

OF DOGS, CATS AND MEN

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On March 25, the citizen initiative noalmaltratoanimal.org has organized meetings in various cities of Spain to collect signatures that allow tougher penalties against animal abusers. This article seeks to support this initiative arguing that acts of animal abuse have to be harshly condemned and punished because they hide a potential danger not only towards mistreated animals, but towards all the men, women and children who want to live in a society supportive, respectful, empathetic, cultured and healthy.

Out of respect for the sensitivity of those who are reading these lines, there is not a single link to photos of abused animals or descriptions of situations of abuse. Unfortunately there is enough graphic material on the internet about both so that those of you who are interested in knowing more can satisfy your curiosity.

The Penal Code and animal abuse

In Spain, article 337 within Chapter IV of crimes related to the protection of flora, fauna and domestic animals of the [Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, on the Penal Code](#) says that: *"The who by any means or procedure unjustifiably mistreats a domestic or tamed animal, causing death or injuries that seriously impair its health, will be punished with three months to one year in prison and special disqualification from one to three years for the exercise profession, trade or trade related to animals".*

The reality is that prison sentences are handed down only rarely for animal abusers and, even in those cases, rarely if ever do they translate into actual sentences beyond a small financial penalty.

Empathy and emotional intelligence

The [Royal Academy of Language](#) defines empathy as the mental and affective identification of a subject with the mood of another. Empathy is a basic ability of human beings, which allows us to connect with the feelings of another being, and create bonds of sympathy, understanding and tenderness between him and us. Empathy is, in fact, one of the key factors of emotional intelligence.

Empathy develops in us since we are little. Normally it is the family and the environment of the baby that help him through affection to express his emotions and understand the emotions of others. And also to respect. Therefore education in values is essential to develop the empathy of a human being.

Dr. José Gómez Galán, professor at the University of Extremadura and National Award for Educational Research, supports the [theory](#) that education is necessary to make people aware of respect for animals and the environment. *"It is necessary to educate for animal protection. All mammals share between 90% and 99% of DNA. If I have the ability to feel fear, pain, cold or hunger, so does a dog or a horse. What we understand as suffering is produced in a part of the brain that is located in our limbic system and is common to all".*

Dr. Gómez Galán also provides an interesting reflection on the role of ethics in positioning against animal abuse. He affirms that: *"The same ethical, philosophical and theological arguments that are used today to justify the mistreatment of animals are exactly the same that were used a hundred years ago to defend, for example, the existence of slavery. Fortunately today no one dares to deny human rights, but this is a recent achievement, and it was due to the fact that there were people who fought with incontestable arguments. We advocate that they have a dignified life and the right not to be mistreated as sentient beings that they are. Show Compassion for animals, empathizing with their suffering, makes us more human."*

As [Daniel Goleman says in his book Emotional Intelligence](#): *"That capacity, which allows us to know what others feel, affects a wide spectrum of activities (from sales to business management, through compassion, politics, love relationships and the education of our children) and its absence, which is extremely revealing, we can find it in psychopaths, rapists and pedophiles".* Psychopathy is actually

defined as the inability to feel the slightest empathy or compassion, the inability to feel remorse.

There are lots of studies that show that the impulses that generate animal abuse have the same root as the impulses that generate abuse of other human beings. For example:

- In this study, 25% of men incarcerated for violent motives showed substantial cruelty to animals in their childhood. Keller & Felthous Childhood Cruelty toward Animals among Criminals and Non-Criminals, 38 Hum. Rel., 1113-29, (1985).
- In this other one, 88% of the families in the sample treated for child abuse had also mistreated animals. Deviney, Dickert, & Lockwood, The Care of Pets Within Child-Abusing Families. 4 Int'l. J. for Study of Animal Probs. 321-9 (1983).
- This Study on Serial Killers Links Puppy Abuse to Child Murders: Hickey, Serial Murderers and Their Victims, Belmont, CA:Wadsworth, 11 (1991).
- This other shows that of 28 sexual homicides, 36% had mistreated animals in their childhood and 46% in adolescence. Burgess & Douglas, Sexual Homicide: Patterns and Motives, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books (1988)
- And finally, this study on 64 men shows that 48% of rapists and 30% of pedophiles confessed cruelty to animals during their childhood and adolescence. Tingle, Barnard, Robbins, Newman & Hutchinson, Childhood and Adolescent Characteristics of Pedophiles and Rapists, 9 Int'l J.L. & Psychiatry 103-16 (1986).

There is a certain consensus that people who mistreat animals suffer from serious psychological problems, and that mistreatment is almost never limited to animals. Sooner or later it leads to other forms of abuse that involve other human beings.

The reality is that you don't have to be an animal lover to support an initiative against animal abuse. Even if the cats give you a bad feeling and you are not able to see a dog without changing the sidewalk, this also goes with you. Because you are living in the same society with people who are potentially dangerous to the rest of the people with whom you live, capable of harming another living being for the simple insane and insane pleasure of causing pain and anguish. That's sick. And it's wrong.

Isn't there more trouble in the world? And the children who starve? And the tortured people? What about those who don't have a home?

Who do you love more, mom or dad? Is taking a position against animal abuse incompatible with concern for all these problems? Or is it that the fact that there are so many injustices legitimizes animal abuse?

Taking a position against animal abuse is not a position to defend puppies and kittens, it is an attitude of rejection towards violent people with another living being, whatever the breed.

If it is a mental problem or an educational problem, is hardening the sentence the solution?

Sincerely I don't know. I think that the ideal would be to establish the bases to gradually create a more educated, more empathetic, more supportive, more educated society. In any case, every time I ask myself this question I remember an anecdote from when I was little and studied at the Colegio del Sagrado Corazón, in the heart of Vitoria. Every day when I returned home, I would pass by Manuel Iradier street in front of a wall where they had painted a huge, beautiful mural: an open window with a bright sun and a question: "If you have never been in jail, why do you think they are necessary? Someone had written the answer in black spray: "because there's a lot of son of a bitch on the loose."

Two last things to finish. This is the link to the initiative noalmaltratoanimal.org, which also contains the cities, places and times of the demonstration scheduled for the 25th of March across the country. The second is this video, to show that together we can build another society.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Tmvyl1KAg-Y

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