

**THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES (HSUS)  
FIRST STRIKE<sup>®</sup> CAMPAIGN  
2000 REPORT OF ANIMAL CRUELTY CASES  
APRIL 13, 2001**

**Executive Summary of The HSUS's 2000 Study**

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The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) is the first organization to conduct a national study examining the prevalence of human violence in animal cruelty situations. The HSUS's study, conducted from January through December of 2000, 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.

*The results of this year-long study, described in detail below, show an extremely high number of intentional cruelty cases were committed by male teens under the age of eighteen. In addition, our research shows that a large number of cases of intentional animal cruelty also involved some form of family violence, either domestic violence, child abuse or elder abuse.*

The HSUS compiled this information from 1624 animal cruelty cases around the country that occurred during 2000. Reports came from well-documented sources such as media reports and local humane societies. Of these animal cruelty cases, 922 involved intentional violence toward animals and 504 involved extreme animal neglect. The following is an assessment of the demographics of abusers, types of abuse, other forms of violence and demographics of abused animals in cases of intentional cruelty against animals:

**Who Are the Perpetrators?**

Male perpetrators were involved in 76% of cases overall and 94% of the cases involving intentional abuse. While women were involved in only 24% of cases overall, they were responsible for 45% of severe neglect cases, including 68% of animal hoarding cases.

In intentional cases of animal cruelty, the majority of perpetrators were males and a high percentage of the perpetrators were under the age of 18.

- 31% committed by teenagers under the age of 18 (94% by male teenagers).
- 4% committed by children under the age of 12.

**Is There a Connection between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence?**

Almost a quarter of all cases of intentional animal cruelty also involved some form of family violence. Domestic violence was the most commonly reported form of family violence followed by child abuse and elder abuse.

- 21% of cases of intentional animal cruelty also involved some form of family violence.
- 13% involved domestic violence. In these cases, the perpetrator abused his/her partner and/or forced the victim to witness cruelty to animal/s.

- 7% involved child abuse. In these cases, the perpetrator abused his/her child and/or forced the victim to witness cruelty to animal/s.
- 1% involved elder abuse. In these cases, the perpetrator abused the elderly victim and/or forced the victim to witness cruelty to animal/s.

### **Who Are the Victims?**

Companion animals were the most common targets of animal cruelty, with reports of cruelty against dogs (76% of all companion animal cases) much more commonly reported than cruelty against cats (19% of all companion animal cases). This is a lower incidence of cat abuse cases than has been reported by many animal care and control agencies and suggests that the public, media and law enforcement may be less likely to report and prosecute cases of cruelty against cats than acts of cruelty against dogs.

The following is a breakdown of animal abuse victims in this study:

- 76% of cases involved companion animals.
- 12% of cases involved farm animals.
- 7% of cases involved wildlife.
- 5% of cases involved multiple types of animals.

### **What Abuse Is Perpetrated against Animals?**

Over 57% of the reports reviewed were characterized as intentional abuse or torture, 31% involved extreme neglect including starvation and failure to provide care, and 12% involved both neglect and abuse.

In cases of intentional animal cruelty, the most common offenses involved shooting, beating, throwing and/or mutilating the animal/s.

- 33% of cases involved shooting of animal/s.
- 14% of cases involved beating of animal/s.
- 8% of cases involved throwing of animal/s.
- 8% cases involved mutilation of animal/s.
- 6% of cases involved burning of animal/s.
- 6% of cases involved poisoning of animal/s.
- 5% of cases involved stabbing of animal/s.
- 4% of cases involved animal fighting of animal/s.
- 4% of cases involved kicking of animal/s.
- 2% of cases involved animal sexual abuse of animal/s.
- 2% of cases involved drowning of animal/s.
- 2% of cases involved hanging of animal/s.
- 6% of cases involved another form of intentional violence against animal/s.

### **How Many Animals Are Affected?**

At this point, it is impossible to say how many animals suffer or are at risk of cruelty because there is currently no nationwide system by law enforcement or other agencies to monitor all animal cruelty cases. However, in the sample of cases reviewed for this report, an average of 3.4 animals were victimized in each instance of intentional abuse while an average of 31.5 animals were victimized in cases of animal neglect. In the majority of all animal abuse cases (63%), the animals were killed or had to be euthanized as a result of their injuries.

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## **THE HSUS'S Report Corroborates Earlier Research on the Connection Between Animal Cruelty and Human Violence**

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Although this report is the first national study to assess the prevalence of human violence in animal abuse cases, for the past two decades, psychologists, sociologists and criminologists have conducted several studies to examine the extent of animal cruelty in cases of family violence. Early interest in the connection between cruelty to animals and human violence was inspired by anecdotal evidence compiled by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies linking serial killers, serial rapists and sexual homicide perpetrators to acts of animal abuse prior to age 25. Many of these case histories, including reports of alleged animal abuse by David Berkowitz and Jeffrey Dahmer, have been widely publicized in the media and raised public awareness about the animal abuse/human violence connection. However, recent research studies assessing the incidence of animal cruelty in cases of family violence provide us with more concrete evidence of the animal abuse/human violence connection than single case histories.

Several recent studies have assessed the high frequency with which perpetrators of family violence abuse pets to silence, coerce and further intimidate other vulnerable family members. In 1995, researchers interviewed a small sample of domestic violence victims seeking shelter in Utah and found that 71 percent of pet-owning victims reported their batterers had threatened, hurt or killed family pets. Larger studies in 1997 and 2000 in the United States and Canada corroborated these findings and examined the effect this abuse has in preventing victims from leaving an abusive relationship. Researchers in these studies found that over 20 percent of domestic violence victims reported delaying leaving the abusive relationship out of fear for their pets' safety. In response to these findings, animal welfare associations have begun partnering with domestic violence agencies to develop safe haven programs that provide temporary emergency housing for the pets of domestic violence victims.

Similar to domestic violence cases, child abusers often abuse animals to exert their power and control over children, animals, and other vulnerable family members. In some cases, abusers will force children to engage in sexual acts with animals or demand that they hurt or kill a favorite pet to coerce them into keeping the family secret. Often, even the threat of animal abuse will intimidate children into maintaining silence about the ongoing abuse. A 1983 study of families referred to the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services for child abuse found that in 88 percent of pet-owning families with a history of physical abuse, at least one person had abused animals. In two-thirds of the cases the perpetrator of animal abuse was the abusive parent, however in one-third of the cases the children themselves became the animal abusers, often imitating the violence they had seen or experienced, using the pet as a victim.

### **HSUS Recommendations: Legislative and Community Solutions**

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While The HSUS's study is only a sample of the thousands of animal cruelty cases that humane societies, animal control officers and police encounter each year, the results of the study provide us with a better understanding of how animal cruelty fits into the larger problems of community and family violence. The high percentage of teenage involvement in intentional acts of animal cruelty, and the

prevalence of family violence in many of our animal cruelty cases, suggests the need for legislative and community solutions to animal cruelty and human violence.

In recent years, public and professional awareness about this connection has increased due to earlier research and several high-profile cruelty cases. As a result, many areas of the country have already begun strengthening animal cruelty laws and are developing innovative community programs designed to reduce violence. Thirty-one states and the District of Columbia have adopted felony-level animal anti-cruelty laws, the majority having passed in the last few years. Several states have also passed laws mandating psychological evaluation and counseling for convicted animal abusers. This year, eighteen states are working on felony cruelty legislation and improving provisions within current felony cruelty laws. In addition, five states--Florida, Virginia, Arizona, South Carolina and Massachusetts--have introduced bills that mandate cross-reporting between animal control officers and child protective services.

In addition to legislative efforts, many communities throughout the United States have begun developing antiviolence programs that seek to prevent violence by utilizing the animal cruelty/human violence connection to identify and assist vulnerable animal and human victims. Police departments, social service agencies, domestic violence shelters, educators and other antiviolence agencies have started partnering with animal welfare agencies to develop interagency collaborations aimed at reducing family violence and animal cruelty. Many of these interagency programs utilize cross-reporting, cross-training, and multidisciplinary response teams to assist officers and the courts in identifying and intervening with violent perpetrators.

Perhaps the most important approach to the problems of animal cruelty and human violence is *prevention*. The majority of abuse against animals and humans is motivated by fear, ignorance and an inability to empathize with the needs and feelings of others. Humane education can be essential to instilling the knowledge and values that can help prevent children from starting a destructive path. These efforts cannot undo generations of abuse but they can be an effective means of breaking the cycle of family violence from one generation to the next.