

# Understanding the Inter-Relation between Animal Abuse and Human Aggression and Violence

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## ABSTRACT

*Animal abuse is one expression of anti-social behaviour. Aggression and violence towards people in most cases begin with the abuse of animals. Animal abuse is associated with bullying, behavioural problems, experiences of abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual), and juvenile delinquency. The link between animal abuse and human behaviour needs considerable attention and it is critical for practitioners to be aware of the associations between cruelty to animals and human behaviour. A fascination with cruelty to animals is a red flag in the backgrounds of serial killers and rapists. Acts of animal abuse are symptomatic of a deep mental disturbance. Research in psychology and criminology shows that people who commit acts of cruelty on animals do not stop there; many of them move on to their fellow humans. Animal abuse needs to be looked at as a significant indicator of human aggression and violence. People who abuse animals are more likely to engage in anti-social behaviours and commit violence against people. People who abuse animals tend to commit more crimes and engage in criminal activities. Anti-social behaviours like abusing animals usually originate from a traumatic childhood. According to Bratley, A., “Animal mercilessness is certainly not an innocuous venting feeling in a solid individual however this is a significant warning sign”. There are deep psychological issues that lead to violent crimes against people. We should surely address the link between animal cruelty and human aggression and violence to prevent and cure conduct disorders in children.*

**Keywords:** Human Aggression, Distress, Animal Abuse, Human Violence, Cruelty

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## INTRODUCTION

Abusing animals can be referred to as causing intentional harm, suffering, pain, or death by a human to animals. Animal cruelty is an indicator of human aggression and violence, which includes the threat of future acts of violence, including sexual assault, child abuse, domestic abuse, bullying, and other forms of human violence. People who are abusive towards animals are most likely to be cruel and abusive to humans as well. Animal abuse can be defined as an act of anti-social behaviour involving the infliction of distress, pain, suffering, or death to an animal. Animal abuse or animal cruelty can also include abstaining the animals from the five freedoms and the basic necessities of life, including food, water, and shelter, which further can result in the animal suffering or dying. It is quite relevant to relate the issue of abusive behaviour of humans towards animals, which can further be reflected in other criminal behaviours that are likely to occur in the same environment. Deviant and aggressive behaviours of humans can deviate from the ethical and humane attitudes of the vast majority of people globally, and it can lead to unimaginable suffering and pain to the non-human individuals.

Attitude towards animals is an important aspect of human life that affects the interests and feelings of many people and is reflected in the moral and ethical, social, and economic segments (Flynn, 2012).

According to Canadians for Animal Welfare Reforms (CAAWR), there are two kinds of animal abuse inherent across the spectrum of animal abuse. Active abuse, with the intention of harming animals and causing immediate pain and distress, and passive abuse that harms animals by deliberate negligence and causes permanent distress. One or both types are inherent abuse to compassionate animals, animals used for research, industry factory-farmed animal cruelty, animals used for sports and rituals, hoarding, animals killed for their fur, skins, and body parts, and mass-market puppy mill production. Human violence and animal abuse share common features, which include the fact that both types of victims are living creatures with a capacity for experiencing pain and distress; both types of victims can display physical signs of their pain and distress, and may die as a result of the inflicted injuries. Given these commonalities, animal abuse can vary in severity, frequency, and chronicity, and range from the developmentally immature teasing of animals (e.g., a toddler pulling a kitten along by the tail) to serious animal torture (e.g., stealing neighbourhood pets and setting them on fire). Unfortunately, most

assessments of cruelty to animals lack a scaling of these important differences.

## OVERVIEW

Ample research backs up the finding that there is a direct link between acts of cruelty to animals and violence towards humans. This includes child abuse, domestic violence, elder abuse, and other violent behaviour. The connection between the treatment of animals being closely associated with the treatment of fellow human beings was first documented in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Understanding of human aggression and violence and its repercussions have deepened over the past 50 years. The Battered Child Syndrome, a landmark paper in 1962 by Kempe et al., described the types of injuries received from deliberate physical abuse, usually perpetrated by a family member or a babysitter. Following the publication of the Battered Child Syndrome, there was initial reluctance in the medical professions to accept the evidence and act in such cases to prevent further abuse. Writing in 1964, Mead found that across a range of cultures, extraordinary abuse of animals (e.g., torture, killing) by children may precede more violent acts by that individual as an adult. She argued that an act of cruelty towards an animal by a child “could prove a diagnostic sign” and that “such children, diagnosed early, could be helped instead of being allowed to embark on a long career of episodic violence and murder”. Her writings influenced the American Psychiatric Association (APA) to add animal cruelty to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders—III R (DSM-III R) in 1987. In 2013, in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM 5), animal cruelty was retained as a symptom of conduct disorder.

Greater awareness of animal abuse may lead veterinarians to initiate mental health intervention for the abusing family, in addition to treating the animal.

In 1981, Hutton, a social worker in England, highlighted that animal abuse could be used as a diagnostic indicator for family violence. His study found that 82% of families known to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) for animal abuse or neglect were also known to Social Services as having children at risk or having signs of physical abuse or neglect. The association between substantial animal-directed abuse in childhood and later, aggression towards people, was confirmed by Kellert and Felthous in a 1985 paper. In 1998, in a

study published in the *Journal of Emotional Abuse* of abused women who sought shelter at a safe home and who had companion animals, 71 per cent confirmed that their partner had threatened, injured, or killed their pets.

## CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS OF ANIMAL ABUSE

There are multiple reasons for animal abuse motivations that need to be understood with special emphasis; it has a relationship with human aggression and violence. The major factors for being involved in animal cruelty and animal abuse include aggression, human dominance, showing power over the vulnerable, fun, control, fear, dislike, revenge, imitation, economic gains, and sexual pleasure.

Kellert and Felthous proposed nine categories of motivations, including:

- To attempt to control an animal (e.g., hitting a dog to stop it barking).
- To retaliate (e.g., use of extreme punishment for a perceived transgression on the part of the animal, such as throwing a puppy against a wall for vomiting in the house).
- To act out of prejudice against a particular species or breed.
- The emotion of aggression through an animal (e.g., organising animal fights).
- To act out of the motivation to enhance one's own aggression.
- To shock people for amusement.
- To retaliate against another person or as revenge (e.g., killing or maiming the companion animal of a disliked neighbour).
- Displacement of aggression from a person to an animal.
- Non-specific sadism refers to the desire to inflict suffering, injury, or death in the absence of any particular or hostile feelings towards an animal. An essential objective communicated inside this inspiration was to determine joy from causing the affliction. As explained by Kellert and Felthous, it is sometimes related to a desire to exercise power and control over an animal as a way of compensating for feelings of weakness or vulnerability.

## TYPES OF ANIMAL ABUSE

Animal abuse comes in different forms, which include acts of violence towards any non-human, negligence or failure to provide an animal with

a healthy environment, and causing psychological damage in the form of terror, torment, or distress.

- *Physical Domestic Abuse*: This is a type of abuse where the violence inflicted upon the animals is absolutely intentional. The motive is to cause deep injury, severe pain, and mental trauma to the animal. Physical violence creates an environment for the animals which makes them feel dominated, terrorised, and frightened. Some people are incapable of showing love and affection to animals. Domestic abuse can take up many forms such as beating, stabbing, kicking, starving, neglecting, burning, and so on. If a man can beat, hit, or cause harm to his own wife, then there is a very high probability that he might do the same with his own pet.
- *Sexual Abuse*: Bestiality (sexual abuse) is the term given to intercourse between a human and non-human (animal). It basically refers to the degrading act of a human having sexual intercourse with an animal. Horrific and disturbing cases of rage against animals are on the headlines very often nowadays. It is not an uncommon phenomenon anymore. Study in criminology and psychology reveals that people who commit acts of cruelty on animals move to humans as their next target.
- *Organised Animal Abuse*: Organised animal abuse is a form of animal abuse in the way of animal fighting, like dogfighting, bullfighting, and cockfighting, mostly for entertainment purposes. It is a staged form of fight where animals are prepared to fight against each other in a very violent and aggressive way.

## MANIFESTATIONS BEHIND ANIMAL ABUSE INTERLINKED WITH HUMAN AGGRESSION (HUMAN BEHAVIOUR) AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Animal abuse has many forms, many reasons, and most importantly, many victims. It is a growing problem in today's society. Many people may wonder why people abuse animals. Some of the major manifestations of animal abuse which are closely linked with human aggression, violence, and anti-social behaviour are described as follows:

- *Child Neglect/Abuse*: Child abuse can further lead to the risk of engaging children in abusing animals and bullying other children. Gullone (2011) explained that violence and aggression in the family

can be associated with an increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems in children, including aggression, conduct disorder, delinquency and antisocial behaviour, anxiety, depression, and a tendency to abuse animals. A feeling of command over an animal is acquired through the maltreatment, and might be inspired by a craving to make up for sensations of shortcoming or weakness.

- *Socialisation*: Gullone (2011) also elaborated that poor parenting and socialisation can be found in families of aggressive children, with central factors including poor parental disciplinary strategies and inadequate monitoring of children's activities. Also of relevance are child-rearing characteristics proposed to create bullies. Guardians' apathetic demeanour towards the child can prompt the leniency of forceful conduct by the latter, the utilisation of actual discipline (i.e., the modelling of aggression), and power assertive disciplinary strategies, which further make the children aggressive towards animals. The information construction ought to be proposed to grow generally as an outcome of growth opportunities, based on hypothesis it would be normal that people who experience maltreatment in their early stages learn explicit forceful practices and antagonistic insights, attributions, and assumption inclinations. Children learn bad conduct and perspectives to separate regularising empathic responses that would some way or another fill in as animosity inhibitors (or potentially, in any case, standardising improvement of sympathy is stifled). These cycles have been ensnared in the advancement of direct issues and issues in kids.
- *Animal Abuse and Conduct Disorder among Children*: As mentioned, in Canadians for Animal Welfare Reforms (CAAWR), DSM-IV has defined Conduct Disorder (CD) as "a repetitive and persistent pattern of behaviour in which the basic rights of others or major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated". The occurrence of Conduct Disorder (CD) may occur as early as five to six years of age, but more commonly occurs in late childhood or early adolescence. Although as many as 50% of childhood cases of CD remit by adolescence, adolescent cases of CD rarely begin without warning signs in childhood. It contains a group of oppositional and reserved practices, including extreme resistance, taking, lying, fleeing, actual savagery, remorselessness (to human and animals), and physically coercive practices. The link between direct confusion and creature misuse co-occur with harassing practices; both animal

abuse and tormenting have been connected with later standoffish practices and total disregard for other people.

- *Exposure to Aggressive Environment:* Baldry (2003) found that youth who witnessed violence between family members, or who witnessed harm to animals, are more likely to have themselves abused animals, compared to peers without such experiences. Observational learning in the development of aggressive behaviour can witness animal abuse instances by the observed incidences. Children who have seen or felt violence are more likely to abuse animals, compared to people who were not exposed to violence. The connection between animal abuse and human hostility reaches out past the prior formative time frames into adulthood.
- *Animal Abuse and Human Aggression in Adulthood:* Human violence and animal abuse are more likely to happen in the adulthood of children whose families are involved in physical and domestic violence.
- *Drug Abuse:* Drug abuse seems to be highly correlated with the acceleration of all types of violence; thus, it becomes very important to assess its role in animal cruelty and abuse cases.
- *Employment/Academic Functioning:* Employment or academic functioning is important as an indicator of stability and functioning. In many cases where an individual is engaging in animal abuse, there are significant difficulties in their work performance and relationship in either work or school environments.
- *Cognitive Functioning:* Cognitive functioning can be used to understand if there is evidence of impairment in cognitive functions, processing difficulty, or the presence of a thought disorder.
- *Mental Health and Personality:* Mental health of individuals is an important factor to determine if there is an acute or prior history of mental illness or emotional instability. It is recognised that many animals' violent behaviours stem from untreated mental health problems. One of the known warning signs of certain psychopathologies, including anti-social personality disorder, also known as a psychopathic personality disorder, is a history of torturing pets and small animals, a behaviour known as zoo sadism. Extra psychological well-being determination is related with animal cruelty. Johnson (2018) explained that other mental health diagnosis correlated with cruelty to animals include conduct disorder, antisocial personality disorder, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, histrionic per-



sonality disorder, and a significant association with substance use disorders, pathological gambling, and a family history of anti-social behaviour.

- *Domestic Violence*: In families, battering husbands abuse companion animals to control and intimidate their wives (Ascione, 1998; Flynn, 2000b, 2000c).

## **RELEVANCE OF SOCIAL WORK TO DEAL WITH HUMAN AGGRESSION AND ANIMAL ABUSE**

Hanrahan (n.d.) explained that the growing disparities and inequities between and among humans in our increasingly globalised world are related to the disparities between humans and animals, society and nature, the social and natural environments, and as such, social work theory, practice, research, and education can no longer overlook the intrinsic anthropocentrism of its theoretical foundations. An anti-oppressive and critical approach to social work must move beyond the idea of social work as a bounded discipline for “bounded beings” (Gergen, 2011). A relational understanding of clients (i.e., individuals and families), as well as service delivery, would enable practitioners to recognise, value, and even co-create meaning and capacity with individuals, families, and communities through existing and new relationships with the physical environment and with non-human individuals.

Domestic and companion animals constitute a significant part of the contextual system people are embedded in, and often form significant relationships in human lives. However, due to the traditional humanist bias of social work, anything other than humans in the human social environment tend to be ignored. As Ryan (2013) notes, the fact that domestic animals are part and parcel of the social environment and the world within which social workers practise should, of necessity, serve to widen the scope of social work’s moral compass.

Arkow (2020) elaborated that social workers exploring a client’s home life and family dynamics may be missing a significant piece of the puzzle if they neglect to inquire about the client’s animals and the attachments, relationships, and problems with them. The connection among human and creature brutality; distress and misfortune; creature helped collaborations; and empathy weariness the executives. Social workers needs to engage in supportive grief support and counselling with end-of-life decisions and follow-up, advocacy, and brokering of



resources, circulating reading materials and educational packets. Social work's tradition of working with cooperative local area change can open up many new vocation potential open doors by fusing human-creature connections into social work practice. Asking about the presence (or non-attendance), solidness (or disturbance), connections, risk, history, and status of creatures in the customers' lives can assist social labourers with acquiring more exhaustive family evaluations, approving significant intra-familial connections, assembling more grounded encouraging groups of people, supporting strength, gaining prior acknowledgment of oppressive practices, and addressing customers' creature care worries with common-sense, fitting, and reasonable arrangements.

## CONCLUSION

Animal abuse is a grave problem that cannot be ignored any longer. Not only is it inhumane, it is also damaging our children's minds. People who abuse animals do not stop with animals. If we do not take the necessary steps to prevent animal abuse, it would mean endangering humans as well, as we would also be exposed to violent people. It is obviously not a matter that will be resolved in the upcoming days, months, or even years, but it is something that must be given the greatest consideration and attention possible. Both human and non-human animals share many characteristics in the sense that they are both sentient living beings, both can feel pain, experience distress, and can die from injuries.

There is an established link among cruelty, human aggression, and anti-social behaviour. This link makes it critically important that abuse towards animals be taken seriously by law enforcement agencies, and by society at large. This is for the sake of the animals themselves, and for people who are also at risk. Transdisciplinary collaboration is vital in the recognition, prevention, and protection of animal and human victims trapped in human aggression and anti-social behaviour. Animal and human welfare agencies must work together to ensure integrated, thorough, and effective interactions.

Animal abuse is evidently related to human aggression and violence and we need to make animal cruelty more worthy of moral and ethical concern. Gullone (2011) explained that by positioning acts of animal abuse within the continuum of other anti-social behaviours, rather than as isolated incidents or acceptable childhood rites of passage, we can gain

more progress not only in reducing animal abuse, but also in improving human safety and lowering tolerance levels for all acts of human aggression and anti-social behaviours.

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