Violence Against Women
Volume 13 Number 4
April 2007 354-373

10.1177/1077801207299201
http://vaw.sagepub.com
hosted at
http://online.sagepub.com

Battered Pets and Domestic Violence

Animal Abuse Reported by Women Experiencing Intimate Violence and by Nonabused Women

Frank R. Ascione
Utah State University, Logan
Claudia V. Weber
University of Minnesota Duluth
Teresa M. Thompson
Box Elder School District, Brigham City, UT
John Heath
Auburn University, AL
Mika Maruyama
Portland State University, OR
Kentaro Hayashi
University of Hawaii at Manoa

Women residing at domestic violence shelters (S group) 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). Reports of threatened harm to pets were more than 4 times higher for the S group. Using the Conflict Tactics Scale, the authors demonstrated that severe physical violence was a significant predictor of pet abuse. 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. A substantial minority of S-group women reported that their concern for their pets' welfare prevented them from seeking shelter sooner. This seemed truer for women without children, who may have had stronger pet attachments. This obstacle to seeking safety should be addressed by domestic violence agencies.

Keywords: *battered pets; battered women; pet abuse*

Authors' Note: Funding for this research was provided by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. We thank the women and children who participated and those who shared the stories of their journeys to safer environments. We express appreciation to Karen Ranson for preparation of this article and to shelter staff for collaborating in data collection.

> "My!" she began, in a high, false voice, "it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary."
> She hurried over that. "As if that could have anything to do with—with—My, wouldn't they *laugh*?"
>
> *—Glaspell (1917/1996, p. 92)*

The overlap between animal abuse and other forms of family violence, specifically child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, has received increased research attention during the past two decades (Ascione, 2005a, 2005b). The abuse of family pets (including forcing women to engage in bestiality) has often been reported, anecdotally, in seminal monographs on domestic violence (Browne, 1997; Pizzey, 1974; Walker, 1984, 1989) and continues to be listed as a form of intimidation in the ubiquitous "power and control wheel" (Shepard & Pence, 1999, p. 275). Animal abuse also emerges as a theme in fictional treatments of domestic violence as illustrated by Glaspell's (1917/1996) short story, "A Jury of Her Peers," from which the opening quote was taken.

Some of the reasons for increased scholarly attention to animal abuse in the context of domestic violence include the following:

- Pets are often viewed as companions or even family members, and some may view animal abuse as another form of family violence (Flynn, 2000b).
- Women who are victims of domestic violence may be especially devastated when batterers threaten and/or actually harm family pets (Flynn, 2000b).
- If children are present, animal abuse may be an additional form of violence to which they are exposed (see example below and Baldry, 2003).
- Individuals who abuse animals are more likely to have been arrested for violent crimes and property and drug-related offenses (Arluke, Levin, Luke, & Ascione, 1999) and to self-report engaging in delinquent behavior (Henry, 2004).
- Animals may sometimes be used as weapons against domestic violence victims (DeVoe & Smith, 2002).
- 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 (Loring & Beaudoin, 2000).
- Concern for the welfare of family pets may be an obstacle to some women's seeking safety (Quinlisk, 1999).

One example will serve to illustrate the level of abuse pets may experience and the degree of terror women and children may be forced to endure (A. Henderson, personal communication, October 27, 1999):

> The father of a 4-year-old girl bludgeoned the family's kitten in front of his daughter and wife. He then put his daughter in her bedroom with the remains of the kitten, unscrewed the light bulb from the ceiling, and locked his daughter in the darkened room for the night. The next morning, he forced his daughter to clean up the remains of the kitten. (Ascione, 2005a, p. 131)

Despite the potential significance of animal abuse in families experiencing domestic violence, few studies have specifically focused on this issue, making it difficult to estimate the prevalence of the problem. Within the domestic violence professional community, the challenges of addressing the needs of clients who have pets have been acknowledged, but systematic assessment of pet abuse is uncommon. For example, Ascione, Weber, and Wood (1997) surveyed domestic violence shelters in the United States that met the following two criteria: The shelters provided residential facilities and some form of services for children. Typically, one of the largest shelters in a state and the District of Columbia was selected for contact, and the survey was completed by the shelter director or a staff member familiar with shelter operations. Completed questionnaires were received from 96% of the 50 shelters contacted. (Utah was not included in this survey.)

The majority of respondents, 85.4%, reported that they had encountered women at their shelters who talked about pet abuse incidents, and 63.0% of respondents noted cases where children mentioned fathers, stepfathers, or mothers' boyfriends abusing animals. That animal abuse and domestic violence might coexist in the same family was acknowledged by 83.3% of respondents, but only 27.1% reported that their shelters included questions about pets and their treatment in their intake interview protocols.

Within the domestic violence research community, a comparable challenge arises when attempting to assess the prevalence of animal abuse. A question or two about pet abuse is sometimes included in domestic violence questionnaires administered to victims (Renzetti, 1992), but these questions are usually embedded in more comprehensive assessments, and the animal abuse information is difficult to disaggregate from summary statistics (e.g., Dutton, 1992; Graham-Kevan & Archer, 2003; Jacobsen & Gottman, 1998; McCloskey, 2001; McCloskey, Figueredo, & Koss, 1995; McCloskey & Lichter, 2003). A similar situation exists in assessments of child maltreatment that include questions about animal abuse (e.g., Sternberg et al., 2004). Questions about batterers threatening or abusing pets or other animals are absent from recent federal guidelines for research data collection in studies of intimate partner violence (Salzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 1999).

To date, only five studies specifically designed to assess women victims' reports of pet abuse in the context of domestic violence have been published in scholarly journals. The first, reported by Ascione (1998), involved a convenience sample of 38 women at a domestic violence shelter in northern Utah. Of these women, 28 (74%) said they currently owned pets or had owned pets during the past year. Adult intimate partners' threats to harm or actual harm of pets were reported by 71% of these women; 57% reported that their partner had actually harmed or killed pets. Some of the incidents described by women involved acts of omission (e.g., the batterer prohibited the feeding of a starving animal or would not allow veterinary care for an injured or ill pet), but most of the incidents involved violence toward pets (e.g., drowning a cat in a bathtub, dousing a kitten with lighter fluid and setting it on fire).

Of the women, 18% reported that concern for their pets' welfare had delayed their entering the shelter sooner than they did.

Flynn (2000a) studied a convenience sample of 107 women at a shelter in South Carolina, 40.2% (n = 43) of whom owned pets currently or in the past 12 months. Threats of harm to pets were reported by 20.9% of the women; 25.6% reported actual harm to or killing of pets. That concern for their pets' welfare had delayed women from seeking shelter (in 5 cases, delays of more than 2 months) was reported by 18.6% of these women, and Flynn noted that 52.4% of the family pets remained with the batterer or ex-partner.

Faver and Strand (2003) interviewed 41 Tennessee women at six different domestic violence programs (counseling group or shelter clients) who currently owned pets or had owned pets in the past year. Threats by the batterers to harm pets were reported by 48.8% of the participants, and 46.3% reported that pets had actually been hurt or killed. Concern for pets' welfare affecting decision making about shelter entry was reported by 26.8% of these women.

Loring and Bolden-Hines (2004) focused on a group of 107 women, residing in southeastern states in the United States, who were victims of domestic violence and who themselves were being evaluated in relation to their having committed illegal acts. It was not clear whether any of these women were residing at a domestic violence shelter. Pet ownership (current or past year) was reported by 62% (n = 72) of these women. Physical abuse of pets by intimate partners was present in 75% (n = 54) of the women's reports.

Carlisle-Frank, Frank, and Nielsen (2004) recruited participants from seven domestic violence shelters in upstate New York. A total of 48 domestic violence victims completed an anonymous questionnaire, and 34 of these women reported owning pets. Pet abuse by batterers was reported by 53% of the women with pets. Pet abuse was reported to have occurred in 51% of domestic violence incidents, and 61% of women reported that children had witnessed pet abuse. In response to additional questions, women reported that batterers who abused pets, in contrast to batterers who did not, were less likely to consider pets as sentient beings or members of the family and more likely to view pets as property. Pet-abusing batterers were also reported to have more unrealistic expectations of pets. Overall, 48% of women indicated that concern for their pets' welfare had delayed their entry into shelters; this figure increased to 65% for women whose pets had been abused.

Collectively, these studies illustrate that pet abuse is common in the lives of significant proportions of samples of battered women and that in a number of cases (18%-48%), concern for pets' welfare affected women's decisions about whether to enter or the timing of entry into domestic violence shelters. However, these studies also share limitations, including small sample sizes with little quantification of the types and frequency of abuse experienced by the women and the absence of comparison groups of women who are not victims of domestic violence. In addition, little information has

been gathered about how children's emotional and mental health might be affected by living in a home where pets, and their mothers, are abused.

The current study was designed to address these limitations by enlisting the participation of a larger sample of women, all of whom had pets, who were battered ($n = 101$), and had sought safety at 1 of 5 different shelters in Utah, and a sample of women, also pet owning, residing in the community and who indicated that they had not experienced violence in their intimate relationships as adults ($n = 120$). A standard interview protocol was used to gather women's reports about the treatment of family pets, and a questionnaire was used to assess their partners' and their own violent behavior. When children were present in these families, mothers were asked to select one of their children, 5 to 17 years of age, who had the most contact, either positive or negative, with family pets, to be assessed for behavior problems and pet abuse variables using maternal reports. A subsample of women who were battered granted permission for their children to be interviewed, if the children agreed. Children of nonabused women were not directly interviewed.

Method

Recruitment of Participants

After receiving approval for this research project from Utah State University's Institutional Review Board and the deputy executive director of the Utah Department of Human Services, we enlisted the cooperation of a convenience sample of 101 women who were victims of domestic violence and who had sought shelter at 1 of 5 different domestic violence programs in the state of Utah (shelter or S group). Women were approached about participating by shelter staff within 48 hours of their entry into the domestic violence program, but always after shelter staff judged that victims' initial crises had sufficiently diminished in intensity. Recruitment occurred during orientation meetings or on an individual basis. The project was described as a study of the relation between domestic violence and pet abuse and required that participants currently owned pets or had owned pets during the previous year. The nature of the assessments was described in the informed consent document and, where applicable, included a request for permission to assess and interview one of each participant's children who were between the ages of 5 and 17 years. Children were read an assent document describing how they would be asked to answer questions about the good and the bad ways that pets are treated. Children were told that their answers would not be shared with their mothers (a condition already agreed to by participants), with the specific exclusion of cases where children talked about hurting themselves or others. Spanish translations of informed consent and assessment instruments were used when appropriate. The voluntary nature of participation

was stressed, and the right to withdraw, at any time, was emphasized for both women and children who participated.

Newspaper advertisements and flyers posted in local businesses were used to recruit a convenience sample of 120 women from the community (nonshelter or NS group), who self-reported that they had not experienced intimate violence at the hands of an adult partner. The study was described as an examination of positive and negative treatment of pets in families and also required that women currently (a) were living with an adult partner and (b) owned pets or had owned pets in the past year. Informed consent protocols were followed, and a subsample of these women reported on the behavior of one of their children. Children in the NS group (if present) were not personally interviewed.

Trained shelter staff recruited S group participants and administered all assessments. Shelters received a $40 stipend for each mother or child participant assessed and $30 for assessments of women without children. Women who participated received $10 in cash on completing the assessments, and participating children received $2 gift certificates to local food establishments. NS group women were interviewed by a trained graduate student, and each received $10 in cash on completion of assessments. NS group participants were given a list of local agencies (e.g., mental health, family therapy) in the event they wished to pursue personal issues raised during the course of the assessments.

Participant Demographics

Women in the S group ranged in age from 17 to 51 years ($M = 31.7$, $SD = 7.95$) and those in the NS group from 19 to 57 years ($M = 32.5$, $SD = 9.89$). Marital status for the S and NS ($n = 119$) groups,[1] respectively, was as follows: married, 50.5%, 85.7%; divorced, 15.8%, 1.7%; single, 31.7%, 12.6%; and widowed, 2.0%, 0.0%.

The mean last grade of education completed (e.g., 12 = completed high school) for the S ($n = 100$) and NS ($n = 118$) participants, respectively, was 12.23 ($SD = 2.11$) and 13.83 ($SD = 2.20$); the means for partners of the S ($n = 95$) and NS ($n = 115$) women, respectively, were 11.81 ($SD = 1.94$) and 14.37 ($SD = 2.55$). Self-identified ethnic/racial group membership for S and NS ($n = 117$) group participants, respectively, was as follows: Caucasian, 68.3%, 95.7%; Hispanic/Latina, 12.9%, 0.0%; Asian, 0.0%, 0.1%; Native American, 6.9%, 3.4%; African American, 7.9%, 0.0%; Other, 4.0%, 0.0%. A total of 76.2% of S and 58.3% of NS women reported having children.

The mean number of pets reportedly owned in the past 5 years was 7.28 ($SD = 10.11$) for S ($n = 99$) and 6.60 ($SD = 11$) for NS participants, $t(1, 217) = .47$, *ns*. S group pets were less likely to receive regular veterinary care (55.5%) than were NS group pets (80.8%), $\chi^2(1, 221) = 16.59$, $p < .001$, and less likely to have received appropriate vaccinations (73%, $n = 100$ vs. 88.1%, $n = 118$), $\chi^2(1, 218) = 8.12$, $p = .004$).

Assessments

For our measure of intimate violence, all women completed the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) twice, once reporting on their partners' behaviors toward them (CTS-PARTNER) and once reporting on their own behaviors toward their partners (CTS-SELF).

Subscale scores were computed for reasoning, verbal aggression, minor physical aggression, and severe physical aggression (Straus, 1979). This version of the CTS was widely used at the time this study was completed (late 1990s) and has demonstrated reliability and validity as reported by Straus (1979).

Treatment of family pets in the S and NS groups was assessed using the Battered Partner Shelter Survey (BPSS; see appendix) and Families and Pets Survey (identical to the BPSS except for shelter-related questions and questions about changes in partners' violence), respectively. Selected items from these surveys were used to compute frequencies of events and as variables that were related to our measures of intimate violence (CTS subscale scores). These items included questions about threats and/or actual harm to pets, the severity of pet abuse (from teasing to torture and killing), whether children were exposed to pet abuse, whether children or the women themselves abused pets, whether concern for pets' welfare affected women's decision making about entering a domestic violence shelter (only for S group participants), and the women's emotional responses to pet abuse.

A total of 39 S group children only (22 boys and 17 girls, $M = 9.8$ years, $SD = 3.1$) were interviewed using the Children's Observation and Experience with Their Pets Survey (see appendix) that assessed a number of factors, including exposure to pet abuse by others, self-reported pet abuse, and attempts to protect pets from harm. Complete Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) information was available from the reports of 37 S group and 58 NS group mothers who agreed to include one of their children in the study. NS group children (32 boys and 26 girls) had a mean age of 10.9 years ($SD = 4.2$). The CBCL yielded Total Behavior Problems, Internalizing Problems, and Externalizing Problems scores for each child.

Analysis Plan

In addition to descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations, and parametric and nonparametric analyses, we conducted separate logistic regressions using selected demographic variables and intimate violence measures to predict threatened and actual pet abuse. We tried to reduce the number of predictor variables and to retain the most influential predictors by forward stepwise regression (Agresti, 2002; Allison, 1999; Neter, Kutner, Nachtsheim, & Wasserman, 1996; Norusis, 1999; SAS Institute, Inc., 1995; Stokes, Davis, & Koch, 2000).

We used SPSS for Windows Version 10 (Norusis, 1999) to perform stepwise logistic regressions. Our binary (yes-no) outcome variables were partners' threats to harm or

kill pets (threat) and partners' actual hurting or killing pets (hurt). The sample sizes were 202 for the threat analysis and 200 for the hurt analysis because of missing data. The pool of 15 predictor variables included (a) eight CTS subscales (scored as continuous variables): Reasoning-Partner, Reasoning-Self, Verbal Aggression-Partner, Verbal Aggression-Self, Minor Physical Aggression-Partner, Minor Physical Aggression-Self, Serious Physical Aggression-Partner, Serious Physical Aggression-Self; (b) S versus NS group (binary); (c) age of woman (continuous); (d) woman's educational level (continuous); (e) partner's educational level (continuous); (f) marital status (binary—married vs. other); (g) have children (binary—yes-no); (h) ethnic/racial group (binary—Caucasian vs. other).

We used the forward stepwise predictor selection criterion method (Norusis, 1999). We began with a model that contained only the constant, then for each of the available predictors at each step, the SCORE test (e.g., Rao, 1947; Rao, 1973, pp. 417-418) was computed, and the p value associated with it was obtained. The predictor with the highest score chi-square test statistic value (i.e., smallest p value) entered the model as long as it was significant at the alpha level of .05. Then the Wald test (Wald, 1943) was performed to check whether there were any variables that should be removed from the existing model. If the variable associated with the smallest Wald test statistic value (i.e., largest p value) had a p value larger than the alpha level of .10, we removed the variable from the model. This process continued until no variables were eligible for removal. We repeated this process conditional on the existing model until either a previously considered model was encountered or no variables met entry or removal criteria.

Results

Women's Reports of Threatened and/or Actual Animal Abuse

Threats to hurt or kill pets were reported by 52.5% of S group and 12.5% of NS group women, $\chi^2(1, 221) = 41.14$, $p < .001$. Actual hurting or killing of pets was reported by 54.0% of the S group ($n = 100$) but only 5.0% of the NS group ($n = 119$) women, $\chi^2(1, 219) = 65.43$, $p < .001$. More specifically, for the S group, 28.0% reported neither threat nor hurt, 18.0% reported threat but not hurt, 19.0% reported hurt but not threat, and 35.0% reported both threat and hurt.

The severity of actual pet abuse reported by S group women involved injury, pain, torture, permanent loss of function, or death in 72.7% of the reports. In cases where pets were threatened or hurt, 86.4% of S group women reported that they were "very close" (as distinct from "liked but not close" or "not close at all") to the animal involved. Of the S group women, 85.7% reported they felt "terrible" (as distinct from "mildly upset" or "didn't bother me") after the pet had been hurt. In most cases, the animals abused were pet dogs or cats; a small number of cases involved birds or small rodents.

Table 1
Results of Stepwise Logistic Regression for Threat

Step	Variable	Wald Test	Reg. Coef.	*SE*	*p* Value
Step 1	MINPHPA	38.69	0.164	0.026	.000
	Constant		–1.752	0.241	
Step 2	MINPHPA	10.60	0.105	0.032	.001
	VERAGGPA	8.41	0.122	0.042	.004
	Constant		–2.651	0.420	
Step 3	MINPHPA	12.25	0.117	0.034	.000
	VERAGGPA	9.73	0.135	0.043	.002
	EDUCSELF	3.98	0.162	0.081	.046
	Constant		–4.992	1.275	

Note: MINPHPA = Conflict Tactics Scale Minor Physical Violence perpetrated by the partner; VERAGGPA = Conflict Tactics Scale Verbal Aggression perpetrated by the partner; EDUCSELF = woman's education level.

Women's reports of their own perpetration of pet abuse were 11.1% and 2.5% for the S and NS groups, respectively. Children's (either the child assessed with the CBCL or other children in the home) hurting or killing of pets was reported for 37.5% of S group and 11.8% of NS group children.

Predicting Pet Abuse

The results of the regression analysis for the threat variable are presented in Table 1. The set of predictors that were selected by the stepwise logistic regression were CTS Minor Physical Violence perpetrated by the partner (MINPHPA), CTS Verbal Aggression perpetrated by the partner (VERAGGPA), and the woman's education level (EDUCSELF). Women's education level was correlated with S or NS group membership ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), and an ANOVA indicated that S group women's education level was significantly lower than NS group women's, $F(1, 216) = 29.7$, $p < .001$. However, the strongest predictors of threats to pets were the CTS Minor Physical Violence and Verbal Aggression subscale variables.

The results of the regression analysis for the hurt variable are shown in Table 2. The set of predictors that was selected by the stepwise logistic regression was membership in the S versus NS group (GPR2), CTS Severe Physical Violence perpetrated by the partner (SVPHAGPA), and the woman's education level (EDUCSELF). The strongest predictors of actual harm to or killing of pets were shelter or nonshelter status and the CTS Severe Physical Violence subscale variable.

Mean CTS scores for the severe physical violence perpetrated by the partner subscale were 45.45 ($SD = 43.77$) for S group women ($n = 99$) and 0.80 ($SD = 5.27$) for NS group women. Comparable data for women's self-reports of their own severe

Table 2
Results of Stepwise Logistic Regression for Hurt

Step	Variables	Wald Test	Reg. Coef.	*SE*	*p* Value
Step 1	GPR2	42.56	–3.288	0.504	.000
	Constant		3.550	0.622	
Step 2	GPR2	24.53	–2.746	0.554	.000
	SVPHAGPA	4.95	0.013	0.006	.026
	Constant		2.453	0.779	
Step 3	GPR2	26.59	–3.003	0.588	.000
	SVPHAGPA	6.65	0.015	0.006	.010
	EDUCSELF	4.01	0.194	0.097	.45
	Constant		0.247	1.331	

Note: GPR2 = S versus NS group; SVPHAGPA = Conflict Tactics Scale Severe Physical Violence perpetrated by the partner; EDUCSELF = woman's education level.

physical violence were 11.79 (*SD* = 17.07) for S group (*n* = 100) and 0.38 (*SD* = 1.21) for NS group (*n* = 119) women.

We also dichotomized the two samples of women into those who reported neither minor physical nor severe physical violence perpetrated by their partner (NO VIOLENCE) and those who reported any instances of such violence (ANY VIOLENCE).[2] For S group women, 16.7% in the NO VIOLENCE subgroup and 55.9% in the ANY VIOLENCE subgroup reported threats to pets. For NS group women, the comparable figures were 7.4% and 33.3%, respectively. For S group women, 16.7% in the NO VIOLENCE subgroup and 56.5% in the ANY VIOLENCE subgroup reported actual harm to or killing of pets. For NS group women, the comparable figures were 3.2% and 8.7%, respectively.

Child-Related Variables

Complete sets of data for the CBCL were available for 37 S group and 58 NS group children. *T* tests for independent samples indicated that S group children's mean scores were significantly higher than NS group children's on the three CBCL scales (see means and standard deviations in Table 3).

Women's reports of children observing pet abuse indicated that this was common for S group children (61.54%, *n* = 39) and rare for NS group children (2.9%, *n* = 69), which is understandable given the low rate of reported pet abuse in the latter group, $\chi^2(1, 108) = 52.81$, $p < .001$. The following descriptive information is based only on S group data.

S group mothers (*n* = 38) reported that 10.5% of the children they selected for participation in interviews had hurt or killed pets and that 25.7% of their other

Table 3
Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) Scores for Behavior Problems

	Total Behavior Problems		Internalizing Problems		Externalizing Problems	
CBCL	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
S group	62.16	11.37	61.51	13	59.49	11.49
NS group	51.84	9.36	52.19	10.26	51.14	8.84
	$t(1, 93) = 4.74$, $p = .000$		$t(1, 93) = 3.89$, $p = .00$		$t(1, 93) = 3.77$, $p = .000$	

children had done so ($n = 70$). When S group children were directly interviewed ($n = 38$), 13.2% admitted to hurting or killing pets.

Of S group children, 40.0% ($n = 35$) responded yes to the question about threats to pets, "Has anyone ever said that they would hurt or kill one of your pets but not do it?" When asked whether they had ever seen or heard one of their pets hurt, 66.7% of S group children ($n = 39$) responded affirmatively; recall that 61.5% of S group mothers had reported that their children had observed pet abuse. The perpetrators of the pet abuse identified by these children included fathers, stepfathers, and mothers' boyfriends (46.4%), brothers (7.1%), other adults (17.9%), or unknown individuals (28.6%). A total of 27 children responded to a question about how they felt when their pet was hurt or killed. Their ratings of emotional distress were as follows: very upset (59.3%), sort of upset (33.3%), not upset at all (3.7%), and not sure (3.7%). Of the children, 51.0% said they had protected one of their pets to save it from being hurt.

Pet Abuse and S Group Women's Decisions to Enter a Shelter

Overall, 22.8% of S group women reported that concern for their pets' welfare had kept them from going to the domestic violence shelter sooner than they did. We examined responses to this question in relation to women's experiences of threatened or actual animal abuse. More specifically,

- If pets had neither been threatened nor harmed, 14.3% of women reported delaying entering the shelter.
- If pets were threatened but not harmed, 16.7% reported delaying entering the shelter.
- If pets were harmed but not threatened, 15.8% reported delaying entering the shelter.
- If pets had been both threatened and harmed, 34.3% of women reported delaying entering the shelter out of concern for their pets' welfare.

Women who did not have children were somewhat more likely to report delaying entering the shelter out of concern for their pets' welfare (33.3%) than were women with children (19.5%).

Discussion

This study adds to a growing literature on animal abuse occurring in the context of domestic violence. Women residing at domestic violence shelters 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. Reports of threatened harm to pets were more than 4 times higher for S group than for NS group women. Using the CTS, we were able to demonstrate that severe physical violence perpetrated by the batterer was a significant predictor of pet abuse, even when other variables (e.g., age, marital status, race/ethnicity, presence of children) were statistically controlled. The vast majority of the shelter women described being emotionally close to their pets and distraught by the abuse family pets experienced (see also Flynn, 2000b). Children were often exposed to incidents of pet abuse, and most reported being clearly distressed by these experiences.

S group children included in the study were reported to have more behavior problems than comparison group children, and some of these children had a history of abusing animals themselves. Cruelty to animals is usually reported by 5% of caregivers in normative samples of children (Ascione, 2005b). The elevated levels of animal abuse perpetrated by children in this study are more comparable to samples of abused children or children being seen at mental health clinics (Ascione, Friedrich, Heath, & Hayashi, 2003) than normative samples of children. In a recent study, Baldry (2003) found that Italian children, between 9 and 17 years of age, who reported that they had been exposed to domestic violence were more likely to admit to abusing animals. Nevertheless, about half of the children in this study reported intervening to protect their pets. Clearly, these children empathized with the plight of their pets, yet their willingness to intervene may represent a threat to their own personal safety, parallel to cases where children may intervene to protect their mothers. Unfortunately, it is clear that children have opportunities to learn either cruelty or kindness to animals in the context of the family (Zahn-Waxler, Hollenbeck, & Radke-Yarrow, 1984).

As with other studies (Ascione, 1998; Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000a, 2000b), we discovered that a substantial minority of S group women reported that their concern for their pets' welfare had prevented them from seeking shelter sooner than they did. This seemed truer for women without children who may have had especially strong attachments to their pets. This obstacle is now being addressed by the collaborative efforts of domestic violence and animal welfare professionals. A number of programs across the United States provide shelter for the pets of women who are battered (Ascione, 2000), allowing these women to escape from an abusive relationship without worrying about what will happen to their pets (because most domestic violence programs will not accept pet animals). A recent example of this type of program and the challenges involved in establishing and operating such programs have been described by Kogan, McConnell, Schoenfeld-Tacher, & Jansen-Lock (2004).

The findings of this study reinforce those of other researchers. Ascione (1998) noted that although national prevalence data for pet abuse are not available, because pet ownership is so high in families with school-aged children, it may be that pet abuse occurs in hundreds of thousands of families experiencing domestic violence. Women may feel guilt if they have to leave pets behind to enter a domestic violence program, may be grieving at the loss of beloved pets, and may endanger themselves if they attempt to retrieve pets from batterers. As described in the introduction, Flynn (2000a) found that 52.4% of sheltered women reported that their pets had remained with batterers. Even though these women were now in a safe environment, 40.0% continued to worry about the safety of their pets.

That S group children were more likely to display behavior problems than NS group children adds to the growing literature on the effects of exposure to domestic violence (Fantuzzo et al., 1991; Graham-Bermann & Edleson, 2001; Groves, 2002; Holden, Geffner, & Jouriles, 1998). As noted by Fantuzzo et al. (1991), entering a domestic violence shelter often means that children may lose many of their sources of emotional support. Pets may be a source of comfort and support that is lost. In the words of one child, Sasha (pseudonym), a fifth grader,

> I had too many pets that died.
> I really don't want to write about it.
> I can't tell you about them either.
> I just don't want to.
> It makes me too sad.
> The door is closed.
> Don't ask me anymore.
> I will cry into the ocean. (Raphael, Colman, & Loar, 1999, p. 25)

This issue clearly needs to be addressed by the domestic violence professional community, especially children's group counselors.

The current study raises a number of critical questions that need to be addressed in future research. Most of the studies in this area have been conducted with women at domestic violence shelters, and we know less about the prevalence of pet abuse in cases where women have not left the batterer or have sought safety in other settings (e.g., with relatives or friends). Larger samples would also allow examination of pet abuse differences related to victims who reside in urban versus suburban versus rural settings; animal abuse is often directed at pets, but valued livestock and other farm animals (e.g., a woman's favorite horse) may be victimized. Pet abuse has yet to be systematically assessed in samples of elderly victims of domestic violence or victims with disabilities (pets may be particularly important to individuals in these two groups). Because animal abuse is violence toward a living creature, we need to know if batterers who abuse animals are more likely to perpetrate severe or lethal violence against their partners and their partners' children. There is also a need to question batterers about their own perpetration of animal abuse and their perceptions about how such acts

affect their adult partners and, if applicable, their children. These and other questions remain as challenges to our understanding of the overlap between the battering of pets and family violence.

Appendix
Battered Partner Shelter Survey/Pet Maltreatment Survey

Demographic information

Participant code:

1. Age _____ 2. Marital Status _____
   (Married, divorced, single)
3. Children living with you now (if any):

	Boys	Girls
Ages	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____

4. Education (last grade of school completed) Partner _____
   (e.g., 11 = junior in high school, 13 = one year of college) Self_____
5. Employment (job title or description)
   (e.g., homemaker, unemployed, mechanic, teacher)
   Partner_____
   Self_____
6. Ethnic group (self)
   Caucasian_____ Hispanic_____ Asian_____
   Native American_____ Black American_____
   Other (specify)_____

Pets in the Home

7. Do you now have a pet animal or animals?
   No_____ Yes_____
   If yes, kind(s) Dog___ Cat___ Bird___ Other (specify)_____
8. Have you had a pet animal or animals <u>in the past 12 months</u>?
   No_____ Yes_____
   If yes, kind(s) Dog___ Cat___ Bird___ Other (specify)___
9. Do your pets receive *regular* veterinary care? No___ Yes___
10. Have you ever received *emergency* veterinary care? No___ Yes___
11. Do your pets have most of their vaccinations? No___ Yes___
12. How many pets have you had in the last 5 years? _____

What Happened to the Pets

13. Has *your partner* helped care for your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    (please describe the type of care provided):

14. Has *your partner* ever THREATENED to hurt or kill one of your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    (please describe the incident(s) in as much detail as possible):
15. How did you feel after the pet was THREATENED?
    ___ Numb, I was extremely upset but felt nothing.
    ___ Terrible, I felt very upset.
    ___ Mildly upset.
    ___ It didn't bother me at all.
16. Were you relieved that the pet was being threatened and not you?
    No___ Yes___
17. Has *your partner* ever ACTUALLY HURT or KILLED one of your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    (please describe the incident(s) in as much detail as you are able):
18. How did you feel after the pet was hurt or killed?
    ___ Numb, I was extremely upset but felt nothing.
    ___ Terrible, I felt very upset.
    ___ Mildly upset.
    ___ It didn't bother me at all.
19. Were you relieved that the pet was being hurt and not you?
    No___ Yes___
20. How close were you to the pet that was abused or threatened?
    ___ Not at all close.
    ___ Liked but not very close.
    ___ Very close; source of comfort and friendship.
21. Did anyone call the police or humane society (or animal control) to report the animal abuse?
    ___No Yes___
    If yes, who made the call?_____
    Who was called? Police___ Humane society or animal control___
    What was their response?_____
22. Have *you* ever hurt or killed one of your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    (please describe the incident(s) in as much detail as you are able):
    If your *children* are all younger than 5 or older than 17,
    OR
    If you have children between 5 and 17, but no child participating in the study, please complete the next four questions (23, 24, 25, and 26)
    If not applicable, skip questions 23, 24, 25, and 26; continue with 27.
23. Does your child help care for your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    Please describe the type of care given:
24. Have any of children ever OBSERVED pet abuse in the home?
    No___ Yes___
25. Have any of your children ever hurt or killed one of your pets?
    No___ Yes___
    (please describe the incident(s) in as much detail as you are able):

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

How long ago did this occur?_____
Sex and age of the child when this happened: Boy____ Girl____
_____ years old

26. What was done at the time of the incident?
___ Nothing
___ Child was reprimanded
___ Authorities were called
___ Other (please describe)
27. Did concern over your pet's welfare keep you from coming to this shelter sooner than now?
No___ Yes___ Please explain:
28. During the time together with your current partner have you noticed any *change* in your partner's willingness to use violence against you or your children?
___ No, he has NEVER been violent.
___ No, he has ALWAYS been violent.
___ Yes, he has become LESS violent
___ Yes, he has become MORE violent
29. Have you noticed any *change* in your partner's willingness to threaten or abuse your pet?
___ No, he has NEVER threatened or hurt our pet(s).
___ No, he has ALWAYS threatened or hurt our pet(s).
___ Yes, he has become LESS threatening and abusive toward pets.
___ Yes, he has become MORE threatening and abusive toward pets.
30. Are there any other pet or animal-related issues you would like to describe (e.g., treatment of farm animals, wild animals, strays)?
No___ Yes___
(please describe the incident(s) in as much detail as you are able):

Children's Observation and Experience With Their Pets

Demographic Information

Participant Code:
1. Age____
2. Boy____ Girl____
3. Grade___
4. Number of brothers and sisters____

Pets in the home

Do you NOW have a pet animal or animals?
No___ Yes___
Kind(s) Dog___ Cat___ Bird___ Other___

Have you had a pet animal or animals in the past 12 months?
No___ Yes___
Kind(s) Dog___ Cat___ Bird___ Other___

Have you ever SEEN or HEARD one of your pets HURT or KILLED?
No___ Yes___

Please tell what happened as you remember it
(You may draw a picture if that would be helpful)

Who hurt or killed your pet?
Father___ Stepfather___ Mother___ Brother___ Sister___
Mother's boyfriend___ Other___

How did you feel when your pet was hurt or killed?
Very upset__ Sort of upset____ Not upset at all____

Has anyone ever said they would hurt or kill one of your pets but not do it?
No___ Yes___
Please tell what happened as you remember it.

Have you ever taken care of a pet? (like fed, walked, or played with it)
No___ Yes___

Have you ever hurt or killed one of your pets?
No___ Yes___
Please tell what happened as you remember it.
(You may draw a picture if that would be helpful)

Have you ever hurt or killed other animals?
No___ Yes___
Please tell what happened as you remember it.

How did you feel after you hurt or killed an animal?
Very upset__ Sort of upset____ Not upset at all____

Have you ever protected one of your pets or saved it from being hurt?
No___ Yes___
Please tell what happened as you remember it.

Did you ever have a favorite pet that you cared about a lot?
No___ Yes___
Kind: Dog__ Cat___ Bird___ Other___

How would you like to see pets treated in your home?
_____ better than they have been treated
_____ about the same as they have been treated
_____ not as good as they have been treated

Notes

1. When *n* values differ from the total for each group (i.e., S = 101, NS = 120) because of missing data, the actual *n* is noted.
2. The authors thank Anne Volant for suggesting this analysis.

References

Achenbach, T. M. (1991). *Manual for the Child Behavior Checklist/4-18 and 1991 profile.* Burlington: University of Vermont, Department of Psychiatry.

Agresti, A. (2002). *Categorical data analysis* (2nd ed.). New York: Wiley-Interscience.

Allison, P. D. (1999). *Logistic regression using the SAS system: Theory and application.* New York: Wiley-Interscience.

Arluke, A., Levin, J., Luke, C., & Ascione, F. (1999). The relationship of animal abuse to violence and other forms of antisocial behavior. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *14*, 963-975.

Ascione, F. R. (1998). Battered women's reports of their partners' and their children's cruelty to animals. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *1*, 119-133.

Ascione, F. R. (2000). *Safe havens for pets: Guidelines for programs sheltering pets for women who are battered.* Available from http://www.vachss.com/guestdispatches/safe_havens.html

Ascione, F. R. (2005a). *Children and animals: Exploring the roots of kindness and cruelty.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Ascione, F. R. (2005b). Children, animal abuse, and family violence: The multiple intersections of animal abuse, child victimization, and domestic violence. In K. A. Kendall-Tackett & S. Giacomoni (Eds.), *Child victimization* (pp. 3.1-3.36). Kingston, NJ: Civic Research Institute.

Ascione, F. R., Friedrich, W. N., Heath, J., & Hayashi, K. (2003). Cruelty to animals in normative, sexually abused, and outpatient psychiatric samples of 6- to12-year-old children: Relations to maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence. *Anthrozoös*, *16*, 194-212.

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

Baldry, A. C. (2003). Animal abuse and exposure to interparental violence in Italian youth. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *18*, 258-281.

Browne, A. (1997). *When battered women kill.* New York: Free Press.

Carlisle-Frank, P., Frank, J. M., & Nielsen, L. (2004). Selective battering of the family pet. *Anthrozoös*, *17*, 26-42.

DeVoe, E. R., & Smith, E. L. (2002). The impact of domestic violence on urban preschool children: Battered mothers' perspectives. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *17*, 1075-1101.

Dutton, M. A.(1992). *Empowering and healing the battered woman.* New York: Springer.

Fantuzzo, J. W., DePaola, L. M., Labert, L., Martino, T., Anderson, G., & Sutton, S. (1991). Effects of interparental violence on the psychological adjustment and competencies of young children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *59*, 258-265.

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

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

Flynn, C. P. (2000b). Battered women and their animal companions: Symbolic interaction between human and nonhuman animals. *Society and Animals*, *8*, 99-127.

Glaspell, S. (1996). A jury of her peers. In S. Koppelman (Ed.), *Women in the trees: U.S. women's short stories about battering and resistance, 1839-1994* (pp. 77-93). Boston: Beacon. (Original work published 1917)

Graham-Bermann, S. A., & Edleson, J. L. (Eds.). (2001). *Domestic violence in the lives of children.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Graham-Kevan, N., & Archer, J. (2003). Intimate terrorism and common couple violence: A test of Johnson's predictions in four British samples. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *18*, 1247-1270.

Groves, B. M. (2002). *Children who see too much.* Boston: Beacon.

Henry, B. C. (2004). The relationship between animal cruelty, delinquency, and attitudes toward the treatment of animals. *Society and Animals*, *12*, 185-207.

Holden, G. W., Geffner, R., & Jouriles, E. N. (Eds.). (1998). *Children exposed to marital violence.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Jacobsen, N., & Gottman, J. (1998). *When men batter women.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Kogan, L. R., McConnell, S., Schoenfeld-Tacher, R., & Jansen-Lock, P. (2004). Crosstrails: A unique foster program to provide safety for pets of women in safehouses. *Violence Against Women*, *10*, 418-434.

Loring, M. T., & Beaudoin, P. (2000). Battered women as coerced victim-perpetrators. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *2*, 3-14.

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*, 27-37.

McCloskey, L. A. (2001). The "Medea complex" among men: The instrumental abuse of children to injure wives. *Violence and Victims*, *16*, 19-37.

McCloskey, L. A., Figueredo, A. J., & Koss, M. P. (1995). The effects of systemic family violence on children's mental health. *Child Development*, *66*, 1239-1261.

McCloskey, L. A., & Lichter, E. L. (2003). The contribution of marital violence to adolescent aggression across different relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *18*, 390-412.

Neter, J., Kutner, M. H., Nachtsheim, C. J., & Wasserman, W. (1996). *Applied linear statistical models* (4th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Norusis, M. J. (1999). *SPSS regression models 10.0.* Chicago: SPSS.

Pizzey, E. (1974). *Scream quietly or the neighbours will hear.* Middlesex, UK: Penguin.

Quinlisk, J. A. (1999). Animal abuse and family violence. In F. R. Ascione & P. Arkow (Eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence, and animal abuse: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (pp. 168-175). West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Rao, C. R. (1947). Large sample tests of statistical hypotheses concerning several parameters with applications to problems of estimation. *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philosophical Society*, *44*, 50-57.

Rao, C. R. (1973). *Linear statistical inference and its applications* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley.

Raphael, P., Colman, L., & Loar, L. (1999). *Teaching compassion: A guide for humane educators, teachers, and parents.* Alameda, CA: Latham Foundation.

Renzetti, C. M. (1992). *Violent betrayal: Partner abuse in lesbian relationships.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Salzman, L. E., Fanslow, J. L., McMahon, P. M., & Shelley, G. A. (1999). *Intimate partner violence surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements* (Version 1.0). Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

SAS Institute, Inc. (1995). *Logistic regression examples using the SAS system.* Cary, NC: Author.

Shepard, M. F., & Pence, E. L. (Eds.). (1999). *Coordinating community responses to domestic violence: Lessons from Duluth and beyond.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sternberg, K. J., Knutson, J. F., Lamb, M. E., Baradaran, L. P., Nolan, C. M., & Flanzer, S. (2004). The Child Maltreatment Log: A computer-based program for describing research samples. *Child Maltreatment*, *9*, 30-48.

Stokes, M. E., Davis, C. S., & Koch, G. G. (2000). *Categorical data analysis using the SAS system* (2nd ed.). Cary, NC: SAS Institute.

Straus, M. A. (1979). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *41*, 75-88.

Wald, A. (1943). Tests of statistical hypotheses concerning several parameters when the number of observations is large. *Transactions of the American Mathematical Society*, *54*, 426-482.

Walker, L. E. (1984). *The battered woman syndrome.* New York: Springer.

Walker, L. E. (1989). *Terrifying love.* New York: Harper & Row.

Zahn-Waxler, C., Hollenbeck, B., & Radke-Yarrow, M. (1984). The origins of empathy and altruism. In M. W. Fox & L. D. Mickley (Eds.), *Advances in animal welfare science* (pp. 21-41). Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic

Frank R. Ascione is a professor in the psychology department at Utah State University and has coedited or authored four books on animal abuse and family violence. He conducted the first study published on the topic of animal abuse and domestic violence and will be the editor of a forthcoming international handbook on this topic. He lectures widely in the United States and at international conferences. He is currently working on a manuscript on batterers' reports of animal abuse.

Claudia V. Weber graduated from Utah State University in Logan, Utah, with a PhD in psychology. She is currently working in the counseling center at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, completing postdoctoral supervision. She plans to become licensed as a psychologist in the state of Minnesota. She has two young sons who have an avid interest in all creatures.

Teresa M. Thompson received her BS and MS in psychology from Utah State University in 1995 and 1997, respectively. She is currently a school counselor for Box Elder School District in Brigham City, Utah. Teresa works with eighth- and ninth-grade students at Box Elder Middle School and with students ranging in age from 11 to 20 years old, who are placed with Youth in Custody and are in treatment facilities for drug, alcohol, and sexual offenses.

John Heath is a graduate research assistant in the experimental psychology doctoral program at Auburn University, specializing in behavioral toxicology. He received his BS from Utah State University in psychology and his MS from Auburn University in experimental psychology. He is engaged in research on the effects of methylmercury intoxication on the visual system. Prior to entering Utah State University, he spent 27 years as a mechanical engineer after being educated in Liverpool, England.

Mika Maruyama is a doctoral student in psychology at Portland State University. Her research focuses on child-animal interactions and their effects on children's cognitive development, humane education as prevention of and intervention for future violent behaviors, children's cruelty toward animals, and domestic violence. Her studies have been conducted both in Japan and the United States, including studies of the effects of animals in the classroom on children's empathy, Japanese batterer intervention programs, and men's reports of violence.

Kentaro Hayashi is an assistant professor of psychology at University of Hawaii at Manoa. He obtained his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and completed a postdoctoral fellowship at UCLA. He specializes in quantitative psychology and psychometrics. Specifically, he studies latent variable models that include factor analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM). He is also interested in Bayesian methods applied to factor analysis and SEM. Furthermore, he has interests in multivariate statistics in general and, more recently, developed techniques such as hierarchical linear models (HLMs) and item response theory (IRT).