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N Bystander Apathy in Animal Abuse Cases: Exploring Barriers to Child and Adolescent Intervention

Author: Arluke, Arnold

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Abstract:

The present study examines how children and adolescents respond when witnessing animal abuse and why many do not intervene to help animal victims. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with 25 late adolescents who witnessed animal abuse months or years earlier. Results were generally consistent with, but not identical to, findings from previous research on bystander intervention with human victims. On the one hand, the response of bystanders to animal abuse was similar to that of bystanders witnessing violence against humans. Both kinds of bystanders are very troubled by what they witness but often appear to be indifferent to the distress of victims, saying or doing little if anything to stop victims from being harmed or to prevent perpetrators from repeating their violence. On the other hand, while both types of bystanders faced the same general barriers to helping, the nature and salience of these barriers differed when comparing the two groups. Child and adolescent bystanders of animal abuse, unlike bystanders of human violence, were heavily deterred by a definition of animal abuse as a form of play among peers that normalized violence and included bystanders as participants, the fear of being labeled a tattletale or spoilsport if bystanders reported the abuse to others or caused it to stop, and individual attitudes and beliefs that led bystanders to excuse or justify the abuse or to feel as though they had no support for protesting, reporting, or preventing it. Implications of the findings are discussed for educating children and adolescents to intervene on behalf of abused animals.

Keywords: [ANIMAL ABUSE](#); [BYSTANDER APATHY](#); [CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HELPING BEHAVIOR](#)

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