



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2016

### I39 Among a German Sample of Forensic Patients: Previous Animal Abuse Mediates Between Psychopathy and Sadistic Actions

Stupperich Alexandra\*, Police Academy Niedersachsen, Bürgermeister-Stahn Wall, Nienburg (Weser), Niedersachsen 31582, GERMANY; and Micha Strack, University of Goettingen, Georg-Elias-Mueller-Institute of Psychology, Goettingen, GERMANY

After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the connection between animal abuse, psychopathy, and sadism. This will be useful for performing risk management and risk analysis on forensic patients.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by making the link between sadistic actions against humans and animals.

Recent research has uncovered a number of developmental pathways through which humans can develop a tendency to show sadistic behavior during crimes. From a broad field of risk factors, personality traits such as callous, unemotional features (e.g., lack of guilt, lack of empathy, callous use of others for one's own gain) appear early and are relatively stable from childhood to early adolescence.<sup>1</sup> One way of acting out Callous, Unemotional (CU) features is to harm and maltreat animals.<sup>2</sup> In an attempt to explain the relationship of psychopathy and severe violent behavior, this study associates former animal abuse, psychopathy, and sadistic staging within forensic patients. Two topics are addressed: (1) could former animal abuse be identified by a psychopathy checklist profile?; and, (2) does animal abuse statistically mediate between psychopathy and sadistic staging? In a German forensic hospital, 60 patients were investigated. Animal abuse was assessed via Face-to-Face (FtF) interview, Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL:SV) was administered, and sadistic staging was identified by file records.

Discriminant analysis separated former animal abuse by high adolescent antisocial behavior, superficialness, lack of remorse, lack of empathy, and grandiosity. Discriminant analyses separated the 10 animal abusers from the 50 non-abusers by a weighted function of the 12 PCL:SV items ( $\chi^2_{(12)}=36.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ; 87% correct classifications,  $\kappa=.61$ ). The discriminant function could be interpreted by its loadings of high adolescent antisocial behavior ( $r=.63$ ), superficiality ( $r=.50$ ), lack of remorse ( $r=.45$ ), lack of empathy ( $r=.40$ ), and grandiosity ( $r=.39$ ). Animal abusers scored significantly higher than non-abusers.

These findings fit with Porter, Campbell, Woodworth, and Birt, who found that psychopaths who killed showed higher factor 1 scores.<sup>3</sup> They concluded that the psychopath's aggressive behavior is controlled, not affective. Using animals as early targets may be an expression of this controlled predatory behavior: on the one hand, animal abuse necessarily implies controlling a creature, but on the other hand, the psychopath learns how to control his own feelings and actions. Additionally, the obsequious behavior of animals may increase the psychopaths' superficial and grandiose feelings.

The second goal of this study was to analyze the pathway among psychopathy, animal abuse, and sadistic acting in forensic patients. The mediation from psychopathy to sadistic staging through animal abuse was found to be a complete one. Sadism and psychopathy have often been theoretically and clinically associated.<sup>4</sup> By prediction of sadistic acting using the total psychopathy scores, the findings were replicated and analyses of animal abuse foster that association. The results, although limited in sample size, fit with a model of animal abuse as a causal step toward sadistic crimes. Hence, information on animal abuse supports risk analysis.

#### Reference(s):

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#### Psychopathy, Sadism, Animal Abuse

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