CRUELTY TO ANIMALS - AN ABUSIVE HUMAN - ANIMAL RELATIONSHIP.
CASE STUDY - ROMANIA

Mircea Lazar¹, Ozana Hritcu¹, Luminita Ailincai¹, Geta Pavel¹, Beatrice Gabriela Ioan²,³,*, Andrei Scripcaru², Roxana Lazar¹

¹“Ion Ionescu de la Brad” Iaşi University of Life Sciences – Faculty of Veterinary Medicine,
²“Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy, ³Institute of Legal Medicine, Iasi, Romania

Abstract: The way animals are treated by humans has been a subject of debate for a long time, but people's attitudes towards animal welfare are still very different, and real concern for animals has developed in recent decades. The European Union (EU) has some of the highest animal welfare regulatory standards in the world which include general requirements regarding breeding, transport, but also requirements specific to certain animal species (such as the slaughter of farm animals). Although the subject is addressed more and more often, there are still deficiencies in terms of following simple rules at least at the minimum level.

Animal cruelty can take many forms from neglect, animal hoarding, to organized abuse, ritual abuse or sexual abuse. These cases cannot be overlooked as they have been shown to have serious implications, from the great suffering inflicted to animals to their possible connection to crimes and abuse against humans.

Combating cruelty against animals is a journey that must be undertaken by all of us, including the governments and the NGOs. At the same time, educating the population plays a major role in the efforts to prevent and combat animal cruelty.

Keywords: animals, cruelty, abuse, welfare, legislation.

INTRODUCTION

Animals have had a profound influence on human societies in the course of history. The human-animal relationship is central to the field of anthrozoology that has a wide spectrum of applicability in many other fields such as medicine, philosophy, archeology, art, animal protection, animal-assisted therapy [1]. The way animals are treated has been a subject of debate for a long time, but people's attitudes towards animal welfare are still very different, and real concern for animals has developed in recent decades [2, 3]. At the same time, research on animal cruelty has seen significant growth over the past two decades [4].

Animal welfare defines the physical and mental state of animals relative to the conditions in which they live and die. Thus, animal welfare means that the animal is healthy, comfortable, well-fed, safe, does not suffer as a result of unpleasant conditions such as pain, fear or distress and can exhibit behaviors that are important for its physical and mental state. In this context, the five freedoms that are likely to ensure animal welfare are internationally recognized: "freedom from hunger, thirst and malnutrition; freedom from fear and distress; freedom from physical and thermal discomfort; freedom from pain, injury and disease; and freedom to express normal patterns of behaviour" [5].

By “pet” is meant any animal that is intended to be kept by humans, in the house or in the yard, for pleasure or for companionship. The owners of the animals have the obligation not to cause them physical or mental pain or unnecessary suffering [6,7] and, at the same time, not to abandon them. The owner is responsible for the wellbeing and health of the animal, has the obligation to provide it with attention, care and the necessary conditions for the proper development, taking into account the individual ethological peculiarities of each species.

Cruelty, mistreatment and abuse of animals are terms that vary from one country to another, they can

*Correspondence to: Beatrice Gabriela Ioan, "Grigore T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, Romania, E-mail: ioanbml@yahoo.com. All authors contributed equally to this work.
be used as synonyms, being interchangeable terms that define unacceptable social behaviors that intentionally cause pain, suffering, stress or even the death of animals. Animal cruelty can affect any animal species, but dogs and cats are the most frequently victimized [8,9]. The term "battered pet syndrome" refers to the physical, social, emotional, sexual harm or intentional neglect of animals [10].

Cruelty to animals is quite widespread, even if the phenomenon is underestimated because many of the cases are hidden and unreported [4].

Acts of cruelty to animals have an increased prevalence in Romania compared to other European Union countries [11]. At the same time, the legal framework in Romania although much improved in the last years still offers a lower degree of protection for the well-being of wild and domestic animals, pets, and those on farms compared to other countries of the world [12].

The aim of this article is to describe and analyze the different ways animal cruelty can manifest itself by presenting five cases where pet animals have suffered as a result of acts of physical cruelty or neglect by humans. At the same time, the authors analyze the European and Romanian legal frameworks aimed at ensuring the wellbeing of animals and protecting them against acts of cruelty.

**CASE PRESENTATIONS**

**Case 1**

In this case four puppies were left to die on the street after being almost completely covered in hot tar, most likely from a construction site (Fig. 1).

**Case 2**

A female dog was found abandoned on the side of the road (Fig. 2). It had bruises, multiple wounds on the cephalic and cervical region, open wounds on the abdomen and large tumor-like lesions (Fig. 3). Most likely, the open lesions occurred as a result of human aggression.
The veterinarians who took over the case devotedly dealt with the dog’s tragedy, treated the injuries and handed it over, after a period of hospitalization, to a shelter that allowed it to stay in a healthy environment where it received food, water and attention, waiting for the moment when it would be adopted and integrated into a loving family (Fig. 4).

**Case 3**

The next case that catches the eyes of animal lovers is the case of a dog that was kept in unfavorable conditions that caused it round wounds and lesions similar to animal bites on the front limbs. Due to the unfavorable conditions that favored the growth and multiplication of bacteria locally the lesions became infected and necrotic. Thus, it was necessary to amputate the front right limb (Figs 5, 6) in order to prevent septicemia. Its family refused to keep a “disabled” animal, therefore a benevolent association finally identified an adoptive family for the rescued dog.

After a period of hospitalization and post-operative treatment, it was ready for its new family (Fig. 7).

**Case 4**

A dog was left with unkempt, matted fur. Although it was progressively losing weight and refusing food, its movement and general condition worsened considerably, the owner was not worried. Later, he came with the animal to a veterinary clinic where he requested the animal’s haircut. Crypts where dozens of larvae were growing and developing were discovered under the hairy covering (Fig. 8). Although the veterinarians tried their best to completely toilet and clean the galleries formed by the worms, their work was in vain. The process was already advanced, the biochemical analyzes and blood count revealed intense signs of septicemia. Antibiotic therapy and local toileting of the areas were tried for several days, but unfortunately the animal’s condition worsened and the therapy only prolonged its agony. The main issue in this case was the carelessness of the owner, his inability and disinterest of raising the animal in an at least decent environment.

**Case 5**

Negligence can inflict major suffering to animals, such is the case of a puppy who suffered a road accident that resulted in exophthalmos and blindness due to head trauma (Figs 9, 10).
DISCUSSION

The cases presented in this article highlight that cruel behaviors against animals could be acts of omission, i.e., various types of abuse as well as acts of commission, i.e., negligence towards animals [13]. Unfortunately, in both situations the impact of such acts on the victimizing animals may be devastating. Such cases are quite frequently encountered by veterinarians and their number is much higher, as there are reports of cruelty applied to other species as well: horses, farm animals and even wild animals.

Animal cruelty: causes and consequences

Animal cruelty is a complex social phenomenon [13] which has a multitude of reasons, causes and situational factors, so we can say that “there is no single type of companion animal cruelty offense, nor is there one typical type of companion animal cruelty offender” [14].

Studies show that structural community disadvantages such as poverty, lack of education and opportunity weaken social bonds, social control and consensus against crime and encourage animal cruelty. As for the characteristics of the aggressors, in the vast majority of cases they are men, who as a rule are actively involved and commit acts of cruelty towards animals, with a high degree of violence. Women, in turn, can commit acts of cruelty towards animals, but they mostly commit acts of passive cruelty, such as neglect, hoarding, or poisoning. Most of the aggressors are young, around or under 30 years old [4, 15, 16].

Animal cruelty requires attention and an appropriate approach both because of the suffering inflicted to animals and because of its association with acts of domestic violence against humans [13, 17] which is “one of the most pressing social problems of the contemporary world” [18].

The relationship between animal cruelty and domestic violence has been studied extensively. Studies show a pattern of violence that perpetuates itself from childhood to adulthood, in terms of the relationship between exposure to or involvement in acts of animal cruelty in childhood and acts of animal cruelty and violence towards people in adulthood [4, 19, 20]. However, animal cruelty is associated not only with violence against family members but also with violence against people in general [4].

Since animal cruelty is an important indicator of other types of domestic abuse, the One Health movement recommended better communication and cross-reporting between veterinarians, social workers, animal shelters, and the humane medical community in a joint effort to reduce violence against all family members, be they humans or animals [4]. Therefore, attitudes towards violence, family and animals largely influence the social response to animal cruelty [13].

European and Romanian legislation on animal protection and welfare

The European Union has some of the highest animal welfare regulatory standards in the world which include general requirements regarding breeding, transport, but also requirements specific to certain animal species (such as the slaughter of farm animals). Although the subject is addressed more and more often, there are still deficiencies in terms of following simple rules at least at the minimum level.

The European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals contains provisions aimed at protecting animals, and at establishing a basic common standard of
attitude and practice towards pet ownership. Provisions are included on breeding, boarding, and keeping of pet animals. The Convention also aims at regulating trading in and breeding of pet animals, at prohibiting the modification of their natural appearance and at reducing the number of stray animals [21].

In Romania, the Government Ordinance no. 42/2004 regarding the organization of the sanitary and food safety activity, states in its first article that "the protection of animals is a state matter and a permanent duty of all citizens" [22]. Animal welfare is regulated by the Law no. 205/2004 concerning the protection of animals and Law no. 60/2004 regarding the ratification of the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals. Law no. 205/2004 regulates the necessary measures to ensure the welfare and living conditions of animals with or without owners. At the same time, the law 205/2014 establishes the National Sanitary Veterinary and Food Safety Authority as the national authority in the field of animal protection [23, 24].

The situation of the stray dogs is legally regulated by the Emergency Ordinance no. 155/2001 [25]. In the case of dogs with owners, the specific legal regulation is provided by the Order no. 1/2014 [26].

According to the above mentioned legal instruments, the following practices are considered acts of cruelty against animals: killing animals with intent; practicing shooting at domestic or captive animals; organizing fights between animals or with animals; the use of live animals for animal training or to control their aggression; using animals for exhibitions, shows, advertising, film-making and similar purposes, if these activities cause them physical and mental suffering, or injuries; abandoning and/or driving away an animal whose existence depends on human care; administration of substances intended to stimulate the physical capacities of animals during sports competitions, in the form of doping; mistreatment and torture of animals; surgical interventions intended to change the appearance of an animal or for other non-curative purposes, such as codomy, ear cropping, vocal cord sectioning, claw removal, beak and teeth clipping; causing physical and mental suffering by any means; separating the cubs from their mothers before they are at least eight weeks old; capture of animals by methods other than those provided by law; the use of tranquilizer weapons in situations other than to immobilize animals; zoophilia.

Law no. 61/1991 for the sanctioning of acts of violation of rules of coexistence, public peace and order, stipulates that "leaving animals at liberty or without supervision that may pose a danger to people or property" is a contravention which is sanctioned with a fine [27].

Added to the previously described law, the Emergency Ordinance no. 55/2002 regulates the regime for keeping dangerous or aggressive dogs. Although it was formulated following some unfortunate events that resulted in victims and whose protagonists were dogs from breeds considered to be dangerous, the ordinance brings important clarifications regarding the meaning of the term "aggressive dog" [28].

The Romanian legislation also transposed of European Union legislation by establishing the Animal Police. According to the law no. 138 of May 13, 2022 for the amendment and completion of Law no. 205/2004 on the protection of animals, police officers from the Romanian Police have duties to protect animals that are in danger, by placing them in shelters or by entrusting them to animal protection associations [29].

The role of veterinary forensics in preventing and combating animal cruelty

Veterinary forensics is a relatively new medical field. The use of specific forensic science methods in the investigation of crimes committed against animals - such as neglect and abuse - has increased in recent decades, especially after the 1970s. The application of forensic science in the veterinary field has intensified on the one hand due to the demonstration of the link between the crimes committed against animals and those committed against humans, and on the other hand due to the improvement of laws aimed at the protection of animals [30].

Collaboration between experts in different areas of forensic science can improve the investigation of cases and increase the quality of the evidences obtained. For example, diagnostic imaging methods are increasingly used in the investigation of medico-legal cases [31] and are also gaining increased interest in the field of veterinary forensics [32] in the investigation of projectile injuries, bone injuries or injuries that may go unnoticed at autopsy [30]. Veterinarians and forensic scientists may also collaborate in investigating crime scenes in cases involving domestic abuse against humans and/or animals, for analyzing - for example, bloodstain patterns, evaluating animals or animal traces in relation to the rest of the scene [33].

In conclusion, animal cruelty is a social phenomenon with complex causality and implications which requires adequate legal and social intervention. Paying more attention to the education of population,
especially of children, teaching them to empathize with animals and their needs, may contribute to the decrease of such cases.

Although the Romanian sanitary-veterinary legislative framework has been much improved, due to lack of information or ignorance of the population, not all cases are brought to the attention of the authorities to be resolved and sanctioned according to the legislative provisions. The close collaboration between Animal Police, veterinarians and psychologists can discover the causes of animal cruelty, in order to prevent future similar occurrences and also abuse to children, life partners, other family members and humans in general.

Conflict of interest
The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment
The cases presented in this article belong to the archive of the Laboratory of Forensic Medicine and Necropsy Diagnosis of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in Iași and of the Veterinary Sanitary and Food Safety Directorate of Iași. The photographic support was offered by the Animal Police service.

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