

## CORRELATION BETWEEN AGGRESSION TOWARDS ANIMALS AND AGGRESSION TOWARDS PEOPLE BASED ON RESEARCH RECORDS

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### Abstract

In the English-language literature, it is indicated, that the perpetrators of domestic violence very often use violence against animals. At the same time, there is no Polish research confirming or falsifying the hypothesis of the existence of such correlation. Therefore, the main aim of this work is an attempt to define, on the basis of the results of the author's research, is there any relationship between the phenomenon of aggression towards animals and propensity to be aggressive towards people. The subject of analysis is the content of the court records in criminal cases concerning the Article 35 of the Act on the Protection of Animals. The research included criminal proceedings instituted against persons accused of a prohibited act in the form of animal killing or cruelty to animals. On the basis of the established criteria, there were selected criminal cases in which there may have occurred the relationship between the use of aggression by perpetrators towards animals and people. The personal and cognitive data of the selected perpetrators as well as psychiatric opinion allowed the author to present the characteristics of the examined population and identify factors that could have played an important role in the genesis of acts of aggression.

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of violent crimes towards people is a characteristic area in criminological research. At the same time, studies concerning violence towards animals are rather marginalized in the Polish criminological literature compared to major research on violence. The problem belongs to the research area of "green criminology" which, in Poland, is a relatively new perspective in criminological inquiries. The term "green criminology" was used for the first time by the British criminologist, M. J. Lynch in the early 1990s (Lynch, 1990), and, at present, the achievements of internationally-renowned criminologists concerning crimes against environment are significant. What should also be noted is the activity of the so-called Green Criminology Working Group, bringing together eco-criminologists from all over the world.

A possible correlation between aggression towards people and towards animals was first discussed in English-speaking criminological literature. The first scholarly mention with reference to this subject matter is attributed to J. S. Hutton. This author, based on the research carried out in the United Kingdom, observed that a disclosure of animal abuse can provide a tool for early identification of violence towards family members (Hutton, 1983).

The leading researchers in this subject matter include: F. R. Ascione (Ascione, 2007, Ascione 2005, Ascione & Arkow, 1999, Lackwood & Ascione, 1998), L. Merz-Perez, K. M. Heide (Merz-Perez & Heide, 2004), A. J. Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald, 2005), Ch. Blazina, G. Boyraz, D. Shen-Miller, (Blazina, Boyraz, & Shen-Miller, 2011), E. Gullone, P. Arkow (Gullone & Arkow, 2012). The authors of the above-mentioned publications demonstrated that violence towards animals is a specific path leading to violence against people. This form of violence is not only a demonstration of personality deficits, but also a symptom of severe disorders in the family, in particular, of a violent nature. The English-speaking literature indicates that violence towards animals can be a precursor of the gravest crimes involving violence, e.g. rape, paedophilia, assault or murder. However, it is relations between violence against animals and domestic violence that are most frequently observed. Those perpetrators use violence against pets as so-called substitute objects. American criminologists formulated the notion of “a triad of family violence”, which includes violence against partners, children and pets (DeGue, 2011). It is also worth mentioning a publication edited by J. Maher, H. Pierpoint, and P. Beirne, presenting various forms of aggression against animals (Maher, Pierpoint & Beirne, 2017).

The results of research carried out in three countries, the USA, Canada and Australia, should also be quoted here. Although the selection of research samples and research methods applied differed in individual countries, the results led to similar conclusions. It was found that in between 11.8% and 39.4% of women affected by domestic violence (the subjects of the study) reported that the perpetrator threatened to harm or kill their animal “companion”. Between 25.6% and 79.3% of women claimed that the perpetrator killed or mistreated their pet. Additionally, the research shows that between 18% and 48% of those women delayed their escape or decided not to leave an abusive partner due to fear for their pets (Gullone & Arkow, 2012).

## **METHOD**

It should be emphasized that there is no Polish research confirming or falsifying the hypothesis of the existence of a correlation between aggression towards animals and people. Therefore, the main aim of this work is an attempt to define, on the basis of the results of the conducted research, is there any relationship between the phenomenon of aggression towards animals and propensity to be aggressive towards people. Moreover, the author formulated the following research problems:

- have the perpetrators of the crimes of cruelty to animals been previously convicted, in particular, for the crimes of aggression?
- to what kind of crimes, it was related to in such cases?
- is it possible to specify the common features that characterize the perpetrators who use violence against animals and people?
- which factors played a leading role in the criminogenesis of aggressive crimes?

The court records containing the data of criminal convictions are of key importance for criminological investigations and allow determining the extent and dynamics of a particular crime (Błachut, 2007). The research method, which was applied in the work, consisted in researching documents. The subject of analysis was the content of the court records in criminal cases concerning the act of cruelty to animals which is penalized in the Article 35 of the Polish Act on the Protection of Animals. The research was conducted in one of the District Court in Poland (Olsztyn city). The time range of the research included 10 years, *id est* since the entry into force of the mentioned Act until the end of the research. The authors researched all criminal proceedings finished with the final judgment, which were instituted against persons accused of a prohibited act in the form of animal killing or violence against animals. The research included 59 criminal proceedings instituted against 61 persons.

In order to select the cases confirming or falsifying the existence of a correlation, there were applied three main criteria:

- legal classification of the act – in the same criminal proceeding the accused was tried for the act of aggression towards animals and other aggressive crime;
- previous conviction of the accused of any aggressive crime;
- correlation of aggression towards animals and people revealed on the basis of evidence collected in the criminal proceeding.

On the basis of the established criteria, a further analysis concerned 23 criminal cases, in which 21 perpetrators were convicted (therein two perpetrators were convicted twice of cruelty to animals) and in which there might have occurred the correlation between the use of violence by perpetrators against animals and people. This represents almost 40% of all examined cases regarding violence against animals. Data collected for the purposes of criminal proceedings have provided basic information concerning gender and age of perpetrator, his/her education, marital status, employment, prior criminal history, legal qualification of committed crimes and the statement whether perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of committing the crime. On the basis of personal and cognitive data of the perpetrators convicted of animal abuse, as well as forensic and psychiatric opinion drew up for the purposes of criminal proceedings, the author presented characteristics of the studied population and identified factors that could have played an important role in the genesis of acts of aggression (risk factors).

In remaining 34 criminal cases concerning animal abuse, there was no correlation between aggression towards animals and people, so they were not included in the further research. However, it cannot be excluded that these offenders might have committed the aggressive crime at the later date. Nevertheless, verifying this statement was impossible within the methodology which was applied for the purposes of research. It should be highlighted that presented research is a preliminary study on the subject of correlation between aggression towards animals and people. In order to present holistic approach to this phenomenon, it is necessary to extend the research sample (population of perpetrators, including juvenile offenders).

## RESULTS

The criminological literature provides the view that sex is the most significant factor predestining aggressive behaviour, both from the biological and psychological perspective. This feature

affects three areas of behaviour, i.e. aggression, dominance and hostility. The share of female offenders in the total number of perpetrators is referred to as feminisation of crime. It is estimated that this indicator amounts to about 10% of total crimes committed in Poland (Grzyb & Habzda-Siwiek, 2013, Kędzierska, 2005). In the examined population, up to 95.2% of offenders were men. This means that almost total masculinisation of these types of crimes is observed. Additionally, the results provide more proof that aggressive crimes are characteristic of the male sex. There was only one case recorded of a woman who satisfied the criteria assumed for the paper. Due to circumstances of the act (particular cruelty) and the history of drug rehabilitation and suicide attempts undertaken declared by the perpetrator, expert psychiatrists were appointed. The analysis of the life course and the mental state of the woman demonstrated her social adaptation disorders. The lifestyle led by the perpetrator was not without effect on her mental condition, since the source of her income was prostitution. The causes of aggressive behaviour of the perpetrator can be seen in the deficit caused by her alcohol addiction and her life experience. The woman came from a large, dysfunctional family. Her father was an alcoholic who mistreated his family.

Criminological research shows that young offenders are the most criminogenic age group and the highest intensity of committed crimes falls for the period before the age of 25 or 30. This regularity is particularly evident for aggressive crime perpetrators (Błachut, Gaberle, & Krajewski, 2001). However, as results from the conducted research, perpetrators of aggressive crimes against animals do not fit into the general age profile of perpetrators of violent crimes. In this specific case, the criminal activity is distributed equally and it is not the highest among the youngest perpetrators.

Among the examined criminal proceedings, cumulative legal qualification with aggressive violence was applied in 60% of cases. At the same time, it was found that more than a half of them concerned domestic violence. Other prior aggressive crimes most often committed by perpetrators included: abuse and damage to health, threats, robbery, assaults or animal abuse. The lowest percentage of crimes concerned assaults on a public authority officer, intimidating witnesses and insults, committed in individual cases. It should be also observed that the analysis of the material collected for the criminal procedure purposes, first of all from witness testimonies, showed that perpetrators who had not been previously sentenced for aggressive crimes, had displayed aggression against animals and physical and verbal aggression towards the nearest members of their family in the past. In view of the relations between the victims and perpetrators, the fact of committing a crime was not reported to law enforcement authorities. Animal abuse was often aimed at exerting influence on the mental sphere of the nearest persons, and the animal was treated as the "substitute object". This allows to claim that the "dark number of crimes" in this area is high.

A disturbed structure of personality is indicated as a risk factor for aggressive behaviours. People with sociopathic personality can demonstrate, among others, the following symptoms: proneness to conflict, aggression, impulsiveness, excessive irritability, disrespectful attitude towards obligations, inability to love, emotional poverty, absence of the feeling of guilt and a tendency to commit criminal acts. Additionally, antisocial personality is often accompanied by other psychopathological categories, e.g. alcoholism or drug addiction (Hołyst, 2009). It was possible to obtain a broader spectrum of knowledge about perpetrators in those criminal cases in which court-appointed experts prepared forensic-psychiatric opinions. In view of the partic-

ular cruelty of animal abuse or other circumstances revealed in the course of the proceedings (e.g. alcoholism, suicidal attempts, nature of previously committed criminal acts), the court had doubts concerning the sanity of more than half of the perpetrators. Dissocial personality disorder was diagnosed for eight of them. Typical features of the perpetrators showing social adaptations disorders included: irresponsible attitude, emotional instability and irritability, lowered thresholds triggering frustration and aggressive behaviours, limited ability to use life experience, disregard for norms and social coexistence rules, limited professional and social efficiency, activity oriented towards reaching immediate aims, lack of stronger emotional bonds with the environment, deepening social destruction, concentration on alcohol drinking, neglecting alternative interests and spending free time.

The research demonstrated that as many as 80% of perpetrators in a given population were under the influence of alcohol when committing an animal abuse crime. The literature provides that a link between alcohol addiction and the occurrence of aggression and violence can be observed in various relations: addiction can cause increased aggression in a given person and lead to the use of violence towards members of a family; a high level of emotional tension and aggressiveness is a cause of alcohol abuse, which leads to the coexistence of alcoholism and aggression; mental disorders cause an increase in the aggression level and alcohol abuse, or alcohol is a cause of mental disorders, accompanied by aggressive behaviour (Cierpiątkowska, 2003). People addicted to alcohol can behave in an unpredictable way, as they have no inner restraints and cannot control their emotions. The effect of alcohol leads to breaking down barriers and releasing urges. It should be mentioned that the research conducted by the Institute of Psychology and Sobriety reports that up to 80% of women living in a relationship with an alcohol addict are victims of various forms of aggression and violence (Cichy & Szyjko, 2015). It was also observed that growing up in a dysfunctional family with an alcohol abuse problem can lead to the emergence of psychopathological features in adult children of alcoholics (ACA). If those children also experienced violence in their childhood, it is highly probable that they will use violence in the later periods of their life (Tsirigotis & Gruszczyński, 2003).

## **AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOURS IN THE CONTEXT OF CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORIES - CASE STUDIES**

The psychological theories explaining the genesis of aggressive behaviour include the so-called frustration-aggression theories, proposed, among others, by J. Dollard, N. E. Miller and D. Berkowitz. The crime-inducing factors evoking an aggressive state in the examined perpetrators include a difficult financial situation related to unemployment or the loss of a job, conflicts between members of family, caused by e.g. division of the property, divorce, alcohol addiction, marriage failure, partner abandonment or conflicts with neighbours. The situation caused a state of frustration, which led to aggression. The perpetrators often demonstrated transferred aggression oriented towards the object that was not the direct source of their frustration, i.e. animals belonging to a family member. Criminal cases in which the anger felt by the perpetrator contributed to committing an aggressive crime can be shown as examples. In the first case, the perpetrator was sentenced for inhumane killing of an animal (dog) by throwing it over a balcony. The animal belonged to his children. His behaviour was caused by the anger caused by the fact that their children received low grades at school. The perpetrator addressed his aggression towards the animal, which he treated as a functional substitute of the frustration

source. The second case concerned a criminal recidivist in domestic violence and cruelty to a dog belonging to family members. Another conviction released a feeling of anger in the perpetrator. He decided to "punish" his wife for giving incriminating testimony, again addressing his physical aggression towards family members and the animal.

Aggression can also be a consequence of frustration caused by inhibited realisation of the so-called pleasure principle. Freud's instinct theory assumes that a human being is driven by two basic instincts: life and love – Eros, and death – Thanatos (Fraud, 1927). Sexual drive can act as aggressive behaviour catalyst. A criminal case concerning a perpetrator who upon hearing his wife's refusal to have sexual intercourse decided to "punish" her can be provided here as an example. Making a statement, he admitted that he had been under the influence of alcohol and could not control his instincts. The situation evoked his feeling of anger, which he diffused on the "substitute object" – an animal belonging to his wife. In another animal abuse case, the perpetrator, jealous of his partner, abused her mentally and physically for a longer period. In the perpetrator's opinion, the partner cheated on him and did not reciprocate his feelings to a satisfactory degree. For fear of her own and her child's life, the woman, under the pretext of paying a visit to her family abroad, left her partner, but left an animal (dog) in the apartment. Not being able to contact the partner, the perpetrator vented his anger on objects belonging to her and on the animal. He inflicted cruelty to the dog by kicking it, locking it without food and pulling out its claws. Unrequited feelings and rejection were a driving force for his aggressive behaviour. The desire for revenge for being abandoned causes anger which intensifies emotional tension. Along with the occurrence of stressful heartbreak, the need to get even for suffering emerges in the perpetrator's mind (Lew-Starowicz & Pikulski, 1990).

The aggression theory developed by A. H. Buss, a co-author of the aggression questionnaire for measuring aggressive tendencies, is another approach worth mentioning here. According to A. H. Buss, aggression is a habit of abuse and may become a permanent human personality feature (Buss & Perry, 1992). Based on the research material, it was established that in 52.4% of perpetrators, the use of aggression can actually be such a permanent character feature. The use of violence towards family members and an animal over a longer period of time can be treated as demonstration of this feature. It was reflected in the alleged acts described in the indictment. The perpetrators were most often accused of many years' of psychological and physical abuse towards their closest persons and animals. At the same time, it is observed that tolerance for victimisation demonstrated by family members has an effect on developing the habit of aggressive behaviour. Studies on aggressive behaviour have confirmed that over time, the victims of aggressive acts become accustomed to aggression and their response to such acts becomes weaker.

Structural and social learning theories seem particularly important among sociological theories explaining aggressive behaviour. The first group includes the theory proposed by E.G. Sutherland based principally on the thesis that criminal behaviour is a normal, learned behaviour which is acquired in the socialisation process, just like other behavioural patterns. The individual is more inclined to commit criminal acts after excessive exposure to patterns accepting law infringement (Sutherland, 1939, Sutherland & Cressey, 1970). Theories of social learning by A. Bandura and R. H. Walters assume that internalization of criminal behaviour takes place as a result of observation, i.e. social modelling. The individual learns aggressive behaviours by his or her own direct experience or by adopting the behaviour of others (Bandura, 1977). In the course of the research, it was found that perpetrators who demonstrate a tendency to aggres-



sive behaviours very often experienced aggression of their family members or were witnesses to aggressive behaviours in their immediate surroundings. More than 60% of perpetrators subjected to psychiatric examination admitted that at home, their parent abused other household members. Aggressive behaviours were assimilated in the socialisation process at the early stage of life by future offenders committing aggressive crimes. It is observed that those people, despite unpleasant childhood experience, followed the deviant patterns in their own families. This concerns not only the use of aggression towards family members, but also alcohol abuse.

Another theory that gained popularity in the late 1990s was the control theory formulated by T. Hirschi, claiming that crime results from the absence of bonds between the individual and such groups as a family, school or peer group (Hirschi, 1969, Hirschi, 1983). In turn, the self-control theory, created in cooperation with M. Gottfredson, assumes that criminal behaviours are closely related to the level of self-control, which is a learned phenomenon. It was observed that individuals demonstrating low self-control are usually impulsive, of low sensitivity, inclined to use violence and taking risk, oriented towards reaching immediate aims, of low verbal intelligence level (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). It was found that offenders examined in the research, with diagnosed dissocial personality, demonstrated a low level of self-control. According to forensic psychiatric opinions, they revealed behavioural issues in the adolescence period, among others, by presenting a disrespectful attitude to school duties, truancy, drinking alcohol and being runaways. It should be noted that in the case of perpetrators of animal abuse, no decrease in criminal behaviour is observed with age.

It was found that perpetrators of animal abuse, who at the same time demonstrate a tendency to show aggressive behaviour towards people, often point to circumstances which, in their opinion, justify their crime. In criminology, such an attitude is explained using the concept of neutralisation techniques developed by G. M. Sykes and D. Matza (Sykes, & Matza, 1957). This concept assumes that the individual internalizes values and norms functioning in the society, but at the same time, assimilates certain techniques of neutralization, through which he/she justifies his/her criminal behaviour. In the examined population, the perpetrators most often explained their behaviour by the fact that the animal was aggressive, which evoked the necessity to take defensive measures. In their belief, it was a circumstance justifying their deed and precluding their responsibility. At the same time, the testimonies of witnesses (usually also victims of domestic violence) gathered for the purpose of the criminal proceeding showed that the animal instinctively tried to defend the member of the family to whom the physical or verbal aggression was directed.

The life course theories also seem to be particularly relevant for explaining aggressive behaviours. Those theories refer to individual periods of human life, determined by specific events. Pioneers in the life course research, W. Thomas and F. Znaniecki, focused on human biography in categories of cultural values and patterns. It was found that an asocial attitude is developed as a result of distortions in subsequent stages of human life. Those theories were also used to analyse criminal careers of individuals (Toroń, 2013). In the opinion of D. P. Farrington, a person demonstrating a tendency to asocial behaviour descends into crime as a result of interactions with the environment where the opportunity and patterns required for committing the crime exist (Farrington, 1994). It is observed that the life course of the examined perpetrators was affected by family environment factors. The perpetrators assimilated values and attitudes functioning in the family, such as aggressive behaviours. In this context, it seems justified to claim

that the socialisation process in dysfunctional families is distorted by wrong personal patterns passed down by parents and it affects the later biography of the individual. The individual, by observation (as a witness to domestic violence) or personal experience concerning the acts of aggression, transfers family behaviours from the childhood to his/her own family. The tendencies to demonstrate aggression can also emerge in adulthood. The causes can include the so-called marital pathologies, e.g. divorce, separation and conflicts with partners. The situation between partners can inhibit aggression (successful life) or stimulate it (conflicts). In criminology, the circumstances directly or indirectly conducive to committing a crime are called criminogenic risk factors. Perpetrators who were convicted for animal abuse and abuse towards a close person argued that their aggressive behaviour was driven by family conflicts. This is explained by M. Wolfgang's concept, which assumes that violence occurs most frequently in the nearest social relations and aggression is caused by growing conflicts between the perpetrator and the victim (Wolfgang, 1975). In their testimonies, the perpetrators explained that the so-called turning points in their life path also included life failures, such as the breakdown of marriage, disease, parents' death in childhood or parents' alcoholism. It should also be emphasized that 81% of the perpetrators examined in the study were habitual criminals. It shows that the lifestyle they demonstrated was related to development of a non-conformist attitude.

## CONCLUSIONS

The subject matter of aggressive crimes towards people and animals is an interdisciplinary issue covering areas of criminological sciences, sociology, psychology as well as medical and veterinary sciences. For this reason, the author had to decide which issues should be exposed and which should only be indicated. This paper does not claim to be a complex analysis of the phenomenon, but only intends to draw attention to its key issues. It should be emphasized that the conducted research is only of a pilot study. Any in-depth analysis of the phenomenon discussed requires extending the research, as well as the need to check later criminal records of all perpetrators sentenced for animal abuse. The results of international studies quoted in the introduction demonstrate that aggression often escalates and cruelty to animals precedes aggression towards people.

The research conducted for the purpose of this study made it possible to verify the research hypotheses posed in the introduction and to formulate conclusions. The main research hypothesis put forward by the author, concerning the existence of a correlation between aggression towards animals and aggression towards people, was confirmed. Confronting the specific hypotheses presented in the introduction to the research process with the above presented results of own research, the following theses can be proposed:

- perpetrators of animal abuse were in most cases habitual criminals committing aggressive crimes;
- perpetrators previously punished for aggressive crimes most often committed a domestic violence crime;
- it is possible to specify common features characterizing perpetrators committing acts of aggression towards animals and people;
- both psychological (endogenous) and sociological (exogenous) factors play a dominant role in the criminogenesis of perpetrators committing crimes under the analysis.



The paper can also contribute to the scientific and social discussion on formulating a successful strategy to counteract this social pathology. The preventive aspects of the phenomenon can be proposed as the particular direction of further analyses and research inquiries, since etiologic and phenomenological issues seem to be examined to a satisfactory extent. To summarize, it can be claimed that the aim of the research, namely, the scholarly analysis of links between the tendency to use aggression towards animals and aggressive behaviour towards people, has been achieved. When estimating the actual level of aggressive crimes against animals and people, a "dark number" of such cases should also be taken into account. In view of the relations between the victims and the perpetrators, the fact of committing the crime is not reported to law enforcement authorities. However, analyzing the testimonies of the victims in criminal cases covered by the research, who decided to report domestic violence, it should be believed that the number of undisclosed crimes in this area is high. It results from the conducted research that causes of aggression towards various types of victims (people and animals) are often the same. It should also be emphasized that revealed correlations between aggression towards people and animals are particularly visible in the case of domestic violence and the attacked animals are "strange" to the perpetrator. This allows the claim to be formulated that animal abuse is an element of a criminological image of a domestic violence crime. Therefore, the findings in this regard confirm the results of international research. However, extracting conclusions that could be applied to the wider community of perpetrators of animal abuse in Poland requires extending the research sample to the whole country, as well as verifying the subsequent criminal records of all perpetrators examined in the research, who have been convicted of cruelty to animals (Narodowska, 2018). The results of foreign research, cited in the introduction, indicate that aggression often escalates and the animal abuse precedes aggression towards people.

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