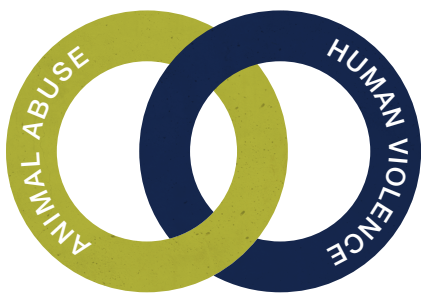


Animal Cruelty's Link to Other Forms of Violence

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 studies document multifaceted links between acts of cruelty to animals and violence toward others, including domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and other antisocial behavior. **This complex web is commonly referred to as “The Link.”**



Despite popular perception, it is not always the case that a person will first commit animal abuse and then graduate to violence against humans. Instead, most research suggests that animal cruelty is one of several antisocial or deviant behaviors that a person may engage in concurrently or over the course of their life.¹ **Put simply, violence is violence; and those who commit violence rarely limit their victim pool to a single species.** This means that animal abuse can be an indicator of other forms of deviant behavior and conversely, familial violence may also be an indicator that animals in the home are in danger.²

Too often, The Link is presented as just a means to an end, a way to compel an indifferent public to care about animal cruelty crimes. Such framing is problematic because animal cruelty crimes ought to be taken seriously in their own right—not just for their links to interpersonal violence—because animals who are victims of crime deserve justice. **However, it is still important for people, particularly those working within the criminal justice system, to understand The Link because it can and should inform intervention and rehabilitation strategies.**

- The Link demonstrates the need for cross-training and cross-reporting between humane agencies and social services agencies.
- The Link shows the need for intersectional services to help both animal cruelty victims and human domestic violence victims.
- Perpetrators may abuse both humans and animals as a result of the same underlying cause. Therefore treatment and rehabilitation for certain underlying issues common to domestic violence and other abuses may be useful in the animal cruelty context.

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 four territories have enacted felony animal cruelty provisions for first-time offenses, up from just six jurisdictions in 1990.
- 36 states and D.C. have statutes allowing animals to be included in protective orders.³ This means that a person can take their companion animal with them when escaping an abusive home, and the restraining order that protects the person can protect the animal as well.
- 12 states and DC mandate or permit child protection and social work officials to report suspected animal abuse;⁴ 11 states and DC have laws requiring or explicitly permitting humane and animal control officers to report suspected child maltreatment or elder abuse.⁵
- In 10 states, animal fighting can be an underlying offense giving rise to racketeering charges.⁶ 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 were 11 times more likely to report that their partner hurt or killed a pet, as compared with women who have not suffered domestic abuse.⁷ 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.⁸
- Abuse of a companion animal is one of the four most significant risk factors associated with someone committing domestic abuse,⁹ and is an indicator of the use of controlling and violent behaviors.¹⁰

Threats or actual abuse of a companion animal may be used to control women¹¹ 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.¹²
- Studies have also shown that approximately one-third of battered women have delayed their escape out of fear for their animals.¹³

Animals play a crucial role in providing comfort and solace for domestic violence victims.

- 99% of people who share their lives with companion animals consider their animals to be “companions” or “family members.”¹⁴
- 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.¹⁵



Children who exhibit cruelty towards animals are more than **twice as likely** to have suffered maltreatment themselves.

Witnessing animal cruelty can be a form of trauma, particularly for children.

- Between 62-76% of animal cruelty in the home occurs in the presence of a child,¹⁶ which is a form of psychological trauma and negatively impacts children's development.¹⁷
- Witnessing animal cruelty may cause desensitization, decreased empathy, learned maladaptive coping mechanisms and other negative behaviors, and unresolved feelings of anger, fear, and resentment—which may, in turn, lead to perpetrating violence.¹⁸
- Children who witness both animal cruelty and family violence are more likely to experience depression and anxiety.¹⁹

When children or teenagers abuse animals, it could be a sign that the child has been abused.

- If a child is cruel to animals, then it may be a sign that the child has experienced serious abuse or neglect. Children who exhibit cruelty towards animals are more than twice as likely to have suffered maltreatment themselves.²⁰
- In particular, several studies have examined the link between children who have been sexually abused and children who then go on to harm animals.²¹
- Children may engage in animal cruelty because it is a learned behavior modeled by a parent or guardian.²²

Childhood animal cruelty may indicate a conduct disorder and is linked to other antisocial behaviors, particularly bullying of peers.

- Animal cruelty was first classified as a symptom of conduct disorder in 1987 in the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III).²³
- 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 animal abuse often coincided with a need for egoistic power and a lack of cognitive empathy.²⁴
- Both animal cruelty and bullying perpetrated by children or adolescents have been linked to fearlessness and moral disengagement—the process by which someone convinces themselves ethical principles do not apply to them in a particular situation.²⁵

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 companion animals have being threatened, injured, killed, or denied care by a caregiver.²⁶
- Elderly people sometimes neglect their animals because they are physically, mentally, or financially unable to provide proper care.²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹
- A study undertaken by the MSPCA and Northeastern University found that 70% 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.³⁰



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.

Researchers have found that **43%** of school shooters in the United States between 1988 and 2012 had histories of animal abuse.

ENDNOTES

- 1 For a much more nuanced discussion of the Violence Graduation Hypothesis and the Deviance Generalization Hypothesis, see Eleonora Gullone, *An Evaluative Review of Theories Related to Animal Cruelty*, 4 J. ANIMAL ETHICS 37 (2014).
- 2 See Arnold Arluke et al., *The Relationship of Animal Abuse to Violence and Other Forms of Antisocial Behavior*, 14 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 963 (1999); see also TIA HOFFER ET AL., VIOLENCE IN ANIMAL CRUELTY OFFENDERS, (2018).
- 3 Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.
- 4 California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Oregon, Tennessee, and West Virginia.
- 5 Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia. Note, this list contains states where animal control officers or humane officers specifically are statutorily authorized/mandated reporters for, and does not reflect states such where all adults are mandatory reporters but no professions are specified.
- 6 Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.
- 7 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).
- 8 Betty Jo Barrett et al., *Animal Maltreatment as a Risk Marker of More Frequent and Severe Forms of Intimate Partner Violence*, 26 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 5131 (2020).
- 9 Benita J. Walton-Moss et al., *Risk Factors for Interpersonal Violence and Associated Injury among Urban Women*, 30 J. COMMUNITY HEALTH 377 (2005) (other factors include low education levels, mental health issues, and substance abuse).
- 10 Catherine A. Simmons & Peter Lehmann, *Exploring the Link Between Pet Abuse and Controlling Behaviors in Violent Relationships*, 22 J. 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).
- 11 Note this document uses the term "women" because the studies cited supporting this finding were done using exclusively domestic violence victims who identified as women. This does not minimize or negate violence suffered by men and nonbinary individuals.
- 12 Shelby Elaine McDonald et al. *Children's Experiences of Companion Animal Maltreatment in Households Characterized by Intimate Partner Violence*, 50 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 116 (2016).
- 13 Barrett et al., *supra* note 8; FRANK R. ASCIONE, EMERGING RESEARCH ON ANIMAL RISK AS A RISK FACTOR FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE 8 (Kathleen A. Kendall-Tackett & Sarah M. Giacomoni eds. 2007); Catherine A. Faver & Elizabeth B. Strand, *To Leave or To Stay? Battered Women's Concern for Vulnerable Pets*, 18 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 1367, 1374 (2003).
- 14 AM. VETERINARY MED. ASS'N, U.S. PET OWNERSHIP & DEMOGRAPHIC SOURCEBOOK (2012) (finding that 35.8% of pet owners consider their animals to be "companions" and 63.2% consider their animal to be part of their family).
- 15 McDonald et al., *supra* note 12.
- 16 Faver & Strand, *supra* note 13, at 1367-1377.
- 17 Roshni Trehan Ladny & Laura Meyer, *Traumatized Witnesses: Review of Childhood Exposure to Animal Cruelty*, 13 J. CHILD & ADOLESCENT TRAUMA 527 (2019).
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 Albert Girardi & Joanna Pozzulo, *Childhood Experiences with Family Pets and Internalizing Symptoms in Early Adulthood*, 28 ANTIPODS 421 (2015).
- 20 Fiona S. McEwen et al., *Is Childhood Cruelty to Animals a Marker for Physical Maltreatment in a Prospective Cohort Study of Children?*, 38 CHILD ABUSE & 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 J. INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE 1036 (2009).
- 21 Fiona Becker & Lesley French, *Making the Links: Child Abuse, Animal Cruelty and Domestic Violence*, 13 CHILD ABUSE REV. 399 (2004).
- 22 Ladny & Meyer, *supra* note 17; DeGue & DiLillo, *supra* note 20.
- 23 DIAGNOSTIC AND STATISTICAL MANUAL OF MENTAL DISORDERS (3d ed. rev. 1987).
- 24 Denise Parkes & Tania Signal, *Revisiting a Link: Animal Abuse, Bullying, and Empathy in Australian Youth*, 5 HUMAN-ANIMAL INTERACTION BULL. no. 1, 2017, at 26. But note in a 2008 Canadian study, Daly and Morton found that *witnessing* animal abuse as a child actually correlated with an increase in cognitive empathy. There, the researchers theorized that the improved ability to take on another's perspective may be a survival mechanism developed after being raised in an abusive environment, much in the same way that children of abusive homes become adept at reading other's facial expressions in order to navigate their world more safely. Beth Daly & Larry L. Morton, *Empathetic Correlates of Witnessing the Inhumane Killing of an Animal: Investigation of Single and Multiple Exposures*, 16 SOC'Y & ANIMALS 243 (2008).
- 25 Glenn D. Walters, *Animal Cruelty and Bullying: Behavioral Markers of Delinquency or Causal Antecedents of Delinquent Behavior?*, 62 INT'L J.L. LAW & PSYCHIATRY 77 (2019).
- 26 HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE U.S. & 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) [hereinafter *CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS AND COMPANION ANIMALS*].
- 27 Barbara W. Boat & Juliette C. Knight, *Experiences and Needs of Adult Protective Services Case Managers When Assisting Clients Who Have Companion Animals*, 12 J. ELDER ABUSE & NEGLECT 145 (2000).
- 28 *CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES FOR OLDER ADULTS AND COMPANION ANIMALS*, *supra* note 26.
- 29 Arnold Arluke & Eric Madfis, *Animal Abuse as a Warning Sign of School Massacres: A Critique and Refinement*, 2018 HOMICIDE STUDIES 7 (2018).
- 30 Arluke et al., *supra* note 2.

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