**Taking it Out on the Dog: Psychological and Behavioral Correlates of Animal Abuse Proclivity**

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**Abstract**

There is a lack of research examining the criminogenic factors related to animal abuse perpetrated by adults, despite the high prevalence of this type of offending. This paper presents a correlational study examining the factors related to two types of animal abuse proclivity. We found that childhood animal abuse, empathetic concern, and a proneness for human-directed aggression were significant correlates of *direct* forms of animal abuse (i.e., the animal was perceived to be the provocateur). We also found that childhood animal abuse, personal distress (i.e., anxiety from interpersonal interactions), and empathetic concern were significant correlates of *indirect* forms of animal abuse (i.e., a person was the perceived provocateur, the animal an alternative outlet for aggression). These findings highlight targets for prevention and intervention programs and the importance of distinguishing between different forms of and motivations for animal abuse.

*Keywords:* Animal abuse, Proclivity, Empathy, Aggression

‘Taking it out on the dog’: Psychological and behavioral correlates of animal abuse proclivity

Animal cruelty or animal abuse – defined as “all socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering or distress and/or death to an animal” (Ascione, 1993, p. 83) – is an abusive behavior across various situational contexts. The latest figures from the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA, 2012) has shown a one third rise in animal cruelty convictions during 2012 across England and Wales, and over 150,000 cruelty complaints having been investigated. In Australia cruelty complaints have also increased by approximately 10% from the previous year, with cruelty prosecutions rising by 50% (RSPCA, 2013). In the United States, media reports indicate similar patterns of behavior, with animal abuse considered common in both rural and urban areas (The Humane Society of the United States, 2011). Despite these considerably high figures, we also know that a significant proportion of animal abuse cases are unreported (e.g., RSPCA, 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the most likely psychological and behavioral predictors/correlates found in the literature and animal abuse proclivity in a sample of adults in a UK community.

The current state of the animal abuse literature predominantly focuses on childhood animal abuse and its sequelae. These findings have mostly stemmed from family violence research, psychiatric services and/or parental reports (Ascione, 2005). An example of the findings include childhood animal abuse, fire setting and bed wetting past a certain age as a triad of predictors for future serial killer behaviors (Faranda, Katsikas, Lim, & Fegley, 2007). Wright and Hensley (2003) assessed the cases of five serial killers and found that all cases had experience with, or a history of animal abuse. However, the cause and effect relationship between childhood animal abuse and serial killing has not been fully substantiated. Despite nearly every serial murderer having a history of animal abuse, not all animal abusing children will become serial killers (Lockwood & Hodge, 1998).

Theoretical developments have also stemmed from existing research on childhood animal abuse. For example, the violence graduation hypothesis posits that childhood animal abuse, or the exposure to animal abuse as a child, is a precursor to later antisocial behaviors (Thompson & Gullone, 2006; Wright & Hensley, 2003). Ascione (2005) suggests that this link may be due to psychological characteristics that both animal abusers and individuals with antisocial behavioral issues seem to share.

**Predictors of Animal Cruelty**

After reviewing the animal abuse literature, it is clear that animal cruelty perpetrated by adults has been given little attention despite these apparent links. Of the few studies that have examined adulthood animal abuse, the majority have examined an incarcerated or clinical sample (Ascione, 2005). Due to the failure to assess the prevalence of animal abuse within the general population, current research frameworks and intervention/prevention programs are largely built upon findings from the child literature and, thus, applied to adult perpetrators.

We know that violent offenders – i.e., individuals who have been convicted of a violent offence – are significantly more likely than non-violent groups to have engaged in animal abuse during childhood (Blair et al., 2004; Lockwood & Hodge, 1998; Slavkin, 2001). Felthous and Kellert (1986) examined the relationship between animal cruelty during childhood and interpersonal aggression in adulthood, and found a significant difference between the violent criminal sample and non-violent criminal sample. Over half of the violent criminals reported a history of animal abuse in comparison to only 8% of the non-violent criminals. Similar findings were seen in a psychiatric sample (Felthous, 1980). The literature has also shown a link between childhood abuse and domestic abuse/violence (Arkow, 1995; Ascione, 2005). Yet we still do not know if there is a similar link between animal abuse perpetrated during adulthood and interpersonal aggression and violence (Ascione et al., 2007).

The link between anti-social/aggressive behavior and empathetic concern for others is well established in the literature (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). However, the relationship between empathy and animal abuse has not been examined as extensively. There are two components of empathy, affective and cognitive (Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow, 1990). The cognitive element relates to the individual’s ability to take the perspective of someone else and to understand their response to a particular situation or stimuli (Davis, 1983). In contrast, the affective element refers to the individual’s ability to share those feelings and react appropriately (McPhedran, 2009). The literature suggests that individuals who are less concerned by the maltreatment of animals express less empathy towards other people (Ascione, 1997; Henry, 2006). Likewise, the higher the levels of empathy reported by an individual, the more positive their attitudes are towards other animals (Erlanger & Tsytsarev, 2012). In light of this, empathy is seen as a key mechanism within the development of both good moral judgment and pro-social behaviors (Hoffman, 2000). Thus, it is the general lack of empathy highlighted in the literature that has also been linked with an increased risk of violence towards both humans and animals (Stanger, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2012). Stanger and colleagues (2012) found that high aggression groups exhibited lower levels of empathy than low aggression groups. So as a result, animal abuse is often considered a rehearsal for later aggression towards others (Ascione, 2005).

In light of the evidence reviewed here, there are three factors worthy of further exploration in how they relate to adulthood animal abuse: i.e., (1) childhood experiences of animal abuse, (2) empathy, and (3) human-directed aggression. Thus, the underlying rationale of this present study was to extend what we know about animal cruelty by applying what we have learned from related literature.

**Animal Abuse Proclivity**

Proclivity scales are a self-report method designed to measure the individual’s propensity, or likelihood, to engage in a particular behavior. To date, research examining other types of offending has effectively used proclivity scales on non-offender samples to access the high numbers of unreported incidents of, for example, sexual offences, such as rape (Bohner et al., 1998) and child molestation (Gannon & O’Connor, 2011), and unreported incidents of fire setting (Gannon & Barrowcliffe, 2012). Similarly, there is currently no national source of animal cruelty data within the UK (RSPCA, 2009) and estimates have been comparably difficult to ascertain in other countries (Humane Society International, 2012), so it is likely that the prevalence of animal abuse is also underreported. The newly developed Animal Abuse Proclivity Scale (AAPS; Alleyne, Tilston, Parfitt, & Butcher, 2015) enables us to examine the factors related to animal abuse proclivity within a community sample of adults.

**The Current Study**

The current study employs innovative methodology to an under-researched area, i.e., the factors related to community adults who display a proclivity to engage in animal abuse. In doing so, this study examines the behavioral and psychological correlates of adulthood animal abuse proclivity, which in turn can be used in methods aimed at preventing future animal cruelty. Given the heterogeneity of motivations underlying animal cruelty and human-directed aggression, two types were examined here: (1) direct – the target of the behavior was the perceived provocateur; (2) indirect – the target of the behavior was not the perceived provocateur but the outcome is intended to elicit a response from the perceived provocateur. After reviewing the literature, the hypotheses for the current study were:

H1: Childhood animal abuse will be significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in both direct and indirect forms;

H2: Empathy will be significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in both direct and indirect forms.

H3: Human-directed aggression will be significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in both direct and indirect forms;

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were recruited from a university campus in the South East of England and were compensated with course credit. The sample comprised of 164 participants, consisting of 87 males (53%) and 77 females (47%). The majority of participants were aged between 18 and 21 years (87%,n= 143) and their ethnicity was predominately White/ Caucasian (69%).

**Materials and Measures**

**Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI)**

The Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983) measures empathy using 28-items across four dimensions; Perspective Taking (PT), Fantasy (FS), Empathetic Concern (EC) and Personal Distress (PD). PT assessed the participants’ tendencies to adopt the point of view of others (e.g. ‘I sometimes find it difficult to see things from the “other guy’s” point of view’). The FS subscale measured the participants’ abilities to transpose themselves into the feelings and actions of fictitious characters in books, movies and plays (e.g. ‘I really get involved with the feelings of the characters in a novel’). The EC subscale assessed ‘other-oriented’ feelings of sympathy and concern for unfortunate others (e.g. ‘Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal’), and the PD subscale measured ‘self-oriented’ feelings of personal anxiety and unease in tense interpersonal settings (e.g. ‘Being in a tense emotional situation scares me’; Davis, 1983). Participants’ responses were measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 ‘*Does not describe me well*’ to 4 ‘*Describes me very well*’. Past validation studies have demonstrated adequate internal validity with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .70 to .78 (Davis, 1994). With the current sample, Cronbach’s alphas for the four IRI subscales showed good internal consistencies: i.e., PT, *α* = .71; FS, *α* = .77; EC, *α* = .80; and PD, *α* = .81.

**Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire (RCRQ)**

Human-directed aggression was assessed using the Richardson Conflict Response Questionnaire (Richardson & Green, 2003). Participants indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*), how often in the past six months they engaged in 26 different actions when ‘angry’ with someone. Indirect aggression was measured with 10 items including ‘Spread rumors about them’ and ‘Destroyed or damaged something of theirs’. Direct aggression was measured using eight items which included ‘Yelled or screamed at them’ and ‘Threw something at them’. The eight remaining items were fillers which represent alternative strategies for dealing with conflicts, for example ‘Dropped the matter entirely’. The scale has previously demonstrated strong internal validity with Cronbach’s alphas ranging from .77 to .91 for direct aggression and .80 to .84 for indirect aggression (Richardson & Green, 2003). In the current study, the direct subscale (*α* = .80) and the indirect subscale (*α* = .83) showed high internal consistency.

**Childhood Experiences with Animal Abuse**

The third factor assessed in this study was participants’ childhood experiences with animal abuse. This study utilized Flynn’s (1999) adapted version of the original Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences (BIARE; Boat, 1999), which excludes items relating to sexual contact with animals. This modified version also excluded sections on pet ownership and pet attachment, and observed animal abuse, and only included the section on participation in animal abuse. This consisted of four items with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ responses. For each item, participants were instructed to only report incidences up to the age of 13 so that childhood experiences could be assessed individually. Items included ‘Have you ever killed a pet?’, ‘Have you ever killed a stray animal?’, ‘Have you ever tortured an animal?’ and ‘Have you ever tried to control someone by threatening or harming an animal?’. Any ‘yes’ responses to the four items were interpreted as involvement in childhood animal abuse.

**Animal Abuse Proclivity Scale (AAPS)**

The final measure was a proclivity scale, assessing the participants’ likelihood of engaging in animal abuse (Alleyne et al., 2015). The questionnaire presented participants with six hypothetical scenarios which they were instructed to read and imagine themselves as the protagonist in the scenarios before answering four questions. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strongly*) for items such as ‘How thrilled would you be in this situation?’, ‘How powerful would you feel in this situation?’, ‘Could you see yourself doing the same?’ and ‘How much would you enjoy observing a reaction to the scenario?’. There were two types of scenarios detailing direct and indirect aggression towards animals. Scenarios detailing direct aggression towards animals included:

‘You have just come home from a bad day at work and have a headache. Your pet dog, Rascal, has been left alone all day while you’ve been at work. You open the door to the living room to find that Rascal, who is normally kept in the kitchen, has managed to open the door into the living room and has chewed a pair of your shoes and urinated on the floor. You pick up one of the chewed shoes and start to hit Rascal on the head in annoyance until the dog is knocked out.’

Scenarios detailing indirect aggression towards animals included:

‘You come home from work to find your partner flirting and touching the estate agent that has come to value your house. You remain calm whilst the estate agent is there however when they leave, you confront your partner about the flirting. Your partner insists there was no flirting and that you are being paranoid. This angers you and you start to knock ornaments over and throw things against the wall in annoyance. To show how annoyed you are, you pick up your partner’s pet cat and throw it against the wall in order to scare your partner.’

The subscales and the overall scale has previously demonstrated good internal consistency with all Cronbach’s alphas above .85 (Alleyne et al., 2015). In the current study, the direct subscale (*α* = .83) and the indirect subscale (*α* = .86) showed similar high internal consistency.

**Procedure**

This research study was first approved by the University’s Ethics Panel. Participants were recruited via a course research scheme that compensates students with course credit for research participation. This study was conducted online whereby students were given a link to begin the study. First, participants were instructed to thoroughly read the information page provided and to indicate their consent (by ticking the associated boxes) to continue. Participants would not be able to proceed without ticking the appropriate boxes. Once consent was obtained, participants were given the questionnaires to complete, which included basic demographic questions, the IRI, RCRQ, childhood experiences with animal abuse items and the AAPS, in that order. Once the questionnaire was completed the participants were directed to the debrief information page which provided further details of the study, the researcher’s contact details if they wished to withdraw their data, and the contact details for support services if they experienced any distress or discomfort during the study.

**Results**

**Retrospective Reports of Childhood Animal Abuse**

In response to the childhood experiences with animal abuse items, four (3%) reported killing a stray animal, one (1%) reported trying to control someone by threatening or harming an animal, six (4%) reported killing pets, and five (3%) participants indicated they had previously tortured an animal.

**Adulthood Animal Abuse Proclivity and Inappropriate Interest**

In line with other offending proclivity scales (e.g., Alleyne, Gannon, Ó Ciardha, & Wood, 2014; Gannon & O’Connor, 2011) and previous findings with the AAPS (Alleyne et al., 2015), endorsements of animal abuse interest and proclivity were calculated as follows: unless participants emphatically rejected the scenarios presented within the AAPS, all responses were considered as an interest in animal abuse. Results showed that 78% (*n* = 126) of participants reported some level of endorsement of the six scenarios (scored as > 24). This shows that 78% of participants reported some level of excitement, power, behavioral propensity and/or enjoyment of another’s reaction. Of the three scenarios which featured indirect aggression towards animals, 64% (*n* = 105) reported some level of endorsement (scored as > 12) and of the three scenarios which featured direct aggression towards animals, 68% (*n* = 111) reported some level of endorsement (scored as > 12). When looking at the behavioral propensity items specifically, it was found that 45% (*n* = 74) of participants reported some level of proclivity for the direct scenarios (scored as > 3), and 40% (*n* = 66) of participants reported some level of proclivity for the indirect scenarios (scored as > 3).

**Psychological and Behavioral Predictors of Direct Forms of Animal Abuse Proclivity**

To elucidate the best predictors of higher scores on the animal abuse proclivity subscales for the direct scenarios, a backward linear regression was conducted. The summed score of the proclivity items for the direct scenarios (higher scores indicating higher levels of proclivity) was used as the dependent variable; whereas the four childhood animal abuse items, and the summed scores of the four IRI subscales (i.e., perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress) and the two RCRQ subscales (i.e., direct aggression and indirect aggression) were inputted as the independent variables. Seven models were computed with the final significant model, *F*(4,145) = 6.49, *p* < .001, explaining 13% of the variance. The independent variables in the final model were all significant: i.e., empathetic concern (*β* = -.24, *p* = .002), direct aggression (*β* = .20, *p* = .011), killed a stray animal as a child (*β* = .32, *p* = .002), and tortured an animal as a child (*β* = -.23, *p* = .026).

**Psychological and Behavioral Predictors of Indirect Forms of Animal Abuse Proclivity**

A second backward linear regression was conducted to elucidate the best predictors of indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity. The summed score of the proclivity items for the indirect scenarios (higher scores indicating higher levels of proclivity) was used as the dependent variable; whereas, similar to the previous regression, the four childhood animal abuse items, and the summed scores of the four IRI subscales (i.e., perspective taking, fantasy, empathetic concern, and personal distress) and the two RCRQ subscales (i.e., direct aggression and indirect aggression) were inputted as the independent variables. Eight models were computed with the final significant model, *F*(3,146) = 11.04, *p* < .001, explaining 17% of the variance. The remaining independent variables were all significant: i.e., empathetic concern (*β* = -.32, *p* < .001), personal distress (*β* = .17, *p* = .023), and killed a stray animal as a child (*β* = .22, *p* = .004).

**Discussion**

The aim of this current study was to examine the behavioral and psychological correlates of adulthood animal abuse proclivity, which in turn can be used in methods aimed at preventing future animal cruelty. The three factors drawn from the literature reviewed were childhood experiences with animal abuse, empathy and human-directed aggression. In light of the initial hypotheses, it was found that specific acts of animal abuse during childhood was significantly related to direct and indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity. It was also found that direct human aggression related to direct forms of animal abuse proclivity, but indirect human aggression was not related to indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity. Finally, of the four empathy subscales, empathetic concern significantly related to both direct and indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity; whereas personal distress related only to indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity.

The first aim of this study was to examine whether childhood animal abuse was significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in both direct and indirect forms. Two of the four items which indicated childhood experiences with animal abuse (i.e. killing a stray animal as a child and torturing an animal as a child) were significant predictors of direct animal abuse proclivity. For indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity, killing a stray animal as a child was the only significant predictor. These results were unsurprising considering the limited research which has linked childhood experiences with animal abuse to later adulthood animal abuse (Hensley, Tallichet, & Dutkiewicz, 2012; Wright & Hensley, 2003). However, previous studies have mostly utilized clinical or incarcerated samples (Ascione, 2005). Unlike these studies, the current findings demonstrate that childhood experiences with animal abuse predict animal abuse proclivity in adults, but also, this study potentially highlights a behavioral predictor for perpetrators who have not been apprehended or convicted. Whilst killing a stray animal as a child is predictive of both direct and indirect animal abuse proclivity as an adult, surprisingly torturing an animal was negatively related to direct animal abuse proclivity. Of the two behaviors, torture is characteristically a more direct form of aggression which one would expect to have a strong positive correlation with direct animal abuse, rather than the negative one found in this study (Ramírez, Lai-chu Fung, Alvarado, & Millana, 2011). These findings highlight the need for further research into how specific types of childhood animal abuse may lead to adulthood animal abuse.

The second aim of this study was to examine whether empathy was significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in both direct and indirect forms. Empathetic concern was the only subscale significantly related to direct adulthood animal abuse proclivity. As previously discussed empathetic concern refers to ‘other-oriented’ emotions, caused by and consistent with the welfare of someone in need (Davis, 1983). Understandably, if an individual has low empathetic concern and is unable to experience ‘other oriented’ emotions (e.g. sympathy, compassion) towards humans and animals alike, then they would be more likely to direct their aggression towards them. In similar studies, empathetic concern has been the only one of the four IRI subscales to significantly relate to attitudes towards the treatment of animals (Furnham, McManus, & Scott, 2003). This is indicative of low empathetic concern as an underpinning cognitive element of the negative treatment of animals and negative attitudes towards animals in general, which has been reflected in the current study’s findings. It is not unusual for empathetic concern to be the subscale that relates to antisocial cognition, in this case direct animal abuse proclivity, because this subscale is seen to be in itself a measure of empathy, whereas the other subscales have been considered related constructs (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Yarnold, Bryant, Nightingale, & Martin, 1996).

For indirect adulthood animal abuse proclivity, empathetic concern and personal distress were the subscales that were significantly related. As previously discussed, the finding that empathetic concern is a significant predictor of both indirect and direct forms of animal abuse proclivity supports the notion that low empathy plays a vital role in all forms of adulthood animal abuse (Hensley & Tallichet, 2008; Stanger, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2012). However, personal distress was also found to be positively related to indirect animal abuse proclivity. According to Davis (1983), personal distress measures ‘self-oriented’ feelings of unease in tense interpersonal settings, therefore an individual with high levels of personal distress experiences heightened levels of anxiety in interpersonal situations. As a result of this the individual would be less likely to directly target the perceived provocateur, and instead, for fear of interpersonal confrontation, indirectly target the provocateur (e.g. through the animal) to reduce feelings of anxiety. Thus, it is unsurprising that high personal distress is uniquely related to indirect animal abuse proclivity.

The final aim of this study was to examine whether human-directed aggression was significantly related to adulthood animal abuse proclivity in direct and/or indirect forms. Results suggested that the more likely an individual is to engage in direct human aggression, the more likely they are to also score high on direct animal abuse proclivity. This highlights the interconnectivity between direct forms of aggression towards humans and animals. By applying what we have learnt from the previous literature, this supports the idea that there may be underlying psychological characteristics that both animal abusers and individuals with antisocial behavioral issues share (Ascione, 2005). For example, an adult who directly abuses an animal will also make a subconscious choice or have a preference to aggress towards others in the direct form. This connection can thus be explained by the shared characteristics of both the direct form of animal abuse proclivity and the direct form of human-directed aggression previously discussed.

The findings of the current study does not, however, support a link between either direct or indirect human aggression and indirect animal abuse proclivity. We know that violent offenders (arguably direct aggressors) are more likely to engage in animal abuse than non-violent criminals (possible indirect aggressors; Felthous, 1980; Felthous & Kellert, 1986). But we know very little to explain why indirect aggression does not overlap human and animal forms. Perhaps future research could examine how personality traits and individual differences might be related to indirect forms of animal abuse proclivity.

The current study has extended the current literature on adulthood animal abuse by highlighting key correlates of animal abuse proclivity. However, this study is not without its limitations which could also explain some of the unexpected results. First, the study utilized a self-report method which is vulnerable to social desirability biases, as well as exaggerated or withheld responses. To minimize these biases, the study was conducted online where participants could complete the questionnaires in the privacy of their chosen location, but future research could address this by including a social desirability scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960). Secondly, the childhood animal abuse items relied on participants reporting retrospectively. This has been highlighted numerous times as a limitation within the current animal abuse literature (Henry, 2004). Henry (2006) suggests that it is possible to better control this effect if the correlates examined are more stable or not limited or affected by time. However, in a correlational design and without case files or official reports from the participants’ childhood, retrospective reports are the only source of data on childhood behavior.

The final limitations lie within the measurement tools used in this study. Empathy was measured using the IRI (Davis, 1983) and the analyses used the four components separately rather than an overall empathy score. Despite some current research using the sum of each of the four scales, Davis (1983) has commented that a summation of the four scores is ‘meaningless’. Although this was taken into consideration throughout the analyses, this altered the hypotheses as empathy was no longer a single variable but four components. Previous research has predominantly used single measures of empathy, which made comparisons between findings difficult (Erlanger & Tystsarev, 2012; Stanger, Kavussanu, & Ring, 2012). Despite this, the subscales have allowed empathy to be examined in more depth, resulting in the specific factors of empathy which are associated with animal abuse to be identified. Future studies should aim to use more than one measure of empathy so that comparisons can be made across whole measures and subscales. This would effectively address the current issues surrounding empathy measures and varying definitions of empathy (Hassenstab, Dziobek, Rogers, Wolf, & Convit, 2007).

In summary, the current study has highlighted the correlates of animal abuse proclivity in an adult sample. There is clearly a need for further research examining the different forms of childhood animal abuse and how they relate to future animal abuse. Furthermore, the type of aggression displayed towards humans and animals has been found to be interlinked (specifically direct aggression towards both humans and animals). This suggests that both animal abusers and aggressive individuals may share unique psychological characteristics that explain this behavior. This study also adds to the existing literature that highlights the importance of empathy, in particular empathetic concern, amongst adult perpetrators of animal abuse. These findings extend the current literature by elucidating key correlates that could serve as targets for intervention strategies. In addition to this, these findings may assist in identifying those who are most at risk for both interpersonal violence and animal abuse. Future research should expand on these current findings by examining childhood experiences with animal abuse, empathy and aggression in a longitudinal study so that the process by which the anti-social cognition and behavior develops can be explained in much more detail. It would also be interesting for future studies to examine frequency of involvement in human-related violence in relation to high or low scores on the animal abuse proclivity scale in order to test the violence graduation hypothesis’ predictive ability.

Overall, it is clear that animal abuse is a rising concern and still largely underreported. Current knowledge is mostly built on findings from the child perpetrator literature and, thus, unsuitably applied to adult perpetrators. Developing understanding of the underlying processes and mechanisms that lead to animal abuse perpetrated by adults will only feed into the development of effective prevention and intervention programs in the future.

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