

Hensley, C., Tallichet, S. E., Dutkiewicz, E. L. (2009). Recurrent childhood animal cruelty: Is there a relationship to adult recurrent interpersonal violence? *Criminal Justice Review* 34, 248-257. doi: 10.1177/0734016808325062

Numerous studies have attempted to define the relationship between animal cruelty and violence towards people, but have had contradictory results (Arluke, Levin, Luke, & Ascione, 1999; Gleyzer, Felthous, & Holzer, 2002; Merz-Perez & Heide, 2004; Merz-Perez, Heide, & Silverman, 2001; Tallichet & Hensley, 2004; Verlinden, 2000; Wright & Hensley, 2003). Thus, this is still a very controversial issue between academia, animal rights activists, and policy makers of how to best address this association and to interpret these findings within the criminal justice system. The present study focuses on a sample of violent and nonviolent offenders to examine if there is a relationship between multiple acts of childhood animal cruelty and later acts of interpersonal violence in order to replicate Tallichet and Hensley's (2004) study. In doing this, the authors included different demographic characteristics, acts of childhood animal cruelty, and interpersonal violence to see if there are grounds for early identification of violent offenders (Hensley, Tallichet, & Dutkiewicz, 2009).

Hensley et al. (2009) distributed questionnaires to all prisoners in one medium security state prison and one maximum security state prison and had a 10 percent response rate. The questionnaire they dispersed involved questions about their history of violence (Have you ever committed murder or attempted murder? Have you ever committed rape or attempted rape? Have you ever committed aggravated or simple assault? Have you ever committed robbery?), how many times they have committed the above mentioned acts, demographic characteristics (race,

education level, geographic location), and how many times they have hurt or killed animals besides hunting (Hensley et al., 2009).

Those inmates who participated in the study reported committing more acts of childhood animal cruelty were more likely to have committed more acts of adult interpersonal violence. In addition, frequent childhood animal cruelty was the only significant predictor of later violence when compared to several demographic factors. This survey asked questions regarding acts of violence committed against individuals, not convictions, and demographics so was able to begin to examine the social contexts in which animal cruelty may and may not lead to violence. Overall, this study showed that with their sample, recurrent acts of animal cruelty regardless of race, education, or geographic location indicated a potential “red flag” for future interpersonal violence (Hensley et al., 2009).

While significant results were found, there were limitations to this study. First, a 10 percent response rate is low and may not be generalizable to more individuals. Specifically, a paper and pencil method was used and excluded illiterate inmates from participating. Also, relying on self-report of animal cruelty could pose validity issues. Future studies should use in-depth face-to-face interviews to yield richer data. Although this study adds to the literature regarding the connection between animal and human violence, there are still many unanswered questions about the origins and development of animal cruelty that require investigation (Hensley et al., 2009).