



Animal Abuse Co-Occurring with Child Maltreatment

A Selected Bibliography

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Scope

This selected bibliography covers literature significant to the study of child maltreatment that co-occurs with animal abuse. Included are English language articles, reports, book chapters, and books. Links are provided to publicly available publications when possible.

Organization

Publications are listed in date descending order.

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Schaffner, J. E. (2013). [Linking Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, and Animal Cruelty](#). GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 307; GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 307.

For years social science has demonstrated a link between animal abuse and human violence but the legal system has been slow to recognize this link. This article discusses the link among domestic violence, child abuse and animal abuse in the home and how one jurisdiction, the District of Columbia, is addressing this complex and integrated cycle of abuse as family abuse. The legal proposals include mandatory cross-reporting of abuse between child services and animal protection services, recognizing pet abuse with the intent of injuring a human family member as grounds for an intra-family abuse protective order, providing companion animal protection in protective orders, and creating safe havens for all abused family members, including the pet.

Girardi, A., & Pozzulo, J. D. (2012). The significance of animal cruelty in child protection investigations. *Social Work Research*, 36(1), 53-60.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the frequency with which child protection workers (CPWs) in Ontario, Canada, seek information about animal cruelty during investigations of child maltreatment and the extent to which they consider information about animal cruelty when making decisions about whether intervention is required. The CPWs ($N = 78$) responded to an online survey about their experiences with animal cruelty during child protection investigations in the previous year. Few CPWs routinely asked questions about animal cruelty during investigations, but those who did ask questions were significantly more likely to report disclosures of animal cruelty by children and caregivers than those who did not ask questions. Many CPWs had directly observed children and caregivers physically harming animals. Almost all respondents indicated that animal cruelty was an important factor to consider when making intervention decisions. The results suggest that CPWs should consider routinely asking children and caregivers questions about animal cruelty and observe the behavior and living conditions of family pets when

conducting risk assessments. Future research should determine whether animal cruelty is a reliable indicator of exposure to family violence.

Schwartz, R. L., Fremouw, W., Schenk, A., & Ragatz, L. L. (2012). Psychological profile of male and female animal abusers. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 27*(5), 846-861.

This study had three purposes: to explore psychological characteristics of animal abusers (criminal thinking styles, empathy, and personality traits), to replicate previously reported results (past illegal actions, bullying behavior), and to examine potential gender differences. The self-reported animal abuser group was 29 college students who reported two or more incidents of animal abuse; controls were 29 college students matched on age and gender. Participants completed self-report measures of criminal thinking, illegal behaviors, bullying, empathy, and the five-factor personality traits. Results indicated animal abusers had more previous criminal behaviors, were more likely to bully, and had the highest scores on the power orientation criminal thinking scale. Abuser by gender interactions were detected; female animal abusers scored significantly higher on several measures of criminal thinking, were found to be more likely to bully, and exhibited lower scores on measures of perspective taking and empathy compared to female controls.

Flynn, C. P. (2011). Examining the links between animal abuse and human violence. *Crime, Law and Social Change, 55*(5), 453-468.

Empirical research has increasingly found evidence for the coexistence of animal abuse and various forms of interpersonal violence. Some researchers have even argued for a specific version of this relationship, namely, that individuals tend to move from violence toward animals, particularly in childhood, to subsequent violence toward humans. Others have suggested that the evidence for this graduation or progression hypothesis is weak and inconsistent, and that an approach to animal abuse that focuses on the link is misguided. This article begins by reviewing the research on the connections between animal abuse and interhuman violence. Then it critically assesses the evidence for and against the link, and discusses the issues and challenges facing future research in this area.

DeGue, S. (2011). [A triad of family violence: Examining overlap in the abuse of children, partners, and pets.](#) In *The Psychology of the Human-Animal Bond* (pp. 245-262). Springer New York.

The relationship between cruelty to animals and the abuse of women and children has been informally recognized throughout history (Ascione & Arkow, 1999). A folk proverb advised, “A woman, a horse, and a hickory tree; The more you beat ‘em, the better they be” (cited in Adams, 1995). Similarly, George Cannon, leader of the Church of Latter Day Saints in the 1890s, warned, “Young ladies, never put yourself in the power or under the control of young men who treat their animals badly, for if you become their wives, they will abuse you” (cited in Quinlisk, 1999). More recently, popular belief in a link between animal- and human-directed violence has been codified in state legislation establishing cross-reporting systems that permit or require animal cruelty and child welfare investigators to refer families to parallel agencies for investigation (Long, Long, & Kulkarni, 2007). Such laws are based on the assumption that families experiencing one form of violence victimization will be at an increased risk for other forms of violence (DeGue & DiLillo, 2009). This chapter provides an overview of current knowledge regarding the extent and nature of this overlap, discusses possible explanations for the exposure of family members (human and nonhuman) to multiple types of violence victimization, and highlights potential implications for prevention and early intervention.

Vaughn, M. G., Qiang, F., Beaver, K. M., DeLisi, M., Perron, B. E., & Howard, M. O. (2011). Effects of adversity on bullying and cruelty to animals in the United States: Findings from a national sample. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 26*(17), 3509-3525.

This study examined effects of type of and cumulative burden of childhood adversities on bullying and cruelty to animals in the United States. Data were derived from Waves I and II of the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults. Structured psychiatric interviews were completed by trained lay interviewers between 2001-2002 and 2003-2004. Although the effects of childhood adversity diminished with the inclusion of confounding variables, several adversities remained significant. For bullying, these included being made to do chores that were too difficult or dangerous, threatening to hit or throw something, pushing, shoving, slapping, or hitting, and hitting that left bruises, marks, or injuries.

With respect to cruelty to animals, swearing and saying hurtful things, having a parent or other adult living within the home that went to jail or prison, and adult/other person fondling/touching in a sexual way were significant. The final models indicated that the cumulative burden of childhood adversities had strong effects on the increased likelihood of bullying behavior but not cruelty to animals.

Alys, L., Wilson, J. C., Clarke, J., & Toman, P. (2009). Developmental animal cruelty and its correlates in sexual homicide offenders and sex offenders. In A. Linzey (Ed.), *The link between animal abuse and human violence* (pp. 145–162). Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press.

DeGue, S., & DiLillo, D. (2009). Is animal cruelty a “red flag” for family violence? Investigating co-occurring violence toward children, partners, and pets. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 24*(6), 1036-1056.

Cross-reporting legislation, which permits child and animal welfare investigators to refer families with substantiated child maltreatment or animal cruelty for investigation by parallel agencies, has recently been adopted in several U.S. jurisdictions. The current study sheds light on the underlying assumption of these policies—that animal cruelty and family violence commonly co-occur. Exposure to family violence and animal cruelty is retrospectively assessed using a sample of 860 college students. Results suggest that animal abuse may be a red flag indicative of family violence in the home. Specifically, about 60% of participants who have witnessed or perpetrated animal cruelty as a child also report experiences with child maltreatment or domestic violence. Differential patterns of association were revealed between childhood victimization experiences and the type of animal cruelty exposure reported. This study extends current knowledge of the links between animal- and human-directed violence and provides initial support for the premise of cross-reporting legislation.

McPhedran, S. (2009). Animal abuse, family violence, and child wellbeing: A review. *Journal of Family Violence, 24*(1), 41-52.

Animal abuse and family violence appear to be “linked” and tend to co-occur in the same households. Companion animals are often regarded as family members, if not by the abuser, then by others within the family. Consequently, in families where any given form of violence exists,

animal abuse is also more likely to exist. This paper examines animal abuse in the context of abusive home environments, and the relationship between an abusive home in childhood and the range of behavioral problems that may extend into adulthood. Existing investigations are reviewed with reference to prevalence, epidemiology, and child development theory. It appears that holistic interventions to counter abusive home environments may represent the most effective way to break the association between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, by addressing the shared situational characteristics common to a range of violent behaviors.

Ascione, F.R. (2008). Animal abuse and child maltreatment occurrence. In C. Renzetti & J. Edelson (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Arkow, P. (2007). [Animal maltreatment in the ecology of abused children: Compelling research and responses for prevention, assessment, and intervention.](#) *Protecting Children*, 22(3-4), 66-79.

Louise Petersen, M., & Farrington, D. P. (2007). Cruelty to animals and violence to people. *Victims and Offenders*, 2(1), 21-43.

The topic of animal cruelty has been largely neglected by criminological researchers. However, studies suggest that children who are cruel to animals disproportionately tend to be violent to people later in life. Case histories of serial killers and mass murderers suggest that many were cruel to animals in their childhood. Furthermore, it is argued that cruelty to animals in a family tends to be associated with domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. Unfortunately, much of the previous research was based on small, unrepresentative samples, with poor or no control samples and retrospective information. Prospective longitudinal surveys of large representative samples are needed. Family based prevention programs might be effective in reducing cruelty to animals, but experimental evaluations of such programs are required. The time is ripe for a major research program to advance knowledge about the causes and prevention of animal cruelty and its implications for criminology.

Montminy-Danna, M. (2007). Child welfare and animal cruelty: A survey of child welfare workers. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 7(3), 83-96.

Twenty-two percent of the child welfare workers surveyed indicated they have been assigned child maltreatment cases where there is a subsequent disclosure of animal cruelty. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to understand how the issue of animal cruelty is addressed within the child welfare system. At present there is no standard protocol for inquiring about and addressing the issue of animal cruelty. Some workers have expanded their assessment protocol to include questions about experiences with animal cruelty. Perpetrators include boys, girls, relatives, and caregivers. Challenges for the child welfare system on all system levels are addressed.

Onyskiw, J. E. (2007). The link between family violence and cruelty to family pets. *Journal of emotional abuse*, 7(3), 7-30.

Family violence remains a prevalent social problem crossing racial, geographic, social, and economic boundaries (World Health Organization, 2002). Different forms of family violence often exist in the same households. In the 1980s, researchers observed a connection between acts of animal cruelty and family violence. Since then other researchers have corroborated their findings. Despite these articles appearing in the scholarly literature, there has been relatively little attention given to this issue in mainstream literature on family violence and little evidence that this information has been used to inform prevention or intervention efforts. This article summarizes the empirical evidence on the link between family violence and cruelty to family pets and discusses the implications of these connections for professionals who work with women, children, families, or animals.

Randour, M. L. (2007). Integrating animals into the family violence paradigm: Implications for policy and professional standards. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 7(3), 97-116.

Noting the established link between animal abuse and family violence, this paper outlines the implications for policy and professional standards. Federal policies related to the collection of crime statistics by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as the collection by federal agencies

of data on family violence, including domestic abuse and child abuse and neglect, are cited and proposals for including questions about animal cruelty into these federal databases are offered. Various types of state legislation, such as cross reporting and increased penalties for individuals who commit violence in the presence of minors, are described, and the implications for the link between animal abuse and family violence are discussed. Finally, the important area of professional standards-how the mental health profession sets and maintains standards for education and training-is reviewed and suggestions for the inclusion of animal cruelty as an important component for assessment and treatment are proposed.

Ascione, F.R. (2005). Children, animal abuse, and family violence: The multiple intersections of animal abuse, child victimization, and domestic violence. In, K.A. Kendall-Tackett & S. Giacomoni, eds.: *Victimization of Children and Youth: Patterns of Abuse, Response Strategies*. Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute, pp. 3-1 -- 3-34.

Baldry, A. C. (2005). Animal abuse among preadolescents directly and indirectly victimized at school and at home. *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health*, 15(2), 97-110.
doi: 10.1002/cbm.42

Animal abuse by preadolescents has been associated with their later family violence and/or criminal behaviour; less is known about animal abuse and concurrent experience of being a victim at home and/or school, or of contemporaneous aggression to peers. To establish the prevalence of animal abuse among Italian preadolescents and its relationship with experience of abuse at home and school (direct and witnessed), and to peer abuse (bullying). An Italian community sample of 268 girls and 264 boys (aged 9–12) completed a self-reported questionnaire about victimization at home and school, animal abuse and bullying. Two in five preadolescents admitted abusing animals at least once in their life, and one in three bullying peers at school, with a higher prevalence among boys. Over three-quarters of all participants reported at least one type of victim experience: one-third had experienced inter-parental violence; over one-third had themselves been abused by one or both parents; two in five had been directly or indirectly victimized at school. Individual tests of association suggested gender differences. Multivariate regression analyses conducted separately for boys and girls showed that the independent variable accounted for more than 25% of the

variance for the girls, but less than 10% for the boys. Experiences of abuse were the key independent variables for the girls; other expressions of aggression were the key variables for the boys. The results suggest that discovery of animal abuse should prompt further enquiries about other problems that a child may have. Detection of animal abuse by a child could offer an early opportunity for intervention to alleviate internalized damage or other aggressive behaviour. Copyright © 2005 Whurr Publishers Ltd.

Becker, F., & French, L. (2004). Making the links: Child abuse, animal cruelty and domestic violence. *Child Abuse Review*, 13(6), 399-414.

The paper sets out the research evidence on the correlation, or the 'links', between child abuse, animal abuse and domestic violence, explores the evidence base available to professionals working with animals or children and describes the process of establishing a national multidisciplinary group known as the Links Group. The paper goes on to consider the challenges in setting up a working group of this kind and its subsequent progress in terms of influencing policy and practice. Finally, the authors make a series of recommendations aimed at continuing the process of change within organizations charged with the welfare of animals, children and vulnerable families. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

Bell, L. (2001). Abusing children—Abusing animals. *Journal of Social Work*, 1(2), 223-234.

Research suggests that if an individual is cruel to animals then he/she is more likely to be aggressive towards his/her partner and children; that children who are abused are more likely to be cruel to animals; and that children who are cruel to animals are more likely to be aggressive towards humans. Because of the potential seriousness of the link between cruelty to animals and a child's experiences and behaviour, a survey was undertaken in the UK to explore what services were available to children who were cruel to animals. This paper summarizes some of the existing research and describes the study of services. The findings show that a small number of children are already receiving services, but that most agencies do not routinely include cruelty to animals as part of their assessment. There is no therapy or counselling specifically focused on cruelty to animals, but agencies could provide a range of services appropriate to the needs of the child and/or

the family. This article highlights the fact that a child's cruelty to animals may be an important symptom of negative experiences and/or predictor of future aggressive behaviour and that cruelty to animals should be included in assessments of vulnerable children.

Miller, C. (2001). Childhood animal cruelty and interpersonal violence. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 21(5), 735-749.

Conduct disorder (CD) affects 2–9% of children in this country and has been found to be relatively stable through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood. Although many behaviors that comprise CD have been studied, there has been a lack of research on cruelty to animals. It has been suggested that animal cruelty may be exhibited by 25% of CD children and that animal abuse may be the earliest symptom evident in CD children. In addition, several studies have found a significant relationship between childhood cruelty to animals and violence toward people. Available research is reviewed in this report, including early studies on the relationship between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, recent assessment attempts, and intervention techniques. Future research needs are also outlined and discussed.

Flynn, C. P. (2000). [Why family professionals can no longer ignore violence toward animals](#). *Family Relations*, 49(1), 87-95.

The issue of violence to animals has been virtually ignored by family scholars and other family professionals. After looking at why animal abuse has not received attention, it is argued that those who study and work with families need to attend to animal abuse for seven reasons: (a) animal abuse is a serious antisocial behavior by children and adolescents; (b) it is a relatively common childhood occurrence; (c) it has potential negative developmental consequences; (d) violence toward animals is related to interpersonal violence; (e) it is connected to and may be a marker of family violence; (f) the well-being of companion animals is being neglected; and (g) it will help achieve a less violent society. The implications for research, policy, counseling and human services, and family life education are discussed.

Arluke, A., Levin, J., Luke, C., & Ascione, F. R. (1999). The relationship of animal abuse to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 14*(9), 963–975.

Results from this study challenge the assumption that animal abusers commonly “graduate” from violence against animals to violence against humans. The criminal records of 153 animal abusers and 153 control participants were tracked and compared. Animal abusers were more likely than control participants to be interpersonally violent, but they also were more likely to commit property offenses, drug offenses, and public disorder offenses. Thus, there was an association between animal abuse and a variety of antisocial behaviors, but not violence alone. Moreover, when the time order between official records of animal abuse and interpersonal violence was examined, animal abuse was no more likely to precede than follow violent offenses. Although these findings dispute the assumption that animal abuse inevitably leads to violence toward humans, they point to an association between animal abuse and a host of antisocial behaviors, including violence. Also discussed are the methodological problems of demonstrating sequential temporal relations between animal abuse and other antisocial behaviors

Boat, B. W. (1999). Abuse of children and abuse of animals: Using the links to inform child assessment and protection. In F. R. Ascione & P. Arkow (Eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence, and animal abuse: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (pp. 83-100). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Flynn, C. P. (1999). [Animal abuse in childhood and later support for interpersonal violence in families](#). *Society and Animals, 7*(2), 161-172.

A survey of university students tested whether committing animal abuse during childhood was related to approval of interpersonal violence against children and women in families. Respondents who had abused an animal as children or adolescents were significantly more likely to support corporal punishment, even after controlling for frequency of childhood spanking, race, biblical literalism, and gender. Those who had perpetrated animal abuse were also more likely to approve of a husband slapping his wife. Engaging in childhood violence against less powerful beings—animals—may generalize to the acceptance of violence against less powerful members of families and society—women and children. This paper discusses the implications of this process.

Van Patten, J. (1999). [The relationship between violence against children and animals.](#) *Protecting Children, 15(2)*, 1-5.

Arkow, P. (1997). Relationships between animal abuse and other forms of family violence. *Protecting Children, 13(2)*, 4-9.

The system of child protective services as we know it today was an off-shoot of the animal protection movement, and the two professions have followed parallel evolutions for more than a century. In recent years, domestic violence intervention programs have also begun to recognize animal abuse as being not only potentially predictive of violent behaviors against humans, but also as part of the constellation of dysfunctional family symptomatology. Abuse against animals, when perpetrated or observed by juveniles, has a pernicious capability of evolving into generalized desensitization to violence and into acts of violence in adulthood. Children who observe domestic violence may imitate abusive behaviors through violent acts against animals. For these reasons, domestic violence prevention agencies should interface with animal protection organizations to explore common interests and opportunities for professional interactions, including referrals, community awareness programs, cross- training, and joint service programs.

Boat, B.W. (1995). The relationship between violence to children and violence to animals: An ignored link? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 10(2)*, 229-235.

The association between violence to children and violence to animals remains largely unacknowledged in the child abuse/neglect arena. Several reasons justifying further exploration of this link are discussed, along with suggestions for enhancing our awareness, knowledge, and services.

Lockwood, R., & Hodge, G. R. (1986). [Tangled web of animal abuse: The links between cruelty to animals and human violence.](#) *The Humane Society News, Summer*. 4 p.

Recent attention to animal abuse as a potentially serious human problem has been prompted by the realization that many violent offenders have a history of animal abuse, the increasing attention being paid to all forms of family violence, evidence of the central role that pets play in normal and abusive families, the links between organized cruelty toward animals and other illegal activities,

and growing public concern over the lenient sentences given in animal cruelty cases. Much of the current evidence indicates that animal abuse is not just the result of a personality flaw in the abuser, but is often symptomatic of a deeply disturbed family, in which children and elders may also be abused. There is also support for the hypothesis that cruelty to animals may be linked to other mental disorders.

DeViney, E., Dickert, J., & Lockwood, R. (1983). The care of pets within child abusing families. *International Journal for the Study of Animal Problems*, 4(4), 321-329.

The treatment of animals was surveyed in 53 families (average age of adults 33.25 yrs; average age of children 8.2 yrs) in which child abuse had occurred. Patterns of pet ownership, attitudes toward pets, and quality of veterinary care did not differ greatly from comparable data obtained from the general public. However, abuse of pets by a family member had taken place in 60% of the families. The families in which animal abuse was indicated tended to have younger pets, lower levels of veterinary care, and more conflicts over care than nonabusive families. There were several parallels between the treatment of pets and the treatment of children within child-abusing families, suggesting that animal abuse may be a potential indicator of other family problems. Findings suggest that it may be helpful to review the role of pets in these families as part of the therapeutic process. (24 ref) (PsycINFO Database Record)