

TV survey highlights animal cruelty trends

[Ola Salem](#)

Last Updated: Jan 28, 2011



Abu Dhabi // Most people in the UAE are aware of animal cruelty but are unlikely to do much about it, according to a new survey that attempts to establish some home truths surrounding the treatment of animals and how they are perceived by people in the Emirates.

Of 757 people surveyed, more than three-quarters (77 per cent) said animal cruelty was common in the UAE.

Almost as many, 72 per cent, said people should be more active in reporting cruelty to the authorities - but only 7 per cent of those who had witnessed mistreatment said they had reported it.

Far more, 40 per cent, said they had confronted the abuser, while almost half (47 per cent) admitted they had done nothing.

The survey was carried out by YouGov Siraj for the Nabd al Arab (Arabs' Pulse) show on Al Aan TV.

"There is a lot of abuse here," said Raghad Auttashi, the founder of Al Rahma Society of the UAE, an animal welfare group. "People tell me of things they see, so I tell them to call the Ministry of Environment on 600-555 - but they don't."

Nearly half those surveyed said they thought animal abuse was more widespread in the Middle East than in western countries. More than two-thirds (70 per cent) said more should be done to combat it, with western expatriates (90 per cent) particularly keen for action.

Two people in five said they regarded animals as property that could be used for any purpose, including entertainment.

But Ms Auttashi said: "In the Quran, it is clearly mentioned that they are creatures like us. It is part of our religion to take care of them."

She said some members of society, especially children, tortured animals for entertainment. Nearly four people in five (79 per cent) agreed in the survey that children who were cruel to animals were likely to grow up to become aggressive or violent.

Sibhig Ali, a 35-year-old Indian, has seen cruelty by children at close quarters. Just this week, his cat was attacked and killed by a dog belonging to a gang of Emirati schoolboys in the Mashrif area of the capital.

"These kids, they come here every day and encourage their dogs to attack cats. Every day cats are buried here," he said. "Two days ago they had their dog attack my cat. Her pelvis was broken and she was severely injured. Yesterday she died."

Ms Auttashi blamed the children's parents. "I'd say 70 per cent is because of them," she said. "Children are not getting any instructions from parents."

Four in every five respondents (81 per cent) said more publicity about animal cruelty would help, while almost half (47 per cent) called for educational programmes on proper animal care.

"This issue is not covered in Arab media enough," Ms Auttashi said. "Arabic media is blind to this."

Maysoon Baraky, the presenter of Nabd al Arab, which airs on Saturdays, said part of the point of commissioning the survey had been to generate some publicity for the issue.

"I think media is becoming more aware of animal rights," she said. "Interest and care in the subject is gradually increasing,"

Dana Shadid, a producer on Nabd al Arab, said the suggestion that animal cruelty at the hands of children was an indicator of future problems was worrying. "Parents need to keep an eye out for that," she said.

Other than informing authorities, 43 per cent of respondents said people should be more active in confronting anyone they see mistreating animals.

Only a fifth (21 per cent) considered it worthwhile to give money to animal charities, and even fewer (17 per cent) mentioned volunteering at an animal shelter.

Of those who did not agree that people should be more active in reporting cruelty, half (52 per cent) indicated that it was none of their business, saying people should not be made to feel guilty for the actions of others. Two in five said cruelty would continue whatever they did.

Dr Mohamed AbdelAzeez, a vet at Al Sondus vet clinic in Al Ain, said he doubted the survey was an accurate reflection of the care given to all animals, including livestock.

"One man last week told me his camel was more dear to him than four men that worked for him," he said. "The people will do anything to save their camels, horses, cows, sheep and goats."

Over half of pet owners, 57 per cent, said they did not take their pets for regular check-ups and vaccinations.

Amal Hamiche, a 24-year-old Algerian who lives in Sharjah suggested the cost of vets might be behind some neglect of animals. "Last time I took my cat, it cost Dh900!" she said. "I told the vet that for a person it doesn't cost that much.

"But I think people here need to be educated on animal care, especially [told] that Islam encourages it.

"My friends think animals aren't clean and cause diseases, so they don't like to own them."

Although two-thirds of those in the survey thought it was common for people to have pets in the UAE, the reality was somewhat different. Just one in five people (22 per cent) said they owned a pet animal.

The most common pets were domestic cats, with a third (32 per cent) of pet owners having one or more. Dogs were only slightly less popular (28 per cent), while almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the pet owners said they had exotic birds (23 per cent).

While cats were more popular in most groups, they were particularly so among Abu Dhabi residents (47 per cent), westerners (79 per cent), those on middle incomes (48 per cent) and those who were divorced or widowed (69 per cent).

Dogs were more popular among those living in Dubai (36 per cent), and those earning less than Dh5,900 a month (35 per cent).

Anita Signorino, the trapping rescue co-ordinator at Feline Friends, an Abu Dhabi-based rescue group, said people should think twice before getting a pet. "Especially in this transient country, not many own pets," she said. "It costs a lot of money, for me to take my three cats back to Australia with me it will cost Dh20,000.

"I made that commitment, but not everyone does. They need to make sure that they will take it with them. They need to make that decision first, before they get pets."

Although only 2 per cent of pet owners had snakes, the same number had lizards or iguanas. Mrs Signorino said reptiles were a popular choice here. "It is too easy to get exotic animals here," she said. "We need better laws and better restrictions."