



FirePsych, Inc.

*Specializing in Firesetting Behavior
Assessment • Training • Research*

Baglivio, M. T., Wolff, K. T., DeLisi, M., Vaughn, M. G., & Piquero, A. R. (2016). Juvenile animal cruelty and firesetting behaviour. *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*, doi:10.1002/cbm.2018.

Background Information

- There has been a tendency in criminological and mental health literature to couple fire-setting and animal cruelty as precursors to particularly adverse mental health and/or violent outcomes.
- Jessor's problem-behavior theory highlights interrelatedness of multiple problem areas as indicative of a more global 'life-style' syndrome of risk behavior using both individual and environmental factors.
- Prior research suggests that juvenile fire-setting may be correlated with antisocial behavior, deviance, vandalism, aggression, greater anger, higher prevalence of maltreatment, sexual abuse, and unstable households.
- Research has also found that animal cruelty may be correlated with physical abuse, family dysfunction, substance use/dependence, and family history of antisocial behavior.

Present study

- Examines prevalence and co-occurrence of animal cruelty and fire-setting in a large, diverse, multiyear, statewide sample of juvenile offenders.
- Examines their correlates, including demographic, criminal history, familial, individual and mental health measures.
- Compares young people with fire-setting histories with those inflicting animal cruelty.
- Examine likelihood of animal cruelty, fire-setting, and their co-occurrence given the prevalence of correlates across criminal history, familial, individual and mental health domains.

Method

- Data included demographic, mental health, and offense histories for the entire population of juvenile offenders arrested/formally processed in Florida between November 1, 2005 and December 1, 2014.
- About 300,000 total: 32% females, 44% white

Measures

- Each individual's official offending record was examined for animal cruelty and arson-related charges.
- Risk/need assessment administered to them at time of arrest and formal processing in Florida
 - Semi-structured interview with probing statements
- Rare events logistic regression was used to analyze data.

Results

- Co-occurrence of fire-setting and animal cruelty was rare (.17%) but about two times greater than what was expected by chance (.009%).
- Male gender, older age, white ethnicity, and a number of personal offending and mental health, social attitude, and familial problems were associated with a higher likelihood of each behavior having occurred separately.
- Only male gender and being a victim of sexual abuse increase odds of experiencing fire-setting and animal cruelty together.
- The likelihood of involvement of firesetting or animal cruelty, alone or in combination, increased as youth evinced an increase in 'risk markers' within each of the four domains examined.
- There is little unique about this co-occurrence; findings suggest that sensitivity to the occurrence of each is the best way forward.

Abstract completed by Alaina Millard