

The Relationship between Childhood Cruelty to Animals and Psychological Adjustment: A Malaysian Study

Authors: Mellor, David; Yeow, James; bt Mamat, Norul Hidayah; bt Mohd Hapidzal, Noor Fizlee

Source: [Anthrozoos: A Multidisciplinary Journal of The Interactions of People & Animals](#), Volume 21, Number 4, December 2008 , pp. 363-374(12)

Abstract:

In Western research, cruelty to animals in childhood has been associated with comorbid conduct problems and with interpersonal violence in later life. However, there is little understanding of the etiology of cruelty to animals, and what in the child's life may require attention if the chain linking animal cruelty and later violence is to be broken. The study reported in this paper investigated the association between parent-reported cruelty to animals, and parent- and self-reported psychological strengths and weaknesses in a sample of 379 elementary school children in an Eastern context, Malaysia. No gender differences were found in relation to cruelty to animals or psychological problems, as assessed with the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). However, there were different predictors of cruelty to animals for boys and girls. Regression analyses found that for boys, parent-reported hyperactivity was a unique predictor of Malicious and Total Cruelty to animals. For girls, self-reported conduct problems was a unique predictor of Typical Cruelty to animals. Parent-reported total difficulties were associated with Typical, Malicious, and Total Cruelty to animals. We suggest that routine screening of children with an instrument such as the SDQ may help to detect those children who may need to undergo further assessment and perhaps intervention to break the chain linking childhood cruelty to animals and later conduct problems.