



ANIMAL CRUELTY'S LINK TO OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE

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When humans or animals in a home are abused or neglected, it creates a warning signal that others in the household may not be safe. Numerous documented studies show that there is a direct link between acts of cruelty to animals and violence toward others; including intimate partner abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, and other violent behavior.¹

Research on “The Link” has shifted the way the public perceives animal cruelty, and has motivated states to enact laws in response.

- Animal crimes are being taken more seriously. All 50 states and 4 territories have enacted felony animal cruelty provisions for first-time offenses, up from just six jurisdictions in 1990.
- 32 states have statutes allowing animals to be included in protective orders. This means that a person can take their companion animal along when escaping an abusive home, and the restraining order that protects the person can protect the animal as well.
- 13 states mandate or permit child protection and social work officials to report suspected animal abuse; 10 states have laws requiring or permitting humane and animal control officers to report suspected child maltreatment.
- In 10 states, animal fighting can be an underlying offense giving rise to racketeering charges.² This is due to the high incidence of other crimes, such as drug trafficking and gambling, that are so often present at animal fights.

Animal abuse often coincides with domestic violence, including intimate partner abuse and child abuse.

- In homes where serious animal abuse has occurred, there is an increased probability that some other type of family violence is also happening. According to one study, women in domestic violence shelters are 11 times more likely to report that their partner hurt or killed a pet, as compared with women who have not suffered domestic

¹ Despite popular perception, it is not always the case that a person will first commit animal abuse and then graduate to violence against humans. What studies *do* show is that, if a person commits animal abuse, it is likely that the same person already has, or at some point will, commit violence against humans. This means that animal abuse can be an indicator of other forms of violence and conversely, violence against humans—particularly domestic violence and child and elder abuse—may also be an indicator that animals in the home are in danger. See Arnold Arluke et al., *The Relationship of Animal Abuse to Violence and Other Forms of Antisocial Behavior*, 14-9 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 963 (1999); See also Tia Hoffer et al., *Violence in Animal Cruelty Offenders*, NEW YORK: SPRINGER BRIEFS IN PSYCHOLOGY/BEHAVIORAL CRIMINOLOGY (2018).

² Those states are: Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.



abuse.³ In another study, 89% of women who had companion animals during an abusive relationship reported their animals were threatened, harmed, or killed by their abuser.⁴

- Abuse of a companion animal is one of the four most significant risk factors for someone becoming a domestic abuser,⁵ and is an indicator of the use of controlling and violent behaviors.⁶
- Threats or actual abuse of a companion animal may be used to control women and children, forcing them to remain in an abusive situation out of concern for the safety of their animal. In homes with domestic violence, 50% of children reported that the abuser threatened to harm or kill a beloved animal in order to maintain control over their human victims.⁷ Studies have also shown that up to 56% of battered women have delayed their escape out of fear for their animals.⁸
- Children often interfere to protect their animals from violence. This willingness to insert themselves in a potentially dangerous situation demonstrates the important role companion animals play in children's lives—particularly children raised in abusive households who may crave companionship and comfort.⁹

When children or teenagers abuse animals, it could be a sign that the child has been abused, or that intervention is necessary to prevent him or her from harming others.

- If a child is cruel to animals it may be a sign that serious abuse or neglect has been inflicted on the child. Children who exhibit cruelty towards animals are more than twice as likely to have suffered maltreatment themselves.¹⁰
- A study conducted in Australia found that teenage boys who bullied their peers were more likely to have abused an animal. The same study also found that both bullying and

³ Frank Ascione et al., *Battered Pets and Domestic Violence: Animal Abuse Reported by Women Experiencing Intimate Violence and by Nonabused Women*, 13 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, 354 (2007).

⁴ Betty Jo Barrett et al., *Animal Maltreatment as a Risk Marker of More Frequent and Severe Forms of Intimate Partner Violence*, 26-1 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 1 (2017).

⁵ Benita J. Walton-Moss et al., *Risk Factors for Interpersonal Violence and Associated Injury among Urban Women*, 30-5 JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY HEALTH, 377 (2005) (Other factors include low education levels, mental health issues, and substance abuse).

⁶ Catherine A. Simmons & Peter Lehmann, *Exploring the Link Between Pet Abuse and Controlling Behaviors in Violent Relationships*, 22-9 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 1211 (2007) (Study showed positive correlation between abuse of a pet and violent and controlling behaviors. Violent behaviors reported included physical and sexual violence, and stalking. Reported controlling behaviors included intimidation, blaming, threats, isolation, and emotional and economic abuse.)

⁷ Shelby Elaine McDonald et al. *Children's Experiences of Companion Animal Maltreatment in Households Characterized by Intimate Partner Violence*, CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, 1 (2015).

⁸ Betty Jo Barrett et al., *Animal Maltreatment as a Risk Marker of More Frequent and Severe Forms of Intimate Partner Violence*, 26-1 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 1 (2017).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ Fiona S. McEwen et al., *Is Childhood Cruelty to Animals a Marker for Physical Maltreatment in a Prospective Cohort Study of Children?* 38-3 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, 533 (2014); see also Sarah DeGue & David DiLillo, *Is Animal Cruelty a "Red Flag" for Family Violence?: Investigating Co-occurring Violence Toward Children, Partners, and Pets*, 24-6 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 1036 (2009).

animal abuse often coincided with a need for egoistic power and a lack of cognitive empathy.¹¹

A large number of Adult Protection Workers report that their clients' animals suffer abuse and neglect, either at the hands of another caregiver or the owners themselves.

- Many seniors and disabled adults are vulnerable to abuse at the hands of caregivers. This puts the companion animals of elderly persons at risk as well. More than 35% of adult protective services workers report that their clients have talked about their pets have being threatened, injured, killed, or denied care by a caregiver.¹²
- Elderly people sometimes neglect their animals because they are physically, mentally, or financially unable to provide proper care.¹³ 45% of adult protective services workers reported that their clients either purposefully or negligently neglected a companion animal. In the vast majority of those cases, the neglect of the animal coincided with self-neglect, causing the elderly person to suffer as well.¹⁴

Animal cruelty is closely related to other types of crimes and human violence.

- Researchers have found that 43% of school shooters in the United States between 1988 and 2012 had histories of animal abuse. The majority of those histories include close-up and personal violence against neighborhood companion animals, such as dogs or cats.¹⁵
- A study undertaken by the MSPCA and Northeastern University found that 70 percent of people who committed violent crimes against animals also had records for other crimes. Compared with a control group of their neighbors, animal abusers were five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people, four times more likely to commit property crimes, and three times more likely to have a record for drug or disorderly-conduct offenses.¹⁶

¹¹ Denise Parkes & Tania Signal, *Revisiting a Link: Animal Abuse, Bullying, and Empathy in Australian Youth*, 5-1 HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION BULLETIN, 26 (2017).

¹² HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE U.S. AND STATE OF WIS. DEPT. OF HEALTH & FAM. SERV., DIV. OF DISABILITY & ELDER SERV., BUREAU OF AGING & LONG TERM CARE RESOURCES, *Creating Safer Communities for Older Adults and Companion Animals* (2003).

¹³ Barbara W. Boat & Juliette C. Knight, *Experiences and Needs of Adult Protective Services Case Managers When Assisting Clients Who Have Companion Animals*, 12 JOURNAL OF ELDER ABUSE AND NEGLECT, 145 (2000)

¹⁴ HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE U.S. AND STATE OF WIS. DEPT. OF HEALTH & FAM. SERV., DIV. OF DISABILITY & ELDER SERV., BUREAU OF AGING & LONG TERM CARE RESOURCES, *Creating Safer Communities for Older Adults and Companion Animals* (2003).

¹⁵ Arnold Arluke & Eric Madfis, *Animal Abuse as a Warning Sign of School Massacres: A Critique and Refinement*, 20-10 HOMICIDE STUDIES, 1 (2013).

¹⁶ Arnold Arluke et. al., *The Relationship of Animal Abuse to Violence and Other Forms of Antisocial Behavior*, 14 JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE, 963 (1999).