Animal Abuse, Animal Hoarding and Elder Abuse: Challenges and Strategies for Adult Protective Services

National Adult Protective Services Association
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Phil Arkow
Coordinator, National Link Coalition

www.NationalLinkCoalition.org
Chair, Animal Abuse & Family Violence Prevention Project
The Latham Foundation

arkowpets@snip.net
HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE PETS?

Why????

Why do so many of us share our homes with filthy, slobbering, shedding, scratching, hairball-barfing, humping, peeing and pooping butt-licking predators?
Because There’s Nothing Quite Like It in the Whole World!

A smooch from your pooch can make your whole day seem brighter!
The “Good Side” of the Human-Animal Bond

“A PET IS AN ISLAND OF SANITY IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE AN INSANE WORLD.”

-- Boris Levinson
The “Good Side” of the Human-Animal Bond

“IT’S NOT THAT THE NURSING HOMES ARE GOING TO THE DOGS...”

“...The dogs are going to the nursing homes, and every indication is that the residents love it. Happiness really is a warm puppy!”
Why do AAA/AAT work?

“When the dogs go walking down the hall of the hospital, it’s like that scene in The Wizard of Oz when everything changes from black and white... to color.”

Judy Levicoff, Abington Memorial Hospital
“When people maintain patterns of caring, whether for a house, a garden, pets or people, they are protecting themselves against despair, against giving up. After retirement, people are urged to give up cares. It can be a lethal tradeoff. The person who stops caring for something may have taken the first steps to the helplessness/hopelessness syndrome. And those who cope best with old age are those who continue the daily acts of caring, especially the most satisfying ones – care rendered to living things, such as pets and gardens.”

-- Beck & Katcher, 1996
The good news....

Pets can enhance and facilitate social capital:

A “ripple effect extending beyond individual health benefits to their owners to non-pet owners and the broader community.”

- 40.5% of pet owners know other people through pets
- 75.8% walk about more frequently... an obesity control trick!
- 83.8% of dog walkers talk to other people
- Pets create a community with a sense of safety

Pets --
ALL IN THE FAMILY!

- More homes have pets than children
- More money on pet food than baby food
- More dogs than people in European countries
- More cats than dogs
- Pet industry: 7th largest retail sector
- A child in the US today is more likely to grow up with pets than with a father
How Do Families See Their Pets?

Roles of Pets in U.S. Households

- Companions: 35.8%
- Family Members: 63.2%
- Property: 1%

Challenge

AVMA: U.S. Pet Ownership & Demographics Sourcebook, 2012
Pets and the Elderly:
The Good...

The Bad, and the Ugly
Animal Abuse: It’s the tip of the iceberg…

ANIMAL ABUSE

CHILD MALTREATMENT

ELDER ABUSE

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

National Link Coalition
Working together to stop violence against people and animals
What is the “Link” between Animal Abuse and other forms of Family Violence?

“When animals are abused, people are at risk; When people are abused, animals are at risk.”
An Extreme – But Real – Example:
Animal Abuse Investigation Thwarts Suicide Bomber

• Gregory Lepsky, 20, Point Pleasant, NJ
• US-born, family emigrated from Chechnya, thought his father had lost the faith
• Family members called police Feb. 2017 after he stabbed “dirty” family dog
• Police found pressure-cooker bomb, ISIS materials, incriminating e-mails, and plot to wreak havoc in NYC
• Told authorities he regretted trying to kill the dog -- because police would not have found him otherwise
July 2018: Three federal counter-terrorism agencies identify animal abuse as a possible warning behavior for terrorism.

“Reporting, investigating, and prosecuting animal cruelty may help minimize violent acts toward humans, including terrorism,” and encourage first responders, animal control, animal shelters, social services, and veterinarians, peers, neighbors, and family members to report suspected animal cruelty to authorities for further vetting. “Their participation becomes a force multiplier and may assist communities and law enforcement with identifying, assessing and managing threats of planned violence while promoting public safety.”
WHAT IS THE NATIONAL LINK COALITION?

National Resource Center.
3,800+ members, 50 states, 57 countries.
Informal collaboration addressing linkages, prevention and response to animal abuse, domestic violence, child maltreatment and elder abuse.
Policy, programs, awareness, & research (1,400+ citations).
LINK-Letter, local coalitions, trainings.

By recognizing how human and animal violence are intertwined, violence prevention is enhanced and families and communities are safer.
Relevance for senior services:

- Elders might benefit the most, but are least likely cohort to have pets

- Animal neglect may also indicate challenges in self-care and need for assistance
  - memory loss
  - fixed/low income
  - physical frailness
  - transportation limitations
  - social isolation

- Animal control/protection often first on scene
Why Are Some People Abusive to Animals?

- Ignorance
- Inability to empathize
- Inadequate coping skills
  (more sensitive to stress and strain, pet’s behavior releases frustration and anger)
- Socialized to abuse
- Believe abuse justified and beneficial
  (violence, power and control)
- Sense of entitlement
  (animals not worthy of moral consideration)
- Personality dysfunction, poor impulse control
- Regional subcultures

*Pamela Carlisle-Frank & Tom Flanagan: Silent Victims*
Animal Abuse and Child Abuse

The “Little Mary Ellen” Case (1874)

Henry Bergh, Founder American SPCA (1866)
The battered-child syndrome, a clinical condition in young children who have received serious physical abuse, is a frequent cause of permanent injury or death. The syndrome should be considered in any child exhibiting evidence of fracture of any bone, subdural hematoma, failure to thrive, soft tissue swellings or skin bruising, in any child who dies suddenly, or where the degree and type of injury is at variance with the history given regarding the occurrence of the trauma. Psychiatric factors are probably of prime importance in the pathogenesis of the disorder, but knowledge of these factors is limited. Physicians have a duty and responsibility to the child to require a full evaluation of the problem and to guarantee that no expected repetition of trauma will be permitted to occur.
Animal Abuse and Child Abuse

- 60% of pet-owning families meeting New Jersey’s criteria for child abuse or neglect also had abused or neglected pets

- Animal abuse in 88% of families with physical child abuse

- Bite rate was 11x greater

- Veterinary usage similar to general population

(DeViney, Dickert & Lockwood, N.J.)
Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

Manipulation – Intimidation – Retaliation

71% of shelter women: husband or boyfriend killed, harmed or threatened an animal;

32%: children hurt or killed animals (Ascione, Utah)

87% in presence of women
75% in presence of the children (Quinlisk, Wisconsin)
Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

Batterers who also abuse pets:
  • use more forms of violence and
  • are more dangerous
... than batterers who do not abuse pets.

History of pet abuse one of the 4 most significant risk factors of becoming a batterer.

18% - 48% of battered women do not leave abusers in fear for their animals

41% of IPV offenders had committed animal abuse (rate in general population: 1.5%)
Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: What’s the Risk?

IPV suspects with histories of pet abuse are significantly more likely to have had previous violent incidents. Victims reported:

• 80% had had at least one prior unreported IPV incident
• 76% had been strangled
• 26% had been forced to have sex with the suspect
• 80% fear they will be killed by the suspect

-- Campbell, Thompson et al, 2018
Animal Abuse Linked with Other Abuse

Man who allegedly beat wife, killed kitten is held

BY ROBIN ERB
BLADE STAFF WRITER

An East Toledo man accused of killing his wife's kitten by putting it in an oven set at 500 degrees and then telling her "Your dinner's ready" appeared in court yesterday on animal cruelty and domestic violence charges.

Dennis Davis, 56, of Main Street, was ordered held in the Lucas County jail in lieu of $8,500 bond by Judge Mary Trimboli of Toledo Municipal Court. "Just when you think they've found every way possible to manipulate someone, somebody comes up with something new," said Sam Nugent, chief prosecutor. "This is quite brutal, quite unnerving."

"I've never had anything like this," Kevin Warner, a Toledo Humane Society investigator, said.

The case began about 3:30 p.m. Jan. 9, according to a police report filed by Roberta Davis, 41, who told officers that she is seeking a divorce from her husband.

Ms. Davis, who did not call police at the time but went to the downtown police station

See KITTEN, Page 18 ►
Domestic Violence Responses

“Doggie Witness Protection Programs”

“Safe Havens”

600+ women’s shelters: Foster referrals

www.safeplaceforpets.org

“SAF-T” – Sheltering Animals & Families Together

148+ pet-friendly women’s shelters in US

(12+ in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Spain)

www.alliephillips.com
Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence

A serious, understudied rural issue...

“It wasn’t just the cats and dogs, it was the sheep and the chickens. I was terrified for their welfare. I knew if I were to leave, he wouldn’t hesitate to kill them. He had done it before.”

-- New York Times 4/1/06

Susan Walsh, 50...
The Link Helps Resolve Ongoing Challenges:
Better support for IPV survivors:
Pet Protection Orders
Policy and Practice Responses: Pets and Divorce Settlements

States Where Divorce Courts Can Award Custody of Pets in the ANIMALS’ BEST INTERESTS
Legislative Responses

Coercive Animal Abuse = Domestic Violence or Elder Abuse
The Animal Abuse/Elder Abuse Link

Animal Welfare Issues for Adult Protective Services

- Memory loss
- Fixed/low income
- Physical frailness
- Social isolation
- Hoarding
Animal Abuse and APS Caseworkers

• 35%: clients talk about pets threatened, injured, killed, or denied care

• 45%: intentional animal abuse or neglect

• 92%: co-existing animal and self-neglect: animal neglect an important warning sign

• 75%: clients’ concern for pets’ welfare affected decisions about accepting interventions or other services

Survey of 200 APS professionals 2001, HSUS & National Center on Elder Abuse
Animal Abuse and APS Caseworkers

“Her decision to go to the hospital depended on what happened to her cat. Her recovery depended on the cat’s well being. So I had to find someone to care for her cat. I never thought that animal welfare would be of my job!”

-- APS caseworker, reported in Boat & Knight (2000)
From the National Link Coalition’s Case Files: Animal abuse linked with elder abuse...

NY man accused of beating his father, then stealing, raping and killing neighbor’s dog...

RI man holds elderly mother’s cat hostage for $20,000 ransom...

FL man charged with killing mother’s three dogs in jealous rage – believed she loved them more than him...

CA woman with starving horses charged with elder abuse when mother found covered in feces & urine...

Investigation into dog slashed with sword uncovers FL woman’s brutal beatings of nursing home resident...

CA Family with autistic son catch caregiver viciously beating boy – and uncover histories of felony animal neglect and murder ...
Elders & Animals -- Issues for APS

1. Pet neglect (forget to feed; overfeed; don’t let out; vet care)
2. Self-neglect (forgo food, hospital, LTHC; eat pet food)
3. Attachment and pet loss (sole companion, exercise, social connection, link to loved one)
4. Safety of caseworker/home health aide/homemaker services (litter boxes, sink, vermin; aggression)
5. Manipulation, Intimidation, Retaliation. Extortion
6. Jealousy over service animal
7. Hoarding/collecting…
Elders & Animals -- Issues for APS

Animal hoarding – *not taken seriously*

“Crazy Cat Lady Action Figure” (2004)

“Hoarders” (2007 --)

“Crazy Cat Lady Board Game” (2007)
WHY DO PEOPLE HOARD ANIMALS?

Animals provide us with:
• Reward
• Acceptance
• Conflict-free relationships
• Sense of self-worth

_Hoarders carry to extreme_

“Some people who have difficulty establishing supportive interpersonal relationships or who otherwise have difficulty coping with life stressors find refuge in animals.”
Elders & Animals -- Issues for APS

Animal hoarding

- Not a harmless eccentricity, but a potentially serious problem for people, animals and the community.
- Multi-disciplinary response always required: APS, animal shelter, law enforcement, public health, fire dept., code enforcement, mental health, veterinarians.
- Animals may be dead or alive.
- Recidivism rate: 100%.
Animal Hoarding - an APS concern:

- Est. 3,500 new cases reported/year
- Est. 250,000 animals
- 40% of object hoarders also hoard animals
- 10-15% of all hoarding cases involve dependent adults or children

Elders and Animal Hoarding

DEFINITION:
• Intense emotional attachments → accumulates large # of animals.
• Fail to provide minimal standards of nutrition, sanitation & vet care.
• Fail to act on deteriorating condition of animals or environment.
• Fail to recognize negative impact of the collection on their own health and well-being.
Elders and Animal Hoarding

STATISTICS:

- 76% female
- 46% aged 60+
- Most unmarried
- More than 1/2 live alone
- Animals:
  - cats 65%
  - dogs 60%
  - farm animals 11%
  - birds 11%
- Median: 39 animals per case
- Dead or poor condition: 80%
- Animal feces & urine: 69% of cases
- Hoarder’s bed soiled with feces/urine: 25%
- Denial: 58% do not acknowledge the problems
FOUR TYPES OF ANIMAL HOARDERS

1. Mental Illness

2. Overwhelmed hoarder

3. Rescue Hoarder

4. Exploiter Hoarders...
Types of Animal Hoarders

1. Mental Illness
Current thinking: not OCD but disordered attachment style emanating from early childhood trauma & life stressors.

Psychological Disorders Identified
- Addiction Model
- Schizophrenia
- Antisocial Personality
- Psychopathic Personality
- Dementia
- Borderline Personality
- Depression
- Münchausen by Proxy
Types of Animal Hoarders

1. Mental Illness
   - Few psychotic
   - Agoraphobics who don’t want to be alone
   - Isolation a cause of accumulation of animals
   - Isolation a result of accumulation of animals
2. Overwhelmed: Good intentions gone bad

- Sincere desire but overwhelmed
  (word gets out as THE place to take unwanted animals)
- Animals become family

Types of Animal Hoarders
Types of Animal Hoarders

3. Rescuers

- Deep mistrust of others: see self as only one who can help
- State of denial
- Anti-euthanasia
- Identity tied to animals
- May rescue specific breeds (or colors)
- May rescue hospice cases, dying animals
Types of Animal Hoarders

4. Exploiters: Greed or criminal intent

• Solicit $ from public
• Get animals to serve themselves
• Actively pick up animals, evade law
Social Work Issues in Animal Hoarding

- Undiagnosed mental health issues (only 9% have histories of MH treatment)
- Physical health issues (rarely leave house; don’t see MDs; zoonoses)
- 14%: histories of elder abuse
- Malnutrition
- Poverty
- Isolation

-- Jenny Coffey, Mayor’s Alliance for Animals/Urban Hoarding Project, New York City
Social Work Issues in Animal Hoarding

- Environmental issues: Fire hazards; Odor; Infestation with pests
- Non-working utilities
- Declining quality of life
- Potential for eviction or hospitalization (>50%)
- 47% have dead or dying animals
- Only 14% connected to traditional social services (e.g., Meals on Wheels, DSS)
- 11% require crisis responses

-- Jenny Coffey, Mayor’s Alliance for Animals/Urban Hoarding Project, New York City
What To Do?

Advantages of prosecution

• Opportunity for evaluation and risk assessment
• Opportunity to evaluate animals
• Can do long-term monitoring (recommended!)
• Court-ordered restitution of costs
• Limits on animal ownership
• Limits on animal-related employment
• Law-enforcement public record
• Makes them accountable
• Educates public about seriousness of the issue
What To Do?

Disadvantages of prosecution

- Criminalizes behavior that may really be mental illness
- Alienates public or judiciary unfamiliar with the extent of the problem
- May not draw upon the community resources in the best position to provide long-term monitoring and solutions (e.g. mental health, adult protective services, animal care and control)
- Costly and time-consuming
# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Hoarder</th>
<th>Persuasion</th>
<th>Threat of Legal Action</th>
<th>Prosecution</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exploiter</td>
<td>Unlikely to be effective</td>
<td>Unlikely to be intimidated</td>
<td>Usually essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescue Hoarder</td>
<td>Unlikely to be effective, at least initially</td>
<td>Must offer potential for scaled-down operation</td>
<td>May be Required when threats fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed Caregiver</td>
<td>Likely to be receptive</td>
<td>May be enough to reduce recidivism</td>
<td>Often unnecessary or counter-productive</td>
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-- Randy Lockwood, ASPCA
Elders and Animal Hoarding

REMEDIES AND RESPONSES

• Foster housing, vet care, euthanasia of large #s of animals, mobile clinic for spay/neuter

• May require court order

• Psych counseling, social services

• Prepare for media interest

• Allow to keep limited #

• Frequent check-backs
Other Issues: Humane Housing for Older People & Pets

Dilemma: elder may be forced to surrender pets and move to subsidized housing
Humane Housing for Older People & Pets

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Housing & Urban-Rural Recovery Act, Sec. 227
(12 U.S.C. #1701r-1)
- disabled or 62+ can keep “common”
  household pets in federally-assisted housing for
  elderly or disabled

- pet deposits vary
  on rent subsidy,
  capped at $300,
  can be paid
  in installments
Humane Housing for Older People & Pets

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!
State laws protect rights of elderly and disabled to keep pets in state-subsidized housing

AZ*, CA, CT, DC*, MA, MN*, NH, NJ*

(* = pet rights also guaranteed in private housing)
Humane Housing for Older People & Pets

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Other pertinent laws:
**ADA:** housing & transportation for service animals (dogs, miniature horses) *(42 U.S.C. #12131-12134)*

**Public Housing Reform Act:** residents of public housing allowed to own common pets subject to conditions *(42 U.S.C. #1437z-3)*

**Fair Housing Amendments Act:** private landlords cannot discriminate against people with disabilities with assistance animals (some exemptions) *(42 U.S.C. #3601-3619)*
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

1. Ask questions in assessments, intakes, interviews:
   - Clients more likely to talk about animals than themselves
   - Your concern for pet --> trust
   - If pet suddenly missing, or having problems, ask why
   - Does client have vet?

   “Are there animals at home?”
   “How are they cared for?”
   “Are you worried about their welfare?”
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

1. Include animal questions in assessments, interviews, intakes
   • “Are there any animals at home?” (basement, garage, shed, yard)
   • “Has anyone ever hurt or threatened your pet?”
   • “Have any animals turned up missing?”
   • “Are you worried about your pet’s safety or health?”
   • “Can you afford to care for your pet?”
   • “Are you, or your home aides, able to do the physical tasks?” (change litter box, clean fish tank or bird cage, walk dog, clean yard, go to vet)
   • “Is someone else available to care for pet?”
   • “Are you depressed over the loss of your pet?”
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

2. Home Visit Assessment Tips
   • Risk reduction: Safety vs. fall
   • Ask about any recent health problems or injuries
   • Inadequate food/water/shelter
   • How is pet being exercised?
   • Pet clean-up
   • Pet food but no human food
   • Excess numbers of animals
   • Future planning: short- or long-term hospital/skilled nursing facility
     • Who will take care of animal?
     • Can pet come to visit?
3. Planning for Transitioning with Pets

- Animals sense changes
- Talk through issues with clients: what do they really want?
- How will pet transition?
- Does new residence allow pets?
- May be more expensive
- Is pet a risk for client with increasing frailty?
- Build in support system ahead of time
- Utilize community animal care & control, pet therapy, vet, AIDS services resources
- May need to find new vet
- Build in plan for animal for future care
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

3. Strategies to Ease Transition
   • Packing and moving considerations
   • Acclimate pet to new setting in advance
   • Scope out the new area for opportunities & resources
   • Change address on tags
   • Order new supplies
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

4. End-of-Life Care Planning
   • End of life wishes and burial/cremation considerations for both pet and older adults
   • Hospice plans (for both pet and older adult)
   • Alert vets to suicide watch potential
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

5. Know who to call for referrals

- Pet care services for seniors/chronic illness (humane society, SPCA, animal services)
  (surrender, adoption, Safe Havens, low-cost vet/spay-neuter, foster care while in hospital, behavior counseling, pet food banks, meals-on-wheels)

- Who ‘Ya Gonna Call? Abuse Busters!

- Seniors’ transport services
- Vets/vet associations/Vet schools
  - 24/7 grief/loss hotline

- Monthly grief support group
- Mobile groomers
- House-call veterinarians
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

6. Develop inter-agency relationships, especially for hoarding cases: MOU

- Cross-training: make all aware of Link
- Cross-reporting protocols: SPCA/Animal Control should call you on hoarding cases
- Join community coalitions
- Invite SPCA/Animal Control to join APS MDTs
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

7. Identify pet-friendly housing (apartments, public housing) -- SPCA volunteers can compile list

Identify nursing homes/assisted living centers with animal-assisted activities
WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

8. If client is capable (physically, emotionally, mentally, financially) suggest a pet for companionship, responsibility, routine, exercise, social outreach

“Animal companions can relieve the anonymity often found in modern society, and can help build friendships. Dogs facilitate interaction among strangers and help establish trust among the newly acquainted.”

WHAT APS CASEWORKERS CAN DO:

9. Find volunteer opportunities for clients at animal shelters
10. Legislative answers: Cross-reporting

APS mandated/permitted to report animal abuse
- California
- Louisiana
- Nebraska
- Tennessee
- West Virginia
Cross-Reporting -- Confidentiality concerns?

Statutory remedies
- State law allowing cross-reporting
- State law mandating cross reporting
- (Limited or absolute immunity from civil/criminal liability)

Codes of Ethics remedies
- Confidentiality can be breached if harm to self or others is risk (NASW)
- Explicit permission (AVMA, AAHA, CVMA, RNZVMA)

Administrative remedies
- OK to report to law enforcement when others are at risk
- Include humane society/animal control in MDTs
- OK to release info if family signs release form
- Report as private citizen
Summary

1. Animal abuse also affects people’s welfare.

2. Animal abuse is a form of family violence.

3. APS personnel can work with animal care & control to recognize and respond to suspected animal maltreatment and better help families

4. Link-based agency policy changes can help families with pets who are experiencing violence.
Any Questions?

www.NationalLinkCoalition.org
Subscribe to our FREE LINK-Letter
arkowpets@snip.net
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Phil Arkow
Coordinator, National Link Coalition
www.NationalLinkCoalition.org
Chair, Animal Abuse & Family Violence Prevention Project
The Latham Foundation
arkowpets@snip.net