

Animal abuse: A close relationship with domestic violence

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Abstract

This article aims to address domestic violence and its relation to animal abuse, and to propose alternative solutions. A close relation has been found between domestic violence and animal maltreatment. It is verified that the majority of the aggressors belong to the masculine gender and the most effective way to break the cycle of abuse is education, with the consequent awareness of respect for life in all its forms.

Keywords: domestic violence and animals; profile of the perpetrator; abused children; possible solutions to the problem; education and awareness.

Resumen - *Malos tratos a los animales: una estrecha relación con la violencia doméstica*

Este artículo pretende abordar la violencia doméstica y su relación con el maltrato animal y proponer soluciones alternativas. Se ha encontrado una estrecha relación entre la violencia doméstica y el maltrato animal. Se observa que la mayoría de los agresores pertenecen al género masculino y la manera más efectiva de romper el ciclo de abuso es la educación, con la consiguiente conciencia del respeto por la vida en todas sus formas.

Palabras clave: violencia doméstica y animales; perfil del agresor; niños víctimas de abuso; posibles soluciones para el problema; educación y concientización.

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1. Introduction

Until the 1960s and 1970s, social scientists paid little attention to forms of violence in which animals could be mistreated, women could be beaten by their husbands or friends, and children could be abused and neglected. They did not relate animal abuse to domestic violence and child abuse, which were treated as distinct forms of violence. Today, however, rather than being viewed as unrelated forms of violence, social science is finally dealing with the possible links between them. Ascione attributes the delay to the perception that these violence are closely connected mainly by the difficulty in defining and recording abuse, as well as the lack of interest of researchers in concentrating their studies on how animals are treated - or mistreated - in our society.¹

Domestic violence does not occur in isolation from other forms of abuse, and there is a growing recognition that domestic violence, child and pet abuse often occur in the same homes.² What is certain is that animal abuse and interpersonal violence toward human beings share common characteristics: both types of victims are living beings, have the capacity to feel pain and anguish, can exhibit physical signs of pain and suffering and can die, as a result of injuries inflicted.³

In the last decades, the concept of multispecies family has emerged, consisting of a family group composed of people who recognize and legitimize their pets as members of the family. An association between animal abuse and domestic violence was found and named internationally as *Link*.⁴

Domestic violence against women is defined⁵ in Brazilian law, in Law No. 11,340, of August 7, 2006, also called "Maria da Penha Law".⁶ It is not a contemporary phenomenon, but only in the last 50 years this problem has been treated with due importance, and policies and strategies have been developed to reduce its prevalence in society. Unfortunately, studies show that it is still a problem that affects millions of women worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, approximately 30% of women in the world between 15 and 69 years of age are abused by their partner. In Latin America, 25% to 50% of women suffer domestic violence. According to data from 2013 of the Secretariat of Policies for Brazilian Women, 38,020 women are beaten daily, and in 68.8% of the cases the perpetrators are the spouses, companions or ex-husbands.⁷ In Brazil, it is estimated that the co-occurrence of domestic violence by intimate partners against women and abuse of family animals is between 71% and 83%, according to data obtained from shelters for abused women in 11 cities in the state of São Paulo.⁸ In addition, 71.8% of the incidents happen in the victim's own home, allowing us to understand that it is in the domestic sphere where most of the situations of violence experienced by women occur.⁹

It is difficult, however, to determine the number of children directly victimized or exposed to domestic violence, but it is estimated that in the United States between 10% and 20% of children are in this situation.¹⁰ In Brazil, in turn, the "Dial Report" service of the Presidential Secretariat of Human Rights (SDH) registered 162,000 reports of physical, psychological and sexual violence against children and adolescents. Data from the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect estimates that domestic violence reaches 18,000 children per day in Brazil.¹¹

Due to the relevance and gravity of the theme, this article presents as research problems: How animals are affected by domestic violence? What is the profile of the domestic aggressor? What are the effects of domestic violence on children, in relation to animals? and What are the possible solutions to this problem? It

¹ ASCIONE, F. Old wine in a new bottle, in *Children and animals: Exploring the roots of kindness and cruelty* (West Lafayette, IN 2005) 26.

² KOGAN, L. et al. Crosstrails: A unique foster program to provide safety for pets of women in safehouses, in *Violence Against Women*. 10 (2004) 418, in <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1077801204263198> [last visited: 25 April 2018].

³ ASCIONE, F. Animal abuse and youth violence, in *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. (Sep. 2011) 3, in <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/188677.pdf> [last visited: 25 June 2018].

⁴ GARCIA, R. - BARRERO, S. Violência doméstica e abuso animal, in <http://www.agrarias.ufpr.br/portal/blog/noticias/artigo-violencia-domestica-e-abuso-animais> [last visited: 27 June 2018].

⁵ "Any action or omission based on gender that causes death, injury, physical, sexual or psychological suffering and moral or property damage, ... in any intimate relationship of affection, in which the aggressor lives or has lived with the offended, regardless of cohabitation".

⁶ See Law 11,340 (2006), in http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2004-2006/2006/lei/11340.htm [last visited: 27 June 2018].

⁷ GARCIA, BARRERO, *supra* note 4.

⁸ Câmara Municipal de Curitiba. Maus-tratos a animais indicam violência doméstica, defendem especialistas, in http://www.cmc.pr.gov.br/ass_det.php?not=29200#&panel1-1 [last visited: 27 April 2018].

⁹ WAISELFISZ, J. Mapa da violência, 2012. Atualização: homicídios em mulheres no Brasil, in http://mapadaviolencia.org.br/pdf2012/MapaViolencia2012_atual_mulheres.pdf [last visited: 27 June 2018].

¹⁰ GARCIA, BARRERO, *supra* note 4.

¹¹ Fundação Telefônica Brasil. Pouco denunciada, violência contra crianças e adolescentes é enraizada na sociedade brasileira, in <http://fundacaotelefonica.org.br/promenino/trabalho infantil/noticia/pouco-denunciada-violencia-contra-criancas-e-adolescentes-e-enraizada-na-sociedade-brasileira/> [last visited: 13 May 2018].

aims to address domestic violence, connecting it to animal abuse, and to propose alternative solutions. In order to reach the above objectives, this work is structured as follows: firstly, domestic violence and its relation to animal abuse will be addressed; then the child victim of domestic violence who also witnesses the abuse and/or death of his/her pet and who may become a reproducer of the violence witnessed or suffered, both with animals and with humans, will be targeted; and, finally, possible solutions for the problem will be identified.

2. The multifaceted domestic violence

In virtually every way, humans like to exert power over other animals. Legally, pets are considered property and this makes them easy targets for abuse. Because humans determine the laws and regulations about how animals are treated - which animals are worthy of legal protection - and given the ineffective response of the criminal justice system to cruelty to animals, aggressors are in a superior position of power and probably will not be deterred from their actions. In addition, animals are the only victims of systematic discrimination and exploitation that truly can not speak in their own name.¹²

Animal abuse is often the tip of the iceberg and the first warning sign of an individual or family in distress. In cases of domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse, animal abuse may be a way for the perpetrator to silence the victims or prevent them from leaving a violent relationship. Abusers kill, injure or threaten animals to exert power over human victims and show them what could happen to them. Killing a family pet can eliminate a source of comfort and support for the human victim. Sometimes the victims themselves abuse animals, either to protect the animal from further harm or to displace its hostility against the aggressor.¹³

Violence against humans or animals may take the form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect. The way animals are seen in a family is a window into interpersonal relationships and family dynamics. Researchers who encounter cruelty, abuse or neglect of animals are rarely surprised to see other issues hidden beneath the surface, such as domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse.¹⁴ Flynn complements, stating that animal abuse tends to be conducted mostly by men.¹⁵ For Garcia and Barrero, "although men may also be victims of domestic violence, women are by far the largest victims of this type of interpersonal violence".¹⁶ And, according to Flynn, as with other forms of family violence, abusive treatment of animals occurs at all socioeconomic levels. However, just like child and women abuse, perpetrators may be represented mostly among the lowest socioeconomic individuals.¹⁷

Relatively little attention is given to one aspect of the problem: the intentional abuse of animals as a method of domestic violence. Often, abusers exploit the close emotional bond, shared by a victim and his animal companion, to cause harm to the human victim. The abuser may beat or kill the animal to cause emotional pain to the woman, use threats against her to gain obedience or control over her, or use those methods to abuse or coerce her return after she leaves the house. The victims suffer from anguish and despair as they witness their partner torturing their beloved animal before their eyes and often speak of how their concern for the animal prevents them from leaving the house. Since institutions that house women victims of domestic violence do not normally accept animals, victims that choose to let themselves go must leave their animal at home. In doing so, they are vulnerable to harm through continued abuse of the animal - abuse that can force them to return home and to the abuser only to protect the animal.¹⁸ Animal abuse is, therefore, a form of power and control used to manipulate, intimidate and retaliate against others in domestic violence.¹⁹

Adams further assures that there is a real threat or death of an animal, usually a pet, as a way to establish or maintain control over women and children who are being sexually victimized. And there is the

¹² FLYNN, C. Acknowledging the "Zoological Connection": A sociological analysis of animal cruelty, in *Society & Animals*. 9 (2001) 79, in

<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f4b5/29859a8332c2849c754d68fe1d989795f469.pdf> [last visited: 27 June 2018].

¹³ National Link Coalition. Web Page: <http://nationallinkcoalition.org/> [last visited: 26 April 2018].

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ FLYNN, C. Exploring the link between corporal punishment and children's cruelty to animals, in *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 61 (1999) 972, in https://www.academia.edu/5088023/Exploring_the_Link_between_Corporal_Punishment_and_Childrens_Cruelty_to_Animals?auto=download [last visited: 26 April 2018].

¹⁶ GARCIA, BARRERO, *supra* note 4.

¹⁷ FLYNN, *supra* note 12, at 75-76.

¹⁸ UPADHYA, V. The abuse of animals as a method of domestic violence: The need for criminalization, in *Emory Law Journal*. 63 (2014) 1163, in http://law.emory.edu/elj/_documents/volumes/63/5/comments/upadhy.pdf [last visited: 26 April 2018].

¹⁹ National Link Coalition, *supra* note 13.

use of animals in rape of women or children, or to get some kind of sexual gratification.²⁰ Sexual victimization of women, children, and animals, however, occurs in a way that is invisible to most people.²¹

The National Link Coalition uses the Duluth Model of Power and Control²² to explain the link between animal abuse and domestic violence:

- a. Isolation: the aggressor refuses to allow the woman to take her pet to the vet and prohibits her from socializing her dog with other dogs.
- b. Threats: the aggressor threatens to injure or kill the pet if the woman leaves home or becomes independent.
- c. Legal abuse: custody battles involving pets. The perpetrator presses charges of theft if the woman leaves the house with the animal.
- d. Denying and blaming: the aggressor blames the woman or the animal for his cruelty. He kills the pet and says that it did not matter because the animal was old.
- e. Emotional abuse: the aggressor gives away, kills or disappears with the pet to take away the source of the woman's unconditional love. He also forces her to be part of sexual abuse of animals.
- f. Economic abuse: the abuser refuses to allow the woman to spend money on pet food or veterinary care.
- g. Intimidation: the aggressor harms or kills pets: "Next time it will be you ...". The target of the abuser also covers family pets or friends who help the woman to escape.
- h. Use of children: the abuser harms or kills pets to bully children. He blames the woman for the "disappearance" of the family pet to create disagreements between her and the children.²³

Adams also assures that a close relationship between mistreatment of animals and domestic violence has been found. In these situations, when an act of animal cruelty occurs in connection with cases of domestic violence, violence is more likely to be carried out by men. "Battering is one of several forms of male dominant behavior over women", and the woman "has to protect everybody – animal, children, herself."²⁴ Fernández, in turn, points out that different studies show the occurrence of cruelty against animals in houses where women are harmed.²⁵

Ascione conducted a survey, in the northern part of the State of Utah, United States of America. The sample consisted of 38 women aged between 20 and 51 years, with an average age of 30 years, who had been in a shelter because they were abused by their companions. The women agreed to grant interviews only to the shelter team. Based on the data collected, Ascione concluded that 71% of the women interviewed also reported aggression on their pets. There have been cases such as threats of putting kittens in a blender, burying live cats and decapitating them, shooting and killing cats, letting dogs starve, neglecting veterinary care, among others.²⁶

Flynn raises an interesting point: when pets witness the woman being physically assaulted, they can play two roles. The first is to comfort, emotionally supporting the victim after the violent episode. The second is to protect, sometimes risking their own physical integrity. Anyway, witnessing the abuse of a victim is always very disturbing for the pet. Similar to stress symptoms in humans, women reported many physical manifestations of stress on their pets when they witnessed their abuse, including tremors, shrinkage, and urination, among others. It is important to note, therefore, that both the violence suffered by the woman harms the animal, and the violence suffered by the animal harms the woman.²⁷ For Adams, hurting animals, such as hurting children, may be the act that convinces the woman of the need to leave her partner. Only harm to the child can convince the woman to leave the house because her

²⁰ ADAMS, C. Bringing peace home: A feminist philosophical perspective on the abuse of women, children, and pet animals, in *Hypatia*. 9 (1994) 65, in <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1994.tb00433.x> [last visited: 26 June 2018].

²¹ *Id.* at 72.

²² See BASINSKAITE, D. et al. Profissionais contra a violência doméstica: um manual de formação, in http://pact-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/PACT_Training_Manual_PT-1.pdf and BRITO, M. - ORTIZ, P. Vera Book: guia de apoio à rede Vera, in https://www.esdime.pt/download/vera_book_guiade_apoio.pdf [last visited: 8 May 2018].

²³ National Link Coalition, *supra* note 13.

²⁴ ADAMS, C. Woman-battering and harm to animals, in *Animals and women: Feminist theoretical explorations* (Durham, NC 1995) 77.

²⁵ FERNÁNDEZ, L. El maltrato animal desde um punto de vista criminológico, in *Derecho y Cambio Social*. 10 (2013) 4, in <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5476723> [last visited: 26 June 2018].

²⁶ ASCIONE, F. Battered women's reports of their partners and their children's cruelty to animals, in http://www.vachss.com/guest_dispatches/ascione_3.html [last visited: 26 June 2018].

²⁷ FLYNN, C. A sociological analysis of animal abuse, in *The international handbook of animal abuse and cruelty: Theory, research, and application* (West Lafayette, IN 2008) 161.

tolerance of what is acceptable against the child has been violated, but the death of her pets is the final sign that convinces a battered woman that her partner is capable of committing murders. The extent to which she cares about her children and pets is the extent to which he can harm her by mistreating them. He abuses the animals or children knowing that, in this way, it will harm her.²⁸

The following part will specifically focus on children victims of domestic violence who also witness the abuse and/or death of their pet, and who may become a reproducer of the violence witnessed or suffered, both with animals and with humans.

3. Are abused children likely to be reproducers of violence?

Baldry conducted a survey in Rome, Italy, involving 268 girls and 264 boys, with an average age of 11 years and 8 months, who were facing domestic abuse and who were victims of bullying. Questionnaires were administered on victimization of domestic abuse, bullying and participation in animal abuse. Children who experienced or witnessed domestic violence were three times more likely to engage in animal abuse compared to participants who did not witness or experienced domestic violence.²⁹ Randall Lockwood, senior vice president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), said in an interview that children who witnessed animal abuse or they themselves were abused demonstrated a behavior known as "reactive abuse": they re-enact what was done to them, both with younger siblings and with pets. Children who have witnessed the family animal being mistreated will usually kill it in order to have at least some control over what they deem to be "the inevitable fate of the animal".³⁰

Kellert and Felthous argue that it is easier in childhood to practice violence against an animal than against parents, siblings or adults.³¹ Concerning the relationship between domestic violence and children who abuse pets, Boat, Loar and Phillips assert that exposure to cruelty to animals can have a significant impact on the developing child, including desensitization and decline of empathy, reinforcing the idea that the child, as well as the pet, is disposable. For the authors, witnessing cruelty to animals in the domestic environment leads to the imitation of abusive behavior.³²

When children abuse animals, they may be imitating the violence they experienced at home - either between parents or the violence that parents have inflicted on them. Children in homes where women or child abuse has occurred may also have witnessed animal abuse. Violent men may have threatened or injured the pets of their partner and/or children, creating a climate of terror for human and animal victims.³³

The emotional impact on children who witness or perpetrate acts of cruelty to animals can be lifelong and devastating. Animal abuse is part of an intergenerational cycle of violence. Children who live in homes with domestic violence and animal abuse absorb unhealthy family attitudes and rules and pass these values on to their own children as they grow up³⁴ and for Dadds, in violent and abusive families, the pet usually serves as an object against which violence can be perpetrated.³⁵

Flynn conducted a survey involving two hundred and sixty-seven undergraduates at a public university in the southeastern United States in the late 1990s. Students completed a questionnaire asking about their experiences with family violence and cruelty to animals. The sample was predominantly white (73%). About one-fifth were African American. Eight out of 10 were under 21 and 92% were under 25. Most were single (90%) and had no children (96%). Almost 92% had brothers and sisters. Approximately 90% had pets in their families during childhood and 80% currently owned pets. The results revealed that those who committed cruelty to animals in childhood or adolescence were physically punished more often by their parents than those who did not commit animal abuse. The combined psychological effects of being both the recipient of a parent's violence and the perpetrator of violence against an animal may not only compound personality problems but also double the instrumental use of violence. In other words, men can

²⁸ ADAMS, *supra* note 24, at 76-77.

²⁹ BALDRY, A. Animal abuse among preadolescents directly and indirectly victimized at school and at home, in *Criminal Behaviour and Mental Health*. 15 (2005) 103, in <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/cbm.42> [last visited: 30 June 2018].

³⁰ SIEBERT, C. The animal-cruelty syndrome, in *The New York Times Magazine* [online], in

<https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/magazine/13dogfighting-t.html> [last visited: 28 June 2018].

³¹ KELLERT, S. - FELTHOUS, A. Childhood cruelty toward animals among criminals and noncriminals, in *Cruelty to animals and interpersonal violence: Readings in research and application* (West Lafayette, IN 1998) 205.

³² BOAT, B. - LOAR, L. - PHILLIPS, A. Collaborating to assess, intervene, and prosecute animal abuse: A continuum of protection for children and animals, in *The international handbook of animal abuse and cruelty: Theory, research, and application* (West Lafayette, IN 2008) 395.

³³ FLYNN, *supra* note 12, at 81.

³⁴ National Link Coalition, *supra* note 13.

³⁵ DADDS, M. Conduct problems and cruelty to animals in children: What is the link?, in *The international handbook of animal abuse and cruelty: Theory, research, and application* (West Lafayette, IN 2008) 119.

learn that violence is appropriate when they are physically hit by their parents and when they have a chance to perpetrate interpersonal violence on animals.³⁶

Of concern is the way in which sexual exploitation influences behavior in relation to animals, as evidence suggests that child victims of sexual abuse injure animals.³⁷ Testimony from survivors of child sexual abuse revealed that the threats and abuse of their pets were often used to establish control over them while also ensuring their silence, forcing them to decide between victimization or death of the animal.³⁸

It is estimated that 90 percent of children in battered families are aware of this violence. Children need to express their feelings and concerns, but instead they may find an atmosphere of silence because it is not safe to express feelings in the presence of a controlling man. The abuser can also influence children to be abusive to pets. The mother, in turn, must not only witness the children being coerced to hurt the animals, but she also can not intervene to stop the abuse. It can be seen, therefore, how closely intertwined are physical violence and psychological abuse.³⁹

Adams goes on to say that those 90 percent of children who are aware of their mother's partner's aggressive behavior may witness beatings, rapes, or animal injuries, thereby realizing their mother's impotence. Even if children want to protect their mother or a pet, they are often unable to do so and feel guilty about their inability to intervene. If they try to protect their mother or the animal, they themselves are at risk of being injured. They can then blame the mother for her impotence and become angry with her, not with the aggressor.⁴⁰

In children at risk of becoming future violent aggressors, cruelty to animals may be one of the first symptoms of misbehavior to appear. Developing a sense of empathy for animals is, admittedly, a bridge to the strengthening of greater empathy for humans, making violence against them less likely to occur.⁴¹ For this reason there are so many studies on the link between animal cruelty in childhood and subsequent violence against humans, and certainly domestic violence is a major factor to be considered.

As abuse against an animal is an indicator of a chaotic home in which the safety of children is at risk, such abuse must be perceived and documented in the same way as a human well-being problem and redefined also as domestic violence.⁴² The following part will focus on measures that can contribute to the solution of the problem.

4. Possible solutions to the problem

Knowing that family violence and animal abuse are linked, the existence of a broad educational and public awareness program on this link is important. Community presentations, special events, specific approaches on the subject in schools, university programs and training for professionals will raise awareness and can leverage effective organizational strategies. Animal abuse is now recognized as part of family violence with serious implications for victims and society. Recognizing the link between animal abuse and domestic violence, child abuse and elder abuse will provide practitioners with an important tool. By working together, professional and public awareness will be lifted, which in turn will lead to safer and healthier communities and more effective programs.⁴³

Domestic violence statutes should treat animal cruelty as an offense when committed for the purpose of harming or coercing the human victim. The failure of the law to do so leaves a powerful method of under-regulated harm and thus leaves the abuse of humans and animals underestimated. The designation of animal abuse as a domestic violence crime fills a major gap in the criminal approach to such violence and enables a large number of specialized protection and rehabilitation measures currently available to victims, such as protection orders and mandatory therapy for the perpetrator. Therefore, the frequency with which domestic violence and animal abuse co-occur, the serious harm that this abuse inflicts, and the substantial benefits of protection and remediation that follow suggest that criminalizing such abuse is a necessary and highly effective approach against domestic and animal abuse.⁴⁴

Shelters for women victims of domestic violence are an option for those victims who have left their homes, but have nowhere to go. Ascione addresses a number of practical and policy issues that need to be

³⁶ FLYNN, *supra* note 15, at 971-981.

³⁷ ADAMS, *supra* note 20, at 65.

³⁸ *Id.* at 67.

³⁹ ADAMS, *supra* note 24, at 76.

⁴⁰ ADAMS, *supra* note 24, at 77.

⁴¹ ASCIONE, *supra* note 3, at 10.

⁴² GARCIA, R. Violência contra animais e violência doméstica: qual a ligação existente?, in https://www.jcnet.com.br/editorias_noticias.php?codigo=151619&ano=2009 [last visited: 28 June 2018].

⁴³ National Link Coalition, *supra* note 13.

⁴⁴ UPADHYA, *supra* note 18, at 1163-1164.

raised when implementing programs to address the pets of women who enter shelters as health and space management issues often prevent the presence of animals in such facilities. First, the domestic violence shelter team needs to be trained on the potential significance of separating pets and cruelty to animals as additional emotional stressors for both women and children. This means that the administrators of these sites should recognize the need for victims to be accompanied by their pets. Second, information on animal abuse can be valuable in developing safety plans for women who remain at home with their abusers and for those women who plan to return home after staying in a shelter. Third, animal shelters need to develop policies that ensure methods for dealing with an aggressor who tries to claim the pet (in some cases as a method of further coercion or intimidation of his partner).⁴⁵

Ascione and Shapiro assert that another important measure is the emergence in the last two decades of the field of Animal Law, which is a powerful instrument of innovation in relation to the link between domestic violence and animal abuse. Evidence of its growth is also found in periodicals, conferences, courses, case books and lawyers specializing in Animal Law. The field of Animal Law is largely responsible for a number of judicial, legislative and regulatory developments that provide a relevant policy for linking domestic violence and animal abuse. In addition to their punitive and deterrent functions for perpetrators, laws educate and shape the attitudes of the general public toward the importance of animal abuse and its relation to other forms of violence. Recognition of animals as sentient beings may support initiatives such as prosecution for wrongful injury and mental distress, in addition to the market value of a battered pet, as well as reclassification of animal abuse from a crime against property to a crime against society. Again, such a classification would allow animal abuse to be viewed more seriously in the context of criminal justice.⁴⁶

Zorza says that in the United States the laws already criminalize animal abuse. In Maine, however, a law that was passed March 31, 2006 allows the acts to protect pets prospectively when victims seek legal protection for themselves and their pets. Specifically, the law allows the victim to take the animals, have the animals housed or cared for by someone the victim designates, or make other arrangements to protect pets, such as prohibiting the abuser from having any contact with the animal.⁴⁷

In Brazil, however, the link between domestic violence and animal abuse has not been much studied nor recognized in policies and strategies that combat domestic violence. This is, however, a vitally important aspect when considering that, according to figures from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), 44.3% of the households have at least one dog and 17.7% at least one cat. Therefore, pets can be part of the domestic violence cycle and be the first victims. In this way, the suspicion of abuse against them can be used as an indicator for the detection and/or prevention of other types of violence. This recognition allows a prompt intervention by a multiprofessional health team, with the participation of veterinarians, who may be the first or only professionals to have access to situations of abuse in the context of the family.⁴⁸

When animals are abused, people are at risk; when people are abused, animals are at risk. Increased awareness of the link is encouraging lawmakers, community agencies and stakeholders to act, giving greater importance to suspected animal abuse, knowing that they may also be preventing other forms of violence.⁴⁹

5. Conclusion

It is believed that the proposed objectives were achieved, as well as the research problems were elucidated: the animals are directly hit by domestic violence in the form of beatings, mutilations, deaths and even being used as objects of coercion for human victims; the majority profile of the aggressor is the individual of the masculine gender, who believes that the woman, the children and the animals are his properties and he can dispose of them according to his will; children who are victims of domestic violence, besides suffering physical and psychological abuse, may in the future become perpetrators of cruelties against animals and even against people; and finally, possible solutions were found to the problem, such as the sheltering of female victims - together with their children and animals -, therapy for perpetrators and the adoption of legislative and judicial measures that take into consideration, in addition to people, also the animals involved in situations of domestic violence. The author also adds the need for therapeutic care for the victims of violence, so that they can overcome, or at least ease, the existing and future effects of the

⁴⁵ ASCIONE, *supra* note 26.

⁴⁶ ASCIONE, F. - SHAPIRO, K. People and animals, kindness and cruelty: Research directions and policy implications, in *Journal of Social Issues*. 65 (2009) 577-578.

⁴⁷ ZORZA, J. Maine's encouraging law protecting animals in domestic violence situations, in *Domestic Violence Report*. 11 (2006) 78, in

<https://www.civresearchinstitute.com/online/PDF/Maine%E2%80%99s%20Encouraging%20Law%20Protecting%20Animals%20in%20Domestic%20Violence%20Situations.pdf> [last visited: 9 May 2018].

⁴⁸ GARCIA, BARRERO, *supra* note 4.

⁴⁹ National Link Coalition, *supra* note 13.

abuse.

The relevance and importance of the research carried out is therefore perceived, as it is concluded that there is a close link between domestic violence and animal abuse. Not only the people but also the animals suffer in violent and pathological homes, and it takes a close look of the whole society to detect the danger to which they are submitted to.

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