but unrecognized for bite risk. Many responders commented that they later realized the animal was escalating to aggression. It was predictable, but the handler did not understand what the behavior was telling them.

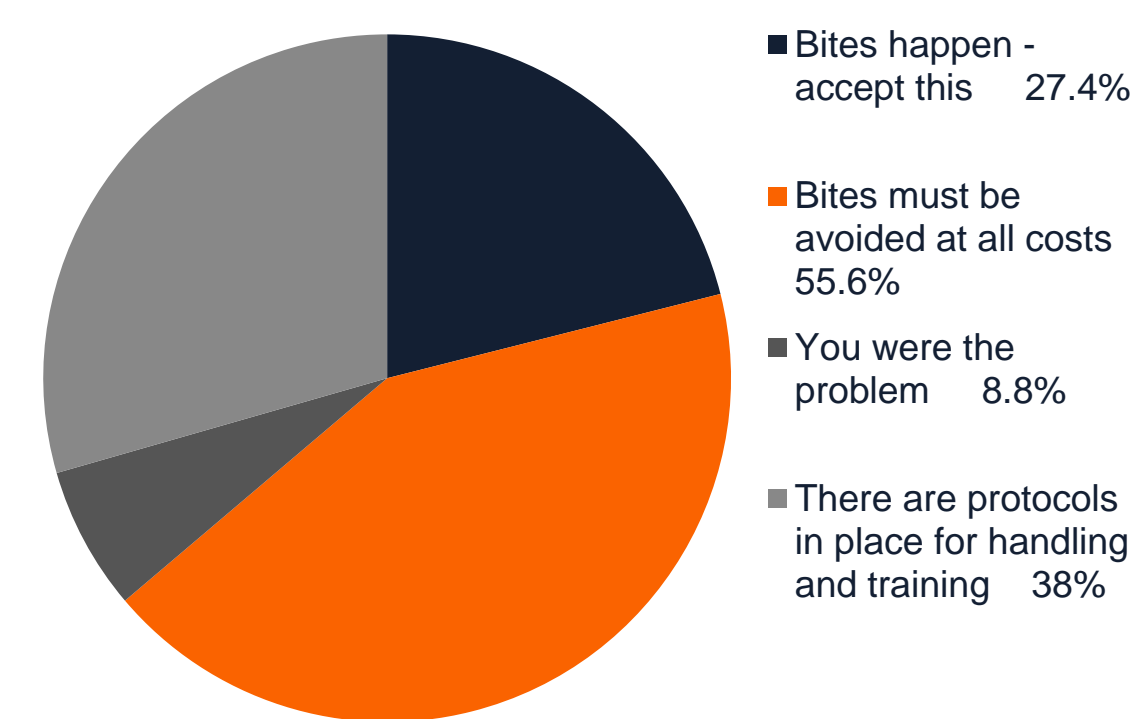
## RESULTS continued

### Did you experience prolonged stress?



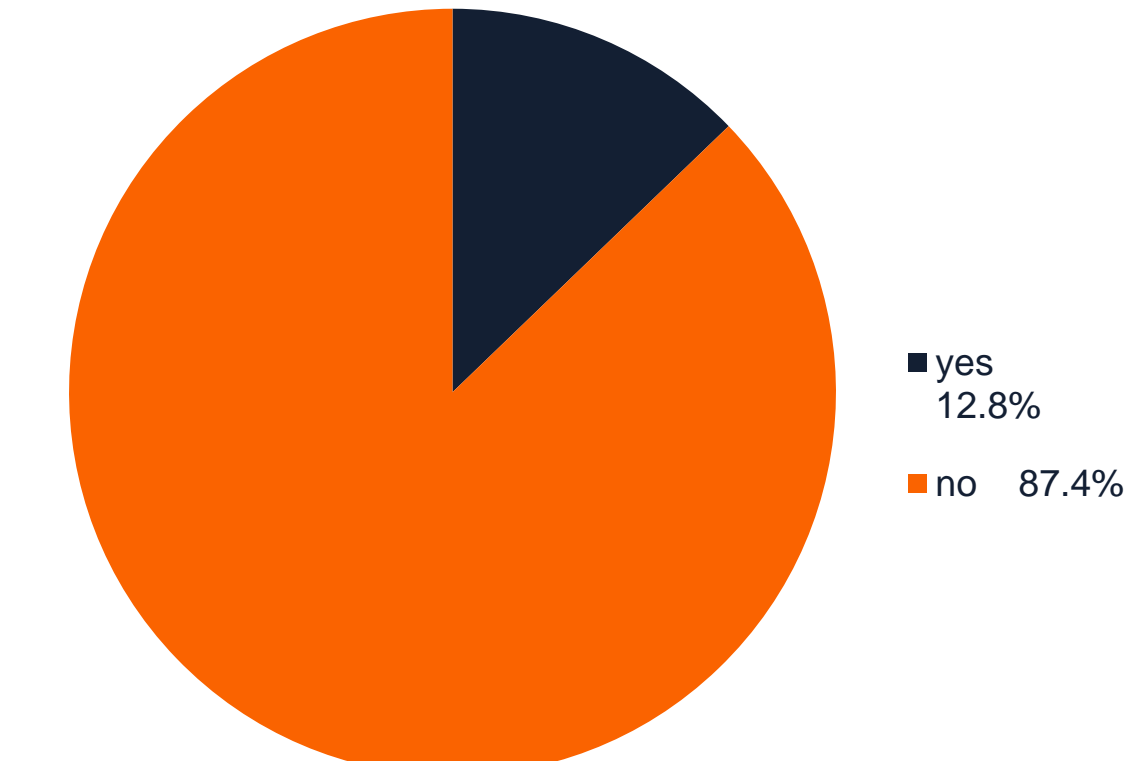
A large percentage of responders indicate prolonged or day long stress. With many practices reporting at least 1 in 10 animals aggressive, bite risk stress is a daily occurrence.

### What is the prevailing attitude toward staff injury?



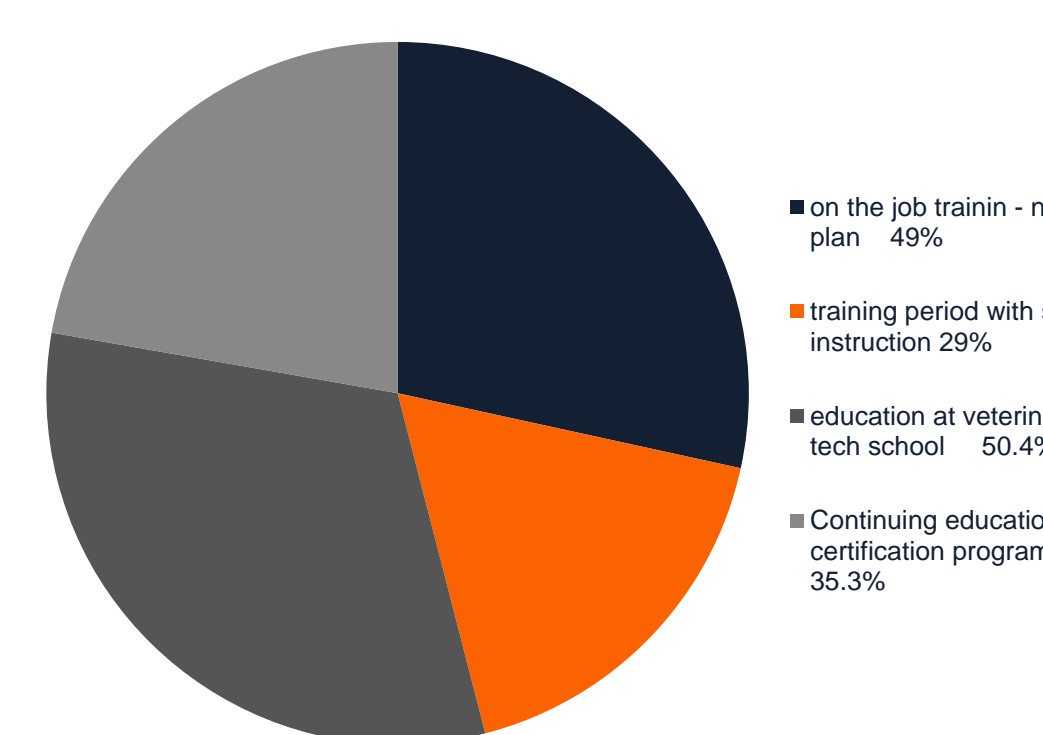
There was variance within a practice about situation review, importance of reducing bite risk, and personal staff responsibility for the injury resulting. Some responders changed practices due to management response to an injury incident.

### have you ever considered leaving your job due to bite risk?



Despite stress, few leave practice. In comments, some indicated they did not feel prepared to change career track in the profession so accepted the daily stress and injury risk. Others who left did due to disabling injury or stress.

### How did you learn restraint and handling techniques?



Many responders indicated they needed to obtain education specific to reading body language of aggression and less stressful handling techniques to reduce bite risk and personal stress. Many indicated their curriculum did not include this education, and it was obtained as additional training to a professional degree.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the survey, there were various scenarios for bite risk, including greeting and non invasive or painful exams. While respondents reported the bite/near bite came without warning, in the majority of incidents the body language of anxiety and aggression was present. Responders acknowledged not recognizing the signs, and commented that continuing a procedure while the animal struggled or growled caused the bite/near bite incident.

The majority of respondents indicate prolonged stress or day long stress due to bite/ near bite injury. Many small animal practices report aggression in 1 in 10 patients. Many practices see over 10 patients per DVM per day, resulting in daily exposure to aggressive patients.

12% of responders indicated considering leaving practice as 1.5% actually do leave. Many commented that they felt ill prepared for an alternate career with a veterinary degree than practice, so stayed despite work related stress.

## TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

Bite risk and resulting job stress is a common occurrence in small animal practice. Additional training in behavior, and less stressful handling techniques coupled with DVM support for anxiety reduction medication reduces this job stress.



Veterinary Technician Alicia Howell RVT teaches cooperative care to a dog who would aggress. Now this dog is safer to examine. Staff skilled in behavior reduce injury risk for themselves and other staff, as well as improve the welfare for the animal in care.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photo contributors - Alicia Howel RVT, VBS behavior Rebecca King, Nicholas Drew DVM