2019 NIBRS ANIMAL CRUELTY USER GUIDE

THIS GUIDE provides a brief overview of National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) animal cruelty data overall, as well as the information provided in the dataset generated by AWI's Center for the Study of NIBRS Animal Cruelty Data ("the Center").

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SUGGESTED DATASET CITATION

The Center's NIBRS animal cruelty data are derived from the NIBRS incident-level extract files maintained by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research's National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). The NACJD original files are available here. The Center greatly appreciates the encouragement of the NACJD for the Center's work to promote greater use of NIBRS data. Researchers interested in more advanced analyses of NIBRS animal cruelty data are encouraged to access the full NIBRS files from the NACJD website.

Suggested citation for the AWI NIBRS animal cruelty data: Animal Welfare Institute (2024). National Incident-Based Reporting System, 2019 Animal Cruelty Data. http://www.awionline.org/content/center-study-nibrs-animal-cruelty-data

INTRODUCTION TO THE NIBRS ANIMAL CRUELTY DATA

As the NIBRS animal cruelty data are relatively new, this section provides a brief description for those not familiar with this resource.

FBI's collection of animal cruelty data. In 2014, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program added animal cruelty as a distinct crime to NIBRS. The UCR Program is an official measure of crime in the United States based on reports of crimes that come to the attention of the police (Morgan & Thompson, 2022). For decades, UCR data were collected via a summary reporting system that primarily collected aggregate crime counts from state contributors. In the 1980s, this summary reporting system format began to be replaced by NIBRS, which gathers detailed information at the incident level (Barnett-Ryan, 2006). Over the years, the FBI has added criminal offenses to

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its NIBRS data collection. In 2014, animal cruelty was added as a criminal offense, and the first states started contributing animal cruelty data in 2016.

Defining animal cruelty. For purposes of its NIBRS data collection, the FBI defines "animal cruelty" offenses as follows:

> *Intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly taking an action that mistreats or kills any animal without just cause, such as torturing, tormenting, mutilation, maiming, poisoning, or abandonment. Included are instances of neglect of duty to provide care, e.g., shelter, food, water, care if sick or injured. Other activities include transporting or confining an animal in a manner likely to cause injury or death; causing an animal to fight with another; or inflicting excessive or repeated unnecessary pain or suffering, e.g., uses objects to beat or injure an animal.*

In reporting animal cruelty, agencies must specify at least one (and up to three) of the four recognized types of animal cruelty: simple/gross neglect, animal fighting, intentional abuse and torture, or animal sexual abuse.

Information collected on animal cruelty. Crimes included in the NIBRS collection are categorized into three groups: crimes against persons, crimes against property, and crimes against society. The FBI categorized animal cruelty as a crime against society. As a result, no information is collected about the animal victim (as "society" is viewed as the victim). However, the details included in NIBRS, as noted above, do specify the type of animal cruelty—specifically, whether the animal cruelty involved simple/gross neglect, animal fighting, intentional abuse and torture, or animal sexual abuse. In addition, because animal cruelty is now a NIBRS offense, a range of details are collected about animal cruelty incidents. These details include the date and location of the incident, characteristics of the offender (e.g., demographics, use of alcohol/drugs), whether an arrest was made, and other crimes that co-occurred with the animal cruelty offense.

FBI data caveats. While NIBRS data provide a new opportunity to study animal cruelty, a few caveats are important to consider in terms of the scope of NIBRS coverage overall and its coverage of animal cruelty crimes, in particular:

First, although the vast majority of law enforcement agencies across the country report crime data to the FBI, not all do. And until 2021, some agencies that reported to the FBI did not use NIBRS—opting instead to report via the traditional (and less detailed) Summary Reporting System (SRS). Data reported via SRS were not incorporated into the NIBRS dataset.

In 2015, however, the FBI announced a plan to phase out SRS by January 1, 2021, and make NIBRS the only format for crime reporting (FBI, 2015). By the time of the phase-out, a growing number of

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states and local agencies were reporting in NIBRS format. Still, others have struggled, and NIBRS has yet to achieve full national coverage (Congressional Research Service, 2022). In 2019, over 45 percent of eligible law enforcement agencies nationwide reported crime data to the FBI in NIBRS format (FBI, 2020).

The second caveat is that some NIBRS-reporting law enforcement agencies may not have contributed animal cruelty data in 2019. As noted above, the FBI first began accepting animal cruelty data in 2016. When new crime categories are added, law enforcement agencies may experience delays in collecting and contributing data on such crimes as their systems and policies are updated (Bibel, 2015).

INFORMATION INCLUDED IN THE CENTER'S DATASET

The goal of the Center is to encourage use of the NIBRS animal cruelty data. To facilitate use of these data, the Center creates yearly datasets that include only animal cruelty incidents. For the 2019 NIBRS data, this selection reduces the file down from the original 6.57 million incidents to 9,956 incidents. It is possible that other crimes will appear in the Center's datasets if that crime occurred in an incident involving animal cruelty—for example, if the incident involved both an animal cruelty offense and an aggravated assault. In addition, the variables presented in the Center's datasets are limited to ones collected in conjunction with animal cruelty offenses and are relevant to initial studies of animal cruelty. This decision reduces the number of variables from 390 to 66.

The specific variables included in the Center's dataset are listed and described in the NIBRS Animal Cruelty Codebook, which is derived from the NACJD's Codebook for the NIBRS extract file.

TECHNICAL NOTES

The Center's NIBRS Animal Cruelty dataset contains all incidents that include an animal cruelty crime. The Center relies on the NACJD's NIBRS incident-level extract files to select out the relevant incidents and variables. The extract file version includes up to three criminal offenses per incident. It is possible for an incident to include more than three crimes. For 2019, 32 incidents (~0.3% of the total) involving an animal cruelty crime involved more than three crimes. Since these incidents exceeded the "three offense" rule used for the extract file incidents, these animal cruelty offenses did not appear initially. For completeness, AWI opted to identify these incidents in its Animal Cruelty dataset by conducting additional analyses using the AWI-created variable (labeled in the data file as "ALLAC"). Because these animal cruelty incidents were not included as part of the initial NACJD extract file, certain details are not reported in the file and could not be included in the Center's dataset.