



Animal Cruelty against Dogs and Cats: Characterization of the Victim and the Perpetrator in a Retrospective Study

**Mary Hellen de Jesus Rodrigues Dias ^a,
Mariana Moreira Lopes ^a, Akzza Auxiliadora De Oliveira ^b,
Adriana Paes Moura ^b, Úrsula Nunes Rauecker ^a,
Ana Maria de Souza Almeida ^c,
Veridiana Maria Brianezi Dignani de Moura ^c,
Wânia Clelia dos Reis Brito Paranaíba ^a
and Eduardo de Paula Nascente ^{a*}**

^a *Department of Veterinary Medicine, School of Medical and Life Sciences, Pontifical Catholic University of Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil.*

^b *UPAVET - Goiânia Public Veterinary Hospital, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil.*

^c *School of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science, Federal University of Goiás, Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. The Authors MHDJRD, AADO and APM developed the experimental protocol, conducted the analyses, and drafted the initial version of the manuscript. The Authors UNR and MML conducted the literature review. The Authors AMDSA and WCDRBP assisted in drafting the manuscript and analyzing the data. The Authors VMBDDM and EDPN designed and supervised the study analysis, reviewed, and revised the final version of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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*Corresponding author: E-mail: eduardopaula@pucgoias.edu.br, eduardodepaula100@gmail.com;

ABSTRACT

The rise in animal cruelty crimes has become a significant social issue, largely due to increasing awareness of animal sentience. Research highlights a strong correlation between animal cruelty cases and psychological disorders in perpetrators, suggesting that violent behavior may, in some cases, be predictable. This study aims to analyze cases of animal cruelty treated at the public veterinary service in Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil, examining the characteristics of the animal victims and the profiles of the perpetrators to promote awareness of animal protection. This study analyzed 10 animal cruelty cases reported in Goiânia (August-November 2023), documenting victim profiles, clinical evaluations, and case outcomes. Necessary interventions for each individual were described, considering the severity and specific needs of the patients. Among the 10 cases analyzed, three involved rescues carried out by public agencies with support from the Animal Protection Group of the Civil Police of Goiás. Five cases were referred to by animal protection advocates, and two were reported by local residents. The results revealed a higher prevalence of such crimes involving adult male dogs, accounting for 62.5% of cases. Of the cruelty types, 80% involved physical abuse or aggression, with 70% of these cases showing traumatic injuries identified during examinations, as well as conditions such as dehydration and ectoparasite infestations. The characterization of the perpetrators indicated a predominance of male individuals, Caucasian, aged over 40 years. Despite ongoing efforts, the low reporting rate highlights the urgent need for stronger public policies and awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Animal cruelty; animal welfare; awareness; physical aggression; negligence.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the fight for animal rights has become an increasingly prominent social cause, acknowledging that animals are sentient beings. The number of cases involving crimes of animal cruelty has shown significant growth, primarily due to the close proximity between humans and pets. Brazil ranks as the third-largest country globally in terms of pet population (Abinpet, 2022). According to data from the (Instituto Pet Brasil, 2022), the country is home to approximately 144.3 million animals. However, it is estimated that 10.8% of these animals live in vulnerable conditions, representing around 8.8 million individuals.

Many people hold a misguided view of what constitutes animal cruelty, likely stemming from misinformation or a distorted perception that animals do not have welfare needs (Porto, 2020). Crimes of animal cruelty go beyond acts of aggression that result in physical harm. In an effort to correct such misconceptions, cruelty is now classified as either neglect (physical or psychological) or abuse/aggression (physical or psychological) (McMillan, 2005; Tostes et al., 2017). Consequently, animals' basic needs must

be met, ensuring they are not subjected to suffering that prevents them from expressing natural behaviors and upholding the five freedoms of animal welfare.

From a legal perspective, animal protection in Brazil officially began with Decree No. 24,645 on July 10, 1934, under the presidency of Getúlio Vargas. Currently, crimes of animal cruelty are addressed under Law No. 9,605 of 1998, known as the "Environmental Crimes Law," which establishes criminal and administrative sanctions for conduct harmful to the environment (Brasil, 1998). Since then, Brazilian legislation concerning animal welfare has undergone continual updates. Until 2019, Article 32 of the Environmental Crimes Law stipulated that acts of abuse, cruelty, harm, or mutilation against wild, domestic, or domesticated animals, whether native or exotic, could result in imprisonment for three months to one year, in addition to a fine.

However, in 2020, a significant amendment to Article 32 was enacted, which remains in effect to date. The penalty was increased to two to five years of imprisonment, alongside fines and a ban on ownership in cases involving acts of abuse, cruelty, injury, or mutilation specifically targeting

dogs or cats (Brasil, 2020). This change followed the approval of Bill No. 1,095/2019, which became Law No. 14,064/2020, commonly known as the Sansão Law. The law was named in honor of Sansão, a Pit Bull that became a symbol of animal cruelty after having its pelvic limbs amputated by its abusers.

Evaluating and studying cases of animal cruelty extends beyond addressing the welfare of affected animals. Analyzing the characteristics of perpetrators often uncovers other crimes and underlying societal issues (Lisboa, 2007). Animal cruelty has been directly linked to psychological disorders among perpetrators, with studies revealing that children who mistreat animals often exhibit personality and conduct disorders (Franco, 2016). There is also a strong association between perpetrators of animal cruelty and criminal behavior, underscoring the importance of investigating their personal lives to rule out domestic violence and prevent future tragedies (Linzey, 2009).

Thus, this study aimed to analyze cases handled by the public veterinary service unit in Goiânia, Goiás, involving animals subjected to cruelty, as well as their respective perpetrators. The findings will contribute to identifying the characteristics of animals commonly victimized and investigating possible patterns and tendencies among perpetrators. This will provide insights into the motivations behind such acts and, most importantly, foster awareness of society's moral responsibility to protect the lives and integrity of animals.

The subsequent sections of this study outline the veterinary cases observed at the referenced public service unit, highlighting aspects indicative of cruelty and defining the profiles of the perpetrators. Additionally, the study presents results and a discussion of the topic, aiming to compare the findings with existing theoretical frameworks and to offer meaningful contributions to the field.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Case Selection

For the present retrospective study, 10 cases identified as resulting from animal cruelty were selected. These cases were chosen from medical records of patients attended and monitored at the Veterinary Emergency Care Unit in the municipality of Goiânia, Goiás, Brazil,

from August 24 to November 17, 2023. All the information obtained is presented descriptively.

2.2 Classification of Animal Cruelty

As outlined by (McMillan, 2005) and (Tostes et al., 2017), all cases were classified based on the type of cruelty inflicted, distinguishing between neglect and abuse/aggression, each of which could further be subdivided into physical or psychological forms. To categorize these modalities, the definitions of each term were considered to appropriately assign the specific type of cruelty.

Neglect does not involve explicit physical aggression but rather the lack of adequate care for the animal, which can result in physical or psychological suffering. Neglect may extend beyond the animal itself to encompass the living environment. In essence, neglect consists of the deprivation or disregard of basic care, such as proper nutrition, medical attention, and suitable living conditions, all essential for the animal's well-being (McMillan, 2005; Tostes et al., 2017).

In contrast, abuse or aggression involves active actions that cause immediate or long-term harm to animals, whether physical or psychological. The impact of these forms of cruelty is reflected in the behavior and quality of life of the animals, often leaving visible physical evidence. In these cases, the perpetrator is aware of the harm caused, revealing deliberate cruelty and disregard for the animal's integrity and well-being (McMillan, 2005; Tostes et al., 2017).

2.3 Data Recording

Information was recorded for all cases, whenever possible, regarding species, breed, sex, and age. Age was categorized as neonates (up to four weeks), juveniles (four weeks to two years), adults (two to nine years), or seniors (over nine years). Additional data were collected, including the animal's origin (domestic or stray) and the location where the animals were found or subjected to cruelty, as described in Table 1. For this study, there was no need for submission to the Ethics Committee, as no experiments or analyses requiring its approval were conducted, and only patient data were collected.

Photographs and videos available for the cases were analyzed to classify the nature of the cruelty more accurately and the environmental conditions in which the animals lived. These visual records provided evidence of the

circumstances and served as concrete documentation for case reporting. Photographs were also used to monitor the clinical progress of some animals undergoing treatment at the unit.

2.4 Patient Management

Upon arrival at the public veterinary care unit, all animals subjected to cruelty underwent a medical consultation, including visual and physical examinations. During the initial evaluation, observations were made of the animals' behavior, noting signs such as aggressiveness, shock, fear, or calmness.

Anamnesis was performed based on information provided by rescuers, though often limited due to a lack of detailed history. This information was also recorded. Physical examinations included measuring basic parameters and visual assessments, akin to routine consultations. Depending on the patient's physical and clinical condition, specific diagnostic tests were conducted, and the most appropriate therapeutic approach was determined.

In cases requiring surgical intervention, biological samples were collected for testing, along with other complementary exams as necessary, to stabilize the patient. All animals were prioritized for hospitalization to allow closer monitoring and prevent further physical complications. Protocols such as fluid therapy, analgesics, wound care, sedatives, and other treatments were implemented as needed for optimal case management and patient recovery.

Veterinary reports were prepared for all animals treated at the unit. These reports detailed the animal's history, the condition upon arrival, the therapeutic protocol used (including specific drugs, dosages, and administration frequency), and recommendations for future care.

2.5 Perpetrator Profile and Case Outcome

Efforts were made to gather all possible information about the perpetrators through inquiries directed at those responsible for rescuing the animals. This procedure aimed to profile each perpetrator. When information from rescuers was unavailable, alternative sources, such as news portals or social media profiles, were consulted for specific details. Due to the confidentiality of the investigation, it was not possible to access the official report issued by the Civil Police.

Each perpetrator's characteristics included data on age, gender, residence, potential associated domestic crimes, and their outcomes, noting the types of offenses charged. In cases where such information could not be obtained, the case was not excluded, and the analysis focused on the affected animals instead. Finally, the outcomes for the animals were documented, including mortality, transfer to animal shelters, adoption, or referral to another hospital/clinic for continued treatment.

3. RESULTS

During the monitored period, as previously reported, 10 cases of animal cruelty were observed. In three cases, animals were rescued following reports to public agencies tasked with investigating allegations of possible abuse. In this context, the Animal Protection Group of the Civil Police of Goiás conducted rescue operations for animals subjected to cruelty, frequently resulting in the detention of the offenders.

The unit also received animals under the care of animal advocates (five cases) who took responsibility for the treatment and expenses necessary for the animals' care. Conversely, in two cases referred to the public veterinary service, animals were rescued by local residents living near the area where the incidents occurred.

The characterization of the animals received, as well as the origin and classification of the types of cruelty these animals were subjected to, are presented in Table 1. By classifying each case according to the studied characteristics, certain trends in the occurrence of animal cruelty crimes can be identified.

The most frequently affected species was canine; out of 10 cases, nine involved dogs and three felines. Additionally, it should be noted that all animals monitored were of mixed breed. There was a predominance of adult animals, with eight of the 16 total animals being adults (50%), aged approximately between two and nine years, followed by juveniles, which accounted for five animals (31,25%). Finally, only three neonates were recorded. Regarding sex, 62.5% of the animals were male (10/16), while females accounted for 37.5% (6/16).

Concerning the locations where the animals were rescued, discrepancies were noted during the

data collection process, with precise locations reported in only six cases. Two cases occurred in rural areas (12,5%), and in two others, it was not possible to determine the origin of the animals (12,5%). However, it is important to emphasize that, in general, all animals originated from Goiânia and its metropolitan area.

Regarding the classification of types of cruelty, physical abuse and aggression (Figs. 1 and 2) were reported in 80% of the described cases. Among these, psychological abuse occurred concurrently in three cases. In one case, physical neglect was noted, while both physical and psychological neglect were observed concurrently in another case. Two additional cases were characterized as involving both physical and psychological neglect, with one of these also exhibiting psychological abuse of the animal.

Table 1 presents the main clinical and therapeutic aspects of the patients treated at the public veterinary care unit, as well as the identification of the perpetrator and the outcome of each case. In 70% of the animals treated, traumatic injuries of varying severity were identified and characterized, most of which affected the integumentary system and adjacent structures. Additionally, most of the animals presented dehydration, low body condition scores, and parasitic infestations of varying degrees. Surgical intervention was required in four cases, with three procedures performed at the veterinary emergency care unit and one referred to another veterinary clinic/hospital due to the complexity of the procedure. Two specific cases underwent forensic examination, during which the general physical condition and injuries were assessed, both carried out following judicial orders.



Fig. 1. Photographic records of selected cases of animal cruelty monitored at the public veterinary care unit and grouped without pre-defined criteria. (A) Case 8; (B) Case 4; (C) Case 3



Fig. 2. Photographic records of selected cases of animal cruelty monitored at the public veterinary care unit and grouped without pre-defined criteria. (A) Case 6; (B) Case 2; (C) Case 10

Table 1. Individual characteristics and origin of patients subjected to different types of cruelty treated at the public veterinary care unit in Goiânia from August 24 to November 17, 2023

Case	Identification	Origin	Characterization of Cruelty
1	3 felines; mixed breed; neonates; 1 female; 2 males.	Household animal.	Physical and Psychological Abuse and Aggression: Animals were placed inside plastic bags and abandoned.
2	Canine; mixed breed; adult; male.	Animal found by an animal advocate in a rural area near Goiânia.	Physical and Psychological Abuse and Aggression: Animal subjected to intentional physical injury (beating) and abandonment.
3	Canine; mixed breed; adult; female.	Animal found on a street in Jardim Balneário Meia Ponte by a resident.	Physical and Psychological Aggression: Ocular trauma (penetrating injury) and abandonment.
4	3 canines; mixed breed; juveniles; males.	Animals from a household rescued by the Civil Police of Goiás.	Physical Abuse and Aggression: Animals mutilated with a kitchen knife. Previous history of similar incidents.
5	Canine; mixed breed; adult; male.	Stray animal. Rescued by animal advocates.	Physical Abuse and Aggression: Animal presenting with blunt cranial trauma caused by a homeless individual using a piece of wood.
6	Canine; mixed breed; adult; female.	Household animal. Rescued by the Civil Police of Goiás.	Physical and Psychological Neglect: Animal kept in prolonged social isolation, confined in an unclean environment with restricted light and inadequate ventilation, without access to food or potable water. Owners refused medical assistance.
7	3 canines; mixed breed; 1 juvenile, 2 adults; 2 males, 1 female.	Household animals. Rescued by the Civil Police of Goiás.	Physical and Psychological Neglect, as well as Physical Abuse and Aggression: Animals were confined in a space with restricted access to food, potable water, and no environmental enrichment. They also exhibited multiple skin lesions indicative of intentional physical aggression.
8	Canine; mixed breed; adult; male.	Origin unidentified. However, it was reported that the animal was from a household and rescued by an animal advocate.	Physical and Psychological Neglect, as well as Psychological Abuse: A household animal was left outside its residence, where it suffered an attack by another stray dog. The owner had been traveling for several days and left the animal outside without any care or veterinary assistance.
9	Canine; mixed breed; adult; female.	Animal from a rural area near Goiânia, rescued by a local resident. Origin unknown.	Physical Abuse and Aggression: Animal subjected to amputation of the left pelvic limb (mutilation) by an individual (farmer).
10	Canine; mixed breed; juvenile; female.	Origin unidentified. Stray animal rescued by an animal advocate.	Physical Abuse and Aggression, as well as Physical Neglect: According to available information, the animal was intentionally run over by a motor vehicle.

Table 2. Clinical aspects, therapeutic management, perpetrator characterization, and case outcomes of dogs and cats subjected to different types of cruelty treated at the public veterinary care unit in Goiânia from August 24 to November 17, 2023

Case	Clinical Aspects	Therapeutic Management	Aggressor	Outcome
1	The three felines, still in the nursing stage, did not exhibit significant clinical alterations.	They were warmed and fed with a nutritional supplement.	Not identified.	All the animals were adopted by the same resident who found them.
2	The animal presented a body condition score of 3/9, lacerated-contused wounds around the left eye with irregular edges, purulent exudate, a foul odor, and a myiasis larval infestation, as well as a hemorrhagic lesion on the right ear pinna.	The wounds were treated, including cleaning, removal of myiasis larvae, and debridement of necrotic tissue. The patient was stabilized and underwent enucleation of the left eye and suturing of the right ear pinna.	Not identified.	After the surgical procedure, the animal was transferred to a partner animal shelter to be made available for adoption later.
3	The animal exhibited penetrating injuries in both eyes, impairing their functionality. The wounds were infected and showed an intense inflammatory process. The animal had a body condition score of 3/9.	After confirming the loss of function in the left eye, the wound was cleaned and treated locally. The animal was stabilized and underwent enucleation of the left eye. The right eye was preserved, and anti-inflammatory medication, analgesics, and antibiotics were prescribed.	Not identified.	After the surgical procedure, the animal was transferred to a partner animal shelter to be made available for adoption later.
4	The animals presented lacerated-contused wounds in the scrotal region, with testicular exposure and sanguineous exudate. All exhibited signs of pain, and one of the animals was at risk of hypovolemic shock.	The animals were stabilized and immediately referred for corrective surgery via orchiectomy. All animals underwent forensic examination, during which general physical conditions and injuries were evaluated.	Male, elderly, 67 years old, Caucasian.	The perpetrator was caught in the act and taken to the Goiânia Central Booking Office. He was charged with animal cruelty. All animals were transferred to an animal shelter.
5	The animal exhibited intense pain, hematoma, and edema in the frontal cranial region.	The animal was evaluated and treated with analgesics, antibiotics, and anti-inflammatory medication.	Homeless man.	The animal was taken in by an animal advocate.
6	The dog presented with cachexia, a body condition score of 1/9, severe dehydration, ectoparasites (fleas and ticks), and jaundiced mucous	The animal was admitted for hospitalization, where it received fluid therapy, vitamin supplements, food, and antiparasitic treatment. A forensic examination was	Two men aged 44 and 47, Caucasian, business owners,	The perpetrators were caught in the act and charged with animal cruelty. The dog was transferred to another facility for treatment but

Case	Clinical Aspects	Therapeutic Management	Aggressor	Outcome
	membranes.	conducted to evaluate the dog's general physical condition.	with good financial status. One identified himself as a pastor.	succumbed two days later.
7	<p>Animal 1: Limping on the right pelvic limb, moderate dehydration, unilateral corneal opacity, low body condition score (3/9), and ectoparasite infestation.</p> <p>Animal 2: Low body condition score (3/9), laceration on the left ear pinna, muscle atrophy in the left pelvic limb, and pale ocular and oral mucous membranes.</p> <p>Animal 3: No external injuries.</p>	<p>All animals underwent physical examinations and were hospitalized.</p> <p>Animal 1: Treated with lactated Ringer's solution for fluid therapy.</p> <p>Animal 2: Wound cleaning, disinfection, and treatment were performed, with follow-up care prescribed until complete healing by secondary intention.</p> <p>Animal 3: Monitoring only.</p>	A 40-year-old Black man who also exploited and mistreated his visually impaired and Alzheimer's-affected 83-year-old father.	The perpetrator was caught in the act and arrested for financial exploitation, mistreatment, and unlawful imprisonment of his father. All animals were transferred to an animal shelter.
8	The animal presented with a lacerated-contused wound on the head, emitting a foul odor, with purulent exudate, myiasis infestation, and skin necrosis. The wound was deep, with possible exposure of the cranial bone. Additionally, puncture wounds were identified in the neck region. The animal had a body condition score of 3/9 and was dehydrated.	Analgesics and antibiotics were administered. The animal was then sedated for wound cleaning. A large number of myiasis larvae were removed, and a significant portion of necrotic skin was debrided. After cleaning, the wound was treated and bandaged.	A woman and her adult son, both Caucasian. Additional details were not provided.	Both perpetrators were referred to the Civil Police of Goiás. Due to the animal's severe condition, it was hospitalized for intensive care.
9	The female dog presented with a body condition score of 5/9 and normochromic mucous membranes. Due to an improperly performed amputation, she engaged in self-mutilation caused by phantom pain, which impeded complete wound	The wound was cleaned, and debridement was performed to facilitate topical treatment. Healing by secondary intention was chosen, along with analgesic therapy.	Not identified.	The animal was transferred to an animal shelter with a prescription for topical treatment of the wound.

Case	Clinical Aspects	Therapeutic Management	Aggressor	Outcome
10	The female dog presented with extreme pain, intense vulvar hemorrhage, and a wound on the pelvic limb. She exhibited a complete fracture of the left cranial and bilateral caudal pubic rami, a complete fracture of the right femur, and subluxation of the left sacroiliac joint.	The dog was treated with fluid therapy and analgesics. She was sedated for radiographic imaging. Due to the complexity of the fractures, surgical intervention for correction was recommended.	Not identified.	The dog was transferred to a partner veterinary clinic, where she underwent orthopedic surgery funded through donations.

For the remaining animals, the approach included wound cleaning and treatment, hydration through fluid therapy, and the administration of vitamin complexes and antiparasitic.

Regarding the perpetrators involved in the cases attended, a complete profile could only be established in half of the cases, even with limited information provided. In three cases, a single perpetrator was involved, all of whom were male. In two other cases, two individuals were implicated; one involved a woman and her son.

Regarding ethnicity, out of the seven identified perpetrators, six were Caucasian (85,71%) and one was Black (14,28%), with the majority being over 40 years old. In one case, it was reported that both perpetrators had a good financial status and identified themselves as "entrepreneurs" when approached. In another instance, it was revealed that the perpetrator also exploited and mistreated his 83-year-old father.

According to the information provided, six perpetrators (85,71%) were referred to the Civil Police of Goiás and charged with animal cruelty crimes, with four of them being detained. As for the animals involved, it was observed that only in Case 1 were the rescued animals adopted, while in one case, the animal succumbed to its injuries. In the remaining situations, the animals were transferred to shelters managed by animal advocates, where they were housed and cared for until they could recover and be made available for adoption.

4. DISCUSSION

Since 1988, domestic animals, such as dogs and cats, have been constitutionally recognized as under human guardianship in Brazil, establishing the obligation for all citizens to promote the protection of these beings (Brasil, 1988). As previously discussed, despite the enforcement of the Environmental Crimes Law, Goiás recently passed Law No. 22.031/2023, recognizing dogs and cats as sentient beings and subjects of rights, acknowledging their capacity to experience pain and distress (Barbosa, 2023). However, the results presented here highlight the severity of the diverse crimes of animal cruelty that are still frequently perpetrated against dogs and cats in Goiânia, a situation similarly noted in a study by (Vieira et al., 2019).

Among the selected cases, nine involved dogs, while only one case involved a cat, a discrepancy that may be attributed to the fact that dogs are more commonly domesticated than cats (Xavier, 2008; Garcia, 2009). Despite variations among studies, the higher incidence of dogs subjected to cruelty was also reported by (Vieira et al., 2021). Furthermore, according to the Brazilian Association of the Pet Products Industry (Abinpet, 2022), there has been significant growth in the pet population in Brazil, with an estimated 67.8 million dogs nationwide.

Behavioral aspects must also be considered when analyzing the higher occurrence of physical and psychological injuries in dogs (Table 2). Canines tend to vocalize frequently, which may cause discomfort to their owners and/or neighbors. Additionally, as diurnal animals that are usually not part of packs, they are more susceptible to acts of cruelty (Rossi, 2017; Moretto, 2022). Conversely, the lower number of cases involving cats could be linked to their natural behavior as elusive creatures, making their capture and confinement more challenging (Carvalho, 2016). Cats also tend to isolate themselves when sick or in pain, complicating the accurate quantification of cruelty cases (Marlet, 2010).

Regarding the sex of the animals affected, there was a higher number of males compared to females, consistent with observations by (Intarapanich et al., 2016, Gomes, 2021). Male animals are often preferred by abusive owners due to being less manageable than females, roaming more frequently, and thus being more prone to inciting violence from owners or suffering automobile accidents (Munro et al., 2001; Intarapanich et al., 2016). However, contrary to this study's findings, (Rodrigues et al., 2017, Vieira et al., 2019) reported a predominance of females among victims of cruelty. The limited number of cases studied and the lack of research quantifying this profile in Goiânia make it challenging to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Young and adult animals were observed to be the most affected age groups, particularly those of mixed breeds (SRD). This finding raises questions about potential aesthetic prejudices against these animals, often considered inferior to those of defined breeds. Another explanation for the predominance of this group in Brazilian municipalities is the lack of effective public policies aimed at controlling the population of

stray and domestic animals, particularly at the municipal level (Moutinho et al., 2015).

Despite being considered endearing and more easily adoptable, neonates and puppies are physically more vulnerable to cruelty, making them easy targets for offenders (Guerra, 2003). Conversely, adult, elderly, and SRD animals face greater challenges in adoption due to their well-defined behavioral habits, cognitive decline, reduced physical activity, and predisposition to various comorbidities (Diverio et al., 2016; Cain et al., 2020).

In the records analyzed in this study, cases of physical abuse and aggression predominated over neglect. Nonetheless, neglect remains the most common form of cruelty among domestic animals, characterized as a passive crime, whereas abuse and aggression are categorized as active crimes (Gomes, 2021). While studies on this profile are scarce, (Brandao et al., 2021) found that abandonment and physical aggression accounted for 19.2% and 6.1% of cruelty crimes against dogs, respectively.

The majority of cruelty cases occurred in socioeconomically vulnerable neighborhoods. (Lima, 2020) established this relationship by evaluating the influence of socioeconomic and emotional factors on animal abandonment and other forms of cruelty. According to these authors, individuals with a household income of up to one minimum wage were significantly more likely to abandon animals (Connor et al., 2018). This profile is particularly common in neglect cases, as family vulnerability often affects not only the well-being of resident animals but also the care of vulnerable children, adults, and the elderly (Hammerschmidt et al., 2014; Brandão et al., 2021).

Regardless of the study region or environmental conditions, (Marlet and Maiorka, 2010) demonstrated that dogs and cats are frequently victims of physical abuse and aggression, a pattern consistent with this study. In five cases, head injuries were observed, affecting the eyes, ear pinna, or skull. This prevalence may be related to a tendency among abusers to target the head and chest of animals (Siqueira et al., 2012; Tong, 2014). A study reported that the main skeletal injuries associated with non-accidental trauma in dogs and cats include skull fractures, dental fractures, rib fractures, and vertebral fractures (Intarapanich et al., 2016).

Beyond the obvious suffering inflicted on animals, these incidents have broader impacts on the community. There is a well-established correlation between animal abuse, domestic violence, and other forms of community violence, a phenomenon termed the Link Theory (Ascione et al., 2007; Hartman et al., 2015; Collins et al., 2018). Animal abuse could serve as a diagnostic indicator of domestic violence. According to (Hutton, 1981), most families involved in animal abuse or neglect are known to social services for having children at risk or showing signs of physical abuse or neglect. This similarity was also observed in one of the cases in this study, where the perpetrator subjected his 83-year-old father to abuse and neglect.

From the results of the cases monitored at the public veterinary care unit in Goiânia, it was evident that men were more frequently perpetrators of cruelty than women. This gender prevalence was similarly reported by (Alves, 2021), who noted that approximately 70% of animal cruelty offenders were men. However, in a psychological profiling study of male and female animal abusers, (Schwartz et al., 2012) found that women scored significantly higher in measures of criminal thinking, were more likely to engage in bullying, and exhibited lower empathy scores.

Four identified perpetrators in this study were adults aged between 40 and 67 years, a demographic also described by Vieira (2023). The age of perpetrators varies based on the study population, type of cruelty committed, and geographic area (urban or rural) (Scheffer et al., 2021). In rural areas, men over 40 years old are often the main offenders, which may be explained by the selective migration of younger populations, particularly women, to urban areas, resulting in the aging and masculinization of rural populations (Maia and Buainain, 2015).

In urban centers, offenders aged 18 to 25 years were predominant among those committing animal cruelty (Arluke and Luke, 1997; Gullone and Clarke, 2008). However, according to the Desistance Theory of Graham and McNeill (2017), the frequency of abusive acts tends to decline steadily after this age, as individuals mature and conform to social and legal norms.

Despite this decline, intrinsic and extrinsic factors may drive the continuation of such behavior. Various motivations for animal cruelty include the belief that animals lack moral consideration, the

transfer of aggression to animals, and the desire to exert power and control over an animal to compensate for feelings of weakness or vulnerability (Gullone, 2011). Thus, even individuals with "normal moral standards" and significant socioeconomic status, as seen in one of the cases studied, may exhibit reprehensible behavior due to moral disengagement and cognitive dehumanization of the victim (Bandura, 1990; 1999).

In most cases observed, animals were referred to the veterinary unit or reported to the police by residents or animal advocates. Despite this, cruelty against animals remains significantly underreported. According to a survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (Ibope, 2019), only 17% of individuals who witnessed acts of animal cruelty made formal reports, while 67% observed abandoned animals, with only 30% choosing to adopt them.

Among the perpetrators identified in this study, all were caught in the act or referred to the Civil Police of Goiás, demonstrating the enforcement of animal cruelty laws. However, research conducted in Rubiataba, Goiás, revealed deficiencies in the effectiveness and application of domestic animal protection laws (Silva, 2021). As previously discussed, changes to the Environmental Crimes Law are insufficient to address this issue. Ethical, cultural, and educational aspects of society must also be considered (Levai, 2003).

Expanding research on this topic at municipal, state, and national levels is essential to recognize the true scope of this problem and further investigate the Link Theory. Such efforts are crucial to developing public policies for building a network to combat these crimes, raising awareness, and enforcing appropriate penalties for offenders. Additionally, perpetrators should be analyzed from an interdisciplinary perspective to evaluate their profiles and understand the social, economic, and psychological factors involved.

5. CONCLUSION

Male, mixed-breed, adult dogs constituted the primary group subjected to animal cruelty crimes treated at the public veterinary care unit in Goiânia, predominantly involving situations of physical abuse and aggression. Additionally, the main perpetrators identified were Caucasian men aged between 40 and 67 years. Despite the

limited number of cases analyzed and presented, the results and discussion herein provide significant insights into understanding animal cruelty crimes committed against dogs and cats.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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