

ANIMAL ABUSE AND... CHILD MALTREATMENT

The Relevance of Animal Abuse to Child Development

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The National Resource Center on The Link between

Animal Abuse and Human Violence

January 2016

There is increasing interest in how Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) – a concept promulgated by the seminal 1998 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study – describes situations that result not only in short-term emotional and physical trauma to children but also to long-term health problems and increased risk of mortality. (See *LINK-Letter Nov.-Dec., 2014*). The study took a longitudinal look at more than 17,000 participants over a 14-year period and examined the adverse effects of such factors as emotional, physical and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; violent treatment of the mother; substance abuse or mental illness in the household; a household member being incarcerated; and parental separation or divorce.

In 2014, the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) expanded the ACES study using psychological distress as an outcome measure and explored whether the ACES adversities could be improved upon by considering a more comprehensive range of possible adverse experiences. The NatSCEV team asked for input at the time as to what additional factors might be included; the National Link Coalition submitted a request that childhood exposure to, and perpetration of, animal cruelty be added as a relevant factor. (See *Link-Letter February, 2012*). This request was made, in part, because since 1986 Aggression to People and Animals (child has been physically cruel to animals) has been included in the *Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of*

Mental Disorders criteria for Conduct Disorder and is one of the earliest symptoms to appear.

The National Link Coalition regularly receives requests from researchers and field workers in the child abuse prevention and intervention arenas asking for statistical data about the impact on children from exposure to animal cruelty, abuse and neglect and community violence such as dog- and cock-fighting. While a more comprehensive collection of facts are available through our online [Bibliography](#), we thought we would share with you some of the more significant findings in recent years about the animal abuse/child maltreatment Link:

- As many as 31% of youths in some neighborhoods have attended a dogfight. *(Cleveland, 2006).*
- 43% of school shooters have histories of animal cruelty. *(Arluke & Madfis, 2013)*
- 24% of children in homes marked by intimate partner violence reported that someone in the home had either threatened to, and/or saw or heard someone, kill or harm an animal. Nearly 78% of children who experienced threats or harm took action to protect their pets. *(McDonald, Collins et al., 2015)*
- Between 62% and 76% of animal cruelty in the home occurs in the presence of a child. *(Faver & Strand, 2003)*
- Children who have been sexually abused are five times more likely to abuse an animal. *(Ascione et al., 2003)*
- Children are the victims in 70% of fatal dog attacks. In 21.1% of fatal dog attacks the dog was abused or neglected. *(Patronek, 2013)*
- Animal abuse was present in 60% of households being investigated for child abuse, and in 88% of homes investigated for physical child abuse. One-third of the animal abuse incidents were perpetrated by children. The rate of dog bites in these homes was 11 times greater than in non-abusive homes. *(DeViney, Dickert & Lockwood, 1983)*

- Individuals with the highest rates of both victimization and perpetration of physical bullying exhibited the highest rates of involvement in multiple acts of animal abuse. (*Henry & Sanders, 2007*)
- Violent adult offenders are significantly more likely than non-offenders to have committed acts of cruelty toward animals as children. (*Merz-Perez et al., 2001*)
- 35% of boys who were sexually abused had also abused animals. (*Friedrich et al., 1986*)
- Family variables including marital violence, paternal pet abuse, paternal drinking, and harsh parenting increase the likelihood of childhood firesetting and animal cruelty and are related to adolescent delinquency. (*Becker et al., 2004*)
- Children with histories of animal cruelty were significantly more likely to have perpetrated bullying, experienced sexual abuse, and have histories of problems with peers or sexually acting out. (*Boat et al., 2011*)
- A child's cruelty to animals may be an important symptom of negative experiences and/or predictor of future aggressive behavior and should be included in assessments of vulnerable children. (*Bell, 2001*)

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