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Animal Cruelty and Human Violence

A documented connection

The Humane Society of the United States

Is there a connection between animal abuse and criminal violence?

A number of studies have drawn links between the abuse of animals and violence against people. A 2001-2004 study by the Chicago Police Department "revealed a startling propensity for offenders charged with crimes against animals to commit other violent offenses toward human victims." Of those arrested for animal crimes, 65% had been arrested for battery against another person.^[i]

Of 36 convicted multiple murderers questioned in one study, 46% admitted committing acts of animal torture as adolescents.^[ii] And of seven school shootings that took place across the country between 1997 and 2001, all involved boys who had previously committed acts of animal cruelty.

How does animal abuse relate to domestic abuse?

Pet abuse is one of four predictors of domestic partner violence, according to a six-year "gold standard" study conducted in 11 metropolitan cities.^[iii] In both domestic violence and child-abuse situations, abusers may manipulate and control their human victims through threatened or actual violence against family pets.

Researchers have found that between 71% and 83% of women entering domestic violence shelters reported that their partners also abused or killed the family pet. And another study found that in families under supervision for physical abuse of their children, pet abuse was concurrent in 88% of the families.^[iv]

Can animal neglect indicate abuse toward people?

Animal abuse in the form of neglect is often one of the first indicators of distress in the household. Whether owing to lack of empathy, mental illness, or substance abuse, a person who fails to provide minimal care for the family pet is more likely to neglect the basic needs of other dependents in the household. In many cases, children found living among the squalor of neglected pets are taken into foster care.

Animal hoarding is an extreme example of how life-threatening neglect affects both people and animals. By the time an animal hoarding situation is discovered, the unsanitary conditions and lack of care may have killed a large number of the animals and compromised the health of dependent children or elders in the household.

Is animal abuse in children normal?

No. Children who abuse animals are sending out clear warning signs that they pose a risk to themselves as well as to others. The National School Safety Council, the U.S. Department of Education, the American Psychological Association, and the National Crime Prevention Council agree that animal cruelty is a warning sign for at-risk youth.^[v]

Longitudinal studies show that chronic physical aggression (e.g., animal cruelty) by elementary school boys increases the likelihood they will commit continued physical violence as well as other nonviolent forms of delinquency during adolescence.^[vi]

A child who abuses animals may also be acting out against violence in his own home.^[vii] Professional intervention can remove a child from a potentially abusive situation and divert him or her from future abusive behavior.

Experts agree that early prevention and treatment of animal cruelty is the key to stopping the cycle of violence, because as aggressive children get older, they are less responsive to therapeutic intervention^[viii].

How can stopping animal abuse affect other issues?

Reporting, investigating, and prosecuting animal cruelty can help take dangerous criminals off the streets. Police know that in homes where animal abuse is a problem, other issues are often concurrent. Acts of animal cruelty are linked to a variety of other crimes, including violence against people, property crimes, and drug or disorderly conduct offenses. ^[ix]

Stopping animal abuse in children can help curb violent tendencies before they escalate to include violence against people.

Are there any laws or policies addressing the connection between animal abuse and other violence?

Several states have cross-reporting laws, which require social workers, veterinarians, or doctors who encounter suspected child abuse to report it. In San Diego, Calif., social workers must report suspected cases of animal abuse to animal control officials. ^[x]

At least 13 states have laws allowing courts to include pets in temporary restraining orders (TROs) in domestic violence situations. ^[xi]

At least 28 states have counseling provisions in their animal cruelty laws. Four of these states require psychological counseling for anyone convicted of animal cruelty, and six mandate counseling for juveniles convicted of animal cruelty. ^[xii]

What can I do to help?

You can help stop the cycle of violence by recognizing that animal abuse is an indicator of serious problems. Reporting animal abuse can help authorities stop other types of violence, and vice versa. Encouraging local law enforcement and prosecutors to take crimes against animals seriously is the key to creating safer communities.

Animal cruelty in children should not be taken lightly. Children who abuse animals should receive immediate professional psychological intervention for both their own welfare and that of the community.

^[i] Degenhardt, B. 2005. *Statistical Summary of Offenders Charged with Crimes against Companion Animals July 2001-July 2005*. Report from the Chicago Police Department.

^[ii] Cohen, W. (1996). *Congressional Register*, 142(141), Oct. 3.

^[iii] Walton-Moss, B. J., Manganello, J., Frye, V., & Campbell, J. C. (2005). "Risk factors for intimate partner violence and associated injury among urban women." *Journal of Community Health*, 30(5), 377–389.

^[iv] DeViney, E., Dickert, J., & Lockwood, R. (1983). "The care of pets within child abusing families." *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*, 4, 3321–3329.

^[v] Randour, M. L. (2004). "Including animal cruelty as a factor in assessing risk and designing interventions." Conference Proceedings, Persistently Safe Schools, The National Conference of the Hamilton Fish Institute on School and Community Violence, Washington, D.C.

^[vi] Broidy, L. M., Nagin, D. S., Tremblay, R. E., Bates, J. E., Brame, B., Dodge, K., Fergusson, D., Horwood, J., Loeber, R., Laird, R., Lynam, D., Moffitt, T., Petitt, G. S., & Vitario, F. (2003). "Developmental trajectories of

childhood disruptive behaviors and adolescent delinquency: A six site cross national replication." *Development and Psychopathology*, 39(2), 222–245.

[vii] Randour, M. L., & Davidson, H. (2008). *A Common Bond: Maltreated Children and Animals in the Home: Guidelines for Practice and Policy*. The Humane Society of the United States: Washington, D.C.

[viii] Kazdin, A. E. (1995). *Conduct Disorder in Childhood and Adolescence* (2nd ed.). Sage: Thousand Oaks, Calif. and Loeber, R. (1990). "Development and risk factors in juvenile anti-social behavior and delinquency." *Clinical Psychology Review*, 10, 1–42.

[ix] Arluke, A., & Lockwood, R. (Eds.). (1997). *Society & Animals, Special Theme Issue: Animal Cruelty*, 5(3). Society & Animals Forum (formerly Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals): Washington Grove, Md. 301-963-4751.

[x] The Humane Society of the United States. (2008). *First Strike: The Violence Connection*.

[xi] Ramsey, S., Randour, M.L., & Gupta, M. (2010). "Protecting Domestic Violence Victims by Protecting Their Pets." *Juvenile and Family Justice Today* 19(2), 16-20.

[xii] The Humane Society of the United States, 2008.