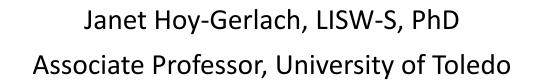
Adult Protective Services



and Animal Welfare: Practice Implications





Research Brief - adapted from Peak, T., Ascione, F., & Doney, J. (2012). Adult Protective Services and Animal Welfare: Should Animal Abuse and Neglect Be Assessed During Adult Protective Services Screening? *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 24(1), 37. https://doi.org/10.1080/08946566.2011.608047

National survey in 2013 of APS practices relating to animal abuse and neglect

- APS representatives from 50 states were contacted
- Phone survey conducted with APS from 41 states
- 51% of respondents do not ask any questions regarding pets
- Only 1 state asked about pet-related concerns, beyond the initial inquiry of whether the household had a pet
- 4 states reported animal welfare important but did not specifically assess for
- In all states that responded, APS workers could add notes of pet-related concerns in "additional information" sections

National survey — most common safety concerns

- Owner inability to care for pets
- Owners spending money on pets instead of self
- Not knowing what to do with the pet(s) when emergencies occurred

National survey – other concerns

- Emotional abuse pets may be used as leverage to coerce older adults
- Co-occurrence of self-neglect and neglect of pets reported
- Older adult may be inadvertent perpetrator of animal harm
 - Inability to care for animal
 - Hoarding

Consistent with findings from 2003 survey

- 200 APS professionals surveyed in 40 states
- 35% of respondents indicated that older adults described pets being threatened or harmed
- 92% reported older adult self-neglect co-occurred with pet neglect
- 75% reported pet-welfare issues complicated process of providing services to older adults (e.g. client refusing relocation if pets not allowed to accompany them)

More on emotional abuse...



Witnessing Animal Abuse



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Emotional Abuse of Children





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Adapted from McDonald, S., Graham-Bermann, S., Maternick, A., Ascione, F., & Williams, J. (2016). Patterns of Adjustment among Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence: a Person-Centered Approach. Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 9(2), 137–152. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-016-0079-y







What is emotional child abuse?

- Emotional or psychological child abuse is a *pattern of behavior that impairs a child's emotional development* or sense of self-worth. This may include constant criticism, threats, or rejection, as well as withholding love, support, or guidance.
 - (https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/identifying/emotional-abuse/)
- Numerous behaviors are listed as emotionally abusive, including:
 - <u>Terrorizing:</u> The adult creates a climate of fear, bullies and frightens the child, and makes the child believe that the world is capricious and hostile.
 - <u>Corrupting:</u> The adult encourages the child to engage in destructive and antisocial behavior, reinforces deviance, and impairs a child's ability to behave in socially appropriate ways.

(https://preventchildabuse.org/resource/preventing-emotional-abuse/)

Background

- At least 25% of children whose mothers experience domestic violence also see their pet threatened or abused
- Most often the child says the motivation is to control the mother
- Since pets are often sources of social support for children, this may be especially traumatic ("terrorizing" behavior)
- Alternately, kids may become complicit in the abuse of the animal ("corrupting" behavior)
- Follow up study (focus of today's presentation) examines the harmful effects on children of witnessing abuse to pets

McDonald SE, Collins EA, Nicotera N, Hageman TO, Ascione FR, Williams JH, & Graham-Bermann SA (2015). Children's experiences of companion animal maltreatment in households characterized by intimate partner violence. Child abuse & neglect, 50, 116-27 PMID: 26520828

Follow-up study on how witnessing animal abuse affects child mental health

- An ethnically diverse sample of 291 children between the ages of seven and 12 took part.
- Recruited through their mother's use of domestic violence services in one state in the United States
- All had a family pet at home.
- On average, the women had been experiencing domestic violence for nine years.

Follow-up study - method

- Each mother and child completed questionnaires.
- The child's exposure to animal cruelty was assessed via questions that asked the mother whether her partner had "ever threatened to hurt or kill a family pet" and if the partner had "ever actually hurt or killed a family pet."
- Researchers examined six domains of adjustment among children:
 - 1. social problems
 - 2. attention problems
 - 3. internalizing behavior (anxiety, depression, etc.)
 - 4. externalizing behavior (disruptive/aggressive behavior)
 - 5. Empathy
 - 6. callous/unemotional traits

Follow-up study – findings

- Children could be grouped into three categories depending on how well they were coping: Resilient (66 percent; n=191), Struggling (28 percent; n=83), and Severe Maladjustment (6 percent; n=17).
- Children exposed to animal cruelty were 3.26 times more likely to be in the Struggling group and <u>5.72 times more likely to be in the Severe</u> <u>Maladjustment group</u> compared to the reference group of resilient children
- Children in the Severe Maladjustment group <u>exhibited clinically</u> <u>significant social problems, attention problems, internalizing</u> <u>behaviors, and externalizing behaviors</u>

Implications of findings

- Witnessing violence toward animals, because it is predictive of emotional development impairment, meets the definition of "emotional abuse"
- Only 15% of children in the resilient group had been exposed to animal abuse
- 48% of struggling group and 41% of severe problems group were exposed to animal abuse
- Concomitant <u>exposure to animal abuse in the context of intimate partner</u> violence is a strong predictive factor in resilient versus maladjusted youth
- Inclusion of witnessing violence toward animals in child assessment/intake procedures may help identify children at greatest risk of psychological maladjustment

Emotional abuse, pets and older adults

- Coercion of older adults via threats to pets is emotional abuse
- Witnessing pet abuse is emotional abuse

National APS 2013 survey — practice implications

- Screen for animal welfare concerns in elder abuse cases
- Include general questions as well as specific items to identify issues related to pet management and care
- Screening protocol and follow-up protocol questions (in event of animal abuse) available at National Adult Protective Services Association:

https://www.napsa-now.org/get-informed/research/putting-research-into-practice/animal-welfare/

 Make connections with animal welfare organizations to link clients to needed support services for pets

Support Services/Resources for Older Adults with Pets

- Pet food banks (include mobile services)
- Low cost veterinary clinics (some may do outreach/home visits)
- Volunteer programs that assist with pet care tasks
- Temporary foster care in cases of owner hospitalization
 - Small animal rescue nonprofits
 - Humane Societies
 - Programs emerging that specifically provide this service

Other resources

Aging in place – seniors and pets

https://www.aginginplace.org/seniors-and-pets/

National Summit on Loneliness in Older Adults and Pets

https://habri.org/pressroom/20200220



Questions?

