

Colorado's Research on Domestic Violence, Children, & Pets: Executive Summary

Inspiring Colorado to End Domestic Violence

Background

Over the past 5 years, CCADV has partnered with the Graduate School of Social Work at the University of Denver to conduct statewide research looking at the impact on children who witness both animal abuse and domestic violence. Designated advocates at 22 domestic violence organizations were trained to help recruit mothers and their children to participate in the study, as well as how to conduct interviews with them to obtain data.

This project was an extension of Dr. Frank Ascione's groundbreaking work* regarding the Link, which first documented the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse in 1998. This work led to an earlier partnership between GSSW and CCADV when then Public Policy Director Amy Miller approached Dr. Ascione to help with the passage of [SB10-80](#) in 2010.

Participants

All mother-child dyads were clients at a Colorado domestic violence program when they enrolled in the study. To be eligible, they also must have had a pet in their home within the last year and the child had to have been between the ages of 7 and 12 at the time of the first interview. A total of 291 dyads participated in the study, and 180 completed follow-up interviews a year and a half later. Notably, 61% of mothers and 55% of children participants are Latino/a, with 55% of the mothers being born outside the USA (mostly from Mexico).

The Link between DV and Animal Abuse

- 30% of mothers reported that their abusive partner had threatened to harm their pet(s), and 26% reported that their partner had harmed or killed their pet.
- Non-Hispanic partners born in the U.S. were nearly 5 times more likely to harm pets.
- Physical violence towards the mothers was higher when the mother reported her partner threatened (but didn't harm) her pets.

Effects on Children

- Of those reporting harm, 71% of mothers reported that their child had seen or heard the abuse.
- Children were more than 2 times more likely to harm an animal when the mother's partner had harmed the animal.
- 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 did not witness animal cruelty.

This Colorado-specific research is ground breaking in many ways including the large number of participants, the richness of the follow-up data set, and the findings involving animal abuse, domestic violence, and children. Some results have already been published in academic journals, while some of the data is still being analyzed and written-up by various research team members.

Please view the [Community Report](#) for a more in-depth description of the project, data, and results. The [Practice Implications](#) and [Bibliography](#) sections of this site will be continually updated as more analyses are produced.

**Ascione, F.R. (1998). Battered women's reports of their partners' and their children's cruelty to animals. Journal of Emotional Abuse, 1, 119-133.*