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Dennis D. Long
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Joan H. Long
Hospice Care of South Carolina

Shanti J. Kulkarni
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

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DENNIS D. LONG

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Department of Social Work

JOAN H. LONG

Hospice Care of South Carolina

SHANTI J. KULKARNI

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Department of Social Work

Research indicates an association between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty. This article examine the virtues and limitations of creating statutory authority requiring professionals to report substantiated abuse, neglect, and cruelty across service delivery systems (e.g. child and adult protect services and humane societies). Such a legislative approach authorizes and legitimizes "mandated cross-sector reporting." The probative and research value of this type of initiative is examined as well as ethical and political considerations.

Keywords: *violence, cruelty, reporting, research, practice, pets, service animals, interpersonal violence, animal cruelty*

In American culture, people often develop meaningful and sustained relationships with pets. It is not unusual for dogs,

cats, and other animals to be embraced as valued members in the family unit (Barker & Barker, 1988). Many animals dwell in households and form special relationships with family members by "providing unconditional love and opportunities for affection; functioning as a confidant, playmate, and companion; and assisting in the achievement of trust, responsibility, and empathy toward others" (Fontaine, 2000, p. 390). The role that service animals play in the lives of people with disabilities highlights the reciprocal caregiving that can occur between humans and pets.

Examining the relationship between animals and humans in the context of the family constellation and interpersonal violence is a worthy endeavor. Animals represent living assets in the lives of an appreciable number of Americans. People become attached to and form social-emotional bonds with animals. Bikales (1975) describes the family pet as a "significant other" in the home.

The human-animal relationship and the role of animals in the physical and social lives of Americans constitute unique phenomenon for study. In a male-dominated society, it is the power of men over women, children, and animals that underlies many forms of violence and contributes to a shared vulnerability to abuse (Adams, 1995; Flynn, 2000a). Interpersonal violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another personal, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation." (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). Interpersonal violence often occurs when people in positions of power, typically men, exert power and control over their disadvantaged counterparts (e.g. women and children).

The purpose of this article is to examine the virtues and shortcomings of mandated reporting of interpersonal violence and animal cruelty across service delivery system types, human and animal. While recognition of a relationship between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty is an important step, collaboration between service systems holds promise for better understanding violent behavior and coordination of services for families and animals.

What Does Research Tell Us?

Although mostly descriptive in nature, a growing literature developed over the past decade documents an association between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty (Arkow, 1998; Ascione, 1998; Becker & French, 2004; Flynn, 2000b; Jorgenson & Maloney, 1999; Quinlisk, 1999; Trolinger, 2001). The consensus of research findings suggests that "animal abuse often occurs in conjunction with domestic violence" (Favor & Strand, 2003, p. 243). For example, when considering three research studies examining female pet owners residing in shelters, Favor and Strand state "the percentage of women who reported that their partners had threatened or harmed their pets ranged from 46.5% to 72%" (2003, p. 239). Often, cruelty towards pets can be viewed as another tactic which an abuser uses to control his female partner. In other cases, abusers' substance abuse, lack of emotional regulation, and poor impulse control may be responsible for violence that results in everyone in the household becoming a target, including pets.

However, this body of research is not without its' limitations. For example, Favor and Strand (2003) note that these studies frequently rely upon nonprobabilistic, convenience samples of women residing in shelters or participating in domestic violence programs. Overall, we know far less about victims of interpersonal violence who do not seek formal services. It is likely that women with strong attachments to animals are further under-represented because of their reluctance take refuge in shelters where pets are prohibited (Kidd & Kidd, 1994).

Becker and French conclude that animal abuse can be viewed as a "part of the continuum of abuse in a family" (2004, p. 401). When evidence of physical abuse of family members is present in the home, there is a likelihood of animal abuse and visa versa. Abusers commit acts of violence as a means of control to coerce others to their will and ways. Children, women, and animals are particularly vulnerable as victims within the family as they are often physically weaker and frequently emotionally and materially dependent upon the abuser. Behavior intended to cause pain, suffering, or distress to a person or animal can be conceptualized as an unacceptable means to control-oriented ends.

The First Strike® campaign, sponsored by The Humane Society of the United States, is a community oriented program that provides practical information for increasing public and professional awareness of the connection between cruelty to animals and human violence (visit www.hsus.org). The campaign promotes a view of family and interpersonal violence that transcends categories (e.g. animal cruelty, partner abuse, child abuse) broadening interpersonal to include other species as well as family to include non-humans.

Animal Cruelty, Interpersonal Violence, and Intervention

Netting, Wilson, and New (1987) suggest that the animal-human bond has broad and important implications for helping professionals. Beyond the use of animals as resident animals, service companions, therapeutic agents, and forms of assistance (Arkow, 2004; Behm, 2004; Fontaine, 2000), animal abuse may alert us to the fact that interpersonal violence is also occurring in the home. For example, a parent who abuses a family pet may also be abusing other family members. Favor and Strand (2003) encourage helping professionals to "incorporate questions about animal abuse in psychosocial assessments" (p. 245).

Favor and Strand (2003) acknowledge that although the "social work literature has recognized the connections between domestic violence and child abuse (e.g. Pulido, 2001; Featherstone & Trinder, 1997), the role of animals in family violence has been ignored." (p. 237) To understand this disregard, Favor and Strand note "social work's traditional mission has been to foster *human* welfare" not animal welfare (2003, p. 240). In addition, animal rights and family protection agencies often represent independent or marginally-linked organizational structures in many communities and states. Consequently, services for the protection of humans and animals frequently lack integration and coordination.

The segregation of animal and human welfare groups in American has occurred despite the historical emergence of child-saving institutions from animal protection societies. It is important to note that in the United States, the origins of

organized efforts to protect children from interpersonal violence can be traced to the New York Society for the Protection of Animals in 1874 (Zilney & Zilney, 2005).

Given a documented link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence, helping professionals should recognize that if animal cruelty is occurring in a family, then the possibility that interpersonal violence (e.g. child or partner abuse) is also occurring needs to be explored. The converse is also true. With this understanding and knowledge, it becomes incumbent for professionals to examine and advocate for aggressive, timely, and effective means to protect vulnerable groups of people and animals from harm, promote human dignity and the care of animals, and thwart violence.

The Reporting of Violence and Cruelty

Most states require social workers and other professionals (e.g. social workers, counselors, psychologists, teachers, nurses, and physicians) to report interpersonal violence against children and older adults to appropriate child or adult protection agencies. Similarly, veterinarians often have an ethical or legal obligation to report animal cruelty to prescribed animal rights organizations (e.g. humane societies) or legal authorities. Under these "Good Samaritan Laws," veterinarians are granted legal protection in various states from civil or criminal liability when notifying authorities of animal mistreatment and cruelty (Nolen, 2001). These types of mandates and protections promote *in-sector reporting*, where protective reporting of violence levied against women, children, and animals takes place to separate, independently administered organizational structures (e.g. criminal justice for domestic violence, child protective services, and humane societies).

It is important to note that mandatory reporting of interpersonal violence to police and authorities is controversial. For example, some states require physicians to make such reports. Domestic violence organizations often oppose such reporting when it takes away the woman's self-determination and erects a barrier for women seeking medical care.

Cross-sector reporting is exemplified by law requiring "veterinarians who have reasonable cause to know or suspect that

a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, or who observed the child being subjected to circumstance or conditions which would reasonably result in abuse or neglect to immediately report the information, with immunity from civil or criminal liability, to the local department of social services or law enforcement agency" (Arkow, 1998, p. 411). Nolen confirms, "There is speculation veterinarians will eventually be required to report not only animal cruelty, but also child abuse, domestic violence, and senior citizen abuse, as must other license health care professionals. Already in Colorado and Illinois, veterinarians must notify authorities of suspected child abuse and senior abuse, respectively" (2001, p. 648). The requirement of veterinarians to notify authorities of suspected child or senior abuse points to the need for veterinarians to receive education and training about issues of interpersonal violence.

When considering Colorado and Illinois law, it can be argued that in certain instances of cruelty toward animals, veterinarians have an obligation and responsibility to report information to appropriate human service or law enforcement organizations. Conversely, cross-sector reporting authority could be legislatively required of various helping professionals to report instances or suspicion of animal neglect or abuse to designated animal protection and/or law enforcement agencies. *Mandatory cross-sector reporting* occurs when statutory authority (e.g. federal or state law) requires professionals to report and establish appropriate recording mechanisms across service delivery systems to protect children, adults, and animals from violent acts.

The First Strike® campaign has taken a leadership role in advocating for and advancing cross-reporting legislation (www.hsus.org/firststrike). Dedicated to promoting antiviolence, the First Strike® campaign encourages people and professionals to work together and seek alternatives to "the widespread practice of categorizing violence" (The Humane Society of the United States, 2004, p. 1). "Data from the American Humane Association, Humane Society of the United States, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and others indicate that a least 11 states have some form of animal abuse reporting laws" (Nolen, 2001, p. 648).

The Benefits of Mandatory Cross-Sector Reporting

A mandate requiring authorities and professionals to establish a coordinated system to detect, document, and track patterns of violence and abuse involving humans and animals has a probative and research value. Social scientists and helping professionals seek a richer understanding of the conditions and dynamics surrounding and underlying family violence and patterns of interpersonal violence. Discovery in this area holds promise for yielding new and improved means for identifying and protecting vulnerable population groups (e.g. assessment tools, perpetrator and victim profiles, and behavior patterns), especially benefiting women and children, and thwarting cruelty toward animals. In an aggregate fashion and on a case-by-case basis, mandatory cross-sector reporting constitutes an important step for enabling researchers to quantify violence leveled against humans and animals and in a qualitative way "create descriptive accounts of phenomena previously not well understood" (Dudley, 2005, p. 15).

To illustrate the potential impact of cross-sector reporting, consider the usefulness to a child protection professional of learning from a humane officer that a father with small children has been cited for physically abusing the family dog with his belt. This type of revelation would likely prompt the protective worker to look for a specific form of physical abuse (e.g. belt marks) on children in the home.

Faver and Strand (2003) suggest that knowledge as to whether a pet has been abused or threatened could have significance to a variety of professionals within different arenas including: court advocates, law enforcement officers, crisis workers, school officials, and mental health workers (pp. 245-246). Access to current, pertinent, and valid data on which to act is essential for effective prevention and intervention services. With respect to violent acts, timely knowledge of actions and behaviors can help shape intervention strategies and influence professional decision-making concerning the safety and security of consumers as well as providers of services.

Once legally endorsed, the sharing of substantiated abuse across sectors could spawn the emergence of workshops,

training sessions, as well as interdisciplinary meetings and teams to develop, refine, and reinforce reporting mechanisms. For shared data sets, special care must be given concerning accuracy of and authorized access to information according to agency type, official, and legislated guidelines. From an inter-organizational perspective, mandatory cross-sector reporting could contribute to a strengthening of communication, collaboration, and coordination of efforts. The Amber Alert system, utilized in many areas and with media outlets across our nation, is a good example of how law enforcement agencies and social service organizations collaborate and use technological advancement to garner early responses to missing children.

Zilney and Zilney's (2005) research examining a cross-reporting initiative between Family and Children's Services professionals and Humane Society investigators in Canada found education and training of workers, monthly reminders regarding checklist items, and support and commitment from senior management in agencies to be important aspects for inter-organizational cross-reporting. They suggest "this project illustrated the need for institutional cooperation if agencies are to maximize services and resources to children, animals, and families. Because animal abuse research and is potential association with human violence is still in its early stages, projects such as this one are imperative to improve understanding of this social problem" (Zilney & Zilney, 2005, p. 63).

In the interim, until cross-sector reporting becomes more formalized, Becker and French (2004) encourage helping professionals to develop formal training and educational forums designed to raise the awareness of various professionals concerning the association between animal protection and interpersonal violence. Special consideration needs to be given to the creation and advancement of interagency and cross-sector educational and training opportunities. From the Canadian experience, Zilney and Zilney (2005) report that partnerships can "improve communication among workers. Informal consultation is now more apparent, and the agencies have incorporated innovative interventions to assist each of them despite bureaucratic restraints facing both institutions" (p. 60). Offering appropriate continuing education credit and incentives to

bring representatives from children and family service agencies, interpersonal violence groups, women's rights organizations, law enforcement units, and animal protection foundations together is a strategy that has educational merit and can potentially contribute to new and innovative inter-organizational relationships.

Negative Consequences of Mandatory Cross Reporting

The efficacy of mandatory reporting systems is often called into question. When required, do professionals report suspected abuse? Zilney and Zilney (2005) suggest "the checklist was not difficult to complete, yet workers sometimes failed to do so because they forgot or did not deem it appropriate" (p. 60). Can registry systems be an effective means for tracking domestic violence and cruelty toward animals, especially given the mobile nature of abusers across state lines (Whiting, 1977)? And, are social scientists able to substantiate that mandatory reporting of abuse has an effect in reducing abuse and neglect? These are important questions when considering the substantial resources involved in the investigation of abuse and neglect claims, particularly when taking into account unsubstantiated cases (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 61).

Infringement upon civil liberties and danger to confidentiality are important ethical considerations when developing mandatory reporting systems. Confidentiality and consent laws in some states act to prohibit the sharing of information. And, "[o]nce identifying information is put on a computer, painstaking steps must be taken to arrange for erasure or expungement" (Whiting, 1977, p. 765).

In volatile family situations, it is not uncommon for a significant other to wrongfully accuse another person of violent acts. The harm that can be inflicted upon a person's image or reputation as a result of false claims can be multifaceted, damaging, and enduring. Once information is entered and disseminated to various organizations, the impact of an unsubstantiated claim becomes difficult, if not impossible, to negate or repair.

Consider the scenario where a humane official records

suspicion of animal cruelty against a prospective adoptive mother. Ultimately, it is revealed that the family cat was suffering from a rare and often misdiagnosed medical condition. However, a considerable amount of time lapsed between suspicion of animal cruelty and the clinical diagnosis of the pet. In the interim, the social worker conducting the adoption study becomes wary of the prospective mother's parenting abilities. Contemplate the time, energy, and social-emotional damage inflicted by wrongful suspicion of animal cruelty.

Investigative and protective programs and services for children, women, and animals are expensive and often rely upon the successful acquisition of highly sought-after resources. Some people already question the adequacy of "the proportion of the Department of Community Services and Family and Children's Services financial resources that is devoted to investigating notification of suspected abuse and neglect" (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 61). Others note that for provision of services, "The problem is not lack of knowledge of service gaps; it is lack of money and effort to fill those gaps" (Whiting, 1977, p. 765). Mandating cross-sector reporting of neglect, abuse, and cruelty has the potential of effectively draining and redirecting an already limited pool of funding from existing programs and services for children, families, and animals.

An Ethical Analysis of Mandated Cross-Sector Reporting

Professionals have an ethical responsibility to "draw on their knowledge, values, and skills to help people in need and to address social problems" (National Association of Social Workers, 1996, p. 5). When knowledge and technology become available to combat interpersonal violence and cruelty against animals, a professional obligation exists to examine and embrace such possibilities and opportunities to "pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people" (National Association of Social Workers, 1996, p. 5).

As is the case with mandatory cross-sector reporting, ethical dilemmas for professionals are characterized by competing value tensions (Mattison, 2000). Ethical decisions typically

focus on an assessment and weighing of the potential benefits or gains of a particular act or inaction versus the potent harm or detriment. The value orientation(s) of people involved or affected, knowingly or unknowingly, is a relevant consideration. After careful reflection and assessment, "[r]esolving the ethical dilemma ultimately involves determining which of the competing obligations or values to honor foremost" (Mattison, 2000, p. 207). Do the potential preventative and protective advantages of knowing, recording, and sharing information about neglect, abuse, and cruelty outweigh the financial costs and obligation to protect the civil liberties of people suspected and accused of interpersonal violence and cruelty toward animals?

Proponents of mandatory cross-sector reporting legislation can clearly be identified. Advocates from the First Strike® campaign have stated, "If existing confidentiality laws prohibit the exchange of information on abuse . . . your first goal would be to work toward change of those laws" (The Humane Society of the United States, 2004, p. 7). Organizations, groups of people, and individuals empathetic to the rights and protection of children, victims of interpersonal violence, and animals would appear to have a value-driven alignment with mandatory cross-reporting efforts.

Similarly, advocates of fiscal constraint and people interested in minimizing legislative and governmental oversight of and interference with the civil liberties of citizens would appear at odds with mandatory cross-sector reporting initiatives. Modern technology presents many opportunities for governmental and private groups to delve into the lives of people everyday. The use of contemporary information systems in mandatory cross-reporting to promote health and well-being constitutes a potential lightning rod as a social-political issue. The extent to which the federal government or states should legislatively assume an active role in monitoring and examining important matters of the day is open for debate.

When the Ability to Know Supersedes Privacy

Jankowski and Martin (2003) describe decision themes and processes for conceptualizing determinations "to report" and

"not to report" neglect and abuse. One such outlook is called a "categorical" approach, where neglect and physical and sexual abuse are reported on the basis of documented evidence in accordance with legal definitions. Specific forms of neglect and abuse deemed reportable are explicitly named and defined as elements in a mandated reporters act (Jankowski & Martin, 2003, pp. 321-322).

When the probative and research value of state or federal cross-sector reporting of interpersonal violence and animal cruelty outweighs civil liberties and rights to privacy, a consideration of the speculative versus substantiated nature of reporting is necessary. More specifically, what specific guidelines would require an individual to make a mandated report? Would mere suspicion of neglect, abuse, and/or cruelty warrant reporting or would a higher standard need to be met?

The standards delineated for mandatory cross-sector reporting constitute a critical element with respect to legislative initiatives. Stipulating definitions and forms of human neglect and abuse and animal cruelty for cross-sector reporting is imperative. "For example, laws against child neglect or abuse represent a community's decision to intervene in a parent-child relationship. Although the legislative decision favoring intervention may be widely supported, it proves difficult to specify the conditions under which it should occur"(Rodham, 1973, pp. 490-491).

Uncertainty and disagreements in defining criteria for reporting violence can yield a stance that intrusion into family life should only occur in extreme cases (Lindsey, 1994). Using this logic, severe abuse becomes limited by definition to medically or professionally diagnosable physical abuse, emotional deprivation, and psychological damage. This kind of categorical approach precludes the reporting of unsubstantiated behavior and actions not resulting in substantiated harm.

While a categorical approach to cross-sector reporting may appear narrow in scope, the experience of using broader definitions of abuse and neglect with in-sector reporting has been known to result "in an avalanche of child abuse reports that public child welfare agencies have been required by law to investigate... not accompanied by additional funding" (Lindsey, 1994, p. 51). When considering the possibilities for error and

wrongful accusation, a cautious methodology emphasizing specificity in definition of neglect, abuse, and cruelty appears a logical starting point.

Political Realities

A growing body of literature has emerged on the topic of the convergence of politics and science. "Whereas academic disciplines are directed to understand aspects of nature and environment, the helping professions normatively are obligated to engage the world, to understand selective aspects of it, and to attempt to change some of its features or facets" (Meenaghan, Kilty, & McNutt, 2004, p. 3). Social change, argued for on the basis of rationale thinking, value orientation, or scientific knowledge, can be viewed as inherently political (Long, Tice, & Morrison, 2006, p. 147). Serious consideration of implementation of mandated cross-sector reporting mechanisms, if not foremost, is a political issue and as a consequence contingent upon the political views of people in any given time and place.

At face value, support for legislative cross-sector reporting initiatives aimed at documenting and thwarting domestic violence and animal cruelty would appear to be appealing to the general public and a somewhat easy sell to family and pet -loving politicians. However, in the United States, arguments for legislation involving social benefit and welfare have traditionally been countered by concerns over budgetary limitations, cost-effective utilization of resources, fiscal responsibility, government interference in the lives of families, and self sufficiency (Long, 2000; Meenaghan, Kilty, & McNutt, 2004).

Additionally, legislative initiatives are often reactive rather than proactive in nature. As was the case with the Amber Alert system, tragic events or dire circumstances serve to prompt social legislation. For example, the graphic explanation and public distribution of information describing the preventable death of children at the hands of a parent previously cited for abusing a pet could catapult cross-sector reporting legislation to the political forefront. Politicians are prone to take action when confronted with political pressure mounted from disturbing realities.

Reisch (2000, p. 294) argues that helping professionals need to think politically and evaluate their roles and influence in social welfare practice, particularly involvement affecting relationships between government and nonprofit organizations. In order to promulgate cross-sector reporting efforts, helping professionals should consider effective and ethical dissemination of research and case-based findings. Partnerships with members of mass media (Brawley & Martinez-Brawley, 1999) can be useful in raising public and political awareness concerning the relationship between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty and the potential merits of cross-sector reporting.

Conclusion

The attachment between family members and their pets constitutes a unique bond in American culture. While research is primarily descriptive in nature, an association exists between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty continues to receive support in the research literature. Children, women, and pets often face a common threat in our society—abuse at the hands of others. "Abuse is about power and control. This is true whether the abuse is inflicted on a partner, child, or pet" (Trollinger, 2001, p. 30). Family violence often has an array of victims.

Professionals are called upon to examine research findings and community-based resources to address the continuum of violence threatening American families and households. While citizens, practitioners, and public officials may disagree about the most appropriate course of action, thoughtful discourse concerning the documentation and analysis of the relationship between interpersonal violence and animal cruelty is needed.

From a research standpoint, cross-sector reporting of interpersonal violence and animal cruelty stands to enhance documentation of interpersonal violence and improve the identification of behavioral patterns concerning perpetrators and victims of violence. At stake is the ability to effectively identify, quantify, and describe the spectrum of abuse and cruelty using information from various types and auspices of agencies and organizations.

From a practitioner point of view, an effective and well

integrated system for reporting and monitoring neglect, abuse, and cruelty can be useful in implementing preventative services and developing effective intervention plans. As a result of knowledge of a previous citation(s) from a cross-sector organization(s), a helping professional gains insight about the kind and prevalence of violent behavior in a family setting. The type, frequency, and nature of the violence constitute valuable sources of information in the quest to uncover the underlying causes of violence.

Reamer (2005) states professionals "are obligated to make decisions that, in their judgment, are morally defensible and consistent with the ethical standards of the profession" (p. 169). Practitioners and researchers should make every effort to act responsibly and respect the dignity and worth of all beings. This includes thoughtful consideration of the multitude of potential consequences of legislative acts, evaluative processes, and social research for all relevant parties.

Professionals also have a responsibility to facilitate research and knowledge aimed at combating injustices and forms of oppression inflicted upon vulnerable populations groups. Mandated cross-sector reporting constitutes one vehicle for breaking through the partitioning of family violence. Information from mandated cross-sector reporting can contribute to grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the forming of new concepts and complex causal models constructed to explain violent acts and provide a richer understanding of victims and perpetrators of violence.

From a practice perspective, cross-sector reporting would hopefully contribute to forging stronger relationships and bonds between various animal and human abuse constituencies. Historically, societies against animal cruelty often formed before domestic violence and child protection services. Battered women's advocates and child protective workers have found themselves at odds with one another. For example, child advocates blame mothers for being non-protective while women's advocates focus on the empowerment of women over child rearing. Becker and French (2004) and Piper and Meyers (2006) acknowledge the potential benefits of multi-agency and interdisciplinary coalitions and links groups for bringing people and causes together to build synergy and promulgate the sharing

of information, raising awareness, cross-training, evidence-informed practice, and the removal of barriers for the common goal of keeping women, children, and their pets safe.

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