

**VIOLENCE AFFECTS ALL MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY:  
SAFE PET PROGRAMS IN WESTERN CANADA**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

In North America, pets are integral part of their owner's lives, yet animal welfare agencies see thousands of cases of animal cruelty each year. At the same time, domestic violence is occurring with frightening regularity and is often underreported. Research has shown that animal cruelty is a part of domestic violence. Companion animals are an important source of support for victims of family violence, while representing a potential risk factor. Studies show that women will delay leaving an abusive relationship out of concern for the safety of their pet. This thesis is an exploration of the policy response to this risk factor: safe pet programs. Concentrating on transition houses and emergency shelters in Western Canada, over half of the agencies contacted offered a safe pet program in various forms. Some policy recommendations are made, namely asking questions about pets on intake and keeping statistics on the safe pet programs.

**Keywords: domestic violence, animal cruelty, animal abuse, safe pet programs**

**Subject Terms: domestic violence, animal cruelty, domestic violence policy**

For those who have experienced violence –  
those without voices, and those who have not yet found their voice.

For Bob – every day I realize how lucky I am.

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## INTRODUCTION

*“ A spaniel, a woman and a walnut tree:  
the more they’re beaten the better they be.”  
Old English proverb (Ascione & Arkow, 1999:141)*

Companion animals are an important part of life for many people. General pet ownership estimates for North America indicate that about 60 percent of households have at least one pet (APPMA, 2008; Humane Society of Canada, 2004). Over 85 percent of pet owners consider their pet a member of their family. (Lacroix, 1999: 64; Zilney, 2007: 44). A majority of those owners buy Christmas and birthday presents for their pets (Zilney, 2007: 45). Donohue (2005) has observed that “the grief surrounding the loss of a companion animal has been compared to that experienced when a spouse or family member dies” (187). Pets are an integral part of their owner’s lives, yet animal welfare agencies across Canada see thousands of cases of neglect or abuse each year (Stevenson, 2008).

At the same time, domestic abuse and intimate partner violence is occurring with frightening regularity. According to Canadian statistics, “over 38,000 incidents of spousal violence were reported to police” in 2006, yet this represents less than one third of all domestic violence assaults (Bressan, 2008: 10-11). Many incidents of family violence are never reported to the police. Women’s shelters are consistently full across the US and Canada (Kogan et al., 2004; McIntosh, 2004). Almost 80,000 women and children sought shelter from domestic violence at transition houses or emergency shelters in Canada between April 2005 and March 2006 (Vaillancourt & Taylor-Butts, 2007: 7). But what does one have to do with the other? The connection between the abuse of animals and the abuse of human family members is made clear when researchers reveal startling statistics like “women residing at domestic violence shelters were nearly 11 times more likely to report that their partner had hurt or killed pets than [those]... who had not experienced intimate violence” (Ascione et al., 2007: 354).

Many researchers and mental health professionals have linked animal cruelty and aggressive behaviour. Cruelty to animals is a symptom of conduct disorder (CD), a childhood behaviour disorder classified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*

involving a general pattern of deceit and aggression (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Anecdotal evidence linking childhood cruelty to animals with serial killers abounds in the media and academic research (eg. Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Lea, 2007; Merz-Perez & Heide, 2004; Wright & Hensley, 2003; Zilney, 2007). Many studies have looked at the connections between violence against people and violence against animals, finding correlations that inspire further research. Merz-Perez, Heide and Silverman (2001) found that violent offenders were more likely to have abused their pets in childhood than non-violent offenders (570). Arluke, Levin, Luke and Ascione (1999) found that cruelty to animals was part of a general antisocial and aggressive lifestyle while Kellert and Felthous (1985) found that animal abuse was more prevalent in the violent offenders in their research.

The link between aggression against people and animals continues in the research into domestic violence. Some researchers have revealed the impact that companion pets have on the partner's decision to leave an abusive situation, notably that an abused partner will stay in a relationship longer out of concern for the pet (Ascione et al., 2007; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000; McIntosh, 2004). Some researchers have focused solely on the emotional and mental impact that companion animal abuse has on the abused partner, observing that the pets provide a critical source of support for victims in situations of domestic abuse (Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2000).

Findings such as these have given rise to domestic violence programs that focus on the safety of all members of the family – including pets. Safe pet programs are one such option in operation in various communities in North America. Safe pet programs take different forms, from highly structured and promoted programs like the Crosstrails program in Colorado (Kogan et al., 2004) to case-by-case solutions cobbled together by transition houses as the need arises. The safe pet programs serve two main policy objectives, meeting the need for safety of the woman, and providing a safe place for the pet. Meeting both of these objectives means that at least one barrier to getting the woman out of an abusive situation has been overcome. The current study focuses on safe pet programs in operation in the western Canadian provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. What do domestic violence service providers, in particular transition houses and emergency shelters, offer in the way of safe pet programs? What do these programs look like? What forms do they take? How many safe pet programs are

operating? These are some of the questions that this exploration of safe pet policies in Western Canada seeks to answer.

### **Why is Animal Abuse Important to Study?**

No one would dispute that domestic violence is a serious issue that needs attention from all members of society. However, some may say that we should pay attention to the human victims, not the animal victims, and that humans are more important. I do not share this viewpoint. I believe that humans and animals are deserving of equal consideration as victims of domestic violence. Though this study specifically deals with companion animals, all animals are beings that have the capacity for suffering. They can feel pain, fear, and sorrow, as well as joy. Animals are increasingly becoming integral members of the modern family. In a situation of domestic violence *all* family members are affected – pets included. Further, research has shown that companion animals are fundamental sources of support in families, especially in those who experience domestic violence (Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000). The single fact that animals are such a positive presence in our lives and yet can be used as weapons to hurt another person makes animal cruelty worthy of serious study.

The close relationship that has been fostered over centuries between humans and companion animals creates both responsibility and vulnerability. It is our responsibility to care for our pets as we have essentially made them unable to care for themselves. Our pets depend on us for basic necessities: food, water, shelter, and socialization. This dependence creates vulnerability on the part of the pets, leaving them open to possible abuses. This is akin to the potential vulnerability of the human family members to the abusive parent or spouse. Of course, there are times when we let down those in our care – no one is perfect. It is when that letdown is intentional, targeted, or done with malice that society needs to get involved.

### **Important Terms Defined**

Various definitions abound in the literature for both animal abuse and domestic violence. Terms such as intimate partner violence, wife abuse, family violence, domestic violence, and spousal aggression have all been used to refer to interpersonal violence within an intimate relationship. Family violence entails two basic behaviours: abuse and/or neglect. Abuse is the

intentional infliction of physical or psychological harm while neglect involves a caregiver neglecting to provide adequate food, water, shelter or care for the individual in their care (Feldbau-Kohn, O'Leary, & Schumacher, 2000; Lutzker, 2000; Wolf, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Children, elders and animals seem to be subjected to both neglect and abuse, whereas intimate partner violence seems to be mainly abuse (Feldbau-Kohn et al., 2000; Lutzker, 2000; Wolf, 2000). The terms 'family violence' and 'domestic violence' are more encompassing of all family members including companion animals. They are used interchangeably in this research to refer to the overall situation of violence in the home. While acknowledging that other human victims of violence may be present in a home (i.e. children or elders), this study will focus on intimate partner violence. The term intimate partner violence refers to emotional, physical, and psychological abuses perpetrated against a spouse, partner or a member of a romantic relationship.<sup>2</sup> 'Companion animals' and 'pets' are also used interchangeably, referring to domesticated animals who reside in the family home.

Several authors have offered definitions of animal cruelty. Kellert and Felthous (1985) define animal cruelty as "the willful infliction of harm, injury and intended pain on a nonhuman animal" (1114). Ascione (1998) offers a more specific definition, taking into account the importance of social context: "cruelty to animals is defined as socially unacceptable behaviour that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering or distress to and/or death of an animal" (85). On the other hand, for Agnew (1998) "abuse is broadly defined as any act that contributes to the pain or death of an animal or otherwise threatens the welfare of an animal" (179). For the purpose of discussion, animal abuse, animal cruelty, and cruelty to animals are interchangeable terms for the intentional infliction of harm or suffering on an animal, whether by commission or omission, outside of socially acceptable behaviour. This definition includes issues of neglect and active aggression but excludes behaviours like hunting and euthanasia.

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual abuse does fall into the realm of family violence, but this paper will focus on physical and psychological abuse and neglect as sexual abuse entails many issues beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Although this paper focuses on male-against-female intimate violence, it is acknowledged that female-against-male intimate violence as well as intimate violence in same-sex relationships does occur. See Renzetti (1992) for further information on same sex relationship violence.

## **THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

*“That which traditionally defined humans from animals – qualities such as reason and rationality – has been used as well to differentiate men from women” (Adams, 1994, quoted in Zilney, 2007: 128).*

Several theoretical approaches in the body of research have been used to understand animal abuse and domestic violence, and have informed the development of approaches to domestic violence policy. An understanding of these theories provide a grounding from which to approach the literature review that follows. Two commonly used theoretical explanations for domestic violence are feminism and social learning theory. Feminism calls attention to the role of patriarchy and gender, while social learning theory states that behaviour is learned through interaction with others (Adams, 1998; Agnew, 1998). In the research on cruelty to animals, there are two particular theories that have been raised: general deviance and the violence graduation hypothesis. The general deviance theory would dictate that animal cruelty is part of a wider pattern of an individual’s deviant behaviour whereas the violence graduation hypothesis states that an individual begins with cruelty to animals and then ‘graduates’ to violence against humans (Arluke et al., 1999; Beirne, 2004; Merz-Perez et al., 2001; Zilney, 2007).

### **Feminism**

No discussion on domestic violence can begin without a discussion of feminist theory. At its root, feminist theory calls attention to inequities in society, based not simply on gender but also race and class, seeking to change the imbalance of power. A fundamental principle of feminism is patriarchy, broadly defined as the systemic and cultural domination of women by men (Duffy & Momirov, 1997; Messerschmidt, 1986). Patriarchy incorporates masculine domination of all spheres of social life and plays an active role in the creation of gender roles and determination of gender specific values. Messerschmidt (1986) acknowledges the impact of patriarchy on both genders in stating that “the social experience of men and women are different” but goes on to say that “patriarchy is also a system of hierarchical system of power relations that provides control not only of men over women but also among men” (32).

Feminist theory would insist that patriarchy is an important concept to consider when examining male criminality, specifically domestic violence. It has been suggested by authors such as Zilney (2007) and Simmons and Lehmann (2007) that when abusing one's partner, men are essentially illustrating their dominance by exerting physical control over weaker others. Duffy and Momirov (1997) argue that violence is sanctioned in order to control women and children via a "socially constructed definition of masculinity in terms of power and domination" (123). Messerschmidt (1986) makes the socially constructed definition explicit in stating that "a masculine character...requires self-confidence, independence, boldness, responsibility, competitiveness, a drive for dominance, and aggression/violence" (40). Along these lines, Agnew (1998) theorizes that "animal abuse may also be a mechanism for 'accomplishing masculinity'," the abusive actions illustrating the valued male traits of aggression and power (192).

Patriarchy is more than physical domination. Duffy and Momirov (1997) state that male domination encompasses economic and psychological aspects as well (123). However, with the economic domination of women comes the economic responsibility carried by the men encompassed in the traditional 'bread-winner' role. Messerschmidt (1986) notes that "the masculine role in [a capitalist] system centres around earning money and providing material security for *his* family [emphasis in original]" (40). Economic factors are mentioned in much of the research on domestic violence as a significant stressor in the abusive relationship (eg. Duffy & Momirov, 1997; Feldbau-Kohn et al., 2000). A component of the financial strain on the relationship may be the added expense of caring for and feeding a companion animal. Couple this with the idea of the masculine, aggressive male and the preconditions for intimate partner violence and animal abuse are present.

Linking animal abuse with feminist theory is not difficult when the issue of power is raised. In a patriarchal system, male values and needs are reinforced in social institutions like the media, education, and the criminal justice system (Messerschmidt, 1986). Female values and needs, or the needs of the less powerful such as the lower economic classes or minorities, are not heard. Animals could be included in the population of the less powerful. Though the support she found in her research was modest, Zilney (2007) persuasively tied feminism (and thus patriarchy) with animal cruelty insofar that men with "patriarchal attitudes towards women and dominionistic attitudes towards nonhumans are more likely to engage in abuse behaviours

towards both women and nonhumans” (xxxiv).

## **Social Learning**

Social learning theory arises quite often in relation to domestic violence and has been used in attempting to explain cruelty to animals. Social learning theory states that behaviour is learned in interactions with others, with rewards and punishments playing strong roles in how well the individual learns and repeats the behaviour (Akers, 2001). Agnew (1998) believes that social learning theory is well suited to explaining animal abuse given that children tend to imitate parental behaviour and attitudes. If the parents are abusive, the children may imitate the behaviour or at least internalize the attitude that such treatment is acceptable.

Dutton (1999) theorizes that part of the social learning process of family violence is the development of personality features that are supportive of the use of violence, such as “attributional tendencies to externalize blame and disproportionate emotional reactions” (77). Though Akers (2001) would refer to these as internalized attitudes, the concepts are very similar. Personality features and internalized attitudes tie into the concept of motivations for violence and aggression. For example, two of the motivations for animal cruelty that Kellert and Felthous (1985) found were retaliation against a person and displacement of hostility (1124). The argument could easily be made that these two motivations could be a function of an extreme emotional reaction or blame externalization, whether they are referred to as internalized attitudes or personality features. Put into a domestic violence context, instead of directly confronting the object of their hostility (the partner), the abuser focuses the aggression on the family pet, using the harm done to the pet as a means of retaliation.

Looking at social learning from a slightly different perspective, Gill (2006) reasons that women are conditioned to stay with their abuser through the cycle of violence where the “honeymoon stage follows violent episodes and reinforces their desire to stay with the abuser” (56). In essence, the abuser rewards the victim for staying and punishes any attempt to leave. Companion animals can play an important role in this process, providing a means of punishing or a reason to stay in the relationship.

Related to social learning theory is the intergenerational transmission process. Social learning theory works with significant figures in the individual’s life like their peer group as well as social institutions like the media (Akers, 2001). The intergenerational transmission process

focuses on the family environment: children learn from abusers that aggression is a good way to solve problems or violence is the appropriate response to emotions of anger or stress (Dutton, 1999; Gill, 2006). Children in domestic violence situations would become abusers or victims in their future relationships depending on their socialized gender, thus linking feminist perspectives with social learning theory. Similarly, observing pet abuse in the home could lead the child to internalize that behaviour. There have been mixed results in the research of intergenerational transmission theory and domestic violence, some studies finding an effect and others finding no specific effects but recognizing a general one (Dutton, 1999; Kwong, 2000). However, almost all research agrees that a family history of domestic violence is a significant risk factor for future familial violence (eg. Dutton, 1999; Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Kwong, 2000; Merz-Perez et al., 2001).

## **Violence Graduation Hypothesis**

The violence graduation hypothesis states that an individual begins with cruelty to animals and then ‘graduates’ to violence against humans (Arluke et al., 1999; Beirne, 2004; Merz-Perez et al., 2001; Zilney, 2007). Early versions of this theory pointed to the ‘triad’ of firesetting, enuresis (bedwetting), and cruelty to animals as predictive of future violence against humans (Ascione, 1998: 92). Though the triad was found to be inconsistent in its predictive ability (Ascione, 1998; Felthous & Kellert, 1998), it did offer a potential direction of study: cruelty to animals on its own may have predictive potential. Margaret Mead (1998) echoed this in saying

It may well be that [killing or torturing a living thing] could prove to be a diagnostic sign, and that such children, diagnosed early, could be helped instead of being allowed to embark on a long career of episodic violence and murder (31).

Essentially, this is one of the arguments for why the criterion of cruelty to animals is included in the diagnosis for conduct disorder (Ascione, 1998: 83).

In attempting to outline the seriousness of cruelty to animals, some authors point to the anecdotal evidence of serial killers abusing animals in their childhood, offering supporting evidence of the violence graduation hypothesis (Agnew, 1998; Jorgensen & Maloney, 1999; Lockwood & Hodge, 1998). Much of the research in this area has been conducted by Frank

Ascione and has focused on the behaviour of children. Generally, Ascione's work shows support for the violence graduation hypothesis (Ascione et al., 1998; Ascione, 1998; Ascione & Arkow, 1999; Ascione et al., 2007). Support is also found in retrospective studies focussing on childhood behaviour as in Kellert and Felthous (1985) and Merz-Perez et al. (2001). In their review of the literature, Felthous and Kellert (1998) found support for the violence graduation hypothesis but make the point that "repeated acts of animal cruelty are associated with personal violence that is serious and recurrent" (74). Linked to the research on domestic violence, Zilney (2007) states that the violence graduation hypothesis "suggests that animal abuse is not an isolated incident with only an animal victim, but an under-recognized component of family violence, with common origins and influences" (Zilney, 2007: xxxiii). Testing both theories using a general population sample, Zilney (2007) found greater support for the violence graduation hypothesis than the general deviance hypothesis. However, Arluke, et al. (2001) make an interesting point in discussing the violence graduation hypothesis, posing that the graduation may take place "from remote to intimate targets" (971). It could be that in cases of intimate partner violence the animal abuse is part of the escalation of aggression, an intriguing application of the violence graduation hypothesis.

## **General Deviance Hypothesis**

The general deviance theory states that behaviours like domestic violence and cruelty to animals are part of a broad spectrum of deviant or criminal behaviours. Zilney (2007) describes the hypothesis as "the notion that acts of deviance cluster predictably over the course, with individuals engaging in crime in their teen and early adult years" (xxxiii). Furthermore, Arluke, et al. (2001) state that under the general deviance hypothesis "different forms of deviance have the same underlying causes" (965). Unlike the violence graduation hypothesis, general deviance does not cite animal cruelty as being a predictive factor of future violence against people (Arluke et al., 1999; Zilney, 2007). Animal cruelty is simply part of the individual's deviant behaviour patterns.

Arluke, et al. (2001) set out to test the general deviance theory. The central hypothesis was that "animal abuse would correlate just as strongly with nonviolent criminal behaviour as it will with interpersonal violence" with no specific time order (966). Pointing out the flaws with

self-report studies, Arluke et al. (2001) used official records from the Massachusetts SPCA of prosecuted individuals, a matched community sample and the official criminal records for both groups. The results supported the general deviance hypothesis: prosecuted animal abusers were much more likely to have a wide criminal history, including violent and property offences, than the community controls (Arluke et al., 1999: 968). A notable shortfall to this study was that Arluke, et al. (2001) did not use data from juvenile records, restricting their sample to individuals aged 17 years or older, making it difficult to discount the validity of the violence graduation hypothesis.

Lea (2007) set out to disprove the violence graduation hypothesis, theorizing that the general deviance hypothesis was a better explanation. In her sample of young adults, Lea (2007) found that animal cruelty in adolescence was part of a pattern of general deviant behaviour, including stealing, vandalism, fighting, misbehaviour in school, and bullying. Moreover, cruelty to animals was correlated with both violent and non-violent behaviour. When Lea (2007) examined adolescent behaviours that correlated to adult violence (measured by fighting), she found that animal cruelty had no significant effect. Lea (2007) concluded that

any association that does exist between animal cruelty and human-directed violence is decidedly complicated and nuanced. I could find no evidence that animal cruelty perpetuated during childhood or adolescence is associated with violence during adulthood (113-4).

The results are mixed in the research about which theory regarding animal cruelty is more likely to be accurate. Some research designed to test the violence graduation hypothesis has shown positive results, such as Zilney (2007) and Merz-Perez et al. (2001) while other researchers like Arluke et al. (1999) and Lea (2007) have found greater support for the general deviance theory. In all likelihood, a mix of the two may be the most accurate, especially when dealing with the role the companion animal occupies in situations of domestic violence.

## **FAMILY VIOLENCE IN THE LITERATURE**

*“If only we can overcome cruelty, to human and animal, with love and compassion we shall stand at the threshold of a new era in human moral and spiritual evolution – and realize, at last, our most unique quality: humanity” ( Jane Goodall).*

### **A Brief History of Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty**

Efforts to prevent animal cruelty began long before any social awareness of family violence. Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham both decried cruelty to animals, though for different reasons (Zilney, 2007). Kant was concerned that cruelty to animals would lead to future violence against humans while Bentham believed that animals were due the same consideration as humans because they too had the capacity to feel pain and experience suffering (Zilney, 2007). Kellert and Felthous (1985) note that true social awareness of animal cruelty rose with the “development of the companion pet animal as a social phenomenon beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” (1114). Reminiscent of Kant, they go on to note that part of what motivated the concern about the treatment of animals during this era was the assumption that cruel behaviour towards animals would lead to similar behaviour towards humans (Kellert & Felthous, 1985: 1114). Zilney (2007) relates that there was one voice during the era that linked violence against women and animal cruelty: Mary Wollstonecraft. Zilney (2007) points out that although much of the focus on Wollstonecraft’s writings has been on rights of women, Wollstonecraft did make the argument that animal abuse was “a predictor or risk factor to the abuse of women” (39).

Historically, both animals and women were considered ‘property’ under the law, and therefore any legislation was aimed at protecting the property rights of owners (husbands, fathers, etc.), rather than the welfare of the women or animals (Stevenson, 2008; Zilney, 2007). In response to this attitude and formed primarily to deal with the abuses of carriage horses in England, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) was founded in 1824. North America became involved in the animal welfare and protection movement when the American SPCA was founded in New York in 1866 (SPCA Intl., 2007; Zilney, 2007). Even with

the expansion of SPCA branches across North America, the establishment of numerous smaller animal welfare agencies, and the increasing public awareness of the plights of abused animals, animals are still considered as ‘property’ under both criminal and civil law in both Canada and the United States (Stevenson, 2008).

The rights of women proceeded much slower. It was almost a century after the founding of the ASPCA when the rise of feminism called attention to intimate partner violence (Duffy & Momirov, 1997). Both partner abuse and child abuse began to be taken much more seriously in the 1970s and 1980s. Charities and support groups were founded to aid victims of family violence in addition to an increase in criminal prosecutions of abusers (Duffy & Momirov, 1997). The movement gained rapid momentum and resulted in important social and legislative changes. For example, it was only in 1983 that the *Criminal Code* in Canada was changed to reflect the fact that a husband can be charged with the sexual assault of his wife (Martin’s Annual Criminal Code, 2007: 574-5). Prior to this amendment, it was common law that free sexual access to his wife was a husband’s right by virtue of the marriage. In essence, a wife was the property of her husband (Martin’s Annual Criminal Code, 2007). Though this may seem to be an extreme example, it illustrates how far the status of women has come in a few decades. It is also an example of how similar the status of animals and women were only a short time ago. In spite of the advancement of the status of women, in the United States “between 1998 and 2002, family violence accounted for 11 percent of reported violence...approximately 3.5 million incidents” (Zilney, 2007: 88-9). In Canada, domestic violence accounted for 15 percent of all violence reported to the police in 2006 (Ogrodnik, 2008). These statistics are an indication of how far women still have to go.

## **Victims of Domestic Violence and the Companion Animal**

Turnbull, Hallisey-Hendrix and Dent (2000) say that “pets provide unconditional love, trust, loyalty, and total acceptance – all benefits to our lives” (90). This is just as true, perhaps more, for victims of domestic violence. For example, Flynn (2000) found that 73 percent of women in a domestic violence shelter said their pets were important sources of emotional support (168). Furthermore, Flynn (2000) discovered that women were more likely to rate their pets as important sources of emotional support when they did not have any children (169). In

their research into the relationship between abused women and their pets, Faver and Strand (2003) found that “battered women whose pets had been abused were more likely to report that their pets had been a very important source of emotional support while they lived with their batterers” (1371). Adams (1998) holds that in situations of family violence “when a husband destroys a pet he may be destroying the woman’s only source of comfort and affection” (322). Companion animals can and do provide an essential source of support for victims of familial abuse. However, the relationship with the pet can also be a significant risk factor for ongoing abuse of all family members.

Research into intimate partner violence and animal abuse has consistently revealed that companion animals play a role in the abused partner’s decision to stay or leave, noting that potential delays place all the victims at a greater risk of abuse (Ascione et al., 2007; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000; McIntosh, 2004). Kogan et al. (2004) estimate that “360,000 women in the United States are at risk of abuse because fearing for their pets’ safety has prevented them from leaving an abusive home” (421). Research in this area generally involves surveying or interviewing women who seek refuge at domestic violence shelters, and consequently may reflect the worst cases of intimate partner violence. Several studies have examined the decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship and specifically, the impact that animal abuse has on the decision.

Faver and Strand (2003) surveyed residents of several urban and rural domestic violence shelters and looked at whether threats to the family pets made the women more likely or less likely to leave an abusive relationship. Although using a fairly small sample ( $n = 41$ ), Faver and Strand did find that threats or actual harm to the pet by the abuser affected the woman’s decision to leave the abusive situation. One drawback to the study was that Faver and Strand (2003) did not question whether the woman was staying to protect the pet or planning on leaving with the pet. The study did present two other interesting results. One was that rural residents were more likely to have their pets threatened or harmed by their abuser than urban residents (Faver & Strand, 2003). The second was that concern for their pets was more of a factor in the woman’s decision to stay or leave for those living in rural areas (Faver & Strand, 2003). In discussing their results, Faver and Strand (2003) suggested that the geographic and social isolation of a rural lifestyle may increase attachment to pets, and the isolation may make any cruelties less likely to be noticed (and therefore reported) by neighbours.

Threats to the animals can be used to ensure obedience to the abuser or be a means of keeping the partner in a relationship. Arluke et al. (1999) offer a compelling summary of the use of pets by the spousal abuser:

Animal abuse is often a component of the emotional abuse suffered by battered women. When physical abuse decreases, emotional abuse may increase. Animal abuse thus serves as a 'reminder' that physical abuse is still available as a control strategy...[and] animal abuse may follow physical attacks (972).

Ascione et al. (2007), Flynn (2000) and McIntosh (2004) all looked at how concern for the safety of a companion animal can delay a woman leaving an abusive relationship.

Flynn (2000) found that 25 percent of the women in his sample delayed going to a shelter out of concern for their pet, and some women delayed leaving the relationship for two months. Ascione et al. (2007) and McIntosh (2004) discovered the very same proportion, one quarter of the women they interviewed delayed going to a domestic violence shelter out of concern for their pet's safety. The studies ascertained similar levels of pet abuse: Ascione et al. (2007) found 53 percent and Flynn (2000) found 47 percent of pet owners experienced threats or actual harm to their pets as part of the family violence. However, Ascione et al. (2007) employed a control group from the community to compare with the domestic violence shelter residents interviewed. They discovered that residents in the domestic violence shelter were much more likely than the community sample to have experienced pet abuse in addition to their own abuse (Ascione et al., 2007). In addition, Ascione et al. (2007) found that women without children were more likely to delay going to a shelter for the sake of their pets.

Even leaving an abusive situation can be harmful to the victims of abuse, including the pets. Flynn (2000) and Ascione et al. (2007) reported that half of their respective respondents left their pets with the abuser. Flynn (2000) comments that "being separated from or losing one's pet may create additional trauma" for the human victims of domestic violence, especially given that the pets are being left in abusive situations (172). Quinlisk (1999) advocates sensitivity on the part of shelter staff and counsellors:

Although the welfare of the animal may not seem that important to the staff or be a priority when the family has so many other needs, the welfare of the animal may be very important to the client or her kids. Their ability to function, let alone make good decisions, may be impaired if they are anxious about the animal (175).

In Tutty's (2006) interviews with women who had left abusive situations, two women related that "after [they] left their partners, the men carried out the threats, one by shooting the animals, the other by letting them starve to death" (25). These may be extreme examples of the harm that companion animals may suffer when left without the protection of the other family members, but are by no means unlikely endings.

Within a family, companion animals provide emotional support for the abused humans, however this relationship can give the abuser something to exploit. Jorgensen and Maloney (1999) point out that abusers use cruelty to the family pets as methods of "control, intimidation, or retaliation" against other members of the family (144). Duffy and Momirov (1997) contend that being "forced to witness the killing of a beloved pet" or any cruelty against an animal is emotional abuse (47). Faver and Strand (2003) write that "threats or harm to pets can be used to coerce or control a woman only to the extent that she cares about the animals" (1371). The fact that pets are important to their owners makes the pet a potential and powerful weapon to be used in the commission of domestic violence.

## **Perpetrators of Domestic Violence and the Companion Animal**

Even though the perpetration rates of partner abuse have been reported in some studies as being approximately equal between men and women, women are more likely to sustain injury and tell others about the abuse at some point (Feldbau-Kohn et al., 2000). On the other hand, men are much more likely to commit cruelty to animals than women (Baldry, 2003; Beirne, 2004; Lea, 2007; Zilney, 2007). There have been many studies that have looked at the typical abuser in the context of domestic violence (Feldbau-Kohn et al., 2000; Gill, 2000). Limited research has also been conducted into animal cruelty, trying to determine characteristics and motivations of typical abusers (Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Lockwood & Ascione, 1998). When both bodies of research are compared, the similarities between the two are striking.

Kellert and Felthous (1985) were among the first to research animal cruelty motivations, citing a paucity of research in this area as a primary cause for the inadequate attention paid to animal cruelty by legislators and others. Looking at three groups, aggressive criminals, non-aggressive criminals and non-criminals, nine motivations for animal abuse were derived (Kellert

& Felthous, 1985). These included retaliation against a person, displacement of anger from a person to an animal, using an animal to express aggression and enhancing one's own aggressiveness (Kellert & Felthous, 1985: 1123-4). The study also evaluated the differences in the commission of cruel acts against animals between the groups, with some fascinating findings. The participants who reported committing animal abuse in childhood were also more likely to report that they had experienced domestic violence in their childhood. The obvious implication is that experiencing domestic violence increases the probability that an individual will engage in criminal acts in the future, including animal abuse. This also illustrates the interconnectedness of domestic violence and animal cruelty.

Merz-Perez et al. (2001) found very similar results to Kellert and Felthous (1985). The violent offenders were significantly more likely to have committed cruelty to animals as children than non-violent offenders (Merz-Perez et al., 2001: 561). In particular, Merz-Perez et al. (2001) found that violent offenders were more likely to have hurt or killed a pet than the non-violent offenders. Interestingly, many of the participants in the violent offender group related issues of family violence in their childhoods (Merz-Perez et al., 2001). Several authors have noted that pets are generally held in higher esteem than stray or wild animals, and therefore violence against companion animals represents a more serious form of aggression (Agnew, 1998; Kellert & Felthous, 1985; Merz-Perez et al., 2001; Zilney, 2007). Like Kellert and Felthous (1985), Merz-Perez, et al. (2001) observed a discrete difference in the motivations for the animal cruelty in their sample. The violent offenders were more likely to refer to their behaviour as not cruel and more likely to cite their reaction to animal abuse as a thrill or an emotional release (Merz-Perez et al., 2001).

Kellert and Felthous (1985) did not address whether their participants had witnessed any animal cruelty in the context of domestic violence but only inquired about the presence of domestic violence in the household. Merz-Perez et al. (2001) looked at reports of childhood cruelty to animals without really addressing the presence of domestic violence except in passing. Nonetheless, these two studies together indicate that animal cruelty is linked to offending in general, violent offending in particular, and experiencing domestic violence. In addition, both studies note that animal abuse is a complex and multi-faceted behaviour, one that cannot be reduced to a simple list of motivations.

Baldry (2003) investigated whether there was a difference in the commission of animal cruelty between individuals who had been abused and exposed to animal abuse and individuals who only witnessed animal abuse. She found that half of her sample of university students admitted to some form of animal abuse, and significantly more males had committed an act of animal cruelty (Baldry, 2003). The two strongest predictors for the commission of animal cruelty were the same for both groups: gender and exposure to a peer's animal abuse. Baldry (2003) hypothesized that peers may play a larger role in the lives of children who have experienced family violence: "Bullying, offending, and abusing weaker creatures (animals or peers) is strongly associated with the need for affiliation and gaining of social status in children who might suffer from abuse and neglect in their families" (277).

On the other hand, Hensley and Tallichet (2005) illustrate that family relationships were very important to the commission of animal abuse (Hensley & Tallichet, 2005). In their survey of incarcerated offenders, Hensley and Tallichet (2005) found that those who witnessed cruelty to animals were more likely to commit animal abuse. Furthermore, witnesses to a family member's abuse of animals were more likely to be cruel to animals on a more frequent basis and begin to mistreat animals at a younger age (Hensley & Tallichet, 2005). These results are supported by McIntosh's (2004) discoveries regarding the impact of domestic violence on children. Of the women interviewed from a domestic violence shelter, 23 percent were concerned that their children would hurt an animal and 16 percent thought their children may have already hurt the family pet or engaged in other animal cruelty (McIntosh, 2004: 9).

Zilney's (2007) research seems to tie these observations about cruelty to animals firmly to the perpetrators of domestic violence. She found that cruelty to animals at any point in the life course was a significant predictor of domestic violence, and predictive of partner violence in particular (Zilney, 2007). The research also revealed that those who admitted abusing animals were also more likely to admit involvement in other criminal acts "including drug use and participation in unnamed illegal activities (Zilney, 2007: 104-5). A very interesting finding in Zilney's (2007) research was that owning a pet at any point during the individual's life was negatively correlated with both partner abuse and animal abuse (106/108). Zilney (2007) suggests that animal companionship and ownership may function as a protective factor in the context of future domestic violence.

## **Dealing with Violence Including Companion Animals**

There are a few programs and policies currently in place that try to deal with the whole family, not just the human family members. These include cross-reporting initiatives and safe pet programs. While this study does focus on safe pet programs, cross-reporting initiatives play a large role in combating domestic violence that includes companion animals.

Cross reporting initiatives are critical to dealing with all the victims of domestic violence. For example, an animal protection agency receives a call about an animal in distress. When the investigator arrives at the residence, they see not only evidence of animal neglect but evidence of child neglect as well. The investigator then notifies the child protection agency in the area to deal with the human victims. It also works in the opposite direction, social workers will notify the animal service agency that there is a pet being abused or neglected when they attend a home about a case of child abuse or neglect. The first formal cross-reporting initiative in Canada was started in 2001 between the Guelph Humane Society and Family and Children's Services (OSPCA, 2002; Zilney, 2007). In Canada, Ontario is currently the only province to formally have a cross-reporting program, though agencies in other provinces and jurisdictions may communicate on an informal basis. An example is the BC SPCA, who encourages sharing information with other agencies but is not required to do so (BCSPCA, 2004).

Jorgensen and Maloney (1999) detail an innovative program started in Colorado in 1996 utilizing cross-reporting ideas called DVERT, or the Domestic Violence Enhanced Response Team. Individuals who are at risk of serious harm from their abuser after leaving the relationship are evaluated and admitted to the program (Jorgensen & Maloney, 1999). Calls from DVERT clients are placed at the top priority. A team of support workers including police, case workers and victim's services counsellors is compiled for each woman who respond to all calls to the woman's address, day or night (Jorgensen & Maloney, 1999). If there are others at risk in the home, such as animals, the secondary team made up of professionals with specific knowledge of the area is dispatched to the address (Jorgensen & Maloney, 1999). The animal care workers will handle any animals in the home, providing veterinary care or collecting evidence (Jorgensen & Maloney, 1999). This program acknowledges the presence of other victims in the family violence dynamic, and actively tries to address the needs of all the victims.

Similar programs are active in Canada and the United States. For example, ADT Security offers a program called DVERS, or the Domestic Violence Emergency Response System, in conjunction with local victim services agencies and law enforcement (ADT, 2007). The high-risk individuals are given a pendant and an alarm system. If the alarm monitoring company receives a signal from any of its DVERS clients, police and other services are immediately dispatched to the address at a top priority (ADT, 2007). While there is no cross-reporting between DVERS respondents and animal services agencies yet, it represents a possible direction for future policy.

As discussed, a range of research has indicated that women delay leaving abusive situations out of fear for the safety of their pets. Safe pet programs are the direct result of this research, and operate in various forms across North America (Ascione et al., 2007; CVMA, 2008; Kogan et al., 2004). Though they are called by various names, safe pet initiatives provide emergency shelter for the pets of women and children leaving abusive situations. Depending on the program, the pets will receive temporary shelter at a veterinary clinic, animal shelter or animal foster homes. Stays for the pets vary according to program guidelines and need, but are generally the duration of the woman's stay at the emergency domestic violence shelter.

Kogan et al. (2004) outline a specific safe pets program which was started in 1999 in Colorado called Crosstrails. The main goal of Crosstrails is to "create and maintain a safe place for pets owned by women who stay at Crossroads Safehouse," a domestic violence shelter (Kogan et al., 2004:425). Crosstrails is unique in that the woman is specifically asked about any pets when she calls the shelter, she can bring the pets with her to the shelter, and shelter staff handle the arrangements of locating the pet in foster care (Kogan et al., 2004). One thing to note about Crosstrails is that confidentiality is critical and anonymity of the pet is ensured at all steps in the program, a result of lessons learned from previous attempts at providing haven for pets of victims of domestic violence (Kogan et al., 2004). The women are not told where their pet is and all identifying information is removed from the pet who is assigned a Crosstrails number (Kogan et al., 2004). This is done to ensure that the pet cannot be tracked by the abuser or used as leverage to get the woman to return to the abusive situation. In the first four years of operation, Crosstrails fostered 90 animals proving that there is a need for more safe pet programs (Kogan et al., 2004).

## **What Does the Literature Mean for the Current Study?**

In all, the literature looking at both the perpetrators and the victims of domestic violence makes strong connections to animal cruelty. The correlations between intimate partner violence and animal abuse are clear and startling. The concern of the victims for their pets places both the woman and the pet in a vulnerable position. There are some programs and policies in place trying to address these issues, but they seem to be scattered across North America. The possibilities for additional research seem limitless. So how does all the previous research relate to the current study?

In 2000, Frank Ascione published *Safe Havens for Pets: Guidelines for Programs Sheltering Pets for Women who are Battered*, looking at some of the barriers and challenges that the houses may face with possible solutions (Ascione, 2000). In 2002, the BC/Yukon Society of Transition Houses published a tool-kit for their member transition houses to help them set up a safe pet program (Harrison, 2002). In 2008, American Humane published their own guide on how to implement a safe pet program at transition houses (American Humane Association, 2008). All of the publications mention challenges that may be encountered and how to overcome them in the drive to provide shelter for all family members escaping family violence. Barriers like allergies, space constraints, funding considerations, and managing communal living space are all raised. This information has been disseminated over the last ten years in various forms. So what has been done with this information? Specifically, what kinds of safe pet programs (SPPs) have the transition houses operating in Western Canada implemented to try to deal with pets as victims of family violence? Answering this final question is the focus of the current study.

## **METHODS**

### **Sample**

Using the Sheltternet website ([www.sheltternet.ca](http://www.sheltternet.ca)) a list of transition houses and emergency shelters was compiled.<sup>3</sup> Sheltternet was selected because it lists emergency shelters and transition houses for women leaving abuse across Canada, thus providing a common resource for the provinces. The website is offered in ten different languages, appealing to a very wide population. Searching for shelters in one particular area is very simple through a map of Canada that can be zeroed in on a particular region of interest. The interactive map was used to compile a list of all the first stage transition houses in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. The focus of this study was on first stage housing providing emergency and crisis accommodation to women leaving domestic violence. Stays in first stage housing vary from two weeks to thirty days depending on facility, but generally provide a long enough stay to get the woman out of the dangerous situation and for arrangements to be made for longer term accommodations. Most first stage transition houses are staffed 24 hours a day in order to provide services day or night for women leaving abuse.

After the initial list of transition houses and emergency shelters was compiled, each organization was searched on the Internet for more information. Sheltternet only offers very basic information for most of its listings – shelter name, location (city) and help line telephone number, and in some cases, a link to the organization website. Where the website link was available, the site was consulted for additional information such as administration telephone numbers, list of services offered as well as confirmation of the type of housing the organization provided. When a link to a website was not provided through Sheltternet, the organizations were searched using Google.

There were some eliminations from the primary list of transition houses: safe home networks and second stage housing. Although safe home networks do provide the same primary crisis service of a safe place to stay, the women stay in private homes of volunteers for three to

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<sup>3</sup> Names and locations of the transition houses are not related, and the data is aggregated to protect the confidential nature of these services.

five days before being moved into a transition house or other accommodation with more services and a longer stay. Second stage transition houses were eliminated from the sample for several reasons. First, the women leaving transition houses and emergency shelters typically transition into second stage housing where the living quarters are separate (such as small apartments) and are offered for an extended period of time (typically from six months to two years). Second, and more importantly for this study, second stage housing facilities are used after the woman has left the abusive situation, they are not used for emergency and crisis accommodations. After these eliminations were complete, there were a total of 109 transition homes and emergency shelters contacted across British Columbia (n=64), Alberta (n=32), and Saskatchewan (n=13).

## **Procedure**

The transition houses were first contacted by telephone. When available, the administration telephone number was used as the primary contact, with the transition house telephone number as second point of contact. The crisis line was used as a last resort if no other telephone numbers were available, or if referred to the number by the administration contact. In many cases, a message was left for the person who would best be able to speak about any services offered regarding pets. If no return phone call was received, a follow-up phone call was made seven to ten days after the initial call. If a message was again left requesting a return phone call, no further follow up was conducted with the particular agency. This decision was made in recognition of the sensitive nature of the services that the transition houses provide, the possibility that non-contact was deliberate on the transition house's part, and the reality that often the transition house staff will have more pressing issues to deal with. Five of the sample fell into this category of non-contact. Only one shelter indicated no desire to have a conversation about any pet services offered, the reasons for this are unknown because the call was terminated. This case plus the five non-contact cases were eliminated from the analysis, leaving a total of 103 transition houses in the sample (BC, n=62; AB, n=29; SK, n=12).

The conversation was opened with the question "I am inquiring about any programs or services that you may offer to women escaping situations of domestic violence with their pets" and asking to speak with the person who would be best able to speak to the details of the service. The phrasing of the opening question shifted from "women escaping situations of domestic violence *who have* pets" to the wording "*with their* pets" due to some confusion occurring about

the purpose of the call in contact with the first few transition houses. The opening question was deliberately open-ended in order to elicit responses about what kinds of services are provided for women with pets. If needed, clarifying comments were given such as the example of a woman leaving an abusive situation and not wanting to leave her pet dog behind. When a staff member indicated a SPP was in place, information was sought about duration of stay, where the pet is housed, cost for the program, where the responsibility for providing pet supplies like food rested, any veterinary care available, if the owner is permitted to visit the pet, how long the program has been in operation, if the clients are asked about pets on intake, and any statistics kept on number of pets in the program were asked. All conversations were ended with a question about whether there was any details about the program or issue that was not asked about and an expression of thanks for the staff member's time.

Initially, if the staff member indicated that pets were allowed at the transition house, the staff member was asked if they would be willing to complete a short list of questions about the SPP via email. All of the shelters asked agreed. A list of questions were emailed to the shelter staff member to complete. The questions did shift slightly based on the conversation with the shelter staff member and the information gathered during the phone call. These questions (without responses) are included in Appendix A. This method did not work very well as two of the five email requests sent were not returned. The remainder of the data was gathered during the telephone calls. The presence of a written policy regarding pets and written agreements between the clients and the transition house was also inquired about, with a request to send these documents via email or regular post. This garnered a much higher response rate than the email questionnaire, likely due to the minimal time involved in the simple request. All forms requested were received, a total of nine documents.

If the transition house indicated that they were partnered, either formally or informally, with an animal care agency, the name of the agency was asked (if not already mentioned) as well as a contact person at the animal care agency. The agencies were then contacted by telephone with similar questions about the service provided for pets of clients in the transition house. The animal care agencies were contacted in order to gain more in-depth information about the service offered to women at the transition house, and the questions were specifically directed at that particular offering as opposed to more general animal care and rescue services. The details received were compiled with the initial information received from the associated transition

house. The same procedure was used regarding messages being limited to an initial contact call and one follow-up call. Six agencies did not return the contact after the follow up message. The transition houses associated with these agencies were not eliminated from the analysis as sufficient information was generally gathered during the phone call with shelter staff.

When private citizens were mentioned as part of the SPP as in the case of a foster care network, no contact information was solicited to protect the privacy of the individuals. When a private business was mentioned as part of the SPP such as veterinary practices or commercial boarding kennels, it was requested that the staff member forward my contact information to the business with a request to contact me about the service. Again, this decision was made to protect the privacy of individuals involved in the service. No return phone calls were received from the businesses, possibly because the request for contact may not have been passed on.

## **Organizing the Data**

Once all the phone calls were completed, a spreadsheet was compiled with all of the information on each SPP. A SPP was defined as any arrangement where the transition house staff had a part in making the arrangements for safe placement of the pet, whether that included making all arrangements or providing the client with the contact information to a secondary caretaker and supporting the client in the placement of the pet. Caretakers were defined as where the pet resided for the duration of the SPP placement. Five broad categories with subcategories were devised from the data: Presence of SPP, SPP Caretaker, Reason for not having a SPP, Challenges to a SPP, and Program Considerations. The categories and the subcategories are listed in Appendix B. Categorizing the data in this way allowed some of the common themes to stand out and provided an overview of the programs in Western Canada. An important note, the subcategories under Challenges arose directly out of the conversations with transition house staff members, while the subcategories under Program Considerations were devised previous to any contact with the transition houses and modified during the course of the research. Namely, the subcategory of Veterinary Services was added.

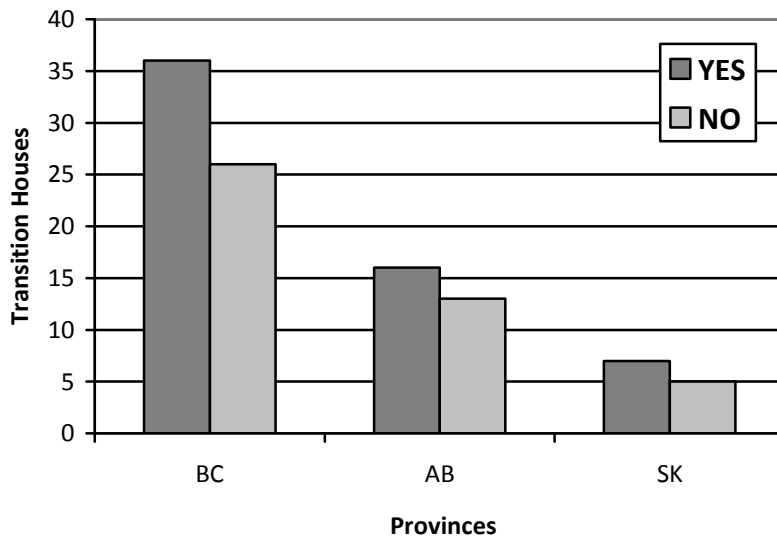
In addition to the quantitative data gathered, a qualitative component to the research was also included. This required reading the conversation notes multiple times to look further for themes that could not be categorized as easily. Coloured highlighters were used to mark five

different themes in the notes in the first few readings: Need for a SPP; Challenges to implementing a SPP; Women will not leave a pet behind; Importance of the pet-human relationship; and Involvement of pets in domestic abuse. Subsequent readings resulted in the combination of the five smaller themes into two comprehensive themes: Awareness of the issue that pets are often included in a domestic violence dynamic, and Challenges to implementing a SPP.

## RESULTS: SAFE PET PROGRAMS IN WESTERN CANADA

Out of the 103 transition houses included in the sample, over half of the houses (n=59) provided some kind of safe pet program. Each province in the study showed the same trend in the majority of transition houses offering safe pet programs (see Figure 1). In British Columbia, 36 transition houses had a SPP and 26 did not. Sixteen out of 29 Alberta transition houses operated a SPP. In Saskatchewan, 7 SPPs were in operation out of 12 houses contacted.

Figure 1: Safe Pet Programs in Western Canada



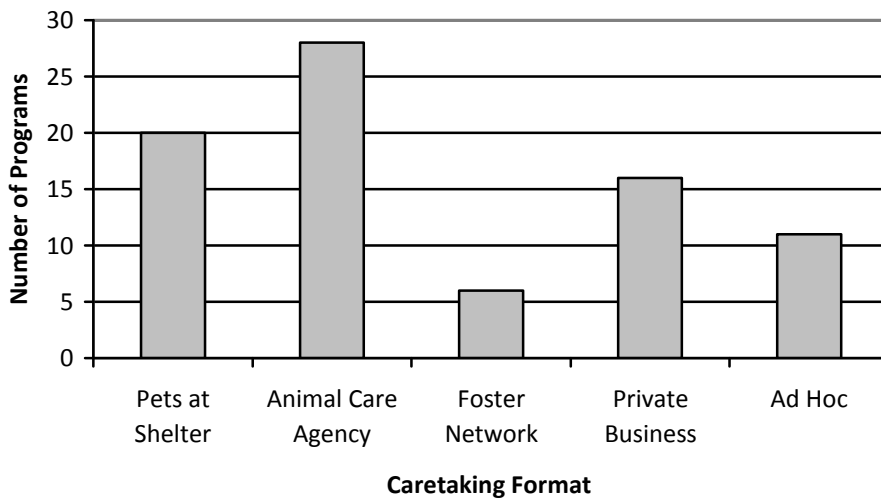
Of the transition houses that did not provide a SPP, the reasons for this varied. Eleven of the 44 transition houses that did not offer a SPP indicated that there was no need for such a service in their community, while ten other transition houses either wanted to implement a SPP or were in the process of doing so. Two transition houses responded that they used to have a SPP but had stopped the program, one because the animals were not being cared for by their owners and the other because the community resources used were no longer available.

An interesting result was that when responding that they did not have a SPP, the shelter staff member often mentioned another shelter that did have a SPP. This was exclusively a BC

phenomenon. Twelve of the 26 transition houses who did not have a program mentioned another shelter, and five of the 36 transition houses who did have a SPP in operation also mentioned other shelters who provided a SPP.

The SPPs use a range of caretakers, from allowing pets at the transition house (n=20) to agreements with foster care volunteers (n=6) or animal care agencies like the SPCA (n=28), to arrangements with private businesses such as veterinary clinics, commercial boarding kennels and pet sitting services (n=16). A summary of the caretaking options used by the various SPPs is presented in Figure 2. The most common solution is an agreement, formal or informal, with animal care agencies. Several transition houses utilized a few solutions, combining an arrangement with a private business with an animal care agency to provide a greater probability of placing the pet. Each of these solutions were counted separately. For example, one BC transition house recognized that space is often an issue at the local animal care agency, so they

**Figure 2: Safe Pet Program Caretaking Formats**



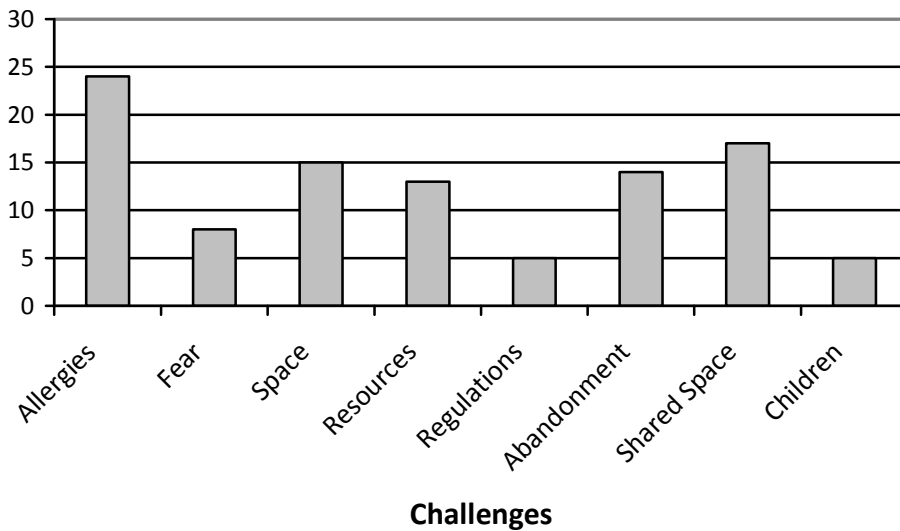
Note: Several programs utilize more than one caretaker, so total number of caretaking options exceeds the total number of SPPs.

searched out a community volunteer who was willing to provide foster care for pets of the transition house’s clients. Ad hoc caretaking options were used by transition houses without a formal SPP in place (n=11). Ad hoc solutions mentioned by shelter staff included pooling money to get a client’s dog into a shelter and staff members volunteering to take pets home. For the

most part, ad hoc solutions were simply described as doing whatever shelter staff could with the help of the client to get the pet into a safe place using any available resources.

There were a number of challenges raised by transition house staff, both by those who had a SPP and those who did not (see Figure 3). When multiple challenges were raised by one transition house or associated animal care agency, they were counted separately. Allergies (n=24), both of staff and clients, and shared space (n=17) were the most often mentioned challenges to putting a SPP in place allowing pets at the transition house. The possibility that other clients would be fearful of the pets at the house (n=8) and the potential problems that may arise with the interaction of children and dogs in particular (n=5) were also challenges that were raised by the transition house staff in regards to allowing pets at the house. Available space (n=15) was a challenge mentioned both by transition houses in reference to allowing pets at the shelter and by animal care agencies in terms of having the space to take the pets into their

**Figure 3: Challenges Raised to Implementing a Safe Pet Program**



Note: Many of the transition houses contacted raised more than one challenge.

facility. Interestingly, money or funding was mentioned by only two transition houses. This was grouped together under resources (n=13), including challenges like having enough staff and volunteers, and the presence of community resources. Abandonment of pets (n=14) was raised exclusively by those operating SPPs and by one of the transition houses who used to have a

program. This indicates that the particular challenge of how to deal with pets that are abandoned or relinquished by their owners is a challenge that has arisen out of experience.

Another interesting challenge raised was regulations governing allowing pets at the transition house. This category was compiled of provincial government regulations, liability for damage and injuries caused by animals, and service contract conditions. All six of the agencies raising the regulations challenge were in BC. Three of the transition houses stated that BC Housing regulations, a government agency that provides and guarantees funding for many not-for-profit housing ventures, prohibited pets being allowed into the transition house. Two other transition houses raised the issue of liability, stating their insurance would not allow pets on the premises. One of the animal care agencies contacted stated that they must hold kennel space for their municipal animal control contracts and were therefore limited in the amount of space that they could allow to be used for pets of women entering transition houses.

In almost every case where a SPP was operating, there was no cost to the woman for the service. In the five cases where a cost for the service was mentioned, a donation request or amount based on ability to pay were the norm. Payment was not required to place the pet in the program. In six of the SPPs, the owner was responsible for providing food and supplies for their pets. In all other programs, the pet supplies were provided by either the transition house or, in the majority of programs, the caretaker of the pet (foster care, animal care agency, or business).

In addition to pets being housed at no cost to their owners, veterinary services were also provided by many of the programs. This was quite a surprising result out of the research. These included services like basic health examination, vaccinations and sterilization (spay or neuter) procedures. When these services were offered, there was no cost for the women. The financial costs for the veterinary care were borne by different agencies. The majority of the animal care agencies offered sterilizations and vaccinations, as part of their mandate of reducing unwanted animals as well as for the health of the pet and other animals in the shelter. Spay and neuter services were actually a requirement of one of the programs run by an animal care agency. If the client refused (even though there was no charge), the pet was not accepted into the program. In other cases the transition house would pay for sterilization and vaccinations before sending the pet to foster care, for the safety of the foster family and the pet.

Confidentiality is always a concern for transition houses. Often the physical address of the house is closely guarded, and all efforts are made for the house to appear as 'normal' in the neighbourhood as possible while maintaining increased security for its residents. This is why it was so interesting to observe that confidentiality within the SPPs was not a consistent concern. Only 15 of the transition houses and associated agencies mentioned that confidentiality was an important issue for the SPP. It should be noted that none of the private businesses returned contact, perhaps for the very reason of confidentiality.

Confidentiality is linked to permitted owner visitation with their pets while in the SPP. Where confidentiality was noted as important, visitation between the owner and the pet usually was not allowed, in particular with regards to foster arrangements. Confidentiality was maintained primarily for the security of the fostering individuals in case the ex-partner followed the woman to the foster location. Another reason for not allowing any contact between foster families and the women, brought up by two separate transition houses, was the fact that women can and do return to abusive relationships taking the pet with them. The two staff members stated that this would make fostering incredibly stressful for the foster families, knowing what kind of situation the pet may be returning to. In these situations, confidentiality is in place to protect the foster family, the pet and the women, both physically and emotionally.

The SPPs where owners were allowed to visit their pets were mainly animal care agencies with sufficient security measures in place and enough staff to deal with any potential issues, such as an angry ex-partner trying to retrieve the pet. One of the main reasons animal care agencies brought up against visitation was stress on the animal. Being in a kennel is a stressful situation for an animal, and having the owner drop in for a short time then leave the pet again increases the stress. However, allowed visitation varied. Some caretakers permitted or even encouraged visitation when visits could be regular and consistent. One of the SPPs had procedures in place to pick up the animal and bring it to a neutral location where the woman and pet could visit in relative security, maintaining the confidentiality of the caretaker location. The SPPs who allowed visitation recognized the importance of the owner-pet bond. One animal care agency specifically encouraged visitation, noting (anecdotally) that maintaining the relationship appeared to decrease the rate of abandonment by the owners. Again, these results could be further rounded out with better response from the caretakers.

Two very surprising findings arose from the conversations with both the transition houses and animal care agencies. The first is that almost every agency indicated an awareness that pets are often victims of domestic violence and acknowledged the importance of the human-pet relationship. Yet not one single transition house, even those with very structured and established SPPs, asked about the presence of pets in the home during the intake conversation. There was a prevailing assumption that the women would volunteer the information and ask for the service for their pets. The second surprise came in that very few of the agencies kept records or statistics on how many animals had entered their SPP. Even the animal care agencies did not keep a record of pets taken in specifically for the reason of domestic violence. Furthermore, the agencies did not keep a record of the costs involved in providing for the pets, any costs were generally paid out the operating budgets. There were several ‘best guesses’ as to number of pets and dollar amounts but no firm numbers. As a result of these two results, it is difficult to determine how often the SPPs are utilized, the relative costs involved, and most importantly, how many pets are left behind in potentially dangerous situations.

Both awareness of the issue and challenges to implementing a SPP are directly related to the general mandate of transition houses which is to provide a safe environment for women and children leaving abuse. Providing safe haven for pets is linked to this mandate when women will not leave their pet behind, when women will stay to protect their pet, and when women will return to an abusive situation for the sake of their pet. Challenges to providing a safe place for pets is related to the overall mandate of transition houses insofar that, in some cases, they may directly interfere with overcoming a woman’s barrier to leaving an abusive relationship.

### **Awareness of Pets as Victims**

Research has shown that companion animals provide an essential source of support for women in situations of domestic violence and are often victims themselves of violence (e.g. Ascione et al., 2007; Flynn, 2000). Several of the transition houses in the sample mention pet abuse as a component of domestic violence on their websites, including threats to or harm to pets in the definition of domestic abuse. In conversations about SPPs, transition house staff consistently acknowledged the presence of the issue in their community, that concern for pets can present a barrier to a woman leaving an abusive situation. One of the transition house staff said that “it [the pet] is a reason a woman will stay and often the only love she has received in

years.” Another stated that the “woman does not trust what will happen to her pet after she goes.” In another conversation a staff member related that leaving an abusive relationship is “extremely difficult with pets, pets are family and leaving them can be a hard decision to make.” Even those transition houses who did not have a SPP and who had not encountered a need for the service often indicated awareness of the issue. One transition house mentioned that especially when there are no children in the family, the dog becomes like a child to the woman, and no woman would leave her child behind.

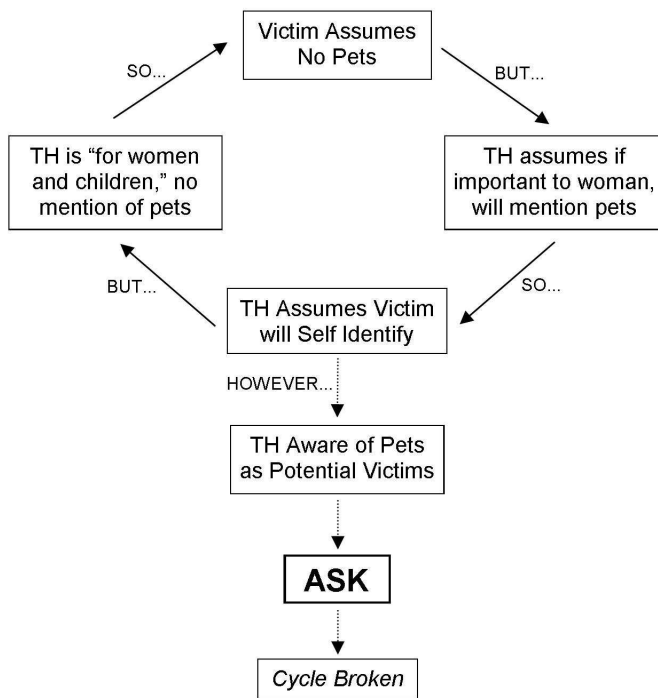
It is in these comments that the relationship between the SPPs and the general mandate of transition houses becomes clear – removing a barrier to leaving an abusive situation by finding the pet a safe place, and interrupting the violence by removing one more potential victim. The relationship is clear, but are the methods and procedures involved in the programs in line with the mandate? There are two points of disjuncture in the SPPs: the absence of a specific intake question about the presence of pets in the home, and the lack of statistics kept on the number of pets taken into the program.

### **Awareness But No Question?**

*Not one single transition house* asked a question about pets during the intake questioning. Each transition house assumed that the woman would self-identify as needing a safe place for her pets. But there are flaws with this assumption. Not one transition house website who had a SPP mentioned that pets could be offered safe haven as well as the women. In fact, most of the programs were not promoted to the community at all. The only programs that were promoted were established SPPs offered to transition houses in their region by two separate animal care agencies. The brochures and informational material were primarily distributed to the transition houses and veterinary clinics, not really targeted at the general public. Still, the transition houses associated with these established and promoted programs did not ask the question on intake about the presence of pets. This seems in almost direct opposition to the mandate of the transition houses. There is a barrier to getting the woman to a safe place – fear for the safety of her pet – and a program has been put in place to address this. Yet this is not actively pursued by the transition houses. There appears to be a ‘cycle of assumption’ happening, with a very simple solution to stopping the cycle. Ask the question.

Figure 4 presents the cycle of assumption as it arose in this study, illustrating the tautological nature of the thinking of both the transition house staff and their clients. Some may hold to the argument that if the pets are really so important to the woman, she will mention them. Ascione (2000) would refute this assertion, stating that “in the midst of a crisis, some women may not think to express their concerns about pets or may misjudge the significance on pet welfare (e.g. the possibility that animal abuse may indicate that violence will escalate)” (29). Another counter-argument is that the service provider (transition house) has more detailed knowledge about the services they provide than the client does, as well as more knowledge about

**Figure 4: The Cycle of Assumption**



Note: Transition houses (TH)

the prevalence of the issue of pet involvement in the victims of domestic violence. This knowledge places the onus on the service provider to ask, and to provide the information to overcome the barriers to getting the woman to a safe place. One transition house provided a case example of a client returning to the abusive home to retrieve her dog after arriving at the house and discovering that her pet was welcome there. The staff member in this case specifically

related how the client had been concerned about the safety of her pet, but assumed that no pets were allowed at the house. Asking the question about pets would have reduced the client's stress in the first place, and prevented the potentially dangerous situation in returning to collect her dog.

### **Keeping Statistics Can Help**

Asking the question about pets on intake is also a way to address the second point of disjuncture between actions within the SPP and the mandate of the transition house, the lack of statistics kept on the number of pets in the program. Statistics are kept by transition houses on items like number of bed nights provided, number of women with children needing their services, types of abuse suffered. These statistics are extremely useful for proving the (unfortunate) necessity of the transition house and providing evidence of the community need on funding applications and grant requests. On the other hand, statistics were not kept on the number of pets in a SPP, or even on the number of requests for the service whether the pets could be placed or not.

Comments from the transition houses on specific numbers of pets helped were all guesses. A common response from transition houses when asked how often the SPP was used or the service was needed was "not very often" or "quite rare." One transition house staff member stated that it was not that common to receive a request to help a pet, guessing at less than one request a month. Another transition house estimated between 10 and 15 pets were helped on an annual basis. One transition house staff member approximated that 27 pets had been taken into the house over a nine month period, and had helped their clients find alternate arrangements for another 28 pets.

Even the animal care agencies associated with the transition houses did not keep statistics on the number of pets leaving situations of domestic violence. Generally, these were grouped in with the 'boarding' statistics or simply lumped in with the overall shelter nights provided. The two animal care agencies that did keep statistics were again the two established and highly structured programs mentioned previously. One program had provided safe haven for 70 animals since its inception in 2000. The other program provided assistance for 27 individuals leaving abusive situations in 2008, helping 81 animals.

Even without firm statistics from both animal care agencies and transition houses, it can be seen that the need for a SPP varies from community to community. It is also very clear that the need really is unknown. A solution to this is to *ask the question* about the presence of pets in the home, whether there is a SPP in operation or not, and to keep track of the answers. It could be that there is not a substantial need for a SPP in a community, but the only way to truly discover this is to ask. Furthermore, keeping statistics on the need for a SPP could provide evidence that there is a need in a community for such a service and the numbers would provide the foundation for a funding application to put a program in place. Keeping statistics could also help in recognizing what challenges are really in place to implementing a SPP.

### **Challenges To Implementing a SPP**

There were eight overall challenges raised by both the transition houses and animal care agencies contacted: allergies; fear of animals; available space; available resources; regulations; abandonment; shared space; and concerns about children and pets. These were raised by transition houses with a SPP as well as those without anything in place for pets of their clients.

Abandonment was qualified as a challenge, but it was really referred to more as a cost of having a SPP in place. This was only raised by those with direct contact with the animals, either the transition house staff who helped to place the pets in foster care or the animal care agencies that handled the animals. Again, no statistics were kept on the number of pets that were not reclaimed by their owners but estimates ranged from about half of the pets in the SPP being relinquished to just a few pets abandoned. The issue of abandonment was mentioned in all the pet policies and forms received from the transition houses with SPPs. Statements revolved around retrieving the pet within a certain period of time after leaving the transition house or they would be considered abandoned. Generally, the transition house would turn the pet over to the local animal care agency for adoption, or if the animal care agency was the caretaker in the SPP, would retain custody of the animal and try to place it in a permanent home. Interestingly, even though abandoning the pet left the transition house or caretaker with the responsibility of finding another home for the pet, allergies and shared space still appeared to be more pressing challenges which were harder to overcome.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was allergies, and was exclusively raised by the transition houses in relation to allowing pets at the houses. This was the first reason given for not offering a SPP by the transition houses that had no program in place, presenting allergies as a barrier as opposed to a challenge to be managed with alternative solutions. Of the transition houses who allowed pets at the house (either inside or on the property), few raised the issue of allergies, and then only as a reason for how the program was structured. For example, one transition house has an outdoor kennel area for dogs and cats who are not allowed in the house due to potential allergy concerns. However, this transition house does allow caged animals (hamsters, birds, fish, etc.) in the house. Allergy concerns did not prohibit the operation of SPP, it simply modified how the service was delivered. Another transition house who did allow pets in the house did not mention allergies, and when asked about it the staff members indicated that the clients in the house will manage the allergies themselves. In fact, this transition house has a resident cat (to deal with a mouse problem) and the staff member stated that the women will take allergy medication in order to “snuggle and get affection from the cat.” A separate transition house who allowed pets has a clause in the pet agreement that the owner signs on entering the house that alternate arrangements be made for the pet if one of the other clients is allergic to or afraid of the pet. To the best of the staff member’s knowledge at this particular transition house, the situation where the pet had to be relocated had not arisen. This again brings up the importance of keeping accurate statistics and illustrates that the challenge of allergies can be managed in most cases.

Some of the transition houses that brought up challenges like allergies, space, and fear to allowing pets at the house were partnered with other agencies. For example, one transition house stated that allergies were a primary concern to allowing pets at the house so they had partnered with a local commercial boarding kennel. Several other transition houses indicated agreements with animal care agencies in their efforts to manage issues like available space and allergies at the houses while still providing the SPP for their clients. Many of the challenges to having pets at the transition house can be met by partnering with outside agencies, depending on what is available in the community. For the transition houses that raised the challenge of resources, like the lack of community resources, the challenge may be a bit more difficult to overcome. But again, there is a way to discover how large these challenges really are – ask.

Not one of the transition houses asked clients about allergies, or fear of pets, or willingness to be in a house with pets on intake. For the transition houses that may be trying to put in place a SPP that allows pets at the house, this would be an important consideration. For the other transition houses, asking community members, asking animal care agencies, asking veterinarian clinics would be the second step. The first step would be determining the level of need for the service by asking their clients about pets, by breaking the cycle of assumption. Many of the transition houses seemed to assume challenges like allergies existed and prohibited the implementation of a SPP, or that a SPP only took one form. Asking other transition houses what their SPPs entail would be a way to discover what challenges they faced implementing a SPP, and how these were dealt with, to further serve the mandate of helping women escape domestic violence.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Overall, the presence of SPPs is encouraging. Yet there are failings in the way the SPPs are operating. They are not truly meeting their mandate, safety for the woman and for the pet, or the overarching mandate of the transition houses, stopping the cycle of violence. Domestic violence as a social problem cannot be deconstructed to address one small part, a solution necessarily needs to be comprehensive, inclusive and intertwined with all aspects. Systems theory offers a way to understand the complexity and begin to frame solutions for domestic violence. Stewart and Ayres (2001) state that

Rather than selecting instruments to fit a particular kind of policy program...systems analysis suggests that the nature of the problem cannot be understood separately from its solution. Policy responses therefore cannot be 'designed,' but represent a way of navigating through the problem (83).

Safe pet programs represent a way of navigating through the issue of family violence.

The potential policy recommendations that have arisen out of this research into SPPs are lengthy. Some are complicated ideas, some very simple suggestions. Some potential solutions are expansive and expensive, some proposals are nearly free. They all focus on one central idea – SPPs in any form serve a critical purpose in line with the mandates of transition houses, facilitating women leaving situations of abuse and helping to end the cycle of domestic violence. Three central recommendations are focused on: collaboration with other agencies; determining the need for a SPP; and keeping statistics on the involvement of pets in domestic violence.

### **Collaboration Within the Community**

Systems theory contends that issues should be treated “as wholes, composed of related parts” (Stewart & Ayres, 2001: 81). Communities dealing with the issue of domestic violence necessarily are comprised of many different agencies and service providers that fill a particular need. One potential way to way to address some of the challenges to implementing a SPP is for transition houses to collaborate with other agencies. This has been suggested by others as well (e.g. Ascione, 2000; Harrison, 2002) with varying results. For example, the several BC transition houses who approached the local SPCAs with the idea of a partnership SPP found that the

agencies were unwilling to discuss the options. The suggestion to approach the local SPCA was made by the CARE guide published and distributed to all transition houses and emergency shelters in BC and the Yukon (Harrison, 2002). I believe that collaboration must be more or less equal; it cannot be a 'we supply the pets, you supply everything else' type of arrangement. This places too much of the burden – financial, space, staff, resources – on one agency. It also does not recognize some of the constraints that some agencies have to operate under, such as adhering to municipal contract kennel space requirements in the case of animal care agencies or liability concerns in the transition houses.

Collaboration is simple on its face, but finding other willing agencies with which to collaborate is another part of the issue. Ideally, networking opportunities could happen at a specially organized conference on the issue of domestic violence, but these can be expensive and time consuming for both the organizers and the attendees. Smaller scale networking opportunities could come from attending community business association meetings. Opportunities could also be generated by organizing a small community information session on how to help victims of domestic violence and the need to include pets in this conversation. Simply raising the issue in the community may result in interested parties inquiring about ways they can help, from potential foster homes to donations of pet supplies to offers of kennel space. The key is to raise the issue of how pets are included in domestic violence and what this means for the human family members in the community. Meeting the needs for safety of victims of domestic violence is the primary policy goal of transition houses. Community collaboration on a holistic level – including all community members and *all* victims in the family – can help to meet this goal. But first, transition houses have to know what the need in the community actually is.

### **Ask the Question About Pets**

From the responses and approximate numbers of pets in the SPPs operating in Western Canada, it is clear that the perceived need for a SPP differs among communities. A simple and free solution to see if the perception is accurate is to ask about pets on intake. This is not a new solution, and has been recommended by others like Ascione (2000). Stewart and Ayres (2001) state that “some highly successful policy interventions work, not because they reach the underlying causes of particular behaviours but because they address significant contributory

factors” (83). SPPs do not address any causal factors in the commission of family violence, they try to deal with a risk factor for the continuing victimization of the family members. Mitigating risk factors is part of transition house mandates like ‘stopping the cycle of violence.’ Asking about the presence of pets in a situation of domestic violence directly addresses one of these risk factors, and therefore is directly tied to the overall mandate of transition houses. Still, the question is not being asked.

It could be that the woman is not concerned about the pets, that she feels they are safe remaining in the home. Or it could be that she is very concerned but did not know to ask the transition house staff about any options that may be available. Asking the question about pets is a critical step in breaking the cycle of assumption that seems to be occurring in transition houses with SPPs. In opening the conversation about pets with the woman, transition house staff are better placed to discuss options for the safety of the pets even in the absence of a SPP. Perhaps this conversation is even more important if a SPP is not available in the community, forcing an examination of the options available to the woman and encouraging her to include her pets in her safety plan. Several transition house staff members at houses without a SPP mentioned that in encouraging the client to make her own arrangements for her pets, they are starting the woman on the path to healing by empowering her to provide for those she feels responsible for. The value in this sentiment is apparent, but it must be recognized that not every client will be able to take this step on contacting the transition house. However, this encouragement cannot happen unless the concern about pets is disclosed to transition house staff. Asking about pets opens this conversation.

There is a potential drawback that should be mentioned in relation to asking about pets in the home. It could be that the woman is not worried about the pets when she contacts the transition house, but the intake questions about pets could create fear in the client. It would be important in this situation for transition house staff to reassure the client that every circumstance is different. While the solution of asking about pets is simple, it is not without some potential flaws.

## **Record the Answers**

A component of asking questions about pets is recording the answers. Again, this is not an original suggestion having been raised by Ascione (2000). Keeping statistics will help transition house staff (and animal care agencies) gain a better handle on the involvement of pets in domestic violence in their community. It could be that the need for a SPP really is small, one or two clients with pets a year. In this case, a few volunteers could be solicited for fostering knowing the need is limited. Alternatively, it could be that one or two women a week are calling the transition house with concern for the safety of their pets. This would necessitate a much more comprehensive solution, maybe a shelter expansion or approaching multiple agencies and businesses to help with the SPP. These statistics can indicate a need for a SPP and be used for funding applications to set up a program, especially in communities whose need is great. Statistics can be used to gather community support for the implementation of a SPP, perhaps presented at a community information session. Statistics can also be used to help change some of the larger policies regarding pets, for example changing the BC Housing regulations in place prohibiting pets at transition houses. Keeping track of the need in the community will help the transition house determine how best to deal with the fact that women will stay in an abusive situation for the sake of their pets, and thus better serve the transition house's mandate.

The central feature to these three recommendations is recognition of the interrelated nature of animal abuse and domestic violence. The SPPs appear to have the recognition, but the actions do not match the mandate. Systems theory emphasizes the importance of relationships in the creation and analysis of policy, whether between individuals or organizations (Stewart & Ayres, 2001). In the context of SPPs, both organizational and individual relationships are critical to program success. Community organizations need to recognize the importance of collaboration in dealing with the issue of domestic violence. A large part of this collaboration is acknowledging the need for safety of all family members including pets. Acknowledging this need and recognizing the interrelation of animal cruelty and family violence must be made by all parties to the issue – victims and service providers, those who operate a SPP and those who do not. With this acknowledgement and recognition illustrated in the form of asking questions about the presence of pets in the home, achieving the policy goals of safety for all family members is much more likely.

## **WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE DIFFERENTLY?**

There are several limitations to this research. The sample was limited to three provinces: British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. This was done based on time and scope constraints. Extending the sample to include all of Canada may provide a better grasp on the breadth of SPPs that are operating currently, but would necessarily involve more time than was available for this research. Even within the current geographic constraints, an examination of safe home networks and second stage housing within the provinces could also have provided a more rounded picture of the full scope of SPPs operating in Western Canada. Demographic data was not presented for the individual communities. This was not applicable given that the data from the transition houses and other agencies were aggregated. Perhaps a geographic grouping of transition houses with corresponding data may have been a good addition to the research.

Regarding research method, a great deal of non-verbal information is necessarily lost during telephone conversations. Face-to-face interviews would have been a better choice, but time and financial constraints precluded travel over the three provinces. In addition, the calls were fairly short, the majority lasting less than ten minutes. Though this was intentional in acknowledgement that many transition houses are understaffed, longer telephone calls may have resulted in more information. As well, the open-ended question used to begin the conversation may not have been the best way to access all the desired information. A structured and consistent script may have resulted in more uniform data gathered, but may not have revealed what the transition houses and animal care agencies thought was the most important issues about pets and domestic violence.

Compiling the sample from one source, the Shelternet website, was also a limitation. It could be that there are many more transition houses and emergency shelters that were not included in the potential sample because they are not listed on Shelternet. Using other searches, such as a government database or provincial association membership lists may have resulted in a more robust sample of transition houses to contact.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

*“Until we extend our circle of compassion to all living things, humanity will not find peace” (Albert Schweitzer).*

Future directions for research in the area of SPPs are seemingly limitless. This research is simply a scratch on the surface of the problem of pets as victims of domestic violence and how it impacts the human family members. Addressing some of the limitations of this study already mentioned is one way to move forward into future research, namely expanding the sample to include all of Canada and conducting in-person interviews with the transition houses staff.

A close examination of the different models of SPPs would be a valuable addition to research in this area. Being able to present various models, complete with demographic information and details about community resources could help similar communities fashion a SPP to fit their particular circumstances. A component of this research would be an examination of the challenges in more detail, how those challenges were met or not, and how that impacted the success of the program. An interesting finding from this research was that a few transition houses used to offer a SPP but discontinued the program for various reasons. An in depth evaluation of what happened in these cases could provide ideas on how to better structure programs in the future. A comparison between the SPPs in operation in various countries, namely Canada and the United States, would likely be very informative especially in terms of how the various challenges were overcome.

Another area of future research would be following up with the agencies contacted in the course of this study to see if the process of raising the issue of pets and family violence effected any change in policy or future plans. Several transition houses contacted expressed interest in the results of the study, requesting a copy of the final report. Several others asked about options in place in other communities, looking for information on how to set a program in place in their community. The mere question asking about what is being done for women with pets leaving abusive situations may have started the process of policy change. This would be very interesting to follow up after a year or two, allowing time for change to occur.

## **A FINAL WORD**

Cruelty to animals and domestic violence are clearly linked in academic research literature. Companion animals provide support for victims of domestic violence, a positive presence in what otherwise may be an unbearable situation. Companion animals also represent a risk factor, both in terms of staying for the sake of the pet or as a weapon used by the abuser to control the family members. When research uncovers that half of the women in a domestic violence shelter had their pets threatened or abused (Flynn, 2000), we need to take notice. When studies reveal that 25 percent of women delay leaving an abusive situation out of fear for the safety of their pets (McIntosh, 2004), we need to take action.

Over half of the transition houses and emergency shelters contacted in the course of this research took action in the form of a safe pet program. Whether the goal is removing a barrier to leaving an abusive relationship or ensuring the pets are cared for, the result is the same – safety for all members of the family from domestic violence. Almost every transition house contacted indicated an awareness of the involvement of pets in the victims of domestic violence, but not one asked if the pet needs a safe place as well. Very few keep statistics on how often they are asked about safety for a companion animal, or how often safe haven is provided for a pet. Asking the question and recording the answer are two critical points of disjuncture between the goals of the SPPs and the policy in practice. Inherent in these two suggestions is the acknowledgement that animal abuse and family violence are interconnected. This is an acknowledgement that must occur for the policy goals of SPPs, and in fact for policy goals of domestic service providers on a wider level, to be achieved.

Nonetheless, SPPs have shown that they are valuable resources in addressing the needs of the abused members of the family. But more needs to be done. More research, more programs, more attention, more resources need to be focused on a holistic approach to stopping family violence. Lockwood and Ascione (1998) say that cruelty to animals is “an objectively definable behaviour that occurs within a societal context” (443). As a society, we need to change the context. We need to include pets in the victims of family violence. We need to expand our view of what victimization entails, including how pets are used in the discussions of human

victimization. We need to stop addressing the individual symptoms of domestic violence with policies that exclude members of the family. We need to recognize that domestic violence and animal cruelty have far-reaching consequences for our society, and start to take violence against *all members* of the family more seriously.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Email Questionnaires**

All the emails were comprised of the following questions, then tailored based on the information gathered during the telephone conversation and the program details.

1. Mission statement or purpose of the program
2. How long the program has been running
3. Intake procedures or questionnaire
  - a. any restrictions on pets or clients
  - b. are referrals required
  - c. are clients specifically asked about pets
4. Steps in placement of pet(s)
  - a. who is responsible for placement
  - b. where the pet is placed
  - c. length of pet's stay
  - d. financial costs involved
    - i. who is responsible for costs
    - ii. any financial help available
5. How much contact women/children have/are allowed to have with pet
6. Any security precautions in place for the protection of the pet
  - a. anonymity of pet placement
7. Program statistics
  - a. annual placement numbers
  - b. average cost per pet for placement
  - c. number of clients with pets
  - d. number of clients who leave pet behind
8. How is program success measured?

## Appendix B: Data Coding Categories

### Safe Pet Program?

Yes

No

### Mention of Other Shelter?

Name of Shelter

No

### Program YES

Care Agreement

Pets at Transition House

Animal Care Agency

Foster Network

Private Business

Ad-Hoc

### Program NO

Wants to Have SPP

Used to Have SPP

No Need Seen

No

Client make own Arrangements

### Challenges to Program

Allergies

Other Clients Fear of Animals

Space

Money or Resources

Regulations or Laws

Abandonment of Pets

Shared Space/Communal Space

Children - safety

### Program Considerations

Contact with Pet

Yes

Depends

No

Cost for Client

Yes

Donation

No

Vet Services Provided

Transition House

Caretaker

No

Pet Supplies

Client

Transition House

Caretaker

Arrangements Made By

Client

Client with Help

Transition House

Pet Restrictions

No

Details of restriction

Question on Intake

Yes

No

Confidentiality Concerns

Important

Not Important

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