

INTERVENTIONS WITH ANIMAL ABUSE OFFENDERS

Introduction

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Introduction

“So how do we make them *stop*?”

This question is becoming increasingly prominent as attention to animal abuse increases, both among the public and within the criminal justice system. While holding animal abuse offenders accountable through incarceration or other punitive measures remains a frontrunner topic, closely related is the concern about what offenders may do once they leave incarceration. Particularly given the tendency for animal abuse cases to receive “slap on the wrist” sentences or at best lesser jail time than those sentenced for other violent crimes, incarceration may not be a complete solution for protecting animals from future harm. Additionally, research on connections between animal abuse and other violent and antisocial behavior (see National Link Coalition, 2016) raises the question of whether those who harm animals may in general be more likely to commit other criminal acts. By preventing further violence, an effective intervention program could have greater impact on animal and human safety than incarceration alone. Finally, the principles of balanced and restorative justice emphasize not only offender accountability and community safety, but also the improvement of offender functioning. For these reasons, interventions aimed at animal abuse offenders have potential as a

component of both judicial and nonjudicial approaches to the problem of animal abuse.

However, despite efforts over the past two decades, there are still no proven effective methods for stopping abusive behaviorⁱ toward animals. We begin this chapter by reviewing the relatively short list of interventions currently in use for both juvenile and adult animal abuse offenders, then consider obstacles to intervention, and present our recommendations for addressing these obstacles and tailoring future intervention approaches.

A few notes on terminology and focus are in order before continuing:

1. Throughout this chapter, we prefer “animal abuse offenders” or “individuals who have abused animals” rather than “animal abusers.” The term “abuser” connotes characteristic and ongoing behavior—which may be true for some offenders, but not all. It could be argued that the term “offender” is similarly problematic, though we retain its use here.
2. We also refer to the approaches discussed in this chapter collectively as “interventions” rather than “treatment” or “therapy,” because not all of them are therapeutic in nature. Depending on a variety of factors, such as the motivations for the abuse, therapy (which is based on the premise of an underlying disorder) may not always be appropriate. For example, with an offender whose neglect of an animal stemmed primarily from ignorance of

proper care, an educational approach may be most beneficial (see chapter on Animal Neglect). Alternately, for an offender who abused an animal in the context of domestic violence (for example, harming the animal to intimidate human members of the household) or for those whose abuse of the animal was motivated by power and control, educational or non-therapy group intervention programs may be indicated (see also chapter herein on Physical Cruelty, Animal Hoarding and Animal Sexual Assault). A recurring theme in our work is making a thorough assessment of the animal abuse and matching the intervention to the offender's individual needs.

3. As the authors of this chapter are based in the United States, our focus is on interventions developed and based primarily in North America. At this time, we are unaware of significant intervention efforts taking place in other areas, though this is likely to change as attention to this topic increases.
4. Finally, a substantial caveat: As discussed throughout the chapter, lack of data presents a major challenge to this work—and to the field of animal abuse prevention/response as a whole. There is a dearth of empirical information regarding not only the efficacy and effectiveness of most of the animal abuse interventions currently in existence, but also about animal abuse itself: rates, etiologies, typologies, trajectories. We also struggle to compile such basic statistics as the proportion of animal abuse cases that reach the attention of the courts or other agencies, the percent of court cases that are prosecuted, the outcomes of those prosecutions, the ratio of dispositions that include intervention, the frequency of completion of

interventions, the availability of practitioners willing and able to handle cases involving animal abuse, and so on. Consequently, at present this work relies heavily on anecdotal evidence, the experience of the authors and their colleagues, and application of theory from other fields. It is our hope (and a rallying cry throughout this chapter) that the multiple disciplines and agencies that “touch” this issue will collaborate to plug the gaps that exist in the knowledge base, paving the way for more empirically supported interventions and a more sophisticated approach overall to the topic of animal abuse.

Existing Interventions

In presenting interventions currently in use, we begin by reviewing those directed at adults and then move to those designed for children. However, it is always important to match the intervention to the developmental level of the individual, which may be either above or below his/her actual age.

Interventions with Adults

AniCare Adult. AniCare (Jory and Randour, 1999) was the first published intervention for juvenile and adult animal abuse. Based on intimate justice theory as used in domestic violence interventions (Jory et al., 1997), AniCare in its original format emphasized helping offenders accept accountability for their behavior and challenge internalized beliefs that justify abuses of power. The recently published second edition (Shapiro and Henderson, 2016) addresses a wider range of

motivations for animal abuse and incorporates a broader range of theoretical approaches, including cognitive-behavioral, attachment, trauma-based, and psychodynamic. AniCare is not a manualized intervention, but instead guides clinicians in making a thorough assessment of the factors underlying animal abuse (severity, culpability, motivation/psychodynamics, attitudes/beliefs, emotional intelligence, family history, and mitigating circumstances) and choosing appropriate intervention tools based on that assessment. These may involve clarifying values and attitudes about animals and acquiring empathy and other interpersonal skills.

Adult Diversion Programs. In the criminal justice system, diversion provides an alternative for subgroups of offenders for whom the completion of community-based court requirements, such as an intervention program, may be equally or more successful in preventing recidivism (reoffending) than traditional prosecution and sentencing (Center for Health and Justice at TASC, 2013). These offenders typically have the opportunity to have the offence removed from their record upon successful completion of the requirements. The advantage to the court is typically less cost and time compared with full prosecution of a case.

For which subgroup(s) of animal abuse offenders might diversion be appropriate? Data on animal cruelty crimes have been difficult to obtain systematically, though the FBI's recent inclusion of cruelty in its National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) database (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016) holds much promise. However, agencies tasked with enforcement of animal protection laws and

ordinances report that the majority of the violations they handle are relatively simple infractions that stem from ignorance of animal protection laws and/or proper care of animals, often in conjunction with lack of resources. If responding to these situations with an intervention focus (e.g., instilling better knowledge of animal care) eliminates the reasons for the harmful behavior, it may be an effective and welcome alternative for a significant subset of offenders whom courts may be unlikely to sentence to incarceration in large numbers.

Note that the description of a case as “relatively simple” does not imply that the animal victim(s) suffered less: for example, a dog left in a car on a warm day by an owner unaware of how quickly vehicles heat up might suffer more than a dog maliciously yet rapidly killed by a gunshot. However, it may be possible to intervene effectively in the former situation with a more straightforward, educationally-focused approach while still holding the offender accountable for the harm that resulted. At the same time, there may also be value in more intensive approaches as diversion options for low-level and/or first offenders whose behavior toward animals is fueled not primarily by ignorance, but also by attitudes toward animals/violence, psychopathology, or other factors potentially amenable to intervention.

At the time of this writing, diversion programs for adult animal abuse offenders exist in a handful of jurisdictions, usually offered through a partnership with a local

humane society. For example, the Washington Humane Society offers educational programs about basic animal care to low-level offenders.

Common challenges among adult diversion programs include the variability of curricula used within or across sites and the lack of routinely collected outcome data to determine whether these programs actually prevent recidivism (National Institute of Corrections, 2011). In response, the Animals and Society Institute (2016) has developed a diversion program curriculum that will soon be piloted in Pennsylvania. The program consists of three levels: a basic three-hour animal care class (Companion Animal Responsibility and Education); a 16-session (one- to two-hour sessions) Level II intervention, BARK (Behavior, Accountability, Respect, and Knowledge), which incorporates work on accountability, attitudes, and beliefs; and a Level III referral to individual AniCare treatment. A version of the program is also available for juveniles. One goal of the pilot implementation is to gather data on both immediate and longer-term effectiveness so that the model, if successful, can be used elsewhere.

Animal Welfare Courts. The idea of creating specialized courts for animal cruelty cases, similar to drug, mental health, and domestic violence courts, is receiving increasing attention. In general, the specialized court model emphasizes rehabilitative needs of offenders alongside punishment, and permits greater focus on the special circumstances that often surround these types of offenses (National Institute of Justice, 2013).

Currently we are aware of only one animal welfare court, located in Pima County (Tucson), Arizona, although preliminary efforts to replicate the Pima County model are underway in New Mexico. Pima County's animal welfare court handles misdemeanor animal cruelty cases that are not referred to Superior Court; as of September 2013, the court had heard approximately 175 cases (McNamara, 2013). Offenders may be referred either to an animal welfare education class or to the Animal Treatment Offender Program (A.T.O.P.; Lowther, 2012). A.T.O.P. is based on the original AniCare Adult model with some added topics, such as sessions on stress management, anger control, and substance abuse in its relationship to animal abuse. Based on the results of an individualized intake assessment, participants complete 16-52 group sessions, with up to 15 participants per group. One-on-one sessions are added as needed.

Promote Animal Welfare Online Course (PAWedu). This online course costs \$25 and consists of a series of 14 self-study lessons on animal care, such as failure to provide protection from the weather and failure to provide proper food and water (PAWedu, 2016). Anger and anger control are also addressed. Successful completion of the course's final exam generates a certificate that can be used to satisfy court (e.g., diversion or probation) requirements. Although outcome data on PAWedu have not been published, the content and format of the course make it likely to be most appropriate for low-level offenders for whom lack of basic

knowledge of animal care was the primary factor in the offense, and those who are capable of completing the self-study format.

Interventions for Animal Hoarding. Arluke et al., (see chapter on Animal Hoarding herein) discuss interventions in their chapter on animal hoarding, so we do not deal with them here. In general, it appears that animal hoarding is a complex psychological and behavioral phenomenon that requires a carefully coordinated, multi-systemic response (mental health, justice system, animal protection) to be effective against the typically high rate of recidivism (Frost et al., 2015).

Interventions with Children

AniCare Child. This handbook for practitioners (Shapiro et al., 2014) guides the clinician in making an assessment of the child's relationship with animals, including animal abuse both perpetrated and witnessed by the child. The assessment process considers key factors similar to those in the adult version of AniCare, adjusted for the child's age (6-16 years) and developmental level. Interventions draw from empirically supported treatments for other forms of childhood behavior problems. For example, a child who becomes frustrated and aggressive when his dog does not obey commands might be helped by the practitioner to complete a cognitive-behavioral problem-solving exercise involving:

- identifying the problem

- brainstorming options such as ignoring his dog's disobedience, trying to give his dog commands in a more appropriate way that may make him more likely to obey, or enrolling in obedience classes with the dog
- evaluating pros/cons of each option (for example, responses from children included: "If I ignore my dog, I will still feel annoyed, but if I go to an obedience class my dog will listen to me better. However, I'm not sure where to find an obedience class.")
- selecting an option (for example, responses included: "I think going to an obedience school is the best solution. My dog would learn a lot and I would too. I know a store that sells pet supplies in my neighborhood; they might tell me where to find obedience classes. And I can call the humane society about classes. They probably would know.")
- evaluating outcomes (for example, responses included, "My dog and I learned a lot and I like my dog better now.")

Additional intervention techniques are suggested within the handbook for those children whose animal abuse is determined to result primarily from insufficient empathy (e.g., working on taking an animal's point of view) or from attachment problems (e.g., helping children who have failed to develop a secure bond with a parent avoid taking out the frustration of their own unmet needs on a companion animal).

Children and Animals Together (CAT). This Phoenix, Arizona-based program (Risley-Curtiss, 2014) targets children ages 6-17 who have committed animal abuse. Children may be referred from any source: the justice system, child protection, community mental health, parents/guardians, etc. (Risley-Curtiss, personal communication, May 27, 2016). Individualized in-home assessment is a priority to obtain details about the animal abuse behavior, determine the child's motivation for harming animals, and establish whether the child has been exposed to family violence. The intervention plan is based on the results of the assessment, and children with severe pathology may be referred for more intensive, therapeutic interventions. The core intervention component of the CAT program is 14 weekly sessions (16 hours total) at a local animal shelter, focusing on learning prosocial skills while interacting with animals. Based in a systems approach, the program emphasizes participation by caregivers and other family members, with the goal of maintaining and reinforcing progress outside the sessions.

Teaching Love and Compassion for Juvenile Offenders (jTLC). This Los Angeles, California-based program is an outgrowth of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (spcaLA) Teaching Love and Compassion (TLC) violence prevention program (spcaLA, n.d.). Whereas the original TLC program is an in-school intervention for at-risk youth not specifically identified as abusive to animals, jTLC works with the Los Angeles court system to intervene with juvenile animal cruelty offenders ages 8-18. Juveniles who have previously been adjudicated for cruelty to animals, or who have a history of other violent offenses, are ineligible.

Juveniles who have not engaged in animal abuse but who have engaged in bullying may be admitted to the program, as may those who have witnessed animal abuse and/or family violence. The program curriculum includes conflict resolution, empathy, coping strategies, animal care education, and working with shelter dogs.

Challenges and Strategies for Developing More Effective Interventions

We now turn to an analysis of the factors that have hindered the development of interventions for animal abuse—including, as always, lack of data, but also extending to systemic challenges in intervention referrals, practitioner familiarity, and overall understanding of animal abuse. For each, we present recommendations and calls to action for overcoming the obstacles and laying the foundation for enhanced approaches to intervention.

Fixing the Referral Pipeline

In order to provide interventions to those who abuse animals, it is first necessary to find them. Animal abusers do not typically wear signs labeling themselves, nor do most share common distinguishing features that make them readily identifiable. Further, as with other violent behaviors and illegal activities, most people who harm animals do not self-refer for help: they do not wish to disclose the behavior, and/or do not see it as a problem. The most common ways in which the social service system encounters individuals who have abused animals, then, are:

- through referral from the courts
- in the case of minors, through referral by parents/guardians
- through discovery of animal abuse that was not part of the initial presenting problem or referral question

Beyond the challenges inherent in working with what is generally an unwilling population, each of these referral paths is riddled with speed bumps and a few possible potholes:

Court Referral. It is likely that the majority of cases of animal abuse never reach the courts. Animal abuse is often a clandestine act, and its victims can neither report the crime nor identify their abusers. Animal cruelty laws, while improving, remain weak compared to laws for other violent crimes. Enforcement of cruelty laws is chronically underpowered and underfunded. For those cases that do enter the justice system, charges may be dropped or never filed for many of these same reasons, which result in insufficient evidence to prove the case (Arluke and Luke, 1997). Additionally, although the designation of special animal cruelty prosecutors is on the rise and there is also now at least one animal welfare court in operation, in many prosecutors' offices animal cruelty cases still fall toward the bottom of the priority list—below crimes that directly affect human victims. (The growing body of research linking animal abuse to interpersonal violence and other crimes [see

National Link Coalition, 2016, for an extensive bibliography] may, over time, serve to elevate the perceived importance of these cases.)

Assuming that a defendant is found to have committed the offense, there is no guarantee that s/he will receive intervention. In an analysis of cases handled by the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals between 1975 and 1996, only 10% of the 280 sentences included counseling (Arluke and Luke, 1997). Currently, 32 states' laws specifically mention counseling for adults convicted of animal cruelty or juveniles adjudicated for cruelty (National District Attorneys Association, 2013). In some cases, judges "may order" counseling, whereas others "shall consider" or "shall order" it. Some statutes address only certain types of cruelty, such as animal fighting, torture, or bestiality. Notable among the laws is their lack of consistency across states and even within states, such as counseling required for juveniles but not adults. Laws addressing psychological evaluation of offenders—which is an important tool in determining appropriate interventions—demonstrate similar inconsistency. Even in states where laws mention counseling, anecdotal evidence suggests that judges inconsistently order it. Possible reasons for this discrepancy include:

- the judge or attorneys are unfamiliar with the section of the law pertaining to intervention
- neither the prosecution nor the defense asks for intervention as part of the sentence

- the judge or attorneys do not believe intervention will be useful, either for this particular offender or in general
- the judge does not feel justified in ordering counseling due to a perceived lack of severity of the offense
- the offender may be unable or claim to be unable to bear the costs of mandated intervention, leading the judge to waive it

Given these challenges to court referred intervention, it may be premature to focus on simply increasing legislative provisions for animal abuse offenders. Rather, focusing on improving anticruelty laws, enforcement, and the overall justice system response to animal abuse may be a prerequisite though not necessarily easy task. From there, increasing justice system awareness of animal abuse interventions may be the appropriate next step—though hopefully in concurrence with greater progress in developing more empirically supported interventions to which the justice system may refer offenders and in increasing the number of practitioners willing to provide them (see next section). These supply and demand variables interrelate closely.

Parent/Guardian Referral. One problem with this referral path is that parents/guardians may be unaware of their child’s abusive behavior toward animals, either due to the behavior occurring in secret (Dadds et al., Charlson, 2004) or due to lack of adult supervision. Children may harm animals outside the home in less readily observable settings, such as neighborhood cats or wildlife. Some adults

who do encounter animal abuse by children minimize the behavior (e.g., “boys will be boys”) and are unlikely to refer a child for intervention in the absence of other problems. Conversely, others may be ashamed to disclose their child’s animal abuse due to perceived social stigma. Community education regarding animal abuse and the importance of children’s healthy relationships with animals may be a key strategy to evaluate as a means to increase awareness, understanding, and response by adults to childhood animal abuse.

Incidental Revelation. It is also possible that information about animal abuse may come to light while an individual is undergoing intervention for some other issue. If an individual proactively discloses animal abuse, a great deal hinges on the practitioners’ response: do they dismiss the information, or proactively explore and address it? Alternately, animal abuse can be identified through routine screening questions with all clients, regardless of whether animal abuse is known to have occurred or is a focus of the intervention. Unfortunately, the widespread lack of practitioner familiarity with the topic of animal abuse, and with the relevance of information about clients’ relationships with animals in general (see next section), means that such routine questions are seldom asked. Further, questions about behaviors and attitudes toward animals rarely appear on standard intake or assessment instruments used in clinical settings. Where they do, they typically do not explore the subject in depth. For example, the widely used Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach and Rescorla, 2001) only contains the two items: “Cruel to animals,” which leaves the definition of cruelty open to the respondent, and “Fears

certain animals, situations, or places, other than school (describe).” The only response choices available are “Not true,” “Somewhat or sometimes true,” and “very true or often true.” Instruments designed for general clinical use with adults that include items about animals are even rarer. Yet existing instruments specifically designed to assess animal abuse and/or clients’ relationships with animals are not commonly used in the majority of practice settings. Most such instruments have been designed for research, rather than clinical use. Further, most practices are limited in the amount of time available for assessment, which may make it impractical to add a dedicated questionnaire about animals to the intake packet for all clients.

Our recommendation is that standard intake procedures in all intervention settings include at a minimum one screening question about animals, with more detailed follow-up if the item is endorsed. On a domestic violence crisis helpline, for example—where the length of the call may be determined by how long the victim is safely able to remain on the phone—an advocate may simply ask, “Are you concerned about any pets or other animals?” Similarly, school counselors could ask if a child has or has ever had animals, if s/he has ever lost one, and if s/he ever harmed or saw someone else harm one.

Finally, practitioners may obtain information about animal abuse through third-party sources, such as interviews with family members, teacher reports, or presentence investigation reports. However, this can only occur if these sources

themselves report and/or document the animal abuse, which may be unlikely for reasons similar to those described above. In general, though, practitioners are wise to obtain information from multiple sources where practical and ethical. In the case of socially undesirable and potentially illegal behaviors such as animal abuse, third-party sources may be more likely than the client to voluntarily disclose information about such behavior.

Developing Practitioner Familiarity

If, despite the above obstacles, an offender does receive a referral for intervention, or if information about animal abuse is revealed during intervention for some other issue, the next question is whether there is a practitioner competent to address the animal abuse. Although attention to human-animal relationships is growing within the social sciences and helping professions, most practitioners remain relatively unfamiliar with animal abuse or its potential significance. Signal et al. (2013) found that most psychologists reading descriptions of animal abuse by children did not identify the animal abuse as a primary intervention target unless the psychologists suggested a preliminary diagnosis of Conduct Disorder for the child.

This lack of awareness can be traced in large part to the relative absence of animal topics in the professional training of human services personnel. Harm to animals receives only brief treatment in the current edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V)*; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The only *DSM* disorder for which cruelty to animals is a diagnostic criterion is Conduct

Disorder, and then only since the 1987 revision (*DSM III-R*). Zoophilia (sexual arousal involving animals) that causes clinically significant distress or impairment in functioning is contained in the category Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder (see also Chapter herein on Animal Sexual Abuse). However, if zoophilia does not cause distress or functional impairment, it is not treated as a disorder according to *DSM-V* criteria. There is no *DSM-V* distinction between individuals who act on the arousal by committing animal sexual assault (bestiality) and those who do not. The new diagnosis of Hoarding Disorder in *DSM-V* mentions animal hoarding as a potential special manifestation of animal abuse, which may spur greater awareness on the topic in coming years. Although animal abuse has been observed in clinical practice in association with numerous other mental disorders, with initial research suggesting particular connections to personality disorders and substance use disorders (Gleyzer et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 2009), it has not yet been established as a diagnostic feature of other disorders such as would merit inclusion in their *DSM* criteria sets. Further research examining potential patterns of association between animal abuse and mental disorders is greatly needed.

For now, the upshot of this lack of awareness is that many practitioners do not understand animal abuse and do not consider themselves competent to work with individuals who have abused animals. From the current authors' experiences leading trainings, it is clear that an additional subset of practitioners is unwilling to work with these individuals because of their own discomfort in hearing about animal abuse and/or distaste for working with individuals who have harmed

animals. If an offender is referred (by a court, guardian, etc.) for evaluation or intervention and no one will take the case, this may serve to delegitimize animal abuse as a concern within the system and discourage future referrals. At the same time, if referrals for animal abuse evaluation/intervention are infrequent, there is little incentive for practitioners to become competent in handling these cases.

Perhaps the single most powerful change that could be made systematically is to integrate material on animal abuse and human-animal relationships into the standard training of human service professionals. While specialized courses on the human-animal violence connection and the human-animal bond are growing in popularity (Animals & Society Institute, 2016), it seems equally if not more important to reach those practitioners and practitioners-in-training who do not already have a special interest in this topic and who would be unlikely to sign up for an elective course on it. If these practitioners come to recognize animal abuse as another form of violent behavior that may be also connected to other problematic behaviors and/or other pathology, developing their competency in animal abuse intervention could be as straightforward as educating them on determining how the animal abuse is connected to the client's other functioning and incorporating this information into the interventions they already provideⁱⁱ. Consequently, these practitioners may be more willing to take identified animal abuse cases, as well as to be proactive in addressing animal abuse when it is not the identified focus of an intervention.

If animal abuse diversion programs and/or specialized animal welfare courts are successfully replicated across the U.S., this too may solve part of the “referral pipeline problem” and result in greater access to intervention by offenders for whom it is appropriate. Another potential outgrowth of these initiatives is that they may drive interest among clinicians in becoming familiar with this area in order to take advantage of demand by the courts.

Selecting a Finer Paintbrush

When the present authors conduct training on animal abuse prevention/intervention and ask participants to describe the first image that comes into their heads when thinking of an “animal abuser,” the most common response—particularly from lay audiences—is an adult man beating or kicking a companion animal, such as a cat or dog. Yet the preceding chapters of this book demonstrate that animal abuse is not a homogeneous phenomenon. Rather, animal abuse can take multiple forms, within and across such categories as physical, emotional and sexual abuse, and neglect; it can be direct or indirect, and proximal (in close contact with the victim) or distal; its victims can be companion, wild, or farmed animals; it can be perpetrated by males or females of any age. Further, humans inflict harm on animals for a variety of reasons: financial gain, ignorance, aggression, retaliation, species prejudice, thrill, peer pressure, status, cultural practice, and so on (see Kellert and Felthous, 1985, and Vermeulen and Odendaal, 1993, for a fuller review). These differing motivations for abuse may themselves differ by gender: previous research by Gupta (2008) used structural equation modeling to illustrate potentially different pathways to violence against animals for males and females.

It follows that just as there is no single “cure” for interpersonal violence, there is unlikely to be one uniform approach to intervention that works for everyone who has harmed animals. If a heterogeneous group of offenders receives a single intervention, even if that intervention works very well for some, its positive effect is likely to be difficult to detect amidst the outcome data from the whole group. Yet while programs such as AniCare emphasize using the results of individualized assessment to inform intervention strategy, such toolkit-style, non-manualized approaches lend themselves less readily to outcome evaluation. Considerable work is needed to further clarify potential subtypes of animal abuse offenders who may warrant differing intervention approaches, and to develop distinct intervention approaches that work optimally for each. However, this work requires access to large populations of offenders in research-oriented intervention settings, which (as discussed as part of the “referral pipeline problem”) is not currently the norm.

A controversial but related question is whether all animal abuse offenders actually need intervention. Public opinion suggests that they do: Bailey et al., (2016) assessed undergraduate students’ reactions to reading animal cruelty vignettes in which the species of animal victim, age of perpetrator, and location of crime (that is, in kennel or shelter) varied. Across all vignettes, the median response was “Strongly Agree” to the item, “The guilty person should have to complete psychological counseling or complete an anger management program”. At the same time, participants also strongly agreed that all offenders should receive punishment.

Psychosocial interventions remain unpopular with some prosecutors who see them as antithetical to offender accountability and punishment, or as minimizing the seriousness of crime. In our view, this argument perpetuates a false dichotomy between intervention and punishment, illustrated satirically in the song “Gee, Officer Krupke” from the classic musical *West Side Story* (Sondheim, 1957): e.g., “This boy don’t need a job, he needs a year in the pen;” “The trouble is he’s crazy/The trouble is he drinks/The trouble is he’s lazy/The trouble is he stinks.”

However, it is still important to ask—through a lens informed by data rather than opinion—whether there is a subset of animal abuse offenders for whom it may not be possible to develop effective intervention, and for whom punishment or other approaches may consequently be more effective. Although the current state of research knowledge may not yet permit answering this question definitively, it should remain on the table. The presence of significant numbers of “incurable” offenders in outcome research is likely to have the same result as providing an intervention that is appropriate for only one subtype of offenders: unless it is possible to identify the subset or subtype and examine their outcomes separately from the group as a whole, we may erroneously conclude that the intervention does not work at all, especially in small samples with inadequate statistical power to detect true differences.

An opposite yet no less egregious mistake than the above false negative (type II error) is to conclude that an intervention works when it actually does not (type I

error). As lamented throughout this chapter, data are limited in the area of animal abuse interventions, and it is not uncommon for interventions to be developed and advertised with scant evidence of effectiveness. With outcome research on animal abuse in its infancy compared to other intervention research, and at least partially due yet again to the difficulty of obtaining solid samples of animal abuse offenders thanks to challenges previously described, methodological weaknesses haunt much of the existing work. Comparison groups such as no-treatment controls are often absent: thus, even if substantial improvement is observed in those receiving the intervention, it is impossible to identify whether the change was due to the intervention or would have occurred regardless (e.g., natural improvement over time). Attitudes are often used as a proxy for behavior—e.g., reporting that intervention participants demonstrated improved scores on a measure of kind attitudes toward animals—but seminal work by LaPiere (1934) illustrates that questionnaire-based attitudinal measures do not always predict actions. When behavior is measured, it is rare to see it measured over lengthy follow-up intervals, providing no indication as to the lasting effect of the behavior change beyond the end of the intervention. Notwithstanding the challenges inherent in studying animal abuse interventions, it is time for the field to hold itself accountable to a higher standard.

Where Else Next?

Bridging the Prevention/Intervention Divide

While the interventions described earlier in this chapter focus on individuals who have already harmed animals, programs aimed at preventing violence toward animals and/or humans are becoming more widespread. It may be useful to consider prevention and intervention as a continuum rather than a dichotomy; for this purpose, the public health model of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (Clark and Leavell, 1958) may be helpful. As applied to mental and behavioral health, primary prevention aims to prevent initial onset of a disorder; secondary prevention emphasizes early detection and treatment once a disorder exists, with the aim of healing or eliminating the disorder; and tertiary prevention focuses on reducing disability and preventing relapse associated with an established disorder.

One branch of primary prevention, universal primary prevention, refers to efforts directed at the general population (Mrazek and Haggerty, 1994). Humane education programs are a notable example of such an effort, often delivered in school classrooms and focused on healthy attitudes toward animals, empathy, and care and responsibility for animals in the home. In a literature review of humane education programs, Arbour et al. (2009) note that despite the existence of over 2000 such programs currently operating in the U.S, there is scant research documenting the effects of teaching children about humane animal treatment and empathy building skills on their subsequent behavior toward animals. The Healing Species Violence Intervention and Compassion Education Program (Pearson, 2011) is the only animal-oriented program of any kind to be included on the National Registry of

Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), a project of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Designed for children aged 9 to 14 and aimed at the development of prosocial behaviors through interacting with an instructor and a rescued dog, the program demonstrates reductions in aggressive and violent behavior compared with children who do not receive the program, as well as reductions in disciplinary referrals and beliefs that aggression is normal.

Primary prevention can also be “selective,” that is, targeted at at-risk populations rather than the population as a whole, or “indicated,” targeting those who already show some minimal symptoms of a disease. Programs working with youth deemed at risk for violence toward animals vary in duration and intensity. For example, through Forget-Me-Not Farm, a weekly after-school program, children from families and communities in which violence is prevalent, learn the responsible care of animals (Rathman, 1999). An adult-oriented example of a primary prevention program is Pets for Life (The Humane Society of the United States, 2014), which uses a community outreach model to assist with animal care in underserved communities where lack of resources and information may jeopardize companion animal welfare.

As applied to animal abuse, primary prevention efforts aimed at preventing the initial occurrence of animal abuse may be viewed as one end of a continuum, with diversion (secondary prevention) and other intervention programs (secondary/tertiary prevention) treated as prevention efforts on that same continuum. This perspective may provide a more cohesive and powerful approach

to animal abuse than *post hoc* intervention alone. Connection is key: if primary prevention is the domain of different researchers and practitioners from those who research and implement after-the-fact interventions, and if the two groups do not share knowledge effectively, then the theoretical benefit of the prevention continuum is lost. Consider two graduate students, one of whom wants to enter the field of humane education to help children be kinder to animals but cannot fathom working with people who harm animals, and the other of whom wants to work in forensic settings with animal abuse offenders but has no interest in “normal” human behavior. Each is in a position to learn something from the work of the other, and they may even encounter some of the same individuals at different points in time—but if their paths never intersect, they may unwittingly be working at cross-purposes.

A Note on Animal-Assisted Interventions

Some of the interventions described in the early part of this chapter involve offenders working with animals, while others do not or at least do not explicitly prescribe it. Perhaps one of the most polarizing questions in the field of animal abuse interventions is whether individuals who have harmed animals should be allowed to have contact with them. Hotly debated forms of “contact” include future animal ownership (a proscription against which is often sought in court cases),

community service at animal shelters, and animal-assisted interventions (including animal-assisted therapies).

On one hand, for ethical and safety reasons, interventions targeted at perpetrators of other forms of violence do not typically recommend contact with the victim (or with potential other victims) as part of the offender's rehabilitation: someone convicted of child abuse is unlikely to be sentenced to work at a children's home without public outrage, and couples therapy is controversial and largely eschewed in the field of domestic violence intervention. Animal abuse offender registries, similar to sex offender registries, have been implemented in a few counties and in one state (Tennessee) with the goal of protecting animals and the public by monitoring and restricting offenders' contact with animals.

On the other hand, animal-assisted interventions are growing greatly in popularity, with federal research funding now being directed at their development and dissemination (Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2012). The use of actual animals has promise as a potent means of teaching boundaries, empathy, prosocial behavior, and attachment skills. If interventions with animals can be delivered in a carefully structured, supervised setting that minimizes risk to the animal while allowing the offender to practice developing more positive relationships and behaviors with animals, perhaps these serve as a valuable step toward offenders eventually interacting with animals in less supervised settings. (A major challenge of "no animal contact" orders in sentencing is that they are very difficult to enforce, given the general lack of enforcement

resources for animal protection and the ease for most people of obtaining access to animals. We therefore adopt the assumption that individuals who have abused animals are likely to have opportunities to interact with and/or acquire animals again in future without the supervision, or perhaps even the knowledge, of the justice/intervention system.)

As with all human-animal interaction programs, including animal-assisted therapies, we emphasize the importance of considering the safety and wellbeing of the animal rather than solely the potential benefit to the human participant. In an appeal to parsimony, we also challenge animal-assisted interventions for animal abuse to demonstrate that they do in fact provide unique benefits to offenders that could not be achieved without the presence of the animal in the intervention.

Conclusion

The preceding serves as a review of currently available interventions for animal abuse offenders, whether those offenders are identified through the court system, through adult referral of a juvenile, or through incidental revelation of animal abuse in an intervention focused on another problem. Although promising programs exist, access to demonstrated effective interventions for both children and adults is clearly not yet available in most areas of the country. In painting a picture of why this is so, it is important not simply to fault the interventions themselves but to adopt a systemic view of factors at all levels that impede the development and

dissemination of more effective services. It is our hope that this analysis will serve to spur initiatives in both research and policy that seek to overcome these obstacles. While it may be difficult to be patient, especially when the original question “So how do we make them stop?” becomes the more insistent “So why haven’t you made them stop yet?,” we believe that careful attention to these tasks that lie ahead in the field of animal abuse interventions is energy well invested toward safer and more compassionate communities for all.

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ⁱ The focus of this chapter is on animal abuse defined as “non-accidental, socially unacceptable behavior that causes pain, suffering, or distress to and/or the death of an animal” (Ascione and Shapiro, 2009, p. 570).

ⁱⁱ Nevertheless, we recommend that stopping the abusive behavior toward animals be explicitly addressed even when it is not the intervention goal, and that animal abuse not be treated as a mere indicator.