

Examining the links between animal abuse and human violence

Clifton P. Flynn

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Abstract

Empirical research has increasingly found evidence for the coexistence of animal abuse and various forms of interpersonal violence. Some researchers have even argued for a specific version of this relationship, namely, that individuals tend to move from violence toward animals, particularly in childhood, to subsequent violence toward humans. Others have suggested that the evidence for this graduation or progression hypothesis is weak and inconsistent, and that an approach to animal abuse that focuses on the link is misguided. This article begins by reviewing the research on the connections between animal abuse and interhuman violence. Then it critically assesses the evidence for and against the link, and discusses the issues and challenges facing future research in this area.

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Introduction

Great thinkers throughout the ages have proposed a link between our treatment of animals and our treatment of humans. The posited association often deals with negative acts toward humans and other animals, although the reverse has also been suggested—that the humane treatment of animals may be related to kindness toward people [[12]: 197–199].

The academic study of violence toward animals, and its relation to human violence, has steadily increased in volume, in quality, and in stature over the past twenty or so years. Criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, social workers, legal scholars, and others have recognized the myriad ways in which animal abuse is

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