



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Analyzing the Psychology Behind Animal Abuse and Tendencies of Human Criminality

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ABSTRACT

The correlation between being exposed to or partaking in animal abuse at a young age and growing up to direct those traumas and tendencies towards people has been a major topic of multiple psychological and criminal studies. There has been increasing importance in understanding how different variations of familial violence play a role in a child's ability to compartmentalize emotion, considering the influence that animals may have in this growth and development. A great deal of current evidence shows that animal abuse is not solely a result of a child's character, but more of a symptomatic effect caused by systemic emotional trauma from unstable familial dynamics. There is also clear evidence that serial killers, domestic abusers and other individuals reported to have drastic violent tendencies towards others, typically showed a habit of abusing animals, or being exposed to animal abuse as children. This narrative review is completed in order to assess this correlation and determine if there could be ways of preventing children from maturing into adulthood and misdirecting their juvenile traumas towards other adults through acts of violence.

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Introduction

The issue of youth driven animal abuse is imperative to analyze with respect to public health because human violence is a prevalent issue regarding increasing episodes of domestic violence, mass murders or serial killings. Animal abuse is defined as "all socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering and/or death to an animal" [1]. Having the capability to study this correlation through the analysis of previous literature will help to support the efforts in decreasing the numbers of school shootings, domestic abuse, and murders through raising awareness of this distinct connection and the initial signs of violent tendencies in developing children. Typical acts of violence, such as school shootings, homicides and domestic violence between romantic partners are typically foreshadowed in the form of animal or domestic pet abuse when those same individuals are going through childhood and adolescence [2]. Being aware of this correlation can be an exponential help towards the public safety of many communities that may get targeted due to previous emotional trauma a child was subjected to. Analysis of events can be divided into three pertinent sections: The acts of animal abuse carried out by children, acts of animal abuse that are witnessed by children and acts of animal abuse that occur in the context of domestic violence. It is important to analyze the foundations of the evolution of these behaviors to get afflicted individuals the appropriate treatment needed to prevent their violent behaviors from progressing further. It has been studied and determined that individuals growing up with a tendency to

harm innocent creatures tend to grow up and expand their violent tendencies, projecting them onto their peers and other individuals [3]. Any aggressive act directed towards an animal is an early indicator of future psychopathology. If this is unrecognized and left without treatment, then it can escalate into more detrimental acts [4]. On the topic of more severe acts that can manifest from these foundations, many serial killers were known to have harmed animals as children, examples include Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy [5].

Previous studies have examined a distinct correlation between the formation of interest in the abuse of pets and small wild animals and the evolution of that abusive tendency towards other humans as adults. Animal abuse has also been determined to be a precursor to interpersonal violence, this relationship having been termed the "Link" [1]. The psychology behind a child's curiosities indicates that there are underlying issues that push them to inflict harm on a creature that is easily attainable and defenseless. The importance of noticing and understanding the origins of these tendencies is so that these children and adolescents receive the necessary therapy and care in order to properly process their emotions and thoughts, prior to having these tendencies spiral out of control [6]. Therefore, the primary objective of this study is to systematically review other peer reviewed articles for any studied that examine the correlation between childhood animal abuse tendencies and its causation towards violent tendencies into adulthood.

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Materials and Methods

The research question focuses on whether there is a connection between animal abuse and human violence. The study design completed is a narrative review of other peer-reviewed articles specifically chosen due to their relevance to this topic. Peer-Reviewed Articles and data from government resources were collected using PubMed, Google Scholar, and JSTOR, and analyzed in order to appropriately evaluate the correlation between animal abuse and its influence on violent tendencies in people. Terms utilized for data collection were comprised of “animal abuse and domestic violence”, “animal abuse and young children”, “animal abuse and psychological influence”, “animal abuse and adolescents”, “progression to violence from animal abuse” and “serial killers and animal abuse”. Articles found were then selected based on sample subjects, demographics and relevance to the research topic. Sample groups were further organized by age, background and exposure to primary household violence. None of the articles were chosen to represent a specific demographic. A few of the articles are literature reviews that also focus on research regarding the link between animal abuse and inter human violence. Those same articles take collected data and critically assess the evidence that either proves or disproves that link, offering further evaluation on the challenges that can arise from any further research regarding this topic. The data was analyzed through correlations and quantitative assessment, using software in order to generate visuals to illustrate the prevalence and connection. There were several possible limitations to this study, including reporting bias and lack of time available for dedication to longitudinal research or long-term data collection. IRB approval is not needed as it is an evaluation of psychological development and not actual clinical trials implemented on human test subjects.

Results / Findings

The data from each of the articles reviewed was analyzed based on congruency and disparity. The top result found is that each of the resources shared a commonality in the agreement that children who witnessed and performed acts of animal cruelty would progress into evolving those tendencies towards other individuals. This trend was witnessed in cases of murderers, serial killers, school shooters, public shooters, and reports of individuals that committed acts of domestic violence on their spouses or children. The data from some of the articles expands further in elaboration regarding the extent of childhood exposure to certain traumas, such as witnessing animal abuse, witnessing domestic violence, committing animal abuse and being a victim of domestic violence. This extends further into the topic of importance, as it delves into the relevance that exposure to trauma from domestic violence could be the basis for childhood acts of animal cruelty that develop into interpersonal acts of violence, rather than stemming from a child that commits animal cruelty simply from curiosity.

Many of the articles touched upon the concept of the “Graduation Hypothesis”, which focuses on how an individual progresses from violence towards animals, to directing their aggression towards other humans as adults [7]. 354 cases of serial killers were evaluated, and in 21% of those cases, the individual had a history of animal abuse, see figure 1.

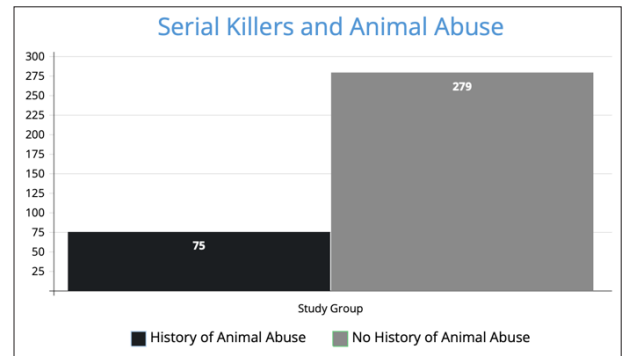


Figure 1: [7]

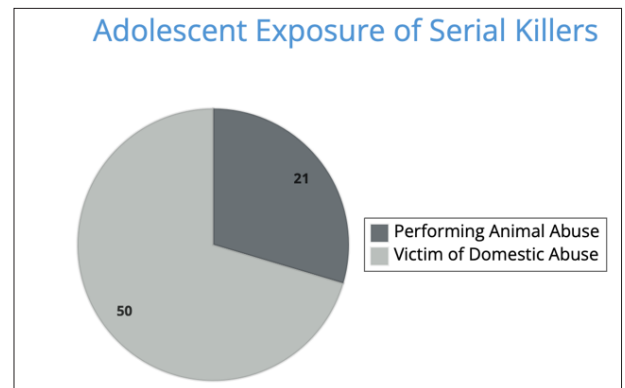


Figure 2: [8]

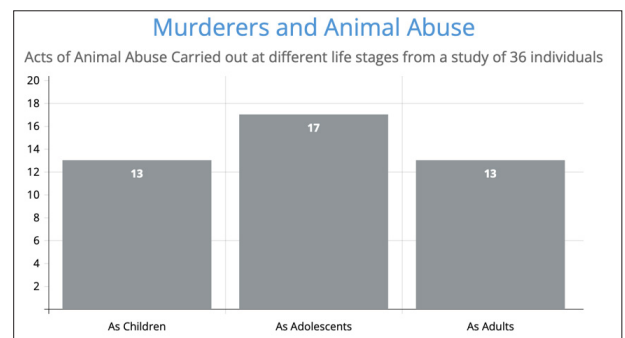


Figure 3: [Douglas, 2008]

Discussion

Upon reviewing all collected articles, it is determined that there is a strong connection between animal cruelty and violent tendencies as adults. Continued study regarding this connection is important since animal cruelty is a considerable warning sign of future violent behavior, if not the most reliable indicator of this. There is enough research in both psychological and criminal studies that exemplify how individuals that abuse animals do not limit themselves to only committing those acts on animals alone [3]. Oftentimes they progress to humans, and there is enough evidence to support the fact that individuals who abused pets and small animals as children are more likely to commit crimes and homicide as adults, and this is since small acts of violence have a tendency of escalating into larger acts of violence. The psychology behind this is because humans tend to victimize something they can easily have control over first, then they will get bored of it being so easy, and will turn to other, harder to attain, objectives [5]. The lack of demographical limitation to article selection was to allow for a more broad-spectrum view

on this public health topic, to exemplify how it isn't an issue only prevalent to a certain group or location. Acts of animal cruelty manifested from childhood psychosis is a global issue, as trauma can afflict developing children and manifest in more severe ways if not recognized at the beginning. Limitations were encountered for data collection of this topic. The method used for data collection might have been limited due to reporting bias. Participants in some of the peer-reviewed articles may have had inclination to provide inaccurate information in order to support the researcher. Lack of time for prolonged research is another limitation of this study. For many of the research articles, typically only extreme cases of inter human violence are being reported and further studied, whereas smaller counts of domestic violence or childhood animal abuse are less likely to be reported. Smaller incidences of events such as domestic violence within relationships also tend to be overlooked or not even reported, although they may also have stemmed from an origin of childhood animal abuse [9]. The limitation of time is prevalent as precise evaluation of this link would entail focusing on psychological evaluations of children who have acted out in violence towards animals and following those same children through adolescence into adulthood to see if they develop violent tendencies and thoughts towards other humans without the intervention of trained professionals prior to maturity [2].

Recommendations can be made regarding the outcome of this research so that individuals know what habits to look out for, to recognize early signs of animal abuse in children and adolescents, and therefore be able to provide them with appropriate counseling and education in to supplement their psychological development. Recognizing key patterns is imperative in decreasing the risk of future domestic violence or general tendencies towards violence. Further research can also be made to marginalize further influences on this behavioral trend, such as changing the research focus towards victims of domestic abuse who have also witnessed their abuser commit animal cruelty. This shift in focus regarding the research topic will give more insight and more data regarding an adult performing animal abuse alongside domestic violence.

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