

The Correlation Between Animal Abuse and Socially Dangerous Human Behavior

Empirical literature substantiates the common and historical view that violence toward humans and animal abuse are related – “violence is violence.” That relationship (sometimes referred to as “the link”) is particularly strong in domestic settings, where animal abuse is often entangled with spousal, child, and elder abuse. Witnessing acts of cruelty can result in either adopting the violent behavior (through modeling) or induce emotional trauma. The link may also be evident in more organized forms of animal exploitation, such as staged animal fighting. In these settings, participants may become desensitized to the suffering of animals, manifesting dangerous social behavior as a consequence.

Studies and Other Supporting Information about “The Link”

- In a nationally representative sample of 43,093 adults, cruelty to animals was significantly associated with antisocial behaviors (Vaughn, et al., 2009).
- A Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals study found animal abusers five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people, four times more likely to commit property crimes, and three times more likely to have a record for drug or disorderly conduct offenses (Luke, et al., 1997).
- In a study by the Chicago Police Department from 2001 to 2004, of 332 people arrested for cruelty to animals or dog fighting 70% had also been arrested for non-animal-related felonies; 86% had two or more crimes in their history; 65% had also been arrested for battery of all sorts; and 59% were confirmed gang members (Degenhardt, 2005).
- Youth who witness violence between family members or witness harm to animals are three times more likely to abuse animals (Baldry, 2005).
- A longitudinal study of more than 2000 children living in the UK found that children who were cruel to animals were three times more likely to have been maltreated than other children (McEwen, et al., 2014).

- A study found significant increased crime rates among slaughterhouse workers compared to the general population (Fitzgerald & Kalof, 2009).

Policy Remedies to Address Animal Cruelty and Related Social Behaviors

- All 50 states now have felony animal cruelty laws and anti-animal fighting laws. In 2016, the FBI began tracking crimes against animals in the same way it tracks other serious criminal offenses in the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS). Forty-five states have cross-reporting laws pertaining to animal cruelty, though each has its own language and definitions of mandated reporting. Forty-six states have laws against bestiality.
- The Congress has updated the federal Animal Fighting law five times in the last two decades, including amendments to the 2018 Agricultural Improvement Act to extend prohibitions on animal fighting to the U.S. territories. There is a federal law banning the sale of videos depicting malicious acts or cruelty. In 2018, the Congress passed the Pet and Women Safety Act to address the link between domestic violence and animal cruelty. And in 2019, the Congress passed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act, establishing a federal anti-cruelty statute, with prohibitions against bestiality.
- Twenty-two states and D.C. have laws authorizing or requiring psychological evaluations of individuals convicted of certain forms of animal abuse. Twenty-nine states and D.C. have laws authorizing or requiring counseling for those convicted of certain forms of animal abuse. More than half of the states have laws allowing pets to be included in domestic violence protective orders.

In 2020, Animal Wellness Action and the Animal Wellness Foundation conducted investigations in several states and on Guam and found large-scale networks trafficking tens of thousands of animals for fighting to other states, territories, and nations. A Philippines-based television network in 2020 released videos of 50 videos, involving on-farm visits, with the American cockfighters touting the bloodlines of their fight birds – one more indicator that U.S. animal fighters are supplying animals to pits across the world. In 2019, BeastForum.com, which had more than a million users, shut down, but practitioners of bestiality have created other web portals to facilitate this exploitation of animals. The presence of animal crush videos remains disturbingly widespread.

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Animal Wellness Foundation/Animal Wellness Action

611 Pennsylvania Ave., S.E., #136

Washington, D.C. 20003

www.animalwellnessaction.org