

Annotated Bibliography on Animal Abuse and Violence Against Women

The Animals and Society Institute is pleased to present this annotated bibliography on animal abuse and violence against women. This is part of a series of bibliographies on animal abuse and related topics. If you would like to suggest additional peer-reviewed articles to include in this review, please contact Dr. Lisa Lunghofer, lisa.lunghofer@animalsandsociety.org.

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 nonabused women. *Violence Against Women, 13*(4), 354-373.

Research question: What is the relationship between animal abuse and domestic partner violence against women?

Sample: Pet-owning women who had been abused and sought shelter in one of five domestic violence programs in Utah (N = 101). A control group of women who had not been abused (N = 120) was recruited from the surrounding communities. If women had children between the ages of 5 and 17, the child with the most contact with the family pet was interviewed (abused women N = 39; control group N = 58).

Methodology: As a measure of intimate partner violence, participants completed the Conflict Tactics Scale. Actions toward pets were measured using the Battered Partner Shelter Survey and the Families and Pets Survey. All women with participating children completed the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991). Children from the abused group were also interviewed using the Children's Observation and Experience with Their Pets Survey.

Findings: Threats to harm or kill pets were reported by 52.5 percent of the battered women group, while 12.5 percent of their control counterparts reported the same. In more than 85 percent of cases where animal violence or death did occur, women described themselves as "very close" to the pet; nearly 23 percent reported a delay in seeking shelter out of concern for the animal's welfare. Women who were victims of domestic violence were also more likely to engage in pet abuse (11.1 percent versus 2.5 percent), as were their children (37.5 percent versus 11.8 percent). Significant physical partner abuse strongly predicted the likelihood of pet abuse among batterers. Children in these situations were more likely to have behavioral problems, including animal abuse.

Limitations: This study had a small, relatively homogeneous sample. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the study, the batterers' behavior was assessed only through the reports of the women who took part in the study.

Ascione, F. R. (1997). Battered women's reports of their partners' and their children's cruelty to animals. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 1(1), 119-133.

Research question: This study aimed to ascertain the prevalence of pet ownership among women entering domestic violence shelters; the prevalence of threatened or actual animal abuse by the women's abusive partners; and the prevalence of animal abuse by the women's children.

Sample: Thirty-eight women who sought shelter at a domestic violence shelter in northern Utah.

Methodology: Shelter staff interviewed participants using the Battered Partner Shelter Survey-Pet Maltreatment Assessment.

Findings: Nearly three-quarters of the women interviewed owned pets. While more than 70 percent of women reported threats of violence toward pets from their abusers, nearly 60 percent of abusers actually carried out the threat, either harming or killing the animal. Nearly one in three of the women with children reported that one of their children harmed or killed animals; in most of these cases, the abusive partner had also either threatened or committed actual harm to a pet.

Limitations: This study's small sample size, and the fact that all women were from one small geographic area, limits the ability to generalize results. In addition, no control group existed for comparison, and estimates of violence depended solely on the battered women's reports.

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.

Research question: What are the impressions of domestic violence shelter staff regarding their experience with women reporting animal cruelty committed by their abusers? Do shelters routinely assess this information?

Sample: The largest shelter in each of 49 states (all except Utah) and the District of Columbia was recruited for this study. Shelters were generally located in large cities and offered overnight stays and children's services. Forty-eight shelters participated in the study.

Methodology: The authors developed a survey containing items about staffs' estimates of the co-occurrence of animal abuse and domestic violence, and whether a question about the co-existence of these forms of abuse is asked upon intake.

Findings: The majority of shelter staff – more than 83 percent – reported observation of the overlap between domestic violence and animal abuse. In addition, more than 85 percent of shelters reported women who sought their services talked about violence toward animals in their homes, and 63 percent reported children doing the same. However, only approximately 27 percent of shelters included questions about animal abuse on their intake forms or interviews.

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Limitations: No data on the actual overlap of domestic violence and animal abuse were collected. The questions posed to shelter staff also did not provide any information on the frequency of the overlap. Finally, the shelters surveyed were the largest in each state, and therefore exclude suburban and rural shelters, making generalization of findings difficult.

Faver, C. A., & Cavazos, A. M. (2007). Animal abuse and domestic violence: A view from the border. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 7(3), 59-81.

Research question: Are the rates of animal abuse among Hispanic women who have been victims of domestic violence similar to rates among non-Hispanic women? Do Hispanic women in abusive situations delay seeking shelter due to concern for their pets at the same rate as their non-Hispanic counterparts? Finally, do these women turn to their pets as sources of emotional support?

Sample: Pet-owning women seeking aid from two domestic agencies in South Texas, near the United States-Mexico border (N = 151). Nearly three-quarters of the women in the sample were Hispanic.

Methodology and tools: Shelter staff administered a modified version of the Pet Abuse Survey (Strand, 2003; Strand and Faver, 2005).

Findings: More than one-third of women (36 percent) reported that their violent partner threatened, abused, or killed their pet. More than 50 percent of non-Hispanic women reported pet abuse, while 32 percent of Hispanic women reported the same; however, this difference was not statistically significant. Most study participants (62 percent) reported that their pets were very important sources of emotional comfort. Among all pet-owning women, one-fifth reported that apprehension regarding their pets' safety affected their decision to seek shelter.

Limitations: The concept of pet abuse may have varied among participants, since the survey did not present a standardized definition. Measures of the severity of abuse and relative importance of pet abuse as a factor in delaying leaving the abusive situation were not included. Finally, the ethnicity of participants was not self-reported but based on the judgment of shelter staff; furthermore, ethnicity data was not collected for 11 percent of participants.

Faver, C. A., & Strand, E. B. (2007). Fear, guilt, and grief: Harm to pets and the emotional abuse of women. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 7 (1), 51-70.

Research Question: What is known about the emotional impact of pet abuse on battered women? What has research on the link between animal cruelty and domestic violence revealed about the dynamics of emotional abuse?

Sample: A literature review of animal abuse and domestic violence was analyzed through the feminist framework of Carol Adams. Existing research is examined using Adams' hypothesis that animal abuse is a display of power and control that must be considered separately from other

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forms of abuse because it attacks the emotional and physical well-being of humans and animals. This differs from other analyses because it focuses on *emotional* bonds between women and animals, as well as the fact that harm to animals is inherently different than harm to inanimate property.

Methodology: The authors reviewed a variety of articles examining the effects of pet abuse on those who have witnessed it in the context of domestic violence. Strategies are then recommended for how to assess and understand the emotional implications of witnessing pet abuse.

Findings: Pet abuse as emotional abuse has not been adequately studied or implemented in screening as part of domestic violence assessment. Studies of domestic violence and animal abuse have not adequately measured the implications of how abusers manipulate animals in order to control women's behavior. Pet abuse is a unique form of abuse because it harms both the human and the animal. Witnessing pet abuse may cause varied and long-lasting emotional trauma in domestic violence survivors. Animal abuse can trigger feelings of guilt, anger, shame and fear, all of which fall under the umbrella of emotional abuse. By investigating and assessing a woman's attachment and relationship to her pet, it will be possible to better understand the effect that pet abuse has on survivors of domestic violence.

Faver, C. A. & Strand, E. B. (2003). To leave or to stay? Battered women's concern for vulnerable pets. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18(12), 1367-1377.

Research question: What are the differences between rural and urban battered women in their experiences with pet abuse and the role that apprehension about their pets' welfare plays in their decision to leave or stay with their abuser? Additionally, the authors reviewed the effect that threatened or actual pet abuse actually has on a battered woman's decision to leave.

Sample: Subjects consisted of 41 women from two rural and four urban shelters located in a southeastern state.

Methodology: All subjects completed a survey distributed to them by shelter staff. The survey collected demographic information and included several questions from Ascione's (2000) Domestic Violence Pet Abuse Survey.

Findings: Nearly 50 percent of women reported that their batterer had both threatened and carried out abuse toward their pets; nearly 27 percent reported that this was a factor in their decision to stay or leave the relationship. While not statistically significant, more rural than urban women reported both threatened and actual abuse, and concern for pets affecting their decision-making. Overall, logistic regression analyses indicated that women whose partners had threatened or harmed their pets were significantly more likely to report that concern for their pets affected their decision about leaving or staying with their batterer.

Limitations: The sample included both women who had left the abusive relationship and were in a shelter and women who were receiving services but still in the relationship. Limited resources

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resulted in the use of only one set of questions about decision making for both groups. As a result, the authors were not able to determine whether concern for a pet actually hastened or delayed the decision to leave the relationship. In addition, because the survey was administered by shelter staff, it is unclear what information was provided to study participants prior to survey completion. Women who had concerns about pets may have been more likely to participate than other women.

Flynn, C. P. (2000). Woman's best friend: Pet abuse and the role of companion animals in the lives of battered women. *Violence Against Women*, 6(2), 162-177.

Research question: Flynn's study aimed to answer four main questions: "What is the nature and extent of pet abuse suffered by battered women; how important are pets as sources of emotional support to victims of abuse; do women continue to worry about their pets after seeking shelter; and does concern for the welfare of their pets cause some women to delay seeking shelter" (p. 163).

Sample: The sample for this study was derived from a South Carolina shelter for women who had been battered by a male partner during a five-month period in 1998 (N = 107).

Methodology: During intake, women were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding pets and their experiences with pet abuse.

Findings: Approximately 40 percent of respondents indicated that they had pets either currently or at some point during the relationship. Of these, nearly 50 percent reported that their partner had threatened (nine respondents) or carried out (11 respondents) abuse toward the animal. Most pet owners – nearly three-quarters – reported that their pets served as at least somewhat significant sources of emotional comfort. Women who reported that their pets were abused were more likely to report that their pets were important sources of emotional support. Women continued to worry about their pets after seeking shelter, especially if the pet had suffered abuse previously. Eight women, or nearly 20 percent of those with pets, reported delays in seeking shelter due to concerns about their companion animals.

Limitations: The method of recruitment for this study resulted in a relatively homogenous and small sample. Only descriptive data are presented. No statistical tests were conducted to determine whether differences noted were statistically significant.

Loring, M. T., & Bolden-Hines, T. A. (2004). Pet abuse by batterers as a means of coercing battered women into committing illegal behavior. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 4(1), 27-37.

Research question: The authors explored whether threatened or actual violence against a woman's pets heightens her susceptibility to coercion to participate in illegal activities such as forgery, fraud, drug trafficking and theft. In addition, the authors explored whether women who are the victims of such coercion are traumatized by compromising their values in order to protect their pets, or by separation from pets as a result of incarceration.

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Sample: Women referred to a family violence center specializing in helping women who have legal issues served as the subjects of this research (N = 107).

Methodology: Either a psychologist or a social worker interviewed each woman and reviewed relevant documentation (e.g., police reports) in order to understand the circumstances of the pet abuse and the woman's potential for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Findings: Seventy-two of the women studied owned pets, and 75 percent of these women (N = 54) had experienced both threats and actual abuse perpetrated on their pets by their batterer. Among these 54 women, 24 had been coerced by their male partner to commit illegal activity as a result of abuse or threats against the woman's pets. Each woman met the criteria for PTSD, and all described the anguish experienced when their pets were threatened or abused, especially as the pet provided a comforting presence in times of abuse and isolation.

Limitations: The study presents only descriptive statistics.

Salter, D., McMillan, D., Richards, M., Talbot, T., Hodges, J., Bentovim, A., Hastings, R., Stevenson, J., & Skuse, D. (2003). Development of sexually abusive behavior in sexually victimised males: A longitudinal study. *The Lancet*, 361 (Feb. 8), 471-476.

Research Question: What are the risk factors that contribute to adult men committing sexual abuse?

Sample: 224 adult male survivors of childhood sexual abuse

Methodology: Researchers analyzed reports of 224 male children who had been seen at a sexual abuse clinic between 1980 and 1992. The data were coded to identify possible risk factors that could lead children to become perpetrators of sexual abuse later in life. The research team then investigated police reports from around the country to determine whether or not the 224 men had been arrested or investigated for illegal activity, paying particular attention to crimes of a sexual nature. The team also noted whether the subject had been observed committing sexual abuse as a minor.

Findings: Although it is commonly believed that children who are sexually abused will grow up to commit abuse themselves, the study indicated that only 12 percent (26) of the 224 men had been observed or charged with any type of sex-related crime. Of these victim-abusers, 71 percent had been neglected as children, 58 percent had witnessed intrafamilial violence, and 38 percent had been abused by a female person. Twenty-nine percent of victim-abusers were recorded as having been cruel to animals, compared to 5 percent of nonabusers. Although animal abuse was not the most widely reported risk factor in the study, it was present in more cases of victim-abusers, indicating that it was a significant risk factor.

Limitations: The study only analyzed reported cases of sexual assault and only identified victim-abusers from police reports. It is possible that more subjects committed abuse but were not

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identified. Additionally, the lack of a control group failed to account for risk factors that contribute to sexual assault by men who were not abused as children. The time frame of the study also limits the results, as subjects could potentially begin to commit abuse later in life after data collection ended.

Simmons, C. A., & Lehmann, P. (2007). Exploring the link between pet abuse and controlling behaviors in violent relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 22(9), 1211-1222.

Research question: What is the connection between pet abuse and the display of controlling behaviors in abusive relationships?

Sample: Women seeking assistance at an urban Texas domestic violence shelter (N = 1,283) between 1998 and 2002.

Methodology: Pet abuse was measured with five Likert-scale items: threats, verbal abuse and physical abuse toward pets; killing pets; and carrying out violence in the presence of children. Controlling behaviors were measured using the Checklist of Controlling Behaviors (Lehmann, 1998). Types of abuse were captured by shelter intake questionnaires regarding the presence of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and stalking. Marital rape was also included, based on responses to the Checklist of Controlling Behaviors.

Findings: One quarter of respondents indicated that their partners had committed an act of animal abuse. All types of abuse (aside from physical) were reported significantly more often in conjunction with pet-abusing partners. Women reporting batterers who abused or killed pets reported significantly higher scores on the Checklist of Controlling Behaviors, as well as on each of its subscales (e.g., intimidation, isolation, blaming).

Limitations: Study results were based solely on women's reporting of their partners' behaviors, accounts of which generally differ between parties (Browning & Dutton, 1986). In addition, acts of animal abuse may occur outside of the victim's knowledge, so the actual incidence of abuse may in fact be higher.

Tiplady, C. M., Walsh, D. B., & Phillips, C. J. C. (2012). Intimate partner violence and companion animal welfare. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, 90(1-2), 48-53.

Research question: How does intimate partner violence (IPV) influence companion animal welfare?

Sample: Twenty-six Australian women age 18 and over with at least one companion animal.

Methodology: Self-selected respondents contacted the researcher by telephone. Participants were screened using the Hitting, Insulting, Threatening, Screaming and Frightening (HITS) tool, a scale reflecting behaviors related to IPV. Additional questions, presented in an interview format, addressed pets' behavior following IPV, threats made regarding pets, and actual physical or verbal abuse toward the animal.

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Findings and implications: A majority of respondents indicated either physical (77 percent) or verbal abuse (92 percent) toward their pets. Nearly one-third indicated that their partner threatened violence toward a pet if the woman were to leave the situation. Most respondents (85 percent) reported long-term behavioral changes in their pets following IPV, including timidity/cowering, fear and aggression. Most women (69 percent) also reported that they did not know about emergency pet accommodation services that would keep their pets safe while they escaped the violent situation. Almost two-thirds of women said they would not use such a service due to attachment to their pets (65 percent).

Limitations: The method used to recruit women into the study may have introduced significant bias, and the study's very small sample size limits its generalizability.

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), 1277-1295.

Research question: What are the rates of partner animal abuse among a sample of female victims of domestic violence versus women who had not been abused? What percentage of women hesitated to leave their violent situation out of concern for their pets?

Sample: A group of women who had experienced domestic violence (DV group) was recruited from domestic violence service agencies in the Australian state of Victoria, while women in the non-abuse group were drawn from the community. In order to qualify for inclusion in the DV group, women had to have experienced domestic violence in either a current or recent relationship, and had to have owned a pet during that relationship. In addition, those who were asked about delays in leaving their abusive situation were living in a shelter or transitional housing situation specifically for victims of domestic violence (N = 33). Each group comprised 102 women.

Methodology: Participants were interviewed via telephone and asked questions about animal abuse in the home (partner, child or other family member); threats of animal abuse (partner/child); and actual or threats of animal abuse witnessed by a child.

Findings: Nearly 53 percent of women in the DV group reported partner violence toward pets, while none of the women in the control group reported animal abuse. Forty-six percent of women in the DV group reported partner threats of abusive behavior toward pets, while nearly 6 percent of women in the control group reported threats. Children's animal abuse between the groups differed significantly as well, with 19 percent of women in the DV group reporting animal abuse perpetrated by their children, and 1 percent of control group participants reporting the same. Of women qualifying for questioning regarding a delay in leaving their abusive situation, one-third reported a delay, with the majority delaying leaving for more than eight weeks. Threats of animal abuse by a partner were a significant predictor of group membership; women who reported their

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partner had threatened abuse toward pets were five times more likely to belong to the DV group than the control group.

Limitations: Demographically, the women in the two groups were significantly different in terms of age, number of children and education level. These differences may account for study findings.

Walton-Moss, B.J., Manganello, J., Frye, U. & Campbell, J.C. (2005). Risk factors for interpersonal violence and associated injury among urban women. *Journal of Community Health, 30(5), 377-389.*

Research Question: What are the risk factors for abuse and intimate partner violence-related injury among an urban population?

Sample: Women who had survived an attempted homicide (N = 183) or the proxies of women who did not survive (N = 220) in 11 U.S. cities between 1994 and 2000. A control group consisted of women selected through random stratified digit dialing in the same cities. Within the control, half reported being threatened with physical and/or sexual harm in the past two years (N=427) and half did not (N=418).

Methodology: All control group members were asked to complete the Danger Assessment, HARRASS, and five questions from the CVAWS in order to evaluate emotional abuse. They were also asked questions related to socio-demographic factors, relationship characteristics, weapon availability, drug use, psychological abuse, perceived mental health of self and partner, and prior arrest of partner. The results were analyzed with STATA.

Findings: For the women in the study, two risk factors for abuse were found: younger age and fair or poor mental health. Women who were less than 26 years old and women who reported fair to poor mental health were about twice as likely to be abused. Perpetrators of IPV were more likely to have not graduated from high school, abused alcohol or drugs, and only be described as having fair or poor mental health. They were also more likely to abuse or threaten to abuse pets. Study findings suggest that characteristics of the partner are more strongly and more often associated with abuse than characteristics of the victim. Greater focus on partner characteristics as risk factors for IPV may lead to earlier identification and intervention.

Limitations: The study had three major limitations. First, it relied only on women's retrospective accounts of their own abuse and did not account for the perspective of their partners. Second, it was only able to examine the experience of women in an urban environment and didn't take into account the experiences of rural women. Third, it only measured homicide and near-homicide experiences and ignored risk factors such as childhood abuse.

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