

Take animal abuse seriously

The recent murder-decapitation of an 11-year-old schoolboy in Kobe has shocked and stunned Japan, even more so since the accused in this crime is a 14-year-old boy.

Everyone from the media, education authorities, government officials to so-called experts like child psychologists have put forward their own theories on the root causes of this crime, laying the blame on the current school system, the breakdown of the family system, or the stress of modern life. There may be answers in all of these, but more than anything the blame should be placed on Japan's legal system, in particular its lack of laws in regard to animal abuse.

If Japan had strict laws against animal abuse this terrible tragedy might never have happened. The accused student began his career of violence by taking pleasure in torturing cats and birds while they were still alive, mutilating their bodies and then boasting to friends what he had done. His school mates knew about it, so did the neighbors, so did his family. Yet nobody reported him to the police and even if they had done so it is unlikely that any action would have been taken. Why does Japanese society and the law have such a nonchalant view toward animal abuse? Why is it not a serious offense in Japan to torture animals for fun? Studies in America and in Europe have shown there is a definite link between animal abuse and violence against children or other humans. Youngsters who are cruel to animals are more likely to become aggressive toward humans as they develop. Most serial killers and mass murderers have a history of abusing animals in their childhood. Abused children may act out aggression and frustration on animals they perceive as more vulnerable than themselves.

Abuse against animals is taken seriously in these countries, where almost certainly this young suspect would have been placed in a reformatory, or at least under psychiatric treatment before things had gone too far. In Japan a child who pulls wings off dragonflies, throws stones at cats, teases a chained dog or even glues up young puppies' eyes is indulged by parents and teachers who regard those actions as a childish prank. In this society, killing and mutilating animals is not regarded as abnormal as this case has shown.

Until animal abuse is recognized as a crime in Japan and punished accordingly, this cycle of violence is likely to be repeated with similar tragic results.

ELIZABETH OLIVER

Nose, Osaka

JT 08/15/97
