Selective Battering of the Family Pet

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Abstract –This study examined the attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of both pet-abusing and non-pet-abusing perpetrators of family violence. Using data collected from victims residing at domestic violence shelters study results indicated that relative to their non-pet-abusing counterparts, pet-abusing batterers tend to less often show affection toward their pets, more often communicate with their pets only through commands and threats, more often view companion animals as property, are more likely to scapegoat their pets and more likely to have unrealistic expectations about their pets, more frequently punish their pets, and are more sensitive to stressful life events--particularly those perceived to be caused by the pet. The study also queried respondents about batterers' past history with pets, the frequency and type of abuse inflicted on animals, the number of batterers who hunt, the frequency with which children witnessed abuse of the family pet, the impact of animal guardianship on decisions to remain with or return to the batterer, and where companion animals ended up when victims fled the batterer.

Keywords: Pet abuse; domestic violence; batterers; attitudes; perceptions; companion animals

Despite the growing body of literature examining animal victims of family violence (DeViney, Dickert, and Lockwood 1983; Kellert and Felthous 1985; Zahn-Waxler, Hollenbeck, and Radke-Yarrow 1984; Veevers 1985; Lockwood and Hodge 1986; Browne 1987;1993; Dutton 1992; Renzetti 1992; Adams 1994;1995; Arkow 1994a,b;1996; Boat 1995; Ascione 1998; Ascione, Weber, and Wood 1997; Arluke, Levin, Luke and Ascione 1999; Flynn 1999a;2000a,b) there remains a shortage of research seeking to uncover the perceptions, attitudes and behaviors distinguishing batterers who abuse only human family members from those batterers who also abuse the family pet. Such a distinction is critical because it helps explain why people choose to abuse animals and what potential remedies can be developed to guide treatment efforts.

Previous findings have indicated that not all domestic violence batterers with pets abuse the animals (DeViney, et al. 1983; Arkow 1994b; Ascione 1998; Ascione, Weber, and Wood 1997; Flynn 2000c). Results from studies on the incidence of threats and actual harm to family pets indicate that approximately half of the batterers living with pets were reported to either have

harmed or threatened to harm the animals (DeViney, et al. 1983; Browne 1987; Renzetti 1992; Arkow 1994b; Quinlisk 1995; Ascione, Weber, and Wood 1997; Ascione 1998; Flynn 2000b). Furthermore, studies have indicated that the types of animal abuse within domestic violence settings can run anywhere from verbal threats, to denial of food, water and veterinary care, to a variety of physical assaults, to actually killing the animal (DeViney, et al. 1983; Vermeulen and Odendaal 1993; Arkow 1994b; Adams 1995; Ascione 1998). Both the types and frequency of pet abuse by domestic violence batterers were examined in the present study.

Batterers' Beliefs and Pet Abuse

Flynn (2000c) found that pets may be victimized in violent families because they are considered "property". Previous research has indicated that family pets--especially those residing in angry and aggressive households such as those families with ongoing domestic violence--are often made the scapegoat for family and personal problems (Kellert and Felthous 1985; Veevers 1985; Zahn-Waxler, et al. 1984; DeViney, et al. 1983; Lockwood and Hodge 1986; Vermeulen and Odendaal 1993; Adams 1994; Flynn 1999b;2000b). Agnew (1998) has argued that stressed and strained people may use animals as scapegoats because animals provide a safe target for the discharge of aggressive feelings. Likewise, Kellert and Felthous (1985) found that self-reported animal abusers often said they abused animals to retaliate against animals they perceived had "wronged" them or to eliminate undesirable traits in an animal such as damaging property or making noise. Agnew (1998) has further suggested that those who engage in animal abuse tend to be more sensitive to stress and strain. Batterers may abuse the family pets to reduce stress or to get revenge against the perceived "cause" of the stress. One of the primary stressors for abusers may be the pet's own behavior. And finally, research findings indicate that animal abusers frequently report the animals' "bad" behaviors as a reason for abusing them (DeViney, et al. 1983; Kellert and Felthous 1985; Felthous and Kellert 1987a). The present study examined pet-abusing and non-pet-abusing domestic violence batterers' perceptions of companion animals as sentient

beings versus property, tendencies to scapegoat the family pet for personal and family problems,

sensitivity to daily hassles and stressors (including those perceived to be caused by the family

pet) and unrealistic expectations about companion animals.

Battering, hunting and attitudes about animals

Some authors have suggested that the attitudes and behaviors of those who engage in

companion animal abuse may be similar to those who hunt. Agnew (1998) has argued that

animal abusers--including hunters--have a more dominionistic attitude toward animals believing

they are distinct from and superior to animals and that they have been granted divine dominion

over animals to use as they please. Statman (1990) has stated that hunting combined with

threatening or harming a pet are warning signs for identifying a batterer, and Pope-Lance and

Engelsman (1987) have pointed out that many abusers who are cruel to animals also kill them for

sport. To further clarify the relationship, Adams (1994) has argued that battering incidents of

human and non-human victims increase just prior to the hunting season.

Empirical evidence has been less than conclusive about the relationship, however. Herzog and

Borghardt (1988) found that some people intentionally expose their children to abuse companion

animals to reinforce them for participation in other forms of abuse like hunting. However, the

results of a recent study indicate that while hunting appears to be related to harming stray or wild

animals, hunting appears to be unrelated to the abuse of companion animals, other forms of

animal abuse or violence directed toward humans. It is important to note that the subjects were

college students with a mean age of 20.3 years and the results may not be indicative of the

'typical' hunter (Flynn 2002). In order to contribute to the current data pool on hunters and

animal abusers the present compared the number of pet-abusing hunters with non-pet-abusing

hunters.

Family cycles of pet abuse

An important focus of research has been children who witness abuse to the family pet by a parent. One study found that children of women residing in a domestic violence shelter were twenty times more likely to have witnessed pet abuse than children from a control group (Ascione, Thompson, and Black 1997). This finding is troubling considering previous research that suggest the chaotic home with aggressive role models to be the most common factor for animal cruelty later in childhood (Tapia 1971). Additionally, children have been found to imitate the behavior of parents who scapegoat and abuse the family pet. Zahn-Waxler, et al., (1984) reported that some parents found their children's aggressive, abusive behavior towards the family pet "cute". Such reactions had a significant impact on the children's future behavior toward animals. Ascione, Thompson, and Black (1997) found 32% of the children in households with ongoing domestic violence had imitated the abuser by hurting or killing the family pet.

Witnessing combined parent and companion animal abuse may compromise children's psychological adjustment and increase their propensity for interpersonal violence through observational learning (Felthous 1980), making their own cruelty to animals more likely (Ascione 1998). Children who witness violence directed at both parents and animals may go on to abuse their pets as scapegoats for their own anger (DeViney, et al. 1983; Arkow 1996; Davidson 1979) or because imitating their families' abusive behaviors toward animals seems normal to them (Lockwood and Hodge 1986).

Additionally, previous research findings indicate a link between abusive behavior directed towards animals in childhood and subsequent abusive behaviors during adulthood directed towards human victims (Lockwood and Hodge 1986; Kellert and Felthous 1985; Felthous and Kellert 1987b; Ascione 1993; Boat 1995; Arkow 1996; Flynn 1999a; Miller 2001). In order to consider the cyclical nature of pet abuse, through respondents' reports the present study examined both the relationship pet-abusing and non-pet-abusing batterers had with their pets in their family

of origin as well as the number of their children who subsequently went on to witness animal abuse by these batterers.

Companion animal victims, human victims and the price of leaving the batterer

Previous research has indicated there is a tendency for victims of family violence to delay seeking help and leaving the batterer out of concern for the family pets (Ascione, Weber, and Wood 1997; Ascione 1998; Flynn 2000a). Additionally, previous research findings indicated that about half of the animals were left behind with the batterer (Ascione 1998; Flynn 2000b). In one study more than one-fourth of the pets were left in the care of family members or friends and more than one-fifth the pets were abandoned, taken to the animals shelter or given away (Flynn 2000a). In a separate study Flynn (2000c) reported that women whose companion animals had been abused were as likely to leave their pets behind with the animal abuser (55%) as with batterers who had never harmed the pets (50%).

The present study queried victims as to the impact companion animals had on their decision to remain in the violent home, the types and frequency of abuse directed toward the family pet, what happened to the animals when victims finally fled the batterer, as well as the impact the animal had on the human victims, both within the violent setting and afterwards.

The present study hypothesized that those domestic violence abusers who harm the family pets may tend to differ from non-pet-abusing batterers in their perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors with regard to their pets. More specifically, this study sought to determine whether there were differences between abuser-types in terms of (1) perceptions of companion animals as sentient beings vs. property, (2) tendencies to "scapegoat" the family pet for personal and/or family problems, (3) sensitivity to hassles and stressors in the environment--particularly those perceived as being caused by the pets, (4) unrealistic expectations about animals, (5) previous relationships with pets in their families of origins. For the purpose of this study animal abuse was

theoretically defined as socially unacceptable, deliberate and unnecessary suffering and harm inflicted on animals.

Methods

Domestic violence victim respondents were queried about their and their partners' attitudes, perceptions and behaviors with regard to their companion animals. Their partners included both pet abusers and a group of batterers who reportedly never abused the family pet. This methodology was implemented not only to allow for a systematic approach but to address criticisms of prior research on animal cruelty and family violence (Anon 2001). More specifically, prior studies have been criticized for lacking control groups or a systematic approach, as well as using survey populations that cannot be generalized. The present study was designed to redress some of these shortcomings.

Ascione (1998) has suggested that it is important to assess the batterers' perception of animal abuse as well as the victims'. An important question he has proposed for study is "What is the victim's knowledge of the partner's history (as a child, adolescent and adult prior to the current relationship) of animal abuse?" Assessing the conditions surrounding the batterers' attitudes, beliefs and actions surrounding abuse from the victim's perspective was the primary approach of the present study. Victims' perspectives were believed to be more reliable than those of the batterers in this case. Edleson and Brygger (1986) found that partners in domestic violence families tend not to agree about the different forms of violence the batterer perpetuates. When batterers who had undergone intervention were asked about the batterer's violence and/or threats against pets, victims' and batterers' exact agreement was only twenty-four percent.

Given the potential for disagreement about the specifics surrounding pet abuse, who makes the better witness--the victim or the perpetrator? The evidence seems to favor the victim. This is primarily because self-disclosure bias and social desirability may preclude any ability to obtain

accurate reports regarding attitudes and actions surrounding pet abuse from pet abusers themselves. Adams (1995) has argued that batterers choose not to disclose their abuse of animals because it exposes their controlled and calculated reasons for violence. Despite the fact that practitioners working with batterers have documentation of their deliberate harming or killing of the family pet, according to Adams it is rare for batterers to ever disclose having harmed their animals. This argument appears to have empirical support. When assessing intake statistics of domestic violence perpetrators the overall conclusion has been that most batterers simply do not admit to pet abuse (Arkow 1994b).

Questionnaire

Data were collected by way of a written survey to reduce potential problems associated with victim-respondents' reluctance, social desirability and interviewer bias connected with the sensitive nature of the subject matter. The surveys, which consisted of 78 items, took approximately 25 minutes to complete. Twenty-six of the questions were subdivided in to three scales: Sentient Beings Scale, Hassles & Stressors Scale, and Unrealistic Expectations Scale. All questions were converted to binary variables for scaling purposes.

The Sentient Beings Scale was comprised of fourteen scaled questions: how often batterers and victims tell pets they love them; frequency of showing affection towards pets; whether they refer to themselves as the pets' mom or dad; who participates in caring for and playing with pets; how they communicate with pets (commands/threats/conversationally); whether pets are considered as full-fledged family members (viewed equally as children, grandparents, partners, etc.), whether pets live indoors with family but are not considered full-fledged family members, or whether pet is viewed as property; whether pets' birthdays were celebrated; whether pets received gifts for holidays and birthdays; whether pets were in the family will; whether pets joined other family members on vacations or family outings (walks, trips to the park, picnics, drives, etc); whether pets appeared frequently in the family photo album; the number of toys pets

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have; whether pets' names appear on family greeting cards; and where pets live the majority of the time.

The Hassles-Stressors Scale was comprised of five scaled questions: what sort of daily life events typically set the respondent's partner (the batterer) off such as lights left on in unoccupied rooms, money problems, dirty dishes left in the sink, furniture not in its proper place, friends causing problems, dinner not on the table on time/not warm, appearance of family members (clothes, hygiene, etc.), in-laws causing problems, children misbehaving, problems at work; pets misbehaving as something that typically set off the batterer; the cleanliness level and organized condition of the house as stressors that upset the batterer; and how often the pets are severely punished.

The Unrealistic Expectations Scale was comprised of seven scaled questions: what upsets the partner (batterer) most when the pet misbehaves—this included choices: the partner is most upset about the disrespect the pet shows him/her; the partner is most upset because s/he believes they should be listened to by the pet because s/he is in charge; the partner is most upset because safety of the pet or other family member is in jeopardy when pet disobeys; partner is most upset about property damage due to pet's bad behavior; partner is most upset about others' perception of the family resulting from the pet's behavior; partner is most upset that s/he must yell at/discipline the pet; the most common reasons the respondent's partner (the batterer) thinks the pet disobeys him/her--this included choices: the pet disobeys because the pet disrespects the partner, pet disobeys because pet does not know any better, pet disobeys to get attention, the pet disobeys because s/he is inherently bad, the pet lacks training to understand, and the pet is just behaving as an animal naturally would; the type, intensity and frequency pets are routinely punished; items partner believes to be true about companion animals such as cats should never scratch the furniture, dogs should not bark unless they are "watchdogs", cats should not kick litter outside of the litter box, and dogs should be able to "hold it" even if they have not been walked/let out all day.

Procedure

Domestic violence shelters in upstate New York, USA were contacted and asked to participate in the study. Based on their willingness to participate, the surveys and accompanying cover letters explaining the purpose of the study were distributed to seven of these domestic violence shelters. Shelter managers and staff members placed the questionnaires in a prominent place and advised respondents seeking refuge at the shelter that participation was voluntary and anonymous. A security drop-box was provided at each location allowing respondents to deposit their completed surveys in a tamper-proof, secured box. A total of 48 domestic violence victims participated, 34 of whom had pets. The majority of results presented in this paper are based on only those respondents with pets, with all respondents included for comparison purposes for the hassles/stressors items, the hunting item, relationship with pets in family of origin items and participant demographic information.

Participants

Participants came from a mixture of urban, suburban and rural regions. All of the respondents were female and ranged in age from 21-41, with their partners' age ranging from 21-66. Respondents' ethnicity was comprised of 73% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic and 11% African American, and 3% other ethnic make-up, with their partners being 61% Caucasian, 16% Hispanic and 16% African American, and 7% other. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents reported having at least one child. Fifty-six percent of respondents and 61% of their partners were reported as having a high school degree or "some college".

Demographics for pet-abusing (PA) and non-pet-abusing (NPA) batterers in households with pets included: Gender = PA Male 95%, Female 5%, NPA Male 86%, Female 14%; Age range = PA 26-51, NPA 27-66; Ethnicity = PA 60% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 30% African American,

NPA 57% Caucasian, 7% Hispanic, 29% African American, 7% other; At least one child = PA 90%; NPA 93%, Education-high school or some college = PA 65%, NPA 50%.

Analysis

Much of the data involved comparing the two groups of batterers on their responses to categorical answers to survey questions. These questions were analyzed using a Chi-square test. Typically, these Chi-square tests were performed on the raw survey categories, while in a few cases cells were collapsed into larger categories to eliminate cells with too few observations. In some cases data were numerical rather than categorical in nature. For example, the number of stressful events that set off a batterer was summed into a numerical value. Groups of conceptually similar questions were also converted into a numerical value by first converting each question into a binary value and then summing the scores for these questions. With this numerical data, the two-groups were compared using an unpaired t-test assuming equal variances[1]. Unless otherwise specified, the results for t-tests used two tails. Since most of the results involved simply comparing two groups, these statistical tests proved sufficient to cover the majority of analysis. However, in one case, a regression model was used to compare whether or not batterers tended to scapegoat the family pet as the dependent variable by looking at whether or not the family pet was abused (binary independent variable) while controlling for the number of children (a scalar independent variable).

Some other results, including demographics, were simply analyzed by calculating means or frequencies for subgroups without performing any tests of statistical significance.

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[1] Tests for equality of variances between t-test groups yielded no significance differences

Results

Fifty-three percent of respondents said their partners had physically harmed their pets. Given that previous research has supported the finding that not all batterers abuse their companion animals this begs the question, 'Do batterers with pets who abuse the animals differ in some way from those batterers who abuse human family members but never touch the pets'? The findings of the present study seem to indicate they do (See Table 1).

Designation of PA and NPA groups were based on actual abuse only (as opposed to threats). The PA and NPA categories were defined by how participants responded to being queried whether their partners ever abused their pets. Respondents were then asked to specifically define what they meant by 'abuse'. Ninety percent of the types of pet abuse reported included 'physical' abuse items and 10% included 'neglect' items only. Eighty percent of pet-abusing batterers were reported to have both threatened and abused the family pet.

Perceiving the animal as a sentient being vs. viewing the pet as "property"

It was hypothesized there may tend to be a difference between pet-abusing and non-pet-abusing batterers with regard to viewing companion animals as sentient beings versus viewing them as property. Fourteen scaled questions were asked in an effort to tease out those individuals who recognized that animals were sentient beings with feelings and preferences from those individuals who perceived their pets primarily as property. Respondents reported that 63% of PA never tell their pets they love them, while only 21% of NPA never tell their pets they love them. Additionally, while none of the PA told their pets they loved them on a daily basis, 36% of NPA

told their pets they love them on a daily basis. These results were highly significant (χ^2 = 12.88,

df =1, *n*=33, p = .0003).

When it came to showing affection to their pets 90% of PA were reported as never doing so,

while 57% of NPA were reported to show their animals affection at least occasionally. Again the

results were highly significant (χ^2 = 8.82, *df* =1, *n*=34, p = .003). Likewise, respondents' reports

of their partners' style of interactions with family pets also showed dramatic differences between

the two types of batterers. Ninety-five percent of PA talked only to their pets through commands

and threats, while 5% talked to their pets conversationally. On the other hand, for NPA, 79%

were reported to regularly talk to their pets conversationally, while 21% talked to their pets only

through commands or threats. The results distinguishing these two groups were highly significant

(χ^2 =19.52, *df* =1, *n*=34, p < .0001).

There was also a difference between the two types of abusers with regard to how they perceive

their family pets. Seventy percent of PA were reported to consider their pets as property. For

NPA, 64% were reported to believe their pets were full-fledged family members. The distinction

between these two groups was highly significant (χ^2 = 12.52, *df* =1, *n*=34, p = .0004).

Independently these questions appear to support the hypothesis that whether the pet is

typically harmed by abusive family members is indeed differentiated with regard to certain

attitudes, perceptions and behaviors regarding the family pet. If, as it was hypothesized, these

questions are indeed measuring something akin to perceptions of animals as sentient beings

versus objects/property we would expect to see significant results when grouping these questions

together in to a single scale. Indeed this is what occurred; a t-test of the scaled questions appear

to indicate that PA are more likely to view their pets as property and less likely to see them as

sentient beings than NPA. The results were highly significant (*t* = -3.19, *df* = 32 [2], *n*=34, p =

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[1] *df=n-2; 34-2=32*

.0032) with pet abusers having a mean score of 11.25 and non-pet-abusers having a mean score of 8.35.

Pets as Scapegoats:

Another goal of the present study was to determine whether pet-abusing batterers had a higher tendency to scapegoat the family pet than non-pet-abusing batterers.

When asked to identify the specific family members typically made the scapegoat for daily frustrations/family problems and the frequency for which this occurred, PA were reported to scapegoat the family pet more often (35%) than NPA (7%). This finding was significant (χ^2 =4.00, *df* =1, *n*=34, p = 0.046). Pet abusers punished their animals more often than non-pet-abusers. This finding was highly significant (χ^2 = 18.99, *df* = 3, *n*=34, p = .0003). The results for the scapegoating variable remained significant after controlling for the number of children in the family by using a linear regression model (F =15.3, *n* =34, p = .0006).

Having unrealistic expectations for animals:

Another goal of the present study was to determine whether there was a difference between pet-abusers and non-pet-abusers with regard to unrealistic expectations about their pets (that is, about the animals' ability to control natural behaviors such as barking and excreting) and whether there was a difference between these two groups in the frequency and severity of punishment they gave the family pets when these expectations went unmet.

Again, in order to determine whether there were any significant differences between batterers who harmed both pets and humans and those batterers who never harmed the family pet, responses were analyzed for both abuser types. When respondents were asked about what types of issues upsets their partners most about the family pets 95% of PA were reported to have

unrealistic expectations about animals (such as getting upset over the disrespect the pet shows the batterer; the pet not recognizing the batterer is in charge; the property damage the pet causes; others' poor perceptions of the family due to the pets misbehavior) compared to 64% of NPA. The results were significant (χ^2 = 5.35, df = 1, n=34, p = .02).

Similarly, when asked their beliefs on statements such as animals should never have "accidents", animals should not vocalize, cats should never scratch the furniture, animals should always do as they are told, respondents reported that 90% of PA have unrealistic expectations about their pets' behavior compared to only 57% of NPA (χ^2 = 4.98, df = 1, n=34, p = .0257). Additionally, 75% of pet abusers with unrealistic expectations about animals were reported to punish the animals "harshly" (physical punishment versus scolding or time-out). This result was highly significant (χ^2 = 18.79, df =1, n=34, p < .0001). And 68% of pet abusers with unrealistic expectations about their animals were reported to punish their pets at least monthly. The result was again highly significant (χ^2 = 18.99, df =3, n=34, p = .0003).

If, as it was hypothesized, these questions are indeed measuring something akin to unrealistic expectations regarding pets we would expect to see significant results when grouping these questions together in to a single scale. Indeed this is what occurred; a t-test of the scaled questions appear to indicate that PA have more unrealistic expectations about their animals than NPA. The results were highly significant (t = -5.31, df = 32, n=34, p < .0001) with PA having a mean score of 3.5 and NPA having a mean score of 1.7.

Hassles and Stressors

It was hypothesized that pet-abusers and non-pet-abusers might differ in the types and frequency of life events they got upset by. Additionally, it was believed that pets would be viewed more frequently as one of life's key stressors or hassles by pet abusers than non-pet-abusers. Responses were derived from a 12-item list of everyday events (e.g., work problems;

messy house; lights on in unoccupied rooms). PA were reportedly set off by many more items than NPA. The results were highly significant when looking at abusers with pets ($t = 3.36$, $df=32$, $n = 34$, p = .0021) and when looking at the full sample population ($t = 3.40$, $df = 46$, $n = 48$, p = .0014). Additionally, batterers who were concerned about the cleanliness of the house were more likely to abuse the family pet. These results were highly significant when compared to non-pet-abusers who had pets ($\chi^2 = 8.68$, $df =1$, $n=34$, p = .003), however, there was no significant difference when the full sample population was used ($\chi^2 = 2.04$, $df = 1$, $n = 48$, p = .15). Of significance, PA were reportedly set off by "pets misbehaving" significantly more often than NPA with pets. Of non-pet-abusers, 71% were reportedly not regularly upset by the family pets. For pet abusers, 85% were reported to be regularly set off by their pets' behavior. Again, the results were highly significant ($\chi^2 = 11.57$, $df =1$, $n=34$, p = .0007). When these questions were scaled together a t-test revealed that PA were reportedly set off by significantly more hassles or stressful life events--and more often by pets' behavior-- than their NPA counterparts with pets. The mean for pet abusers was 1.45 and for non-pet-abusers the mean was 0.57. The results were highly significant ($t = -4.93$, $df = 32$, $n=34$, p < .0001).

Pet Mistreatment in Family of Origin

Another important question concerned the type of relationship adult perpetrators of domestic violence had with the family pet in their family of origin. There was a significant difference between pet abusers and non-pet-abusers with regard to childhood relationships with the family pet. Of the 61% of respondents who reportedly knew about their partners' history with companion animals, the majority of pet guardian respondents with non-pet-abusing partners ranked their partners' relationship with their family pets while growing up as "very" or "somewhat" close (63%). The majority of pet guardian respondents with pet-abusing partners, however, ranked their partners' relationship with their family pets while growing up as "neutral"

(77%). When all households (pets/no pets) were included, only 33% of non-pet-abusers were "very" or "somewhat" close with their pets during childhood.

Only 21% of pet guardian respondents with non-pet-abusing partners reported their partners abused their pets or witnessed abuse of their pet by a family member in childhood, while 50% of respondents with pet-abusing partners reported that their partners abused the family pet or witnessed abuse of their pet by a family member during childhood. For the full sample of non-pet-abusers 18% abused their pets or witnessed abuse of their pet by a family member during childhood.

Conditions Surrounding Abusive Homes

The present study also sought to determine the specifics and the conditions surrounding the escape of human and non-human victims from violent homes and the role the pets played on decisions to remain--and in some cases to return--to the abusive environment.

The present study found that 48% of victims delayed seeking help and leaving the abusive home because of concerns about their pets. Furthermore, of the cases where batterers had previously been abusive towards the family pet, 65% of victims delayed leaving the abusive environment out of concern for their animals.

While it was expected that a percentage of human victims would delay seeking refuge from the violence out of concern for their animals it was also important to learn the conditions surrounding their departure. Would they consider returning to the violence out of concern for their pets? If so, how many would actually do it? And, if they did not return to the batterer, what would happen to the animals? The present study found that 48% of victims had at least considered returning to the batterer due to concerns for the pets. Twenty-five percent of victims stated they had at some previous time returned to the abuser out of concern for their companion animals, and 35% of victims returned to the violence out of concern for their animals in cases where the batterer had previously abused the pet.

What happens to the animals when the human victims flee the batterer? In the present study 22% percent of victims reported they took their pets to a public shelter when they fled the abusive home and 20% of victims left their companion animals with the batterer. A t-test comparing the results of this question to the overall Sentient Beings scale revealed that victims who considered their companion animals to be property rather than sentient beings were more likely to abandon their pets when fleeing the violence. These results were significant ($t = 2.44$, $df = 31$, $n=33$, $p = 0.02$).

When asked specifics about the abuse directed towards their pets 43% of all respondents with pets reported that batterers did so through physical punishment described as "punching, hitting, choking, drowning, shooting, stabbing, throwing against the wall/down the stairs, etc." Thirty percent of respondents reported that abusers verbally threatened to either kill or hurt the pet. Twenty-six percent reported the abusers denied food and/or water to the animal and another 26% denied the animal veterinary care. Of those families where pet abuse had occurred, 48% of respondents reported it occurred "often" during the past 12 months and another 30% reported that abuse to the family pet had occurred "almost always" during the past 12 months. Victims whose pets had been abused reported that abuse to the family pets occurred an average of 51% of the time violent outbursts had taken place over the past year. Seventy-one percent of respondents whose pets had been abused reported they felt either "terrible" or "mildly upset" about the abuse that occurred to their animal.

Sixty-one percent of victims in the present study reported that their children had witnessed the batterer committing acts of abuse against their pets. Forty-three percent of victims reported that their children had either been physically abused or threatened with physical abuse by their partner.

Finally, the findings indicated that hunting may be related to violence directed toward the family pet. Respondents reported that 52% of PA also hunt, compared to only 11% of NPA with pets, and 19% of all NPA. The results were highly significant for the pet-owning sub-sample (χ^2

= 16.51, $df = 1$, $n=34$, p < .0001) and for the total population sample ($\chi^2 = 17.66$, $df = 1$, $n = 48$, p < .0001).

Conclusion

The findings of the present study indicate that violence directed toward animals appears to be embedded in a complex content of attitudes, perceptions and belief systems that are translated in to actions. Batterers, as the findings seem to indicate, are far from being a monolithic group. Some abusers appear unable to distinguish—or to care—that both their human and non-human victims experience great suffering at their hands, while others engage in a bizarre justification process for battering and terrorizing the human family members while protecting the non-human ones. Further research is needed to test these variables under a variety of conditions and settings to determine whether the findings in the present study are consistent and applicable to other regions. It is possible that the regional culture of the area surveyed in the present study is unique enough as to prohibit applicability of the results to other communities. The small sample size may also impact the reliability of these results. Caution should be used until the findings have been further replicated when generalizing the results to other populations.

Once the findings of the present study can be shown to be generalized, identifying attitudinal, perceptual and behavioral trends and tendencies will not only increase our understanding of what drives those who abuse but will also provide a number of red flags to alert those involved in identifying and/or stopping animal abuse.

Table 1

Attitudes, Perceptions, Beliefs, and Treatment of the Family Pet: Pet-Abusers and Non-Pet-Abusers	
Perceiving Pets as Sentient Beings vs. Viewing Animals as Property	
Pet-Abusers (PA)	**Non-Pet-Abusers (NPA)**
• 63% Never tell pets they love them	• 21% Never tell pets they love them
• None tell pets they love them on a daily basis	• 36% Tell pets they love them daily
• 90% Never show affection to pets	• 57% Show pets affection at least occasionally
• 95% Talk to pets only through commands or threats	• 79% Talk to pets conversationally
• 70% Consider pets "property"	• 64% view pets as members of the family
Pets as Scapegoats	
Pet-Abusers (PA)	**Non-Pet-Abusers (NPA)**
• More frequently scapegoat the family pet for personal and family frustrations	• Less likely to scapegoat the family pet for frustrations and problems
• More frequently punish pets	• Less frequently punish pets
Unrealistic Expectations	
Pet-Abusers (PA)	**Non-Pet-Abusers (NPA)**
• 95% Have unrealistic expectations about their animals	• 64% Have unrealistic expectations about their pets
• 75% Punished pets harshly (physical punishment)	• Punishment of pets less harsh and less frequent
• 68% Punished pets at least monthly	
Hassles and Stressors	
Pet-Abusers (PA)	**Non-Pet-Abusers (NPA)**
• Set off by multiple stressors daily	• Set off by less daily stressors
• Tend to be concerned by cleanliness of house	• Less concerned w/cleanliness of house.
• 85% Set off by pet's behavior	• 71% Not regularly upset by family pet

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