

# SHERIFF & DEPUTY

A Resource for Sheriffs, Deputies, and Other Public Safety Professionals  
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## NAVIGATING THE 'NEW NORMAL'

Sheriffs support their communities during COVID-19

SHERIFFS.ORG



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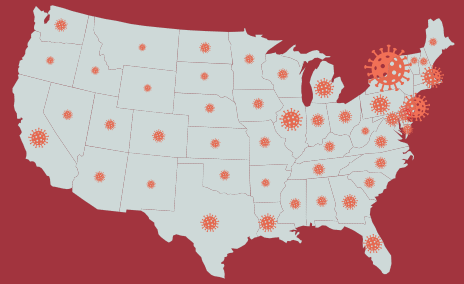
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# CRUNCHING THE NUMBERS ON CRUELTY

The National Incident-Based Reporting System delivers preliminary data on animal cruelty investigations

By Julie Palais

Last year, *Sheriff & Deputy* covered animal cruelty in a special feature that highlighted the link between animal cruelty and human violence. Law enforcement officers should pay attention to animal cruelty, it said, explaining that “crimes against animals are crimes against people.” Then-NSA President John Layton, Sheriff of Marion County (Indiana), noted that “animal cruelty doesn’t happen in a vacuum.” Such crimes often happen “concurrently with other acts of violence like domestic violence, child and elder abuse, assault, and even homicide.”

This article presents results from the first study to examine animal cruelty data released by the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). NIBRS will replace the Summary Reporting System (SRS) format of crime reporting in January 2021. Data on animal cruelty has been collected since 2016, and hopefully it can provide new insights about such crimes. It may also help lead law enforcement officers to people who are committing other crimes.

In 2003, NSA recognized the significance of animal cruelty crimes and petitioned the FBI to add them as a separate category to the NIBRS database. Simultaneously, animal advocates from the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) and other organizations, with support from legislators, law enforcement organizations, and domestic violence groups, initiated an effort to convince the FBI to start collecting such data.

The rationale was based on empirical studies of the connection between, and co-occurrence of, animal cruelty and different forms of family and interpersonal violence. Animal cruelty is defined by the FBI as “intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly taking an action that mistreats or kills any animal without just cause, such as torturing, mutilation, maiming, poisoning, or abandonment.”

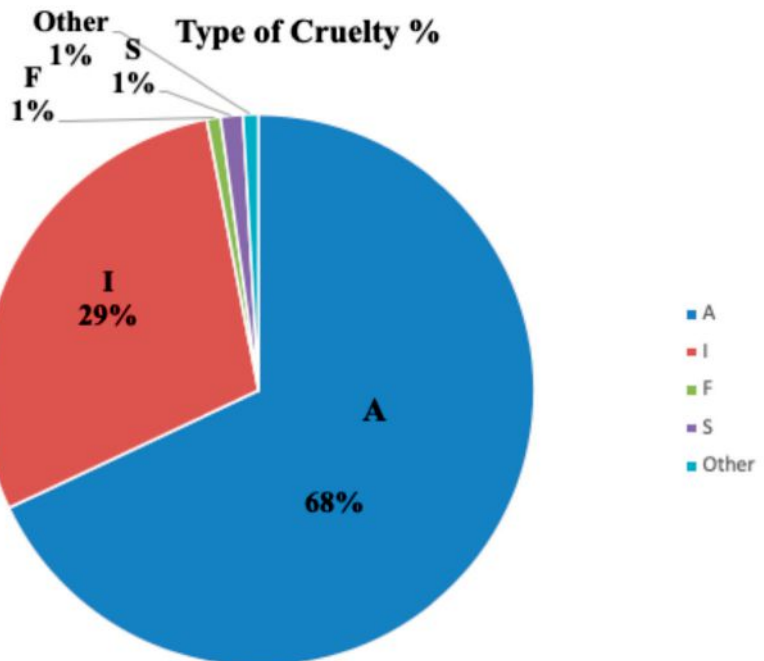


Fig. 1. Animal Cruelty Offenses for 2018 by Offense Category (A=Simple/Gross Neglect: 68%; I= Intentional Cruelty: 29%; F=Organized Abuse (e.g. dog/cock fighting): 0.8%; S=Animal Sexual Abuse: 1.3%; and Other=Combinations of the Above: 0.9%).

## Gender of 2018 Animal Cruelty Offenders (%)

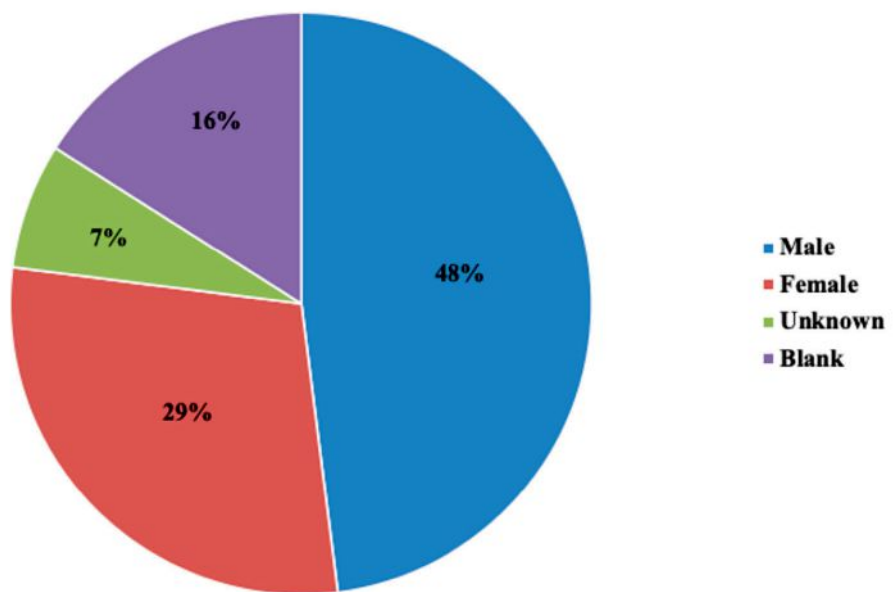


Figure 2. Gender of Animal Cruelty Offenders for 2018 (Male: 48%; Female=29%; Unknown: 7%; Blank: 16%).

Animal cruelty is a crime in all 50 states, and many studies suggest that those who engage in such acts are also more likely to commit other crimes. FBI classifies animal cruelty under “Crimes Against Society” and includes four subcategories of offenses: simple/gross neglect (coded A), intentional abuse or torture (I), organized abuse/animal fighting (F) and animal sexual abuse/bestiality (S).

In addition to the FBI NIBRS website ([ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2018](http://ucr.fbi.gov/nibrs/2018)), readers should familiarize themselves with the Crime Data Explorer (CDE) website ([crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov](http://crime-data-explorer.fr.cloud.gov)). It provides a useful map of the U.S. showing the 17 states that are NIBRS-only, eight that are SRS-only, and 25 states that submit data to both NIBRS and SRS databases. The website provides information on each state’s population, the number of law enforcement agencies, and the percentage reporting to NIBRS. Although discrepancies exist between the NIBRS and Crime Data Explorer sites, only 43% to 46% of all law enforcement agencies nationwide reported to NIBRS in 2018, leaving the database incomplete.

## Preliminary results

Table 1 summarizes the animal cruelty incidents reported in 2016, 2017, and 2018 from the NIBRS FBI website. The table shows that there were 1,126 animal cruelty incidents reported by 13 states in 2016, 3,328 incidents reported from 23 states in 2017, and 5,201 animal cruelty incidents reported from 29 states in 2018. Each column in the table also provides the number of law enforcement agencies reporting in NIBRS for the entire country for that year.

The table has two footnotes. Footnote 1 is a list of the states that do not yet contribute data to NIBRS, either because they are still only reporting in SRS or because they were not yet certified to report for that year. In order for data to be counted under NIBRS for a particular year, a state must be certified for a full year before its data can be included.

Footnote 2 is a list of states that are part of NIBRS but don’t yet contribute animal cruelty data, either because the animal control officers in the state or in a particular jurisdiction are not in a law enforcement agency, or because the state’s

**Table 1. Number of Animal Cruelty Incidents by State**<sup>1,2</sup>

Year	2018	2017	2016
Alabama	2	0	0
Arizona	2	0	0
Arkansas	0	0	0
Colorado	782	526	8
Connecticut	74	18	0
Delaware	1,097	923	494
Hawaii	50	0	0
Idaho	7	2	0
Illinois	0	0	0
Indiana	0	0	0
Iowa	0	0	0
Kansas	0	0	0
Kentucky	186	45	0
Louisiana	0	0	0
Maine	13	3	0
Maryland	0	0	0
Massachusetts	44	13	2
Michigan	398	277	130
Minnesota	61	4	1
Mississippi	47	0	0
Missouri	43	43	15
Montana	92	83	0
Nebraska	1	0	0
New Hampshire	173	81	0
North Dakota	81	46	7
Ohio	102	23	0
Oklahoma	0	0	0
Oregon	421	134	105
Pennsylvania	0	0	0
Rhode Island	5	0	0
South Carolina	295	200	0
South Dakota	24	12	10
Tennessee	463	476	219
Texas	393	69	0
Utah	0	0	0
Vermont	41	21	0
Virginia	0	0	0
Washington	128	114	85
West Virginia	11	18	13
Wisconsin	154	97	37
<b>Total #</b>	<b>5,201</b>	<b>3,228</b>	<b>1,126</b>
<b># of agencies</b>	<b>7,283</b>	<b>6,998</b>	<b>6,849</b>

<sup>\*</sup>District of Columbia (DC): 2016 (0); 2017 (0); 2018 (0); n.d. = no data

<sup>1</sup>States that are not NIBRS-certified (8): AK, CA, FL, NC, NJ, NV, NY, WY

<sup>2</sup>States that are part of NIBRS but not collecting/reporting animal cruelty data (13): AR, GA, IL, IN, IA, KS, LA, MD, NM, OK, PA, UT, VA.



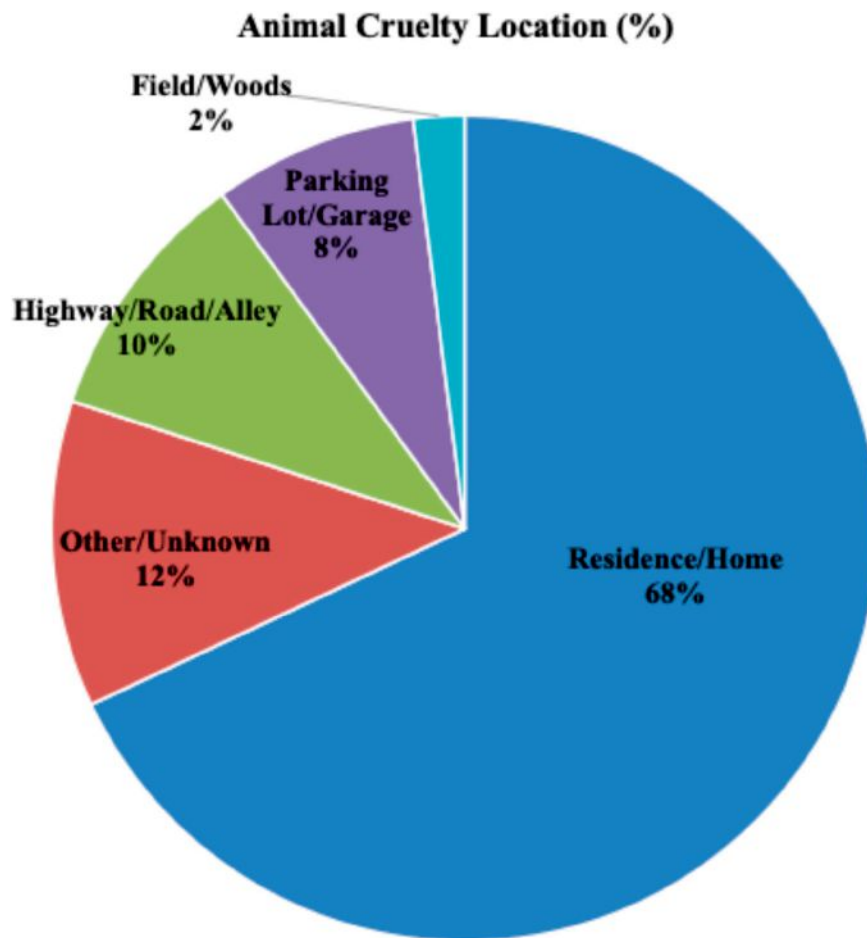


Fig. 3. Five Most Common Locations of Animal Cruelty Incidents for 2018: Residence/Home: 68%; Other/Unknown: 12%; Highway/Road/Alley: 10%; Parking Lot/Garage: 8%; Field/Woods: 2%.

records management system (RMS) may not be up-to-date and able to capture the data collected for crimes involving animal cruelty.

The most important thing to know about Table 1 is that zeroes do not mean that no animal cruelty crimes occurred; instead, zeroes mean that no data was reported to NIBRS from the state's program for uniform crime reporting (UCR) program that year.

The data in Figs. 1 and 2 were obtained from the FBI in an Excel spreadsheet. Fig. 1 on p. 70 shows a pie chart of 2018 animal cruelty data from the NIBRS website, broken out by type. It shows that by far the most common incidents reported in 2018 are incidents of simple/gross neglect (A, 68%), followed by those involving intentional cruelty (I, 29%). All other categories of animal cruelty (e.g. F, S, and combination of crimes) amount to only 3% of all incidents reported.

Fig. 2 on p. 70 is another pie chart showing the gender of animal cruelty offenders in 2018 from the same NIBRS data. It shows

that a plurality (48%) of animal cruelty offenders are male, while only 29% are female; the offender's gender was unknown in 23% of cases. There are many reasons why data is unknown or left blank, and because only 43% to 46% of law enforcement agencies report to NIBRS, it will take a few more years to be able to interpret the results with confidence.

Fig. 3 above is a pie chart with data from the NIBRS website illustrating the most common locations where animal cruelty crimes were reported in 2018. Of the 5,201 incidents of animal cruelty reported, 68% took place in a residence/home; 10% of the incidents were reported on highways, roads, alleys, streets, or sidewalks; 8% were reported at parking lots, drop lots, or garages; and a small number (2%) were reported to have occurred in a field or woods. "Other/unknown" locations comprised 12% of cases.

One takeaway from this analysis is that when a law enforcement officer is called to a home or residence in a human-related matter,

they should be on the lookout for crimes involving animals. And if there is animal cruelty reported at a residence, it is very likely that human family members may be at risk.

The data in Fig. 4 on p. 73 is from the 2018 NIBRS data tables showing the location of assaults (crimes against a person) and animal cruelty (crimes against society). Fig. 4a shows the number of assault offenses, and Fig. 4b shows the number of animal cruelty incidents as a function of the five most common locations for each type of crime. The shapes of the charts are virtually identical, with incidents occurring in a residence/home, highway/road/alley, parking lot/garage, other/unknown location, school (for assaults), and field/woods (for animal cruelty).

As previously mentioned, animal cruelty crimes do not occur in a vacuum, and often occur concurrently with other acts of violence. Although the numbers are different for these two types of crimes, it is clear that the greatest number of assaults and the greatest number of animal cruelty crimes occur in residential settings.

This highlights the importance of being on the lookout for incidents of animal cruelty when responding to a domestic violence call, and being watchful for crimes against persons when responding to an animal cruelty call. For this reason, let's look at what types of co-occurring crimes typically occur in a residential setting.

Fig. 5 illustrates the 2018 NIBRS animal cruelty data for incidents of both neglect (A, Fig. 5a) and incidents of intentional cruelty (I, Fig. 5b). The six most common crimes to co-occur in association with animal cruelty taking place at a home/residence (location code 20) are shown in the two pie charts. These data are from the same database as in Figs. 1 and 2, provided to AWI by CJIS staff. While the figures look qualitatively similar, there seem to be fewer incidents involving intimidation and slightly more incidents involving co-occurring drug/narcotics violations in cases of animal neglect. Incidents of intentional cruelty, vandalism, burglary, and intimidation are more common co-occurring offenses.

These results support the notion that persons committing acts of intentional cruelty might be capable of other crimes considered violent or threatening. More data is needed

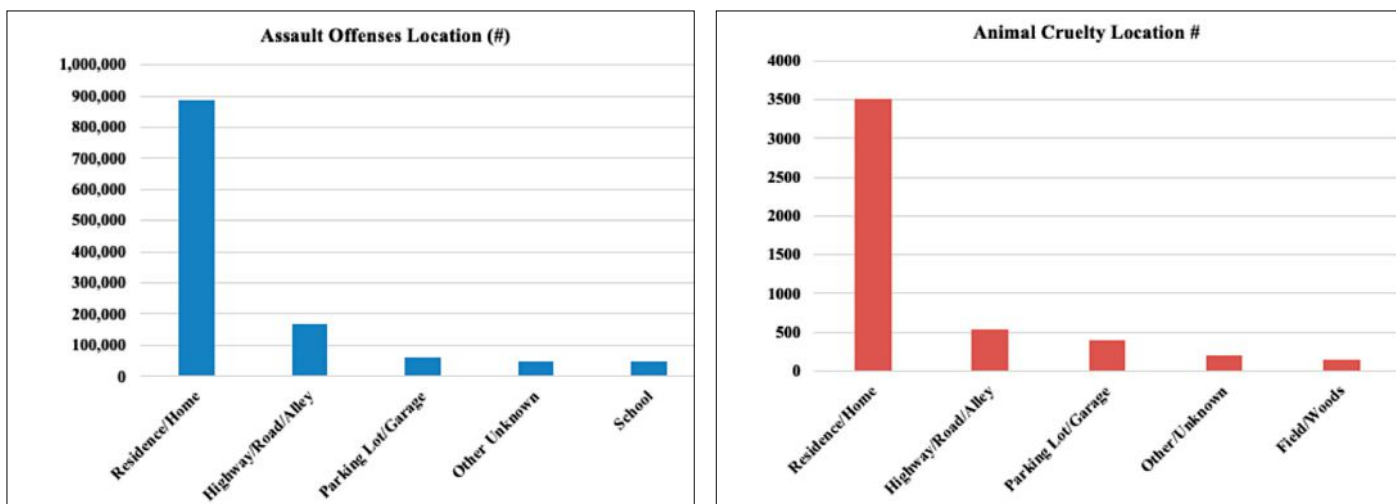


Fig. 4. Comparison of Location of (a) Assault Offenses and (b) Animal Cruelty Incidents for the five most common locations for each type of crime.

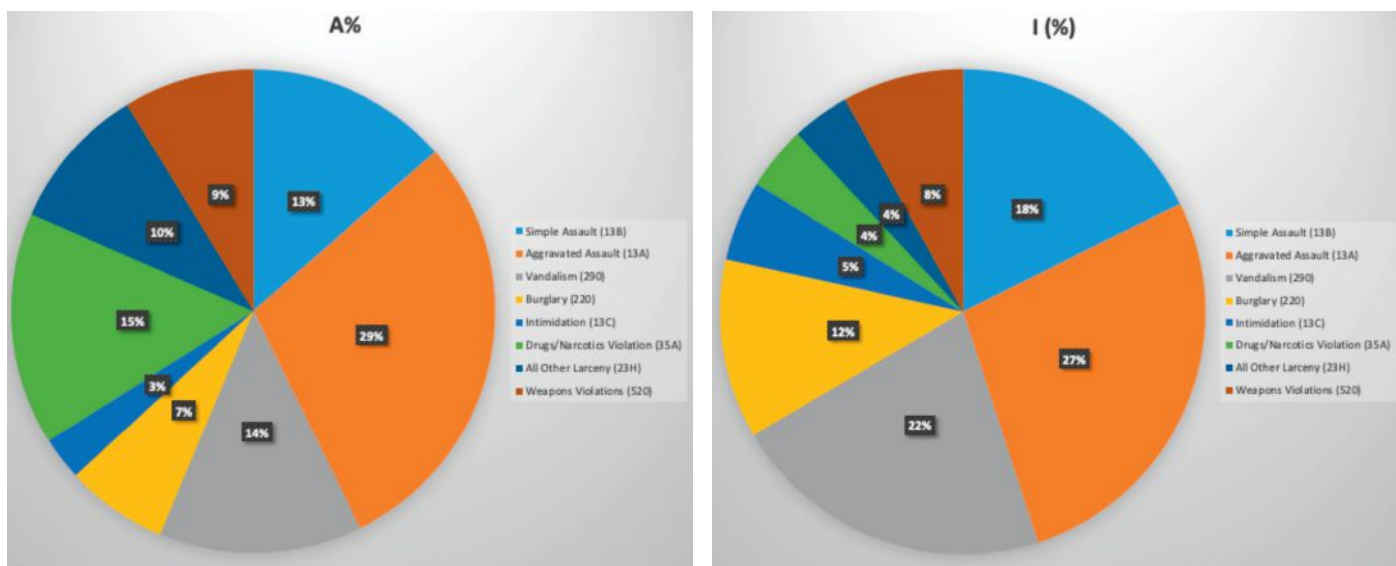


Fig. 5. Percentage of Co-Occurring Incidents at Residence/Home Location for (a) Animal Neglect (A) and (b) Intentional Animal Cruelty (I).

to support these observations; this article can only provide a first look at what kinds of data are coming up in NIBRS reports, and how it might be useful to law enforcement officers focused on protecting public safety.

### NIBRS needs your help

With your help and the help of those around the country who are working on the front lines of animal control and law enforcement, more and better data can be collected. In order to make that data the most useful to everyone, it is important for it to be as complete and accurate as possible.

If you aren't already in contact with local animal control officers (ACOs) or they are not connected to a law enforcement agency in your community, give them a call to see

how you can work together to ensure that accurate animal cruelty data from your community gets into the NIBRS database. The National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA) ([www.nacanet.org](http://www.nacanet.org)) can help you find the agency responsible for animal control in your community.

NSA's National Law Enforcement Center on Animal Abuse ([www.sheriffs.org/programs/national-law-enforcement-center-animal-abuse](http://www.sheriffs.org/programs/national-law-enforcement-center-animal-abuse)) offers many resources, and the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI) has a template for a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that can be created so that non-law enforcement animal control agencies and law enforcement agencies can work together to report animal cruelty crime statistics to NIBRS. AWI is interested in

your thoughts and ideas for helping improve data collection and the incorporation of animal cruelty crimes into NIBRS.

Contact me ([julie@awionline.org](mailto:julie@awionline.org)) or Dr. Mary Lou Randour, senior advisor of Animal Cruelty Programs and Training at AWI ([marylou@awionline.org](mailto:marylou@awionline.org)) to share your ideas and access a copy of the MOU template. Reach AWI by phone at (202) 337-2332. ★

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