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Formal and Non-Formal Responses Against Companion Animal Abuse in Indonesia: Possibilities and Challenges

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Abstract

Although dogs and cats are recognized as the most popular companion animals, they are ranked second as the most abused animals for social media content. In addition, Indonesia ranked first as the producers of these contents. Existing laws regarding animal abuse in Indonesia are still enforced in an anthropocentric approach and this prevents just treatments for animals that fell victims of the abuse. This research collected recorded verdicts against animal abuse cases that happen in Indonesia. Five verdicts of physical animal abuse cases, two verdicts against animal neglect cases, and four verdicts against dogs smuggling were found and used as the basis to create a model of responses against animal abuse. In physical animal abuse cases, first time offender is given probational period and repeat offender is sentenced to imprisonment or fined. In animal neglect cases, the offender is educated to raise his or her awareness of animal welfare. Animal confiscation is done if only the offender is deemed incapable of giving care for the animal or is a high-risk for the animal in care. In dogs smuggling cases, the offender is sentenced to imprisonment and fined as they could cause a rabies outbreak that threatened public health. In each type of animal abuse case, strict law enforcement and collaboration between animal welfare organization and law enforcement officer is needed to prevent and to handle animal abuse cases and to achieve justice for companion animals.

Keywords: law enforcement, animal abuse, companion animals, responses, verdicts

Introduction

Based on a survey published by Gfk (Growth from Knowledge) in 2016, dogs are ranked first (33%) and cats are ranked second (23%) as the most popular companion animals. Regardless, based on another survey published by AfA (Asia for Animal), together with SMACC (Social Media Animal Cruelty Coalition) in 2021, dogs and cats are ranked second as the most abused animals for social media content. In addition to this, Indonesia is ranked first as the producer of animal abuse contents in social media as 1,626 out of 5,480 documented videos were produced and uploaded in Indonesia. These surveys shows that although dogs and cats are known as the most popular companion animals, they fell as victims of animal abuse (Verga & Michelazzi, 2009, h. 233-7). The lack of companion animal welfare and weak law enforcement against animal abusers are thought as the leading cause of this (Ferdinandez et al., 2018, h.583).

Through criminology researches, it is known that domestic violence offender, sex violence offender, and murderer have a history of animal abuse (Johnson, 2018, h. 406). Domestic violence offender abuses or kills companion animal to control and to prevent victims of abuse to runaway (Ascione et al., 2007, h. 355; Newberry, 2017, h. 273-4). The connection between animal abuse and other forms of violence against humans can be used to characterize companion animals, especially dogs and cats, as victims of human violence (Vrečko, 2019, h. 85-7). Companion animals fell victim for human violence due to lack of awareness regarding negative consequences of animal mistreatment, the believe that the abuse is justified, or a gain of benefit from the abuse (Agnew, 1998, h. 183-93). Companion animals are often regarded as mere properties and dehumanized as simple machines without feelings or consciousness (Vollum et al., 2004, h. 227-8). Despite of the findings, attitudes towards companion animals can change when people are faced with alternatives of animal treatment (Knight et al., 2010, h. 267-9).

These attitudes are also reflected in formal and non-formal responses against animal abuse cases as they are often seen as far less serious than human violence cases (Wagner et al., 2015, 454-6). Due to this kind of perspective, challenges occur in enforcing laws against animal abusers in case reporting, ambiguous interpretation of the regulations, law enforcement officer's attitudes, and in the sentencing of the abusers itself (Morton et al., 2020, 3 - 14). According to the law, animal abuse is an intentional or unintentional act or repeated act that causes physical and emotional stress to animal, including, but not limited to, unnecessary pain, suffering, prolonged stress, or premature death (Johnson, 2018, h. 403). Specifically, companion animals are abused in the form of physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, hoarding, breeding and selling, and stigma (Arluke & Irvine, 2017, h. 41-2; Arluke et al., 2017, h. 107-8; Beirne et al., 2017, h. 60-3; Maher et al., 2017, h. 135-9; Nurse, 2017, h. 89 - 92; Yeates & Bowles, 2017, h. 16 - 21).

According to Indonesia Penal Code Article 302 Section (1), animal abuser is sentenced for 3 months of imprisonment and fined for Rp 4,500 and Section (2), serious animal abuser is sentenced for 9 months of imprisonment and fined for Rp 300. According to the Law of the Republic Indonesia Number 41 of 2014 Article 91B Section (1), animal abuser is sentenced for 1 to 6 months of imprisonment and fined for Rp 1,000,000 to Rp 5,000,000 and Section (2), a person that conceal animal abuse is sentenced for 1 to 3 months of imprisonment and fined for Rp 1,000,000 to Rp 3,000,000. The minimum and maximum penalties are according to discretion of the judge regarding the seriousness of the abuse. Although serious penalties exist within the law, imprisonment is often replaced with probational period and fine was often omitted in sentencing animal abusers. The laws also can not be use to prevent companion animal abused as it is the act and not the intention considered as an offence. Due to these circumstances, an alternative to formal response against animal abusers is also required.

A person will abide to the law when it is in accordance with the value held by the society where that person lives (Hahn, 2022, h. 206-7). A holistic intervention is required to socialize and internalize the law into the society so that each person will abide the law (Jacobs et al., 2018, h. 11-4). Animal welfare organization must be involved in making new regulations or socialization by law enforcement officers. Owners must be educated about animal welfare and how it is related to human welfare. Media channel could be used to socialize and educate people regarding the law. Government and animal welfare organization could work together for regular inspection or regular program that involves people. And professionals could also play their parts in the socialization and internalization of the law (Randour et al., 2019, h. 8). This research was then done to build a model of formal and non-formal responses against different types of animal abuse that currently happens in Indonesia.

Materials and Methods

This research was an explorative qualitative research to interpret companion animal abuse cases and the responses against them according to the recorded verdicts which then used to build a model of responses against them according to the existing laws. Research articles and reports were collected from scholar.google.com. Regulations related to animal abuse were collected from peraturan.bpk.go.id. Verdicts related to recorded animal abuse cases were collected from putusan3.mahkamahagung.go.id.

Results and Discussion

In Indonesia, existing laws can be used in sentencing animal abusers in various situations and conditions. Each of these laws has their own definition of animal, companion animal, animal health, animal welfare, acts considered as animal abuses, and sentencing offender who is proven guilty. Those regulations are:

1. Indonesia Penal Code 302
2. The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2009 on Animal Husbandry and Animal Health
3. Regulations of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia Number 95 of 2012
4. The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 41 of 2014 on the Changes to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2009 on Animal Husbandry and Animal Health

Table 1. Animal Protection Regulations in Indonesia

| No | Regulations | Article | Section |
|----|--|------------|-------------|
| 1. | Indonesia Penal Code | 302 | 1, 2, 3, 4 |
| 2. | The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2009 | 66 | 1, 2, 3, 4 |
| 3. | Regulations of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia Number 95 of 2012 | 92 | - |
| 4. | The Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 41 of 2014 | 66A 91B | 1, 2 1,2 |

According to these regulations and verdicts collected from the Indonesia Supreme Court database, animal abuse cases in Indonesia can be divided into three categories (Mogbo et al., 2013, h. 94-5). The first is physical animal abuse which is a form of abuse that is done by the owner as a form of punishment or stranger as a form of dislike or prejudice. The second is animal neglect which is the most common form of abuse and unintentional because the owner is lacking in knowledge and awareness of animal welfare. And the third form is smuggling of dogs which is a form of abuse that is done for economic reasons and cultural reasons and involves animal theft, physical abuse, and animal neglect in the treatment of these dogs.

Response to physical animal abuse

In physical animal abuse cases found, the abusers were sentenced to imprisonment for 3 or 4 months, but replaced with probational period for 6 months with discretion that it was the first criminal offence ever done by the abusers. Besides probational period, reconciliation between the abuser and pet owner was always attempted. In Case 1, the abuser made a peace agreement with the dog owner and donated Rp 3,500,000 to local organization. In Case 3, the abuser is a relative of the dog owner and has a history of psychological disorder and a peace agreement was made. In Case 4, the abuser and the cat owner made a peace agreement witnessed by local authorities. In Case 2, the dog owner refused to make a peace agreement with the abuser. In Case 5, peace agreement could not be made as the abuser put public health at risk of a rabies outbreak.

Table 2. Verdicts on Physical Animal Abuse Cases

| No | Court Number | Case brief | Verdicts |
|----|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | 223/Pid.B/2019/PN Cln | Killed a dog by slamming it and hit it with a rolling door rod. | Imprisonment 4 months; probational period 6 months |
| 2. | 117/Pid.B/2020/PN Cln | Shot a dog that runs to his front yard and chased his pet rabbit | Imprisonment 4 months; probational period 6 months |
| 3. | 101/Pid.Sus/2020/PN Jkt.Pst | Poured caustic water to a female dog and five puppies | Imprisonment 3 months; probational period 6 months; fine Rp 1,000,000 |
| 4. | 625/Pid.B/2021/PN Bks | Hit a kitten in the head using a broom stick | Imprisonment 3 months; probational period 6 months |
| 5. | 207/Pid.Sus/2022/PN Blt. | Slaughtered dogs and sold dog meat | Imprisonment 4 months; fine Rp 3,000,000 |

Response to animal neglect

In animal neglect cases found, the abusers were either sentenced to imprisonment or fined. There are only 2 verdicts found in the Indonesia Supreme Court database on animal neglect cases. Case 1 happened after the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 18 of 2009 published but this regulation itself does not include penal sanction for animal abuse. Indonesia Penal Code 302 exist but was not used in this case. Instead, the case was considered as civil case than criminal case. Case 2 was the first case in which an animal neglect case was put on trial and penal sanction was given to the offender. The little number of cases in the database shown that animal neglect cases is often unreported or solved using another alternative.

Table 3. Verdicts on Animal Neglect Cases

| No | Court Number | Case brief | Verdicts |
|----|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | 420/Pdt.G/2011/PN.JKT.PST | Neglecting 4 dogs in transport resulted in the death of 3 of them | Material compensation Rp 90,000,000 |
| 2. | 27/Pid.B/2023/PN Pbr | Neglecting 17 cats in her care resulted in the death of 7 of them and malnourishment | Imprisonment 3 months |

Response to dog smuggling

In dog smuggling cases found, 3 of them was a part of the dog meat trade that is already banned through a Circular issued by the Directorate General of Livestock and Animal Health of the Indonesia Ministry of Agriculture in 2018. In Case 1, the act was not related to dog meat trade and the offender was sentenced according to the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 16 of 1992 on Animal, Fish, and Plant Quarantine. In Case 2, Case 3, and Case 4, all was related to the dog meat trade. In Case 2 and Case 3, the offenders were smugglers that transported dogs from rabies infected region to non-infected region. In Case 4, the offender was dog meat shop owner. Case 3 and Case 4 were related and we can see that the smuggler was given harsher sentence than the dog meat shop owner.

Table 4. Verdicts on Dog Smuggling Cases

| No | Court Number | Case brief | Verdicts |
|----|------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | 3/Pid.S/2014/PN Tab | Transport of animals that transmit rabies without Veterinary Certificate and quarantine | Imprisonment 3 months; probationary period 6 months; fine Rp 1,000,000 |
| 2. | 99/Pid.Sus/2021/PN Wat | Transport of 72 dogs from rabies infected region to non-infected region | Imprisonment 10 months; fine Rp 150,000,000 |
| 3. | 29/Pid.Sus/2022/PN Skh | Transport of 53 dogs from rabies infected region to non-infected region | Imprisonment 16 months; fine Rp 150,000,000 |
| 4. | 61/Pid.Sus/2022/PN Skh | Transport of 53 dogs from rabies infected region to non-infected region | Imprisonment 12 months; fine Rp 150,000,000 |

Alternatives to penal sanctions

Different response was given to cases of animal abuse in regards of the type of abuse and the type of animals that fell victim of the abuse. There area different interpretations of the law and different understanding about what act is considered as an abuse between laymen, animal lovers, and law enforcement officers. In brief, every act or treatment that threatens the welfare of the animal or inflicts unnecessary pain or death of the animal can be considered as an abuse (Agnew, 1998, h. 179-81). In order to give a proper response to each case of companion animal abuse, we must not see only the act but also the motivation or situation that leads to the act. Each abuser will be given different specific response according to the type of abuse and the seriousness of the abuse.

In cases of physical animal abuse found, sadism was not the main motivation that leads to the act, but a sudden burst of emotional release and sometimes a psychological reason. When the act is proven as an abuse, there are three possible responses for it. First, if the animal that fell victim suffered minor injuries, the offender must compensate for the treatment and rehabilitation of that animal. Second, if the animal that fell victim suffered serious injuries, the offender must be sanctioned as the first alternative but also must be given additional fine and prohibited to own and take care of animal for the rest of his or her life. In the second alternative, if the animal died due to the injuries, the offender must be fined with maximum amount. In the first and second alternatives, fine is used as a sanction and probational period is given to the offender only if it was his or her first criminal offence. Social sanction in the form of volunteering during probational period can also be given to the offender to increase his or her awareness regarding animal welfare. Third, if the offender is a repeat offender then imprisonment without probational period must be given as he or she possessed a risk to others.

In cases of animal neglect found, the lack of knowledge and awareness of the negative consequences of the mistreatment and economic capability were the primary motivation of the neglect. When the act is proven as an abuse, social sanction, instead of a fine or imprisonment is most appropriate. First, if the owner has economic capability to take care the animal, socialization and education to increase the owner's knowledge and awareness regarding of animal welfare is most appropriate. Second, if the owner has no economic capability or is going through an economic crisis, aids in the form of animal food, health treatment, or a job can be given to support the owner until he or she is capable again. Supervision must be done to make sure of the owner's commitment. Third, if the owner is deemed has no capability to take care the animal, confiscation must be done to relieve the owner's burden. Partial confiscation is done to reduce the number of animals to match the capability of the owner. Full confiscation is done when the owner has no capability at all due to economical or other reason and then the owner is prohibited to own or take care of an animal for a certain period of time or for the rest of his or her life to prevent another neglect.

In cases of dogs smuggling found, we need to see the bigger picture, which is the dog meat trade, and sometimes cat meat trade. In dog meat trade, we have the supplier, smuggler, shop owner, and consumer. The supplier must be given penal sanction when it is proven that the dogs or cats that he or she catch were stolen. The smuggler must be given penal sanction when it is proven that he or she smuggled was transported from a rabies infected region to non-infected region. In the case with shop owner, after a ban on dog meat trade was upheld in a region, a period of time must be given to them to transition from dog meat into government regulated meat. After the transition period, a warning is given to the shop owner that still sells dog meat and penal sanction is given if the shop owner does not heed the warning. For the consumer of dog meat, penal sanction and a ban can not be given to them as the taste for dog meat is personal and sometimes is cultural. Socialization and education regarding the risk of rabies outbreak, cruelty behind the dog meat trade, and animal welfare is most appropriate for dog meat consumer. Dog population management could also be done to cut the supply of dog meat by cutting the population of stray dogs.

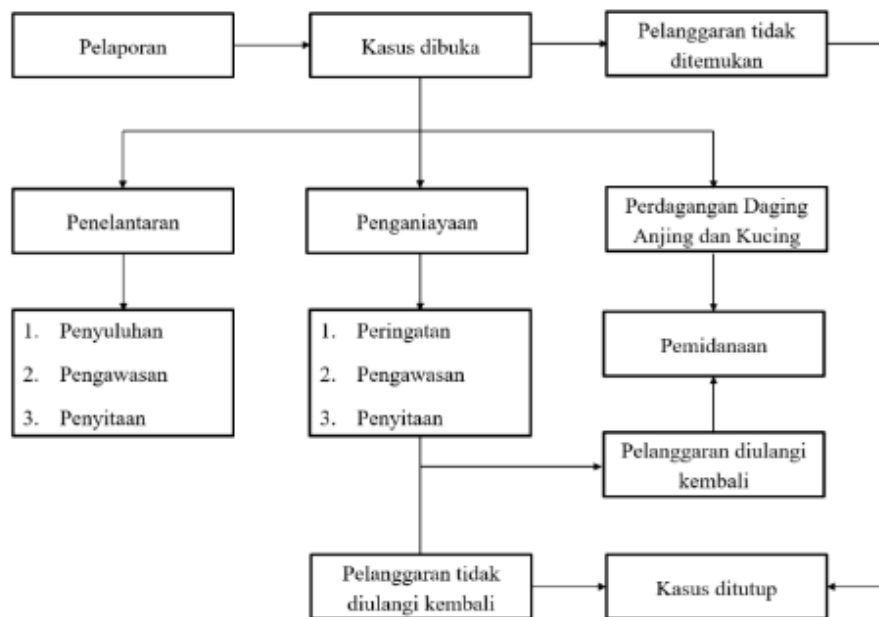


Fig. 1 Flow chart of responses against different types of animal abuse

In response to animal abuse, imprisonment must be given only if the offender possesses a risk in harming others or causes public unrest (Morton et al., 2020, h. 13-4). Since companion animal abuse is considered as less serious than human violence, alternatives to the legal response is required to bridge the gap between the law, law enforcement, and public sentiment (Wagner et al., 2015, h. 454-7; Knight et al., 2010, h. 235-67). In a democratic country such as Indonesia, legal dispute is often seen as a drastic measure and sometimes stigmatized (Krešić, 2019, h. 1847). Despite of this view of legal dispute and the reluctance of the owner or laymen to report the abuse, animal welfare organization and law enforcement officers must give social or legal sanction to the offender to increase society awareness of and obedience to the existing law. Mediation with the guardian and education must be given to under age offenders. For adult offenders, they must choose for donation, social service, or volunteering at a shelter as social sanction. Penal sanction is given only if the animal that fell victim is injured, disabled, or died and purely motivated by sadism.

Conclusion

Companion animal abuse cases in Indonesia can be categorized as physical abuse, neglect, and dog or cat meat trade. Companion animal abuse is still considered as less serious than human violence and there is a gap between the law and law enforcement against animal abusers. Alternatives to penal sanctions in the form of social sanction is necessary to bridge this gap and to increase society awareness of and obedience to the existing law.

Conflict of Interest

I certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial, personal, or other relationship with other people or organizations related to the material discussed in the manuscript.

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