

Animal Abuse and Human Mental Health

(Summary of meeting with Mr. J. Schefflein, May 12, 2014)

According to article 168 AEUV, the EU and its member states are responsible for „eliminating sources of threats to the physical and mental health“ of their inhabitants. A potential threat to mental health respectively a psychological stressor which may lead to psychosomatic symptoms are confrontations with animal cruelty and suffering in public and in private homes. Animal cruelty has been proven to be closely connected to mental disorders and interpersonal violence of perpetrators, but also the mental health of involuntary witnesses. („The Link“: s. www.nationallinkcoalition.org).



A more permanent exposition to animal suffering requires mental defense mechanisms for self-protection, among them the control and downregulation of empathy. This probably contributes to more generalized unempathic attitudes of children and adult in such countries with high frequency of public animal suffering – towards animal and humans. The prevalence of animal abuse is significantly more frequent among perpetrators of interpersonal violence. Animal abuse is also one of the diagnostic criteria of conduct disorder and antisocial personality disorder (DSM-IV-R or see: http://www.incasa.org/PDF/2011/Animal_Abuse_Human_Abuse.pdf). Also many animal welfare activists and people confronted with animal abuse show mental problems, however different ones such as depression, sleeping disorders, nightmares and even burn-out and posttraumatic stress disorder as well as somatic problems. In extreme cases the feelings of helplessness have even resulted in suicide.

Not only animal welfare activists, but also citizens of EU-states with a low incidence of animal abuse in public who usually have a positive attitude towards companion animals report that they avoid visiting or moving to countries where they would be confronted with poverty of children and suffering of animals (stray cats and dogs) in public.

http://eeas.europa.eu/health/pandemic_readiness/index_en.htm

The treatment of animals in public is a significant indicator of the morale of a society – be it empathic cooperation and interconnectedness or cold ignorance!

In contrast, friendly interactions and close relationships to companion animals positively affect mental and physical human health, as many studies document (see: www.zukunft-heimtier.de and <http://www.waltham.com/waltham-research/hai-research/hai-overview/>).

The idea of One Health, which is supported by the American Medical Association and American Veterinary Medical Association as well international experts from related fields, emphasizes the interconnectedness of the wellbeing of humans, animals and nature (e.g. via infectious diseases, comparative medicine)

<http://www.mentalhealthandwellbeing.eu/>



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