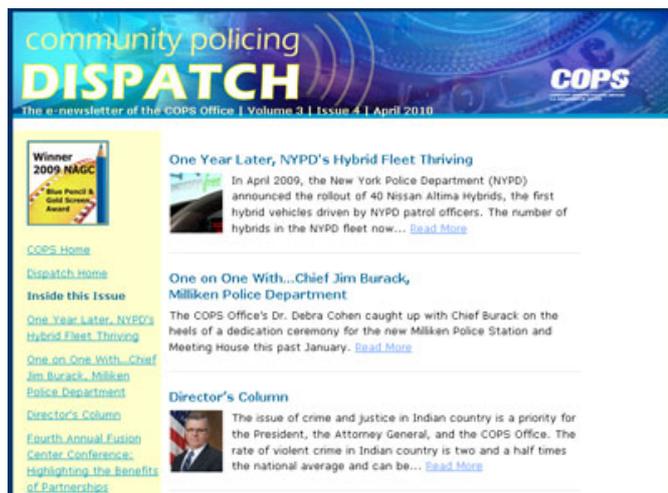


Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse: A Multidisciplinary Approach in Illinois

Escrito por Dr Patricia Rushing
Jueves, 01 de Abril de 2010 01:21



"I made my first kill today. It was a loved one...I'll never forget the howl she made. It sounded almost human...I'll never forget the sound of her bones breaking under my might. I hit her so hard I knocked the fur off her neck...It was true beauty." Six months later, this 16-year-old fatally stabbed his mother and went on a shooting spree at his high school in Pearl, Mississippi.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated." If this is the case, as I believe it is, we, as a society are in trouble. As you know, animals feel pain and fear—just like humans—but are often helpless victims because they have no voice. Sadly, some people choose to abuse animals over people for this very reason!

Research suggests that animal abuse is closely linked to other criminal violence. For example, animal abusers are 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 (Arluke, Levin, and Ascione, 1999). Approximately 70 percent of domestic violence abusers have records of other crimes and 60 percent had a household pet (Breaking the Silence of Violence II).

The FBI and other law enforcement agencies have recognized the high incidence of repeated animal abuse in the early history of many of the most violent offenders including serial killers, serial rapists, and sexual homicide perpetrators. As former FBI Supervisory Special Agent Alan C. Brantley explains, "It has long been accepted among professionals who must assess dangerous populations that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Violence against animals is violence, and when it is present, it is synonymous with a history of violence"

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(Brantley, 1998).

In Illinois, a coalition of public and private organizations has been assembled to create a strategy to empower the community to recognize that in violent homes animals, children, adults, and the elderly are all potential victims who are entitled to respect, safety, and protection. To that end, we hope to elevate the understanding of the relationship between family violence and animal abuse. The *Animals Subject to Family Violence: Early Detection = Prevention Task Force* is engaged in the development of progressive and standardized education and hands-on training about the connection between animal abuse and interpersonal violence to social service, animal welfare, and criminal justice professionals as well as members of the community. Plans are under way to create a repository for the Illinois-specific standardized message, public awareness, and outreach efforts as well as materials for professionals to use as they disseminate information about the connection between animal abuse, child abuse, adult, and elder abuse. Members are actively researching and serving as advocates for legislation, policy, protocol, and practices thus creating a framework for the development of court advocates for animals to ease the burden of humane investigators and to ensure the humane custody and care of animals impacted by family violence. A model community-based multidisciplinary team is in development that will teach communities how to establish a local team and provide guidance to identify and investigate family violence involving animals.

This task force is multidisciplinary and that no funds are brought to this initiative, only the collective intellectual capacity, mutual interest and willingness to work together. Member organizations include: the University of Illinois, Institute of Government and Public Affairs Center for Public Safety and Justice; Prevent Child Abuse Illinois; the city of Chicago; Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network; the Office of the Illinois Attorney General; the Illinois Family Violence Coordinating Councils; the Illinois Department of Human Services, Bureau of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention; Illinois Humane; Safe Passages; the Anti-Cruelty Society (Chicago); Best Friends Animal Society; Cook County Commissioner's Office (Joan Patricia Murphy); the Adler School of Professional Psychology; the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services; and Safe Humane (Chicago).

April is Child Abuse Awareness month in Illinois, and the task force is preparing to announce this initiative with a formal resolution, sponsored by State Representative Sara Fiegenholtz, 12th District, Chicago, which resolves to endorse April as Child Abuse Awareness month and *recognize the connection between child and animal abuse and that in Illinois, cross-reporting is one means to this end*

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So, why the concern about animal abuse as it relates to violence in the home? Chronic or repetitive antisocial crimes like animal abuse and fire setting committed by children are crimes of power. Youthful sex offenders have admitted to engaging in animal abuse and bestiality to elevate their mood state when bored or depressed. Additionally, when a child is victimized, he or she may seek out a more vulnerable victim to victimize, including younger children or pets.

The idea that animal abuse, child abuse, wife beating, gay bashing, or elderly abuses are issues unto themselves is no longer a viable stance. Violence is violence and it has gotten out of hand. It claims perpetrators and victims from every social and economic bracket, and unless we collectively address the issue head on, a new generation of productive, nurturing individuals will be lost (ASPCA, 2006). Violence is perpetrated by the very young as well as the elderly which speaks to the cycle of violence.

Considerable research also has connected interpersonal violence—including domestic violence, to animal abuse: Animal abuse should be considered as an indicator of other problems in dysfunctional and violent households. Animals are abused in 88 percent of the families in which children are abused (Deviny, Dickert, and Lockwood, 1983). In fact, the majority of school shooters from Brenda Spencer in San Diego through Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold at Columbine High School were reported to have engaged in serious animal cruelty. Luke Woodham, who killed his mother and two students in Pearl, Mississippi, recorded in his diary (quoted above) the bludgeoning and burning of his pet dog 5 months prior to the shooting. Sadly, an adult neighbor did not report the occurrence to police or animal control (Early Warning/Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools, 1998).

Domestic abuse is a difficult topic to discuss. There are many victims who suffer from psychological illnesses and physical pain as a result of domestic abuse. Many times human victims are recognized and pets are overlooked. Many times pets are the first victims of domestic abuse within the home. Animal abuse in the home is underreported. Meanwhile, there are programs that call for people to prepare in case of emergencies such as domestic abuse.

In summary, the Illinois *Animals Subject to Family Violence Task Force* initiative is but one endeavor across the country working to reduce family violence. Randy Lockwood (2007) of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals once said 'violence is violence and it has a destabilizing affect on our communities.' Illinois' multidisciplinary approach to addressing the issue of family violence is an attempt to reverse the destabilizing affects abuse has on our communities. Perhaps we can, as one big community, show what a great nation we are by treating our animals well.

Along with Illinois, California, Connecticut, Maine, Nevada New York, Tennessee, Vermont, and Washington have laws that specifically provide for pets in Orders of Protection. Some jurisdictions across the country also encourage cross-reporting. For instance, professionals in child protective services are taught to look for and report animal abuse in the home under investigation, and animal control and humane investigators are taught to look for and report signs of family violence. Such is the case in Illinois.

To research local resources as well as national organizations for materials to assist in the development of multidisciplinary teams, protocols, and outreach materials to help reduce domestic violence and animal abuse. During the month of April, the *Animals Subject to Family Violence Task Force* will have materials online at www.dvanimalabuse.org

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http://cops.usdoj.gov/html/dispatch/March_2010/domestic_violence.htm

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