

Animal abuse - Key Literature

Australia

Harpur, Paul, and Heather Douglas, 'Disability and Domestic Violence: Protecting Survivors' Human Rights' (2015) 23 (3) *Griffith Law Review* 405.

This paper reviews the literature in relation to domestic violence, the legal system and disability. It considers how disability domestic violence may be manifested eg pp 408-411 identifies that those victims who require support from their partners for daily tasks can be especially vulnerable to abuse (e.g. leaving a person who requires assistance off the toilet on the toilet for hours). Victims who rely on mobility aids, medication or medical technologies are especially vulnerable to partners who restrict access. It notes that people with disabilities have significantly different relationships with their pets when pets are service animals (e.g. guide dogs for blind and deaf people) – perpetrators who threaten or harm pets can have an extremely disabling impact upon a survivor with a disability; threatening to injure or immobilise a service animal is particularly distressing for a person who relies on that animal for their independence.

Kotzmann, J., Bagaric, M Wolf, G. & Stonebridge, M. [Addressing the impact of animal abuse: The need for legal recognition of abused pets as sentient victims of domestic violence in Australia.](#) (2022) 45(1) *University of New South Wales Law Journal* 184-208.

This article reviews current literature about animal abuse in the context of domestic violence (pp187-196) It then proposes introducing laws that recognise such animals as sentient victims of domestic violence arguing that this would enable courts to make orders protecting these animals, which would safeguard their welfare and ensure that people with whom they live who are also experiencing domestic violence can escape without worrying about the fate of their animals and it would convey the seriousness of animal cruelty, and might increase support for and awareness of programs for rehoming abused animals, and training of people involved with animals to identify and report animal abuse.

Tania Signal, Nik Taylor, Karena Burke and Luke Brownlow, 'Double Jeopardy: Insurance, Animal Harm, and Domestic Violence' (2018) 24(6) *Violence Against Women* 718.

This article analyses the overlap between animal harm and insurance discrimination for victims/survivors of domestic violence (DV). Deliberate harm of animals is an indicator of antisocial behaviours, including DV perpetration (p 719). Companion animals may hold special emotional significance for victims of DV, especially when they are also targeted for abuse. Adult victims of DV often risk their own wellbeing to protect their companion animals by delaying leaving, or returning to, a violent relationship. An online search

of Australian insurance companies was conducted to assess different policy stipulations regarding companion animals, and to determine whether non-accidental injury caused by an intimate partner would be covered. The authors also discuss the implications of exclusion criteria for victims/survivors of DV, shelters for animals implicated in a violent and/or abusive domestic relationship, and, more broadly, for cross or mandatory reporting (of animal harm) initiatives. The findings suggested that the majority of companies offering companion animal insurance in Australia refuse to pay the treatment costs for animals deliberately injured within a family violence context, which adds emotional and financial stress on human victims of DV (pp 722-3). The authors highlight the need to reconsider current approaches to violence, and to recognise the nuances of DV, especially where animals are involved. Not only does covering costs associated with harm to animals suffered as a result of DV in insurance policies ensure that the animals get treatment, but it also alleviates the pressure from their carers, who already experience high levels of stress and trauma.

Taylor, Nik & Fraser, Heather (2019) *Companion animals and domestic violence: Rescuing me, rescuing you (Palgrave Studies in Animals and Social Problems)* Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland.

Abstract: In this book, Nik Taylor and Heather Fraser consider how we might better understand human-animal companionship in the context of domestic violence. The authors advocate an intersectional feminist understanding, drawing on a variety of data from numerous projects they have conducted with people, about their companion animals and links between domestic violence and animal abuse, arguing for a new understanding that enables animals to be constituted as victims of domestic violence in their own right. The chapters analyse the mutual, loving connections that can be formed across species, and in households where there is domestic violence. *Companion Animals and Domestic Violence* also speaks to the potentially soothing, healing and recovery oriented aspects of human-companion animal relationships before, during and after the violence, and will be of interest to various academic disciplines including social work, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, geography, as well as to professionals working in domestic violence or animal welfare service provision.

Volant, Anne M, et al, 'The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: An Australian Study' (2008) 23(9) *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 1277.

This article reports on the first Australian research to examine the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse. 102 women recruited through 24 domestic violence services in the state of Victoria and a nondomestic violence comparison group (102 women) recruited from the community were interviewed by telephone for this study. Significantly higher rates of partner pet abuse, partner threats of pet abuse, and pet abuse by other family members were found in the violent families compared with the nondomestic violence group. As hypothesized, children from the violent families were reported by their mothers to have witnessed and committed significantly more animal abuse than children from the nonviolent families. Logistic regression analyses revealed, for the group as a whole, that a woman whose partner had

threatened the pets was 5 times more likely to belong to the intimate partner violence group.

International

Ascione, Frank R, et al, 'Battered Pets and Domestic Violence: Animal Abuse Reported by Women Experiencing Intimate Violence and by Nonabused Women' (2007) 13(4) *Violence Against Women* 354.

Drawing on available literature this study identifies the following reasons for attention to animal abuse in the context of domestic violence (see p355 of this article for relevant references):

- > Pets are often viewed as companions or even family members, and some may view animal abuse as another form of family violence.
- > Women who are victims of domestic violence may be especially devastated when batterers threaten and/or actually harm family pets.
- > If children are present, animal abuse may be an additional form of violence to which they are exposed.
- > Individuals who abuse animals are more likely to have been arrested for violent crimes and property and drug-related offences and to self-report engaging in delinquent behaviour.
- > Animals may sometimes be used as weapons against domestic violence victims.
- > Threats of harm to family pets may be used to coerce women who are battered into committing illegal acts at the behest of the batterer.
- > Concern for the welfare of family pets may be an obstacle to some women's seeking safety.

The article also reports on a study of 101 women residing at domestic violence shelters (S group) and another 120 women who were not in shelter and reported that they had not experienced domestic violence (NS group). The S group women were nearly 11 times more likely to report that their partner had hurt or killed pets than a comparison group of women who said they had not experienced intimate violence (NS group). The vast majority of shelter women described being emotionally close to their pets and distraught by the abuse family pets experienced. Children were often exposed to pet abuse, and most reported being distressed by these experiences.

Campbell, AM, Thompson, SL, Harris, TL & Wiehe, SE 2021, 'Intimate Partner Violence and Pet Abuse: Responding Law Enforcement Officers' Observations and Victim Reports From the Scene', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 36, no. 5/6, pp. 2353–2372.

US based study. Abstract: The risk of harm/injury in homes where intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs is not limited to humans; animals reside in as many as 80% of these homes and may be at substantial risk of suffering severe or fatal injury. Gaining a better understanding of IPV-pet abuse overlap is imperative in more accurately identifying the risks of harm for all individuals and animals residing in these homes. The objectives of this study were to utilize law enforcement officers' observations and IPV victim reports from

the scene of the incident to (a) determine the prevalence of pet abuse perpetration among suspects involved in IPV incidents, (b) compare characteristics of IPV incidents and the home environments in which they occur when the suspect has a history of pet abuse with incidents involving suspects with no reported history of pet abuse, and (c) compare IPV incident outcomes involving suspects with a history of pet abuse with those involving suspects with no reported history of pet abuse. IPV victims residing in homes with a suspect who has a history of pet abuse often describe "extremely high-risk" environments. With nearly 80% reporting concern that they will eventually be killed by the suspect, victims in these environments should be considered at significant risk of suffering serious injury or death. In addition, IPV victims involved in incidents with a suspect that has a history of pet abuse were significantly more likely to have had at least one prior unreported IPV incident with the suspect (80%) and to have ever been strangled (76%) or forced to have sex with the suspect (26%). Effective prevention/detection/intervention strategies are likely to require multidisciplinary collaboration and safety plans that address the substantial risk of harm/injury for all adults, children, and animals residing in the home.

Faver, Catherine A, and Elizabeth B Strand, 'Fear, Guilt, and Grief: Harm to Pets and the Emotional Abuse of Women' (2007) 7(1) *Journal of Emotional Abuse* 51.

This article reviews the literature regarding the emotional impact of pet abuse on abused women. It argues that harm inflicted on pets by a perpetrator is a form of emotional abuse. The article recommends among other things that service providers should include questions about pets and pet abuse in all assessments.

Fitzgerald, A. J., Barrett, B. J., Stevenson, R., & Cheung, C. H. (2019). [Animal Maltreatment in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence: A Manifestation of Power and Control?](#) *Violence Against Women*, 25(15), 1806–1828.

The study aimed to understand why animal abuse and IPV commonly co-occur. One hundred female survivors of IPV from sixteen emergency shelters were surveyed for the study. Fifty-five of these respondents had at least one pet at the time of their abusive relationship. The survey questions were designed to identify the sociodemographic of participants as well as to discover how the participants perceived motivation for and the intentionality of any animal maltreatment at the hands of their abusive partners. More specifically, researchers measured animal abuse using the Partner's Treatment of Animals Scale (PTAS) which assessed: (a) emotional abuse of animals; (b) threats to harm; (3) physical neglect; (4) physical abuse: and (e) severe physical abuse. The study hypothesised "that survivors' perceptions of their abusers' mistreatment of their pets as premediated and as intended to upset or control them would be significantly associated with higher levels of the five types of animal maltreatment measured by the PTAS" (1815/10).

Results: 89.1% of the women who kept pets during their abusive relationship reported at least one incident of animal maltreatment by their abusive partner. "The most common forms of pet abuse enacted by the perpetrators include threats to get rid of a pet (65.5%), scaring or intimidating a pet on purpose (60%), smacking a pet (56.4%), and throwing an object at a pet (50.9%)" (1815). At the extreme end of the abuse, 10.9% reported their partner breaking a pet's bones and 14.5% reported their partner killing the pet (1815).

Discussion: The findings of the study were consistent with the existing literature investigating the occurrence of pet abuse during abusive relationships. In particular, the results supported the notion that "survivors of IPV perceive that maltreatment of their pets is driven by their partner's desire to cause them emotional harm and/or to enact power and control over them" (1823)/ "that emotional abuse, threats against, and neglect of animals in the context of IPV are perceived by survivors to be part of the broader matrix of power and control tactics that perpetrators use to control them and/or cause them psychological harm". The study did note, however, that there are some forms of animal maltreatment that are not perceived by IPV survivors in this way, highlighting "the need to move beyond monolithic constructions of 'animal abuse' as a singular construct to consider the ways in which different types of animal maltreatment may have distinct correlates with IPV against women" (1823).

Other findings in the study include:

- > Participants in the study did not perceive the animal abuse to be premeditated.
- > While the survivors in our sample tended to understand the emotional abuse, neglect and threats against their pets as intentional and as motivated to exert and/or to regain power and control, the same is not true of physical animal abuse, particularly severe physical animal abuse.

Riggs DW, Taylor N, Fraser H, Donovan C, Signal T. *The Link Between Domestic Violence and Abuse and Animal Cruelty in the Intimate Relationships of People of Diverse Genders and/or Sexualities: A Binational Study*. J Interpers Violence. 2021 Mar;36(5-6):NP3169-NP3195. PMID: 29683079

"Of 503 people (all self-identified as having a diverse gender and /or sexuality) living in either Australia or the UK, 1/5 of those who had experienced IPV reported that animal cruelty had been perpetuated by the violent or abusive partner, associated with greater psychological distress and lower levels of social support."

Roguski, Michael, 'Pets as Pawns: The Co-existence of Animal Cruelty and Family Violence' (Report, Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges, 2012).

This New Zealand study draws on 30 interviews with clients of women's refuges, 30 interviews with community stakeholders identified as having some involvement/knowledge of the co-existence of animal cruelty and family violence, the results of a survey of 203 Women's Refuge clients, and the results of a

survey of 17 local NZSPCA managers. The study identified that it was common for perpetrators to use overt threats and actual harm to animals as a mechanism to attain and maintain control of their family members. The study determined that cruelty to animals was often present in family violence situations. The study also identified that cruelty to animals by perpetrators post-separation was common and that threats to animals had contributed to some survivors of family violence delaying leaving the relationship.