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ANIMAL ABUSE AND CHILD ABUSE: EXAMINING THE LINK



An animal control officer who discovered dead and dying animals due to neglect noticed four children in the home and notified child protective services. CPS intervened and discovered that the children had been physically and sexually abused.

An anonymous complaint from a neighbor about a dog kept in a filthy yard with inadequate food and water led to the discovery of a family in need. A mother, her three children, and an elderly relative lived in squalid conditions, with human waste and garbage throughout the house. Police officers took the dog and the children into custody and reported the elderly person to adult protective services.

While investigating a complaint about a bruised toddler, the CPS worker noticed injuries on both the cat and the family's dog. The dog was chained to a tree, had no food or water, and appeared vicious, snarling and barking. The cat had fleas. The mother revealed that the dog had bitten her children in the past but her husband refused to take the dog to the animal shelter. There were animal feces visible in the home.

Police called for a burglary in progress found a scene of squalor where a family with several young children lived with a menagerie of cats. Within hours, the house is posted as unfit for habitation, the children are placed with family members and the parents are arrested, charged with six counts of child neglect as well as animal cruelty charges.

When police raid an establishment offering cock fighting, children are present. There are numerous examples of animal cruelty in addition to the cock fights, and children have been involved in watching or assisting with maiming and killing the animals.

At a shelter for battered women and their children, staff are horrified to hear how the abuser made the children watch as he tied their pet gerbil and then set the animal on fire. The abuser threatened the children that they could be next.

THERE IS NO EXCUSE



FOR ANIMAL ABUSE

Animal abuse is a type of interpersonal violence. It often co-occurs with child abuse and other forms of family violence. Identifying and intervening in cases of animal abuse can be an important tool in protecting children from maltreatment. More than 82 million households in the United States (68% of homes) include one or more companion animals (2013 National Pet Owner's Survey) and more than 70% of U.S. households with minor children have pets (Randour & Davidson, 2008).

Child protection efforts in the United States are linked in history to animal protection (Ashby, 1997; Williams, 1980). Henry Bergh founded the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) in 1866. When a child named Mary Ellen Wilson was being horribly abused by her caretakers, concerned neighbors learned there was no legislation protecting children from abuse. One individual approached Henry Bergh and asked him to bring her situation to the attention of the courts as a child is part of the animal kingdom. The case had widespread publicity, spurring the formation in 1874 of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children in New York. Many states followed suit and formed state protection associations. In 1877, the American Humane Association was formed.

According to Randour & Davidson (2008), the human-animal bond can be traced to the start of human history. Many people feel a natural connection with animals. Animals, in turn, have positive effects on child growth and development. Studies reviewed in Randour & Davidson show that animals can improve children's cognitive abilities, teach children the skill of empathy, can support children's self-esteem, can offer

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Examining the Link

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opportunities to build interpersonal skills, and offer opportunities to confront loss and respond to grief. It is not the mere presence of an animal, however, that offers benefits to children. Rather, the bond that can form between children and pets is the mechanism for realizing the benefits.

In research reviewed by Randour & Davidson (2008) children with positive bonds to animals scored higher on measures of social competence and empathy, had higher self-esteem, were less aggressive, and were more oriented to social values than children without a pet. They note that animals can also facilitate social interactions, for example, children are more likely to interact with a disabled child if an animal is present.

In contrast, children, and society, experience negative consequences for witnessing violence towards animals, similar to effects of witnessing violence towards people. According to studies reviewed by Randour & Davidson (2008), children who witness animal abuse are more likely to develop behavioral problems, struggle academically, engage in delinquent behaviors, and they are at higher risk for substance abuse. (For a review of effects on children who witness domestic violence, see VCPN, Volume 60).

How is animal abuse defined?

There appears to be no standardized definition for animal abuse or animal cruelty (Becker & French, 2004). Some definitions are vague and hard to quantify. For example, the NSPCC (of the United Kingdom) defines animal abuse as “the intentional harm of an animal. It includes but is not limited to willful neglect, inflicting injury, pain or distress, or malicious killing of animals” (2003). A definition offered by Ascione & Shapiro (2009) is “non-accidental socially unacceptable behavior that causes pain, suffering, or distress to and/or the death of an animal” (p. 570). Some definitions exclude killing animals for food. Others specify ‘companion animals’ when discussing animal abuse.

The NSPCC further specifies three categories of animal abuse:

- Physical abuse: includes kicking, punching, throwing, burning, microwaving, drowning, asphyxiation, and the administration of drugs or poisons.

WHAT CPS WORKERS CAN DO

- Engage in cross-training with animal welfare and animal control staff.
- Have policies and procedures for reporting suspected animal abuse.
- Ask about the presence, welfare, dangerousness, and disappearance of pets in the home.
- Observe the living conditions of the pets.
- Observe the physical and health condition of the pets.
- Inquire about whether pets have ever been harmed.
- Take note of the interactions between those living in the home and pets.

(Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012)

- Sexual abuse: any use of an animal for sexual gratification.
- Neglect: a failure to provide adequate food, water, shelter, companionship or veterinary attention.

What is the overlap between child abuse and animal abuse?

DeViney, Dickert, & Lockwood (1983) studied 53 families who met New Jersey’s criteria for child maltreatment and who also had companion animals. They found that 60% of families had at least one family member who met at least one of the criteria for animal abuse. While 88% of the families that were under state supervision for physical abuse of their children engaged in animal abuse, only 34% of families under supervision for other types of child maltreatment (such as neglect or sexual abuse) also abused animals, a significant difference.

Another early study (Walker, 1980, cited in Arkow, 1997) found a nine percent overlap in Bucks County, Pennsylvania families who were reported to animal protection and to child protection agencies. A study by Montminy-Danna (2007) surveyed 500 child welfare workers. Of these, 121 returned the survey. CPS workers reported that in 22.5% of cases, there was a disclosure of animal cruelty.

A 2008 retrospective study of college students with a sample of 860 students from three universities in the West and Midwest found that 22.9% had been exposed to animal cruelty and 34.6% had been victims of some form of child maltreatment. Exposure to both animal cruelty and child abuse was indicated by 12.4% (DeGue & DiLillo, 2009).

In their review of research, Becker and French (2004) found that animal abuse can be an indicator of child abuse. Animal abuse has come to be seen as part of a continuum of abuse within families. Animals may be used to coerce children into silence. Some abusers even kill animals in front of the child and threaten that the child or other family members will be next. Animal abuse and other forms of family violence tend to co-occur in the same families. Consequently,

animal abuse and child abuse often occur together (McPhedran, 2009).

What is the overlap between domestic violence and animal abuse?

State and national surveys indicate that as many as 70% of battered women who have pets report that their partners had threatened to harm or had harmed or killed their pets and 32% of the women reported that their children had also committed acts of animal cruelty (Ascione, Weber, & Wood, 1997). In the context of domestic violence, acts of animal abuse are used to coerce, control, and intimidate women and children to remain in and to be silent about abusive situations (Becker & French, 2004).

What is the relationship between animal abuse, violence and other forms of antisocial behavior?

A study by Arluke, Levin, Luke & Ascione (1999) attests to a complex relationship between animal abuse and violence towards humans. The researchers note that there is a common idea that animal abuse precedes abuse of humans (as a sort of ‘practice’ or ‘rehearsal’ arena where individuals ‘graduate’ from abusing animals to abusing humans). They maintain that a deviance generalization hypothesis fits the data better than a ‘violence graduation’ hypothesis.

The findings of Arluke et al. support the idea that individuals who commit one form of deviance are more likely than matched controls to commit other deviant acts. Of those who abused animals, 70% also committed at least one other violent offense compared to 22% of controls. In other words, animal abusers were 3.2 times more likely to have a criminal record when compared to control participants. Animal abusers were four times more likely than controls to be arrested for property crimes, and 3.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug-related offenses and for disorderly conduct. Additionally, there is no particular pattern of time-order. Animal abuse might occur either before, after or concurrently with other forms of antisocial behaviors

Given the findings of Arluke et al., animal abuse is one of many antisocial behaviors

committed by abusers, rather than being a predictor or a distinct developmental step. Thus, a child who has tortured his own puppy may have already been violent towards fellow children or towards adults.

Assessment

There are several assessment methods that can be useful in determining animal care. One is observation of the home environment. If parents and children are observed interacting with pets, much information can be gained. During office interactions, or at the home, family members can be asked about pets. Social workers should especially note if a breed of animal is associated with animal fighting or vicious dogs.

Several instruments are available to help in assessing an animal's condition. These are reviewed on the VCPN website. There are also instruments available to assist in assessing animal hoarding and these are reviewed on the VCPN website as well.



Interventions

Because research shows that violence towards children frequently exists alongside other forms of family violence such as domestic abuse and also co-occurs with animal cruelty, it may no longer be wise to treat these different forms of violence as separate, unrelated problems (Randour & Davidson, 2008). Due to the links, networking and a multidisciplinary approach to reporting, investigation, and intervention may be more effective in ensuring safe homes for children. Animal protection and child protection staff working together can detect unsafe conditions for children and animals earlier.

Several key agencies and providers can be included in multidisciplinary efforts. Child protective services, child welfare workers, and human service providers should be aware of the issue of animal abuse and its link to child maltreatment. Domestic violence shelters serve many families with cherished pets that may be left in harm's way when the mother and children seek shelter. Private providers, especially in-home service providers, are in a position to recognize animal cruelty. Humane societies, animal control officers, animal shelters, and animal rescue efforts need to be aware of the link between animal cruelty and child maltreat-

ment. All participants in court systems need to grasp the links between various forms of violence. Participants in community efforts to prevent child abuse should become aware of the links between child maltreatment and other forms of violence. Public health officials, animal control officers, and law enforcement are in a position to detect both animal cruelty and child maltreatment.

Cross-reporting of Animal Abuse and Child Abuse

Given the overlap between animal abuse and child abuse, a number of states have mandated cross-reporting of animal abuse and child abuse. Child protection agencies, animal health care providers, animal control agencies, and child health care providers are all affected. Enacting cross-reporting legislation is thought to be the most direct method to broaden protection for families, children and animals.

Of all 50 states, in 2009, there were 11 that had laws that allowed cross-reporting of animal abuse by CPS workers and six states had legislation that required CPS workers to report animal abuse (Animal Law Coalition, 2009, cited in Risley-Curtiss, Zilney & Horning, 2010). By 2014, there were 13 states with legislation related to cross-reporting (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2014). The legislation is quite varied. Veterinarians, animal control and animal welfare workers are mandated reporters of suspected child abuse in nine states; child and adult protective service workers and veterinarians are mandated reporters of suspected animal

abuse in 20 states, and are permitted to report in 11 additional states (National Link Coalition, 2014). In Virginia, an animal control officer is listed among persons required to report suspected child abuse.

There is limited literature about cross-reporting of child abuse and animal abuse. A study published in 2010 (Risley-Curtiss, et al.) surveyed the District of Columbia and 45 states using a 23-item survey. Researchers tried to reach individuals who were responsible for training of child protective services workers. Risley-Curtiss et al. found that 12 of 46 states (slightly more than a quarter) provide training for CPS staff to inquire about whether or not the family has animals. About 20% (9 of the 46) included information on assessing the types of relationships family members have with the animals and 8 of the 46 trainers included information about recognizing and assessing animal abuse.

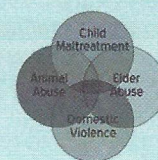
Considering cross-reporting, 26% of the respondents to the Risley-Curtiss et al. (2010) survey reported that some cross-reporting of animal abuse and child abuse occurs. Only three states (6.5%) had a CPS policy for cross-reporting. Only six states (11%) included information about cross-reporting in their core training while 24% (11 of the 46) included some information on cross-reporting in advanced training. The authors note that only five states included questions about animal abuse on their safety and risk assessment protocols, suggesting that when CPS workers do discover animal abuse, they do so by chance.

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NATIONAL LINK COALITION

*Working together to stop violence
against people and animals*

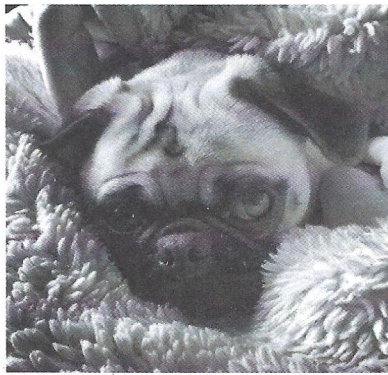


The National Link Coalition is a multidisciplinary, collaborative initiative to increase awareness, research, legislation and programs about the connections between animal abuse and human violence. Phil Arkow is the coordinator of The Link. He reports that there are more than 30 coalitions around the United States, including one in Virginia (see the article on Virginia's Picture, this issue).

The National Link Coalition began in 2008. Arkow explains the goals. The Link endeavors to obtain recognition for the connectedness between animal abuse and abuse of people. "Animal abuse is a human welfare issue," he states. A second goal is to expand the research base and to help people connect with research. Third, the Link hopes to monitor and affect public policy. An interdisciplinary approach is endorsed.

Arkow remarks, "Marvelous progress has been made. For example, in 1995, only five states considered animal cruelty as a felony. Now all 50 states have statutes making animal cruelty a felony." He adds that 900 women's shelters nationally offer some sort of foster care program for pets. "It removes a huge barrier if women fleeing domestic violence can bring their pets to shelter also."

Joining the National Link Coalition is free and members receive a newsletter. Interested readers can join the National Link at: <http://nationallinkcoalition.org/> Phil Arkow can be reached at (856) 627-5118 or E-mail: arkowpets@snip.net



Examining the Link

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The most comprehensive study found by VCPN staff was from Canada (Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012). Unlike prior studies, researchers limited their inquiry to child protective service workers who were actively investigating cases. An invitation to 627 workers yielded a fairly small response with 78 useable replies. The authors note that there may be sampling bias as workers who resonated with the issue of animal cruelty may have been more likely to respond.

Girardi & Pozzulo found that 45% of the workers had directly observed children harming animals during investigative visits over the previous year and 28% had observed adult caretakers physically harming animals. Most indicated that such observed behaviors happened rarely. The majority of workers (94%) had seen evidence of animal neglect (for example, inadequate food or water or excessive confining) while conducting child protection investigations. Almost half (44%) had observed evidence that an animal had been physically abused (such as visible injuries). About two-thirds witnessed animals behaving in a physically aggressive manner towards people in the homes they were investigating.

Despite the high numbers who had witnessed or who suspected animal cruelty, only 23% indicated that they usually reported the animal cruelty to the appropriate authorities. Forty-eight percent of the responding workers had not reported any instance of animal cruelty. Further, most of the respondents did not routinely ask questions to determine whether or not children had engaged in or witnessed animal cruelty.

What CPS Workers Can Do

For states where there is no legislation mandating cross-reporting, agency policy or networking such as through multidisciplinary teams can be used to address the co-occurrence of child maltreatment and animal abuse. While CPS workers are not expected to become authorities on cruelty-to-animal laws, they can make a sufficient assessment to determine whether or not an animal protection agency should be notified. CPS workers can also have policies and pro-

cedures established for reporting concerning animal situations. CPS workers can engage in cross-training with animal welfare staff where each agency can instruct the other about reporting procedures and indicators of a need to report (Arkow, 1997).

Routinely asking questions about animals in the home, the welfare of animals, and animal cruelty can provide opportunities for children or non-abusing parents to report concerns. Children and their caretakers may be willing to talk about animal maltreatment if they are asked. Furthermore, CPS workers should routinely try to examine the living conditions of animals in the home and to note observations of interactions between those living in the home and the animals (Girardi & Pozzulo, 2012).

Prevention

A primary prevention effort that is increasingly available through animal welfare organizations and in schools is humane education. Several of the Virginia SPCA organizations featured in this issue are very involved in humane education. Colleges and universities are beginning to offer degrees in the multidisciplinary field of Human-Animal Studies. Some of these institutions are featured on VCPN's website. There is also the emergence of the field of Animal Law. The ability to include pets in protective orders is just one example of recent legislative change that can prevent harm to animals.

Secondary prevention is aimed towards at-risk populations. These individuals would include those felt likely to abuse animals as well as those who have begun to abuse animals but are not known to abuse people (Ascione & Shapiro, 2009). Children who have witnessed abuse, those who live in violent environments, children with early signs of conduct disorder, those involved in bullying (either as a perpetrator or a victim) as well as those with isolated incidents of animal abuse or incidents of low severity

might be included in an at-risk population (see separate article on Children Who Abuse Animals, this issue). Model programs for treatment of animal abuse are described on VCPN's website.

Another secondary effort is allowing domestic violence victims to bring pets with them to shelters (see the article on Domestic Violence, this issue). Cross-reporting can be considered as a secondary prevention effort. Networking itself is a prevention effort. Interested readers can join the National Link which also has state chapters.

Tertiary efforts at intervention and treatment are described throughout this issue of VCPN and also are featured on our website. Effective violence prevention must begin with addressing perpetrators. Understandings of perpetrator behaviors and effective means to rehabilitate them will be crucial.

Future Directions

Research to date about links between child maltreatment and animal abuse has often lacked sophistication. Small samples and lack of control groups are common difficulties. Little multi-cultural research has been published. Studies have centered on convenience populations (such as shelter residents; incarcerated individuals; college students) which makes generalization difficult.

Summary

Phil Arkow, Coordinator of the National Link Coalition, commented in a recent interview with VCPN staff, "Animal abuse is a human welfare issue." The phenomena of violence towards animals and violence towards humans are often linked. Those who labor for animal protection and professionals who work with child protection, domestic violence, and elder protection should become aware of the linkages between animal welfare and maltreatment of humans.

References Available on the Website

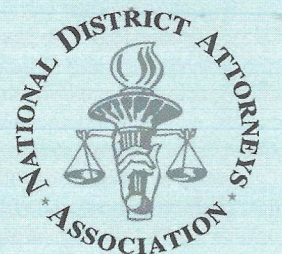
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The **National Center for Prosecution of Animal Abuse (NCPAA)** was created in 2011 by Allie Phillips in partnership with the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). Allie Phillips is a former Assistant Prosecuting Attorney and has been training prosecutors and allied professionals since 1997. **NCPAA's** goal is to support and train prosecutors and other professionals in the handling of animal abuse cases and cases involving the co-occurrence of violence to animals and people. The overall mission of **NCPAA** is to act in the best interests of animals and to create communities where animal protection laws are fully enforced.





DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ANIMAL ABUSE: THE CONNECTIONS



Pets can be important in families, filling both emotional and social needs for family members. Both adults and children can be deeply attached to pets. Approximately 68% of American households contained pets in 2013 and Americans spent approximately \$50 billion on food, care, and other expenses for pets in 2012 (Humane Society of the U.S., 2014).



How Often do Women Coming to Shelters Own Pets?

There is limited data about how many women who are seeking shelter due to domestic violence have pets. In the general population, 68% of households contain pets. Pets are present in over two-thirds of homes with children under age six and in nearly three-fourths of homes with children over age six (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2007). Therefore, general population data suggest that many women who experience domestic violence and many women with children who are seeking shelter due to domestic violence are likely to also have pets. Ascione (2007) summarized older studies (from 1998 to 2004) of women in domestic violence situations. He found the numbers of women with pet ownership were comparable to the pet ownership in U. S. women with children. The nine studies that included this information found pet ownership ranged from 40.2% to 90.6%.

How Often Are Pets Abused in Homes with Domestic Violence?

In surveys of women who are living at domestic violence shelters, large percentages (46% to 86%) of those who have pets report that their abuser had threatened to harm their pets or had actually harmed or killed them (Ascione, 1998; Ascione, Weber & Wood, 1997; Flynn, 2000; studies cited in Hardesty, et al., 2013; Volant, Johnson, Gullone & Coleman, 2008). Abusive acts include

hitting, punching, mutilating, and killing. Neglect can include deprivation of food, water, shelter, and veterinary care. Livestock can be affected as well as companion pets (Arkow, 1997). Pet abuse has been shown to be significantly higher in homes with domestic violence compared to control homes without domestic violence (Ascione et al., 2007; Volant et al., 2008).

While a number of studies have shown an association between animal abuse and domestic violence, few studies have included control groups. A study by Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye and Campbell (2005) analyzed a case-controlled study, conducted from 1994 to 2000 in 11 U. S. metropolitan cities. A total of 3,637 women who had experienced domestic violence and 845 control women participated. Four variables were identified as predictive of intimate partner violence. One of the four was pet abuse. The other three were not being a high school graduate, having a substance abuse problem, and being in fair or poor mental health.

Hardesty et al. (2013) interviewed 19 women in the Midwest who had sought shelter and who had pets. About half (9 women) reported that their abusers used the pet as a method of control. These abusers lacked emotional bonds to the pets while the women had strong emotional bonds to the pets and used the pets as a source of comfort. In some cases, the pets had protected the women during abusive episodes. The abusers made threats and/or physically harmed the pets. There were diverse decisions and outcomes, often traumatic, and women showed persistent worry about their pets. Their pets were seen as central to their recovery and the women planned to be reunited with the pets or planned to adopt new pets. In contrast, the 10 women whose abusers did not use pets as a control mechanism reported different characteristics. Some of the abusers were strongly bonded to the pets. The majority of these women left the pets with the abusers and they were comfortable with that decision. They had no plans to reunify with the pets and were ambivalent about owning pets in the future. They prioritized their children and themselves over the pets and had less emotional attachment to the pets.

Ascione (2000, reported in Becker & French, 2004) compared 100 women who

were battered and had sought help from a shelter with a sample of non-battered women. All women in the study had pets. For the battered women, 55% reported that their partner had hurt or killed their pets while 5% of the controls reported this. The battered women reported that 62% of their children were exposed to the animal abuse. One in four of the battered women reported that they remained in the abusive relationship due to concern about their pet. This study was similar to others such as Ponder and Lockwood (2000) where 44% of battered women reported their partners had abused or killed family pets and where 43% reported that concern for their pet's welfare kept them in the abusive relationship longer. Faver & Strand (2003) offer similar data. Almost half of their sample of 41 pet-owning battered women reported their partners had threatened or harmed their pets. Over a fourth reported that their concern about their pets had affected their decision about leaving or staying.

What Are the Psychological Dynamics of Pet Abuse in the Context of Domestic Violence?

Relatively little is known about the psychological dynamics at the intersection of domestic violence and pet abuse (Maiuro, Eberle, Rastaman & Snowflake, 2008). However, most perpetrators of domestic violence seek to exert control (Wilkinson, 2012). A myriad of control tactics have been postulated. Physical violence or threats of violence, control of financial resources, stalking, emotional abuse, isolation, and threats to harm children or abuse of children are some of the methods used by batterers in attempts to control their partner. In cases where the victim cares deeply about a pet, threats to kill or harm the pet, to give the pet away, to deprive the pet of food or care, and physical abuse of the pet can be additional ways to terrorize or control one's partner and children (Arkow, 1997; Becker & French, 2004; Gilbreath, 2008; Zorza, 2008). Abusers send a strong message warning women that they may be next when abusing or threatening to abuse a pet. The abuser is exerting domination and control while

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Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse

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simultaneously threatening to eliminate their partner's source of comfort. Women may be afraid to leave the abuser for fear of what harm will befall their pet(s).

Differences Between Batterers Who Abuse Pets and Those Who Don't

Carlisle-Frank, Frank & Nielsen (2004) compared the reports of women whose partners had physically harmed their pets to responses of women whose partners had not harmed pets. According to the women's reports, pet-abusing batterers were reported to show less affection towards pets. They communicated with pets through commands and threats. They were more likely to view animals as property. According to the women's reports, men who abused pets were more likely to have unrealistic expectations and were more likely to scapegoat the pets. They were more likely to have punished pets and were, in addition, more sensitive to stressful life events. The authors concluded that violence directed towards animals appears to be embedded in a complex set of attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs.

Effects on Children

Children who observe violence towards animals can become desensitized to violence. These children can also begin to abuse animals themselves (Arkow, 1997). Children living with family violence are exposed to significantly higher instances of animal abuse (studies cited in Thompson & Gullone, 2006). For example, in one study, 29% of mothers in the family violence group reported that their children had witnessed their partner harm or kill a pet while no mothers in the community sample reported this. Further, while 19% of mothers in a family violence group reported that their children had harmed or killed a family pet, only one mother in the community group (1%) reported that her child had harmed or killed a pet (Gullone, Volant & Johnson, 2004). These findings are similar to a survey of over 800 college students (DeGue & DeLillo, 2009). For those students who had witnessed family violence, about 30% had also witnessed animal cruelty. Witnessing animal cruelty had a strong overlap with perpetrating animal cruelty as well, as children who had witnessed animal cruelty were eight times more likely to perpetrate animal cruelty.

Do Women Delay Seeking Help or Refuse to Seek Help due to Inability to Protect their Pet?

Pets may be a factor in a woman deciding whether or not to leave an abusive relationship. For example, in a study of 101 women (Ascione et al., 2007), over a third reported delaying leaving because of concern about pets (cited in Hardesty et al., 2013). An Australian study (Volant et al., 2008) also found that about a third of women reported they had delayed leaving the abusive relationship because of concern for their pets' welfare. Ascione (2007) found data from nine studies that asked women if concern for a pet had delayed their help-seeking. The percentages of women who had delayed seeking shelter due to concern about pets ranged from 18.6% to 48%.



What Shelters Can Do

Since hotline staff members are often the first contact for women, it is important that they ask if any animals in the home also need protection. Women should be informed about options for protecting pets and pets need to be addressed in safety plans and risk assessments (Zorza, 2008).

Literature suggests that many domestic violence shelters are not able to accept pets and do not offer alternative housing for pets. Shelters may worry about practical problems for housing pets. Some residents or their children may be allergic to pets. Pets may be unvaccinated and carrying diseases. Pets may scratch or bite other residents or staff. Pets may require space and accommodations not easily available at a shelter. Pets can be expensive to care for. If a family brings pets and does not care for them properly, back up plans are needed, and possibly even require removal of the pet. Another challenge is re-housing women with pets. Since some landlords will not allow pets or will charge extra for pets, housing selections for women with pets can be more expensive and

more limited than for women without pets. These concerns are addressed in *Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T) Start-Up Manual* (2012) which is reviewed in this issue of VCPN.

Some shelters for battered women have developed safe placements for pets (Arkow, 2008; Gilbreath, 2008). In a recent interview with VCPN staff, Phil Arkow, Coordinator of the National Link Coalition noted that considerable progress has been made. "We now have 900 women's shelters that offer some sort of foster care program for animals, but there still is a tremendous need for pet-friendly shelters," commented Arkow. According to Allie Phillips (www.animalsandfamilies.org) nationally there are 84 domestic violence shelters with kennels on site and 17 more in process.

In some households, companion animals are co-owned by the household's adults. This means a batterer may be entitled to retrieve the animal from a safe haven program or have a claim for the theft of his property (Gilbreath, 2008). Women can bring any purchase records, adoption records, or veterinary records that are in her name to demonstrate ownership. If courts have included pets in protective orders or in a divorce or separation agreement, that action can alleviate concerns about the custody of the pet. Arkow related that in 2006 a woman testified in Maine and obtained a pet protection order. "Today," he added, "twenty-seven states recognize pet protection orders." A list of states that have made provisions for pets in protective orders is available on the website for The National Resource Center on the Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence (<http://nationallinkcoalition.org/>)

Summary

Both the presence of pets and the abuse of pets in the lives of battered women are realities that shelters, police, the court system, therapists, and child protective services workers need to be prepared to address. Prosecution should hold the batterer accountable for the abuse of all victims in the household. Police and shelter staff need to be aware of potential dangers to companion animals in the home. In addition to inquiring about pets and having arrangements to care for pets, counseling should include support for the complicated feelings of loss, guilt, and worry that battered women with pets may feel. Effects on children witnessing animal abuse can be long-lasting (see separate article, this issue). Since child witnesses of both domestic violence and animal abuse are considered at higher risk for poor outcomes (such as conduct disorders; bullying; violence towards others and violence towards animals), these children may need additional support and therapy over what is typically offered.

References Are Available on the Website or by Request

Special Thanks To.....

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Gary Patronek, Ph. D.
Allie Phillips, J.D.

CHILDREN WITNESSING ANIMAL ABUSE



There is no doubt that witnessing abuse and violence is detrimental to children. Child witnesses of domestic abuse experience a wide range of behavioral and emotional difficulties, although aggressiveness and conduct disorder are the problems most frequently linked to angry home environments. Attachment can be disrupted, as well as sleeping and eating patterns. High levels of somatic complaints and poor health have been documented. Increased arousal, avoidance reactions, and emotional numbing can result from exposure to domestic violence. School performance, social competence, and emotional development can be compromised. For a comprehensive review of the effects of children witnessing domestic violence, see VCPN, volume 60.

Young children's experience with animals, especially family pets, can be seen as a microcosm for how children learn to relate to others. What children observe and experience regarding how the adults in their lives treat pets and people presents lifelong lessons to the child (Lewchanin & Randour, 2008). The systematic desensitization of children to violence is felt to be a major factor in later manifestation of social deviance (Gibson, 2005).

Children Living With Domestic Violence

Children living in situations of domestic violence are more likely to witness animal abuse where pets are harmed or killed (Gullone, Volant & Johnson, 2004). Children living in situations of domestic violence are 20 times more likely to have witnessed a pet being abused than children from a control group (Ascione, Thompson & Black, 1997).

Children who witness pet abuse are both traumatized and desensitized to violence with effects evident both in childhood and as adults (Zorza, 2008). Witnessing a combination of domestic violence towards a parent and witnessing the abuse of a pet is thought to compromise children's psychological adjustment and also to increase the propensity for interpersonal violence through modeling or observational learning. Violence may be normalized if it is a usual occurrence in the child's home (Carlisle-Frank, Frank & Nielsen, 2004).

Barbara Boat, Ph. D. has argued that childhood exposure to animal abuse should be considered an ACE (Adverse Childhood Experience) that has the potential to contribute to "toxic stress" and the subsequent risks to the child's brain development, impaired potential, and negative health outcomes. (For an article about the ACE study, see VCPN, volume 87).

Effects of Witnessing Animal Cruelty

Research has linked witnessing animal abuse to significantly higher levels of animal cruelty (Thompson & Gullone, 2006; studies cited in Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Interestingly, witnessing a friend, a relative, a parent or a sibling abuse an animal is linked to significantly higher levels of cruelty towards animals, while witnessing strangers abusing animals is linked to significantly lower levels of later animal cruelty. Frequently witnessing animal abuse was linked to significantly higher levels of animal cruelty.

Flynn (2000a; 2000b) surveyed undergraduate students about their histories of witnessing animal abuse and perpetrating animal abuse. Overall, 17.6% had perpetrated animal abuse with males being four times more likely than females to engage in animal cruelty. The majority of those engaging in animal abuse had witnessed others abusing animals. DeGue and DeLillo (2009) had similar findings in a survey of 800 college students. Witnessing animal cruelty strongly overlapped with perpetuating animal cruelty.



Intervention

When working with children who may have witnessed violence, there are a number of areas of inquiry that may be fruitful. More detail is available in *A Common Bond: Maltreated Children and Animals in the Home* by American Humane (see review, this issue).

Relationships can be important, both the relationship between the child and the abuser and the relationship between the child and the animal. If workers learn about what happened to the animal and how frequently the abuse occurred, patterns of abuse in the home may be more evident. Children may not realize what constitutes animal abuse and may simply describe conditions that they feel are usual. Workers should be prepared for children to have a variety of responses to the conditions and treatment that they have witnessed and ask if the events bothered the child.



It may be helpful to know the role of the child. Was he or she passive and just observing? Was the child a participant? Was the child encouraged to abuse the animal as well? Did the child witness events that adults were hiding from the child or was the abuse done openly? Knowing the child's immediate and long-term response would be helpful. Does the child show anxiety, depression, or trauma responses? Does the child feel shame or guilt or remorse? Is the child indifferent or excusing the adult's behaviors?

Was the abuse of the animal part of a larger series of events? For example, was the child threatened that the animal would be hurt unless the child did certain things? Or was the animal punished because the child failed to do something?

If the child reported what was witnessed, who did they tell and what was the person's response? How does the child explain or make sense of the animal cruelty?

VCPN was not able to find specific interventions for child witnesses of animal cruelty. It is likely, however, that evidence-based treatments for trauma (reviewed in VCPN, volume 95) would be helpful with child witnesses of animal cruelty. Combining effective trauma treatments with humane education and with animal-assisted therapy could potentially enhance the intervention and make it more specific to the trauma of seeing animal cruelty.

Witnessing animal cruelty is likely to have a number of outcomes. Some children may become advocates of preventing cruelty and may become protective of animals and other living things. Unfortunately, others may have heightened risk to model the cruelty they have witnessed and to abuse animals and people (see the article, this issue, on Children Who Abuse Animals).

If service providers (counselors; medical staff; veterinarians; CPS workers; animal protection staff) become more aware of the potentially detrimental effects of witnessing animal abuse, children are more likely to be referred for support, evaluation, and treatment.

References Available on the Website
or by Request