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**YOU CAN JUDGE THE HEART OF A MAN BY HIS TREATMENT OF
ANIMALS: FINDING THE LINKS BETWEEN ANIMAL CRUELTY,
EMPATHY AND AGGRESSION IN A NEW ZEALAND HIGH-SCHOOL
SAMPLE.**

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Abstract

The conclusions emerging from recent research in the United States is that cruelty to animals, especially by children and adolescents, is a form of rehearsal for human-directed aggression (Ascione, 1998a, 1998b, 2005; Feldmann, 1997; Quinn, 2000). The role of empathy in the animal cruelty and aggression link has not been as well explored, but there is some evidence that it is a relevant construct (Zdradzinski, 2010). The present study used the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire-Short Form (BPAQ-SF), the Empathy Quotient Eight (EQ-8) and a modified version of the Youth Assessment for Animal Abuse (YAAA) to investigate the relationship between animal cruelty, aggression and empathy in 133 New Zealand secondary school students aged between 16 and 19 years (M age = 16.8). There was a weak positive relationship between animal cruelty and aggression in the total sample ($r = .185, p = .05$) and a slightly higher weak positive correlation between the physical aggression scale from the BPAQ-SF and animal cruelty ($r = .187, p = .05$). A regression analysis showed aggression and gender accounted for 10.7% of the variance for animal cruelty. When the genders were broken down, the males of the sample had a weak positive relationship between animal cruelty and verbal aggression ($r = .282, p = .05$). In this cohort empathy was not related to animal cruelty but did have a moderate negative relationship with verbal aggression in the males of the sample ($r = -.304, p = .05$). In summary, the present research findings support the findings from overseas suggesting, particularly in a male sample, there is a relationship between animal cruelty and aggression. However, contrary to previous research empathy was not related to animal cruelty in this sample.

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