

Bite injuries in the Brazilian jurisprudence: analysis of 1125 lawsuits registered during the last 18 years

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Livia Grazielle Rodrigues¹
Fernanda Silveira Vallim¹
Matheus Felner¹
Ricardo Henrique Alves
da Silva²
Mauro Machado do
Prado³
Rhonan Ferreira Silva⁴

¹ School of Dentistry, Federal
University of Goiás, Brazil

² Forensic Odontology, School of
Dentistry of Ribeirão Preto,
University of São Paulo, Brazil

³ Forensic Odontology, School of
Dentistry, Federal University of
Goiás, Brazil

⁴ Forensic Odontology, School of
Dentistry, Federal University of
Goiás; Forensic Odontology,
Scientific Police, State of Goiás,
Brazil

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Corresponding author:
liviagrazie@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of lawsuits founded on physical violence reached alarming rates worldwide. Bite injuries figure in the jurisprudence as a specific type of aggression that may be assessed by forensic expert witnesses, namely forensic odontologists. From a criminal scope, these injuries may be assessed firstly to quantify bodily impairments (aesthetic and functional); and secondly to indicate how likely suspects are involved in crimes based on the relation of their dental traits with the bitemark patterned injury. Characterizing the jurisprudence involving bite injuries may contribute to highlight the importance of forensic odontologists in Court. The objective of this research is to screen the Brazilian jurisprudence for cases involving bite injuries and extract data that could contribute to further research and practice in the field of bitemarks. The open access jurisprudence was searched with the operators "bite" and "bitemark". Full-text lawsuits founded on indemnification based on physical aggression were selected. All the lawsuits retrieved (n=2488) were analyzed for data extraction. A total of 1125 lawsuits dated between 1997 and 2015 were considered eligible. Medical forensic expertises were requested by the Brazilian Courts in 641 lawsuits. In 3 cases the forensic odontologist performed bitemark analysis to indicate whether or not suspects could be involved in the crime. Lawsuits involving bite injuries increased gradually in the jurisprudence. Forensic odontologists have to be aware and skilled for practical expertises in the field. Training in forensic odontology must be provided and encouraged to enable optimal performances under the needs of justice .