



Incorporating the LINK into Social Work & Violence Against Women Shelters

What is the Violence Link?

Gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence and domestic violence, is a pervasive issue that impacts every community. Overwhelming research and statistics indicate animal abuse is prevalent in offenders who commit domestic violence.

While animal abuse has been linked to various forms of violence and crime, most of the research has identified domestic violence as one of the more commonly co-occurring forms of violence. In March 2016, the CACP Crime Prevention and Community Safety and Well-Being Committee endorsed the *National Framework for Collaborative Police Action on Intimate Partner Violence*. This document recognizes threats to harm pets as a form of IPVⁱ. Research into domestic violence, from a number of sources, has cited the following:

1. In one Australian study, women whose partners had threatened household pets were five times more likely to have experienced domestic violence in the relationshipⁱⁱ.
2. Pets can be used by perpetrators of domestic violence to coerce, humiliate and control their victims. In an American survey, more than 71% of female victims of IPV who own pets reported that their abusive partner had harmed, killed or threatened animals to coerce, control and humiliate themⁱⁱⁱ.
3. Perpetrators who abuse pets use other forms of violence and demonstrate greater use of controlling behaviours than partners who do not abuse pets^{iv}.
4. Abusers specifically choose pets as targets to avoid police detection because there is a commonly held belief that police do not give the same amount of attention to animal cruelty cases as they do domestic violence cases^v.

Also of great concern in the literature is the exposure of children to violence. Of the children exposed to domestic violence in one American study, 66% have also been exposed to pet abuse, and 51% said they had protected one of their pets or saved a pet from being hurt^{vi}. It has been established that a child witnessing animal cruelty experiences significantly higher risk of adolescent or adult interpersonal violence^{vii}.

Additional concerns are raised by studies addressing the link between pet abuse and the likelihood of an IPV victim leaving their abuser. Researchers from the University of Windsor and the University of Calgary have found that 56-74% of abused women living at shelters delayed leaving the home due to fear for their pet's safety^{viii ix}.

It is also clear that animal cruelty offenders are heavily linked to other anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. Research commissioned by the New South Wales Police in 2002 examined a sample of 200 individuals, out of a random sample of 947 offenders convicted of animal cruelty, homicide or sexual homicide. This research suggests that animal abuse is a better predictor of sexual assault than previous convictions for homicide, arson or weapons offences.



Why Incorporate the LINK?

Incorporating the violence link into your daily work can save lives. Knowing that animal abuse is often an early predictor of further violent crimes against humans can help your clients get out faster. Thanks to new Canadian research we know that:

- **89% of participants report their abusers engaged in animal abuse;**
- **65% report their abuser used physical harm to their animals to control, coerce or punish them;**
- **14.5% report their abuser killed their animals;**
- **56% of women who flee violence report delaying leaving their abusers due to concerns about the family pet;**
- **1/3 of those that do flee report returning to either check on the family pet or to move back in with the abuser because of the pet;**
- **82% of bestiality cases involve the sexual abuse of a child.**

Understanding and incorporation of the Link into the sheltering intake procedure can save lives – both human and animal.

What to Ask & When:

When a potential client reaches out to you because they wish to leave their abuser ask them the following questions about their pets:

1. Do you have animals on your property?
2. What type of animals?
3. How many animals?
4. Do you have concerns about the well being of your animals?
5. Has [your abuser] ever threatened or abused the pets?
6. If yes, what have they said/done?

ⁱ Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, National Framework for Collaborative Police Action on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), March 2016

ⁱⁱ Volant, A. M., Johnson, J. A., Gullone, E., Coleman, G. J. (2008). The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: An Australian Study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23(9)

ⁱⁱⁱ Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., & Wood, D. S. (1997). The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered. *Society and Animals*, 5(3), 205-218

^{iv} Simmons, C. A., Lehman, P. (2007). Exploring the Link Between Pet Abuse and Controlling Behaviors in Violent Relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(9)

^v Roguski, M. (2012). *Pets as Pawns: The Co-existence of Animal Cruelty and Family Violence*. Auckland: Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

^{vi} Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., Thompson, T. M., Heath, J., Maruyama, M., Hayashi, K. (2007). Battered Pets and Domestic Violence: Animal Abuse Reported by Women Experiencing Intimate Violence and by Non-abused Women. *Violence Against Women*, 13(4)

^{vii} DeGue, S., DiLillo, D. (2009). Is Animal Cruelty a “red flag” for Family Violence? Investigating Co-occurring Violence Toward Children, Partners, and Pets. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 24(6), 1036-1056

^{viii} Fitzgerald, A. J. (2017). The Intersection of Animal Maltreatment and Intimate Partner Violence in Canada: Findings from Recent and Ongoing Research. CFHS Canadian Violence Link Conference, December 6th 2017

https://d3n8a8pro7vymx.cloudfront.net/cfhs/pages/1763/attachments/original/1517008484/Dec_6_-_Understanding_and_Mitigating_the_Unique_Barriers_to_Leaving_-_Dr._Amy_Fitzgerald.pdf?1517008484

^{ix} Crawford, D, & Bohac Clarke, V. (2012). Inside the cruelty connection: The role of animals in decision-making by domestic violence victims in rural Alberta. Research report to the Alberta SPCA. Edmonton, Alberta: Alberta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.