

Presentation title:

Neutralization techniques used by defendants charged with animal welfare offences in Finland

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Animal welfare offences are a heterogeneous type of crimes that include violence and various forms of negligence of animals' physiological and behavioral needs. However, we know little about the offenders' own perception and rationalizations concerning their criminal behavior against animals. Our data comprised 1443 judgments in animal welfare offenses in Finland between January 2011 and May 2021. We applied various categorizations of neutralization techniques used by the defendants and identified differences between the offender profiles (violent offenders vs. others, animal hoarders vs. others, and crimes against farm animals vs. companion animals). Nearly all defendants responded to the charges. Overall, they appealed most often to their challenging circumstances: health problems, burn out, high age, lack of time and difficulties with organizing the care for the animals. Defendants charged with offences against production animals offered more explanations than the other groups and appealed to financial problems, weather conditions, and having too many animals. Also, they utilized more frequently the techniques of negating the norms, denial of injury, and condemning the condemners, who were mostly the official veterinarians that had conducted animal welfare inspections. Defendants charged with violent crimes against animals appealed more often to intoxication, strong emotions, and animal's triggering behavior, whereas those charged with long-lasting offences against large number of animals more often denied their responsibility. Our results confirm the observation that the farmers experience official animal welfare supervision negatively. Violent animal welfare crimes and animal hoarding stand out as their own types of crime also at the level of neutralizations. The differences between crime types and the motivations behind them should be considered when developing animal welfare control and crime prevention.