Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse

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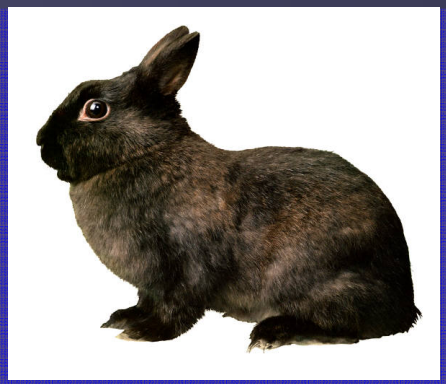
Historical Perspective

Outright cruelty to animals was wrong because it produced violence toward humans.

Thomas Aquinas

Historical Perspective

"Those who delight in the suffering and destruction of inferior creatures will not be apt to be very compassionate or benign to those of their own species."



John Locke
1705

Historical Perspective

Childhood cruelty to animals may be a precursor to antisocial behavior in adulthood

Margaret Mead
1964

Historical Perspective

- 1865 - Society to Prevent Cruelty to Animals
- 1874 - Society to Prevent Cruelty to Children
- 1930s - Social Security Act
- 1944 - Prince v. Massachusetts
- 1962 - Dr. C. Henry Kempe authors The Battered Child Syndrome – child abuse an independent diagnosis
- 1967 - Mandated Reporting Laws all 50 states
- 1970s - MR Laws expand to include sexual abuse

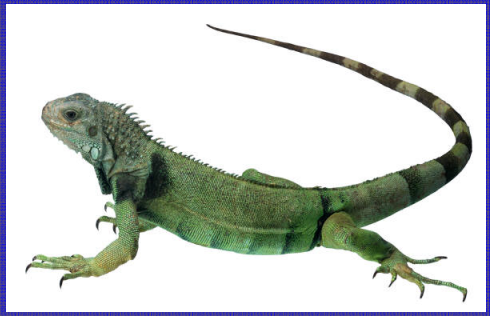
4 Major Themes from the Research

- Animal Abuse as part of a continuum of abuse within the family
- Animal abuse perpetrated by children who show later aggressive and deviant behavior
- Animal abuse as an indicator of the existence of child abuse
- The therapeutic potential of animals in child development and within post abuse work

Becker and French 2004

A Continuum of Abuse

- 23 families in one social service area who were reported for animal abuse
- 82% of the families were also known to social services and the children were considered at risk



Hutton (1980)

A Continuum of Abuse

- 53 families - NJ division of Youth and Family Services
- In the majority of families where there was evidence of physical abuse there was also animal abuse.
- In approximately 2/3 of pet abusing homes the father was abusive toward pets
- In approximately 1/3 of pet abusing homes children were abusive toward pets
- Adults and children 10 times more likely to be bitten

DeViney et al (1983)

A Continuum of Abuse

- Sexual abuse survivors reveal
  - Pets used to gain control
  - Pets used to ensure their silence

  Adams (1998)

- Domestic violence
  - Animal abuse used to gain control
  - Animal abuse used to gain silence.

  Ascione (1998), Arkow (1996), Firmani (1997)

A Continuum of Abuse

- 100 battered women / compared with a group of women in non-violent homes
- 50% of battered women reported their partner had hurt of killed pets
- 5% of non battered women reported partner had hurt or killed pets
- Almost 25% reported that they delayed leaving because of concern for animals.

Ascione (2000)

A Continuum of Abuse

- 21 Refuges for women
- 44% of abused women reported that their partners had abused or killed family pets
- 43% of the women reported that concern for their pets' welfare prevented them from leaving the relationship earlier.

Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2000)

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Becker and French 2004

Animal Abuse by Children

Animal abuse may be a form of rehearsal for human directed violence.

Becker and French (2004)

Animal Abuse by Children

- 28 incarcerated sexual homicide perpetrators
- 36% committed acts of animal cruelty in childhood
- 46% committed acts of animal cruelty in adolescence

Ressler et al (1988)

Animal Abuse by Children

While not everyone who abuses animals becomes a serial killer, virtually every serial killer first abused animals.

Mertz-Perez et al (2001)

Animal Abuse by Children

- Albert DeSalvo – “The Boston Strangler”
  - Trapped cats and dogs in boxes and shot arrows into the boxes
- David Borkowitz “The Son of Sam”
  - Shot neighbors Labrador Retriever
- Jeffrey Dahmer
  - Killed neighbors pets and impaled their heads on sticks in his yard
- Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold – Columbine
  - Mutilated cats

Animal Abuse by Children

- Features of childhood cruelty that are most predictive of later aggression
  - Lack of remorse
  - A variety of cruel acts
  - Victimizing a variety of species
  - Being cruel to socially valuable animals
    - Dogs or cats v. rats

Kellert and Felthous et al (1983)

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Becker and French 2004

An Indicator of Child abuse

- 35% of boys who were sexually abused had abused animals
- 5% of boys who were not sexually abused themselves, abused animals

Friedrich et al (1986)

An Indicator of Child Abuse

- 12 year study
- 300 children who sexually abused other children and committed other violent offenses.
- Many of these children were molested as children
- 20% of these children had a history of sexually abusing animals

The Young Abusers Project Duffield et al (1998)

An Indicator of Child Abuse

It has been noted that in most cases the sexual acts were carefully planned with pet animals targeted, isolated, groomed and abused (rather like their child victim counterparts)

Duffield et al (1998)

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Becker and French 2004

Therapeutic Potential

Animal relationships can help children move along the developmental continuum and promote the development of resilience

Gilligan (2000)

Therapeutic Potential

- Give children warmth, recognition, attention
- Offer Comfort - physically and emotionally
- Provide friendship and companionship
- Help children develop responsibility
  - "I can do it"
- Enhance empathy
- Promote healing

Practical Implications of the Research

- Cross Training
  - Child Protection
  - Law Enforcement
  - Prosecutors
  - Health Care Professionals
  - Veterinarians
  - Humane Services
  - Women's Shelters
  - Child Advocacy Centers
  - Judiciary
  - And others

Practical Implications of the Research

- Reporting of child abuse by animal welfare professionals
  - California, Colorado, Maine and Ohio mandate animal welfare professionals to report suspected child abuse
  - 18 states require all persons to report

Practical Implications of the Research

- Forensic Interviews with children
  - Ask children about their pets
  - Excellent way to build rapport
  - Ask are pets happy / safe?
- Caregiver interview
  - Ask about pets in the home
  - Has child witnesses violence toward people or pets?
  - Has child intentionally caused harm or injury to pet?

Practical Implications of the Research

- Break the Cycle of abuse!
  - As soon as possible
  - If you find one form of violence, look for other forms of violence
  - Offer counseling
    - Specialized counseling from professional trained to deal with the issues of abuse

What are you going to do?