



# Pet Abuse, Interpersonal Violence, and Victim Services

*The Center for Victim Research (CVR) Library's annotated bibliographies collect and summarize research about difficult-to-search topics in victim research.*

Animal welfare advocates and researchers sometimes refer "The Link," the co-occurrence of violence against humans and against animals. This annotated bibliography collects research about the connections between domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and pet abuse, the influence of pets on victims' decisions about reporting abuse, leaving relationships, or seeking services, and examples of multidisciplinary collaborations in animal welfare, human services, and criminal justice for addressing violence. Research focused on 2016-2020 and includes research from the United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. This is not a comprehensive scan of all literature. Articles are linked to the full-text when possible; other articles are available in the [CVR Library](#) for registered users (free to register).

## Pet Abuse Co-occurring with Family Violence

**[Elder Abuse and Animal Abuse: Implications and Strategies for Adult Protective Services](#)** by P. Arkow. (2016, National Adult Protective Services Association, Research to Practice Series, 2 pgs.)

This workshop summary discusses circumstances that Adult Protective Services workers may encounter with clients who have pets, like pet neglect or pets used by family to control older adults. The author suggests adding questions about pet well-being to intake forms and assessments, which may also uncover elder abuse.

**[Help-Seeking Among Abused Women With Pets: Evidence From a Canadian Sample](#)** by B.J. Barrett et al. (2018, *Violence and Victims*: 33(4), 604-626)

This study captured how companion animals affect women's decisions about violent relationships and service utilization. Findings showed that animal mistreatment was common among survivors who had pets. Some study participants did not leave the relationship earlier because of their concerns for their pets. At the same time, survivors were also motivated to leave their partners because of the pet abuse. Women who reported severe intimate partner violence indicated they would have left a relationship sooner if pets were allowed in the shelter.

*See also for additional research in Canadian shelters about domestic violence and pet abuse: [Examining the Relationship Between Intimate Partner Violence and Concern for Animal Care and Safekeeping](#) [Author Manuscript] by M.A. Wuerch et al. (2017, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20 pgs.)*

**Intimate Partner Violence and Pet Abuse: Responding Law Enforcement Officers' Observations and Victim Reports From the Scene** by A.M. Campbell et al. (2018, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 20 pgs.)

Researchers analyzed incident reports detailing current domestic violence and previous violence, which included a question on pet abuse. Findings indicated that suspects with a history of pet abuse were also likely to have a history of strangling the victim and making death threats. Minors were often present in homes with co-occurring animal abuse and domestic violence. Police reported that victims in homes with pet abuse seemed more afraid, apologetic, and nervous and were more likely to have bruises and report pain. The authors discussed potential reasons for the differences between their study's and other studies' prevalence of co-occurring domestic violence and pet abuse (3% vs. up to 75%).

**Search Tips**

**Human Services:** Adult Protective Services, Child Welfare, Child Protective Services, Sheltering Animals and Families Together, victim assistance

**Pet Abuse:** animal welfare, animal cruelty, violence against companion animals

View an [example search](#) in the CVR Library.

**A Template Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence Survivors' Experiences of Animal Maltreatment: Implications for Safety Planning and Intervention** by E.A. Collins et al. (2018, *Violence Against Women*: 24(4), 452-476)

This survey asked about survivors' exposure to pet mistreatment. Researchers categorized these experiences as another coercive control tactic, abusive partners' discipline for perceived pet misbehavior (including pets protecting victims), and as children replicating partners' animal abuse or attempting to gain control in their lives. The study also described how witnessing pet abuse impacted women's mental health and how worrying about pets' well-being delayed help-seeking.

See also survivors' perceptions of their children's experiences with animal maltreatment: **Intimate Partner Violence Survivors' Reports of Their Children's Exposure to Companion Animal Maltreatment: A Qualitative Study** by S.E. McDonald et al. (2019, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*: 34(13), 2627-2652)

**The Connection Between Animal Abuse, Emotional Abuse, and Financial Abuse in Intimate Relationships: Evidence from a Nationally Representative Sample of the General Public** by A.J. Fitzgerald, B.J. Barrett, A. Gray, & C.H. Cheung (2020, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23 pgs.)

This Canadian study explored violence against animal companions as a form of emotional abuse in a community-based sample (rather than shelter-based or police-reported samples). Threatening and perpetrating pet abuse increased the likelihood that abusers used other forms of emotional abuse and controlling, jealous behaviors. However, pet abuse was not as strongly related with property or financial abuse, even though pets are legally property. The authors discuss how service providers can approach this unique bond, as survivors do not view their pets as property but as an important source of emotional support.

**Pets in Danger: Exploring the Link Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse** by M. Newberry (2016, *Aggression and Violent Behavior*: 34, 273-281)

To estimate prevalence and forms of pet abuse, this study applied content analysis to posts in online forums where domestic violence survivors voluntarily and anonymously discussed their experiences of pet abuse. Survivors discussed the importance of their pets in their lives, including how pets helped them cope with abuse and tried to protect survivors from violence. The forum posts detailed types of pet abuse, including as threats and forms of controlling survivors' behavior. Survivors also shared their perceptions about why perpetrators targeted their pets: to discipline the animals, to demonstrate jealousy and threats to harm humans, and to deal with the abusers' own trauma.

**People of Diverse Genders and/or Sexualities Caring for and Their Animal Companion: Experiences of Family Violence in a Binational Sample** [Author Manuscript] by N. Taylor et al (2019, *Violence Against Women*, 25(9), 1096-1115)

This article reviews the literature on the connection between pet abuse and domestic violence, studies about identity-based intimate partner violence (like threats to tell others about a survivor's sexuality), and research about the support that people of diverse sexualities and/or gender identities find in their pets. The article also includes survey results from the United Kingdom and Australia, which found that pets provided emotional strength for coping with abuse, protecting animals' well-being was a priority for survivors, and witnessing violence against their pet was often a trigger to leave a relationship. Survivors also noted their pet's emotional trauma and the lack of pet-friendly victim services.

See more analysis of this study: [\*\*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\*\*](#) by D.W. Riggs et al. (2018, *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27 pgs.)

## **Victim Services Collaborations and Animal-assisted Interventions**

[\*\*An Increasing Risk of Family Violence During the Covid-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Community Collaborations to Save Lives\*\*](#) by A.M. Campbell (2020, *Forensic Science International*, 3 pgs.)

This article reviews natural disaster research as a potential area for insight on how stay-at-home orders compound risk factors related to family violence and animal abuse. The author's recent study found that neighbors are more likely to report animal abuse than domestic abuse and that animal abuse can indicate more severe forms of domestic abuse. The author discusses how animal welfare and human welfare organizations can work together to address both forms of violence.

[\*\*Fleeing with Fido: An Analysis of What Canadian Domestic Violence Shelters Are Communicating Via their Websites about Leaving an Abusive Relationship when Pets Are Involved\*\*](#) by A. Gray et al. (2019, *Journal of Family Violence*: 34, 287-298)

The researchers reviewed shelter websites for information about the link between animal-directed and human-directed abuse and help seeking and safety planning services in relation to pet ownership. They found that most shelter websites did not mention pets or animals at all and few discussed pet-friendly services.

[\*\*Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence and Internalizing Symptoms: The Moderating Effects of Positive Relationships with Pets and Animal Cruelty Exposure\*\*](#) by R.D. Hawkins et al. (2019, *Child Abuse & Neglect*: 98, 104166)

This study reviewed how witnessing intimate partner violence and animal cruelty and bonding with pets affects children's mental health. Findings indicated that positive relationships with pets may act as a protective factor to limit internalizing problems and posttraumatic stress symptoms.

See more research on how pets impact children's stress: [\*\*Effect of Pet Dogs on Children's Perceived Stress and Cortisol Stress Response\*\*](#) by D.A. Kertes et al. (2017, *Social Development*: 26(2), 382-401) and a related intervention in Spain: [\*\*Leaving A Mark, An Animal-Assisted Intervention Programme for Children Who Have Been Exposed to Gender-Based Violence: A Pilot Study\*\*](#) by A. Muela et al. (2019, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*: 16(21), 4084)

**Animal Abuse as a Type of Trauma: Lessons for Human and Animal Service Professionals** by M.L. Randour et al. (2019, *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 12 pgs.)

This article summarizes peer-reviewed research about co-occurring animal abuse and domestic violence or child abuse. The authors also review policy changes like protective orders that include pets, legal statuses of pets, cross-reporting between social services and animal welfare organizations, and the 2014 update to the FBI's National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) to include animal cruelty.

**Current Challenges to Research on Animal-assisted Interventions** by J. Serpell, S. McCune, N. Gee & J.A. Griffin (2017, *Applied Developmental Science*: 21(3), 223-233)

This review article summarizes the state of studies on the human-animal interactions and their effect on humans' well-being. The authors discuss the research on these studies' theoretical bases and research gaps related to methodologies, study samples, and types of therapy animals. The authors also mention the potential disconnect between research on about long-term human-animal bonds with personal pets and the typically short interactions with therapy animals.

See also: **[The State of Animal-Assisted Interventions: Addressing the Contemporary Issues That Will Shape the Future](#)** by A.H. Fine, A.M. Beck, & Z. Ng (2019, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16, 3997)

**[The Link Between Interpersonal Violence and Animal Abuse](#)** by A. Vincent, S. McDonald, B. Poe, & V. Deisner (2019, *Society Register*: 3(3), 83-101)

This article summarizes research about domestic violence, child welfare, and community violence and the connections to violence against animals. It also reviews the current state of cross-reporting between human services and animal welfare organizations and the use of data to improve policies related to animal cruelty and abuse. Finally, the authors offer a case study of Ohio legislation about cross-reporting and community outreach to improve connections between fields to address animal abuse co-occurring with domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse.

## Additional Resources:

- [HABRI Central](#) collects studies about the Human-Animal Bond.
- The Humane Society Institute for Science and Policy - Animal Studies Repository includes [Annotated Bibliography: Cruelty to Animals and Violence to Humans](#) (2014-2015) by Erich Yahner.
- National Link Coalition coordinates multidisciplinary teams to advocate for policies and services that address violence against humans and animals. One of the coordinators, Phil Arkow, regularly updates [Bibliography of The Link between Animal Abuse, Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, Elder Abuse, and Community Violence](#).

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