

Why Family Professionals Can No Longer Ignore Violence Toward Animals*

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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.

The abusive or cruel treatment of animals by family members has received virtually no attention among family scholars. This is true despite its surprisingly common occurrence, its disturbing nature, and its negative consequences for both people and animals. Committing violence against animals in childhood may likely signify a troubled child and/or a dysfunctional family. Clinical studies have shown that children who are particularly cruel to animals are more likely to engage in aggressive or violent behavior toward others (Felthous & Kellert, 1986; Rigdon & Tapia, 1977; Tapia, 1971). Further, animal abuse may be a marker of child abuse or other forms of violence occurring within families (Arkow, 1996; Boat, 1995). Research has revealed that abusive parents and partners, almost always male, sometimes threatened to harm, or actually harmed, animals as a way to control, intimidate, and silence their victims (e.g., Ascione, 1998; DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood, 1983; Gelles & Straus, 1988).

What studies that do exist have been done primarily by psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as by those in the field of veterinary studies. They have employed an individualistic, psychopathological perspective, in which animal abuse is viewed as part of a defective personality and/or as a predictor of later criminality.

The minimal attention given to this issue by family researchers, clinicians, educators, and other family professionals has resulted in a very limited knowledge base and little or no efforts to address the problem. This article, after considering why violence toward animals has been relatively ignored for so long by family scholars and other family professionals, will argue that this issue can no longer be overlooked. Finally, the implications for those who study and work with families are considered.

Why Violence to Animals Has Been Ignored

Why has violence to animals been ignored by family researchers? The reasons given by Arluke and Luke (1997), explaining a similar oversight by criminologists, apply equally well for family scholars. First, society tends to value animals less than people. Consequently, abusive or violent behavior toward animals is not taken as seriously. In their study of the prosecution of animal cruelty cases in Massachusetts from 1975–1990, less than half of the cases resulted in a conviction, only one-third of those found guilty were fined, only 10% received jail time, and counseling or community service was ordered even less frequently. Second, other issues are seen as more important, and are thus given higher priority by researchers. Third, because only a small fraction of the cases are ever reported in the media,

public perception is that animal abuse is rare. Again citing from the above study, only 5% of 268 prosecuted cases of animal cruelty were reported in the press. Fourth, crimes against animals are seen as isolated incidents, rather than connected to other behaviors such as violence against people.

In addition to these reasons, the extensive amount of socially acceptable forms of violence against animals (i.e., hunting and fishing, animal experimentation, meat-eating) are likely to contribute to an indifference about less acceptable forms of violence. When this cultural acceptance of the exploitation of animals is supported by powerful institutions of religion, science, and government, and when those who are interested in the welfare of animals are perceived as overly emotional or irrational, then it is no surprise that so few social scientists have examined this phenomenon, particularly from a family perspective. Finally, animals, along with nonverbal human infants, are the only victims of systematic discrimination and exploitation who truly cannot speak on their own behalf. This silence makes it easier for all of us, including family professionals, to ignore their plight and its relation to our lives.

Why Violence to Animals Must Receive Attention

In this section, I will argue that the maltreatment of animals by family members must be addressed for the following seven reasons: (a) It is a disturbing, antisocial, and illegal behavior; (b) among children and adolescents, both witnessing and perpetrating animal cruelty are relatively common; (c) abusing animals, and possibly observing abuse by others, is likely to have negative developmental consequences for children; (d) perpetrating animal abuse is likely to lead to other forms of interpersonal aggression, both within and outside the family; (e) the presence of animal cruelty may be a marker of other forms of violence taking place in families; (f) the welfare of companion animals, most of whom are viewed as family members, is being neglected; and (g) addressing violence in all of its forms, including violence against animals, will help efforts to promote and

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achieve a more humane and less violent society for all individuals—humans and animals.

Animal Maltreatment is a Serious Antisocial Behavior

Numerous studies in the family literature have focused on antisocial behaviors among children and adolescents. Animal cruelty is an obvious candidate for inclusion in the category of antisocial behaviors, yet it has been largely overlooked by family scholars and practitioners. As will be argued below, violence to animals by children is a behavior, like other antisocial actions, that should concern parents, educators, clinicians, and policy makers because of the potential negative consequences it has for all members of society. Threatening to harm, harming, torturing, and killing animals are all unwarranted acts that deserve to be taken seriously. Like some of the other antisocial behaviors, animal cruelty may be rewarded by peer groups, and for males, linked with developing and proving one's masculinity. The Massachusetts study of animal cruelty by Arluke and Luke (1997) found that about half of adolescent offenders committed their crimes in groups. Parents who trivialize or fail to punish animal maltreatment or even worse, encourage or demonstrate such cruelty (e.g., kicking the family dog, shooting strays) not only risk promoting violence and ignoring psychological problems in their children, but they may also be condoning (and sometimes modeling) illegal behavior.

Like the many other antisocial behaviors examined by those who study and work with families, violence toward animals by children and adolescents is clearly a serious problem that warrants serious attention. Doing so will help to identify not just the troubled youth, but also the dysfunctional families in which they are likely to reside (Arkow, 1996).

Childhood Experience of Animal Cruelty is Surprisingly Common

Although the research is quite limited, there is evidence that the incidence of animal abuse in childhood is alarmingly high. Two studies of college undergraduates, one from the midwest (Miller & Knutson, 1997) and my own from the southeast, found that half of the students had either perpetrated or witnessed animal cruelty. In the Miller and Knutson study, approximately half of the students (48.4%) reported some exposure to animal cruelty. Although most students (about 57%) who had been exposed to animal cruelty had only witnessed it, one in five had perpetrated abuse. Approximately one out of seven respondents had killed stray animals, about one in ten had hurt or tortured animals, and 3.2% reported killing their own pets. Males were particularly likely to have experienced animal abuse, being twice as likely as females (about two-thirds vs. one-third) to have observed or committed animal abuse.

My survey in the fall of 1997 of 267 undergraduates at a public southeastern university revealed remarkably similar results. Students in introductory psychology and sociology classes completed an eighteen-page questionnaire that contained questions about the respondents' experiences with animal cruelty, as well as other items regarding their families, attitudes, and demographic variables. Approximately three-fourths of the sample was White (73.4%), and about one-fifth was African-American. Slightly over two-thirds of the sample (68.4%) was female. The majority of respondents were typical college age students at or

near the beginning of their college careers. Over eighty percent were either freshmen (58.8%) or sophomores (24.3%), and eighty percent were under the age of twenty-one. Nine out of ten were single, and 95.5% were childless.

Measure of animal cruelty. Exposure to animal abuse was operationalized by asking subjects whether they had witnessed or committed 10 different acts against animals. Subjects were asked if they had ever: (a) seen others hurt or torture an animal to tease it or cause it pain; (b) seen someone kill an animal; (c) had another try to control them by threatening to hurt or actually hurting an animal; (d) seen another have sex with an animal; (e) killed a stray animal; (f) hurt or tortured an animal to tease it or cause it pain; (g) killed a pet; (h) touched an animal sexually; (i) had sex with an animal; or (j) been forced by another to hurt an animal. If any of the first four were reported (a–d), the subject was considered to have witnessed animal abuse. If any of the next five were reported (e–i), the subject was considered to have committed animal abuse. Since item j, being forced by another to hurt an animal, did not fit neatly into either category, it was counted only in the overall experience of animal abuse.

These items were the same items used by Miller and Knutson (1997), who had adapted the Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences (formerly called the Animal-Related Trauma Inventory) for use in a questionnaire format (Boat, 1999). As in the Miller and Knutson study, in an effort to eliminate reporting of socially acceptable behaviors, items concerning the subject witnessing, killing, or being forced to hurt an animal specifically excluded killing for food (i.e., farm animals intended for slaughter), while hunting, and mercy killing.

In addition, for each type of abuse, respondents were asked to report the type of animal involved, what was done to the animal, the number of separate incidents, and the age when the cruelty was first experienced. For cruelty committed by others, subjects reported whether the perpetrator was their father/stepfather, mother/stepmother, siblings, other relatives, friends or neighbors, or other.

Just as in the Miller and Knutson study, nearly one-half of the respondents (49.1%) had experienced (either witnessed or perpetrated) animal cruelty. Nearly 45% had witnessed others abuse animals, while 17.6% had actually perpetrated abuse. The majority of those who had perpetrated abuse had also witnessed it. As can be seen in Table 1, about one-third of the respondents had seen another person hurt or torture an animal, and over one-fourth had witnessed an animal's killing.

Killing a stray and hurting or torturing an animal to tease it or cause it pain were the most common acts of abuse committed. In this sample, witnessing or perpetrating sexually abusive acts was very rare. Only eight respondents said that someone had tried to control them by threatening to hurt or actually hurting an animal, and just one respondent reported being forced by another person to hurt an animal.

Males were much more likely to have been exposed to animal abuse than females. Two-thirds of male respondents had either witnessed or perpetrated abusive acts against animals, while only 4 out of 10 females had experienced animal abuse. The gender difference was particularly striking with regard to perpetrating abuse. Over one-third of the males (34.5%) had inflicted abuse on animals, compared with only 9.3% of females. Of those who had been exposed to animal cruelty, three-fourths

Table 1
Percentages of Southeastern Undergraduates' Experiences with Childhood Animal Abuse, Overall and by Gender

Abusive Act	Male (n = 84)	Female (n = 182)	Total (n = 267)
a. Saw other hurt/torture animal	43.4	27.5	32.3
b. Saw other kill animal	48.8	18.7	28.1
c. Other tried to control subject by threatening to hurt/actually hurting animal	1.2	3.3	3.0
d. Saw others perform sex with animal	1.2	0.0	.4
e. Subject killed stray	29.8	5.0	13.1
f. Subject hurt/tortured animal	13.1	3.8	6.7
g. Subject killed pet	6.0	1.1	2.6
h. Subject touched animal's sex parts	2.4	1.1	1.5
i. Subject performed sex acts with animal	2.4	.6	1.1
j. Subject forced by another to hurt animal	1.2	0.0	.4
Experienced any animal abuse (a-j)	67.9	40.1	49.1
Only witnessed (a-d)	33.3	30.8	31.5
Only perpetrated (e-i)	7.1	3.3	4.5
Witnessed and perpetrated	27.4	6.0	13.1

of females had only witnessed abuse, whereas one out of two males had perpetrated abuse against animals.

Nearly half of the male respondents had seen another person kill an animal, and 43.4% had witnessed an animal being hurt or tortured. The comparable figures for females were 18.7% and 27.5%, respectively. Males were six times more likely to have killed a stray animal, three times more likely to have hurt or tortured an animal, and nearly six times more likely to have killed a pet.

Table 2 presents specific characteristics related to witnessing and perpetrating animal abuse. Friends or neighbors were more likely than family members to have been observed committing abuse, and within the family, fathers were more likely to have victimized animals than mothers or siblings.

The most likely victims of abuse, both witnessed and perpetrated, were small animals (e.g., rodents, birds, reptiles, and poultry), dogs, and cats. The two most common methods of cruelty employed were shooting and direct physical aggression—hitting, beating, kicking, or throwing an animal against the wall. Shooting was the predominant method used for killing animals, while direct physical aggression was more likely to be used to inflict pain or torture animals.

Most subjects had only witnessed or perpetrated one type of violence. Of the respondents who had abused an animal, 70.2% had committed only one kind of abuse. Slightly over half of those who had witnessed animal abuse (55.4%) had seen only one type, while another one-third had witnessed two different kinds of abuse. However, the majority had experienced that one type on more than one occasion. As can be seen in Table 2, this was true for abuse that was perpetrated, as well as just observed.

Respondents were most likely to first witness animal abuse between the ages of six and twelve, but around three in ten initially observed cruelty during adolescence. For those perpetrating abuse, most who had killed a stray did so first when they were in their teens, while more who had hurt or tortured an animal or killed a pet did so first between the ages of six and twelve.

In sum, as many as one-half of all children and two-thirds of male children may be exposed to cruelty to animals. One out

Table 2
Percentages of Characteristics of Two Most Common Types of Animal Cruelty, Witnessed and Perpetrated

Characteristic	Witnessed		Perpetrated	
	Kill stray (n = 75)	Hurt/ Torture (n = 86)	Killed (n = 35)	Hurt/ Tortured (n = 18)
Perpetrator				
Father/Stepfather	31.5	4.7		
Mother/Stepmother	8.2	1.2		
Siblings	5.5	5.8		
Other relatives	19.2	9.3		
Friends or neighbors	43.8	70.9		
Other	17.8	12.8		
Type of Animal				
Dogs	38.4	48.8	17.1	44.4
Cats	27.4	40.7	11.4	16.7
Other small animals ^a	54.8	39.5	77.1	50.0
Large animals ^b	9.6	3.5	2.9	0.0
Other	9.6	3.5	11.4	5.6
Method Used				
Poisoned	9.6	9.3	13.3	5.6
Drowned, strangled, smothered	6.8	7.0	3.3	5.6
Hit, beat, kicked, threw against wall	23.3	76.7	23.3	77.8
Shot	76.7	17.4	60.0	16.7
Stabbed, burned, blew up, castrated	11.0	22.1	0.0	33.3
Number of Incidents				
One	38.9	47.7	35.3	22.2
Two	20.8	19.8	38.2	33.3
Three to Five	30.6	15.1	17.6	16.7
Six or More	9.7	17.4	8.8	27.8
Age at First Incident				
2 to 5	6.8	11.1	0.0	11.1
6 to 12	56.2	50.0	29.4	50.0
Teen	28.8	33.3	70.6	33.3
Adult	8.2	5.6	0.0	5.6

Note: Some percentages may exceed 100% due to multiple responses by some subjects.

^aSmall animals include rodents, birds, reptiles, and poultry.

^bLarge animals include horses, sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, and pigs.

of five children and one out of three male children may perpetrate it. Any behavior—particularly an antisocial, potentially harmful behavior—that is so prevalent should certainly receive the attention of family professionals.

Potential Negative Developmental Consequences

In 1987, the American Psychiatric Association's *DSM-III R—Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd edition, revised*—added physical cruelty to animals to the list of symptoms that served as criteria for the diagnosis of conduct disorder (Ascione, 1993), and was retained in the 1994 *DSM-IV* (Arkow, 1996). Thus, the presence of cruel or abusive behavior toward animals may be a serious indicator of child psychopathology that deserves the attention of parents, researchers, and professionals alike. According to the *DSM-III R* the essential feature of this disorder is a "persistent pattern of conduct in which the basic rights of others and major age-appropriate societal norms or rules are violated" (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p. 53). Physical violence and cruelty are common, both toward people and animals. "The child may have no concern for the feelings, wishes, and wellbeing of others, as shown by callous behavior, and may lack appropriate feelings of guilt or remorse" (p. 53).

Table 3
Percentages of Short- and Long-Term Psychological Effects of Witnessing and Perpetrating Most Common Acts of Animal Cruelty, Southeastern Undergraduate Sample

	Witnessed		Perpetrated	
	Saw Other Kill (n = 74)	Saw Other Hurt/Torture (n = 86)	Killed (n = 34)	Hurt/Tortured (n = 18)
Bothered Then				
A lot	24.3	48.8	23.5	11.1
Some	44.6	39.5	26.5	27.8
Not at all	31.1	11.6	50.0	61.1
Bothers Now				
A lot	18.9	41.2	9.1	22.2
Some	29.7	31.8	39.4	33.3
Not at all	51.4	27.1	51.5	44.4

There are several possible negative social and psychological developmental outcomes that could result from engaging in animal abuse. One that has received considerable attention concerns the potential inhibition or distortion of empathy (Ascione, 1992; 1993). Inflicting cruelty against a smaller, weaker, less powerful creature may make it easier to disregard the feelings of other living beings, humans or animals. The inability to empathize with others may lead to treating others in a manner consistent with the above symptoms of conduct disorder—with callous disregard, and without feelings of regret or remorse. If animal abuse interferes with the development of empathy, then interactions with others may not only be unkind or unpleasant, but violent as well.

To get a general measure of the psychological effect of experiencing animal cruelty, respondents in our undergraduate sample were asked how much witnessing or perpetrating animal cruelty bothered them at the time of the first incident and how much it bothers them now. The results for the two most common types of abuse witnessed and perpetrated are presented in Table 3. Those who witnessed cruelty were more likely to be affected than those who actually perpetrated it. Seeing another person hurt or torture an animal had the most negative psychological impact, both at the time and currently. Eight out of nine students who witnessed someone hurt or torture an animal reported being bothered some (39.5%) or a lot (48.8%) when the cruelty occurred, and nearly three out of four (73%) report still being bothered now. Almost one-third of the respondents said that observing an animal being hurt or tortured bothered them a lot at both times, while only 9.4% were not bothered at all either then or now.

Approximately 70% of those who saw someone kill an animal reported being bothered at the time, and slightly less than half said that the experience still bothers them. One out of six were bothered a lot both at the time and now. Of the eight respondents who said that someone had tried to control them by harming or threatening to harm an animal, all were and continue to be bothered by that experience (not shown in table). Seven reported being bothered a lot then, with one being bothered some. At the time of the survey, half say that they are bothered a lot now, while the other four are still bothered some.

The pattern for perpetrating animal cruelty is somewhat different. Approximately half of those who either killed a stray or hurt or tortured an animal were bothered by their actions, both then and now. However, those who hurt or tortured animals ap-

pear to be affected more later by their cruelty than at the time. Just under 40% reported being bothered at the time, but 56.5% said their actions bother them now. Forty percent of those who killed or hurt/tortured animals claim that they were not bothered by their abuse at either time.

It seems clear that for a significant number of respondents, experiencing animal cruelty, and particularly witnessing it, resulted in some psychological or emotional strain not only at the time of the cruelty, but several years later as well. Why would the effects be more pronounced for those who witnessed violence to animals in childhood than for those who actually perpetrated it? Several overlapping explanations are plausible. First, children who engage in animal cruelty are likely to have certain characteristics that lead them to be less affected by violence (i.e., predominantly males whose socialization has included violence). Additionally, committing an act of cruelty against an animal may create the need to justify that action by redefining it as something other than cruelty. Finally, one who witnesses animal cruelty has no control over the act; in fact, in some cases the cruelty may have been employed to shock, intimidate, or exert control over the observer. Witnessing the abuse and being helpless to prevent it may make the psychological impact even worse.

In addition to negative psychological consequences, experience with animal abuse also places children at risk regarding their own physical well-being. In the sample of southeastern college students, one-fifth of all respondents (and three-fourths of those who had witnessed an animal being killed) had observed someone use a gun to kill an animal. Perpetrators were most likely to be friends or neighbors, followed by fathers, suggesting that either unsupervised gun use or access to guns (or both) may heighten the danger for children who observe animal abuse. When considering that half of respondents who killed a stray used a gun, the opportunity for additional harm to the individual or others is evident.

Childhood Animal Cruelty is Related to Interpersonal Violence

Clinical case studies of troubled youth (Rigdon & Tapia, 1977; Tapia, 1971) and retrospective studies of aggressive criminals (Felthous & Kellert, 1986; Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Res-sler, Burgess, Hartman, Douglas, & McCormack, 1986; Tingle, Barnard, Robbins, Newman, & Hutchinson, 1986) have consistently revealed a relationship between childhood animal abuse and interpersonal violence in childhood and as an adult. Some of the common features of the subjects' childhoods included chaotic and violent home environments. In particular, paternal abuse and alcoholism were frequently present. Thus, the presence of childhood animal cruelty may reveal not only information about a disturbed individual, but may help to predict those individuals who are engaging in violence against others now or who may do so in the future.

Tapia (1971) analyzed 18 case histories of children in which cruelty to animals was either the main complaint or one of the complaints. All of the children were males, and their ages ranged from 5 to 15 years, with half of the boys being between 8 and 10. Bullying and fighting were reported in ten of the cases, and other aggressive symptoms such as destructiveness, fire-setting, and stealing were also common. According to Tapia, "The overall picture must be viewed as one of aggression with poor control of impulses" (1971, p. 76).

In a follow-up study published six years later, Rigdon and Tapia (1977) examined the cases of thirteen of the original eighteen boys. Eight of the thirteen were still being cruel to animals. Of the seven boys whose earlier case histories included bullying and fighting, five still presented these behaviors.

Kellert and Felthous (1985) examined the relationship between abusing animals in childhood and aggression among criminals and noncriminals as adults. Retrospective interviews were completed with 102 inmates from prisons in Connecticut and Kansas, and 50 noncriminals who were randomly selected from neighboring towns. Criminals, based on observational ratings by prison counselors since arriving at the prison, as well as on their own self-reports, were classified as being aggressive, moderately aggressive, or nonaggressive. Aggressive criminals reported significantly more childhood incidents of cruelty to animals than any of the other groups. Twenty-five percent of aggressive criminals reported being abusive to animals on five or more occasions as a child; this compares with 6% of moderate and nonaggressive criminals, and none of the noncriminals. In addition, aggressive criminals not only committed more childhood acts of animal cruelty than the other groups, but the severity of the acts was significantly greater. The fact that moderately aggressive and nonaggressive criminals did not differ from noncriminals in severity of childhood animal cruelty suggests "the *fundamental* importance of aggressiveness rather than criminality in the occurrence of childhood cruelty toward animals" (Kellert & Felthous, 1985, p. 1,120).

Another article (Felthous & Kellert, 1986) based on the same populations examined in greater depth childhood aggression among aggressive criminals reporting childhood animal cruelty. All sixteen of the aggressive criminals who had a history of "substantial abuse to vertebrate animals" reported fighting in childhood, and a majority had fought as adults.

Studies of criminals involved in sexually aggressive crimes have also uncovered a history of animal abuse. In one study, nearly half of rapists and over one-fourth of pedophiles had shown cruelty to animals as a child (Tingle et al., 1986). A retrospective study of serial murderers revealed that 36% reported killing and torturing animals in childhood, while 46% did so as adolescents. This connection between animal cruelty and violent crime has become an important factor used by the FBI in the profiling of serial killers (Lockwood & Church, 1998).

If violence toward animals is related to committing interpersonal violence, it seems likely that it would be associated with approval of violence as well. Owens & Straus (1975) found that exposure to childhood violence, as a perpetrator, witness, or victim, increases the likelihood of approving of interpersonal violence as an adult. It seems reasonable that exposure to animal cruelty, particularly as a perpetrator, could have a similar effect.

In fact, among the southeastern undergraduate sample, abusing animals as a child was related to current approval of interpersonal violence in families (Flynn, 1999a). Those students who had perpetrated childhood animal cruelty had more favorable attitudes toward corporal punishment, even after controlling for frequency of childhood spanking, biblical literalism, race, and gender. In addition, respondents who had been abusive to animals as children were more likely to approve of a husband slapping his wife. Given this association of animal cruelty and attitudes toward family violence, it should not be surprising that violence to animals and violence in families often co-exist.

Animal Abuse May be Marker of Family Violence

Only recently has the link between animal abuse and family violence been empirically investigated (Ascione, 1993; Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). For the most part, knowledge about this connection came secondarily, through anecdotal evidence in the reports of wife abuse or child abuse (e.g., Gelles & Straus, 1988). Boat (1995) has referred to the absence of research on the connection between violence to animals and violence toward children as an "ignored link" in the child abuse arena.

An examination of studies of various forms of family violence reveals that violence against companion and noncompanion animals has been found to occur where there is also physical and sexual violence against: (a) female intimate partners, both in heterosexual (Browne, 1987; Dutton, 1992; Walker, 1979) and same-sex (Renzetti, 1992) couples; (b) children (DeViney et al., 1983); and (c) siblings (Wiehe, 1990). Further, related studies of sexual abuse victims in day care settings have found that abusers have often threatened to harm or actually harmed pets as a way to intimidate, control, and insure the silence of their victims (Faller, 1990; Finkelhor, Williams, & Burns, 1988). Levinson (1989) concluded in his cross-cultural study on family violence that "women are more likely to be permanently injured, scarred, or even killed by their husbands in societies in which animals are treated cruelly. . ." (p. 45).

Only five published studies (and only one in a family journal)—three on violence toward children and two on wife abuse—have specifically focused on the connection between animal abuse and family violence. The first study to examine this link was conducted by DeViney et al. (1983). They found that in 88% of New Jersey families, identified by the state, in which there was physical child abuse, pet abuse was also present. Two-thirds of the pet abusers were fathers, while one-third were children. The authors argued that battered pets may be an indicator of other forms of family violence.

Miller and Knutson (1997) examined the relationship between receiving severe physical punishment in childhood and exposure to animal cruelty among two populations—criminals and college students. In both groups, a positive correlation was found between harsh physical punishment and experiencing animal cruelty. Exposure to animal cruelty was defined as either witnessing or perpetrating any of the ten acts of animal abuse in the previously cited Boat inventory. The measure of physical discipline was not limited to just spanking, but included acts that many would see as abusive such as punching, kicking, and choking. Because of the way these variables were measured, the relationship between ordinary (i.e., nonabusive) physical punishment and perpetrating animal cruelty was not clearly established.

To clarify this issue, using the southeastern college sample, I investigated the relationship between receiving "ordinary" physical punishment and committing animal abuse (Flynn, 1999b). Subjects were asked to indicate how often each parent had used physical punishment, "like spanking, slapping, or hitting." Perpetrating animal cruelty was operationalized as having done any of the five acts from the Boat inventory (items e-i, Table 1).

A significant positive relationship was found between frequency of childhood spanking and perpetrating animal cruelty, but only for males punished by their fathers. Male respondents who were punished more frequently by their fathers were more likely to commit animal cruelty. This relationship did not hold

for males spanked by mothers, or for females spanked by either parent. The association between corporal punishment by fathers and sons' childhood animal cruelty held, after controlling for child abuse, father-to-mother violence, and father's level of education.

Two studies have examined pet abuse and the role of pets in the lives of battered women. In the first published study linking pet abuse and wife abuse, Ascione (1998) surveyed 38 clients at a Utah shelter for battered women about their partners' and children's cruelty to companion animals. Of the 74% of women who either currently owned pets or had owned pets in the past year, 71% reported that their partner had threatened, harmed, or killed at least one of their pets. Approximately one-fifth of the women said that they delayed seeking shelter out of concern for the safety of their companion animal.

In a replication and extension of the Ascione study, I surveyed 107 clients at intake at a battered women's shelter in South Carolina (Flynn, in press). Only 40.2% of clients had owned or currently owned pets, and 46.5% of these women (almost one-fifth of all clients) said that their pets had been threatened or harmed by their abusive partner. The lower rates of pet ownership than women in the Ascione study (40.2% vs. 74%) was probably due to sociodemographic differences between the two groups. The majority of South Carolina women who did not have pets were African-American, single, and unemployed.

The women reported that their pets served as important sources of emotional support during their abusive relationships. This was particularly true for pets that had been abused. Approximately half of the women said that their pets were still with the abusive partner, causing women to continue to worry about their pet, especially if the pet had been threatened or harmed previously. And as in the Ascione study, one-fifth of the women delayed seeking shelter out of concern for their pet's welfare. Five of these eight women waited over two months before coming to the shelter.

These few studies, along with the anecdotal evidence from previous studies on family violence, illustrate the connection between violence to animals and violence in families. Children who are violent to less powerful animals may be imitating violence that they have observed between their parents, or that their parents have inflicted upon them. Children also may have witnessed animal abuse in conjunction with wife abuse or child abuse. Women and children victims in families with companion animals may have had their pets threatened or harmed by violent male partners. Observers who have pointed out this link (Arkow, 1996; Ascione, 1993; Boat, 1995) suggest that both forms of violence can serve as markers of the other, and such a relationship has important implications for prevention and intervention strategies aimed at reducing violence toward animals and family members.

Valued Companion Animals are Potential Victims

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, 58.2 million households in the United States (58.9%) had one or more companion animal in 1996 (American Veterinary Medical Association, 1997). In the southeastern undergraduate sample, 89.2% had pets in their family while growing up, and 80.3% reported currently owning companion animals. Studies of companion animals have revealed that most people regard their pets as members of their family (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988; Siegel,

1993). Pet owners have strong emotional attachments to their animals, and animal companions have been shown to be significant sources of affection and support, particularly during difficult and stressful life transitions such as divorce and remarriage. At other times, such as when couples are making the transition to parenthood, pets may serve as an additional stressor, rather than as a source of affection and attachment (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988). Parallels from the family violence literature would suggest that, either way, their status as family members may make companion animals more vulnerable to violence.

In their study of urban pet owners, Albert and Bulcroft (1988) found that pets were most likely to be acquired when families had school-age or teenage children. This corresponds to the ages when individuals first report witnessing or perpetrating animal cruelty. Families also reported lower levels of attachment during these stages, which could contribute to maltreatment of pets by family members.

The notion that animals in families might be at risk was raised over a decade ago in the family literature. Veevers (1985), in an article analyzing the roles of pets in families, argued that one of their functions was to serve as surrogate enemies. In that role, the potential for violence against pets by family members was evident. Veevers suggested that pets might be physically victimized as "scapegoats," or that pets might be threatened or harmed to control or emotionally abuse a family member. She also hypothesized that violence against companion animals might serve as a training ground for later interpersonal violence.

Ending Animal Abuse is an Important Step in Reducing All Violence

Information about why humans are abusive to animals is an essential element of any strategy aimed at ending all violence (Arluke & Luke, 1997). As Arkow (1996) states, "When animals are abused, people are at risk—and vice versa" (p. 33). Ascione (1993) argues that the more we understand about how violence toward animals is related to interpersonal violence in general, the more effective our prevention and intervention efforts are likely to be. Or, as Solot (1997) put it, "If we are to be successful in our quest for a society without violence, in which all living beings are treated with dignity and respect, we must have a better understanding of all types of violence. There is much work to be done" (p. 264).

Solot (1997) notes that, unlike any other form of violence, the published research on animal abuse is motivated almost entirely by its association with violence against people. Yet, understanding and preventing animal cruelty and abuse are worthy goals in and of themselves; to acknowledge that need not diminish the study of violence to humans. She reminds us, however, that "even as we validate the connections among all forms of violence, we must take care not to invalidate each separate form. The woman who beats her children, the teen who rapes his girlfriend, and the adolescent who sets a cat on fire all need attention because they have committed horrific acts of violence against *other living beings* [*italics added*]"—not because someday they might do something worse" (p. 262).

Reducing and preventing interpersonal violence may depend in part on our ability to teach and reinforce respectful and compassionate treatment of all living beings, human and animal. "... If aggression to animals can become generalized to involve humans, perhaps an ethic of compassion and respect for animals

can also carry over to humans" (Felthous & Kellert, 1987, p. 716).

Implications for Family Professionals

Theory and Research

The need for empirical research on the role and impact of animal abuse in the lives of children and families is great. Knowledge is needed concerning the characteristics of abusers and animal victims, the nature and incidence of animal abuse, the causes of animal cruelty, and the consequences for individuals and families. In addition, evaluation of treatment and prevention programs, as well as policies designed to reduce or punish animal cruelty, are fruitful areas for applied research.

Compared with violence toward humans, violence toward animals has received considerably less attention. However, the theoretical and empirical bases that have been developed in the areas of interpersonal violence, and particularly domestic violence, could be of great benefit to those who investigate animal abuse. For example, the co-existence of violence, power, and control in all violent situations suggests that these issues are likely operating in the abusive treatment of animals, as well (Sotol, 1997).

The potential links between animal abuse and family violence should also lead researchers to examine the effects of witnessing violence. Observing violence between parents has been linked to acceptance of interpersonal violence (e.g., Owens & Straus, 1975) and to engaging in violence (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). Witnessing animal abuse, particularly on multiple occasions, may serve to desensitize the observer to violence in general. The emotional and psychological impact of viewing animal cruelty also warrants attention. Based on our findings from college students, witnessing cruelty not only is troubling to most individuals at the time, but continues to bother them several years later.

Decades of family violence scholarship should also caution us not to look for narrow psychological models to explain animal cruelty. Straus (1980) has argued that less than ten percent of family violence can be explained by relying solely on personality characteristics or psychopathology. Similarly, the development of valuable theories of animal abuse and cruelty should benefit from emphasis given to psycho-social and socio-cultural factors (Arluke & Lockwood, 1997).

Feminist perspectives have played a significant role in understanding domestic violence, and consequently have much potential for analyzing violence against animals, and more specifically, the connection between animal abuse and violence toward women and children in families. The issues of gender, control, and violence that have been central to a feminist analysis of wife abuse (e.g., Yllo, 1993) also appear to have great promise for explaining animal abuse, and the link between the two. For example, Adams (1995) illustrates how harming animals is part of a batterer's strategies to control women and children in families.

Adams (1994; 1995) has argued that a patriarchal culture explains the violence against women, children and animals, and that violence toward animals and its relationship to domestic abuse should be seen in that light. The disadvantaged status of women, children, and animals makes it possible for all three groups to be victimized by more powerful violent males in a male-dominated society that has failed to take male violence se-

riously. "A hierarchy in which men have power over women and humans have power over animals, is actually more appropriately understood as a hierarchy in which men have power over women, (feminized) men, and (feminized) animals" (Adams, 1995, p. 80).

Certainly, the limited empirical evidence to date lends support to such analysis. The overwhelming majority of perpetrators of animal abuse—both adults and children, criminals and non-criminals, clinical and nonclinical populations, within and outside of families—are males. The vast majority of complainants in animal abuse cases are female (Arluke & Luke, 1997). Further, those who commit violence toward animals often have been victims of physical violence themselves, typically from their fathers (e.g., Flynn, 1999b; Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Tapia, 1971). Studies of battered women and their children suggest that harming animals is a powerful way to control, intimidate, and terrorize women, children, and companion animals in families (Ascione, 1998; Flynn, in press).

Among the general population, women have significantly more favorable attitudes toward animal rights and animal welfare than do men (Herzog, Betchart, & Pittman, 1991; Peek, Bell, & Dunham, 1996; Pifer, 1996). This may be due to a variety of factors that encompass both female socialization and social structural influences. An orientation toward relationships, with an emphasis on empathy and caring, may cause women to broaden such an orientation to include animals. In addition, women's status as members of a subordinate group may lead them to oppose domination in all its forms, including human domination by animals (Peek et al., 1996). A combination of these factors may make it less likely that females would engage in violence to animals. On the other hand, when male socialization minimizes empathy and includes and encourages aggression, and when their dominant position in society and in families renders empathic behavior less likely and causes violent behavior to be seen as an option for maintaining power, then perhaps we should not be surprised by the high rates of male violence against both humans and animals.

Policy

Policy makers should strengthen laws and penalties for those who engage in abusive behavior toward animals. As of 1997, animal cruelty statutes in eighteen states include felony-level offenses, indicating a dramatic increase over the past decade (Arluke & Lockwood, 1997). In some jurisdictions, stiffer penalties for animal cruelty have been successfully enacted, in part by relying on claims that such cruelty is a likely indicator of a tendency toward future interpersonal violence (Ascione, 1998). Further, those prosecuting domestic violence cases may improve their chances of securing an order of protection, custody of the home and children, and the arrest of the batterer by using evidence of animal cruelty to support their case, and to bring additional charges. Given the limited success of the criminal justice system in dealing with male batterers (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, & Perrin, 1997), stricter enforcement of animal cruelty laws may be an effective way to snare perpetrators who have managed to escape responsibility for their violence in the past.

Recognizing the link between animal abuse and family violence should lead to the cross-training and cross-referrals between animal control officers and human service professionals. Following the lead of California, other states could add animal control officers to the list of professionals mandated by law to

report suspected child abuse (Arkow, 1996). Those who investigate child abuse may also see signs of the maltreatment of pets. Policies that enable the sharing of information between both groups of professionals could result in a more effective response to human and animal victims of violence.

Animal abuse should be taken seriously not just because of our concern for humans. Lax enforcement of animal cruelty laws leads to untold suffering by nonhuman animals, and those who perpetrate such horrible acts should be punished, irrespective of their link to other forms of violence against humans.

Clinicians and Human Service Professionals

Clinicians who work with children, and particularly counselors and social service providers who work directly with victims of child abuse or wife abuse, need to ask questions about the presence of violence against animals. Counselors should be aware that children who are cruel to animals may have the propensity for other types of interpersonal violence. Both perpetrating and witnessing animal cruelty can have potentially harmful psychological consequences that could linger for some time. A sense of loss, guilt over not being able to prevent the abuse, grief, or even the absence of any emotional response are possible reactions to experiencing animal abuse. Assessment techniques need to be developed that tap the incidence and nature of animal cruelty.

Two such inventories have already been created. Ascione, Thompson, and Black (1997) have developed such an instrument for use with children. The CAAI—Children and Animals (Cruelty to Animals) Assessment Inventory—is a semi-structured interview designed for children over age four and their parents. This inventory taps multiple dimensions of animal cruelty, including severity, frequency, duration, recency, diversity (across and within categories), animal sentence level, covert (degree to which child tries to hide the cruelty), isolate (individual vs. group cruelty), and empathy (expressions of remorse or concern for animal victim).

Boat (1999) has also developed an inventory designed to determine if an individual's history includes animal-related events involving trauma, cruelty, or support. The BIARE—Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences—was created to be used for screening and information-gathering. Included are questions concerning the following areas: pet ownership history, experiencing animals as a source of support, loss of animals, cruelty to animals, killing of animals, animals used to coerce/control a person, sexual interactions with animals, and animal-related fears.

Similarly, shelters for battered women must incorporate questions about pets and pet abuse in their intake interviews and services. One study has found that while shelter staff are aware of the link between animal abuse and domestic violence, few ask about pet abuse at intake, or offer services for their clients with pets (Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997b). Counseling programs should help battered women deal with the range of emotions that are likely to accompany the loss of, or separation from, a pet. Children of battered women may need attention, either because they could be traumatized by witnessing animal abuse, or because they may have learned to inflict it themselves (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997a).

Shelters also should expand their services to include the practical needs of pet owners. The majority of shelters do not

provide temporary or emergency shelter, or emergency services, for the pets of clients (Ascione et al., 1997b). Given that pets of shelter clients are likely to have received lower levels of veterinary care (Ascione et al., 1997a) and that many pets may still be at risk for harm since they continue to reside with the batterer, the lack of such services could be doubly harmful. Arkow (1996) suggests that shelters establish collaborative arrangements with local animal shelters or foster-care volunteers to provide temporary housing for pets, and with local veterinarians to provide medical care.

Family Life Educators

It is essential that educators are aware of, and take seriously, animal abuse and its connection with violence and other problems facing children and families. A majority of households contain companion animals, and the vast majority of animals are valued as family members. Pet ownership is more common in families with school-age children and adolescents (Albert & Bulcroft, 1988), so the potential for abusive interactions involving animals and family members is clear. As Felthous and Kellert state, "clinicians, jurists, school teachers, parents, and others who work and play with children should be alert to the potentially ominous significance of this behavior in childhood and the advisability of concerned, helpful intervention" (1987, p. 1128).

If cruelty to animals is related to interpersonal aggression, perhaps the inverse is true as well. That is, one way to reduce the violence committed against both human and animals may be to encourage positive, empathic interactions with animals in childhood. One year-long humane education program showed that, for certain elementary grades, children not only demonstrated more positive attitudes toward animals, but that this change also was related to greater human-directed empathy (Ascione, 1992). Family life educators could develop and implement similar programs designed at enhancing empathy toward both animals and humans. As noted by Kellert and Felthous, "The evolution of a more gentle and benign relationship in human society might be enhanced by our promotion of a more positive and nurturing ethic between children and animals" (1985, p. 1128).

Conclusion

Violence toward animals by family members is an issue that has been largely neglected by family professionals. The time has come to correct this oversight. Our attempts to do so may be impeded by society's contradictory attitudes toward animals, as well as by the temptation to see animals as less worthy victims (Solot, 1997). But if we are to address the needs of children and families, if we are to promote a nonviolent society, then we must pay attention to all forms of violence, including violence against animals.

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