

“He say’s he’ll kill the dog if I leave”

Family violence, pets and vets : An Australian study



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Commonwealth Mongrel

Vet by training – worked in practice, out in the field, and with the US Navy

Now a pathologist who moonlights as a clinician

Special interest in Veterinary Forensics, particularly the Pathology of Abuse and the link between domestic/family violence and animal abuse



Scarlett O’Hairy and Claude Monet

Domestic violence in Australia: And the Link

- 31% of Australian women have experienced physical violence from a partner
- 55% of female homicide victims were killed **by an intimate partner**
- At least one woman is killed every week in Australia by a current or former partner
- Domestic violence is **the** leading risk factor contributing to death, disability and illness in women aged 15-44 in a study in Victoria

Domestic violence in Australia – an overview of the issues. 22 Nov 2011. Liesl Michell. Published on the Parliament of Australia website, www.aph.gov.au. Accessed 25th October 2013



*“When animals are abused,
people are at risk;*

*When people are abused,
animals are at risk.”*



The joy of the human-animal bond



Pets simply help us to love life...

Abusers can manipulate this strong emotional bond in order to induce fear and control

- Strong emotional attachments create an opportunity for exploitation by those who seek to control, coerce or dominate others to fulfill their own needs for power and control

“I’ve loved this dog longer than any relationship I’ve ever had....”

-- “Nicole,” in La Crosse, WI
women’s shelter seeking
Safe Haven housing for her dog





Links: those who abuse animals abuse people

Batterers who also abuse pets are more likely to use all of the following methods of abuse:

Physical Violence
Sexual Violence
Emotional Violence
Marital rape
Stalking

Simmons, C.A. & Lehman, P. (2007), Exploring the link between pet abuse and controlling behaviors in violent relationships. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 22(9), 1211-1222.

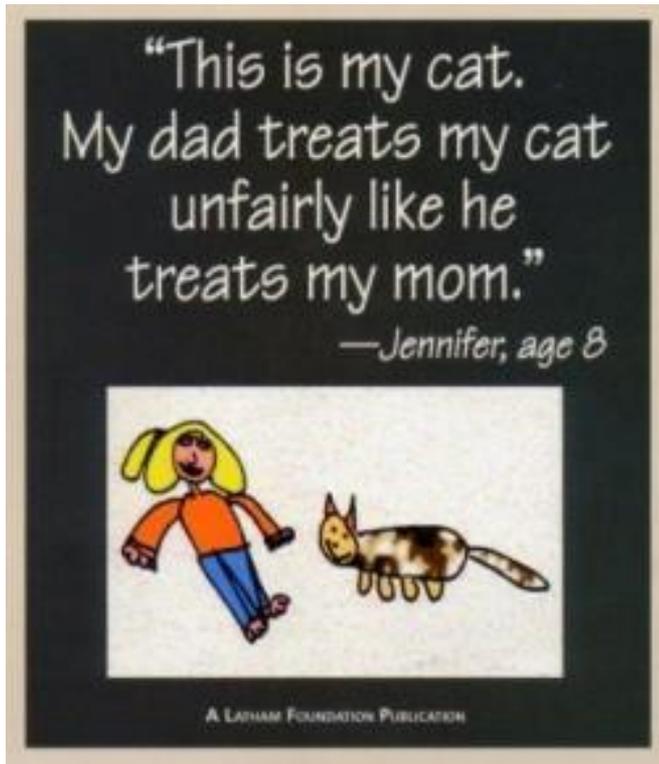
Animal Abuse increases the risk of fatal abuse

**The 3 top indicators that a woman will be killed by her batterer:
(Nashville, TN)**

- **He has threatened suicide**
- **He has access to weapons**
- **He has threatened to, or has mutilated or killed pets**

Nashville's domestic violence phone hotline began asking callers these three questions: an affirmative answer → higher priority response.

After 1 year, DV fatalities decreased 80%



In various previous studies, the majority of pet owning victims of DV report their pet has also been abused, including in VIC (52.9%), QLD (77%) and several studies in the US (70-85%).

Volant et al, 2008, Tiplady et al, 2012

Pet abuse isn't just dangerous for the animals

33% of battered women in Australia— and their children – delay, can't or won't find refuge in fear for their animals' welfare



Volant et al, 2008.

"My ex-partner threatened to kill all our animals if we left... He beat my son's dog in a rage, she was only trying to protect us. I tried to stop him so he beat me instead".



Rural and Remote locations

A serious, understudied rural issue...

“It wasn’t just the cats and dogs, it was the sheep and the chickens. I was terrified for their welfare. I knew if I were to leave, he wouldn’t hesitate to kill them. He had done it before.”

-- Susan Walsh, 50, New York Times (2006)



Susan Walsh, 50, whose testimony before the Maine legislature resulted in the first state law that allows animals to be included in protection orders in domestic violence cases

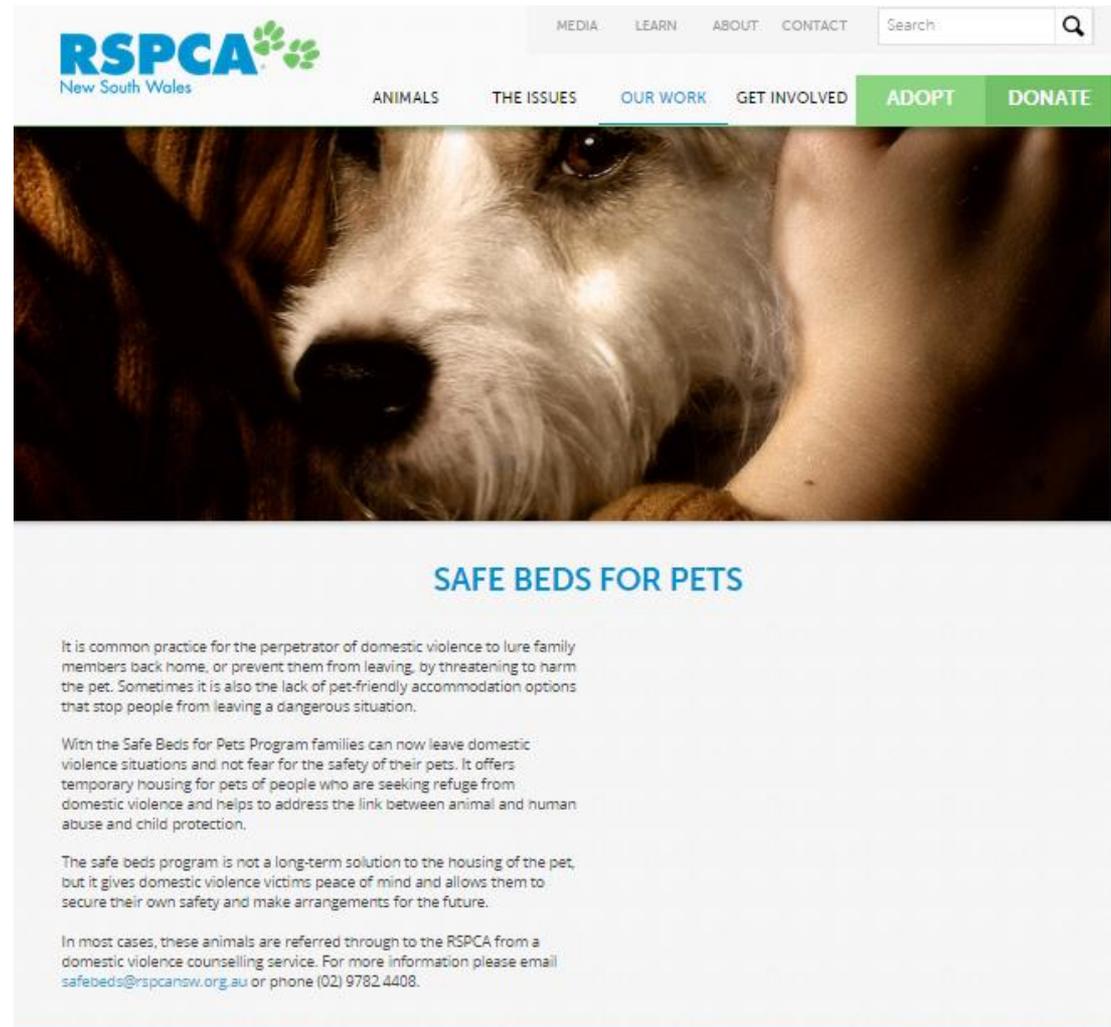
Two projects underway currently

- › 1. “Family Violence, Pets, and Vets: An Australian Study”
- › 2. “Safe Beds for Pets: A review”

RSPCA run program in NSW which fosters animals for victims of domestic/family violence

We are analysing the 10 year old program from two sides:

1. A Sydney based Domestic Violence Service (Referral data)
2. RSPCA NSW (Intake data)



The screenshot shows the RSPCA New South Wales website. The header includes the RSPCA logo, navigation links (MEDIA, LEARN, ABOUT, CONTACT), a search bar, and menu items (ANIMALS, THE ISSUES, OUR WORK, GET INVOLVED, ADOPT, DONATE). The main content area features a close-up image of a dog's face. Below the image, the title 'SAFE BEDS FOR PETS' is displayed in blue. The text explains that it is common for domestic violence perpetrators to lure family members back home or prevent them from leaving by threatening to harm the pet. It also notes that the lack of pet-friendly accommodation options can prevent people from leaving dangerous situations. The program offers temporary housing for pets of people seeking refuge from domestic violence and helps address the link between animal and human abuse and child protection. The program is not a long-term solution but provides peace of mind and allows victims to secure their own safety. For more information, users are directed to email safebeds@rspcansw.org.au or call (02) 9782 4408.

Where are we now?

Awaiting human ethics approval

Pilot study ready to go

Planning to roll out across various services end of 2014





Thank you for listening

Any Questions?

