The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
First Strike™ Campaign
2001 Report of Animal Cruelty Cases

In the year 2000, The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) compiled its first report of high-profile cases of animal cruelty on a national scale. The report was published in April 2001. The following report is based on cases that occurred in the United States from January through December 2001. Like the first report, this one assessed the demographics of animal abusers, the types of animals abused, and the incidence of family violence in high profile animal cruelty cases throughout the United States.

It is important to note that this is not a scientific study. Rather, it provides a snapshot based on well-documented sources including media reports as well as reports from local humane societies and other animal welfare organizations. This report is based on information from 1677 animal cruelty cases involving 1863 perpetrators. Of these animal cruelty cases, 939 (56%) involved intentional cruelty toward animals and 738 (44%) involved extreme animal neglect. The compilation also included cases of animal fighting (dog fighting and cockfighting), and animal hoarding/collecting. The types of animal cruelty that are covered in the findings include:

- **Intentional cruelty or abuse**, when a person knowingly deprives an animal of food, water, shelter, socialization, or veterinary care or maliciously tortures, maims, mutilates, or kills an animal. People who are intentionally cruel to animals take satisfaction in causing harm.
- **Neglect**, when a person fails to provide an animal with proper shelter, food, water, attention, grooming or veterinary care. Cases of neglect are acts of omission rather than commission and do not give satisfaction to the person whose animals are neglected.
- **Cockfighting**, when two or more specially bred birds, known as gamecocks, are placed in an enclosure to fight, for the primary purposes of gambling and entertainment. A cockfight usually results in the death of one of the birds; sometimes it ends in the death of both.
- **Dog fighting**, a contest in which two dogs—specifically bred, conditioned, and trained to fight—are placed in a pit (generally a small arena enclosed by plywood walls) to fight each other, for the spectators' gambling and entertainment.
- **Animal hoarding**, the accumulation of a large number of animals, where the caregiver provides minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation and veterinary care; and fails to act on the deteriorating condition of the animals and/or the environment.

Discussion

This is the second report from The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) about high-profile animal cruelty cases. Overall, the results show that adult and teenage males commit the highest percentage of intentional animal cruelty, yet adult males have a higher frequency of being charged with animal cruelty as compared to teenage males. This raises an important concern about whether law enforcement agencies and courts are taking cases of teen violence against animals seriously.

In this report, teens accounted for 20% of the intentional acts of cruelty against animals. This figure is consistent with findings reported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) for other juvenile violent crime arrests. OJJDP reports that juveniles were

responsible for about 16% of all violent crime arrests, including 18% of assaults (Snyder, 2002). However, the reported rate of juvenile animal abuse is low when compared with other juvenile crimes known to be frequently associated with animal cruelty. For example, juveniles are involved in 53% of all arson arrests and 41% of all vandalism arrests (Snyder, 2002). The OJJDP does not currently track animal cruelty arrests, but the findings in this report suggest that law enforcement officials should be required to report juvenile animal cruelty to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. By including animal cruelty among the more serious violent crimes, law enforcement officials, mental health providers, and juvenile corrections personnel would be in a better position to determine appropriate sanctions for crimes against animals.

In recent years, psychologists, criminologists, and sociologists have started to recognize that animal cruelty is often a "red-flag" or warning sign that may indicate a teenager is at-risk for committing future interpersonal violence. There have also been several high-profile cases, mostly involving school shooters and serial killers, which illustrate how adolescents often direct their first acts of violence toward animals. A recent study found that violent offenders in a maximum correctional facility in Florida were significantly more likely than nonviolent offenders to have committed acts of cruelty toward pet animals as children (Merze-Perez, et al., 2001).

While adolescent motivations for animal cruelty have not been studied as extensively as those for adults, researchers have suggested a few developmentally related motivations. Adolescents may be motivated to harm animals because of peer pressure, to relieve boredom or depression, to experience sexual gratification, or to rehearse how they may carry out a violent act against a person at a later time (Lockwood & Ascione 1998). For these adolescents the underlying need is to maintain power and control over another living creature because they have poor internal control themselves. In addition, many adolescents who harm animals have been victims of physical and sexual abuse. A 1983 study of families referred to the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services for child abuse found that in 33% of pet-owning families with a history of physical abuse, children became the animal abusers, often imitating the violence that they had seen or experienced themselves (DeViney, et al. 1983).

This report also demonstrated that animal cruelty in its most violent forms often co-exists with domestic violence and child abuse. This realization has lead a growing number of law enforcement agencies to include humane societies and animal care and control agencies in their multi-disciplinary teams responding to family violence.

Responding to animal cruelty cases helps in preventing community violence in several ways. For youthful offenders, animal cruelty may be the earliest serious offense that brings them to the attention of law-enforcement and/or mental health authorities. This may represent the first and best chance to provide services or therapy that can prevent a future of violence for these young offenders. In cases of animal cruelty within the context of family violence, animal abuse may be the first or most visible crime that draws attention to perpetrators who display violence to a variety of victims. Finally, in the cases of serious violent offenders whose animal cruelty is one of many forms of antisocial behavior, prosecution for animal cruelty may provide a tool for protecting the public from other acts of violence they are likely to commit. To pass off acts of cruelty with outdated opinions like "boys will be boys" or "it was only an animal" prevents an important opportunity to intervene with all animal cruelty offenders

HSUS Recommendations: Legislative and Community Solutions to Violence

Although the cases covered by this report only represent a sample of the thousands of animal cruelty cases that local humane societies, animal care and control agencies, and law enforcement agencies investigate each year, the results provide us with a snapshot of who commits these acts and what types of animals become victims. The significant, but likely under-reported, percentage of teenage involvement in intentional acts of cruelty suggests that there is a need for more legislative and community interventions.

In recent years, there has been an increase in animal-related violence prevention and intervention programs for at-risk youth around the United States. These programs work to break the cycles of violence and abuse through teaching humane education and by fostering respect for animals among participants. The programs share a similar goal in that they teach young people to train, care for, and interact with animals in a nurturing way. In 2000, The HSUS published a directory of these programs entitled, *Violence Prevention and Intervention, A Directory of Animal-Related Programs*. Many of these programs are innovative, and have produced positive behavior changes in participants. Yet, it is important to formally evaluate these programs to determine how effective they are in helping participants develop skills like empathy, compassion, and respect for other living creatures. To our knowledge only two of these programs have undergone a formal evaluation process.

Parents, teachers, guidance counselors, childcare providers, peers and others who serve as role-models for adolescents also need to be informed about animal abuse and how it can be a "warning sign" for other potentially violent behavior. It is also important for larger groups, like PTAs, school boards, and professional teachers' associations to be aware of animal cruelty and to share information with their members on how to properly intervene if they suspect an adolescent has abused an animal. These groups should also develop collaborations with local humane societies and animal care and control agencies so that they can cross-report and cross-train one another.

In addition to community efforts, state legislators must continue to support bills that mandate psychological counseling for anyone who is convicted of animal cruelty. Currently, there are eight states that mandate psychological counseling for juvenile offenders. These include California, Colorado, Iowa, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah. In addition, three states—Rhode Island, Missouri, and Vermont—have introduced bills that mandate psychological counseling for all animal cruelty offenders.

Overall, it is vital for violence prevention efforts to begin before a child becomes a teenager. Teaching humane education in primary classrooms is one way where teachers can promote respect for animals among children. This will not only encourage children to be kind to animals, it may also go a long way in preventing future violence.

Who commits animal cruelty?

Male perpetrators were involved in the majority of all animal cruelty cases as well as nearly all those involving intentional violent cruelty and animal fighting. Interestingly, females had a much lower percentage of involvement in intentional cruelty and animal fighting cases as compared to males, but they had a higher percentage of involvement in animal hoarding cases. This data is consistent with The HSUS' findings in the 2000 Report.

While teenagers were responsible for one-fifth of intentional cruelty, male teenagers were the perpetrators in 95% of these cases. This data is also consistent with The HSUS' findings in the

2000 Report. In addition, children under 13 continue to have a low percentage of involvement in intentional cruelty.

The following table shows the percentages of men verses women involved in various types of animal cruelty:

Gender	**All Cases**	**Intentional Cruelty**	**Animal Fighting**	**Neglect**	**Animal Hoarding**
Males	76%	92%	91%	54%	38%
Females	26%	8%	9%	46%	62%

The table below provides a breakdown of intentional animal cruelty by offender age.

Age	**Intentional Cruelty**
Child	4%
Teen	20%
Adult	76%

This table shows the percentage of intentional animal cruelty committed by age and gender.

Intentional Cruelty		
Age	**Male**	**Female**
Child	96%	4%
Teen	95%	5%
Adult	91%	9%

Who are the victims of animal cruelty?
Much like the study conducted in 2000, companion animals were the most common victims of animal cruelty in 2001. In 2000, 76% of cases involved companion animals; 12% involved farm animals; 7% involved wildlife; and 5% involved multiple types of animals. The following is a percentage breakdown of animal abuse victims for 2001.

Animal Type	**Percentage of Cruelty Cases**
Companion Animals	74%
Farm Animals	14%
Wildlife	6%
Exotic Animals	2%
Multiple Types	4%

Do certain age groups target particular types of animals for cruelty?
Children, teens, and adults all have a high percentage of committing acts of cruelty against companion animals—over 70% in each age category. Interestingly, children committed the highest percentage of cruelty against wildlife as compared to teens and adults. The following table shows a breakdown of cruelty by offender age and type of animal.

Animal Type	**Offender Age**		
	Child	*Teen*	*Adult*
Companion Animals	71%	75%	81%
Farm Animals	0	8%	10%
Wildlife	25%	14%	8%
Exotic Animals	0	2%	1%
Multiple Types	4%	1%	1%

How many dogs vs. cats are victims of cruelty?
In 2001, cruelty incidents involving dogs are more commonly reported than cruelty cases against cats. This does not necessarily mean that dogs are at greater risk for being victims of cruelty than cats. In fact, many animal care and control agencies report a higher incidence of cat abuse. These findings suggest that cat cruelty incidents are underreported by the public and media. It also suggests that law enforcement may be less likely to respond to and prosecute acts of cruelty against cats than acts against dogs. Teens had the highest percentage of cruelty against cats as compared to children and adults.

The following table shows a percentage breakdown of dog and cat cruelty.

Animal Type	**All Cases of Cruelty**
Dog	67%
Cat	22%
Both involved in case	4%
Multiple species involved (including cats and/or dogs)	7%

This table shows a breakdown of dog and cat cruelty by offender age.

Animal Type	**Offender Age**		
	Child	*Teen*	*Adult*
Dog	71%	55%	73%
Cat	29%	43%	26%
Multiple Species	0	2%	1%

What are the offenses?
In cases of intentional animal cruelty, the most common offenses involved beating, torturing, shooting, and mutilation. Males were involved in over 90% of the majority of the offenses. Females had the most involvement in poisoning and hanging cases.

The following table is a breakdown of common offenses perpetrated on animals.

Common Offenses	Percent of Violent Cases	Percent of Cases Involving Males	Percent of Cases Involving Females
Beating	18%	98%	2%
Torturing	17%	88%	12%
Shooting	16%	98%	2%
Mutilation	10%	92%	8%
Throwing	9%	88%	12%
Burning	6%	92%	8%
Animal Fighting	4%	91%	9%
Kicking	4%	93%	7%
Suffocating	3%	93%	7%
Poisoning	3%	73%	27%
Stabbing	3%	89%	11%
Hanging	3%	81%	19%
Dragging	2%	100%	0
Animal Sexual Abuse	1%	100%	0
Drowning	1%	92%	8%

Is there a connection between animal cruelty and human violence?
In cases where there was a co-occurrence of animal cruelty and either domestic violence or child abuse, males had a higher percentage than females as perpetrators. In cases where there was a co-occurrence of animal cruelty and elder abuse both males and females had an equal percentage of involvement as perpetrators. In cases where there was a co-occurrence with domestic violence, child abuse, or where the spouse/child witnessed the abuse, the most common offenses included stabbing, throwing, or drowning the animal. Here is a breakdown of the co-occurrence of animal cruelty and family violence by gender.

Type of Family Violence (Co-occurrence with animal cruelty)	Gender of Perpetrator	
	Male	*Female*
Domestic Violence	89%	11%
Child Abuse	67%	33%
Elder Abuse	50%	50%

The following table shows a breakdown of animal cruelty cases that involved a simultaneous report of a spouse or child witnessing the act of cruelty or where the perpetrator was charged with domestic violence or child abuse.

Offense	Percentage of Co-Occurrence with Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, or Spouse/Child Witness
Stabbing	37%
Throwing	29%
Drowning	22%
Kicking	21%
Burning	19%
Beating	17%

How many perpetrators are charged with animal cruelty?
Three-quarters of the males and over sixty-percent of the females involved in cruelty cases were arrested and charged with animal cruelty. In addition, more than sixty-percent of teens and almost three-quarters of adults were charged with animal cruelty. Compared to the other age groups, children were not charged as frequently. The following tables provide a breakdown of who was charged with animal cruelty by looking at gender and age of the offenders.

Gender	Charged
Male	75%
Female	68%

Age	Charged
Child	35%
Teen	66%
Adult	74%

How many animals are affected by cruelty in the United States?
Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine how many animals are victims of cruelty or are at risk of becoming victims because there is no national tracking system in place to monitor all animal cruelty cases. In the sample of cases that were reviewed for this report, an average of 5.1 companion animals were victimized in each instance of intentional animal cruelty and an average of 22.7 companion animals were victimized in cases of animal neglect or hoarding cases. In the cases reviewed, 55% of the animals were killed or euthanized as a result of their injuries.

References

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