



## Research

# A new questionnaire examining general attitudes toward animals in Cyprus and the United Kingdom



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## ABSTRACT

A review of the animal welfare literature indicates that all the current measures used to evaluate it have limitations in how they assess attitudes toward animals and their care. Few studies have examined animal welfare outside non-Western nations, although attitudes toward animals and their welfare is an important issue in these countries also. The present study examines attitudes toward animal welfare in Cyprus as compared with the United Kingdom, and describes the development of a new measure to integrate the ostensibly disparate dimensions underlying attitudes toward animals and their abuse. Pilot items sampling a variety of attitudes toward animal welfare were administered to 523 people in the United Kingdom and Cyprus. Exploratory factor analyses indicated that many of the subdimensions proposed could not be empirically identified, and a general animal welfare dimension was sufficient to capture most of the variance. This scale—the Animal Welfare Scale—had a good reliability. The Animal Welfare Scale is brief and simple to score, extending the potential for research in the field of animal welfare alongside other psychological constructs and does not need any specialist administration to deliver; hence, it is potentially applicable to any animal welfare issues.

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## Introduction

Research examining animal welfare outside of the English-speaking nations is uncommon, although human-animal relationships, whether based on farming, companionship, or as part of a shared environment, are universal (Serpell, 1999). There are a variety of methods used to measure welfare. We developed a new questionnaire measuring attitudes toward animals, which was then used to compare responses from 2 culturally different European cultures, Cyprus and the United Kingdom (UK), to test the generality of application.

Cyprus has cultural elements that reflect attitudes from South-eastern Europe and Western Asia, as well as a long-shared history with the UK; yet, the UK and Cyprus have disparate attitudes toward animals, making the comparison a strong test of the validity of the instrument (Phillips et al, 2012). Research into animal welfare in Cyprus is uncommon. A national study carried out by the Cyprus Voice for Animals (a local charity) gathered data from just over 1000 members. Approximately 86% of the sample reported owning an animal, with 69% of these individuals owning dogs and 32% owning cats (Cyprus Voice for Animals, 2011). These figures indicate high levels of animal ownership within the Greek Cypriot society, but the local media reports a high incidence of animal abuse. Abuse ranges from the inhumane methods of slaughter used by local slaughterhouses (Nicolaou, 2013) to the case of a puppy which was shot after straying from its owner's land (Djani, 2012). Members of the Cypriot public have requested action regarding the lack of appropriate legislation and action concerning the growing number of stray dogs and absence of sterilization and licensing laws for the nation (Kombos, 2013). The publicity surrounding animal abuse incidents and the lack of governmental infrastructure regarding animal ownership highlights the growing interest and desire of people in Cyprus to advance this field and more significantly, a need for systematic scientific research into this topic.

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### Measures of attitudes toward animals

A number of measures examining attitudes toward animal welfare have been developed. An early development was the Pet Attitude Scale (Templer et al., 1981), which was developed to measure peoples' perceptions of their childhood companion animal. The Animal Attitude Scale (Herzog et al., 1991) was used to assess individual differences in attitudes toward animals. This measure included attitudes toward animals used in research in farming and wildlife within their habitat. Henry (2004) developed two measures, one of which assesses Experiences with Animals, and is a modification of Flynn's (1999a, 1999b) adaptation of Boat's (1999) Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences. The first part of the scale inquires about the participants' ownership of animals during their childhood and whether they own animals currently. The second part of the scale explores the participants' experiences with animal cruelty (if they had been witnesses or willing/unwilling agents in the abuse of animals). If the participant responded "Yes" to any of these questions, they were then requested to provide additional information on these incidents of abuse. The second measure developed by Henry (2004), the Attitudes Toward the Treatment of Animals Scale (ATTAS), was tested as a pilot using 104 psychology students and examined the extent to which participants would feel bothered by thinking about the maltreatment toward animals. Both scales are reported as valid and reliable for use. Henry (2004) argues that further research is needed to clarify what the cognitive and affective constructs the scores of the Attitudes Toward the Treatment of Animals Scale assess reflect more generally. Although these scales are appropriate in addressing animal-related experiences and abusive behaviors, they do not incorporate attitudes toward animals in general.

A number of measures of animal abuse in children have also been developed. These include a parent-report questionnaire to examine cruelty to animals that could act as a tool for poor prognosis among conduct-disordered children, which was tested in children and their parents (Guymier et al., 2001). Dadds et al. (2004) created a parent-informant or child report measure based on Ascione's (1993) cruelty parameters, the Children and Animals Inventory, which sought to assess a child's cruelty to animals as an indicator of the child's potentially problematic development. Finally, Merz-Perez and Heide (2004) created an assessment using retrospective reports of animal abuse committed by incarcerated men. Difficulties have been identified with the use of all of these assessment measures. Parents may not be aware of their child's behavior (particularly not antisocial acts), therefore unable to accurately report on their child's actions. No measure is able to assess every aspect of animal abuse, which potentially encompasses the physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect of animals and the severity and frequency of such events. Retrospective reports may not be reliable, particularly if a significant amount of time has passed since the abuse took place (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Measures investigating animal abuse tend to examine children as opposed to adults, and although Merz-Perez and Heide (2004) considered incarcerated men, this cohort is inherently problematic because of their concurrent antisocial behavior, potentially skewing such measurement.

The development of a quick, reliable, and brief screening instrument would benefit the various animal shelters and organizations working for the protection of animals by providing a more concrete basis for their work. A brief screening instrument would also be useful for researchers interested in animal welfare, as well as issues of cruelty, empathy, and antisocial behavior in relation to animals generally (e.g., Ascione, 1997; Egan & McKenzie, 2012).

No animal welfare-related questionnaire has been used or validated in Cyprus. Our first and primary aim was thus to create

and validate a new questionnaire in Cyprus, which could be used concurrently in the UK to assess effects of cultural differences. The second aim of the study was to identify attitudes toward animals and how these attitudes relate to abusive behaviors while taking into account the changing nature of society in Cyprus. None of the reported measures have incorporated the assessment of general and abusive attitudes toward animals. Furthermore, all previous measures are >10 years old. Consistent with the increased sensitivity expressed by the media and society regarding the environment and animal welfare, we chose to create a questionnaire that would possibly reflect newer ideologies and perceptions. This study documents the results of a new questionnaire developed to compare facets of attitudes toward animals in Cyprus and the United Kingdom.

### Method

#### Participants

The total sample from Cyprus comprised 332 persons (male:female = 71:261). The age range was 14–62 years (mean = 27.4 years; standard deviation = 7.63 years). The total UK sample comprised 191 participants (male:female = 41:150). The age range was 12–76 years (mean = 31.16 years; standard deviation = 12.89 years). An independent samples *t* test indicated that UK residents (mean = 31.16; standard error of mean [SE] = 0.93) were significantly older than Cypriot residents (mean = 27.35; SE = .42;  $t(267.99) = 3.72$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ). Chi-square tests indicated no associations between country of residence and gender [ $\chi^2(1) = 0.000$ ;  $P > 0.05$ ].

#### Measures

Following a review of the current literature into scales measuring animal abuse and welfare, items were generated that addressed general attitudes toward animal welfare, types of abuse, the function of abuse, and responsibility for actions. Fifty-seven items were designed to be brief, use natural language, and be comprehensible by the broadest population possible.

The majority of the items developed examined the participants' attitudes toward animals in general, though 21 of the original 57 items included specific questions on dogs, cats, horses, and donkeys. These specific animals were chosen as cats and dogs, 2 of the most common companion animals in the UK and Cyprus (Cyprus Voice for Animals, 2011; Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, 2011); horses remain common in the UK (Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, 2011), and there is a large presence of donkeys in Cyprus. By including items referring to companion and working animals along with items referring to domestic companion animals, participants' responses sampled a more complete outlook on their attitudes toward general animal care.

The 57-item pilot questionnaire, along with demographic items, was given to a native Greek speaker to translate, which was in turn back-translated to English by a native Greek speaker. There were no major differences between the 2 versions of the pilot instrument. If there were no exact matches in Greek for words or phrases, wording was used that conveyed the same meaning as in the English version. The draft pilot Greek and English questionnaires led to one question being removed as participants from both countries reported difficulties with understanding the question, and another 9 items were modified in both versions of the scale to facilitate comprehension.

The final version of the pilot questionnaire consisted of 57 items rated on a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The scale comprised 4 sections. These a priori sections were conceptualized as "Attitudes to

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