

Colorado's Research Project on Domestic Violence, Children, and Pets: A Report to the Community

June 2016



Research Partners



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Introduction of the Study

- In 2010, Professor Frank R. Ascione at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work was awarded a \$1.5 million grant from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to advance his groundbreaking research about the dynamics of domestic violence and animal maltreatment
- Partnering with the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Colorado domestic violence programs and survivors, the research team aimed to interview 300 mothers and their children
- This report to the community provides the key findings from this study, in honor of the women and children who courageously shared their stories





Prior Research on Animals and Domestic Violence

- Over 50% of pet-owning women at DV shelters report animal abuse perpetrated by their adult partner and one-third delayed seeking shelter because of concern for their pets (Ascione et al., 2007; Volant et al., 2008)
- The majority of DV agencies did not routinely ask clients about pet abuse (Ascione et al., 1997)
- Children exposed to DV are nearly three times more likely to abuse animals (Currie, 2006)

Participant Eligibility for Project Connections

For a mother and child to be eligible to participate in the study:

- The mother (aged 18 or older) is a client of a Colorado domestic violence program reporting a history of abuse within the last year
- The mother's child is aged 7 to 12 years old at the time of the first interview
- The mother and child have had a pet or animal in their home within the last year



**Do you have
a pet animal or
have you had
a pet animal
in the past year?**

**Do you have a child
between the ages of
7 and 12 years?**

Interview Procedures and Measures

Eligible mothers and children were interviewed individually by trained advocates at partnering domestic violence victim agencies in Colorado, with interviews lasting about 2 hours. Interviews included the following assessment tools:

- Child Behavior Checklist 6/18 (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001)
- Pet Treatment Survey (Ascione, 2011)
- Children's Observations and Experiences with Animals (Ascione, 2010)
- Cruelty to Animals Inventory (Dadds et al., 2004)
- Callous and Unemotional Traits (Frick, 2004)
- Griffith Empathy Measure (Dadds et al., 2008)
- Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence (Edleson et al., 2008)
- Conflict Tactic Scales 2 (Straus et al., 1996)
- Children's Treatment of Animals Questionnaire (Thompson & Gullone, 2003)



Confidentiality and Voluntary Consent

- The Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence and Animal Abuse research study was approved by University of Denver Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- A Certificate of Confidentiality was issued by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to protect researchers from disclosing information that could identify study participants
- Mothers and children volunteered to participate with informed consent and assent administered by trained advocates
- All identifying information was coded so the database will never include participant names or contact information
- Study participants and agencies received financial incentives as compensation for their time



RESULTS FROM FIRST INTERVIEWS

n= 291 mother/child pairs

Study Participants

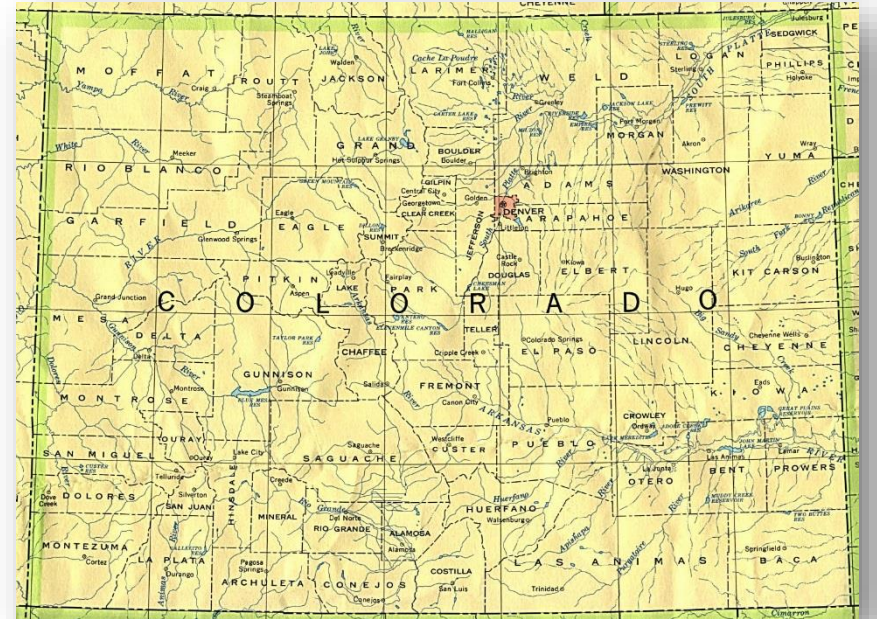
- Trained advocates individually interviewed 291 mothers and 291 children at 22 domestic violence shelters and programs in Colorado

Residential and nonresidential programs

- 77% from nonresidential programs

Programs in urban and rural communities

- 94% from urban communities
- 180 of the same mothers and children were interviewed for follow-up assessments 18 months later



Participant Demographics at First Interview

n=291 mother/child pairs

Average age of mothers:

- 36.3 years (range 21-65)

Average age of children:

- 9.1 years (range 7-12)

Average number of children in family:

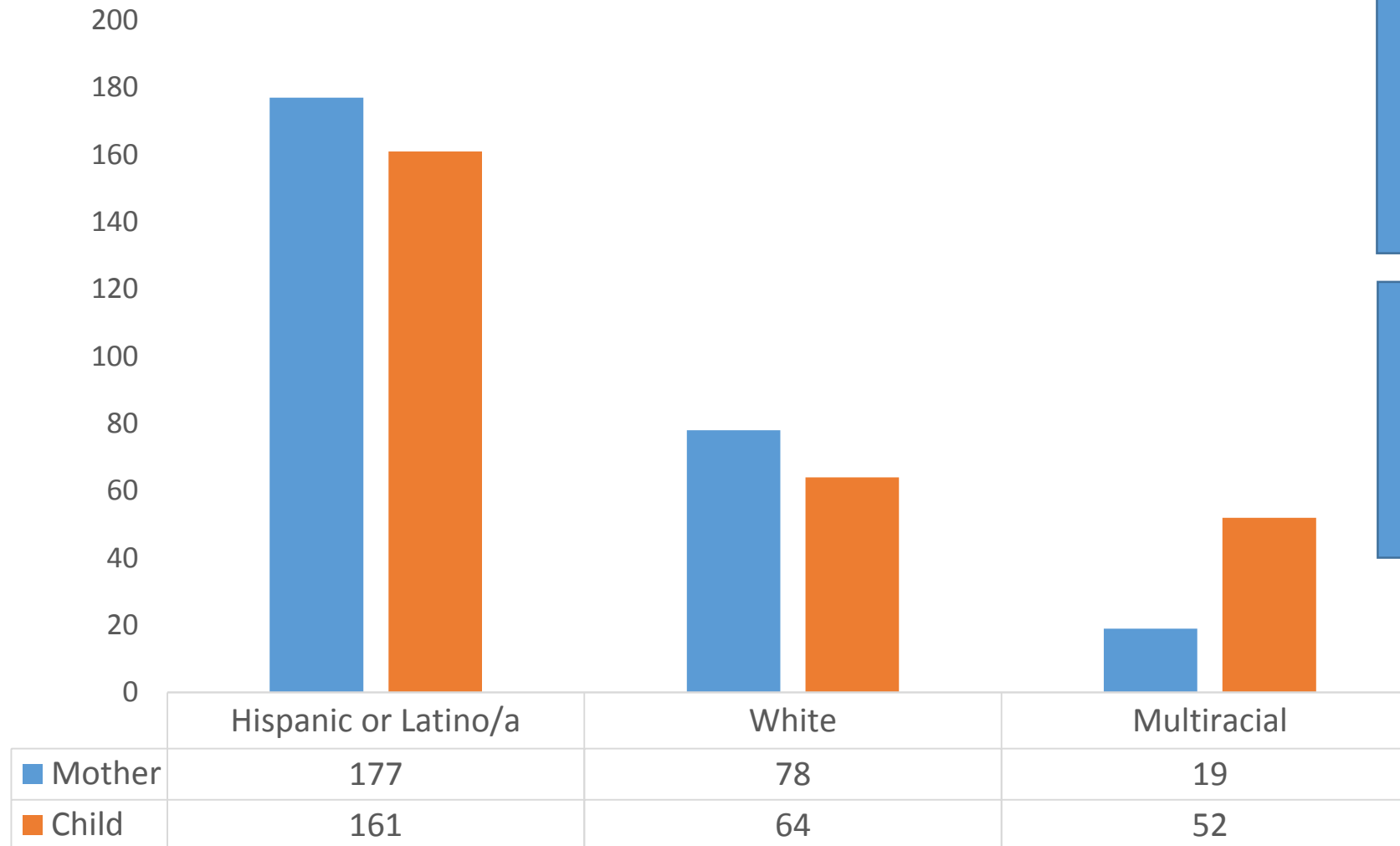
- 2.7 children (range 1-8)

Average number of pets in family:

- 2.1 pets (range 0-53)

<u>Self-Reported Ethnicity</u>	<u>Mother</u>	<u>Child</u>	<u>Partner</u>
Caucasian (White)	27%	22%	33%
Hispanic or Latino/a	61%	55%	56%
African American (Black)	3%	3%	5%
Asian	0%	0%	1%
American Indian/Alaskan	2%	1%	1%
Multiracial	7%	18%	4%

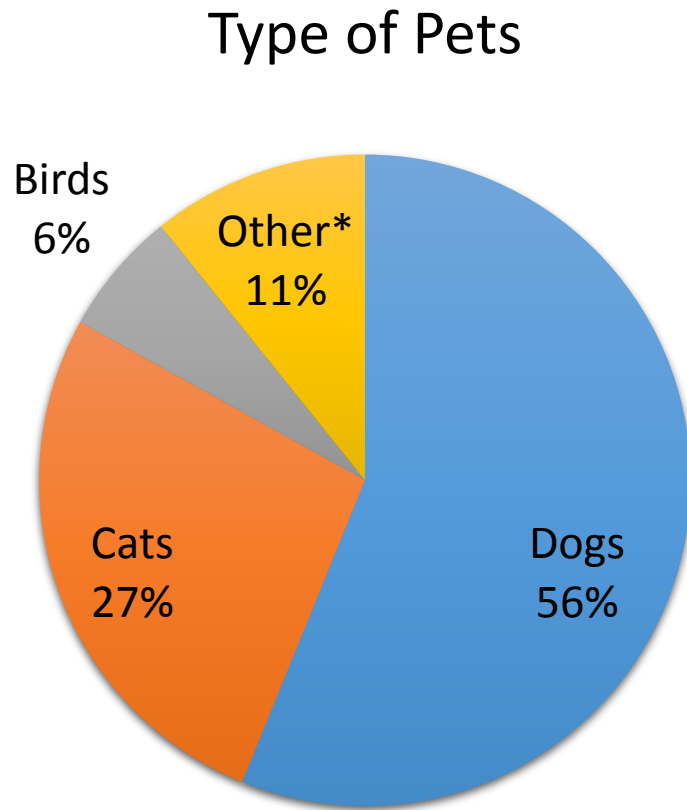
Participant Ethnicity (n=291 pairs)



60% of mothers self-identified as Hispanic or Latina and 55% were born outside of the USA - mostly in Mexico

The high percentage of Latinx victims enhances the research on DV

Pets in the Mothers' and Children's Homes



Number of Pets:

- 59% of families have 1 pet
- 22% of families have 2 pets
- 19% of families have 3+ pets

*Other Types of Pets Include:

- Small mammals (hamsters, ferrets, guinea pigs, ducks, rabbits, etc.)
- Farm animals (horses, goats)
- Reptiles and amphibians (lizards, dragons, geckos, snakes, etc.)
- Other (fish, hermit crabs, spiders)

Residential Families with Pets

<u>Mothers in DV Shelters:</u> <u>Where are pets now?</u>	<u>First Interview</u> <u>(n=60)</u>
With a relative	25%
At home	22%
With partner	13%
Don't know	10%
With a friend	7%
At boarding facility	7%
With her at DV shelter	5%
Gave away/sold	3%
Pet died/was put down	3%
Other	5%

For mothers in DV shelter, about one-third of their pets stayed with family or friends

However, about one-third of their pets stayed either at home or with the abusive partner

Reports of Animal Cruelty

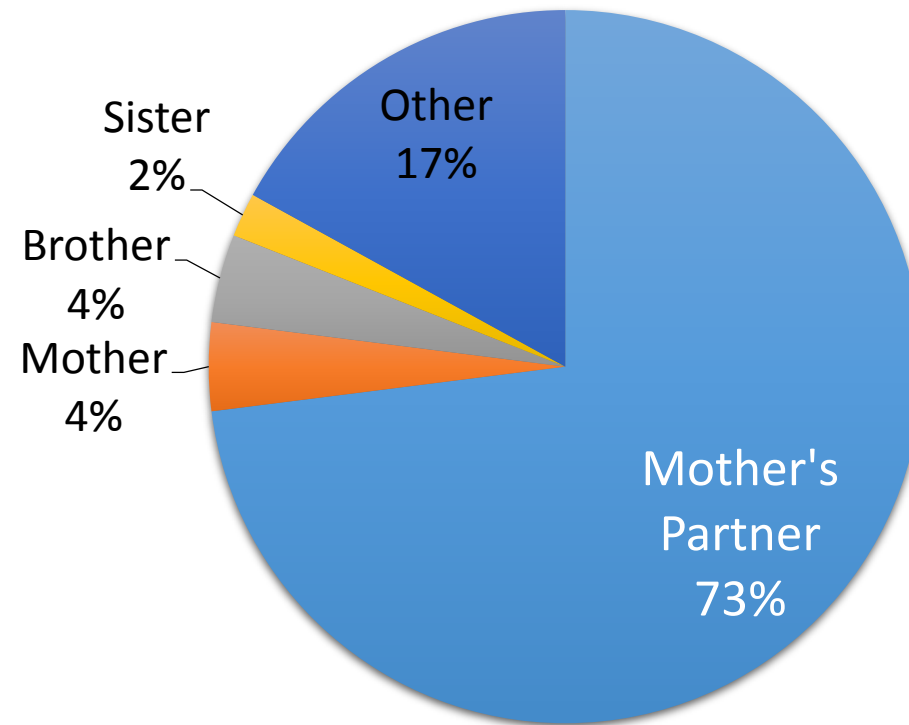
<u>Mother Reports</u>	<u>% (n=291)</u>
Partner threatened harm to pet	30%
Partner actually harmed or killed pet	26%
Said she was “very close” to pet who was a source of “comfort and friendship”	84% of those reporting harm
Child harmed an animal 1 or more times	10%
Child witnessed harming of pet	26%

<u>Child Reports</u>	<u>% (n=291)</u>
Someone threatened harm to pet	17%
Father, stepfather, or Mom’s boyfriend (Mother’s partner) made the threat	72% of threats
Mother’s partner hurt or tried to hurt the pet on purpose	23%
Child saw or heard pet get hurt or killed	21%
Felt “very upset” or “sort of upset” when child witnessed pet get hurt	95% of those who witnessed

Children Exposed to Animal Cruelty

- In cases where partners were reported to have hurt or killed pets, 71% of mothers reported that their child had seen or heard the abuse
- Of children who report pets had been harmed, 73% said the pets were harmed by their mother's partner

Children: Who harmed your pet?



Children Harming Animals

11% of children harmed animals themselves

- Of children who harmed animals, 69% felt sorry for the animal
- Of children who harmed animals, 90% harmed worms/insects, 40% harmed mammals, 10% harmed fish/reptiles, and 5% harmed birds

**Children were more than
2 times
more likely to harm an animal
when the mother's partner had harmed an animal**

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Trigger Warning

The next two slides include specific examples of animals being harmed, threatened, and abused

Voices of the Mothers

Has your partner ever threatened to hurt or kill one of your pets?

- “Several times throughout relationship, partner would get drunk and say, ‘If you ever leave me, I’ll kill the damn dog!’”

Has your partner ever actually hurt or killed one of your pets?

- “Every time he is mad at me he will kick, punch the dog and body slam him against the concrete. He does it to take it out on the dog while he is mad at me.”
- “He said he spanked the dog... but I think he kicked him because I came home and his leg was broken. Then he wouldn’t let me take him to the vet and said he would kill (the dog) if I did.”
- “He poured ammonia into my daughter's fish tank and killed them.”

Did concern over your pet’s welfare keep you from coming to shelter sooner?

- “I did not have anywhere to go and when I went into a shelter they did not allow pets, so since my son was crying for the pets I returned home”

Voices of the Children

Have you ever seen or heard one of your pets hurt or killed?

- “My dad held (our dog) up by the neck and whipped her.”
- “(My mom’s partner) put (our) fish down the garbage disposal and then said he was sorry, but I’m not sure if he was.”

Have you ever protected your pets or saved it from being hurt?

- “I would always hide my cat when my dad was drinking, because I did not want (my dad) to hurt him. I would hide him in my closet with stuffed animals.”
- “When I see my dad is mad I will take our bird out of the cage and put him in my room. Because I know he will pick the feathers out.”
- “That day that my dad said he would burn my dog on the grill, I took him into my room and locked (my dog) in the closet with food and water until the next day.”

Voices of Domestic Violence Advocates

“An awful lot of people walk right back out the door when we can’t house their pets.”

Researchers also interviewed advocates in three focus groups (n=21)

- “That pet is a huge part of their coping strategy and so they would probably rather stay in the home if it means not having to be away from their pet.”
- “Safety is number one. ‘I need to know that my animal is safe and not just safe, but in a good place.’”
- “The (animal) shelters you know many times are full” ... “won’t take horses” ... “She was fearful that (her dog) was going to be put down” ... “The max they’d ever kept our pets was 30 days”
- “It is a part of their emotional safety plan, not just physical safety. So it’s really frustrating that the services are lacking.”

Voices of Advocates: Towards Solutions

“Those of us who don’t have ‘Do you have pets?’ on our forms, we ought to get them.”

In three focus groups (n=21), advocates discussed how to help families with pets

- “We made the decision to allow women and children to bring in their pets if they were concerned for their safety. We had a city leadership group build a kennel.”
- “We work really hard to have a community... who will adopt the cat... A personal family that will take care of the cat while mom is in the shelter.”
- “We do take service animals and a lot of times a woman will come in and you know they’re not service animals... We take her word, and we let her stay there.”
- “The kids really enjoy having the animals around. It is kind of a comfort to them in a lot of ways.”

RESULTS FROM FOLLOW UP INTERVIEWS

n=180 mother/child pairs

The research study repeated the assessment tools 18 months after the first interviews. The study did not include an intervention, but all participants received services from the domestic violence program. The next slides propose the ongoing impact of these domestic violence services.

Relationship with Prior Abusive Partner

<u>Mother's Reported Relationship with Prior (Abusive) Partner</u>	<u>First Interview (n=291)</u>	<u>18-Month Follow Up (n=180)</u>
Divorced, Separated, or "Ex"	30%	78%
Married but not living together	30%	12%
Living together, married or dating	35%	7%
Other	5%	3%

At Follow Up almost 80% of mothers reported they had separated from or divorced their prior partners

At Follow Up almost 40% of mothers and children reported they had no contact with the mother's prior partner

Significant Reduction in Domestic Violence

<u>Mothers: Frequency of Prior Partner Actions</u>	<u>First Interview</u>	<u>Follow Up</u>
Conflict Tactics (total)	257	56
Psychological Abuse	109	41
Physical Abuse	87	10
Injuries	21	2
Sexual Abuse	39	3

At Follow Up the number of abusive acts perpetrated by the prior partner against the mother decreased greatly, even when the mother was still in contact with the prior partner

<u>Children: Exposure to DV from Mother's Prior Partner</u>	<u>First Interview</u>	<u>Follow Up</u>
Children exposed to DV	10.9	5.6

Similarly, children reported their exposure to domestic violence also decreased greatly

Mothers' Employment at Follow Up

<u>Mother's Employment Status</u>	<u>First Interview</u>	<u>Follow Up</u>
Full time	36%	54%
Part time	10%	14%
Stay-at-home parent	30%	12%
Unemployed	24%	20%

At Follow Up over 50% of mothers reported they were employed full time, a significant increase from the first interview.

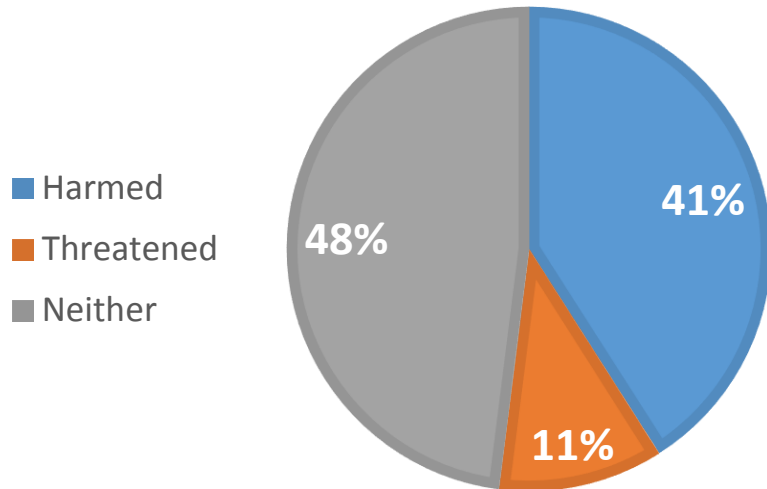
Researchers will continue to analyze the results of Follow Up interviews, comparing to the initial interviews.

PRACTICE AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

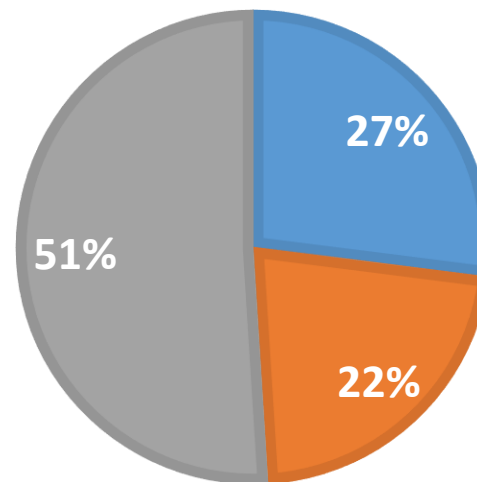
So what does all this mean?

Non-Hispanic partners born in United States were
nearly 5 times
more likely to harm victims' pets

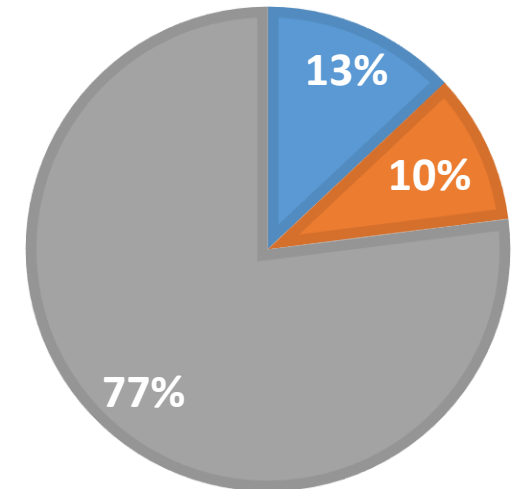
NON-HISPANIC US-BORN



HISPANIC US-BORN



HISPANIC MEXICO-BORN



Additional research is recommended
to help understand these differences

Universal Screening for Animals

- Advocates routinely ask “Do you have children?” but often don’t ask about animals
- Many survivors consider pets and animals as their families and as their “furry children”



Advocacy Tips:

As a standard practice on all intake calls and interviews, after asking about children, also ask:

- “Do you have any animals?”
- “Has your partner ever hurt or threatened any animals?”

Threats towards Animals and Physical Violence

Physical violence towards the mothers was higher when the mother reported her partner threatened (but didn't harm) her pets

Note: When asked if pets had been “threatened,” participants often described incidents when pets were physically harmed

Advocacy Tip:

- Ask victims if the partner has ever threatened or harmed any animals or pets

Children's Descriptions of Animal Abuse

Several themes about animals were identified from qualitative analysis of the children's quotes:

- Pet abuse being used as a control tactic
- Animals being harshly punished
- Children acting proactively to prevent pets from being abused
- Children acting to intervene in cases of direct animal abuse

Advocacy Tips:

- Please ask about pets and animals!
- Process any sadness, guilt, etc. regarding animal maltreatment or leaving a pet
- Teach children how to safety plan and protect their pets safely



Acknowledge that children may be at a greater risk when domestic violence perpetrators engage in animal abuse

Our research found that:

- 95% of children who witnessed animal abuse said they were “very upset” or “sort of upset”
- Children exposed to animal cruelty were 5 times more likely to be profiled as having “severe problems” and 3 times more likely to be “struggling” versus their peers who were “resilient”

Include Animals in Safety Planning

Advocacy Tip:

Safety planning tools at www.ccadv.org/dvandpets

- Consider if the survivor has family or friends who can keep, watch, or care for animals
- Document animal ownership (e.g., veterinarian and microchip records, licenses, photos)
- Include animals in protection orders
- If planning to leave, include animal items in your “go” bag (e.g., food, medications, leash, toys)

URI PALS AWARENESS TIPS

Develop a safety plan for the whole family, including your pet(s).

PET-CARE PLAN: Identify in advance friends or family members who can help care for your pet(s).

ANIMAL OWNERSHIP DOCUMENTS: Keep registration records, vet records, a microchip, and/or a current photo to prove ownership of your pets.

LEGAL PROTECTION: Include pets on orders of protection. Give a copy of any legal documents to a trusted friend or family member.

SAFETY SUPPLIES: Pack an emergency bag and keep it hidden, but easily accessible. Make sure to include food, supplies, and records for pets in the emergency bag.

<http://uriny.org/domestic-violence/pals/>

Develop Housing Options to Include Animals

- Partner with your local animal shelter
- Partner with local veterinarians
- Recruit volunteers to foster animals
- Develop pet-friendly shelters
- Identify pet-friendly housing options



Advocacy Tip:

Safety planning tools at www.ccadv.org/dvandpets



National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-SAFE (7233)

Home Who We Are What We Do Resources Find Help Get Involved

Domestic Violence and Pets



Pet Research Project

Colorado advocates and scholars have been gathering data about children exposed to intimate partner violence and animal cruelty since 2011, and we are excited to share our results!

[Project Summary](#)



Sheltering Pets Toolkit

These tools will help you explore the variety of strategies that may increase options for survivors who have pets.

On this spectrum, you may need to consider:



Additional Resources

–DV and Pets Factsheet

–Human Animal Bond in the Context of DV

–Legal Advocates/Attorneys:
Obtaining Protection Orders
for Survivors with Pets

Advocacy Tip:

- Go to www.ccadv.org/dvandpets for animal resources and research updates

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Journal Articles Published to Date from this Research

- McDonald, S. E., Corona, R., Maternick, A., Ascione, F. R., Williams, J. H., & Graham-Bermann, S. (accepted subject to minor revisions). Examining profiles of risk, protection, and resilience among children exposed to intimate partner violence using latent profile analysis. *Journal of Family Violence*.
- Hartman, C. A., Hageman, T. O., Williams, J. H., St. Mary, J., & Ascione, F. R. (in press). Exploring empathy and callous-unemotional traits as predictors of animal abuse perpetrated by children exposed to intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*.
- McDonald, S. E., Corona, R., Maternick, A., Ascione, F., Williams, J. H., & Graham-Bermann, S. (in press). Examining profiles of risk, protection, and resilience among children exposed to intimate partner violence using latent profile analysis. *Journal of Family Violence*.
- McDonald, S. E., Shin, S., Corona, R., Maternick, A., Graham-Bermann, S., Ascione, F. R., & Williams, J. H. (in press). Children exposed to intimate partner violence: Identifying differential effects of family environment on children's trauma and psychopathology symptoms through regression mixture models. *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

- Hartman C. A., Hageman, T. O., Williams, J. H., & Ascione, F. R. (in press). Intimate partner violence and animal abuse in an immigrant-rich sample of mother-child dyads recruited from domestic violence programs. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. DOI: 10.1177/0886260515614281.
- McDonald, S. E., Graham-Bermann, S. A., Maternick, A., Ascione, F. R., & Williams, J. H. (2016). Patterns of adjustment among children exposed to intimate partner violence: A person-centered approach. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 9, 137-152.
- McDonald, S. E., Collins, E. A., Nicotera, N., Hageman, T. O., Ascione, F. R., Williams, J. H., & Graham-Bermann, S. A. (2015). Children's experiences of companion animal maltreatment in households characterized by intimate partner violence. *Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect*, 50, 116-127.
- McDonald, S. E., Vidacovich, C., Williams, J. H., Ascione, F. R., & Green, K. E. (2015). Validity of the Children's Treatment of Animals Questionnaire: A Rasch analysis. *Anthrozoös*, 28, 131-144.

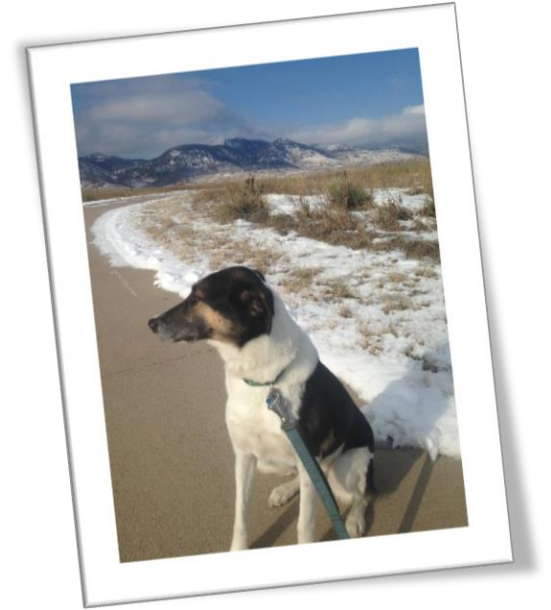
Please contact Amy Pohl at CCADV if you are interested in obtaining copies of these research publications. Additional articles will be written and cited on the CCADV DV and Pets website as we continue analyzing the research.

Additional Works Cited

- Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., & Wood, D. S. (1997). The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered. *Society & Animals*, 5(3), 205-218.
- Ascione, F. R., Weber, C. V., Thompson, T. M., Heath, J., Maruyama, M., & Hayashi, K. (2007). Battered pets and domestic violence animal abuse reported by women experiencing intimate violence and by nonabused women. *Violence Against Women*, 13(4), 354-373.
- Volant, A. M., Johnson, J. A., Gullone, E., & Coleman, G. J. (2008). The Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Animal Abuse An Australian Study. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 23(9), 1277-1295.
- Currie, C. L. (2006). Animal cruelty by children exposed to domestic violence. *Child abuse & neglect*, 30(4), 425-435.

Recommended Resources

- CCADV DV and Pets Website: <http://ccadv.org/dvandpets/>
 - For resources and updates on Colorado's work regarding DV and animals
- Colorado LINK Project: <http://coloradolinkproject.com/>
- Sheltering Animals & Families Together (SAF-T) Program: <http://alliephillips.com/saf-tprogram/>
- Frank Ascione's Safe Havens for Pets: http://www.vachss.com/guest_dispatches/safe_havens.html
- AWI Safe Havens Mapping Project: <https://awionline.org/content/safe-havens-mapping-project-pets-domestic-violence-victims>
- Red Rover Relief Grants for DV: <https://www.redrover.org/node/1151>



Thank you for your contributions to this research:

- Project Connections Research Team:
 - Frank R. Ascione, Tina O. Hageman, Christie Hartman, Shelby McDonald, Jason St. Mary, Philip Tedeschi, and James Herbert Williams from the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work
 - Elizabeth Collins, Tamara Greene, and Amy Pohl from the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Colorado Domestic Violence Programs:
 - The agencies, administrators, and advocates who volunteered to recruit and interview the research participants
- Survivors:
 - Most importantly, thank you to the 291 mothers and children who courageously shared their stories in hopes that this research would benefit others!

Additional Information

- This report is in the public domain. While permission to reprint this publication is not necessary, it should be cited as:
- Project Connections Research Team (2016). *Colorado's research project on domestic violence, children, and pets: A report to the community*. Denver, CO: Project Connections.

For updates on this research, please go to www.ccadv.org/dvandpets.
For additional questions, please contact James Herbert Williams at James.Herbert@du.edu or Amy Pohl at APohl@ccadv.org.