DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL TOOLS FOR THE PREVENTION OF CHILDHOOD ANIMAL CRUELTY: A CRIMINOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

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1 INTRODUCTION

The study of childhood animal cruelty in Hungary – as well as at the international level – is particularly important, as this behaviour can serve as an early indicator of later violent or antisocial conduct. The criminological literature highlights that the combined influence of various factors – biological, psychological, familial, and social – contributes to a child's tendency to abuse animals [1].

Teachers and professionals working with children play a key role in both prevention and early detection. Within the educational system, the implementation of animal protection pedagogy, the development of empathetic skills, and education in responsible pet ownership can all contribute to reducing the incidence of animal cruelty during childhood. Through the coordinated functioning of early warning systems, the collaboration between families and professionals, and the understanding and application of established criminological and psychological models, potential risks can be managed more effectively to provide better protection for children.[2] Animal cruelty is not merely an animal welfare issue; it can also indicate problems within the child and family environment. Therefore, from the perspective of child protection and prevention, it is crucial that appropriate professional training, methodological guidelines, and multidisciplinary collaborations are in place [3].

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The essential pillar of the investigation was an anonymous, self-administered survey, which was specifically distributed among Hungarian educators. The survey was accessible from December 11, 2022, to November 11, 2023 – covering an 11-month period – which facilitated data collection over an extended timeframe and contributed to the diversity of respondents. It was hosted on the Google Forms platform and promoted via Facebook and e-mail, thereby enhancing its broader reach. In total, 2023 participants completed the survey, providing a significant sample for statistical analyses.

3 RESULTS

Teachers expressed strong awareness and concern about childhood animal cruelty but identified significant gaps in available resources and institutional support. A noteworthy proportion of teachers reported having encountered at least one suspected case of animal cruelty during their careers, with many recalling situations involving persistent teasing, neglect, or physical harm inflicted on pets or stray animals. These findings highlight the urgent need for improved institutional frameworks, offering teachers not only knowledge but also reassurance and concrete strategies for dealing with challenging cases of suspected animal cruelty.

4 CONCLUSIONS

There is a strong demand for structured, adaptable educational tools addressing childhood animal cruelty. The innovative result of the paper is a so called TeSzeresd! program, based on teachers' responses. The program was created in response to identified gaps and needs. Its primary goal is to help educators recognize early signs of abusive or violent behaviour toward animals in children. Teachers will learn how to respond accordingly. It's essential for teachers to receive precise tools on how to handle suspected animal abuse cases. Preventive methods will also be provided. These methods aim to develop children's empathy, emotional intelligence, and sense of responsibility. The program focuses on early detection and suitable action. It equips teachers with necessary knowledge for intervention. Overall, it aims to improve child development in emotional and ethical areas.

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