

Facts About **The Link**[®] Between Violence to People and Violence to Animals

What Does the Research Show?

Philosophers and educators have been describing the connections between animal abuse and interpersonal violence since the 14th century. In recent years, a growing body of scientific research has confirmed this conventional wisdom. The research is prompting changes in public policy and organizational programming, and is opening new vistas in collaborative approaches to curtailing family violence in its many forms.

The Link and Violent Crimes

Law enforcement agencies and courts worldwide are recognizing that people who commit acts of serious animal abuse frequently have previous histories of, or future tendencies toward, violent crimes against humans.

Children's acts of animal abuse are some of the strongest and earliest diagnostic indicators of conduct disorder, often beginning as young as age six and a half (Ascione, 2001).

The FBI identifies animal cruelty as one of several juvenile behaviors associated with increasingly violent behavior. The FBI uses reports of animal cruelty in analyzing the threat potential of suspected and known criminals (Lockwood & Church, 1996).

In a Massachusetts study, 70% of animal abusers had criminal records including crimes involving violence, property, drugs, or disorderly behavior (Arluke & Luke, 1997).

Half of school shooters have histories of animal cruelty (Verlinden, Herson, & Thomas, 2000).

Of search warrants executed for animal abuse or dogfighting investigations, 35% resulted in seizure of either narcotics or guns. Of 22 offenders arrested for animal abuse violations, 18 had prior arrests for battery, weapons, or drug charges and 5 had subsequent arrests for felony offenses (Chicago Crime Commission, 2004).

Thirty-one percent of inner-city teens in Chicago have attended a dogfight (Cleveland, 2006).

Adults who keep vicious dogs are more likely to have been arrested for violent crimes and drug- and property-related offenses (Barnes, Boat, Putnam, Dates, & Mahlman, 2006).

A Canadian police review of crime records found that 70% of people charged with cruelty to animals also had other reported incidents of violent behavior, including homicide (Boat & Knight, 2000).

In an Australian study, 61.5% of convicted animal abuse offenders had also committed an assault, 17% had committed sexual abuse, and 8% had arson convictions. Animal abuse was a better predictor of sexual assault than were previous convictions for homicide, arson, or firearms offenses. Animal cruelty offenders committed an average of four different types of criminal offenses. All sexual homicide offenders reported having been cruel to animals. Sexual assault, domestic violence, and firearms offenses featured prominently in cruelty offenders' criminal histories (Clarke, 2002).

In a study of incarcerated aggressive criminals in South Africa, 63% had deliberately inflicted harm on an animal as a child, and 29% had witnessed a parent or other family member being cruel to animals (Schiff, Louw, & Ascione, 1999).



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The Link and Domestic Violence

Because women are often emotionally close to, and have primary responsibility for, household animals, they are particularly vulnerable to batterers who would exploit this bond to exert power and coercion. Millions of battered women are trapped in abusive homes because there is no one to care for animals that cannot accompany them to safety. Children in these households are at risk of witnessing and perpetrating this violence as well.

More than 48% of Americans consider their animals as “companions” and almost 50% consider them as “members of the family” (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007).

Thirteen percent of intentional animal abuse cases involved domestic violence (Humane Society of the United States, 2001).

Twelve independent studies have reported that between 18% and 48% of battered women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their animals (Ascione, 2007).

Over 71% of battered women reported that their batterers had harmed, killed or threatened animals. More than 75% of these incidents occurred in the presence of the women and/or children to coerce, control and humiliate them. More than 13% of the children admitted that they had hurt pets, and 7.9% admitted to having hurt or killed animals. However, 50% of the children said that they had protected their pet by directly intervening (Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997).

Thirty-two percent of battered women reported that their children had hurt or killed animals (Ascione, 1998).

In a Wisconsin study, 68% of battered women reported their animals had been the target of violence. Of these incidents, 87% occurred in the presence of the women to intimidate and control them, and 75% occurred in the presence of children (Quinlisk, 1999).

In a Texas study, batterers who harm animals were found to be more dangerous and to use more forms of violence and controlling behaviors than batterers who do not abuse pets (Simmons & Lehmann, 2007).

Children exposed to domestic violence were found to be three times more likely to be cruel to animals than children in nonviolent households (Currie, 2006).

Forty-eight percent of battered women reported that animal abuse had occurred “often” during the past 12 months. An additional 30% reported that the abuse occurred “almost always” (Carlisle-Frank & Flanagan, 2006).

The Link and Child Maltreatment

Children who harm animals or witness acts of violence against animals are at increased risk of developing antisocial behaviors and of becoming victims of child maltreatment. Conversely, children who are victims of maltreatment are at increased risk of harming animals.

Pets are part of childhood. Almost 68% of households with children under age 6 and more than 74% of households with children over age 6 have pets (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). A child in America is more likely to grow up with a pet than with a father (Melson, 2001).

Seven percent of intentional animal abuse cases involved child abuse and neglect (Humane Society of the United States, 2001).





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In a New Jersey study, at least one person in 60% of pet-owning families being investigated for child abuse and neglect had abused animals. At least one person in 88% of pet-owning families being investigated for physical child abuse had abused animals. In one third of the families, the children had abused the animals, using them as scapegoats for their anger. The rate of dog bites and attacks in these homes was 69%, compared with 6% in a control group (DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983).

Sexually abused children were five times more likely to abuse animals than were children who were not sexually abused (Ascione, Friedrich, Heath, & Hayashi, 2003).

Twenty percent of children who sexually abused other children also had histories of sexually abusing animals. In most cases, the acts were carefully planned, with pets targeted, isolated, groomed, and abused — much like child victims of sexual abuse (Duffield, Hassiotis, & Vizard, 1998).



In one survey, 91% of abused children institutionalized for delinquency and emotional disturbances said they had had special pets, and 99% showed very positive feelings toward these pets. However, these youths reported that abusive adults had frequently punished or intimidated them by killing, harming, or removing their pets (Robin, ten Bensel, Quigley, & Anderson, 1984).

In a British study of animal cruelty cases, 82% of the families investigated by the RSPCA were also known to social services departments and 61% were known to probation departments. These families were largely described as having children at risk (Hutton, 1983).

The Link and Elder Abuse

Senior citizens are at particular risk of hoarding excess numbers of animals in unhealthy environments. Signs of animal neglect are an early warning sign of a senior's self-neglect or need of assistance. Seniors' emotional attachments to their pets make them vulnerable to those who would exploit this bond to exert control over an older victim.

Ninety-two percent of adult protective services caseworkers encountered animal neglect among clients who were unable to care for themselves. Seventy-five percent noted their clients' concern for their pets' welfare affected decisions about accepting interventions or other services. Forty-five percent of adult protective services caseworkers have encountered intentional animal abuse or neglect (Humane Society of the United States & State of Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, 2003).

A significant percentage of people who hoard or collect animals are older women (Pet-Abuse.Com, 2007). Their inability to adequately care for large numbers of animals puts them at risk of self-neglect, eviction, and health issues, and often indicates a need for mental health and social services interventions (Patronek, Loar, & Nathanson, 2006).

In the absence of children or other loved ones, animal companions may be particularly significant others for isolated seniors: the loss of these animals when a senior is forced to move to subsidized housing or assisted living facilities can be traumatic. Abusive children may attempt to intimidate elders, retaliate against them, or control their assets by harming, threatening, or removing their pets (Arkow, 2007).

Thirty-five percent of adult protective services caseworkers reported that their clients talk about pets being threatened, injured, killed, or denied care (Boat & Knight, 2000).

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