

Women and their best friends “A Social Commentary”

Rhondda Waddell*

College of Education and Social Services, Saint Leo University, USA

Humans have held animals in high esteem throughout history, so much that we see pets depicted in close family relationships even in prehistoric drawings. In our modern world, pets are widely included in households around the globe [1] and survey research conducted in the United States indicates that a majority of households include at least one pet [2]. Human survival has been enhanced because of our relationship with animals which have helped in numerous capacities, offering hunting, herding, maintaining body heat, a food source, and for protection [3]. Staats and Sears [4] reported in their study titled, *Teacher's Pet and Why They Have Them: An investigation of the Human Animal Bond*, women were more likely than men to self-report reasons related to social support for pet ownership, including that a pet helped them get through hard times and that they would be lonely without a pet. Men on the other hand were more likely to report their pet relationships as beneficial to helping to facilitate useful functions such as increasing exercise or for protection purposes. Our ancestors may have believed that pets, with their sharp senses, would provide early warning about danger and perhaps give their owners a survival edge and that pets would join forces in defending against other life-threatening assaults [5]. This thought could still hold true for today, but for some the threat is more internal not external forces that are of paramount concern when intimate personal violence becomes a family issue in which animal lives are linked with family violence.

The “Link” is the phrase used to identify the connection between animal abuse and violence towards people such as partner, elder, and child abuse. Empirical research [6,7] demonstrates this bi-directional link. Animal abuse may, and frequently does, precede and/or accompany human abuse and may be used to exert power and control over victims. Moreover, companion animals may sacrifice their own health or give their lives for family members by “functioning as sentinels of unsafe environmental conditions” [7]. Merz-Perez and Heide [8], research conducted explored a correlation between animal cruelty and antisocial behaviors. The findings suggested that cruelty to companion and other animals may be an indicator that individuals are at risk themselves of having violence committed against them. Women whose pets are threatened, harmed, or killed experience fear for themselves and their animals. This may affect their decision to leave the home when it requires them to choose between taking their pet with them or not. This could result in them giving up their pet to a shelter (where they may be killed) or to others to avoid harm. In these despairing cases where pets are separated from the family, the women can experience profound grief over the loss of their pets and the disrupted relationship with their pets. If the women have children who also experience this loss, then the children suffer the loss along with them.

Ascione et al. [9] found, in their study of companion animal abuse experiences of abused and nonabused women, that 61.5 percent of abused women reported their children witnessing pet abuse, in contrast to 3.3 percent of the non-abused women. Research also supports links

between animal, child, and elder abuse across the board. For example, children who have been sexually abused or physically abused are more likely than nonabused children to abuse animals later in life [10]. According to statistics retrieved from the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence [11] Up to 70 percent of domestic violence victims have pets. Out of those with pets, 48 percent to 71 percent report that their pets have been abused or killed. Abusive partners often use the bond between victims and their companion animals to control, manipulate, and isolate. Research indicates that 20 percent to 65 percent of domestic violence victims delay leaving a dangerous situation because they do not know where to place or how to protect their pets. Some survivors return because they fear for the animals' safety.

Clearly, the importance of the human animal bond that exists between women and their pets is a significant relationship that must be taken seriously by all helping professionals. This is of concern for screening and assessment procedures by helping professionals, and all first responders need to be trained to look for signs of animal abuse when out on calls involving intimate partner violence or any domestic disputes. After all without animals the human species may not have survived, and we must give animals the same considerations.

References

1. Eendenburg N, Hart H, de Vries W (1991) Differences between owners and nonowners of companion animals. *Anthrozoos* 4: 120-126.
2. AVMA (1997) U.S. Pet ownership and demographics source book. Schaumburg, Ill: American Veterinary Association, pp: 71.
3. Robinson I (1995) *The Waltham book of human-animal interaction: Benefits and responsibilities of pet ownership*. Tarrytown, NY: Elsevier Science, Inc. pp: 162.
4. Staats S, Sears K (2006) *Teachers' Pet and Why They Have Them: an investigation of the Human Animal Bond*. *J Appl Soc Psychol* 35: 1881-1891.
5. Ascione F (1999) *Safe Havens for Pets: Guidelines for Programs Sheltering Pets for Women Who Are Battered*. Published by the author at Utah State University with support of The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.
6. Deviney E, Dickert J, Lockwood R (1983) *The Care of Pets Among Child Abusing Families*. The Human Society Institute for Science and Policy: INT 1 STUD ANIM PROB 4: 321-329.
7. Jalongo M, Stanek M, Fennimore B (2004) *The world's children and their companion animals: What children learn from families*. In M.R. Jalongo (ED.) *The world's children and their companion animals: Developmental and educational significance of the child/pet bond* (p. 54). Olney, MD: Association for Childhood Education International.

*Correspondence to: Rhondda Waddell, College of Education and Social Services, Saint Leo University, USA, E-mail: Rhondda.Waddell@saintleo.edu

Received: June 06, 2019; Accepted: June 18, 2019; Published: June 21, 2019

8. Merz-Perez L, Heide K (2004) *Animal cruelty: Pathways to violence against people*. New York: Altamira Press.
9. Ascione F, Weber C, Wood D (1997) Final report on the project entitled: Animal web, re and domestic violence. Logan, UT: Author.
10. Ascione F (2005) *Children and animals: Exploring the roots of kindness and cruelty*. West Lafayette, In: Purdue University Press.
11. National Resource Center on Domestic Violence (2018) Retrieved April 29, 2019 from <https://nrcdv.org/dvam/sites/default/files2/AnimalAbuse-TalkingPointsForm.pdf>.