Animal Cruelty and Human Behavior

Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence

Up to 75 percent of domestic violence victims report that their partners threatened or killed family pets.


A New Jersey study found that animal abuse had occurred in 88% of homes being investigated for physical child abuse.


Domestic batterers who harm animals are more dangerous and more violent to their human victims than batterers who do not abuse animals.


In a study of battered women in several northeastern states, 48 percent of respondents reported that animal abuse had occurred "often" during the past 12 months and 51 percent reported that animal abuse incidents coincided with violent outbursts against human family members.


Between 18 percent and 48 percent of battered women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their animals.


Children exposed to domestic violence are three times more likely to be cruel to animals than children living in nonviolent households.

Approximately 60 percent of college students who witnessed or perpetrated animal cruelty as children also reported experiences with child mistreatment or domestic violence.


Animal Cruelty and Mass Murderers/Serial Killers

Serial killers including Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, and David Berkowitz each tortured and/or killed animals as children.


The largest single survey to date of serial killers found; 36 percent admitted to committing animal cruelty as children; 46 percent admitted to committing animal cruelty as adolescents; 36 percent admitted to committing animal cruelty as adults.


A 2003 study found that of 354 serial killers profiled, 21 percent were known to have committed animal cruelty, although it is speculated that more might have committed unreported incidents of animal cruelty


The 2003 Wright & Hensley study also looked at five serial killers in depth (Carroll Edward Cole, Jeffery Dahmer, Edmund Kemper, Henry Lee Lucas, and Arthur Shawcross), and found that each killer turned to animals to revenge their rage and humiliation. The persons who caused the frustration were seen as too powerful to hurt, so they chose animals because they were viewed as weak and vulnerable, to later repeat the patterns of their animal cruelty against human victims.

Of the nine school shootings between 1996 and 1999, half of the shooters had histories of animal cruelty.


Animal Cruelty and Other Serious Crime

The Chicago Police Department examined the arrest records of 332 people who they had arrested for animal cruelty, and found that:
- 70% of suspects had arrests for other felonies, including two homicides;
- 86% had multiple arrests;
- 70% had narcotics arrests of which 68% were for sales or trafficking;
- 65% were arrested for battery-related violent offenses;
- 27% for firearms violations;
- 13% for sex crimes; and
- 59% were gang members.


A Massachusetts study of 153 animal abusers found that 70% were arrested for other crimes within 10 years of their animal cruelty arrest:

- 38% for violent crimes;
- 44% for property crimes;
- 37% for drug offenses; and
- 37% for disorder offenses.


A Canadian Police study found that 70% of people arrested for animal cruelty had other violent crimes, including homicide, in their records.

(Boat, B. W., & Knight, J. C. (2000). Experiences and needs of adult protective services case managers when assisting clients who have companion animals. Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect 12(3/4), 145-155.)

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