

Criminological aspects of animal abuse: A review study

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the complexity of animal cruelty, problems with its varying definitions which depend on legal frameworks, social norms, cultural and public perceptions and many possible approaches to the issue of animal cruelty, this paper will focus only on active cruelty (acts of commission), i.e. the intention to harm an animal and cause pain and suffering. It will study the phenomenon as a multi-indicator for violence.

Regardless of whether animal abuse is treated as a criminal offence or a misdemeanor or if it is absent from the legal framework altogether, it represents a complex phenomenon present in both children and adults. This abuse affects families and a wide range of social institutions, not only harming animals but also indicating various inter-personal types of violence and individual behavioral disorders. This paper explores intersectional and interdisciplinary research on animal abuse, its connection to subsequent adult or concurrent domestic violence and child abuse, contributing factors such as defense mechanisms and the roles of empathy and remorse. Understanding animal cruelty as a part of human violence and as a sign of serious concern for the welfare of both animals and humans is a first step towards building sustainable social policies.

Key words: animal abuse, domestic violence, defense mechanism, empathy

Introduction

For at least half a century, social and behavioral science research on animal cruelty has been highlighting the act of animal cruelty as a *multi-indicator for violence*. Although American animal protection societies had linked animal abuse and child abuse in the domestic domain back in the 19th century (Arkow, 1999; Ascione, 2005), it was not until the late 1960s that experts started conducting systematic research of this link (Hellman & Blackman, 1966; Tapia, 1971; DeViney, Dickert & Lockwood, 1983; Ascione & Webber, 1995, Ascione et al., 1997; Arluke et al., 1999). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders first included animal cruelty as a diagnostic criterion for Conduct Disorder in 1987. While behavioral sciences and criminology have considered animal cruelty both as an indicator and a predictor of crime for some time now, animal abuse is still rarely identified as a criminal offence or even a misdemeanor.

Legal, social, and cultural significance of animal abuse is central to animal abuse research. Any studies or policy findings depend on how animal abuse is defined, which methods are used and what criminological links are established. For instance, one of the pioneers of animal abuse research, Ascione (1993), defines animal abuse as "socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally

causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal” (1993, p. 228). As any definition, this one initiates discussions and critique. Pagani, Robustelli & Ascione (2010) address some of these problems that scholars face when dealing with the meaning and definition of animal abuse. They notice how two similar studies on young people in Italy yielded significantly different results with regard to the prevalence of animal abuse, ranging from 18% to 55,8%, depending on how animal abuse was defined. They hypothesized that even a small difference in age of the two sampled groups can make a difference in results (for instance, being motivated to answer, being sincere, or remembering) (Pagani, Robustelli & Ascione, 2010, p. 269). Therefore, everything is significant - from the definition of abuse (e.g. whether it includes only acts of commission and/or also omission, what counts as “socially unacceptable”, or which animals count), to sampling, and even methods.

Although methodological issues remain, numerous studies from different disciplines are consistent in discussing its growing prevalence and its dependence on social context and links to other forms of violence, and thus point to a need for a systematic scholarly and institutional approach to this serious issue. The aim of this paper is to provide a review study or a red thread cutting through a complex body of research on animal abuse in such a way that it outlines 1) the importance of social context of animal abuse as a crime and its links to other types of violence; 2) psychological mechanisms in animal abuse; and 3) personality traits and disorders (such as lack of empathy, antisocial and aggressive behavior) in order to better understand its meaning and phenomenology.

Establishing the connection between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence

The bulk of multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research points to animal abuse as a serious social, legal, ethical, criminological and psychological problem which needs to be studied more extensively, especially its connection to other related previous, simultaneous or forthcoming acts of violence. Earlier studies of the connection between animal cruelty and interpersonal violent behavior had focused on human violence in adults and its connection to animal cruelty in childhood. Hellman and Blackman’s (1966) pivotal research on prison inmates who were charged with violent crime and sent to psychiatric evaluations by courts, jails, or parole officers found that three fourths of them also exhibited what is often called the triad or part of the triad of violence; cruelty to animals, fire-setting, and bed-wetting as children. The study also showed that individuals usually experienced neglect or abuse within their family circle. This seminal work became a starting point for not only an academic, but also increasing public interest in the topic and created a diachronic link between past animal cruelty and future danger for the society.

Further research followed the outlined path. Tapia (1971) conducted research on eighteen cases of children in which reasons for concern were detected because of their cruelty to animals and antisocial behavior. He found that they were all boys, usually young, of normal intelligence, exhibiting numerous aggressive symptoms such as destructiveness, bullying, fighting, stealing, and fire-setting (Tapia, 1971, p. 70-77). DeViney, Dickert and Lockwood’s research (1983) found that abused or neglected children in 60% of the analyzed cases exhibited abusive behavior towards

animals. These and other similar research findings established a co-occurrence or synchronicity of human to animal and simultaneous human to human violence, most commonly domestic violence.

Most of the recent research on animal cruelty investigates one aspect of animal abuse and its connection to specific types of co-occurring violence, such as domestic violence, child abuse, bullying, etc. Some studies were conducted after several theoretical works first created the foundations and established the links. For instance, Lacroix (1999, p. 63) argued that "shared characteristics of women and children as victims of family violence can easily be extended to family pets" as/since victims of family violence share common traits. Victimology of domestic violence is marked by the fact that "women, children and animals have historical status under the law as property" (1999, p. 63). Recognition of violence against children, women, and animals as a part of a similar victimology, that of a 'crime behind closed doors', is in fact historically intertwined at its core, and the recognition of one has always been tied to the awareness of the other. In the 19th century, American animal protection societies had taken on cases of abused children and had successfully prosecuted the first case of child abuse (Arkow, 1999, p. 19). *The case of Little Mary Ellen*¹ in 1874 was not only the first successful prosecution of child abuse which was facilitated by animal protection activists, but it created an incentive for the foundation of child protection societies and joint child and animal protection associations (Ascione, 2005, 8-9). Similar collaborations between animal, children, and women's rights efforts appeared throughout the years that followed. One example is the animal control officer training program of the American Humane Association (primarily working on animal protection) in the 1990s which included skills on how to recognize child abuse (Arkow, 1999, p. 24). A much later recognition of the *battered child syndrome* (Kempe et al., 1962) was a product of a long struggle for legal recognition of child abuse that was in many ways led by animal activists (as historically, battered children in the U.S. were routinely labelled as "accident-prone"). This later influenced women's struggles for the recognition of the *battered woman syndrome* (Walker, 1979), as well as the recognition of what Munro (1996) first called *battered pets*.

Scholarly attention to animal cruelty as a form of human violence has helped the society to recognize for the first time that animal abuse is often related to a history of domestic violence (Lookwood, 1999, p. 6). With studies that were conducted in order to collect information on different violent offenders who engaged in animal abuse in childhood, more focus was put on researching child development and family conditions in which animal abuse often occurs. Ascione and colleagues (1997) conducted a pivotal research on this connection. The results of their study together with women's shelter networks in 48 U.S. states showed that 85,4% of shelters responded affirmatively when questioned if women in the shelters talked about incidents of pet abuse, 63% responded affirmatively to whether children in the shelter talked about pet abuse and, finally, 40 out of 48 shelters reported that they believed these forms of violence were connected (Ascione et al., 1997, p. 211). A follow up study was conducted with battered women directly, confirming some of the previous results on the co-occurrence of animal abuse and domestic violence (Ascione, 1998). Namely, 32% of battered women with children stated that their children (both girls and boys) were cruel to animals as well, either hurting them or killing them (Ascione, 1998, p. 125). Ascione and colleagues continued their research on the connection between battered women and children and

¹ In 1874, Mary Ellen was a victim of family abuse in a case that was the first successful example of prosecution of the perpetrators and the protection of the victim in the U.S. - a case that was brought to light by animal protection society activists (an American society for the prevention of animal cruelty, APCA).

animal abuse, showing that information can be collected in a comparable manner world-wide and that the percentage of the occurrence of animal abuse in different studies is roughly between 40% and 60%, or even higher when threats are included (Ascione et.al., 2007, p. 357). Moreover, comparative data showed that households affected by domestic violence owned pets more frequently than the average statistics for U.S. families (Ascione et.al., 2007, p. 366). Due to the fact that pets are more present in families with small children, pets were not only direct victims of violence, but were also utilized to amplify threats to human victims.

Policy-oriented studies on the connection between animal cruelty and domestic violence showed that abuse of family pets is commonly used to facilitate domestic violence against women and children and that it discourages women to leave and desensitizes children to violence and animal cruelty (Faver & Strand, 2003; Becker & French, 2004, Upadhy, 2014). DeGrue and DiLillo (2009) go further in exploring the connection between animal abuse and child abuse in a family environment. Their study, conducted with 860 college students, from pet-owning families in which animal abusers were either parents or family members, showed that 22,9% of the participants reported exposure to animal cruelty (DeGrue & DiLillo, 2009, p. 1044). Specifically, 49,4% of the participants reported at least one form of domestic violence during childhood, most commonly physical abuse, while 15,7% experienced sexual abuse (DeGrue and DiLillo, 2009, p. 1044). The overlap between animal abuse and domestic violence was significant: 37,2% reported exposure to one of these forms of violence, and 17,8% to both (the rest or 36,2% reported no exposure) (DeGrue & DiLillo, 2009, p. 1044). Although the study made no inquiry into the connection of experiencing and participating in animal cruelty, it did contribute to linking animal abuse with domestic and children abuse. By reviewing the existing research, McPhedran (2009) confirmed the relationship between an abusive home in childhood and a range of behavioral problems that may extend into adulthood, calling for holistic interventions that could counter past abusive experiences and future interpersonal violence. More recent research on this link provides new insight into the complexity of animal cruelty as a result of domestic abuse and looks into bullying and its links to both domestic violence and animal abuse (Henry & Sanders, 2007; Sanders et al., 2013), or the link between experiencing animal abuse in childhood and later approval of interpersonal and domestic violence (Flynn, 1999).

Previously mentioned studies all point to and explore the links between violence against animals and against humans that appear either diachronically (one preceding and possibly 'predicting' the other, i.e. a progression thesis) or simultaneously (as in the case of domestic violence), and form a body of scholarship on the victimology of animal abuse crime. Whether the animal abuser is a child or an adult or whether other forms of violence have occurred or might occur, there is a need for a closer look into the phenomenon on a personal level. With the exception of very few scholars who question methodological issues, such as non-representative sampling (Piper & Myers, 2006), or circumstances and the social context of respondents (e.g. convicts might be more prone to admitting animal abuse than the regular population) (Patterson-Kane & Piper, 2009), or making a leap into creating a progression thesis (Beirne, 2004), the research consistently provides a link to interpersonal violence as well as points to developmental problems (in children) or antisocial behavior. The literature on child development, particularly on defense mechanisms against stress and trauma and the development of empathy furthers the inquiry into the link between domestic and animal abuse and aggressive behavior. These two aspects are discussed further.

Animal abuse behavior as a defense against stress and trauma

Although defense mechanisms have been an important topic of psychological and psychoanalytical research for a longer time, scholars have only recently begun to focus more on the presence of these unconscious processes in individual phenomena, such as aggressive behavior towards animals in children and youth. People often use a particular mechanism to deal with stress, such as repression or shifting the focus to other issues unconsciously, or displacement where a person can transform their fear into abusive treatment of others. Unlike coping mechanisms that are conscious and tend to include a solution to a problem, defense mechanisms are unconscious, arise involuntarily, and in principle do not help in solving the difficulty but rather relieve stress (Cramer, 2003a, 221-224). As these processes determine our everyday behavior in many ways, defense mechanisms play a crucial role in protecting "the individual from experiencing excessive anxiety, and to protect the self and self-esteem" (Cramer, 2008, p. 1963).

Throughout the 20th century, academic psychology has identified more than 40 different defense mechanisms and more than 20 different scales have been established to measure them. Many early psychoanalysts, particularly those who were active before the 1930s, considered defense mechanisms to be a part of psychopathology, while coping mechanisms were considered a part of normal psychological functioning (Cramer, 1998b, p. 931). Freud, in particular, saw them as determining factors of different psychopathological symptoms. However, as early as 1936 Ana Freud argued that defense mechanisms were a part of normal development and should be considered pathological only if they appear with unnecessary intensity at an inappropriate age, or if they are used in situations when they no longer appear needed (Cramer, 1998b, p. 931). This means that age, among other factors, is crucial in analyzing whether defense mechanisms can be considered pathological. According to Cramer, "excessive use of defenses, in which they become the characteristic, repetitive reaction to many different situations, or the use of age-inappropriate defenses, is likely to occur in conjunction with the presence of psychopathology" (Cramer, 2008, p. 1972).

Cramer (2008) outlined a theoretical model for the development of three defense mechanisms in the early years of our lives that can help us understand the connection between animal abuse and defenses in children. During the early years of life, denial is the predominant defense, projection prevails during mid-childhood, and by late adolescence identification becomes predominant (Cramer, 2008, p. 1966). They are cognitively more complex, and therefore logically appear in late childhood. In the identity development process, especially in instances when self-esteem is low, the most common defense is identification. In late adolescence and early adulthood, in the so-called period of identity formation, crisis of our self-esteem and the pressure that it represents for our forming identity can often produce a need for release, which can present itself in narcissism. A need to develop an image of a separate identity and to protect the self-esteem for future achievements will produce specific and normal defense mechanisms, such as projection and identification (Cramer, 1998a, p. 157). The use of these three mechanisms in early adulthood is connected to personality change that is related to the Big 5 personality traits (Cramer, 2003b). The significance of these defense mechanisms for predicting personality change increases with age and is therefore not specific for early adulthood only. The author concludes that the use of denial and projection correlates with an increase in neuroticism, but decreases in extroversion and agreeableness, with a less favorable outcome for higher IQ tested individuals (Cramer, 2003b, p. 91-96). Adults who

use immature defenses later in their lives show signs of maladjustment, but these findings must be put into context of gender as well as IQ (Cramer, 2003b, p. 100). Projection, for instance, seems to be increasingly predominant for men, and general findings confirm that it is typically associated with males and masculinity (Cramer, 2003b, p. 100).

Age and gender are central in the functioning of defenses. The defense mechanism system is based on the psychological assumption that defense mechanisms resolve or decrease conflict between the external and internal reality by using one of the following methods: turning against the self (TAS); turning against objects (TAO), which includes identification with the aggressor and displacement; projection (PRO); reversal (REV), which includes negation, denial, reaction formation, and repression; and principalization (PRN), which includes intellectualization, isolation, and rationalization (Davidson & MacGregor, 1998, p. 973-974). In developing this system, the findings proved to be significant in terms of gender differences. Men seemed to be more inclined to TAO and PRO, while women tended to lean more towards REV and PRN, although both of these categories are quite dependent on age.

Although extensive papers have been written on the pathological aspects of defense mechanisms, research on the specific connection between defense mechanisms and animal abuse still seems to be scarce. Three defense mechanisms seem to be particularly important and connected to animal abuse: projection, identification (with the aggressor), and displacement. Projection is a mechanism of self-deception in which a person allocates one's own unacceptable desires or urges to others (Corey, 2004, p. 71-72). Desires, aggressions or our other urges are interpreted as being owned by others, i.e. usually transferred onto an object of our desire. The problem is projected as being the fault of other. For instance, fear of being seen as weak is projected as a trait of weakness on another person or an animal. Social context and cultural value systems are an essential part of such a projection. A "collective projection", as Visković argued, exemplified in folk proverbs about animals such as *I will beat you like a cat; I will beat you like an ox in the cabbage, or I will kick the flies out of your head*, demonstrate our collective experience of humans' relationship with animals (Visković, 2009, p. 127-131). In those and other similar phrases, the reader is assuming violent attitudes toward animals as normal and considers it to be a part of our collective unconsciousness. Hatred and aggression are expressed through name-calling such as calling one a dog, a leech, or a rat; while our weaknesses and other 'unacceptable' features are easily attributed to animals (Visković, 2009, p. 146). Projection, therefore, reflects not only individual but also collective value systems and hierarchies, including the abusive behavior that goes with it.

Second defense mechanism that should be considered in animal abuse behavior is identification. Instead of the term identification, some authors use introjection. Corey (2004, p. 72), for instance, defined introjection as a positive, role-model based mechanism; while negative introjection seems to be a defense mechanism of identifying with the aggressor or the person causing trauma, which manifests itself in the adoption and internalization of values and standards that the abuser upholds. *Stockholm syndrome* is one example of negative identification. Cycle of domestic and child abuse in which a child adopts the violent behavior of a parent and reproduces it later in life is another. Traumatic events in introjection are much more severe, they usually involve violence and develop over time. Repetition of behavior is central both to the cause of such defense (a long-term, repeated trauma) and to the result of the defense mechanism (future, long-term behavior of a person).

Alongside these findings, Thompson and Gullone's (2006) study reported significantly higher levels of cruelty in those individuals who had repeatedly witnessed someone close (a friend, relative, parent, or a sibling) abusing an animal, and significantly lower levels for those who had rarely witnessed abuse or abuse by a stranger, pointing at the importance of a role-model in animal abuse repetition.

Displacement, alongside projection and introjection, seems to be the third relevant defense mechanism in animal abuse cases. Displacement, or transference of urges, such as anger and aggression, may be displaced onto objects with no connection to frustration and is often a chain-reaction fueled by social hierarchies: boss yells at the husband, the husband beats his wife, the wife hits the child, the child does the same to the dog. Unlike in introjection, the trigger in displacement can be a momentary attack on the person's self-esteem, an insult, or a source of stress, and the reaction usually appears immediately after the traumatic event. Arluke's (2002) study on young adults with experience of animal abuse argued that animal abuse "serves to displace frustration by making the aggressor feel better", an increasingly common behavior usually seen as an "angry child" with "destructive energy" that needs to be released (p. 405-406). Arluke found that most respondents did not see their behavior "as a serious and stigmatizing form of deviance but rather as a folk-way violation or lapse in good judgment", linking defense mechanisms to culturally acceptable value systems (2002, p. 409).

Projection, identification with the aggressor, and displacement can all result in aggressive behavior. All three allow for the transfer of aggression onto another object, usually perceived to be weaker than the subject employing the defenses. While displacement and, to some extent, projection, function as an immediate defense against internalized fears caused by external pressure, identification with the aggressor releases the fear of being the victim and allows for the long-term empowerment and boosting of self-esteem by identifying with the 'stronger' party. Animals and women, as well as other children in all three cases present a weaker object and are the most usual objects of release. Collective projection, as Visković (2009) pointed out, additionally enables the abuse of animals as a stress release, as our social understanding of the low status of animals in most cultures is taken for granted. This is somewhat similar to the lower status of women in relation to men, or children in relation to adults (male adults). External and internal stress, trauma, or abuse that trigger defenses and are combined with cultural value systems contribute greatly to the decrease of empathy for the object of aggression (e.g. animals) and enable aggressive behavior, which is discussed in the following section.

The role of empathy in animal cruelty

In his interviews with students, Arluke (2002) found that the most common reasons for animal cruelty reported by students were: boredom, thrill, experimenting, wanting to fit in, curiosity, and doing adult-like activities (such as hunting). Arluke concluded that “children learn that boundary issues are significant to adults. They see that, if adults regard certain people as “not us”, they become a suitable subject for scorn or attack” (2002, p. 416). Value scale, set by a broader social understanding of animal-human relations, seemed crucial in expressing frustrations or defense mechanisms, as many of the respondents said that animals are not human, that they are objects, and that cruelty to animals is a “normal phase of growing up” (2002 p. 426). Furthermore, wild animals are not as important as domestic animals or pets, and animals belonging to others are also not as deserving as their own, and so on. Very few respondents felt guilty, while a majority spoke about their former abuse as fun, lacking any guilt or shame (Arluke, 2002, p. 426). These and similar findings point to the need for linking the socio-cultural context, such as co-occurring violence and abuse, triggers and defense mechanisms, and lack of empathy, be it socially induced or biologically pre-set.

The scholarship bridging the studies of animal abuse and human aggression can be grouped into those interested in the role of empathy and those looking into personality disorders. Both approaches encompass a wide range of theoretical standpoints, varying from social to biological theories with similar focus on animal abuse as a pattern of problematic behavior and not as an outlet or defense mechanism. Still, it is important to keep in sight the interconnectedness of ‘normality’ (cultural, social, psychological) and ‘deviance’ (criminal or pathological). In his social-cognitive model of understanding animal abuse, Henry (2018) explained the connection of mechanisms and individual responses to certain situations in which lack of empathy and animal abuse might occur by linking studies on individual mechanisms, social context and empathy. Cultural norms determining the perception of animals as property enable humans “to engage in behaviors that cause suffering and death” as extreme forms of lack of empathy (Henry, 2018, p. 459). As social structures, cultural norms enable formation of our individual schemas or latent structures which form the backbone of our mechanisms and organize our cognitive and emotional life in relation to a particular concept, such as animals (Henry, 2018, p. 464). Therefore, our perception of, for example, a stray dog or a bug references our beliefs and beliefs of people surrounding us, that perceive these objects quite often as very low forms of life and a suitable outlet for frustration, easily with no empathy involved.

Today we define empathy as, to take one possible definition, “the natural capacity to share, understand, and respond with care to the affective states of others” that “plays a crucial role in much human social interactions from birth to the end of life” (Decety, 2012, vii). A natural aspect of empathy vs. empathy as an attribute that is developed and nourished still presents a milestone of increasingly fragmented research, and pop culture phenomenon of the crime genre boom of the idea of ‘natural born killers’ is not helping in keeping the discussion academic. Nevertheless, the development of social empathy is essential in empathy development from the preverbal phase to introspection, allowing a person to see others from “a shared platform”, a socially conditioned and learned set of knowledge about empathic values (Lichtenberg, 2016, p. 119). Hoffman (2000, p. 8) further pointed to the centrality of empathy as a topic of research for criminologists and other social scientists as “an emphatic feeling of injustice” or “when bad things happen to good people” and placed it at the core of our collective reflections on fairness and jurisprudence. This is

a by-stander model of empathy that allows us to reflect on social, political, and individual reality and the world itself. Social empathy is particularly important when discussing what is deserving of one's empathy in the legal, moral, or criminological sense. For instance, we might "feel" empathy for an animal that has been killed, but legally or even morally we do not consider it wrong. The arbitrariness or collective lack of empathy was an especially intriguing, though morbid, topic of social research after the monstrosities of the Holocaust in WWII, and many women's and animal rights writers do bring up this correlation when discussing the atrocities against other marginalized groups. In her *Sexual Politics of Meat* (2010), Carol Adams compared the mass killing of livestock with mechanisms in genocides and historical oppression of different groups such as women, which all share the extreme process of the creation of a collective lack of empathy. Adams explained our tolerance to the abuse and inequality through the politics of language, as knowing the world through language means accepting the power that constructs its meaning. Reduced to *a piece of meat* literary or metaphorically, abuse of women or animals through rape, battering, and killing was and is a part of our everyday life and of our "culture".

Animal abuse, lack of empathy and antisocial behavior

Regarding criminological aspects of studies on empathy, lack of empathy and antisocial behavior connected to it seem to be a central point, especially if one is interested in motives and triggers of violent acts and abuse. According to Baron-Cohen (2012, p. 12), empathy is our ability to identify what someone else is thinking or feeling and to respond to their thoughts and feelings with an appropriate emotion. This suggests that empathy consists of identifying and responding. Baron-Cohen argued that empathy occurs when we are *double-minded* (we are keeping in mind someone else's mind). Opposite to that is a state of a *single-minded* attention, which means we are thinking only about our own mind (2012, p. 11). In this state, our empathy is lacking or, as Baron-Cohen puts it, we have an "empathy erosion" (2012, p. 5). To measure empathy, he developed a scale called Empathy Quotient or EQ; namely, if someone is as low as level 0, this means that "they cannot experience remorse or guilt because they just don't understand what the other person is feeling" (Baron-Cohen, 2012, p. 17). This most extreme level of lack of empathy, a "Zero-Negative" is not the only type of person with a lack of empathy, but it is the one usually deemed as negative (Baron-Cohen, 2012, p. 31). There is also "Zero Positive", such as people with Asperger Syndrome or other conditions on the autistic spectrum. Three types of Zero-Negative - Borderline Personality Disorder (Type B), Psychopathic Personality Disorder (Type P), and Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Type N) – make up the negative spectrum of disorders. Lack of empathy in any of the three types can be dangerous for their surroundings. For instance, someone who is Zero-Positive and whose "cognitive empathy may be below average" but "affectively their empathy might be intact enabling them to care about others" because of the way their brain works, may even act super-morally (Baron-Cohen, 2012, p. 67). Contrary to that, some Zero-Negatives (such as psychopaths) will recognize another's emotions perhaps even too well, but will not act on them in a positive way (as defined by others around them).

This aspect of measuring empathy seems to be the most questionable one. For instance, many day-to-day factors influence our ability to express empathy or lack of it, and these factors can be both internal and external, making our response to certain measuring questionnaires susceptible

to change. Consequently, our empathy can be susceptible to our personal psychological state and context that fluctuate significantly. Reasons for low levels of empathy or a lack of it vary due to biological factors, such as a deficiency in brain activity in certain brain regions involved in empathy, genes and hormones, or environmental factors, for instance our familiar surroundings, our traumas, or our defense mechanisms against traumas, drugs and other substances, or specific contexts that we find ourselves in.

All and all, criminological research can benefit from researching the links between animal abuse, lack of empathy and anti-social behavior, although establishing the connection requires caution. For instance, a study done by Daly & Morton (2018, p. 8) on a group of male students who had a history of animal cruelty showed that "individuals who had witnessed abuse showed generally higher scores on three scales of cognitive empathy". According to this research, animal abusers seem to exhibit a much clearer understanding of cruelty as inappropriate behavior than others and are able to detect it better in tests (Daly & Morton, 2018). Some of the earlier studies by Daly & Morton also suggested that "abuse of animals is not necessarily consistent with a lack of empathy; rather, the dissociation between cognitive and affective measures of empathy typifies more serious types of abuse (witnessing multiple killings)" (Daly & Morton, 2008, p. 252). In fact, a milder exposure to animal cruelty may "lead to development of empathy, whereas chronic or serious exposure has the opposite affect" (Daly & Morton, 2008, p. 252). Schwenck and colleagues argued that children with an autism spectrum disorder are generally capable of recognizing primary emotions although they need more time, while children with a conduct disorder display a deficit of emotion empathy (especially children with elevated callous-unemotional traits) (2012, p. 657). All this points to the differences between cognitive and affective empathy in certain anti-social behaviors and the significant relevance of affective empathy in animal cruelty.

Understanding the lack of empathy and whether it is a cognitive or affective type is especially important in criminological research both in terms of how it relates to acts of cruelty (such as animal abuse), but also how it relates to different antisocial behaviors. Although a lack of empathy is not listed in *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013) as a disorder, it is associated with some personality and conduct disorders, which is particularly important when discussing animal abuse. According to APA, children or adolescents with a conduct disorder often exhibit disobedience and dishonesty and are prone to physical violence towards people and animals; they express lack of kindness and compassion, disrespect others, engage in reckless thrill-seeking and destructive, law-breaking behavior. Such children often lack guilt as they have little concern for the rights or well-being of others. Most children grow out of this by adulthood, while some develop antisocial personality disorders.

Using data retrieval outlines, Gleyzer and colleagues (2002) analyzed a group of 48 subjects - criminal defendants who had a history of animal cruelty - and matched them with defendants who had no such history. Their evaluation files were matched by using four specifically designed data retrieval outlines (similar to surveying, but without questionnaires directed to persons). This study showed that cruelty to animals in childhood was significantly associated to an antisocial personality disorder (APD), while mental retardation, psychotic disorders and alcohol abuse showed no such association. Gullone's (2011) review of studies dealing with human aggression, antisocial behavior and animal abuse pointed at the co-occurrence of antisocial and aggressive behavior and animal abuse. She

argued that animal abuse is one expression of antisocial behavior, and these usually co-occur in a way that the presence of one is highly predictive of the other. Furthermore, studies show that there is a significant association between animal abuse, bullying, and victimization in terms of antisocial behavior traits (Sanders et al, 2013). Sanders and Henry's study (2015) done on female students suggested that those exposed or experiencing animal abuse, bullying, and victimization reported significantly more behavioral challenges and disturbances, thus creating a link between conduct problems and antisocial behavior and animal abuse, bullying, and victimization. To conclude, these studies show that animal abuse should be considered an important indicator of antisocial behavior and conduct disorders and implications of such a stance should be reflected in law enforcement officers, health and other professionals in sanctioning, prevention and treatment activities.

Conclusion

Numerous studies on antisocial behavior and its connection to animal cruelty in children and adults show the multi-fold nature of violent behavior. Both national and comparative studies show that domestic and partner violence often includes pets, and children often participate in it. The expanding "triad" of domestic violence (women, children, pets, elderly, live-in maids) points to shared characteristics and similarities in victimology, but also deepens our knowledge on the multiplicity of domestic violence, as well as the deterrents of violence for child development. Other studies presented here further showed that children who experienced abuse also became involved in acts of animal abuse. Witnessing or experiencing animal abuse influences children's development and often disincentives them in terms of empathy. The bulk of research thus underlines that animal cruelty is a red flag for human violence and that this is a warning sign for detecting other forms of violence and recognizing hidden victims. It is also a warning that a more thorough approach for the rehabilitation of victims of domestic violence as well as for the prevention of future violent behavior is needed.

The scholarship, to some extent, has successfully influenced the development of policies and social institutions on this matter. Although animal cruelty has traditionally not been considered a symptomatic indicator of any particular psychiatric disorder, the research that has been conducted in the past 25 years has successfully argued that animal cruelty in children and adults is associated with antisocial behavior and personality disorders (in adults), especially those with a criminal history. There has been extensive literature on the pathological aspects of defense mechanisms and how they relate to certain emotions or (aggressive) behavior, but research on the direct connection between defense mechanisms and animal abuse seems to be scarce.

What is suggested here is that three defense mechanisms are most commonly used by children as well as adults in instances of animal cruelty: projection, displacement and identification with the aggressor. These allow for a transfer of aggression onto another object, usually weaker than the subject employing the defenses, while boosting self-esteem and relieving stress. Therefore, the links established in domestic violence victimology prevail here as well. Animals, women and other children present a weaker object in our collective projection, which, therefore, additionally enables the abuse. This can result in very weak situational empathy, and mechanisms that depend on cultural norms allow us to feel no remorse. Lack of empathy, be it affective or cognitive, is

consequently never only inherited, but always results from complex experiences and situations. Therefore, it is not a surprise that, as stated earlier, some studies show that animal abusers ranked higher in cognitive empathy than the rest of “us”.

Finally, the complexity of the topic is crucial for the development of legal and institutional frameworks for the protection of animals, as well as of human society in general. Understanding animal cruelty from a legal and social policy standpoint does not only entails the decision to use sanctions or not, and what type, but also education, training and skills, prevention, multi- and inter-sectional intervention and rehabilitation, all of which should be informed by the multi-fold nature of human violence.

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Kriminološki aspekti zlostavljanja životinja: Pregledni rad

Sažetak

Uzimajući u obzir složenost okrutnosti prema životinjama, problem njezinih različitih definicija koje ovise o zakonodavnom okviru, socijalne norme, kulturnu i javnu percepciju te mnoge različite pristupe ovom problemu, naglasak ovog rada bit će samo na aktivnoj okrutnosti (počinjenje djela), tj. namjeri ozljeđivanja životinje te nanošenju boli i patnje. Istražit će se sami fenomen kao višestruki pokazatelj nasilja.

Bez obzira tretira li se zlostavljanje životinja kao kazneno djelo ili prekršaj ili je u potpunosti odsutno iz zakonodavnog okvira, ono predstavlja složeni fenomen koji je prisutan i kod djece i kod odraslih. Ovakvo zlostavljanje pogađa obitelji i niz društvenih institucija te ne škodi samo životinjama, nego je i pokazatelj različitih međuljudskih oblika nasilja i individualnih poremećaja ponašanja. Ovaj rad istražuje intersekcijnska i interdisciplinarna istraživanja zlostavljanja životinja, njihovu povezanost s posljedičnim nasiljem u odrasloj dobi ili paralelnim obiteljskim nasiljem i nasiljem nad djecom, čimbenike koji doprinose tome kao npr. obrambeni mehanizmi te uloge empatije i kajanja. Promatranje okrutnosti prema životinjama kao dio ljudskog nasilja te kao znak ozbiljne zabrinutosti za dobrobit i životinja i ljudi prvi je korak prema izgradnji održivih socijalnih politika.

Ključne riječi: zlostavljanje životinja, obiteljsko nasilje, obrambeni mehanizam, empatija.