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Presentation title: Defining crimes against companion animals in Finland – passive neglect and active maltreatment

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In Finland, two thirds of animal welfare inspections and administrative measures relate to companion animals. However, we have little knowledge on the specific features of animal welfare offences against companion animals. The prevalence and offender profile of violent crimes against animals are not known, nor is the possible connection to other crimes. It remains unclear whether animal hoarding cases are detected and prosecuted in Finnish courts. Our aims were (i) to describe the specific features of the offences against companion animals, and (ii) to explore the legal consequences following these crimes in Finland. Our data comprised of 1443 judgements with 1717 defendants in animal welfare offences in Finland between 1 January 2011 and 20 May 2021. The offences against companion animals differed from those against production animals by offender's age, gender, offence location and the consequences to the victim and criminal sanctions. We identified three distinguishable types: passive, large-scale and active offences. Passive offences included neglect of the basic care of animals, extending to complete abandonment. Large-scale offences recurred or lasted for two months or more and involved at least 15 animals. Large-scale offences were often located in small municipalities and led more often to the animals' death than other offences. They were typically committed by elderly women who rarely confessed the charges even partly, which may refer to animal hoarding. In contrast, the violent animal welfare offences were typically committed by urban young men who were charged also with other crimes, and often targeted against other people's animals, which is in line with previous research on intentional animal cruelty. We argue that to prevent and reveal crimes against companion animals, we need to recognize the diverse nature of animal welfare offences, strengthen the cooperation between authorities and efficiently control the ban on keeping of the animals.