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Working together to stop violence against people and animals

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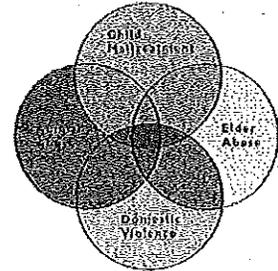
ON THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND HUMAN VIOLENCE



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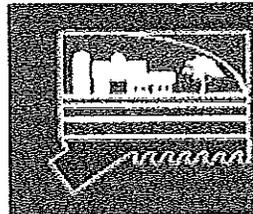
Phil Arkow, Coordinator and Editor

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ANIMAL ABUSE AND... CHILD MALTREATMENT

Connecticut Cross-Reporting Program Releases Figures



When the State of Connecticut implemented its pioneering cross-reporting program between the Department of Children and Families, which supervises child protection cases, and the Department of Agriculture, which

directs the state's animal control officers, it was not known how many cases might be reported. The first set of full-year statistics have just been released and the numbers show a definite need for such reporting procedures.

Between Jan. 1 – Dec. 31, 2015, DCF received 87 written reports from the Department of Agriculture where animal control officers suspected child maltreatment. Of the 87 reports received, 38 (43.7%) involved families who had histories with DCF. Information provided in the reports in 8 of the 87 cases (10.9%) met the standard to trigger an investigation by DCF. At year's end, these 8 cases were still open.

Comparable figures of reports of suspected animal abuse filed by DCF personnel with the Department of Agriculture were not immediately available.

The Connecticut law requires local animal control officers to report suspected animal cruelty cases to the Commissioner of Agriculture, who in turn files a monthly report with the Commissioner of Children and Families. DCF then reviews those reports, cross-references them against addresses where they have ongoing investigations, and provides that information to caseworkers for inclusion in the department's record on the child. DCF workers are required to report suspected animal abuse to the Commissioner of Agriculture. The law also provides for DCF and animal control personnel to receive training on recognition and reporting of these forms of abuse.

Exposure to Animal Abuse Seen as Risk Factor for Children in Homes with Intimate Partner Violence

A newly-published study has looked at the impact of polyvictimization -- co-occurrence of exposure to different types of violence -- among children in homes marked by intimate partner violence (IPV) and has found exposure to animal abuse to be a particularly significant concern and a risk factor predictive of childhood behavioral problems. (See the [December 2015 LINK-Letter](#) for related study.)

Among the many socioemotional adjustment problems linked with childhood exposure to IPV, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems are the most consistently documented. Children who directly witness IPV are 1.9 times more likely to exhibit internalizing problems and 1.5 times more likely to demonstrate externalizing behaviors. Between 40 and 60% of children residing in domestic violence shelters are said to be in the clinical range of externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems. However, there is also evidence of children's resilience in the face of exposure to IPV.

This study examined profiles of adjustment in an ethnically diverse sample of 291 school-age children recruited from community-based domestic violence services. Six domains of children's adjustment were examined: social problems, attention problems, internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, empathy, and callous/unemotional traits. Many variables were analyzed to determine children's levels of resiliency, struggling and severe maladjustment.

Exposure to concomitant animal cruelty was found to be significant and predictive. Results supported the hypothesis that exposure to animal cruelty would distinguish between resilient and maladjusted profiles. Children who were exposed to animal abuse were 3.26 times more likely to be in the struggling group and 5.72 times more likely to be in the severe problems group compared to the reference group of resilient children.

Because children often turn to animals as confidants and rely on them as a way to manage stress, and list animals as important social relationships, exposure to animal abuse may be particularly traumatic to children living in homes affected by IPV, they emphasized.

The authors suggest that incorporating assessments of children's exposure to animal cruelty in intake procedures may help identify children with the greatest risk of psychological maladjustment.

-- McDonald, S.E., Graham-Bermann, S.A., Maternick, A., Asclone, F.R., & Williams, J.H. (2016). Patterns of adjustment among children exposed to intimate partner violence: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*. DOI 10.1007/s40653-016-0079-y

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