

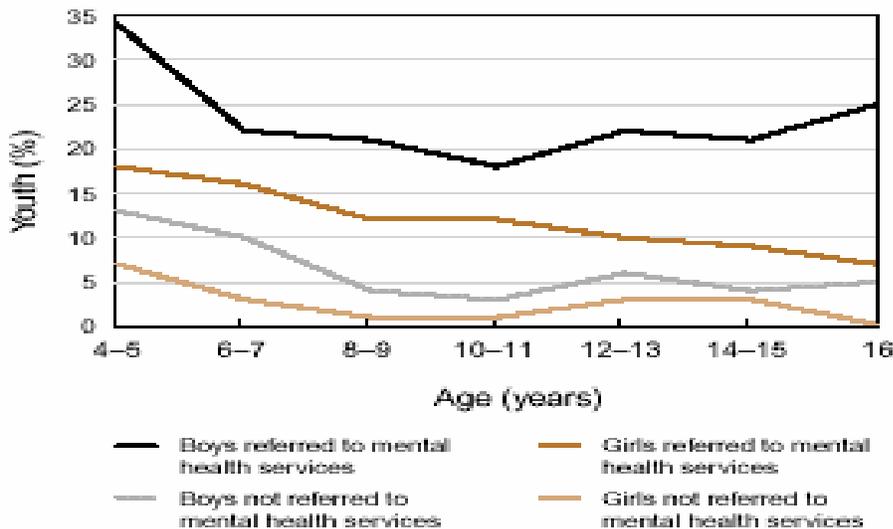
Testimony Given Before The Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee

May 13, 2009

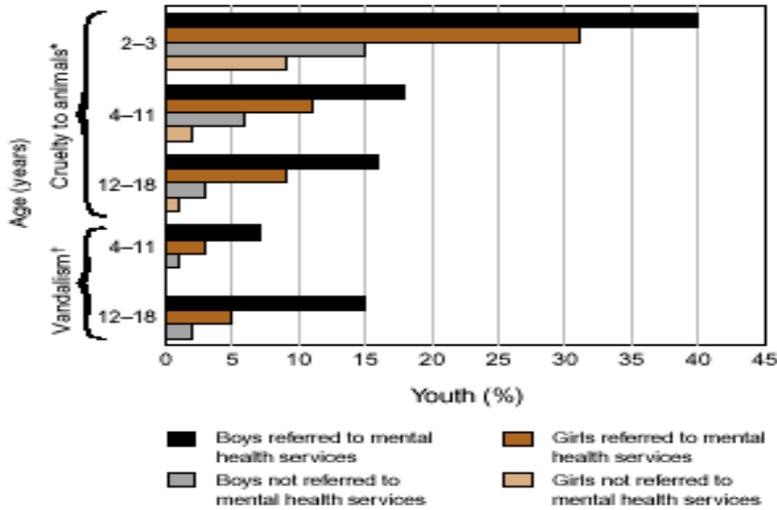
Thank you for allowing me to offer testimony in support of House Bill 55. My name is Daniel L. Davis, Ph.D. I am a psychologist in Columbus, Ohio with specialization in behavioral disorders of children and adolescents as well as forensic psychology. I was invited to present testimony by the Ohio Psychological Association. I am the author of three books and numerous professional journal articles in my area of specialization and hold an academic appointment in the Department of Psychiatry at The Ohio State University and have also taught at Otterbein College with the rank of Adjunct Senior Lecturer. My views are my own and do not carry the endorsement of any group or agency with whom I am affiliated other than OPA.

House Bill 55 requires psychological assessment and therapy to juveniles who have been adjudicated for animal cruelty. It also requires specialized training for providers of these mental health services. This bill addresses the well-documented link in the psychological scientific literature concerning the link between animal cruelty and serious emotional and behavioral problems in youth. In a brief review of the research, studies since have shown that children's acts of animal abuse are some of the strongest and earliest diagnostic indicators of conduct disorder, a serious behavioral disorder, often as young as age six and one half (Ancione 2001). Half of school shooters had a history of animal cruelty (Verlinden, Henson and Thomas, 2000).

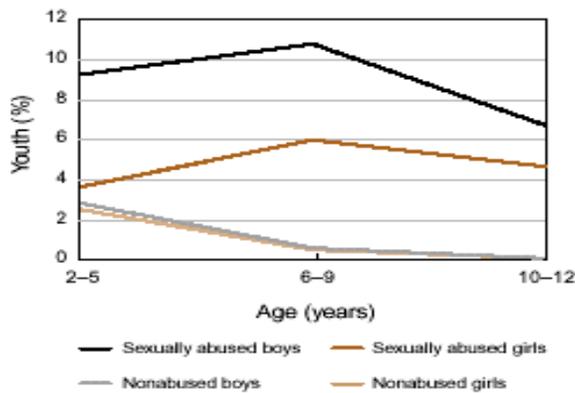
The following graphic visually displays these findings in the Acione research. Using a sample of 2600 youth who were not referred for mental health services and 2600 youth who were in the sample of the Quay Behavior Checklist, the number of youth who abused animals had a significantly higher rate of referral to mental health services:



Youth who committed vandalism had a much lower rate of need for mental health services as contrasted with youth who abused animals:



Sexually abused youth were also much more likely to abuse animals:



This is not only an American phenomenon but an international problem. In a study of incarcerated aggressive criminals in South Africa, 63 percent reported deliberately inflicting harm on an animal as a child (Schiff, Louw and Ascione, 1999).

As you can see from only this brief review, the problem of animal cruelty is a significant one that can provide the clear potential of early identification and intervention with youth. Youth who abuse animals are clearly more at risk for serious emotional and behavioral problems and this important legislation provides the real opportunity to not only end the suffering of an innocent animal but also may provide the tools and opportunity to divert a youth from a pathway of serious emotional and behavioral problems and the subsequent high cost of either treatment or incarceration.

There are specific treatment programs for youth who are abusive to animals (Randour 1999) There are comprehensive models for interventions with youth who abuse animals. Since animal abuse is often an early marker for other serious psychological problems that also have well researched interventions, the prognosis with early intervention for these youth would appear to both hopeful and pragmatic.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Daniel L. Davis, Ph.D.

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