

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**The Lack of a Specialized Animal Abuse Unit Within
Law Enforcement Agencies**

**An Administrative Research Paper
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ABSTRACT

Animal cruelty is any inhumane or violent act towards any animal; it does not just pertain to physical abuse; neglect is also a form of abuse. Animal cruelty takes many forms and many victims, but the end result is always the same: animal suffering. The primary and motivating concern for the creation of an animal abuse section in a police agency is to train sworn law enforcement officers in animal cruelty laws, so law enforcement officers can be more effective in the general investigative procedures, techniques, and legal process of cruelty prosecutions. Law enforcement officers are not generally trained or equipped to handle animal cruelty cases, and they occasionally require the assistance of trained civilian animal cruelty investigators associated with non-profit animal protection organizations.

The purpose of this research is to show that there is a direct correlation in animal cruelty and human violence, and police intervention is vital. Not only have experts documented this link in the lives of serial killers, but they have also acknowledged that in homes where animal abuse occurs, child abuse or other domestic violence is more likely to occur as well. The method of inquiry used by the researcher included: research of relevant published material, internet sites, periodicals, journals, and a survey from personnel employed by law enforcement agencies. The researcher discovered that most police agencies did not have a special investigative unit that investigates animal abuse; they merely depend on civilian employed animal cruelty investigators.

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INTRODUCTION

Everyday in America, countless animals suffer from cruelty and neglect. Even though thousands are rescued, there are several thousands who never get rescued or help gets to them a little too late. Even in a society where there are multiple animal rescue agencies, many people still get away with animal abuse and neglect of their pets. Law enforcement needs to make it one of their main missions to put a stop to animal abuse. The problem or issue to be examined considers whether or not law enforcement agencies should employ an animal abuse unit within their respective law enforcement agency and, if so, whether or not sworn police officers or civilian personnel should staff it.

Animal abuse and/or cruelty to animals occurs in all jurisdictions, and depending on the jurisdiction, sometimes little to no attention is given to the issue. Due to budget constraints in small towns and rural counties, animal crimes are viewed as a low priority; therefore, very little to no time is spent investigating animal related calls. The relevance of having a police staffed animal abuse unit within the police department is because civilian animal control officers do not have police powers; therefore, they have to rely on the police to enforce animal control laws and make the arrests.

The purpose of this research is to propose that every law enforcement agency in the nation be required to have a specialized animal abuse unit that is staffed by licensed police officers. These officers will be better trained to deal with animal abuse violators who are, occasionally, involved in high priced gambling rings that use dogs or roosters for animal fights. These police officers will be better trained in animal abuse laws; therefore, they will be better able to follow-up with the arrest and/or the filing of criminal

charges pertaining to animal abuse. The research question examines who will enforce animal cruelty cases in the rural areas of a county, where the abuse is not easily visible and the location is so isolated that the neglected animal is never discovered. If reported, most agencies that do not have a unit specifically designed to investigate animal abuse cases will not spend too much time looking into the complaint.

The intended method of inquiry used to provide the data needed for this research will include information from various sources, including but not limited to: a review of articles, Internet websites, periodicals, journals, and interviews with both sworn and civilian personnel. The intended outcome or anticipated findings of the research will show that if law enforcement agencies have trained animal abuse cops (licensed police officers), they may be able to slow down the cruelty to animals in all jurisdictions, arrest the violators earlier, and get them prosecuted.

The violator can be rehabilitated; therefore, this will possibly stop the violator from moving up to the next step of violence, which is usually towards fellow human beings and could possibly save violators from becoming a serial killer like Jeffrey Dahmer, Edmund Kemper III, or Albert "Boston Strangler" DeSalvo. Studies have shown strong links between animal abuse and domestic violence; furthermore, young people who torture animals are at a higher risk for committing crimes against humans later in life. The field of law enforcement will benefit from the research or be influenced by the conclusions because police departments and communities will now have police personnel within their department that focuses specifically on animal welfare. If animal violence is reduced, this could help achieve a less violent society for children and adults.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research concerning the creation of an animal abuse unit within a police agency revealed very little information. There is insufficient research on the topic of police departments having a police staffed animal abuse unit. However, Internet research concerning the correlation between animal abuse and violence to the human race was found on several Internet websites. Most of the law enforcement agencies in Texas are staffed by civilian animal control officers who respond to injured and abused animals; they are not Texas Peace Officers who can conduct follow-up investigations into the animal abuse.

The Humane Society of the United States website (www.hsus.org) and the Humane Teen website (www.humaneteen.org) reported that, in Plantation Key, Florida, three young men lured raccoons into an open pen with dog food and attacked them with baseball bats. Two of the animals died, and the third animal was critically injured and later euthanized by animal control officers. The same websites also reported that in Loxahatchee, Florida, a lost pet pit bull named "Shack" was tossed into a fighting pen with a trained fighting dog. After 15 minutes, the bloody, bruised dog "Shack" was clearly beaten and removed from the ring. "Shack" was then tied to a fence and died a few hours later. A final example from the same websites was that in Fairfield, Iowa, three teenagers broke into a sanctuary for abandoned cats. Armed with baseball bats, the boys bludgeoned 16 cats to death and severely wounded seven others.

Prater (2008) stated that based on the FBI findings, many serial killers tortured and killed animals before murdering humans, which caused people to commonly assume that anyone who hurts an animal gradually progresses to human victims. This

theory, however, has never been substantiated by research. One good reason this theory is unsubstantiated is that not all children who deliberately hurt animals grow up to harm people.

Numerous studies indicate that in homes where animal abuse is taking place, child and spouse abuse is likely occurring as well. According to Lindskoog (2008), the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office Animal Cruelty Investigation Unit handles an average of 40 to 70 animal abuse cases per year, ranging from animal fighting to neglect and every imaginably sad case in between. These units have been effective in shutting down several dog fighting and cock fighting facilities in Palm Beach County and have brought people who have been cruel or who have mistreated animals to justice. The unit works in conjunction with the Palm Beach County animal care and control, and the two units have been sharing resources for years. Further support of the connection between animal abuse and spousal abuse can be seen in Ascione's (1998) research. This research stated that 71% of battered women in a Utah safe house reported that their partners had threatened, harmed, or killed their companion animal.

The American Humane Association website (www.americanhumane.org) reported that the correlation between animal abuse, family violence, and other forms of community violence has been established. Child and animal protection professionals have recognized this link, noting that abuse of both children and animals is connected in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. When animals in a home are abused or neglected, it is a warning sign that others in the household may not be safe. In addition, children who witness animal abuse are at a greater risk of becoming abusers themselves. The presence of young children at cockfights is an especially disturbing element. Exposure

to such brutality can promote insensitivity toward animal suffering and enthusiasm for violence (“Animal fighting: the final round-cockfighting fact sheet,” n.d.). In many communities, human services, animal services, and law enforcement agencies are sharing resources and expertise to address violence. Professionals are beginning to engage in cross-training and cross reporting through inter-agency partnerships (“Understanding the link between animal abuse and family violence,” n.d.).

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) of Texas (www.sPCA.org) stated that investigating reports of animal cruelty is not only one of the toughest but also one of the most vital parts of their mission. The SPCA maintains a Rescue and Investigations Department with four full-time humane investigators who respond to more than 4,000 cases of cruelty each year in Texas; of this, less than 20, or less than half of one percent, are pursued with civil charges. The balance of the cruelty investigations is resolved through education and other outreach measures.

The SPCA of Texas Rescue and Investigations Department also inspects places where animals are utilized, kept, sold, traded, or bartered to ensure the animals are being cared for properly under Texas law. Receiving an average of 9,500 calls a year from people who have seen or that know about cases of animal cruelty, the investigators rescue almost 700 animals in distress each year in a variety of Texas counties. The phone calls are often requests for investigation or rescue because the animals do not have water, food, shelter, or care. Other calls often include cruel confinement or abuse concerns. Most animals investigated or rescued are dogs, cats, horses, and cattle. Humane officers receive on-the-job training and basic police training.

Kirkwood (2008) stated that Sergeant Sherry Schlueter heads up a unique program that combines the authority of law enforcement with the mission of humane agencies. Sergeant Schlucter is the head of the nation's first Abuse and Neglect Investigation Unit, a division of the Broward County Sheriff's Office in Florida. The combination of law enforcement and a humane ethic makes for a strong weapon in countering abuse and neglect, but Sergeant Schlucter says the weapon can often be a double-edged sword.

In addition to the power to seize animals, law enforcement officers have the authority to investigate, interview, interrogate, and make arrests. While the badge and gun of a law enforcement officer may command more respect, they can also invite confrontation from otherwise cooperative individuals who are more likely to comply with a humane agent acting solely in the interest of the animal. Kirkwood (2008) stated that Sergeant Schlucter felt law enforcement investigators should be investigating crimes against animals, specifically because they are crimes.

The Pet Abuse website (www.pet-abuse.com) reported that in Nashville, TN, animal control officers are investigating an incident where they discovered that the owner of a 2-month-old female Pit Bull puppy named Midnight allegedly picked up the puppy and shot her in the face. In spite of her injuries, the dog is expected to survive. Animal control says criminal charges are expected, and police are investigating the incident. Pet Abuse (www.pet-abuse.com) also reported that a Sacramento man was arrested after authorities found more than 300 cats and kittens stacked inside freezers in the man's home. Sacramento Police Sergeant Jim Hose said Michael Parnell, 46, initially refused to allow officers inside his home. Fearing for the safety of Parnell's 81-

year-old mother inside, officers entered to discover a horrible stench, a large number of live cats, and unsafe conditions in the house. Upon further investigation, Hose said officers found three large freezers filled with hundreds of dead cats and kittens.

Investigators were working to determine why the man was saving the carcasses and if there was any cruelty involved. Sacramento City Animal Care Services Senior Officer Pete Alarcon said that animal control personnel took about 20 live cats from the home.

Quinn (2000) found a study that stated a stunning 88% of the families who had physically abused their children also had records for animal abuse. In other research, from the Helping Animals website (www.helpinganimals.com), Robert K. Ressler, who is a Criminal Profiler for the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), stated that the FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children.

Other research has shown consistent patterns of animal cruelty among perpetrators of more common forms of violence, including child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association considers animal cruelty one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder. History is full of high-profile examples of this connection. For example in Edmond, Oklahoma, U.S. Postal employee Patrick Sherrill entered his place of employment, a U.S. Post Office, killed 14 coworkers, and then shot himself. Patrick Sherrill had a history of stealing local pets and allowing his own dog to attack and mutilate them (www.pet-abuse.com). Another example stated that Earl Kenneth Shriner, who had killed, raped, stabbed, and mutilated a seven year old boy, had been widely known in his neighborhood as the man who put firecrackers in dog's rectums and strung up cats (www.pet-abuse.com).

The Humane Society of the United States reported that Albert DeSalvo, the "Boston Strangler," who killed 13 women, began his violence at an early age; he trapped dogs and cats in orange crates and shot arrows through the boxes (www.hsus.org). Similarly, this website also mentioned that serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer, who murdered, mutilated, and cannibalized 17 young men between 1978 and 1991, had impaled dogs heads, frogs, and cats on sticks (www.hsus.org).

Most recently, the Pet Abuse website (www.pet-abuse.com) reported that high school killers, such as 15-year-old Kip Kinkel in Springfield, Oregon and Luke Woodham, 16, in Pearl, Mississippi, tortured animals before embarking on shooting sprees. The Pet Abuse website further revealed that Columbine High School students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who shot and killed 12 classmates before turning their guns on themselves, bragged about mutilating animals to their friends.

The Bexar County Sheriff's Office, like many others around the country, has seen the level of animal cruelty cases on the rise. Departments rarely have the manpower to successfully follow up on the origin of the abuser and, most of the time, can only rescue the animal; the abuser is hardly ever identified or prosecuted. Most animal abuse cases are investigated by civilian personnel working in animal welfare organizations. The organizations depend solely on donations to survive and/or to keep the program going. Even though law enforcement is responsible for investigating animal cruelty cases and bringing violators to justice, this task is usually left up to civilian animal control officers who rarely investigate major abuse cases involving illegal cock and dog fights. It is imperative that law enforcement officers are first trained and that they understand how

to approach an animal cruelty case so certain elements of the offense are not overlooked.

The objective as a law enforcement animal cruelty investigator is to protect domestic and wild animals from cruelty, abuse, and exploitation. Law enforcement officers have an obligation to investigate any case of animal cruelty discovered or that is brought to attention. As an animal cruelty investigator, investigators must know the laws affecting animals in their geographic area or jurisdiction. This includes local ordinances, state anti-cruelty laws, and federal laws and regulations.

The state anti-cruelty laws in Texas fall into two categories: civil and criminal. The criminal law is contained in section 42.09 and 42.10 of the Texas Penal Code and in section 54.0407 of the Texas Family Code which requires counseling for juvenile offenders. The civil law is contained in Chapter 821 of the Texas Health and Safety Code. The civil laws are used to remove abused or cruelty treated animals from their abusive owner, and the criminal law is used to punish the abuser.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not Texas law enforcement agencies should be required to hire full time police officers to enforce and investigate animal abuse cases in their jurisdictions. With the realization that animal abuse cases are on the rise, and with research showing a correlation between animal abuse and domestic violence, animal abuse is an ongoing problem that needs to be dealt with. The researcher hypothesizes that Peace Officers specifically assigned to an animal abuse unit are a realistic approach to the ever-increasing frequency of animal

abuse cases. Police officers extensively trained to investigate the cruelty to animals' cases can immediately arrest violators and rescue the neglected or abused animal.

The method of inquiry on this topic will be derived from information obtained from Internet sites, a review of articles, periodicals, journals, a survey distributed to 18 participants, and training materials from law enforcement and animal welfare organizations. The researcher will review relevant published information to discover current trends, problems, and successes other agencies and organizations discovered. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of police staffed animal abuse units within law enforcement agencies will include a survey with eight questions. A survey will be developed (see appendix A) and will be distributed to participants in Module II of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas in Denton, Texas for a statewide perspective of the level of investigation other agencies are completing to address this problem.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 14 completed surveys from participants in Module II of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas in Denton, Texas. The information obtained from the survey will be analyzed by the researcher, who will calculate the survey and create a graph to visually illustrate and report the findings of the survey.

FINDINGS

The agencies surveyed (Appendix B) ranged in size from large departments, to agencies that only employed a few officers. Of the 14 responses, 100% (Appendix C) advised that they did not have an animal abuse investigation unit in their department at all. Seventy percent (Appendix C) advised that the Criminal Investigation Division

conducted the investigation into the animal abuse. Twenty-two percent of the personnel surveyed advised that they did not handle any animal abuse cases, and 8% of the personnel surveyed advised that any animal abuse cases received were referred to the local agencies.

DISCUSSIONS/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not law enforcement agencies should hire police officers to be specifically assigned to investigate animal abuse cases. The purpose of this research was to show the link between animal cruelty and domestic violence as well as, possibly, rape and homicide. Many departments around the country have seen the level of animal cruelty cases on the rise, but they rarely have the manpower to successfully follow-up on the origin of the abuser. Most of the time, officers only rescue the animal and the abuser is hardly ever identified or prosecuted. The research question that was examined focused on how the common law enforcement officer, in general, is not trained to handle animal abuse cases in an appropriate manner. The purpose of the study was to find if there was an innovative means for law enforcement agencies to deal with events involving cruelty to animals other than the traditional use of civilian animal rescue teams and investigators.

The researcher hypothesized that the development of an animal abuse unit within a law enforcement agency will be a tremendous benefit. By interjecting early intervention into calls for service involving animal abuse using specifically trained officers, this could reduce the chances of the animal abuse offender escalating to the next form of violence, which is usually towards fellow human beings. The findings of the research did support the fact that every agency surveyed, like most police agencies

around the state, regardless of size, have experienced several cases of animal abuse in their community and do not have a police staffed animal abuse unit within their law enforcement agency to investigate animal cruelty cases. The police agencies surveyed depended mostly on civilian staffed animal care units.

The researcher concluded from the findings that society will benefit from the research, or be influenced by the conclusions, because law enforcement agencies and communities will have police personnel within their departments that focuses specifically on animal welfare. If animal violence is reduced, this could help achieve a less violent society for children and adults.

There is still a lot of thought that must go on into the decision making process of creating an animal abuse unit, including training, equipment, and manpower. Knowing that these factors are expensive, departments can look into the possibility of obtaining state or federal grants to help with the monies needed to start the animal abuse unit. It is understood that even though some law enforcement agencies do investigate some forms of animal abuse, other agencies depend solely on civilian, privately operated rescue organizations to investigate and rescue abused animals; therefore, violators are never brought to justice and prosecuted.

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**APPENDIX A
(Survey)**

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Implementing an Animal Abuse Investigation Unit In Police Agencies (Survey)

1. Indicate the type of agency you :
 - City
 - County
 - State
 - School district

2. Number of sworn police officers? _____

3. Number of patrol officers? _____

4. What is the population of your community? _____

5. Does you agency currently have an animal abuse investigation unit within your department that deals specifically in animal abuse investigations? _____

6. Are the animal control officers in you community peace officers? _____

7. If yes, who do they work for? _____

8. Approximate number of animal investigations your department handled last year?

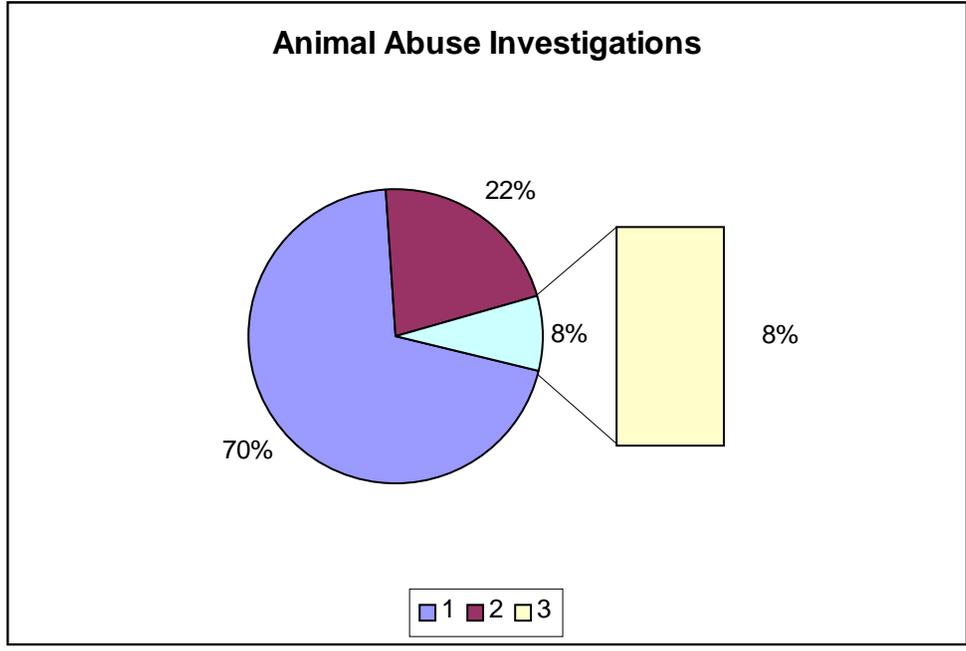
Comments:

APPENDIX B

Departments Surveyed

- 1. State of Texas- Attorney Generals Office-CID**
- 2. Farmers Branch Police Department**
- 3. Pampa Police Department**
- 4. Abilene Police Department**
- 5. Bexar County Sheriff's Office**
- 6. Spring ISD Police Department**
- 7. Rowlett Police Department**
- 8. Austin Police Department**
- 9. Jasper Police Department**
- 10. Princeton Police Department**
- 11. Houston Metro Police Department**
- 12. Collin County Sheriff's Office**
- 13. Houston ISD Police Department**
- 14. Stafford Police Department**
- 15. Katy ISD Police Department**
- 16. Plano Police Department**
- 17. University of Texas Police Department**
- 18. Texas Park and Wildlife Department**

APPENDIX C



Animal Abuse Investigations conducted by surveyed departments.

- 1. 70 % handled their own cases through their CID division.
- 2. 22 % did not handle any animal abuse cases.
- 3. 8% referred animal abuse cases o local agencies.

Law enforcement agencies surveyed to inquire if they had an animal abuse unit specifically assigned to investigate animal abuse. Out of the 14 departments who returned surveys, 100% did not have an animal abuse unit within their police agency.

