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Case report

Fatal tiger attack: A case report with emphasis on typical tiger injuries characterized by partially resembling stab-like wounds

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ABSTRACT

Fatalities due to attacks by tigers on humans are uncommon and are rarely described in the medico-legal literature. We herein present a forensic investigation in a unique case of a fatal tiger attack in the wild on a 35 year old female in India by an Indian Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*). The attack resulted in two pairs of puncture wounds over the nape area with occult cervical spine injuries resulting from transfixing of spine due to the tiger canines; multiple puncture wounds, numerous scratches and abrasions consistent with the tiger claw injuries and injury to the right jugulocarotid vessels. This case outlines the characteristic injury pattern from such an attack along with the multiple sources of the tiger injuries. The analysis of these injuries might reveal the motivation behind the attack and the big cat species involved in the attack. A tiger injury is sometimes compared with a stab injury, as the patterned injuries due to a tiger bite are characterized by multiple penetrating, stab-like wounds. So, a special attention is paid toward establishment of the cause of death from bites by the animal teeth under unknown circumstances of trauma and to exclude the possibility of a homicide beyond reasonable doubt in such cases.

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1. Introduction

Fatal injuries to humans caused by attacks from felines are uncommon in the world [1]. Furthermore, from a global perspective attacks on humans by large felines are extremely rare in Europe [2] and in the United States [3] as compared to feline attacks in Asian countries. Amongst the very few reported cases of fatal and near-fatal injuries to humans from felines, most have occurred in captive conditions such as in zoos, animal farms, circuses and on the private breeder's ground [1–13]. In contrast to this, reported cases of attacks on humans by felines occurring in the wild are extremely rare [14].

This paper describes a unique case of a fatal tiger attack in the wild. In the present case, a female was fatally mauled by a tiger in the wild. At present, the medico-legal literature talks about only two fatal cases of tiger attacks, which have occurred in zoos [5,6]. To the best of our knowledge, probably this case would be the first reported human fatality due to a tiger attack from India. The

purpose of the present article is to highlight the characteristic injuries inflicted by a tiger on the human body in a fatal tiger attack; and to give an insight into the method of attack on humans by the tiger and the scientific information on the injury pattern by tiger.

2. Case report

2.1. Case history

The victim, a 35 year old female was killed by a tiger in compartment no. 458 of Mandhal round, under Kuhi forest range in Nagpur division, India. The victim had gone with her husband and others to collect tendu leaves from the forest early in the morning. According to the eyewitness accounts, the victim was collecting tendu leaves while her husband had climbed the tree to pluck leaves. After a while, the husband and the others heard the victim screaming 'tiger, tiger'. By the time her husband and the others rushed to the victim's help, the tiger had already mauled her fatally. The husband with the help of others hurled stones toward the tiger that made the tiger disappear in the forest, leaving the victim's body at the site of attack. The badly mauled body of the victim was brought to Government Medical College and Hospital,

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Nagpur. Later, post-mortem was performed and the body was handed over to the relatives.

2.2. Autopsy findings

An external body examination showed the following wounds: in the nape area, four deep puncture wounds were found in two pairs, with two wounds situated sideways, parallel to each other (Fig. 1). The first pair consisted of two deep puncture wounds on the right side of the nape of neck (Fig. 1 – injuries nos. 1 and 2 due to left and right upper canine respectively), one above the other, at a distance of approximately 7 cm. The maximum diameter of the wounds was up to 3.5 cm, and the depth was up to 3 cm in the soft tissues of the nape. Similarly, the second pair consisted of two deep puncture wounds on the left side of the nape of neck (Fig. 1 – injuries nos. 3 and 4 due to left and right lower canine respectively), one above the other, at a distance of approximately 5.5 cm. The maximum diameter of the wounds was up to 2 cm and the depth was up to 3 cm in the soft tissues of the nape. The wounds in one plane were approximately 7.5 cm away from the second parallel plane. All the four puncture wounds caused by the canines of the tiger showed abraded margins and tearing of the subjacent muscle mass.

Apart from these characteristic paired puncture wounds caused by the canines over the nape area, there were injuries caused by the tiger's claws on the body. Similar to the abraded puncture wounds due to the canines, the puncture wounds due to the claws were also abraded. The injuries due to the tiger's claws were present over the body on the following areas: On the right supra-clavicular area, there was a puncture wound with a maximum diameter of 4 cm (Fig. 2a). There were multiple characteristic claw marks over the skin overlying the medial end of the right clavicle and the lower one-third part of the right sternocleidomastoid (Fig. 2a). On the left infra-clavicular region and the anterior face of the left shoulder, there were puncture wounds with a maximum diameter of 2 cm and 0.5 cm respectively (Fig. 2b). On the right lateral cervical region there was a puncture wound with a maximum diameter of 3 cm, opposite the anterior edge of the right sternocleidomastoid

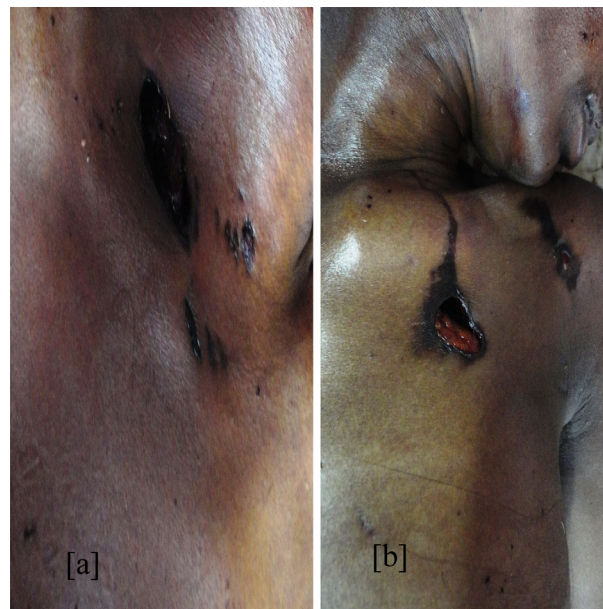


Fig. 2. Puncture wounds and claw marks from the tiger claws on right supra-clavicular region (a); and left infra-clavicular and shoulder region (b) – indicating a strong compression into the ground at the time of restrain.

muscle at the junction of the upper and middle thirds and perpendicular to the jugulocarotid vessels. On the posterior face of the thorax between the scapulae, there were three puncture wounds with maximum diameter varying from 1 cm to 0.4 cm (Fig. 3a). On the front part of the left arm there was a characteristic claw mark of the tiger (Fig. 3b). In addition to the above mentioned injuries, the victim's body showed many scratches, abrasions, puncture wounds and lacerations due to the tiger's claws located mainly over the arms, cervical region and the torso.

The internal examination of the victim's body showed a fracture of the right clavicle and fracture-dislocation of the left

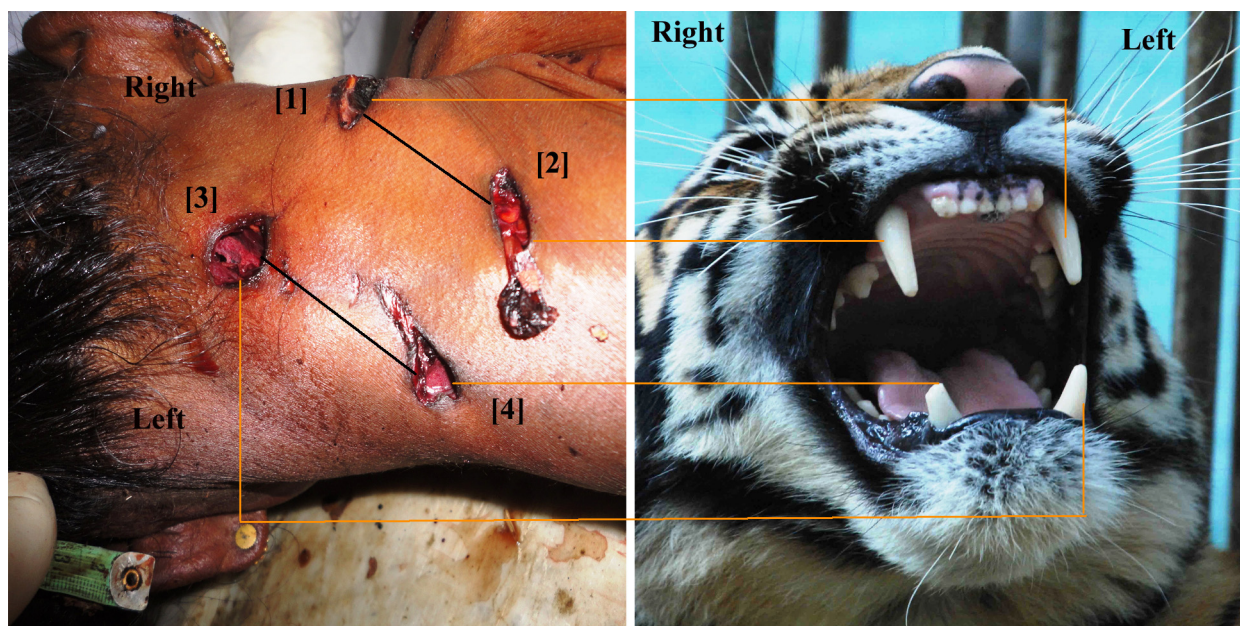


Fig. 1. The nape of neck with four deep puncture wounds linked with the corresponding tiger canines to give the readers a clear idea as how the tiger had gripped the victim at the moment of attack. The puncture wounds in first pair on right side of the nape i.e. injuries nos. 1 and 2 are due to left and right upper canine respectively. The puncture wounds in second pair on left side of the nape i.e. injuries nos. 3 and 4 are due to left and right lower canine respectively.

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