



Overview of AniCare Child: Psychological and Legal Considerations

Background

It appears that as public attention to the topic of animal abuse continues to increase, more cruelty cases are being brought into the criminal justice system

However, jails are crowded, recidivism is a hot topic, and there is increasing interest in (re)habilitation as an alternative or complement to traditional sentencing, particularly for juveniles

It appears that more cases of animal abuse are involving psychological assessment and intervention as part of sentencing

- 28 states currently have counseling provisions in animal cruelty laws
- 4 states (CA, IN, IA, TN) require counseling for all persons convicted of animal cruelty
- 2008: MD HB 378 (died) would have required same for all persons convicted of abuse or neglect of an animal or of aggravated cruelty to animals
- CO requires counseling for 2nd offense
- FL requires counseling for acts of intentional torture or torment
- KS and WV require evaluation
- 6 states (ME, NV, NJ, NM, TX, UT) mandate counseling for juveniles only

However, without assessment/intervention protocols that specifically address animal abuse, we may be missing a piece

Two Policy Frameworks

Prevention

- Primary – Public Education
- Secondary – At-risk populations
 - Targeted prevention programs
 - Assessment/tracking
 - Cross-training/cross-reporting
 - Safe Havens/safety planning (family violence)
- Tertiary -- Intervention/Treatment

Marketing

- Increasing demand – via criminal justice system
- Increasing supply – via education and training of human service professionals

Types of Animal Abuse

Neglect - usu. no satisfaction derived; due to carelessness, callousness, ignorance

Abuse - satisfaction usu. derived from dominance or from behavioral response

Sadistic - takes satisfaction from suffering

Sexual abuse - satisfaction derived from sexual fulfillment

Sub-cultural abuse: socially acceptable

Hoarding - The jury's out



Diagnostic Categories Associated with Childhood Animal Abuse

Attention-Deficit and Disruptive Behavior Disorders

- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder

Attachment Difficulties

Others, including adjustment disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, personality disorders, pervasive developmental disorders, mental retardation, and traumatic brain injury.

Degree of pathology is variable

About AniCare Child

Theoretical Foundation

- Cognitive-behavioral theory
- Attachment theory

Predicated on idea that individual differences in cognitions, behaviors, attachment styles, severity, topography (i.e., motivations/patterns of abuse) require careful assessment and tailored treatment

Factors to Consider in the Assessment of Juvenile Animal Cruelty

- Severity
- Culpability
- Psychodynamics/Motivation
- Attitudes/Beliefs
- Emotional Intelligence
- Family History
- Mitigating Circumstances

"Always Ask": Regardless of the presenting problem, all children entering counseling should be assessed to determine if they have committed or witnessed acts of animal cruelty

Step 1: ASK about the child's relationship with animals

Step 2: If a child has abused an animal, conduct an assessment of extent, nature, motivation

Step 3: Obtain information from multiple sources

Step 4: If a child witnessed animal cruelty, conduct an assessment of effects of observation

Asking children about their relationships with animals:

- Have you or your family ever had any pets? What kind? What happened to them?
- Have you ever lost a pet you cared about?
- Has your pet ever been hurt? Has anybody ever tried to make you do something you didn't want to do by threatening your pet?
- Have you ever been frightened by an animal?
- What happens when your pet or companion animal misbehaves? Who disciplines him or her? How? What happens then?



Treatment:

- **Connection**: establishing a therapeutic relationship
 - **Expression**: identifying, expressing, and regulating feelings
 - **Corrective intervention**: therapeutic activity aimed at redirecting the child's behavior
1. Empathy development
 - a. Puppet role play
 - b. Animal assisted therapy
 - c. Psychosocial-emotional exercises
 2. Self-management
 - a. Problem-solving steps
 - b. Anger management exercises
 - c. "Animals at Risk" TAT

Special Considerations for Teens

After age 16/17, adult version of AniCare is appropriate
In teenagers, accountability issue increases in significance
Client's credibility, resistance, etc. become bigger unknowns

Results Thus Far

Case examples (adult):

- 2001: 6-person jury found Steven Meade, a local Denver radio announcer, guilty of animal abuse. He had ordered an intern to drop a hen from his studio window during a live broadcast. Meade's sentence included 24 one-hour counseling sessions using the AniCare Model of Treatment.
- In another case that stipulated the use of the AniCare approach, the defendant "intentionally tortured, tormented and cruelly beat" two ferrets and five dogs.
- In yet another case, two men in Tacoma, Washington were convicted for killing a stray Siberian husky with a bow and arrow.

AniCare Child appears to be something defense attorneys, prosecutors, and judges can all agree upon

States in which AniCare has been included in sentencing: MI, MA, WA, CO, VT, WI, and NM

ASI has network of therapists trained in AniCare

Where AniCare-trained therapist unavailable, or where (as often occurs) there is already a therapist involved, can provide consultation in applying AniCare

- Easiest if therapist is already familiar with treating abuse/violence

ASI also often involved in cases before they go to trial – educating local activists interested in the cases, attorneys, even judges



Issues & Challenges

Most cases incorporating AniCare have occurred in locales where AniCare workshops had recently been presented; much work remains in dissemination of AniCare and AniCare Child

- Mental health community often does not take animal abuse seriously either
- Difficulty of establishing a treatment as empirically supported
- Difficulty of disseminating even empirically supported treatments

Current & Future Directions

Multi-site study currently underway evaluating efficacy of AniCare Child in several outcome areas: cruelty perpetration, attitudes toward animals, empathy development, beliefs about aggression

Online courses in assessing/treating animal abuse now available through Arizona State University School of Social Work

Incorporation of AniCare/AniCare Child into training programs