

ANIMAL CRUELTY BY CHILDREN AND JUVENILES: CASE STUDIES IN VETERINARY FORENSIC AND LEGAL PRACTICE

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Received 05 November 2024; Accepted 11 February 2025

Published online: 17 March 2025

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How to cite: Davitkov Dajana, Bajović Vanja, Aleksić Radojković Jelena. Animal cruelty by children and juveniles: case studies in veterinary forensic and legal practice. Veterinarski Glasnik, 2025. 79(1): 65-82. <https://doi.org/10.2298/VETGL241105005D>

Abstract

The criminal offense of animal killing and abuse was introduced into the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia in 2006, and in 2009, the Animal Welfare Law was adopted. It is alarming that the perpetrators of this criminal offense, who exhibit violent behaviour toward animals, are often very young individuals, i.e., children under the age of 14 and so who cannot be held criminally responsible. Timely recognition and punishment of such behaviour is crucial, as it can help prevent future violence against humans and raise public awareness about the significance and role of animals in our society. According to Serbian law, children under the age of 14 are not criminally responsible, while for minors between the ages of 14 and 18, a special juvenile procedure is conducted, and specific sanctions are imposed. The authors' initial hypothesis is that children and minors relatively often abuse animals, but the social and legal response to such behaviour is inadequate, and indeed, often entirely lacking. The aim of this paper is to highlight the frequency of animal cruelty among juvenile offenders and children and to emphasize the importance of a timely and appropriate response from all relevant sectors of society.

Key Words: criminal sanctions, juveniles proceeding, killing and abusing animals, minors

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INTRODUCTION

Animal cruelty is defined as socially unacceptable behaviour that intentionally causes the unnecessary pain, suffering, distress, and/or death of an animal (Ascione, 1993). This includes any act or omission that contributes to an animal's pain, suffering, or death, or otherwise endangers its welfare (Beirne, 2011). Cruelty can manifest physically, psychologically, emotionally or sexually, and involves active abuse, passive neglect or simple omission. These actions can be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional (Lockwood and Arkow, 2016). Such behaviour not only harms animals but also has broader negative consequences for society (Lockwood and Arkow, 2016; Prino et al., 2018).

Violence against animals and violence against humans share many common characteristics; in both instances, the victims are living, sentient beings capable of feeling pain and suffering and showing physical signs of distress. Both forms of violence can also result in death (Ascione, 2001). Consequently, it is not surprising that numerous psychological and criminological studies have found that a significant percentage of individuals who commit violent crimes have a history of animal abuse (Arluke et al., 1999; Ascione and Arkow, 1999; Alleyne and Parfitt, 2019). Dogs and cats are most frequently the victims, as reported in several studies (Gomes et al., 2021; Shih et al., 2019; De Siqueira et al., 2012). This prevalence is likely due to their commonality as pets, making them accessible targets for those with sadistic impulses.

Animal abuse, as a behavioural pattern, can occur before, during or simultaneously with violence against humans (Gullone, 2012). The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders identifies this pattern of violence as a significant diagnostic criterion for conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, as cited by Dadds et al., 2002; Vaughn et al., 2009; Gullone, 2012; Longobardi and Badenes-Ribera, 2019).

The relationship between violence against humans and animals is commonly referred to as the violence link or the violent continuum. Violence is not merely a one-time or isolated incident; rather, it is a dynamic process that can escalate if not promptly recognized and addressed. It is crucial to recognize and intervene at every level of this continuum to help prevent escalation to more severe forms of violence and to protect vulnerable individuals and communities.

The prevalence of animal cruelty among children remains largely undocumented in many countries (Mota-Rojas et al., 2022). A study by Dadds et al. (2002) found that 30% of minors engaged in some form of animal cruelty during their teenage years. According to 2022 data, adults were responsible for 53% of pet abuse cases, while minors accounted for 20% (Campbell, 2022). In Italy, half of adolescents exhibited cruelty towards animals during their teenage years (Baldry, 2003), a figure that compares to 21% in Australia (Gullone and Robertson, 2008). Additionally, analysis of mass shootings in USA schools revealed that 45% of perpetrators had a previously recorded

history of violence against animals (Verlinden et al., 2000). Thus, it is imperative to identify, in a timely fashion, this behaviour pattern in children, not only to protect animals, but also to prevent potential future violence against humans.

The necessity for early recognition of violent tendencies in children and the development of their empathy was emphasized in the 1960s by psychiatrist John M. MacDonald. He developed the MacDonald Triad theory, also known as the sociopathy triplet or homicidal trio, which suggests that animal cruelty, pyromania and enuresis (nocturnal urination) after the age of five are linked to emotional distress caused by traumatic events in children under five (Mota-Rojas et al., 2022). Other researchers stressed the importance of additional factors, such as family environment, social influences and mental health, which can also contribute to the development of violent behavioural patterns (Leary et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, many countries still do not recognize the significant violence link between animal cruelty and violence against humans, leading to insufficient attention to this critical issue. In Serbia, the penal code prescribes a prison sentence of up to two years for the basic form of the criminal offense of killing and abusing animals. For the aggravated form, which involves offenses against a large number of animals or particularly protected species, the maximum sentence is three years. This criminal offense was introduced in 2006 (Serbia, 2006), initially facing opposition from some scholars who claimed that the object of criminal legal protection could not be an animal but only a human (Ristivojević and Bugarski, 2014), and that this crime essentially protects not animals, but the feelings people have towards animals (Stojanović, 2019). Such assertions from prominent legal experts demonstrate a lack of awareness of the critical link between violence to animals and to humans. Consequently, it is not surprising that the penal policy toward perpetrators of this crime remains extremely lenient, affecting both minors and adults.

Our initial hypothesis posits that the social and legal responses to crimes of animal abuse committed by juveniles and children are often inadequate or entirely absent. To evaluate this hypothesis, the paper is divided into two parts. The first section examines cases of animal abuse committed by children under the age of criminal responsibility. This segment aims to illuminate the extent of the issue and scrutinize the typical responses—or lack thereof—from both authorities and society. The second part delves into cases from legal practice involving juvenile perpetrators of animal abuse. It assesses the judicial processes, the types of sanctions imposed and the overall effectiveness of the legal system in addressing and preventing such behaviours. By thoroughly analyzing these areas, we aim to highlight the shortcomings in the current approach to addressing animal cruelty by minors and to propose recommendations for more effective interventions.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In Serbia, children under the age of 14 are considered to be not criminally responsible, meaning that criminal proceedings cannot be initiated against them, nor can criminal sanctions be imposed. Because of that, cases of children's violence against animals are not recorded in official judicial statistics, but cases from veterinary-forensic practice show that the phenomenon is widespread. In this paper, an overview of cases from veterinary forensic and legal practice is presented. The cases, from veterinary forensic practice in 2023 at the Department of Forensic Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Belgrade, and committed by children under the age of 14, vividly illustrate the phenomenon of child violence toward animals. Cases from legal practice are also presented, with special attention paid to the number of cases during a ten-year period and the sanctions imposed. The self-accusation method and victims' studies, in combination with other methodological approaches, are crucial for uncovering unreported cases and gaining deeper insights into the phenomenon. Different methods and materials can be used in order to recognize child animal cruelty, such as: (1) environmental factors, which includes exposure to violence and witnessing animal cruelty; (2) links to later interpersonal violence; (3) externalizing disorders, low empathy, low self-esteem, a dysfunctional family, and attitudes accepting of cruelty; (4) witnessing animal cruelty (a serious risk factor for a range of internalizing and externalizing behaviours); and (5) a range of psychosocial barriers that exist in measuring and reporting child animal abuse (Wauthier and Williams, 2022). Also, study by Becker et al. (2004) identified significant associations between various risk factors and juvenile behaviour. Marital violence, paternal pet abuse, and adult alcohol consumption were linked to violent behaviour. On the other hand, exposure to marital violence and harsh parenting by both fathers and mothers were found to be related to animal cruelty. Further analysis showed that young people culpable of disorderly conduct were at a significantly higher risk of being referred to juvenile court and arrested for a violent crime. Self-reported delinquency confirmed these findings. Additionally, animal cruelty was associated with self-reported violent crime (Becker et al., 2004).

While this study primarily focuses on veterinary forensic practice and judicial case analysis, we recognize the value of expanding the methodological framework in future research to include these tools discussed briefly above.

RESULTS

Case 1

A female cat, one and a half months old, weighing 600 grams, and measuring 22 cm in length, was brought in with reports that a 7-year-old boy had repeatedly struck the animal against a concrete surface. An external examination showed bleeding from the

mouth and nose and significant pallor of the mucous membranes. An X-ray revealed fractures of the occipital and parietal bones (Figure 1), along with the presence of liquid content in the abdomen due to a ruptured spleen. The cat's death was attributed to the application of high-intensity blunt mechanical force to the head region.

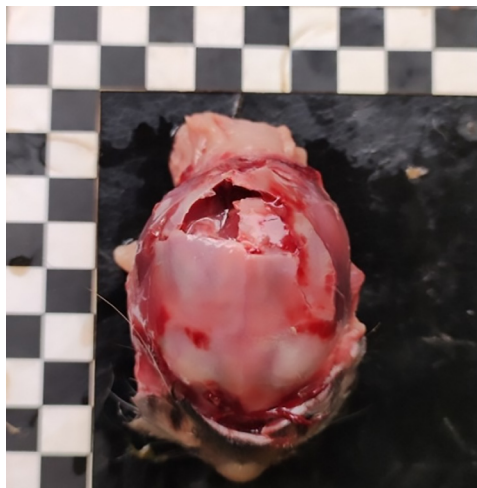


Figure 1: Skull bone fracture in a cat

Case 2

A female white stork (*Ciconia ciconia*), approximately 3 years old, weighing 2.9 kg, with a wingspan of 2.2 meters, was in good body condition and nutritional status. The bird's carcass was brought in with reports that children aged 6 to 10 had shot it in the nest. After it fell from the nest, they tied it with a rope and dragged it on asphalt. The examination revealed massive bleeding in the beak and eye area, with blood content in the beak. Haemorrhages were present on the phalanges and a large hematoma was observed in the chest area. A pellet from an air rifle was found in the region of the right heart ventricle upon opening the head-chest area (Figure 2a, 2b). The stork's death was caused by the air rifle projectile, with additional injuries from blunt mechanical force during the fall from the nest and subsequent dragging.



Figure 2a: Large haematoma and entry wound in a stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) (left image)

Figure 2b: Diabolo pellet recovered from the stork (right image).

Case 3

The carcass of a male dog, 2 months old, weighing 650 grams was presented to the clinic. According to witness statements, the puppy was physically abused by children aged 7 to 10 years in the courtyard of a building. The examination showed poorly developed musculature and an absence of fat tissue. A puncture wound measuring 0.5×0.5 cm, inflicted by a sharp mechanical tool, was observed on the right side of the abdominal region, which did not penetrate the abdominal cavity (Figure 3). Internal examination revealed dark red discoloration of the subcutaneous tissue and musculature in the region of the thyroid cartilage (*infiltratio haemorrhagicae*). The death of the dog was caused by vascular and airway obstruction due to manual strangulation (*strangulatio manualis*).



Figure 3: Marked malnutrition and puncture wounds in a dog inflicted by a sharp mechanical tool

Case 4

The carcass of a female dog, approximately 18 months old, was discovered in a public area. According to witness statements, the dog caught an explosive device, i.e., a firecracker thrown by children aged 10. The autopsy revealed severe mechanical injuries including the destruction of the upper and lower jaws (*destructio maxillae et mandibulae*) with numerous bone fragments, complete destruction of the nasal bone, laceration of the tongue and bleeding in the region of the epiglottis and pharynx (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Complete fracture of the upper and lower jaws of a dog due to the effects of a firecracker.

A section of the bone tissue from the upper jaw was missing. The death was attributed to a combination of blast injuries and the high-temperature effect produced by the firecracker during combustion.

Social and Legal Reaction to the Aforementioned Cases

Considering that the minimum age for criminal responsibility in Serbia is 14 years old, for children under that age who commit a criminal offense, social services intervene by applying measures from the field of social protection. The Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of the RS, Nos. 24/2011, Serbia, 2011) does not specifically outline which measures should be applied to children who are “in conflict with the law.” Consequently, the guardianship authority is responsible for applying any social protection measure it deems appropriate for each specific case. This includes assessing the child and the circumstances in which they live, as well as providing advisory and therapeutic measures, such as counselling and support, family or individual therapy, day care in a shelter and so on.

However, cases of violence against animals often do not elicit a response from social services, as due to the light penalties prescribed, this type of offense is generally regarded as minor criminality. Consequently, police responses are often insufficient when the perpetrators are adults, but even more so when they are children (Bajović, 2023). Police frequently fail to inform social services when children are involved in killing or abusing animals, resulting in such behaviour remaining unreported and unpunished.

Animal abuse is also classified as a misdemeanour under Article 85 of the Animal Welfare Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 41.). Unlike criminal responsibility, which is individual and subjective, the Misdemeanour Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 65/2013, 13/2016, 98/2016) allows parents to be held accountable for misdemeanours committed by their children under the age of 14. However, in practice, proceedings under the Animal Welfare Act (Serbia, 2009) have never been initiated against parents for misdemeanours committed by their children. As a result, the killing and abuse of animals by children under the age of 14 in Serbia remain entirely unregistered and unpunished, and this negative social phenomenon does not receive adequate attention.

Killing and abusing animals by juveniles

In Serbia, individuals aged 14 to 18 are considered criminally responsible, yet their young age grants them a privileged status during criminal proceedings. The principle of procedural protectiveness is applied, with educational measures being the primary type of sanction imposed on juveniles. The intent of these educational measures—as suggested by their name and legal definition—is not to punish the juvenile, but rather to assist and (re)educate them. In this context, highlighting a potential irony within the

legal system, Maher (2005) raises a pertinent question: does this imply that children who are too young for these measures to be applied do not receive the help they need?

Figure 5 provides an overview of the reported and prosecuted cases of the criminal offense of killing and abusing animals from 2006, when this criminal offense was introduced into the legal system of the Republic of Serbia, up to the latest available statistical data from 2022.

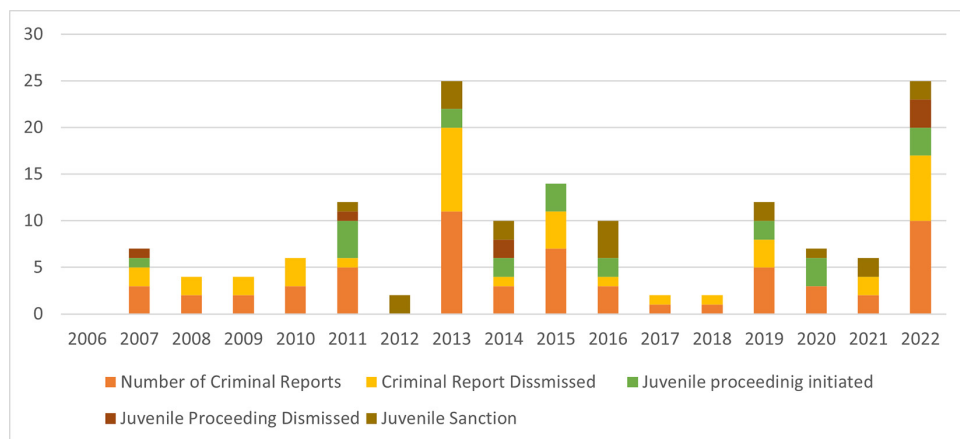


Figure 5: Criminal offenses of killing and abusing animals committed by juveniles in Serbia

From 2006 to 2022, 61 criminal offenses involving the killing and abuse of animals by minors were reported to the public prosecutor, of which 39 were dismissed. During the same period 2,805 adults were reported for the same offense, making the share of criminal reports involving minors only 2%. In 2022 alone, 210 criminal complaints were filed against adult offenders for this crime, compared to only 10 against minors. However, these figures should be approached with caution, considering that this offense has a significant number of unreported cases. The number of reports submitted to animal protection associations during the same period significantly exceeded those submitted to the prosecutor's office. It is also common for the police to not forward the criminal report to the prosecutor but to merely record the case by using an official note; such reports are not included in the statistics mentioned.

Approximately 10 juveniles were spared prosecution, as the public prosecutor deemed it expedient, despite evidence suggesting a reasonable suspicion of their involvement in the criminal offense. The public prosecutors applied the principle of opportunity in about 16 cases—this was roughly a quarter of the total reported cases against juveniles. Criminal proceedings were initiated in 22 cases, so 36% of the reports against juveniles led to the initiation of proceedings. This percentage was significantly higher than that for adult perpetrators, among whom only 10% of criminal reports for killing and abusing animals resulted in the initiation of criminal proceedings. This suggests that, when minors are involved, only the most severe forms of animal killing and abuse are officially reported to the prosecutor.

During the same period, juvenile courts conducted 20 proceedings against minors for the criminal offense of killing and abusing animals. Of these, one proceeding was discontinued, while nineteen resulted in the imposition of a criminal sanction. This means that over sixteen years, only nineteen juveniles were convicted for killing or abusing animals.

Cases from Legal Practice and Imposed Sanctions

The sanctions applied to juveniles tended to be extremely lenient, especially for the criminal offense of killing and abusing animals, which is often considered trivial due to the light penalties prescribed. Typically for this offense, minors were only officially warned, or measures, such as increased supervision by parents or guardianship authorities, were imposed. Over the studied period of 16 years, no juvenile was punished for this crime with a sanction that involved any form of deprivation of liberty.

Judicial Warning

A judicial warning is a mild, non-repressive sanction intended to deter the minor from future criminal behaviour simply through admonishment by the court. In cases concerning the criminal offense of killing and abusing animals, this measure was imposed in the following cases:

Two minors lured a stray dog, caught it by its front and hind limbs and threw it into the river, leading to the animal drowning (Decision of the Higher Court in Pirot, KM 7/13 (11 April 2013).

A minor caused severe injuries to two cats by shooting them with a pellet gun, targeting their heads and spines. Despite the deliberate harm inflicted, the court issued a judicial warning (Decision of the Higher Court in Belgrade, KM 307/15 (05 February 2016).

A minor shot a dog in a neighbour's yard with an air rifle and the dog succumbed to its injuries on the same day (Decision of the Higher Court in Prokuplje, KM 2/23 (15 March 2023).

Special Obligations

Special obligations are duties imposed on minors to re-educate them and prevent future criminal offenses. These can include requirements to apologize to the victim, attend school regularly, participate in sports activities, enrol in training or courses, undergo rehabilitation for substance abuse, etc. For cases involving the killing and abusing of animals, courts have utilized this measure as follows:

Firecracker Incident: An educational measure involving special obligations was imposed on a juvenile who caused severe injuries to a mixed-breed dog

by throwing a firecracker into a yard. The injuries led to the dog's blindness in its right eye and hearing loss in the right ear. The minor was required to participate in individual or group counselling sessions at a social work centre for up to one year (Decision of the Higher Court in Užice, KM 13/13 (21 March 2013)).

Cat Abuse Case: Educational measures were imposed on two juveniles who, as co-perpetrators, caused the death of a cat by forcefully throwing it onto concrete. They were mandated to participate in 30 hours of unpaid work for humanitarian organizations (Decision of the Higher Court in Sombor, KM 9/22 (21 April 2022)).

Increased Supervision

Measures of increased supervision emphasize enhanced monitoring of the minor by parents, another family member or guardianship authorities, without involving deprivation of liberty. These measures are designed to correct behaviours through close supervision rather than through punitive actions, with some examples being:

Cat Abuse and Social Media: Minors who engaged in the cruel killing of a cat by placing its head inside water-filled balloons, throwing it against a building window and subsequently posting the act on Instagram received educational measures of increased supervision by parents. They further buried a kitten in sand, and after it escaped, hanged it from a tree and broadcast the incident on social media (Decision of the Higher Court in Jagodina (12 April 2023) (The court anonymized the case number when delivering the decision))

Gruesome Act Recorded: A minor who inflicted a fatal wound on a cat with a knife and removed its eye, while another minor recorded the act, was subjected to increased parental supervision as an educational measure (The court anonymized the case number when delivering the decision).

Puppy Abuse: Two minors who mistreated a two-week-old puppy in front of a residential building by throwing and kicking it and finally causing its death by placing it on the edge of a garage roof, were also placed under increased parental supervision (Decision of the Higher Court in Sombor, KM 41/11 (03 October 2011)).

Extreme Cruelty: A minor who executed a premeditated act of cruelty by placing a 10-year-old dog in a noose, attempting to hang it and upon failure beating it to death with a stick and later mutilating the body, received increased supervision from guardianship authorities. This individual also set fire to the warehouse where he left the dog's body parts (Decision of the Higher Court in Sombor, KM 38/11 (05 September 2011)).

Violence in Public View: An educational measure of increased supervision by guardianship authorities was mandated for a minor who dragged a chained dog from a yard to the street and fatally beat it with a wooden stick (Decision of the Higher Court in Subotica, Km 4/11 (23 February 2011)).

Fatal Abuse of a Pekingese: A minor took a 10-year-old Pekingese from the victim's yard and delivered a fatal kick to the dog's head causing brain tissue bleeding and death. This act led to an educational measure of increased supervision by guardianship authorities (Decision of the Higher Court in Prokuplje, Km 19/22 (21 February 2023)).

In the context of animal abuse, it is essential to consider the different criminal justice models applied to juvenile offenders. Two dominant approaches in this regard are the procedural protection-based model and the punitive-oriented model. The first emphasizes the protection of juvenile rights throughout the criminal process and puts the focus on rehabilitation, education and reintegration of the juvenile into society. Advantages of this approach are the support and guidance provided to juveniles through psychological assistance and educational programs, which could help reduce recidivism through preventive measures. Also, this approach has the disadvantages of being perceived as too lenient, especially in cases of severe violence, and of not providing sufficient justice for victims or a sense of satisfaction for the community. The other approach (the punitive-oriented model) emphasizes the need for sanctioning juveniles, focusing on deterring future offenses through punishments that may include imprisonment or fines. This approach provides a greater sense of justice for victims and the community and potentially has a deterrent effect on others from committing similar offenses. However, it can also worsen delinquent behaviour in juveniles due to a lack of rehabilitation and to the exposure of juveniles to negative influences within penal institutions.

DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that a significant proportion of animal violence by the youngest members of society goes unreported, unprocessed, and consequently, unpunished. Judicial practices exhibit a tendency toward leniency, which seems inadequate to deter future offenses. This situation underscores the necessity for a more robust and retributive approach to effectively prevent and address animal cruelty committed by minors. Prosecuting cases of animal abuse serves as a preventive measure, deterring not only future animal cruelty, but also potential violence against humans, given the interconnectedness of these phenomena. In both scenarios, the victims are sentient beings capable of experiencing suffering, pain, and discomfort. Often, the motive behind harming animals is the perpetrator's enjoyment of their suffering, which can indicate sadistic traits. It is imperative to take timely and appropriate action to unequivocally communicate to young people that attacks on life and bodily integrity are unacceptable, whether the victims are animals or humans.

Effective prevention requires educating offenders about the unacceptability of violence towards any living being, while highlighting the important role animals play in our lives. Additionally, fostering compassion for animals through educational programs, implementing stricter laws and ensuring their consistent enforcement are crucial steps. Together, these actions form the foundation for building a society that respects and protects all forms of life.

The cases presented above from veterinary-forensic and legal practice are only a fraction of the violence committed by minors against animals during the time-frame studied. The true extent of such cases is likely much higher, as violence against animals often remains unreported, unprocessed and consequently unpunished, especially when the perpetrators are minors. A stark example is the Dubona massacre, where a 21-year-old perpetrator killed eight people and injured 14 others using a firearm (Bubalo and Gozzi, 2023). The perpetrator had a documented history as a minor of killing dogs, information that was known to the police, but was dismissed as trivial and not forwarded to the prosecution service. This lack of response from the relevant authorities ultimately culminated in a tragic mass murder.

Analysis of the presented cases reveals that animal cruelty was exhibited by children of both genders, with a higher frequency observed among boys. This trend is consistent with literature suggesting that such behaviours are more common in boys, likely influenced by gender socialization experiences (Mellor et al., 2009; Chan and Wong, 2019). Additionally, research indicates that violence is more prevalent at all life stages among males compared to females (Becker et al., 2004; Dadds et al., 2004; Currie, 2006; Gullone, 2012; Kavanagh et al., 2013; Chan and Wong, 2019).

Several factors contribute to the development of violent behaviour toward animals, including a lack of empathy (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2004; 2006), witnessing animal abuse, growing up in a dysfunctional family and poor socio-emotional development. A history of being abused by others (Leary et al., 2017), exposure to family violence either as a witness or victim (Chan and Wong, 2019) and physical and/or sexual abuse (Monsalve et al., 2017; Leary et al., 2017; Ladny and Meyer, 2020) also play significant roles. Additionally, a lack of awareness that violence against animals is both ethically and legally unacceptable contributes to these behaviours. These factors can foster indifference to violence and manifest as aggression towards animals, often marking the first symptom of behavioural disorders that also include disrespect for authority and rule violations (Hartman et al., 2019; Ascione and Lockwood, 2001).

In Serbia, the minimum age of criminal responsibility is set at 14 years, meaning that children under this age cannot be legally held accountable for killing and abusing animals. Although their parents can be held liable for childrens' misdemeanours, in practice, prosecutors do not initiate such proceedings. This lack of action is unjustified, considering that parents who fail to provide proper ethical values and educate their children appropriately should be held responsible for their children's behaviour (Difonzo, 2001). Consequently, these offenses often remain completely unregistered

and unpunished, despite their potential to indicate behavioural disorders and a lack of empathy in children.

From 2006 to 2022, courts in Serbia imposed only 19 criminal sanctions on juveniles for the killing and abuse of animals, a figure that is relatively low compared to the actual number of offenses committed. Notably, no minor was sentenced to custodial measures for these crimes. This can be attributed to a generally lenient penal policy towards this category of perpetrator and to a prevailing attitude that treats violence against animals as a trivial crime, underscored by the mild penalties typically prescribed.

An examination of court decisions where minors were given educational measures for killing and abusing animals revealed a concerning trend: the acts of execution were violent and cruel, yet the sanctions imposed were notably mild. The primary purpose of criminal sanctions is to serve both general and special preventive functions. Special prevention aims to deter the specific individual from reoffending through the experience of punishment, while general prevention seeks to discourage others from committing similar crimes through the deterrent effect of punishment. However, educational measures inherently lack the retributive element of punishment, focusing instead on educating and aiding the proper development of the minor. This approach fails to act as a deterrent to potential offenders and does not contribute to raising awareness among young people that killing and abusing animals is unacceptable. This lenient penal policy is further complicated by instances where minors have recorded their acts of violence against animals on mobile phones and posted these on social networks, indicating a desire to boast about their violent actions and seek recognition. Such behaviour points to a disturbing cult of violence among youth. This trend raises significant concerns about the effectiveness of current educational measures and underscores the urgent need for a reassessment of how juvenile justice is administered in cases involving animal cruelty.

The current system, for both juveniles and adults, is based on rehabilitation principles, meaning its primary goal is the reintegration of offenders into society through education, support and resocialization. Advantages of the current system are that the focus on rehabilitation helps reduce recidivism rates and ensures a human rights-based approach to the treatment of offenders, particularly juveniles. The problem is that in a case of serious violence, such as animal abuse, the current system is insufficiently strict, which must result in a sense of injustice among victims and the community. The lack of adequate sanctions likely diminishes the deterrent effect on future offenders. Although rehabilitation remains the core principle of the system, it is possible to consider introducing elements that would ensure a balance between rehabilitation and repressive measures. These could include implementing stricter sanctions for animal abuse, especially in juvenile cases where there is a high risk of repeated delinquent behaviour, developing specialized programs that combine rehabilitation with clear and consistent consequences, and considering specific penalties that both provide justice for victims and allow offenders to learn the consequences of their actions.

CONCLUSION

The “One Health, One Welfare” approach integrates professionals from multiple disciplines, including doctors, veterinarians, social workers and educators, as key players in identifying and preventing violence on both human and animal victims. Given that perpetrators of animal abuse often exhibit tendencies towards violence against humans, it is crucial to report such cases to the appropriate authorities to ensure both immediate and long-term safety. Identifying cases of animal killing and abuse, along with adequate interventions by relevant institutions, implementing suitable education programs, and raising awareness about the seriousness of these acts are fundamental to preventing broader societal consequences.

Recognizing warning signs and intervening appropriately are essential to prevent the escalation of violent behaviour. Multidisciplinary cooperation and an adequate legal framework are vital to ensure that justice is served and that preventive measures are effectively in place to protect vulnerable individuals, whether the victims are animals or humans. Violence is not a one-time or isolated event, but a dynamic process that can escalate if not recognized and addressed in a timely manner. Addressing violence at every level of its continuum is crucial for preventing not only immediate harm to animals, but also severe forms of violence against humans. By effectively addressing these issues, society will foster a more compassionate and respectful attitude towards all living beings, thereby contributing to the overall prevention of violence.

Acknowledgements

The study was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Contract number 451-03-66/2024-03/200143).

Authors' contributions

DD wrote the manuscript, performed necroscopies and participated in data collection, VB participated in writing the manuscript and English correction of manuscript, ARJ performed necroscopies and participated in writing the manuscript


Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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NASILJE PREMA ŽIVOTINJAMA OD STRANE DECE I MALOLETNIKA – STUDIJE SLUČAJA U VETERINARSKOJ FORENZIČKOJ I PRAVNOJ PRAKSI

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Kratak sadržaj

Krivično delo ubijanje i zlostavljanje životinja uvedeno je u Krivični zakonik Republike Srbije 2006. godine, a 2009. godine usvojen je Zakon o dobrobiti životinja. Zabrinjavajuće je da su učinioci ovog krivičnog dela često vrlo mlade osobe, odnosno krivično neodgovorna deca mlađa od 14 godina, koja često ispoljavaju nasilno ponašanje prema životinjama. Pravovremeno prepoznavanje i sankcionisanje takvog ponašanja je ključno, jer može da doprinese sprečavanju budućeg nasilja nad ljudima i podizanju svesti javnosti o značaju i ulozi životinja u našem društvu. Na osnovu našeg zakona, deca do 14 godina starosti su krivično neodgovorna, a za maloletnike, starosti od 14 do 18 godina, sprovodi se poseban "maloletnički postupak" i izriču posebne sankcije. Početna hipoteza autora je da deca i maloletnici relativno često zlostavljaju životinje, ali

da je društveni i pravni odgovor na takvo ponašanje neadekvatan i često izostaje. Cilj ovog rada je da ukaže na učestalost okrutnosti prema životinjama među maloletnim prestupnicima i decom i da se istakne važnost pravovremene i adekvatne reakcije svih nadležnih segmenata društva.

Ključne reči: krivica, maloletnici, propisi, sankcije, životinja