

## Chapter 12

# Family Violence and Animal Cruelty

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In recent years, there has been increasing attention given to the importance of companion and other animals in the lives of humans. The majority of this attention has been focused on the positive outcomes accrued to humans as a consequence of their interactions with non-human animals. For example, epidemiological studies have shown that people with companion animals were more likely to be alive one year after discharge from a coronary care unit as compared to non-owners, and that dog owners were approximately 8.6 times more likely to be alive after one year as compared to non-dog owners (Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980; Friedmann & Thomas, 1995).

Even the mere observation of animals has been shown to result in reduced physiological responses to stressors and increased positive moods (e.g., Rossbach & Wilson, 1992). In their attempts to highlight the salient aspects of the human-animal bond, studies have found that, when asked about the benefits that their companion animals provide, people typically describe their relationships as being characterized by feelings of companionship, security, and being loved (e.g., Siegel, 1990).

As companion animals have increasingly become part of our lives, they have also increasingly assumed an important role within the family system. Not surprisingly, research has painted a picture of human-animal relationships that in many respects is mirroring those between humans and, unfortunately, as is true of relationships between human family members, human-animal relationships are not always positive.

The aim of this chapter is to review the research that has examined relationships between domestic and family violence and animal cruelty. In the first section of this chapter, child and partner abuse research are reviewed. This is followed by a review of investigations into the relationship between human- and animal-directed violence within the family. The chapter concludes with recommendations based upon current understandings.

## Family Violence and Human Aggression Defined

Family violence includes abusive behavior by one family member toward another, including child and elder abuse, and has many forms (Wallace, 2004). These include actual physical aggression as well as threats of aggression. Sexual, emotional, and

psychological abuse, including intimidation, stalking, and covert abuse such as neglect, are also included (Shipway, 2004). As will be discussed in more detail later, the witnessing of abuse has also been classified as a form of abuse (Schumacher, Feldbau-Kohn, Smith Slep, & Heyman, 2001).

If one considers the conceptualization of aggression, it can be clearly seen that the abuse that occurs within the family and that is otherwise referred to as domestic or family violence, can be argued to be specific forms of aggression. Anderson (2002) defined aggression as behavior performed by a person (the aggressor) with the immediate intention of harming another person (the victim). The perpetrator (aggressor) must believe that the behavior will harm the victim and that the victim is motivated to avoid that intended harm. While Gendreau and Archer (2005) have argued that *harm and injury* to others are the strongest indicators that an aggressive act has occurred, it is noteworthy that, in his definition, Anderson (2002) states that *actual* harm is not a requirement. Also, although research has predominantly focused on physical harm, mental or psychological harm are included as consequences of aggression. Further, Anderson's definition includes "harm" that can be either or both physical harm (e.g., physical abuse) and psychological harm (e.g., verbal abuse).

Gendreau and Archer (2005) cited an important dichotomy in aggression based on the work of Feshbach (1964) which distinguishes between behaviors that have the primary goal of causing injury to the victim and pleasure or satisfaction to the aggressor compared to behaviors that do not have injury as the main goal. In the latter case, the behavior is motivated by the primary goal of obtaining a reward. This type of aggression has been referred to as *instrumental* aggression. Given arguments that family or domestic violence are predominantly motivated by the desire to control the victim of the abuse (Flynn, 2009), it can be argued that domestic or family violence can be most accurately classified as forms of instrumental aggression.

## Family Violence between Humans

Each year, thousands of children and millions of women are abused (Black, Heyman, & Smith Slep, 2001; Schumacher et al., 2001; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2006; Wallace, 2004). The outcomes of abuse are significantly damaging, and include medical, behavioral, and emotional problems. For example, research has shown that women who are abused report higher rates of Major Depressive Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress (Cascardi, O'Leary, Lawrence, & Schlee, 1995). Although the majority of research into child abuse remains separate from that examining partner abuse (Heyman & Smith Slep, 2001), available information regarding the comorbidity of the two forms of abuse highlights the significant overlap. For example, in a national survey of over 6,000 U.S. families, 50% of men who frequently assaulted their wives also frequently abused their children (Straus & Gelles, 1990). As with the abuse of adults, that involving children is significantly damaging.

### Child Abuse

The experience of parental abuse can be devastating for children, and there is considerable empirical evidence showing that it is one of the most important parenting variables for

predicting the development of antisocial behavior. Indeed, child abuse and child neglect are now commonly accepted to be factors that place abused or neglected children at increased risk of themselves becoming abusing or neglecting parents (Black, et al., 2001; Eron, 1987; Peterson, Gable, Doyle, and Ewugman, 1998; Widom, 1989). According to figures cited by Kaufman and Zigler (1987), approximately 30% of individuals who have experienced abuse (physical, sexual, or severe neglect) as children will abuse their own children compared to 5% in the general population. Other long-term adverse outcomes of direct and indirect abuse include being at greater risk of arrest for violent crime and for earlier and more chronic engagement in criminal behavior.

On the basis of available evidence, it appears that physical abuse has a more consistent link with aggression than do neglect or emotional abuse (Margolin & Gordis, 2000). Increased risk of aggression and externalizing behavior has also been reported in relation to sexual abuse. Though not as consistent as the link with physical abuse, sexual abuse has been linked with aggressive behavior, delinquency, and other externalizing behaviors (Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

In one 20-year follow-up study, Luntz and Widom (1994) found that abused children had twice the likelihood of being diagnosed as having an Antisocial Personality Disorder compared to a matched (on age, race, sex, and family socio-economic status) control sample. Other research has found that the long-term effects of abuse include school suspensions in late adolescence and physical violence (Dodge, Bates, Pettit, 1990; Lansford et al., 2002). In an attempt to control for possible child-related genetic effects, Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, and Taylor (2004) studied a large sample of twin pairs in Great Britain. They found that physical maltreatment is strongly causative of children's antisocial behavior development, but found no support for child genetic effects on maltreatment.

As summarized by Maughan and Cicchetti (2002), negative familial experiences including exposure to interpersonal violence and displays of negative affect, interfere with children's developing ability to process and to manage their emotions. The effects of direct maltreatment and exposure to interadult violence include deviations from normality in emotion expression, recognition, understanding, and communication. For example, Fergusson and Horwood (1998) reported strong relationships between children's observing of domestic violence and antisocial behavior at a later time.

Research with 3-month-old maltreated infants has shown that such infants display higher rates of fearfulness, anger, and sadness during interactions with their mothers when compared to non-abused children (Gaensbauer, Mrazek, & Harmon, 1981). The maltreated infants were also found to express a truncated range of emotions, and to display negative emotions for higher durations when compared to their normative peers. For older maltreated children, when compared to non-maltreated peers, researchers have found higher rates of aggression (Shields & Cicchetti, 1998), withdrawn behavior (Haskett & Kistner, 1991), and vigilance in response to aggressive stimuli (Rieder & Cicchetti, 1989).

In their study, Maughan and Cicchetti (2002) compared the socioemotional adjustment of 88 maltreated and 51 non-maltreated children who were otherwise demographically comparable. The children were aged between 4 and 6 years. Consistent with previous research, the mothers of the maltreated children in their sample reported more incidents of interadult verbal aggression and physical violence compared to their non-maltreated sample. Also, the mothers of the maltreated children reported more child behavior problems compared to the non-maltreated children. Physical abuse and neglect independently predicted higher levels of socially problematic behaviors including delinquent and withdrawn behavior. Moreover, physical abuse when compared to non-maltreatment was associated with child aggression.

There is some evidence to indicate that the outcomes of abuse are moderated by other environmental factors, including socio-economic status, leading to the conclusion that other types of disadvantage also play a part in the development of externalizing outcomes. For example, in their 1983 study, Wolfe and Mosk compared abused children with non-abused children from non-disadvantaged or distressed families and with children from generally distressed families. They found that the abused children expressed more externalizing behaviors compared to the non-abused children from non-distressed environments, but there was no difference between children who were abused and those from distressed family environments. Similar findings were reported by Toth, Manly, and Cicchetti (1992). This is consistent with the findings of Repetti and colleagues that a common pathway to child dysfunction or pathology appears to be distress or dysfunction in the family system (see e.g., Repetti, Taylor, & Seeman, 2002).

There is also evidence regarding the adverse outcomes associated with interadult violence exposure. Although some studies have failed to find a relationship between parental violence and child externalizing behaviors including aggression (e.g., Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987), a significant number of studies have found such a link (see Margolin & Gordis, 2000).

Indeed, exposure has been associated with higher rates of both internalizing and externalizing symptomatology (Dutton, 2000; Katz & Gottman, 1993). Estimates indicate that children who witness domestic violence are at between 40% to 60% greater risk of developing psychological problems compared to children from non-violent homes (Graham-Bermann & Hughes, 1998). Studies have reported increased levels of child fear, distress, and concern in addition to anger and aggression in response to witnessed inter-adult anger (e.g., Cummings, 1987; Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999). Some have also argued that the witnessing of violence by children places them at higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (Cunningham & Baker, 2004; Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998).

Compellingly, Straus and colleagues (1980) reported that boys who witness paternal violence are at a 1,000% increased risk for assaulting their own partners as adults. A child's exposure to his/her father abusing their mother has been reported to be the strongest predictor for the intergenerational transmission of violent behavior (American Psychological Association, 1996). Importantly, both direct and indirect exposure to violence have been shown to constitute significant risk factors (Baldry, 2003; Fergusson, & Horwood, 1998; Lyons-Ruth, 1996).

## Partner Abuse

With regard to partner violence, Schumacher and colleagues (2001) concluded that demographic variables such as socio-economic status, perpetrator age, and education level appear to be only weakly related. In contrast, all forms of family of origin violence factors have been found to moderately to strongly correlate with partner physical abuse. These include history of child sexual victimization and exposure to parental physical and/or verbal aggression, and violent adult models in childhood, as well as non-family aggression by the parent.

Studies investigating perpetrator personality and personality disorder-related traits have reported elevated levels of aggression, anger, hostility, and impulsivity to be significant predictors of male to female physical abuse (e.g., Hamberger & Hastings, 1991; Hastings & Hamberger, 1994; Murphy, Meyer, & O'Leary, 1993). Not surprisingly, several of the

reported risk factors for child and partner abuse overlap with those for juvenile or adult criminality, and with externalizing disorder symptomatology. Among many identified risk factors are those within the family.

The meta-analysis published by Repetti and colleagues (2002) constitutes a comprehensive examination of family-related factors that are important for the mental and physical health outcomes of offspring. These investigators examined the characteristics of what they referred to as “risky families” and found strong support for the important role played by the family environment in the development of antisocial behaviors. According to Repetti et al. (2002), the characteristics that appear most prominently as family “risk” factors include overt family conflict, particularly recurrent episodes of anger and aggression. Deficient nurturing or low warmth particularly characterized by cold, unsupportive, or neglectful parenting was found to be another quality of a risky family. Families with such characteristics are risky because they leave children vulnerable to a range of disorders, both physical and mental.

On the basis of their analysis, Repetti and colleagues (2002) developed a model including the pathways of risk through which health in childhood is compromised and through which physical and mental health in later periods of development, including adolescence and adulthood, may be influenced. Emphasizing the importance of interactive processes between nature and nurture, they proposed a “cascade of risk” model. Certain vulnerabilities may be created by risky families and genetically-based vulnerabilities may be exacerbated rather than attenuated as would occur within a healthy or protective family environment. A main proposal put forth by the authors is that risky families create deficits in children’s control and expression of their emotions and also in their social competence. They also argued that risky families lead to other disturbances (e.g., physiologic and neuroendocrine system regulation), and that such disturbances can have cumulative and long-term adverse effects.

Consistent with Repetti et al.’s (2002) conclusions, among the more prominent variables implicated in the development of externalizing or antisocial behaviors are parental negativity and inadequate monitoring of children’s behavior. Other variables include particular parental disciplinary practices including power-assertive strategies, and parenting that is harsh, inconsistent, or permissive (Burt, McGue, Krueger, & Iacono, 2005; Larsson, Viding, Rijdsdijk, & Plomin, 2008; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; O’Connor, 2002; Peterson, Hawkins, Abbott, & Catalano, 1994; Tolan et al., 2006).

Indeed, a relationship between harsh and ineffective parental discipline and child aggressive behavior problems has been reported in children as young as 2 to 3 years of age. Other important variables are insecure attachment relationships—particularly disorganized attachment, direct and indirect exposure to abuse or violence, and conflictive parent-child relationships (Lyons-Ruth, 1996; Simons, Paternite, & Shore, 2001).

Reinforcing the overlap between family violence and antisocial behavior patterns, family violence has been found to be a significant predictor of criminality (Pelcovitz, Kaplan, DeRosa, Mandel, & Salzinger, 2000). Thus, it is clear that for many children at risk of developing conduct problems in childhood and subsequent antisocial problems in adulthood, a risky family environment is a significant predictive factor (e.g., Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Bank & Burraston, 2001; McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995; Repetti et al., 2002; Sternberg et al., 1993).

Other important predictive variables for the development of both antisocial and aggressive behaviors include predispositional tendencies such as a low levels of impulse control and empathy, as well as high levels of callousness (Gullone, 2012). In the most

severe of situations including domestic violence and child abuse, the behavior problems of youth have been documented to be of an intergenerational nature (Black et al., 2001; Serbin & Karp, 2004).

Research has also shown that the presence of one type of violence or antisocial behavior predicts an increased likelihood of another type. Pelcovitz et al. (2000) have noted that as the frequency of marital violence in the family increases, the likelihood that child abuse will also be present increases dramatically. The statistics they provide indicate that one incident of marital violence predicts a 5% probability of child abuse while 50 or more such incidents predict almost certainly that child abuse will occur. However, despite the knowledge that different types of aggression and antisocial behavior co-occur, animal cruelty as a form of violence remains relatively neglected in the mainstream antisocial and aggression literature (Gullone, 2012). Similarly, research outcomes indicating relationships between animal cruelty and human aggression remain largely uncited in the mainstream literature. (For exceptions, see Chapter 11.) Consequently, as will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter, intervention and prevention efforts for both human violence and animal cruelty are not as efficacious as they otherwise could be. It is to the animal cruelty research that this chapter will now turn.

## Animal Cruelty Defined

Ascione (1999) defined animal cruelty as “socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or the death of an animal” (p. 51). Others such as Felthous and Kellert (1986) define cruelty to animals as a behavior pattern that deliberately, repeatedly, and unnecessarily causes hurt to vertebrate animals in such a way that is likely to cause them serious injury. Brown (1988) defined cruelty as “unnecessary suffering knowingly inflicted on a sentient being (animal or human)” (p. 3). Brown made clear in his definition that the suffering may be of a physical type as in causing the sensation of pain or it may be suffering that causes distress or psychological hurt such as would be the case with maternal deprivation. Brown also argued that cruelty to animals can be either positive or negative such that committing an act against the animal would constitute a positive form of cruelty whereas failing to act as in neglecting to feed an animal or to care for it appropriately would constitute a negative form of cruelty.

Following detailed consideration of a number of definitions of animal cruelty, Dadds, Turner, and McAloon (2002) noted that most definitions comprise a number of features. These include a behavioral dimension that can be in the form of acts of omission (e.g., neglect) or acts of commission (e.g., beating). Another key characteristic is indication that the behavior occurred purposely, that is, with deliberateness and without ignorance. Another definitional criterion is that the behavior can bring about physical and/or psychological harm. Incorporating these definitional criteria, Dadds (2008) defined animal cruelty as a repetitive and proactive behavior (or pattern of behavior) intended to cause harm to sentient creatures.

On the basis of the above, the definition of animal cruelty that will be adopted herein is:

*behavior that is performed repetitively and proactively by an individual with the deliberate intention of causing harm (i.e., pain, suffering, distress, and/or death) to an animal. Included in this definition are both physical harm and psychological harm.*

## Family and Parenting Experiences

In the earliest published investigation of the aetiology of animal cruelty by children, Tapia (1971) reported an analysis of 18 child cases of cruelty to animals selected from the clinic files of the Child Psychiatry Section of the University of Missouri's School of Medicine. In all selected cases, cruelty to animals was either the chief complaint or one of the referring complaints. Among the cases, there was a high male prevalence. The children were of normal intelligence and young in age, spanning from 5 to 15 years, with half of the cases being between 8 and 10 years. A chaotic home environment with aggressive parental models was the most common factor across the cases. On the basis of the case analysis, Tapia concluded that cruelty to animals occurs in conjunction with other hostile behavior including bullying and fighting, lying, stealing, and destructiveness, and that a chaotic home environment, together with aggressive parent models, are common factors.

A follow-up study was conducted in 1977 by Rigdon and Tapia to determine whether the presence of cruelty to animals as a significant clinical feature provides information that is of prognostic value. The original data reported in 1971 were collected between two and nine years earlier. Five of the original 18 children were not able to be located for this follow-up study. The detailed case-by-case analysis revealed that, of the 13 cases followed up, eight were still cruel to animals as many as nine years later. The authors concluded that “[m]ost of these children [were] the products of a chaotic home situation with aggressive parents who administered harsh corporal punishment.” and that “[t]he most effective form of therapy seemed to be removal from or a significant change in the chaotic home environment” (p. 36).

One of the earliest studies to investigate the relationship between family environment and animal cruelty was the U.K. study by Hutton (1983) who reported Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) cruelty data for a community in England. The data showed that out of 23 families with a history of animal cruelty, 82% had also been identified by human social services as having children who were at risk of abuse or neglect. Around a decade later in the United States, Arkow (1994) reported on a study in which 24% of 122 women seeking refuge from domestic violence and 11% of 1,175 women seeking restraining orders or support services reported having observed animal cruelty by the perpetrator.

In other research, DeViney, Dickert, and Lockwood (1983) studied 53 families who had companion animals in their home and who met New Jersey legal criteria for child abuse and neglect. They found that compared to the general population, there were higher rates of animal cruelty in families where there was substantiated child abuse or neglect. Observations during home interviews revealed that companion animals were abused or neglected in 60% of these families. When the sample was classified according to type of abuse (physical abuse—40%; sexual abuse—10%; neglect—58%), for an alarming 88% of families displaying physical abuse, cruelty to animals was also present. Two-thirds of the companion animals in these homes were abused by the fathers in the family and one-third by children.

In their work comparing criminal (aggressive versus non-aggressive) and non-criminal retrospective reports of childhood experiences and abuse behaviors, Kellert and Felthous found that domestic violence and particularly paternal abuse and alcoholism, were common factors among those aggressive criminals who had a history of childhood animal cruelty (Felthous, 1980; Felthous & Kellert, 1986; Kellert & Felthous, 1985). According to Kellert and Felthous (1985), the family and childhood experiences of many of the aggressive

criminals were particularly violent. The domestic violence in the families of the aggressive criminals was most strongly characterized by paternal violence. Of note, three quarters of the aggressive criminals reported repeated and excessive child abuse compared to 31% of the non-aggressive criminals and 10% of the non-criminals. Among the non-aggressive criminals and non-criminals who were cruel to animals, reports of being physically abused as children were common. As many as 75% of non-criminals who reported experiences of parental abuse also reported being cruel to animals.

In a study by Ressler, Burgess, Hartman, Douglas, and McCormack (1986), 36 convicted sexually-oriented killers were interviewed about their childhood histories. The offenders who were sexually abused in childhood or adolescence were significantly more likely than those who were not abused to report a number of aggressive behaviors including cruelty to animals, cruelty to other children, and assaultive behavior toward adults.

In research examining the relationships between childhood experiences and animal cruelty, Miller and Knutson (1997) compared the self-reports of 314 inmates in a corrections department with those of a group of undergraduate university students. They found modest associations between animal cruelty and punitive and acrimonious childhood histories. On this basis, the authors concluded that there is an association between punitive childhood histories and antisocial behavior.

Also based on retrospective self-reports, Flynn's (1999b) study involved 267 undergraduate students. The results showed a relationship between corporal punishment by parents and the perpetration of animal cruelty. Those who had perpetrated animal cruelty were physically punished more frequently before the teenage years than those who had never been cruel to an animal. Also, more than half of male teenagers who were hit by their fathers reported perpetrating animal cruelty.

Ascione, Friedrich, Heath, and Hayashi (2003) also examined the associations between children's cruelty to animals and physical abuse. In addition, they looked at the relationship between animal cruelty and parental physical fighting. Three groups of children (1. sexually abused group; 2. psychiatric sample with no sexual abuse; 3. control group) aged between 6 and 12 years were involved in the study. Cruelty to animals was associated with a history of abuse, and the association was stronger for children who had been physically abused and those who had witnessed domestic violence.

A study by Duncan, Thomas, and Miller (2005) yielded converging findings through the assessment of charts of boys (aged 8 to 17 years) with conduct problems. The children's histories were also examined to identify the occurrence of physical child abuse, sexual child abuse, paternal alcoholism, paternal unavailability, and domestic violence. Children were grouped according to whether they had or had not been cruel to animals. It was found that children who were cruel to animals were twice as likely to have been physically and/or sexually abused or to have been exposed to domestic violence compared to children who were not cruel to animals.

A more recent study by DeGue and DeLillo (2009) which involved 860 university students from three U.S. universities showed that about 60% of participants who witnessed or perpetrated animal cruelty as a child also retrospectively reported experiences of child maltreatment or domestic violence. The study results also showed that those who had been sexually or physically abused or neglected as children were those most likely to report that they had been cruel to animals as children.

These findings of research examining the relationships between childhood animal cruelty and parenting and family experiences are consistent with those from the larger literature relating to the development of aggressive and antisocial behavior. Such research,



for example, has shown that within homes where there is greater family instability, more conflict, and problematic parenting strategies (i.e., physical punishment), children are more likely to develop childhood-onset antisocial behavior. In addition to examining the parenting and family factors that are associated with children's animal cruelty, a number of explanations have been espoused to promote better understanding of children's animal cruelty. These are discussed below.

## Understanding Children's Cruelty toward Animals

According to Robin and ten Bensel (1985), for some abused or disturbed children, companion animals may represent someone that they can gain power and control over. Thus, cruelty to animals can be conceptualized as a displacement of aggression from humans to animals. This can be explained through the psychological mechanism of identifying with the aggressor. That is, when children are victimized and, as consequence, feel powerless, helpless, and frightened, they may seek to overcome these feelings by exercising control over someone less powerful than themselves. This can be a companion animal, a younger sibling, or even a peer. Exerting such control, and thereby identifying with their abuser, may help children to restore their sense of self-efficacy, albeit in a dysfunctional way (Ascione, 2001). There are indications that other explanations also apply. For example, according to Ascione (1999), some children in abusive situations are forced to abuse animals by the adult perpetrators.

Interestingly, in their survey of 238 abused adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years who were living in juvenile institutions, and 269 control group youth living in the community, Robin and ten Bensel (1985) found that 91% of the abused group said they had a special companion animal. Moreover, 99% of these youth said that they loved or liked their companion animal very much. Among the comparison group, 90% said they had a special companion animal and 97% said they loved or liked the companion animal very much. These findings suggest that companion animals have a prominent place in the emotional lives of children from non-abused as well as abused backgrounds. However, Robin and ten Bensel's study also revealed that the companion animals of the institutionalized group of adolescents suffered more abuse and these adolescents also experienced more violent companion animal loss compared to the control group. Importantly, the abuser was usually someone other than the child. For example, there were several instances of companion animals being hurt or killed as a way of punishing the child. Others (e.g., Muraski, 1992 cited in Arkow, 1996; Summit, 1983) have reported that threatening to harm/kill, or actually harming/killing, a child's companion animals is a common technique used by child abusers to obtain the child's acquiescence or to keep the child quiet about the abuse. Because children are often deeply attached to their companion animals, observing them being violently abused or even killed is emotionally devastating for the child but is an effective control mechanism for the perpetrator (Ascione, 2001).

There is also the proposal that a central common factor in explaining animal cruelty may be an underdeveloped or compromised level of empathy.<sup>1</sup> As argued by Ascione

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1. In addition to the discussion below, this topic is further addressed in Chapters 11 and 15.

(1999), abusing animals may represent the perpetrator's reduced capacity to empathize with a potential victim (human or animal). Such a claim is supported by the demonstrated inverse relationship between *callousness* and empathy (Lahey, Waldman, & McBurnett, 1999). Further support for such a claim comes from the literature on childhood externalizing syndromes. Such syndromes, including Conduct Disorder (CD), are characterized by hyperactive, aggressive, and oppositional behaviors as well as the more serious rule violations that can bring the child in contact with the juvenile justice system (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). CD in childhood has been shown to be characterized by low levels of empathy (Hastings, Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, Usher, & Bridges, 2000) and is predictive of other psychological disorders including delinquency, drug abuse, school dropout, suicide, and criminality in adolescence or adulthood (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1992).

Research by Frick and colleagues has shown that a particular sub-type of early onset CD is differentiated by the presence of callous-unemotional (CU) traits, characteristics also referred to as psychopathy. Subsequent research has indicated that CU traits designate a particularly severe group of antisocial youth characterized by a lack of fearful inhibitions and other emotional deficits including impaired development of empathy and guilt, and an unemotional interpersonal style. A preference for thrill and adventure-seeking activities as well as a greater sensitivity to rewards than to punishments has also been reported (Frick, 1998; Frick, O'Brien, Wootton, & McBurnett, 1994). It is noteworthy that, in extreme forms, this dimension may include finding enjoyment in dominating, intimidating, embarrassing, and hurting others (Lahey et al., 1999).

Of further relevance, the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual—IV Text Revised (DSM-IV TR) includes several diagnostic criteria for CD, related to the category of "aggression to people and animals," and including "has been physically cruel to people" and "has been physically cruel to animals" (p. 99). Related to this, it is significant that hurting animals is considered to be one of the earliest emerging symptoms, appearing at a mean age of six years. As noted by Ascione (2001), since this behavior emerges earlier than other markers of CD including bullying, cruelty to people, vandalism, and causing fires, the presence of animal cruelty could serve as an important early marker for preventative interventions. Reinforcing Frick's conclusions about the importance of CU traits in predicting a particularly severe trajectory of CD, in a recent investigation, it was found that children who were cruel to animals displayed more severe conduct symptoms in general when compared to children who were not (Luk, Staiger, Wong, & Mathai, 1998). On the basis of their findings, Luk et al., (1998) concluded that cruelty to animals may be a marker of more serious conduct problems. Of relevance, predictors of the development of antisocial, aggressive, or violent behavior in childhood include family and parenting experiences, as well as individual differences in personality and temperament.

Despite the methodological limitations that characterize many of the investigations into children's animal cruelty, the consistent finding of a significant relationship between the experiencing of abuse in childhood and engagement in animal cruelty has emerged. This is of particular note given methodological and sampling differences across studies, including different assessment methodologies such as retrospective reporting, self-reports, and other-reports.

Other factors placing children at risk of developing aggressive and antisocial behaviors, of which animal cruelty is one, are those that characterize *risky families* (Repetti et al., 2002). These include overt family conflict, expressions of negative affect, and low nurturance and warmth. Risky parents are cold, unsupportive, or neglectful.

However, although risky parenting and risky family environments leave children vulnerable to the development of psychological and physical disorders, it is important to emphasize the role played by biology, often in interaction with environmental factors such as family environment. Research outcomes converge on the conclusion that certain biologically-based characteristics, such as temperament, are predictive of development along an antisocial behavior trajectory. However, the prediction of such an outcome is stronger if their biologically-based vulnerabilities are reinforced with environmental experiences that place children at risk of developing antisocial and aggressive behaviors such as abusive parenting.

While generally seen as dysfunctional, children's aggressive behavior can also be argued to be adaptive. Thus, children whose aggression increases as they develop, rather than following the normative decreasing pathway, may also be expressing a learned behavior that has survival value in their particular circumstance. That is, as victims of abuse, children experience a sense of powerlessness that, at a very basic level is likely to be experienced as a threat to survival. Identifying with their abuser enables a transformation from a sense of powerlessness to one of being in control. For a child, those who are more vulnerable than oneself are likely to be small animals; thus, those animals are the vulnerable others to whom aggression can be displaced.

In addition to research showing significant associations between risky family environments and children's cruelty toward animals, there is a significant body of research showing significant relationships between domestic violence and animal cruelty. Included within many of the studies in this latter area, is further support for the relationship between a dysfunctional family environment, particularly a violent family, and children's cruelty toward animals. The research examining the link between domestic violence and animal cruelty will be reviewed below.

## The Relationship between Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty

Case study accounts of the relationship between domestic and animal cruelty, such as the one that follows, are powerful indicators of a conceptually explicable association that, until recently, had remained largely unexplored and/or undocumented by both researchers and practitioners.

Mary, J. shot her husband as he entered their trailer, in fact blew the top of his head off. Why? Not because he hit her. He did. Not because he was mean to the children. He was. Not because he had isolated her from her family and friends in a small trailer miles from anything. He had. No, she killed him because he told her he was going to bring home another puppy for her to hold down while he had intercourse with the animal. (Quinslick, 1999; p. 171)

One of the most consistently replicated findings in the animal cruelty literature is a significant co-occurrence between domestic violence and animal cruelty. This research has found that more than 50% of all abused women have companion animals, and in as many as 50% of cases, the animals are abused by the perpetrators of the domestic violence. Motivations for the abuse include hurting and/or controlling the women or their children. The research has also consistently found that concern for the safety of their companion animals keeps many women (and their children) from leaving or staying separated from

their abusers. It can be argued that animal cruelty, when it occurs within the family home, is a symptom of a deeply dysfunctional family (Lockwood & Hodge, 1986).

In 1997, Ascione and others published a study reporting the findings of a U.S. national survey of shelters. One shelter from nearly every U.S. state was selected for participation. Shelter staff were surveyed about the coexistence of animal cruelty and domestic violence and children's cruelty toward animals. They found that as many as 85% of staff who were interviewed reported that they were aware of incidents of companion animal cruelty. A total of 63% of the staff also reported hearing children talk about animal cruelty. Eighty-three percent of workers answered 'yes' to the question "...have you observed the coexistence of domestic violence and pet abuse?"

In a subsequent study, 38 women who sought shelter for domestic violence were directly interviewed (Ascione, 1998). The author reported that 74% owned a companion animal (and 68% owned more than one companion animal). Of these women, 71% reported that threats of harming, actual harm, or killing of companion animals by the perpetrators had occurred. Also, approximately 30% of children exposed to violence were themselves reported to be cruel toward animals. Ascione also found that a significant proportion (18%) of women delayed seeking shelter for themselves and their children, for fear of their companion animal being harmed.

Quinslick (1999) reported the findings of another survey conducted as part of the Domestic Violence Intervention Project. The study involved 72 female victims of domestic violence of whom 58 had companion animals. Of these women, 68% reported violence directed toward their companion animals. In other cases, women reported experiencing threats to kill or to give away their companion animal(s). In 88% of cases, the cruelty was committed in their presence and in 76% of cases, children had been witness to the cruelty. They found that 54% of child witnesses copied the behaviors they had observed. Of particular note is the fact that Quinslick (1999) reported almost identical results for an additional survey involving 32 women.

A later study by Daniell (2001) reported the findings of a survey conducted by the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Ontario SPCA). More than 100 women's shelters throughout Ontario were contacted and a total of 21 agreed to participate. This resulted in 130 women being surveyed, 80 of whom owned companion animals at the time of entering the women's refuge and a further 31 who had owned a companion animal in the past 12 months. The results were largely consistent with past studies. Of the 111 women owning companion animals, 44% stated that their partner had previously been cruel or killed one or more of their companions, and 42% stated that their partner had threatened to hurt or kill one of their animals. Finally, as many as 43% of respondents indicated that concern about their companion animal's welfare had caused them remain in their abusive situation longer.

Flynn's (2000) study attempted to replicate and extend upon previous research examining the human-animal violence link. In his study, the participants were asked four questions. These related to the nature and extent of companion animal cruelty suffered by physically abused women, the importance of the companion animals as sources of emotional support for the women, whether they worried about their companion animal's welfare after seeking shelter, and finally whether their concern for the companion animal's welfare delayed their seeking refuge. One hundred seven women from a South Carolina shelter were involved in the study; 43 of the women had companion animals. Of the companion animal owners, 47% reported that they had experienced threats of harm or actual harm to their animal(s) by the perpetrator of the domestic violence. In contrast to previous

research, only two instances of companion animal cruelty by children were reported. Regarding emotional importance, almost half (46%) of the women reported their companion animal to be a very important source of emotional support. Not surprisingly, almost as many (40%) reported being worried about their animal's safety and 19% of the women reported delaying seeking shelter.

Of note, studies examining the associations between animal cruelty and domestic violence have been conducted across several countries including the United States, Canada, and Australia (e.g., Ascione, 1998; Ascione, et al., 2007; Daniell, 2001; Faver & Cavazos, 2007; Flynn, 2000; Quinslick, 1999; Volant, Johnson, Coleman, & Gullone, 2008). The findings are remarkably consistent across the studies despite their differences in parameters including the country in which the study was conducted, sample size, and the methodology used. However, a limitation of these studies is that, with few exceptions (i.e., Ascione, et al., 2007; Volant et al, 2008), they have not included a comparison group of women who were not in a violent family situation.

In their comparison group study, Ascione et al. (2007) interviewed 101 women who were recruited through domestic violence shelters as well as a comparison community sample of 60 women who had not experienced family violence. The researchers found that the shelter women were more likely to report that their partners had threatened to hurt their companion animals (52%) and that their partners had actually hurt or killed their companion animals (54%). This compared with 16.7% and 3.5%, respectively in the community sample of women. The shelter women's reports included multiple incidents of killing or hurting companion animals in contrast to the community sample for whom incidents were typically isolated and were more likely to occur within the context of disciplining the animal for bad behavior (e.g., biting).

In contrast to the reports obtained from the community sample women, shelter women could not give a reason for the animal cruelty. When women in the shelter group were asked whether concern for the welfare of their companion animal had kept them from seeking refuge sooner, nearly one fourth said "yes." This percentage was markedly higher for those women whose companion animals had already been hurt (35%).

Ascione et al. (2007) also assessed the experiences and behaviors of children. In this regard, over 50% of the shelter women reported that their children had witnessed the companion animal cruelty. This contrasted with less than 4% for the community sample. A total of 39 shelter group children were also directly interviewed. Two-thirds of these children (66.7%) reported that they had witnessed companion animal cruelty incidents as perpetrated (in 46.4% of cases) by their father, stepfather, or mother's boyfriend. Of these children, 13.2% admitted that they had hurt companion animals and 7.9% reported hurting or killing the animals. However, more than 50% of the children said that they had protected their companion animal(s) by directly intervening.

In their Australian comparison group investigation, as noted in Chapter 11, Volant et al. (2008) surveyed 102 women recruited through 24 domestic violence refuge or outreach services and a non-domestic violence comparison community sample of 102 women. The findings were highly comparable to those of past similar studies and included that 46% of women in the domestic violence sample reported that their partner had *threatened to* hurt or kill their companion animal compared with 6% of women in the community sample. Similarly, a markedly larger percentage of domestic violence group women (56%) reported that their partner had hurt or killed their companion animal compared to 0% of women in the community sample. Of those women recruited through refuge (as opposed to outreach) services (n = 34), 35% reported delaying seeking refuge out of

concern for the welfare of their companion animal. Delay periods ranged between one (3%) and eight weeks (24%). A number of the 34 women reported not delaying because they were able to take their companion animals with them.

Also, consistent with past similar studies, Volant et al. (2008) asked the women in the domestic violence sample about their children's experiences. In 29% of cases, children were reported to witness threats of cruelty and the same percentage was reported to witness actual cruelty. A total of 19% of the women reported that their child had been cruel to their companion animal.

In summary, the focus of studies examining the relationship between family violence and companion animal cruelty has predominantly been on (i) determining the prevalence of companion animal cruelty within physically violent relationships and (ii) the prevalence of women who delay leaving their violent relationship for fear of harm befalling their companion animals in their absence, as well as the length of the delay. In addition, studies have reported the percentages of children exposed to the violence and the percentage of children who are also cruel to animals. The findings have demonstrated that between 11.8% and 39.4% of women report that the perpetrator *threatened to* hurt or kill their companion animals. Further, between 25.6% (Flynn, 2000) and 79.3% (Quinslick, 1999) of women report that the perpetrator has *actually* hurt or killed their companion animal(s). Many of the studies examining animal cruelty within abusive families have also reported that between 18% (Ascione, 1998) and 48% (Carlisle-Frank, Frank, & Nielson, 2004) of women have delayed leaving their violent situation out of fear that their companion animal(s) would be harmed or killed if they were to leave.

The consistent finding in the above studies that children who have witnessed human and animal-directed cruelty are at risk of themselves engaging in abusive behaviors was systematically investigated in a recent investigation by Baldry (2003). Baldry's (2003) investigation involved 1,396 youth aged between 9 and 17 years. Participants were asked about their exposure to animal cruelty and to domestic violence. They were also asked about their own treatment of animals. It was found that almost half of participants reported exposure to at least one form of violence (verbal, physical, or threatening) and a similar proportion reported father-directed violence toward the mother, while more than a third reported mother-directed violence against the father. One-fifth of the respondents reported severe violent episodes between their parents.

With regard to animals, it was found that just under half of the youth reported having committed at least one act of animal cruelty with boys being two to three times more likely than girls to have done so. Severe incidents of animal cruelty were reported by a lower 19.4% of youth. Of most relevance, of all participants who reported having engaged in an act of animal cruelty, almost all reported a higher level of exposure to domestic and animal violence. Based on the study outcomes, Baldry concluded that the role of modelling appears to be very important in predicting animal cruelty, clearly indicating that violence against animals is likely to be learned from peers or parents. In addition to modelling of cruelty, Reber (1996) has argued that children's cruelty of animals may be an important marker of attachment disturbances wherein the animal becomes the recipient of a child's uncontrolled rage. Thus, animal cruelty becomes part of the cycle of dysfunction and violence.

Some (although fewer) studies, have investigated the motivations for companion animal abuse with violent families. Consistent with theoretical proposals about underlying motivations, on the whole, the predominant motivation appears to be one of control. According to anecdotal and empirical accounts, animals are killed or harmed in an effort to intimidate, frighten, or control others, including battered women or abused children

(Arkow, 1996; Ascione, 2001; Ascione & Arkow, 1999; Boat, 1995; Faver & Strand, 2003). For example, in his qualitative study involving 10 women seeking refuge from domestic violence, Flynn (2000) found that batterers use animal cruelty to intimidate, to hurt, or to control their partners.

However, not all batterers are cruel to animals. To determine whether batterers who are cruel to their companion animals differ from those who are not, Simmons and Lehmann (2007) investigated the reports of 1,283 female companion animal owners who were seeking refuge from partner abuse. As mentioned in Chapter 11, they found that batterers who were cruel to animals (not all battered animals were companion animals) used more forms of violence compared to those who were not. Specifically, batterers who were cruel to companion animals had higher rates of sexual violence, marital rape, emotional violence, and stalking. They also used more controlling behaviors including isolation, male privilege, blaming, intimidation, threats, and economic abuse. The differences were even greater for those who killed a companion animal compared to those who were not cruel to animals.

The findings reported by Simmons and Lehmann (2007) reinforce the finding from the general aggression literature that individuals whose antisocial acts are more heterogeneous, in this case involving different forms of human and animal abuse, tend to fall at the more severe end of the antisocial spectrum (Dishion, French, & Patterson, 1995; Farrington, 1991; Lynam, 1996). This finding as well as others that have been found within the animal cruelty research, parallel findings from the general aggression literature. This consistency of findings reinforces the argument that animal cruelty is one behavioral manifestation of the aggressive and/or antisocial individual. Some have argued that there is a link between human violence and animal cruelty. Gullone (2012) has argued that, in fact, there is more than a link.

## More Than a Link

An extensive body of research exists that has examined the aetiology of aggressive behaviors and, more recently, the characteristics and developmental histories of the individuals who engage in such behaviors (Hartup, 2005). Documented risk factors include particular biological predispositions, personality traits, and cognitive structures such as schemas and scripts. Risk factors also include the individual's social environment such as socio-economic status and exposure to violence (Reebye, 2005). Within a developmental framework, others (e.g., Greenberg, Speltz, & DeKlyen, 1993) have identified the importance of contextual factors such as family stressors, parenting, discipline, and attachment. Thus, as with all complex behaviors, causal factors are many. Of particular importance, they include complex interactions amongst the identified aetiological factors.

Supporting the argument that there is more than a link between aggressive and violent behaviors towards humans and animal cruelty behaviors, through comprehensive reviews of existing research and theory, Gullone (2012) demonstrated that animal cruelty behaviors predominantly appear alongside human aggression and violence, as well as other crimes, including non-violent offenses. Almost without exception, the perpetrators of animal cruelty crimes are the same individuals who engage in other aggressive or antisocial behavior including partner and child abuse, and bullying. Thus, the co-occurrence that has been consistently reported between animal cruelty and partner as well as child abuse is of little surprise. The same pattern has been found when examining criminal behavior

more generally, but particularly violent crimes against the person such as rape (Arluke, Levin, Luke, & Ascione, 1999; Gullone & Clarke, 2008), and bullying (e.g., Gullone & Robertson, 2008). Animal cruelty is currently listed as a diagnostic criterion for CD (i.e. DSM-IV-Test Revised version) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and has been since 1987 when it first appeared in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Moreover, in their meta-analysis, Frick et al. (1993) reported a median age of 6.5 years for the occurrence of the first incident of animal cruelty along with other aggressive behaviors (i.e., fighting, bullying, assaulting others), thus indicating that animal cruelty appears as one of the earliest indicators of CD. Further, as many as 25% of children diagnosed with CD display cruelty to animals. Cruelty to animals was one of several items that discriminated between their destructive/non-destructive dichotomy with animal cruelty falling within the destructive category (Frick et al., 1993).

There is also evidence that CU traits and psychopathy maybe be particularly predictive of animal cruelty behaviors. According to Lynam (1996), psychopathy is characterized by more crimes than is true for the average criminal offender and also by more types of crimes. Such findings are reflective of the criminal behavior profiles of people who are cruel to animals. Such a profile is also reflective of particularly severe and violent antisocial adults (Blair, Peschardt, Budhani, Mitchell, & Pine, 2006). (For more on this topic, see Chapters 11 and 15.)

In a controlled study aimed at identifying risk factors for abuse and interpersonal violence among an urban population, Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye, and Campbell (2005) compared 845 women who had experienced abuse in the past two years with a control group of non-abused women from the same metropolitan area. Risk factors for the perpetration of interpersonal violence included being a high school drop-out, being in fair or poor mental health, having a problem with drugs or alcohol, and companion animal cruelty.

In the more recent investigation by Vaughn and colleagues (2009), the correlates of lifetime animal cruelty including CD and other disorders, as well as socio-demographic variables were examined. The 2001–2002 data set comprised data from a nationally representative sample of 43,093 non-institutionalized U.S. residents aged 18 years or older. Data were collected via interview by trained interviewers using a validated interview schedule (Grant, Harford, Dawson, & Pickering, 1995).

Among the socio-demographic variables assessed, being male predicted a higher prevalence of animal cruelty, as did being younger and from a lower socio-economic background. The findings showed that the prevalence of antisocial behaviors was higher among those with a lifetime history of animal cruelty compared to those without such a history. The most prevalent antisocial behaviors among those who were cruel to animals were crimes including robbing or the mugging of another person. Supporting the role played by developmental family experiences, animal cruelty was associated with a family history of antisocial behavior.

## Proposed Strategies for Change

Despite the substantial evidence that an individual's animal cruelty can validly be taken as a warning sign that they are engaging in other criminal, antisocial, or aggressive



behaviors, the argument still meets substantial resistance, particularly by many scientists involved in research into aggressive and violent behavior and those within the legal system. This state of affairs is likely related to the fact that the general position held by society and its members is that animals' suffering, when compared to that of humans, is less worthy of both scientific and moral consideration. Since public opinion is related to the law of the land and likewise the law of the land reflects public opinion, this attitude toward animal suffering has become stuck in a vicious cycle of discrimination.

A number of authors (e.g., Clawson, 2009; Lockwood, 2008; Schaffner, 2009) have put forth possible strategies for the promotion of the cultural change needed to enable animal cruelty to be appropriately regarded as the antisocial and aggressive behavior that it is. These strategies include increasing public awareness of animal cruelty and related issues, as well as strengthening animal cruelty legislation. While law often reflects public perceptions, it is also true that law is a major factor in bringing about a change in public perceptions. There is a reciprocal relationship between the two. In this instance, as has happened with child and partner abuse, changes in the law and legal proceedings are required to bring about changes in public perceptions.

First, at the most basic level, the status of animals needs to change in the eyes of the law so that animals are perceived as more than mere property. Additionally, legislative bodies need to enact cruelty laws that appropriately reflect the severity of the offense (Clawson, 2009; Lockwood, 2008; Schaffner, 2009). As argued by Schaffner (2009), "the law should punish violent criminals according to the acts that they perpetrate. Whether the victim is a human being or an animal, a violent crime is a crime against its intended victim, as well a crime against society and its morals" (p. 199).

It goes without saying that the general perception of animal cruelty as relatively unimportant when compared to crimes against humans is having a negative impact on animals. However, as research has clearly highlighted, the same perception is having a negative impact on humans since many crimes against humans may well have been prevented had any animal cruelty incidents that preceded them been taken more seriously. As cogently stated by Schleuter (2008, p. 378):

Most agencies consider crimes against animals complaints to be low-priority calls, regardless of whether they are in-progress crimes, and no matter how violent. . . . If one pays attention to such crimes occurring particularly in a dysfunctional intra-familial setting or in conjunction with other destructive behaviors, future animal abuse or neglect, as well as similar crimes against vulnerable members of the household, may become potentially preventable if proper interventions are put in place.

Related to acknowledgement of the link between animal cruelty and human-directed aggression or violence is a particularly important strategy that has been proposed by several authors. The strategy is the facilitation of cross-reporting of suspected animal cruelty. Such cross-reporting would involve reporting suspected animal cruelty not only to animal welfare organizations, but also to the police force and human service agencies such as child protective services and adult protective services.

In his chapter specifically addressing the role of laws and policy to address the link of family violence, Schaffner (2009) acknowledges that although social scientists have provided data to support the link, the law has been slow to respond. Current laws independently address crimes depending upon the victim. Thus, there are separate laws for animal cruelty, family or domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. Despite the relationships among these different crimes of abuse, there is no existing single law that covers these relationships.

In providing justification for the proposed need for a law that recognizes the link between different types of abuse, among other reasons, Schaffner (2009) argues that one act of abuse often involves multiple forms of violence such that the abuse of a companion animal also psychologically harms other members of the family. According to Schaffner, if properly implemented, law and policy would be better armed to: (i) prevent human abuse, (ii) detect abuse earlier than is presently the case, (iii) protect family violence victims by providing protective orders and safe havens, (iv) facilitate prosecution of the abuser or perpetrator, and (v) avoid further abuses through provision of appropriate sanctions.

Thus, by enacting adequate laws including animal cruelty laws that properly indicate the seriousness of the animal cruelty crime committed, future violence toward both human and animal victims can be prevented. To properly reflect the seriousness of the offense, the law should impose a minimum sentence (Schaffner, 2009). If the severity of animal cruelty crimes is adequately signaled by law and sanctions, the perceptions of prosecutors will change so that they begin to reflect current scientific understanding in their decisions as opposed to falling prey to existing biases that animals are less worthy of moral consideration. It is ultimately the responsibility of prosecutors to enforce animal cruelty laws by prosecuting animal cruelty cases to the fullest extent of the law.

In conclusion, it is time for law and policymakers to act upon the existing body of research. Laws need to be developed that acknowledge the relationship and similarities between different types of abuse and violence, including animal cruelty. Consistent with this recognition, laws need to be implemented fully and fairly across different abusive behaviors. Based on the empirical information available, there exists no possible justification for relegating animal cruelty offenses to the “less important” category. Consequently, there is no justification for punishing violent criminals significantly more leniently or, as often happens, not at all, if the victim of their violent crime is an animal as opposed to a human being. Indeed, there is a high statistical probability that the victims of the violent or antisocial individual are both animal and human. This strengthens the argument that laws should punish criminals according to the severity of the acts they perpetrate without discrimination or favor based on the target species of the particular crime.

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