Animal abuse and family violence- the emerging link.
What is the Link?

- Animal abuse has long been considered an isolated concern. Yet evidence is accumulating that shows strong links between animal cruelty and other crimes, including interpersonal, family, and community violence. The area where child maltreatment, domestic violence and elder abuse intersect with animal cruelty is called the link.
Why is this important in Psychological treatment?

• Intervention in cases of animal abuse can be an important avenue for also preventing or identifying other abuse to children, the elderly or partner abuse. For example, evidence shows that children exposed or encouraged to engage in animal abuse are more likely to further abuse animals or to develop conduct disorders. By identifying the issue, appropriate treatment could prevent future issues.
Child maltreatment

- Children who have witnessed or engaged in animal abuse are more likely to struggle in school, abuse illicit substances, to experience behavioural problems, and engage in delinquent behaviours (Randour & Davidson, 2008).
- 29% of mothers in an assistance group reported that their children had witnessed the abuser harm or kill an animal, compared to no mothers reporting such instances in a community control sample (Thompson & Gollne, 2006).
- In a study surveying 121 child protection workers, workers reported that 22.5% of their cases included a disclosure of animal cruelty (Montminy-Danna, 2007).
- A Longitudinal study by Walton-Moss et al., (2005) found that engaging in animal abuse as a child was one of 4 significant factors predicting future battering behaviour.
- Animal abuse is one of the first symptoms that indicate childhood conduct disorder (Miller, 2001).
• “At a shelter for battered women and their children, staff are horrified to hear how the abuser made the children watch as he tied their pet gerbil and then set the animal on fire. The abuser threatened the children that they could be next” (VCPN).

• “When I was growing up my father was very abusive to our farm animals and pets. I lived in terror of making him angry because I knew he was capable of hurting me the same way he hurt our animals” (Update).
Domestic violence

- Ascione, Webner, & Wood (1997) conducted state and national surveys and found that 70% of battered women reported that their abusers had either threatened or had acted out harm towards companion animals, or had actually killed a companion animal. 32% of these woman reported that their children had also been involved in acts of animal cruelty.
- Data collected from 9 different studies suggests that 18.6% to 48% of women delayed seeking refuge because of concern for a companion animal.
- Research has shown that abuse of a companion animal is significantly higher in homes with reported domestic violence, compared to controls (Ascione et al., 2007).
- “I left once without my pet, but I had to go back because I worried so much about her and missed her. Then I found a way to take my pet with me and I left for good. (National Resource Centre)”
Elder abuse

• Severe neglect or animal hording are indicators that social support services are required. Elders with limited finances, who are frail and/or suffer from memory loss may neglect their own care to look after the pets or may struggle with ongoing animal care. They may be unable to provide adequate food or vet care for animals. Some veterinary groups or welfare charities may be able to assist with temporary foster care, pet food banks, low cost vet services and animal transportation.

• “An anonymous complaint from a neighbour about a dog kept in a filthy yard with inadequate food and water led to the discovery of a family in need. A mother, her three children, and an elderly relative lived in squalid conditions, with human waste and garbage throughout the house. Police officers took the dog and the children into custody and reported the elderly person to adult protective services” (VCPN).
Psychological dynamics

• There is little research in this area but it is thought that companion animal abuse is a form of exerting control over the victim in domestic violence situations. Fear, violence and retribution are the likely reasons for the link.

• Those who abused animals were more likely to view animals as ‘property’ (Carlisle-Frank, Frank & Nielson, 2004). Yet under our current laws animals are considered property.
How do we incorporate this into our work?

• Consider the link in all interactions and work with other agencies

• Order and have on hand psychological assessment materials to use as needed

• Provide therapy that is appropriate including AniCare/therapy animals
Consider the link in all interactions and work with other agencies

• 3 questions at intake interviews/assessment:
  • Are there animals in the home?
  • How does each family member treat them?
  • Do you worry about something bad happening to them?
Consider the link in all interactions and work with other agencies

- Include animals in safety planning
- Stay/leave/going into hiding
- RSPCA safe beds program – The Safe Beds for Pets Program families can now leave domestic violence situations and not fear for the safety of their pets. It offers temporary housing for pets of people who are seeking refuge from domestic violence and helps to address the link between animal and human abuse and child protection. The safe beds program is not a long-term solution to the housing of the pet, but it gives domestic violence victims peace of mind and allows them to secure their own safety and make arrangements for the future. The animal’s location is kept confidential. In most cases, these animals are referred through to the RSPCA from a domestic violence counselling service.
Speaking with children about animal abuse

• Ask children about their relationship with the companion animal/s:
• Consider the relationship, the severity of the abuse, the number of times it was witnessed or occurred, the child’s response, the immediate and long-term response- anxiety, nightmares, sleeping or eating changes, withdrawal, concentration issues, repetitive play with various themes around the abuse, agitated behaviour.

• Consider if the child is showing any anxiety or depression, shame/guilt/remorse/indifference/excusing the abusers behaviour. How does the child explain or make sense of what has happened? Was the child threatened or an animal hurt as a result of doing something or failing to do something?
• Child protection services, child welfare, humane societies, animal welfare organisations, animal control/council pounds, workers involved in the court systems, public health officials, law enforcement officers, psychologists, social workers, elder care workers, need to assist in identifying both animal abuse and human abuse – and work together to assist each issue. Communication, cooperation, cross-training and cross-reporting between agencies must become the norm.
ANIMAL CRUELTY PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

- **Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences (BIARE)**, developed by Barbara Boat, Child Trauma Center, University of Cincinnati (Boat, B.W. (1994). Boat Inventory on Animal-Related Experiences. Cincinnati: University of Cincinnati.)
  

- **ANICARE Animal Related Experiences**
  
  [http://swrtc.nmsu.edu/files/2013/05/207_Boat_Inventory_ASI.pdf](http://swrtc.nmsu.edu/files/2013/05/207_Boat_Inventory_ASI.pdf)


- **Children and Animals Inventory (CAI)**
  

- **Childhood Trust Survey on Animal Related Experiences** (Boat, Loar, & Phillips, 2008).
ANIMAL CRUELTY PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

P.E.T. Scale – for use in schools
http://www.animalsandsociety.net/assets/library/525_s1211.pdf
P.E.T. Scale of the Measurement of Physical and Emotional Tormenting of Animals, developed by Ann Baldry of the Free University of Amsterdam. (Baldry, A.C. (2004). The development of the P.E.T. Scale for the measurement of physical and emotional tormenting against animals in adolescents. Society & Animals 12, 1-17.)

Animal Abusers Interview and Risk Assessment Tool (AARAT)
Developed by Phil Tedeschi of the University of Denver School of Social Work. (Tedeschi, P. (undated). Animal abusers interview and risk assessment tool (AARAT). Denver, CO: Denver University School of Social Work.)

Children and Animals Assessment Instrument (CAAI)
Developed by Frank Ascione of Utah State University et al.
ANIMAL CRUELTY PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

Children’s Attitudes and Behaviors Toward Animals (CABTA).

Children’s Treatment of Animals Questionnaire (CTAQ)

Clinical Assessment of Juvenile Animal Cruelty
AniCare and the use of therapy animals

• AniCare is a specific cognitive behavioural based program that looks at accountability, empathy and problem-solving skills.

• This program is specifically for individuals who have witnessed and become desensitised or who have themselves abused an animal. It uses CBT, psychodynamic, and attachment theories to encourage empathy with animals.

• The AniCare model of treatment for animal abuse (Jory & Randour, 1998) (adult treatment plan) and AniCare child: An assessment and treatment approach for childhood animal abuse (Randour, Krinsk, & Wolf, 2002).
Animal assisted therapy

• Very little exists in the way of randomised clinical trials but therapist reports have indicated that such therapies have increased positive behaviours and improved empathy and concentration.
Peanuts Funny Farm

- Peanuts Funny Farm takes in rescue animals and provides care and rehabilitation for as many neglected, abused and unwanted animals as possible. The sanctuary also organises and runs weekend retreats or day visits for children from dysfunctional or abusive families. At these visits children pay an active role in taking care of and rehabilitating the animals.
- Tracey says, “Teaching children animal-assisted activities with kindness, empathy and thoughtfulness both enhances the quality of animal welfare as well as the quality of the children’s lives. Children develop more awareness and understanding, and after spending quality time with the different animals at Peanuts they find comfort, respect, trust and a love for each other and learn that they matter too. We believe this will help break the cycle and mindset of abuse and help create a better future for both animals and children of today and of future generations.”
Example of Chase- At 12 years of age Chase began having trouble in school after a string of traumatic personal events. He came to Peanuts for a weekend retreat. While at first he did not want to attend, he has now been visiting the sanctuary regularly.

“Now I know that animals are like us, they feel and hurt just like we do. Before I spent time with the animals I never really thought about them and didn’t care, but now I talk to other children and people about animals and how they can help you and that we need to take care of them, as much as we need to take care of ourselves.”

“I feel so much better about myself now and what I can do to help the animals. I felt that I was needed by the animals and helping them made me feel better and I wanted to do better, even when I wasn’t at the farm.”

Visit day
Challenges

- Re-homing families with the companion animals
- Domestic violence protection orders
- Unusual companion animals
- Confidentiality
- Therapy animal use
- Other animal abuse- hunting/circuses/other