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The Importance of the Relationship Between Domestic Violence Victims and Their Pets

A Thesis Presented

By

EMILY RYAN

**MAY 2021**

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The Importance of the Relationship Between Domestic Violence Victims and Their Pets

A Thesis Presented

By

EMILY RYAN

Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies  
Bridgewater State University  
Bridgewater, Massachusetts

In partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of

Master of Science  
in Criminal Justice

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between domestic violence and animal abuse with the goal of adding to the literature in this area. This study collected data from domestic violence and homeless shelters across the United States by sending a questionnaire via email. Two themes emerged based on the questionnaire responses, first, shelters reported that victims disclosed their fear of leaving an abusive situation due to abuse or threat of abuse to a family pet. And second, shelters indicated that they are unable to accommodate pets due to either, health and safety reasons, or financial difficulties. It may be that women are not seeking shelter due to the lack of a pet accommodation, and as a result are more likely to be the victim of a violent situation at the hands of their abuser. Considering the themes that emerged from the responses collected during this study, there is not only a need for pet accommodation within shelters, but also logistical and financial support for the shelters that cannot make these accommodations.

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## **Introduction**

Although violence and human behavior have been topics of research by criminologists, and social and behavioral scientists for many years, animal abuse tends to be an overlooked topic of research (Agnew, 1998). Animal cruelty not only impacts the animals that are harmed, but in some cases the person abusing animals is also violent towards people. According to Arkow (2014b), there is a common link between animal abuse and domestic violence. In many cases, the link is in the form of the abuser who uses threats against the pet to gain more power and control over the human victim, (Arkow, 2014b). Multiple studies have supported the link between animal cruelty and domestic or family violence, and the need for pet-friendly domestic violence shelters (Newberry, 2016; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000 and Ascione et al., 2007).

Although there are some that do, not all domestic violence shelters allow pets inside. Not only does a domestic violence shelter provide safety from the risk of physical harm, but it also provides a place away from violence, not to mention peace of mind for the victim, their children, and their pets. In addition, Strand and Faver (2005), reported that 88% of domestic violence victims did not seek shelter right away due to the concern for their pet. Understanding the stress and worry a victim must endure when they are forced to leave their pets behind in an unsafe environment is essential to the start of the psychological healing process, according to DeViney (1983).

In both animal and domestic abuse cases, the abuse can be displayed in multiple forms, such as physical, verbal, emotional, financial, and social. And in many cases the abuser in the relationship displays a certain behavior pattern in order to take power over the relationship and control the victim or victims, (Womensafe, 2018). In a study done

by Arkow (2014b), results supported this concept of power and control in that some abusers admitted to having abused a pet rather than a human in their home. The study revealed the abusers believed there would be less of a chance that law enforcement would become involved in an incident with a pet compared to a domestic dispute. Overall, based on the research that has been conducted surrounding the topic, there is enough data to suggest there is a connection between animal abuse and domestic violence, according to Becker (2004).

Although research has shown both animal and domestic violence are often connected, both forms of abuse were at one point viewed as a lesser offense compared to other violent offenses. The idea of this connection between animal and domestic abuse and the current corresponding laws leads to the following research questions. First, what is the extent of the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence? Second, how would adding pet centers at domestic violence shelters impact victims seeking shelter?



## Literature Review

### Animal Cruelty

Animal cruelty, defined by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2020), reads as any “act of violence or neglect perpetrated against animals.” These acts of violence can be committed by individuals, but also on a larger scale by businesses or institutions (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2020). Some examples of the large-scale animal abuse and neglect include dogfighting, cockfighting, factory farming, puppy mills, and animal testing. The laws currently in place in the United States to prevent animal cruelty are created at both the federal and state levels. Although every state has a felony animal cruelty law, each state determines what cruelty is defined as under the law, and the corresponding penalty for each offense (Animal Legal Defense Fund, 2020).

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 272, Section 77, defines animal abuse as,

*“whoever overdrives, overloads, drives when overloaded, overworks, tortures, torments, deprives of necessary sustenance, cruelly beats, mutilates or kills an animal, or causes or procures an animal to be overdriven, overloaded, driven when overloaded, overworked, tortured, tormented, deprived of necessary sustenance, cruelly beaten, mutilated or killed”*

And section 77 also includes acts of animal cruelty as a form of animal abuse, defining it as,

*“whoever having the charge or custody of an animal, either as owner or otherwise, inflicts unnecessary cruelty upon it, or unnecessarily fails to provide it with proper food, drink, shelter, sanitary environment, or protection from the weather”*

Although the definition for animal abuse is very similar state to state, some states are stricter and include more detail. For example, the state of New York has laws against declawing cats, as well as new legislation to end the sale of cruelly bred dogs, cats, and

rabbits in pet stores, (The New York State Senate, 2021). Also, both Massachusetts and New York have laws against cropping dogs' ears (Animal Legal & Historical Center 2020). Some states have specific laws against abuse to service animals, and some states do not mention it specifically at all (Animal Legal & Historical Center 2020).

Meanwhile, cockfighting was not banned in Louisiana until 2007 (Louisiana State Legislature, 2020). Laws against leaving a dog inside a hot vehicle provides another example of variation from state-to-state. A majority of the states have no laws in place at all. However, some states have laws against it, but citizens are not allowed to intervene to rescue the dog, or only law enforcement can rescue the dog (Animal Legal Defense Fund, 2019). In contrast, some states, like Massachusetts, California, and Florida, have the Good Samaritan Law, which means anyone can break into a vehicle to rescue a dog in distress (Animal Legal Defense Fund, 2019).

Some of the differences in laws are due to the cultural and geographical differences between each state. For example, states that greatly benefit from farming and livestock have stricter laws surrounding killing or poisoning livestock and humane transport of livestock (Animal Legal & Historical Center 2020). Or for example, the state of Louisiana allows for an exception to the animal cruelty law if it is part of the traditional Mardi Gras event (Louisiana State Legislature, 2020). Louisiana is not the only state to grant exceptions to the law. Kansas and Montana also allow for an exception for rodeo practices accepted by the Rodeo Cowboys' Association (Animal Legal & Historical Center 2020). However, one common exception noted within the animal abuse laws and definitions from state to state, were acts associated with harvesting animals for human consumption or profit. Many states such as, Kansas, Louisiana,

Texas, Montana, and Indiana specify that the animal cruelty laws do not apply if the person is hunting or trapping, herding domestic animals, is performing the act as part of a veterinary practice, performing science or medical research while following accepted standards, or if the laws impede agricultural processes.

There are many forms of animal cruelty that exist throughout the United States, and they each have their own history. Different forms of animal cruelty have been documented throughout history, with the first record of dogfighting in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and factory farming developing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2020). And although illegal, cockfighting still occurs in the United States, more commonly in the Southern States (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2020). This is true for dogfighting, factory farming, and puppy mills as well. The consequences that arise from these forms of animal cruelty do not only impact the animals involved. When it comes to dogfighting, children are often present and studies have shown this to breed criminal activity and desensitize children to violence, (The Humane Society of the United States, 2021). Along with the negative impact animal cruelty has on the animals and humans involved, the environment is also at risk. Factory farming contributes to land degradation, species loss, water pollution, and climate change. Animal agriculture is the cause of 14.5% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, (Farm Sanctuary, 2021).

### **Domestic Violence**

There are records indicating domestic abuse had been very common throughout history, and like today, women and children make up a majority of the victims. Some records of domestic violence date as far back as the Roman Era, and continue through to

the Medieval Era, and into early modern England, (Clark, 2011). Early American settlers brought over common law from England allowing men to beat their wives to correct behavior, as long as the man whipped their wives with a switch no bigger than his thumb (PCWRC, 2020). This is where the common phrase ‘rule of thumb’ originated. Even in more recent history, the United States gave men the right to use violence to punish their wives until the late 1800s (PCWRC, 2020). Up until the 1970s cases of wife beating rarely made it to court, it was not until 1975 that a wife could bring criminal charges against her husband for abuse, although that did not yet apply in all fifty states (PCWRC, 2020). It was not until 1994 that the Violence Against Women Act was passed, which recognized domestic violence as a crime nationally, (USDOJ, 2020). However, society’s views of domestic violence did begin to change slightly in the 1970s due to the Women’s Liberation Movement. From that point on domestic violence began to be viewed more seriously as a violent crime in the United States (Johnson, 2002).

Today, each state has its own definition of domestic violence. Some are more general than others and include stalking, and harassment (NCSL, 2020). For example, in Massachusetts, abuse is defined as an attempt to cause physical harm, actually causing physical harm, causing fear by using force, threats, or duress, or forcing involuntary sexual relations (WomensLaw, 2020). By comparison, abuse is defined in Georgia law as battery, simple battery, simple assault, assault, stalking, criminal damage to property, unlawful restraint, criminal trespass, or any felony (WomensLaw, 2020). Although the definitions of abuse differ from state to state, when determining child custody, all fifty states factor previous domestic violence situations into their decision making (NCSL, 2020). In addition, the laws for domestic violence apply for family or household

members, however, the definition for a family member or household member differ from state to state as well. To keep with the same example, the Massachusetts definition is somewhat more general than Georgia. Massachusetts defines a family or household member as, a spouse or former spouse, someone the victim lives with currently or has lived with in the past, someone related by blood or marriage, someone with whom the victim had a child, or someone with whom the victim had a ‘substantial dating relationship’ (WomensLaw, 2020). In contrast, the Georgia definition is slightly more specific and does not include the term “substantial dating relationship.” Georgia defines family or household member as a spouse or ex-spouse, parent, step-parent, or foster parent, child, step-child, or foster child, anyone who lives or lived in the same household, or someone with whom the victim had a child (WomensLaw, 2020).

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that 71% of the victims of domestic violence also report abuse of their pet by the same abuser. Although research has shown that both forms of abuse are similar and connected, meaning both forms of abuse usually occur due to the abuser having the same characteristics and tactics; animal abuse is sometimes viewed as a lesser offense when compared to domestic violence. Therefore, the two offenses are not always treated the same way in the legal system. However, some states, for example Alaska, include cruelty to animals, if the animal is a pet, as part of the lawful definition of domestic violence (WomensLaw, 2020).

### **Common Factors Between Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence**

#### ***Social Influence in the Legislative Process***

The United States has been passing legislation for centuries, dating back to the 1700s (American Memory, 2020). The process of a bill being created and becoming a law

is taught starting at a young age to children in school (United States Government, 2020a). However, the attitudes or financial incentives that influence bills and the legislative processes are not fully disclosed as part of the lesson plans. Bills are moved forward to Congress, at the federal level, by a senator or representative, and by state legislatures at the state level (United States Government, 2020b). However, the creation of bills and the laws that are subsequently passed have many different potential influences. One of these influences includes the public's input which is often considered when moving a bill forward (United States Government, 2020b).

With so many different beliefs and perspectives influencing the legislative process, it makes sense that laws tend to vary state to state. Although the public's input can be ignored, the politicians rely on the public's votes to stay in office, so it is wise to oblige by the majority's input (United States Government, 2020b). Which is why the public's input and overall beliefs can greatly influence the legislative processes.

Therefore, it is important to understand how individuals develop their beliefs and how these beliefs become publicly accepted beliefs. Depending on an individual's influences, their response to certain situations or even proposed laws can be drastically different than someone with different influences. There are many factors that influence an individual's beliefs and opinions including, religion, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, education level, celebrity influences, and media influences (Schoenfield, 2014). These different influences were discussed by Schoenfield (2014) and described as 'irrelevant influences' in the argument for permissivism. Permissivism, according to Schoenfield (2014), is the claim that sometimes, there is more than one rational response to a given body of evidence. So, for example, the beliefs related to animal cruelty that form for

someone raised on a cattle ranch, would perhaps be different than someone raised on a livestock sanctuary due to ‘irrelevant influences.’ Similarly, an example can be made for views on domestic violence. Some domestic violence victims look towards God to find a way out of the abusive situation, while others believe they are being punished by God for something in their past, (Fortune et al., 2010). Ultimately, the concept of permissivism can be applied to influences attributing to the legislative process as well.

### ***Stigma and Ignorance***

Although the laws surrounding domestic violence and animal abuse are stronger than they have been in the past, there is still a stigma and somewhat of an ignorance surrounding both topics. Victims of domestic violence may hide their situations from close friends and family out of shame or fear. Moreover, a victim’s friends or family may not interfere in an abusive relationship because they believe it is not their place or business. Similarly, there is often an ignorance surrounding animal abuse. Agnew (1998) spoke to this ignorance when discussing animal abuse within the animal industry. He gave the example of cow and pig meat being processed, packaged, and sold as ‘hamburgers’ and ‘pork chops’ in order to distance the customer from the idea that they are buying what once was a living creature. Labeling meat in this way allows for the action of animal slaughter to be viewed more respectably and as more of a necessity.

One could argue that slaughtering an animal is necessary for humans to sustain life and is very different from domestic violence. However, the stigma and ignorance associated with both domestic violence and animal abuse originated from what once was considered an acceptable practice. Therefore, while domestic violence is not considered acceptable today like the abuse and killing within the animal industry, the stigma

surrounding domestic violence can lead to less reporting by the victim or family, denial by the victim, or in some cases homicide (National Domestic Violence Hotline, 2020).

### *Similarities of the Abuser*

The connection between animal abuse and domestic violence is often due to the abuser in both situations having the same behavioral characteristics and tactics. There have been comparable studies conducted in the United States, Canada, and England that all present the same finding, a majority of the victims that report domestic abuse also report abuse to their pet by the same abuser, (Becker, 2004). The studies concluded this commonality was due to the abuser seeking a way to gain power and control over their victim (Becker, 2004). As depicted in Figure 1, there are commonalities within abusive relationships. Originally created by a battered women's group in Duluth, Minnesota, the Power and Control Wheel illustrates common ways an abuser will try to gain power and control over the victim in an abusive relationship (Women Safe, 2018). In some serious cases, the abuser has so much power over the victim, the victim may develop battered woman syndrome. This condition is a mental disorder that leads to the victim feeling trapped or deserving of the abuse, (Gotter, 2017). In some cases, the battered woman syndrome diagnosis is used in court cases in which the victim murdered or assaulted the abusive partner (Gotter, 2017).



**Figure 1**  
*Power and Control Wheel*



*Note.* A visual representation of the common ways abusers gain power and control in abusive relationships. First developed by a battered women’s group in Duluth, Minnesota. (Women Safe, 2018)

According to the Power and Control Wheel, one of the tactics used is for the abuser to use children, or coercion and threats. Similarly, the abuse or threat of abuse to a family pet is also used by abusers to gain control as a form of emotional blackmail (Arkow, 2014b). In a study mentioned by Becker, (2004), a sample of abused and non-abused women that all owned pets revealed fifty percent of the abused women reported injury or death of their pet at the hands of their abuser. Only five percent of the non-abused women reported injury or death of their pet by their partners. This commonality of abuser characteristics in animal abuse and domestic violence situations is the reason Favor and Strand, (2003), argue that social workers should inquire about and consider the family pets when advocating for family welfare.

## **Applicable Theories**

### ***General Strain Theory***

Robert Agnew developed the concept of General Strain Theory of crime and delinquency in 1992 (Agnew & White, 1992). General Strain Theory argues that strain develops when one of the following three situations occur:

- (1) “When others prevent or threaten to prevent you from achieving positively valued goals.”
- (2) “When others remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that you possess.”
- (3) “When others present or threaten to present you with noxious or negatively valued stimuli.”

(Agnew & White, 1992)

Since the development of General Strain Theory, there has been additional research done surrounding the theory, which led to suggested revisions and new areas of application.

General Strain Theory has been applied to numerous areas of study within the criminal justice field. A simple internet search will turn up peer-reviewed articles applying General Strain Theory to topics such as, cyber violence (Cho et al., 2021), bullying and victimization (Glassner, 2020), gender (Isom et al., 2021), and police stress and race (Bishopp et al., 2020). These were just the topics from the first page of search results. So, it would not be a far leap to apply this theory to domestic violence and animal abuse as well. Watts and McNulty (2013), proposed childhood physical or sexual abuse often leads to delinquency later in life due to General Strain Theory. It was argued that childhood physical and sexual abuse meet all three of the General Strain Theory criteria and ultimately, could lead to delinquent behavior (Watts & McNulty, 2013). By applying the concept of General Strain Theory, it could be argued that the trauma and emotional toll from childhood abuse led the victim to becoming abusive to others,

perpetuating an abusive cycle. Although this is not an excuse for the abuser, it does provide a possible explanation for abusive behavior within a relationship.

The idea of an abusive cycle perpetuated by childhood abuse is echoed by Arkow (2021) and Bell (2001). Figure 2 below, illustrates what Arkow (2021), refers to as the cycles of violence. Similarly referred to as the cycle of abuse by Bell (2001), this cycle perpetuates due to the involvement of various forms of abuse. An abuser threatens or harms a family pet, causing the victim to stay in the abusive situation and expose the child to the abusive situation, which could then lead to the child growing up to become violent themselves (Arkow, 2021).

**Figure 2**  
**Cycles of Violence**



*Note.* Illustration depicting the cycles of violence that involve animal abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse. (Arkow, 2021).

### ***Agnew's Theory for the Cause of Animal Abuse***

Animals are killed or harmed for a variety of reasons by humans every day. Sometimes it is for human consumption, for fashion or medical testing, or simply accidentally by a passing vehicle. However, sometimes animals are killed or harmed by humans due to neglect or abuse. There are varying forms of animal abuse, some of the

most common include neglect, hoarding, overbreeding, and physical abuse (Parma Animal Shelter, 2014). Now some people view abuse and neglect as very different examples than the first few examples of human consumption, fashion or medical testing, and accidental vehicle strikes; but Agnew (1998), took a different approach. In developing a theory for the causes of animal abuse, Agnew (1998), used a more liberal definition of animal abuse to account for actions such as factory farming, and animal experimentation. Using this broad definition of animal abuse, Agnew (1998), argues that animal abuse is most likely to occur when one of these three factors are met:

- (1) “Ignorance surrounding our actions towards animals and the related consequences.”
  - (2) “Belief that abusive treatment is justified.”
  - (3) “Perceived benefits of abuse outweigh the costs.”
- (Agnew, 1998)

Along with these three factors, additional factors were considered as both direct and indirect effects on animal abuse. These additional factors, listed below, should be taken into consideration with the individual’s gender, age, education, occupation, and area of residence (Agnew, 1998).

- (1) “Individual traits, like empathy”
  - (2) “The individual’s socialization, including the models they are exposed to, the beliefs they are taught, and the extent to which their abusive and non-abusive behaviors are reinforced and punished”
  - (3) “The individual’s level of strain or stress, including strain caused by animals and humans”
  - (4) “The individual’s level of social control, including their attachment to animals and conventional individuals, commitment to conventional institutions like family and school, and level of supervision”
  - (5) “The nature of the animal under consideration, including the animal’s similarity to us on the phylogenetic scale”
- (Agnew, 1998)

Similar to the cycles of violence discussed by Watts and McNulty (2013), Arkow (2021), and Bell (2001); the second factor speaks to the impact exposure to abusive situations has on individuals.

The theory for the causes of animal abuse proposed by Agnew (1998), has been tested to estimate the prevalence of animal abuse in Russia, Ukraine, and the United States by Hughes et al. (2019). Noted as the first empirical test of Agnew's theory, this study supported the three factors that Agnew proposed are most likely to lead to animal abuse. In a second study done by Mowen and Boman (2019), Agnew's theory was used to research which characteristics are shown to be related to animal abuse. Results of this study show a combination of characteristics including individual traits and behaviors, socialization experiences, and mechanism of social control are significantly related to animal abuse (Mowen & Boman, 2019). However, the measures of strain, which was one of the additional factors that Agnew argued could be direct and indirect effects of animal abuse was not supported by Mowen and Boman (2019). In both studies, the primary factors listed by Agnew that are the most likely causes of animal abuse were all shown to be supported applicable within their research.

## **Prevention**

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social welfare movement to prevent child abuse was mainly associated with the animal welfare movement, (Faver & Strand, 2003). However, the one movement began to be viewed as two when child protective services became an entity of the government and animal welfare groups remained privately owned or operated under non-profit status. Unfortunately, this separation is part of the reason

social scientists often overlooked or ignored the link between domestic violence and animal abuse in their research, (Faver & Strand, 2003).

Over the years, animal activists have formed organizations to fight for change and stronger laws to help protect animals, while also helping educate the public. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) was founded in 1866 and led to the first successful anti-cruelty law in the state of New York. The ASPCA is still active today fighting for animals' rights, and rescuing those in need, (ASPCA, 2018). Soon to follow was the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), which was formed in 1954 and has over ten million members today fighting for the fair treatment of animals, (The Humane Society of the United States, 2021).

Similarly, to the animal activist groups that formed, groups have also formed to prevent domestic violence and support victims. One example is the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Officially organized as a non-profit in 1978, this group's mission is to 'lead, mobilize, and raise our voices to support efforts that demand a change of conditions that lead to domestic violence such as patriarchy, privilege, racism, sexism, and classism' (NCADV, 2020). The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence helped pass the Violence Against Women Act which was signed by President Bill Clinton in 1994. This legislation initiated perhaps one of the biggest steps towards domestic violence prevention, which was the development of the domestic violence hotline, (NDVH, 2020). On May 8, 2019, the Domestic Violence Hotline answered its five millionth call, (NDVH, 2020).

## **Domestic Violence Shelters**

Recently, animal and human rights groups have come together once again to join efforts. One example of this effort is the increased number of pet centers that have been or are being added to domestic violence shelters across the country, (Arkow, 2014a). Bobette Schrandt, the CEO of LACASA, a domestic violence shelter in Howell, Michigan, explained that they added a pet center, so victims do not have to choose between their pets and their own safety, (Arkow, 2014a). While not yet mandatory, many shelters, like the shelter in Michigan, are taking the steps to add pet shelters or make pet accommodations for victims seeking shelter with their pets. The National Domestic Violence Hotline provides helpful information and resources for victims looking for help to keep their pets safe. One of these resources is the Safe Havens Mapping Project, which is organized by the Animal Welfare Institute (2021). This project allows victims to locate a sheltering service in their area, for their pet, while they seek shelter and support.

## **Research Question**

Although current data suggest there is in fact a connection between domestic abuse and animal abuse, the extent of this connection is still a topic of discussion. As mentioned by Arkow (2014a), some shelters across the United States have added pet centers to accommodate victims' pets while the victim seeks shelter and resources. However, some shelters do not provide pet accommodations at all, or some can only provide pet accommodations for certain types of pets. For some victims, not being able to bring their pet to a shelter is enough reason to stay in an unsafe situation. In fact, 88% of domestic violence victims did not seek shelter due to concern for their pet, (Strand &

Faver, 2005). This need for further discussion and research has led to developing the topic of this paper. What role do pets play in the lives of victims seeking shelter from their abuser? More specifically, would the number of victims seeking shelter increase if accommodations could be made for pets at domestic violence shelters? Additionally, do women seeking shelter request accommodations for their pets, and do they refuse shelter when a pet cannot be accommodated?

By understanding the connection many people have with their pets, one must also understand the difficulty in deciding whether to leave a pet behind in an unsafe situation. Based on this reason, the expectation of this study is that shelters will indicate victims have requested pet accommodations. Furthermore, it is expected that shelters will also indicate victims have revealed abuse to their pets by their own abuser, as well as expressed difficulty in leaving the abusive situation due to the pet being in danger.



## **Methods**

To investigate the role pets play in the lives of victims seeking shelter, this exploratory study collected both qualitative and quantitative data from various domestic violence facilities across the United States. A mixed method approach is appropriate to investigate the research question because it allowed the staff to elaborate on forced-choice questions based on their experiences with the clients. This data was collected by sending questionnaires to various facilities asking the staff a variety of questions regarding the facility's pet policy and how this policy, or lack of policy, impacts the clients that are seeking help.

### **Mixed Methods**

#### ***Qualitative Research***

As cited by Knafl and Webster (1988), qualitative research is used for different purposes. These purposes include instrumentation, illustration, description, and theory building (Knafl & Webster, 1988). For the purpose of this thesis, qualitative research will be used to illustrate for the reader, the connection between domestic violence and pet abuse. For example, instead of simply asking are pets allowed to stay overnight with the client and receiving just a "yes" or "no" response, the shelter staff can elaborate and explain that although they do not, they do work with a local animal shelter to help temporarily house client's pets. By allowing the shelter staff to describe scenarios that are specific to their shelter in open-ended responses, a deeper analysis of the data can be performed to draw together themes, and in turn build on the current research that claims domestic violence and pet abuse are connected.

## ***Quantitative Research***

In addition to collecting open-ended responses, forced-choice questions were also used to perform a quantitative analysis of the data. While the open-ended questions allowed for more specific responses for each shelter, the forced-choice questions allowed for numerical responses and could then be calculated to determine percentages. For example, when analyzing the same question discussed surrounding qualitative research, are pets allowed to stay overnight with the client, it is possible to total the number of “yes” and “no” responses, and then determine the percentage of shelters that do and do not.

This mixed method approach is beneficial according to Connelly (2009) because it allows the researcher to gain the strengths and lessen the weaknesses in both types of research being used. Connelly (2009) further explains that while qualitative data adds meaning to numbers, quantitative data provides accuracy that may be overlooked by using qualitative data alone. This explanation is confirmed by (Small, 2021) as well, stating that the use of mixed methods research can resolve ambiguities that result from multiple methods of research surrounding the same topics.

## **Units of Analysis**

The target audience for the questionnaire was domestic violence shelters that have the ability to house clients overnight. To determine if the responding shelters were part of the target audience they were asked if the facility could house clients overnight. If the respondent answered yes, they were then asked if pets were allowed, or if clients often asked to bring a pet with them into the shelter. By gathering and analyzing the responses to these questions, themes can be drawn, and from those themes, conclusions can be

speculated. For example, a theme could be considered if shelters that do not accommodate pets but respond that they are asked often by potential clients to allow their pets to come with them. To discuss possible themes based on both qualitative and quantitative data, some of the responses will be coded by assigning a numeric value, therefore allowing qualitative responses to be quantified.

### **Sample**

The sample of shelters was collected by searching the internet for various facilities. More specifically, a Google search was conducted to search for domestic violence shelters within each state, across the United States. This search resulted in both domestic violence shelters and homeless shelters and after inquiring, it was determined to include homeless shelters as well in the sample because they reported also accommodating domestic violence victims on various occasions. By using the Google map function, the various shelters were shown as dots across each state, which clearly illustrated the distance between shelters. This function also allowed the identification of the shelters that may be in higher demand due to geographic location relative to other shelters in the area or in the state.

The information collected for each shelter included shelter name, city or town name, state, phone number, email address, and the link to their website. Not all shelters had this information available online. Therefore, shelters that did not list websites, or email addresses on their websites, were contacted by phone in order to request the information. The goal was to collect the contact information for as many shelters as possible to therefore increase the possible number of responses received. However, while making phone calls to request contact information, some shelters refused to give out an

email address due to privacy, or in some cases the shelter simply could not be reached by phone. For these shelters, a note was made, and the questionnaire was not sent. When contacting the shelters by phone, some indicated that they provided services for people in a variety of situations, not strictly domestic violence situations, and thus were asked whether the questionnaire would apply to their shelter. However, since a percentage of their clients are domestic violence victims, they were informed that their participation in the survey would still be valued.

The list of shelters in which email addresses were collected totaled 346 and consisted of varying geographic locations, varying population sizes of surrounding towns or cities, and varying socioeconomic statuses of the surrounding communities. As shown below in Table 1, the shelters that email addresses were received from are listed by state.

**Table 1**

<b>Number of Shelter Email Addresses Received by State</b>			
<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Shelters</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Number of Shelters</b>
AK	7	NC	7
AL	7	ND	8
AR	6	NE	8
AZ	5	NH	4
CA	14	NJ	9
CO	4	NM	8
CT	3	NV	7
DE	5	NY	9
FL	12	OH	4
GA	8	OK	5
HI	7	OR	8
IA	4	PA	6
ID	7	RI	7
IL	2	SC	10
IN	7	SD	6
KS	6	TN	7
KY	5	TX	7
LA	8	UT	6
MA	11	VA	7
MD	4	VT	9
ME	10	WA	11
MI	7	WI	6
MN	6	WV	7
MS	9	WY	9
MT	7	<b>Total</b>	<b>346</b>

Ultimately, out of the 346 email addresses that the questionnaire was sent out to, 328 were sent successfully. The remaining 18 emails bounced back, indicating the email did not send successfully. From the sample group of 328 shelters, responses were received from 144 shelters. After exporting the responses and performing an initial analysis, eight of the responses contained no content, bringing the number of questionnaire responses with actual content to 136 shelters. This makes the response rate for this study 39%. Considering the questionnaire was sent out to the shelters unsolicited and from an unrecognized email address, this response rate is surprisingly high. According to Saleh & Bista (2017), while email is the fastest method to deliver questionnaires to a sample group, due to the use of unrecognized email addresses and spamming software, the response rate is often lower than mail or phone surveys. Saleh & Bista (2017), went on to explain that while email response rates were above 50% in the early 1990s, increased use of filters and spamming software has greatly decreased the average response rate. One explanation for the higher than average response rate could be due to the shelter staff understanding the importance of the topic. Various responses indicated that based on previous experience, victims' pets provide support in often traumatic situations, and also present as barriers for leaving abusive situations.

### **Data Collection**

The questionnaire was created and sent out electronically using Qualtrics, which provided options for both forced-choice questions and open-ended responses. Qualtrics is a questionnaire platform that allows users to create intricate questionnaires, to distribute them electronically, and to record the responses. Qualtrics also has the capability to export the questionnaire results into different programs so the data can be

more easily viewed and analyzed. Along with sending the original questionnaire invitation, Qualtrics also provides the option to schedule and send reminder emails to recipients to potentially increase the number of responses. This function was used to send two reminder emails. One was sent two weeks after the initial email, and the second was sent two weeks following the first reminder. These reminder emails were only sent to the shelters that did not yet complete the survey.

### **Questionnaire**

To better understand what kinds of services and support are offered to domestic violence victims and their pets in the United States, the questionnaire that was sent to various shelters included questions about the shelters' current pet policies and available pet accommodations, if any. Some of the questions that were asked in this questionnaire included,

How often are you approached by persons seeking shelter from an abusive partner, and also ask to bring a pet?

Does your facility allow clients to bring their pets with them for overnight or extended placements?

If a pet is unable to stay with a client, can you make other accommodations for that pet or pets?

Has a client seeking services revealed that they stayed in an abusive situation due to fear of leaving their pet behind?

The full list the questions that were asked on the questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix A. The questionnaires were emailed to adult staff members at each shelter, and consent was received prior to asking the first question.

The questionnaire was set up to direct the respondent to a certain line of questions depending on their response to the previous question. For example, in the case that the

shelter cannot accommodate clients overnight, they would be directed to a shorter line of questions because a majority of the remaining questions were related to clients looking for overnight shelter for themselves or their pets. Similarly, depending upon the respondent's initial response to certain questions, they would be directed to additional, more specific questions as well. For example, when asked, "Does your facility allow clients to bring their pets with them for overnight or extended placement?", if the respondent answered, "yes" they would be directed to different question than if they answered "no". The questionnaire layout can also be referenced in Appendix A.

### **Analytic Strategy**

Upon completion, the questionnaires were analyzed for common themes. Ultimately, the presence or absence of a pet policy within these domestic violence shelters were compared to the number of clients that declined services or voiced that bringing their pet with them was important. In addition, other demographics were also taken into consideration, for example, the geographic location of the shelter, number of clients the shelter assists, and the population size and socioeconomic status of the areas surrounding the facility.

A comparison of the shelter demographics could reveal patterns that explain the presence or absence of a pet policy. For example, the data could support or reject the hypothesis that wealthier areas, or more populated areas, receive more funding and can therefore afford to take steps to accommodate victims' pets. If this hypothesis is supported by the data, bringing attention to the lesser funded shelters would lead to a potential increase in pet accommodations for victims and in turn, more victims seeking shelter.

## Results

To investigate the research question different factors were taken into consideration along with the questionnaire responses. Shelter demographics such as client volume, geographic location, population size of the town in which the shelter resides, as well as socioeconomic status of the town and neighboring community were all used in combination with the responses in an effort to reveal patterns and themes. And ultimately this information was used to determine the role pets play in the lives of domestic violence victims seeking shelter from an abusive situation.

An initial analysis of the questionnaire responses revealed that out of the 136 shelters, nine of the shelters answered “no” to the first question, which asked, “*Does your organization have a facility that can house persons who are trying to leave abusive relationships for at least one night?*” Due to this response, the nine respondents were then directed to only a few more questions based on how the questionnaire was designed to re-route respondents. Because these nine shelters cannot accommodate victims overnight, the rest of the questions would not apply and were therefore automatically skipped. The entire layout of the questionnaire can be viewed in Appendix A.

Although the nine shelters could not make accommodations to house clients overnight, the responses to the remaining questions still proved to be important and require analysis. As shown below in Table 2, the nine shelters, revealed how often they are approached by someone seeking shelter from an abusive partner. In addition, as a follow up, these shelters were also asked “*If you are approached, how often do these individuals ask to bring a pet?*” The responses to this question varied among the nine shelters. Responses ranged from ‘rarely’ to ‘50%’ to ‘often.’ However, it was this



question that provoked two responses which led to the consideration of the first theme.

Shelters B and C both gave responses indicating their experience has shown that a victim will not seek shelter if they have to leave their pets at home. The responses from all nine shelters can be viewed below in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Shelter Location	Does your organization have a facility that can house persons who are trying to leave abusive relationships for at least one night?	Can you arrange for overnight or longer stays for persons trying to leave abusive relationships at an off-sight location?	How often are you approached by persons seeking shelter from abusive partners?	If you are approached, how often do these individuals ask to bring a pet?
Alabama	No	Yes	1-2 times a week	1 out of 10. We are a homeless shelter and do not have the level of security for those seeking protection from domestic abuse. We refer those in need to local DV shelters.
Minnesota	No	Yes	Daily	I would say 25% of the time, a victim will not leave their home without their pets.
Kentucky	No	Yes	1-2 times a week	often it a reason they will not go to shelter
Oklahoma	No	Yes	1 time a month	rarely
North Dakota	No	Yes	A few times a year	Rarely.
Wyoming	No	Yes	1-2 times a week	50%
Florida	No	No	1 time a month	25%
Georgia	No	No	A few times a year	We've never had anyone who was abused ask to bring a pet. We have had one addict ask.
Georgia	No	Yes	1-2 times a week	Never

The responses received from the remaining 127 shelters that responded indicating that they could accommodate clients overnight were also analyzed in further detail. In addition, these 127 shelters were also coded to reference a particular respondent more easily throughout results analysis and discussion.

To allow for quantitative analysis of the qualitative data that were collected, the questions that required a “yes” or “no” response were coded by assigning each response a numerical value. By doing this, the questions were then able to be viewed and analyzed as quantitative responses. For example, the value of one was assigned to the “yes” answers and the value of zero was assigned to the “no” answers. By totaling these values, the number of “yes” responses can be determined and compared to the total responses for that specific question. In turn, this can allow for the data to be viewed

more simply by looking at the percentage of shelters that responded a certain way to a certain question.

Throughout the questionnaire there were 11 “yes” or “no” questions asked, and all were coded to determine the total number of “yes” responses and the total number of “no” responses. The complete list of coded quantitative questions can be viewed in Table 3, below.

**Table 3**

<b>Quantitative Questions and Accompanying Responses</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Yes Response</b>	<b>No Response</b>
<i>Does your organization have a facility that can house persons who are trying to leave abusive relationships for at least one night?</i>	127	9
<i>Can you arrange for overnight or longer stays for persons trying to leave abusive relationships at an off-sight location?</i>	7	2
<i>Does your facility allow clients to bring their pets with them for overnight or extended placements?</i>	44	31
<i>Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations?</i>	41	32
<i>If a pet is unable to stay with a client, can you make other accommodations for that pet or pets?</i>	23	8
<i>Have you done this before?</i>	18	3
<i>Has a potential client ever declined services or left accommodations because they feared for a pet at home?</i>	17	12
<i>Has a client seeking services to leave an abusive relationship ever disclosed that their pet was also harmed by the same individual?</i>	59	13
<i>Has a client seeking services revealed that they stayed in an abusive situation due to fear of leaving their pet behind?</i>	56	16
<i>In your experience, do you think that allowing clients' pets into facilities with clients is important to domestic violence victims?</i>	67	2
<i>In your experience, do you think that allowing pets in shelters would encourage more clients to seek services?</i>	63	6

By reviewing the quantitative and qualitative data, two common themes emerged throughout the questionnaire. The data analysis process revealed that the responses to both the forced-choice and open-ended questions formed two distinct themes. These themes included:

1. Victims disclosing their fear of leaving an abusive situation due to abuse or threat of abuse to a family pet
2. Shelters indicating that they are unable to accommodate pets due to either, health and safety reasons, or financial difficulties

Both of these themes emerged as a result of comparing similar responses to various questions from multiple shelters.

### **Fear of Leaving a Pet at Home**

As previously explained, the first theme emerged when the responses from shelters A – I were analyzed. The emergence of this theme developed due to the responses from shelters B and C. When asked “*If you are approached, how often do these individuals ask to bring a pet?*”, both shelters indicated that from their experience victims seeking shelter from an abusive relationship will not leave if that means they will have to leave a pet at home. Since only two shelters made this observation, it could not yet be considered a pattern.

Once the responses from the remaining shelters were analyzed, a pattern was observed throughout the responses. Other shelters indicated that clients will not seek shelter if they are forced to leave their pets at home due to fear of the pet being abused.

For example, shelter BT responded:

*“Victims of domestic violence may delay seeking the safety of a shelter because pets cannot accompany them.”*

In addition to receiving other similar responses throughout the questionnaire, when asked “*Has a client seeking services revealed that they stayed in an abusive situation due to fear of leaving their pet behind?*”, out of the 72 shelters that responded, 77% responded “yes.”

The suggestion that, domestic violence victims will not leave an abusive situation if their pet is left behind, as a common theme, is supported by abundant research (Arkow, 2014a; Arkow, 2014b; Ascione, 2007; Faver & Strand, 2003; Newberry, 2016; Strand & Faver, 2005). This research suggests that abusers use violence towards pets to gain control over their victims (Faver & Strand, 2003). This concept is echoed by a response from shelter L:

*“abusers commonly use pets to manipulate and threaten.”*

While some shelters indicated they have at least one pet on their premises at all times, other shelters indicated that they are only asked by clients a few times a year. However, when asked, *“Has a client seeking services to leave an abusive relationship ever disclosed that their pet was also harmed by the same individual?”*, 78% of the 75 respondents answered “yes.” Some shelters have reported that this has happened on numerous occasions upon client intake. Shelter Z disclosed the following statement:

*“We have heard several times over the last year how the abuser has killed the family pet, broken legs, and broken back of a dog.”*

Not only do these responses, and the others like it, illustrate a need for shelters to accommodate pets, but the respondents also overwhelmingly agree with the importance of providing shelter to pets as well. In response to the question, *“In your experience, do you think that allowing clients’ pets into facilities with clients is important to domestic violence victims?”*, out of the 69 shelters that responded, all but two answered “yes.” Although these responses are essentially the shelter staffs’ opinions, their responses are based on their experiences working at the shelter and on their interactions with various clients. It is also important to note that the definition of ‘pet’ was not given in the questionnaire and for the purpose of this study, pets encompass any animal owned by the

client seeking shelter or services. In most cases dogs or cats, but in other cases horses or livestock were mentioned in the responses.

### **Shelter Unable to Accommodate Pets**

Although a majority of the shelters that responded to the questionnaire were able to provide overnight stays for clients seeking services, not all of those shelters were able to accommodate pets as well. This commonality led to the emergence of the second theme. Several shelters indicated that they are unable to accommodate pets due to either various health and safety reasons, or to financial difficulties. Out of the 75 shelters that responded to the question, “*Does your facility allow clients to bring their pets with them for overnight or extended placements?*”, 59%, responded “yes.” Some of the shelters that responded “no” explained that they can only accommodate service animals, and must partner with local animal shelters or veterinarian offices to provide temporary housing for pets. Shelter Y offered the following explanation:

*“Only service animals are allowed within the shelter. However, we have a partnership with a local animal center that provides housing for pets while survivors stay in the shelter, they are able to visit their pets anytime.”*

The shelters that were unable to accommodate pets gave various reasons as to why this accommodation is not feasible at their shelter in particular. Some of these reasons included, various health and safety issues (such as allergies, fears, aggressive or destructive behavior from the pet, sanitary issues, or the animal not being up-to-date on all vaccinations), financial reasons (either the cost to renovate the space to accommodate pets, or the cost to feed and care for the pets), insurance issues, lack of available space on shelter property, shelter not owning the property and encountering landlord issues, and the inability to accommodate larger animals or even livestock. Some of the shelters

disclosed specific examples of hurdles they encountered when trying to accommodate clients' pets in the past. For example, shelter BO gave evidence of a hurdle commonly faced by shelters regarding health concerns:

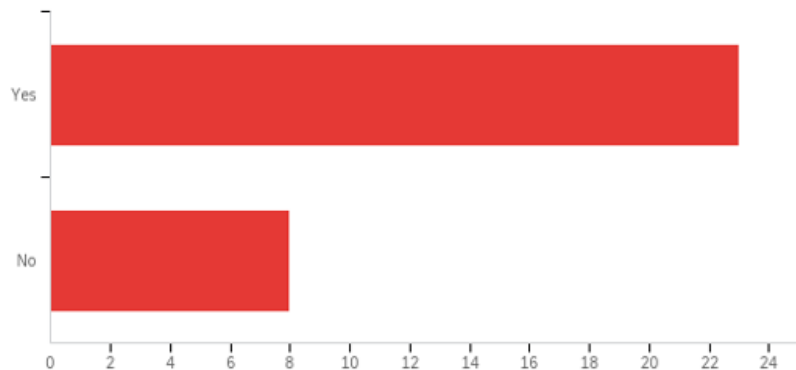
*"We have no room for pet accommodations. Also, we have guests who have breathing problems that are aggravated by dander allergies."*

Similarly, shelter AM disclosed a scenario they encountered with what they were told was a therapy animal:

*"We had a client tell us her dog was a therapy animal, but it urinated all over the carpet."*

While there are many factors that have prevented shelters from accommodating pets, 56% of the 73 shelters responded, "yes" to the question, *"Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations?"*. Additionally, as illustrated in Figure 2, of the 31 shelters that disclosed they do not currently have specific pet-friendly spaces, 74% can make other arrangements for the pets while the victim seeks shelter.

**Figure 2**



*Note.* Graphed responses to the question, "If a pet is unable to stay with a client, can you make other accommodations for that pet or pets? (Retrieved from Qualtrics)

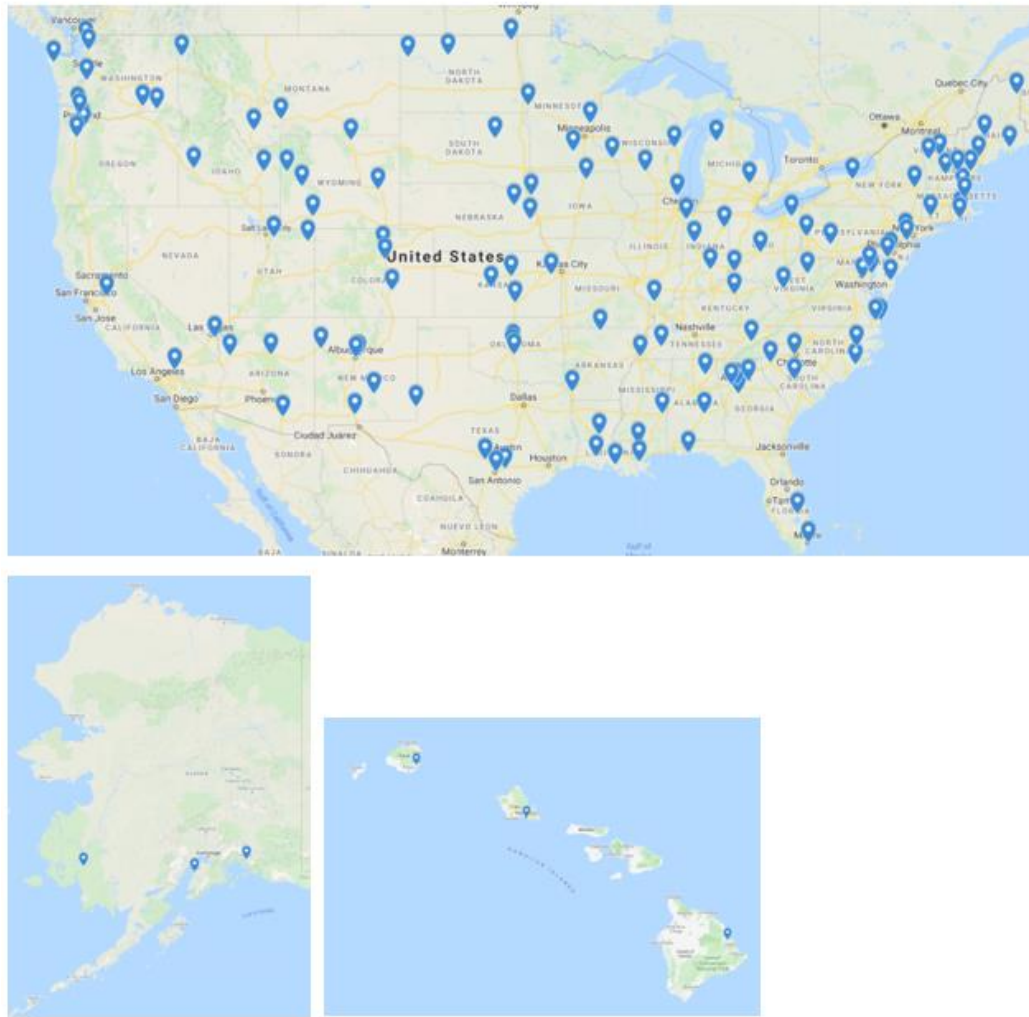
## **Results Based on Shelter Demographics**

As proposed in the methods section of this study, the shelter demographics were analyzed to reveal potential commonalities. The demographics that were taken into consideration included the number of clients the shelter assists, the geographic location of the shelter, and the population size and socioeconomic status of the areas surrounding the shelter. The hypothesis proposed earlier suggested that wealthier areas, or more populated areas, receive more funding and can therefore afford to take steps to accommodate victims' pets. The data revealed financial barriers for pet accommodations were not associated with the shelter's geographic location or population size of the surrounding area. Although the data did not support this hypothesis, it did reveal patterns surrounding the shelter demographics and financial barriers.

### ***Client Volume***

The shelters that indicated they can make accommodations for overnight stays for victims seeking shelter were asked, "*On average how many people seek overnight or longer services in a month? As well as over the last year?*". This information can provide an insight into the volume of clients each shelter receives, as well as how that relates to the shelter's geographic location. Figure 3 illustrates below the locations of the 136 shelters that responded to the questionnaire. In addition, Appendix C list the shelters separated by regions within the United States, as well as the responses to the client volume questions.

**Figure 3**



*Note.* Map-view of the shelters that responded to the questionnaire. Created using Google My Maps.

The responses to the client volume questions ranged from under 20 clients per year to over 3,000 clients per year. Although the numbers did not fluctuate based on which region in the United States the shelter was located in, the shelters located closer to major cities reported a higher number of clients per year. This information is not surprising since the population sizes tend to be higher in major cities than in rural towns located further away from the cities.



### ***Location of Shelters that Include Pet Centers***

Several responses indicated that some shelters have already taken steps to accommodate victims' pets. Some shelters are able to make minor accommodations, such as outdoor space for clients to walk their dog. For example, in response to the question, "*Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations?*", shelter CE answered:

*"We do not have specific pet accommodations, but we do have a nice yard and safe area for walking pets"*

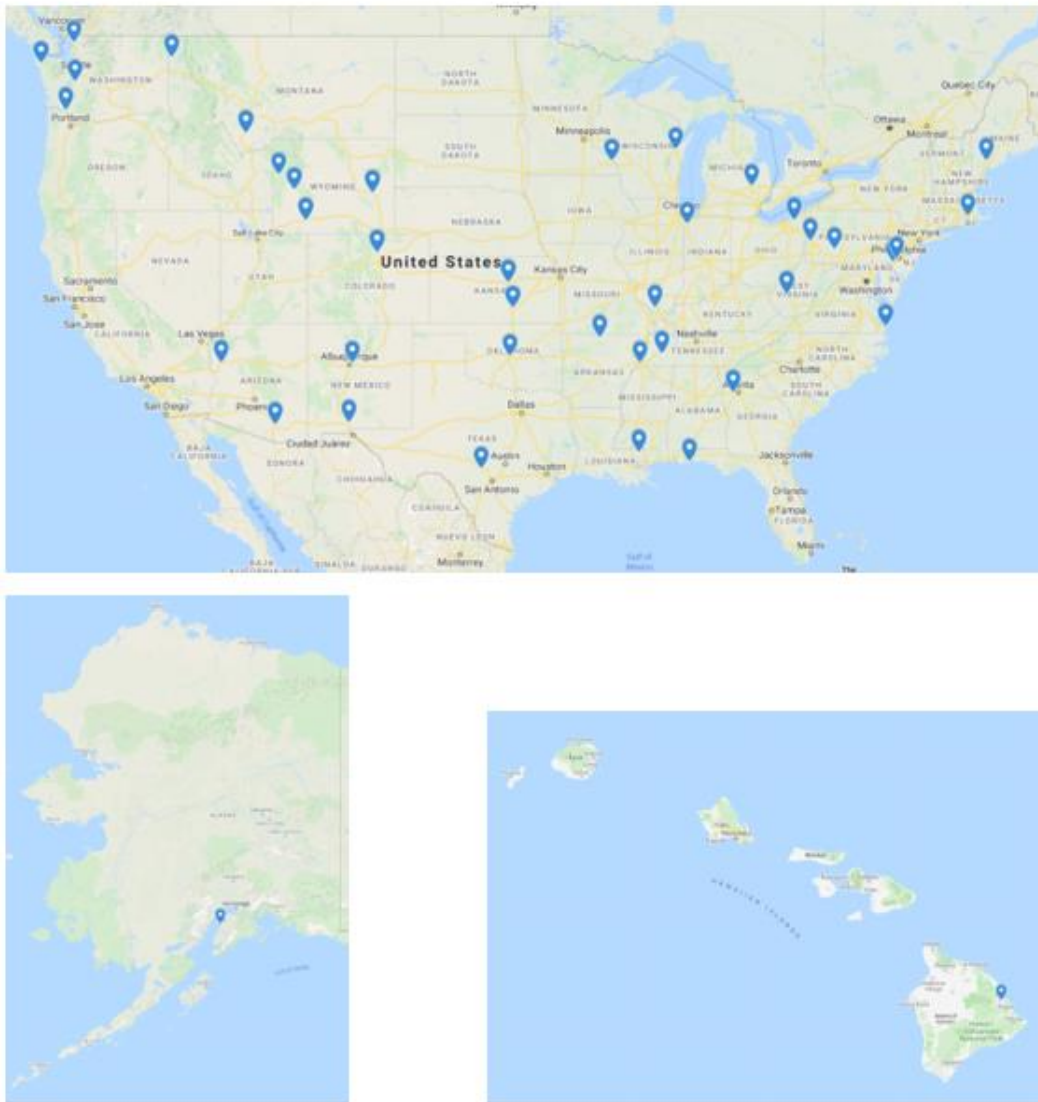
However, other shelters indicated that they could make more specific pet accommodations, such as designated pet rooms, if requested by a client. Shelter BY provided the following example:

*"We have a temperature controlled pet room with individual kennels"*

In total, 41 shelters responded to the questionnaire that their facility could accommodate pets in one way or another.

To determine if the shelter location provided any reason for the shelter's ability to accommodate pets more readily, the geographic location of the shelters were compared to the responses that indicated pet-friendly space was available. Figure 4 below, illustrates the locations of the shelters that indicated they can make pet accommodations. Appendix D provides a list of shelters that answered "yes" when asked if their shelter has a pet-friendly space or accommodation. The listing also is organized by the region location of the shelter within the United States.

**Figure 4**



*Note.* Map-view of the shelters that responded to the questionnaire and indicated they can accommodate pets. Created using Google My Maps.

Although there is no obvious pattern that connects shelters that can make pet accommodations to their geographic location, it is important to note that the first shelter to build a pet-friendly facility in the United States was in 2001 located in Howell, Michigan (Arkow, 2014a). A comparison to the 41 shelters out of the sample group that indicated they could make pet accommodations, reveals positive progress since 2001. However, Figure 4 also allows for a visualization of the stretches of areas across the

United States that do not have shelters that can make pet accommodations. For example, based on the sample group of this study, there were various states that only had one pet-friendly shelter, or had none at all. States such as North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Utah, California, and Louisiana to name a few, did not have any shelters from this study that indicated they could accommodate pets.

### ***Shelter Location and Financial Barriers***

To determine whether shelter location impacts financial barriers, responses to the question, “*What were some hurdles in setting up the pet accommodations?*”, were reviewed. From these responses, 11 shelters listed funding as at least one of the hurdles they encountered when attempting to create pet accommodations. Out of the 11 shelters, six are located in the West region of the United States. One of the reasons shelters in the western part of the United States may face more financial barriers could be due to increased number of clients owning and seeking shelter for large animals. For example, shelter AD, located in Douglas, Wyoming, responded:

*“We were able to obtain a grant from Red Rover to cover our cost so the only problem was finding the room. We are rural so we also needed to find foster care for large animals, mostly horses.”*

Although some shelters explained they were able to overcome the financial barriers they encountered, not all shelters were able to secure the funding they needed. Table 4, below, shows the complete list of the 11 shelter responses and their geographic locations.

**Table 4**

<b>Shelters Impacted by Financial Barriers</b>		
<b>Shelter Location</b>		<b>Response</b>
<b>State</b>	<b>Region</b>	
Pennsylvania	Northeast	The biggest hurdle was securing a grant to allow for funding to create the partnership.
West Virginia	South	Funding was a huge issue. Space was an issue as well as we didn't have the space within the shelter itself to retrofit areas for pets. Other survivor's allergies and fear of animals was an issue as well.
Tennessee	South	Funding, additional onsite space and a person to provide daily care and pet needs.
Oklahoma	South	yes. expenses, policy, insurance
Virginia	South	renovating the shelter to add a pet friendly area
Washington	West	Funding, setting up coherent and practical policies.
Wyoming	West	We were able to obtain a grant from Red Rover to cover our costs so the only problem was finding the room. We are rural so we also needed to find foster care for large animals, mostly horses
Wyoming	West	liability of others getting hurt, policies for taking care of animals, cost, fairness in treating all pets consistently
Alaska	West	Our shelter has been open since 1985, and we have always had facilities for pets, over the years we have upgraded them with the support of local fundraisers and grants. I'm not sure what hurdles there may have been.
Arizona	West	Coordinating with a veterinarian clinic for pets that were not vaccinated prior to coming into shelter and/or documents not available due to fleeing situation. Initial funding for outside kennels. However, a local agency donated all material and labor. Funding for relocation for safety. Pets need soft sided carriers and that was not added into our budget at first.
Wyoming	West	Financing. Our shelter became pet friendly due to a grant from Red Rover. Ongoing concern of allergies for others staying in the Shelter.

The data did not reveal a pattern indicating that the shelters located in wealthier, or more populated areas were rid of financial barriers. Although only 11 shelters indicated finances were a barrier, these shelters were located in various parts of the country and varied by population size.

## **Discussion**

Although the topic of animal abuse is often overlooked by criminologists, and social and behavioral scientists according to Agnew, (1998), in many cases that involve family pets, there are human victims as well. Many times, in animal abuse cases that involve family pets, Arkow, (2014b), explains the abuser uses threats against the pet in order to gain more power and control over a human victim. According to Arkow, (2014b), this dynamic creates a link between animal abuse and domestic violence. This link has led to a need for pet-friendly domestic violence shelters (Newberry, 2016; Faver & Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000 and Ascione et al., 2007). Not only does a domestic violence shelter provide safety from the risk of physical harm, but it also offers a place away from violence can provide peace of mind for the victim, their children, and their pets. Although there are some, currently not all domestic violence shelters in the United States allow pets inside.

### **Research Question Overview**

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate the role pets play in the lives of domestic violence victims seeking shelter from an abusive situation. For some victims not being able to bring their pet to a shelter is enough reason to stay in an unsafe situation. For this reason, the following research questions were proposed, what is the extent of the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence? More specifically, would the number of victims seeking shelter increase if accommodations were made for pets? Additionally, do women seeking shelter request accommodations for their pets, and do they refuse shelter when a pet cannot be accommodated?

In hopes of answering these questions, this exploratory study used a mixed method approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from various domestic violence facilities across the United States. The data were collected by sending questionnaires to various facilities asking the staff a variety of questions regarding the facility's pet policy and how this policy, or lack of policy, impacts the clients that are seeking shelter. The questionnaire was emailed to 346 email addresses and usable responses were received from 136 shelters.

### **Development of Common Themes and Theory Application Based on Literature**

Upon analyzing the responses, two common themes emerged. First, victims disclosed to shelter staff a fear of leaving an abusive situation due to abuse or threat of abuse to a family pet. Second, shelters indicated that they are unable to accommodate pets due to either health and safety reasons, or to financial difficulties. Evidence of these themes were present in both the forced-choice and open-ended responses.

Both themes that were observed can be supported by the qualitative and quantitative data collected in this study. In addition, Agnew's General Strain Theory, and his theory for the causes of animal abuse can be applied to help support the first theme. Watts and McNulty (2013) proposed that childhood physical or sexual abuse often leads to delinquency later in life due to General Strain Theory. By applying the concept of General Strain Theory, it could be argued that the trauma and emotional toll from childhood abuse led the victim to becoming abusive to others, perpetuating an abusive cycle. Similarly referred to as the cycle of abuse by Bell (2001), this cycle perpetuates due to the impact of childhood abuse, animal abuse, and domestic violence.

In addition to General Strain Theory, Agnew's theory for the causes of animal abuse can also be used to explain the first theme. Simply enough, Agnew (1998), proposed, any form of animal abuse can be traced back to one of the following three factors:

- (1) "Ignorance surrounding our actions towards animals and the related consequences."
  - (2) "Belief that abusive treatment is justified."
  - (3) "Perceived benefits of abuse outweigh the costs."
- (Agnew, 1998)

In addition to these three factors, Agnew (1998) included additional factors that have direct and in-direct effects on animal abuse. These additional factors, listed below, should be taken into consideration with the individual's gender, age, education, occupation, and area of residence (Agnew, 1998).

- (1) "Individual traits, like empathy"
  - (2) "The individual's socialization, including the models they are exposed to, the beliefs they are taught, and the extent to which their abusive and non-abusive behaviors are reinforced and punished"
  - (3) "The individual's level of strain or stress, including strain caused by animals and humans"
  - (4) "The individual's level of social control, including their attachment to animals and conventional individuals, commitment to conventional institutions like family and school, and level of supervision"
  - (5) "The nature of the animal under consideration, including the animal's similarity to us on the phylogenetic scale"
- (Agnew, 1998)

The second factor is also used to explain the cycles of violence that were mentioned by Watts and McNulty (2013), Arkow (2021), and Bell (2001) in relation to domestic violence. So, although Agnew's theory was specific for the causes of animal abuse, the factors that contributed to animal abuse share similarities to the factors that contribute to domestic violence. As stated by Bell (2001), "an animal may be the last victim in a chain of abuse that filters down from the strongest family member to the weakest."

## **Development of Common Themes and Theory Application Based on Results**

Although the second theme was not initially applied to a theory, after analyzing the responses it was clear an additional theory could be applied. The concept of utilitarianism was presented by Jeremy Bentham in the late 1700s to early 1800s (Bentham, 1789). The utilitarian theory has different interpretations; however, the general view considers the action that produces the most good to be understood as the ethically right action (Driver, 2014).

Based on the responses to various questions, the utilitarian concept could be applied to the implementation of pet-friendly domestic violence shelters. The second common theme that was observed, was that some shelters indicated they are unable to accommodate pets due to either, health and safety reasons, or to financial difficulties. Some of the shelters that were unable to make pet accommodations explained in their responses that other clients at the shelter could potentially be negatively impacted by the presence of pets. For example, shelter W indicated a hurdle in creating a pet-friendly shelter included the impact it may have on other clients. Their response was:

*“Other clients may not want to live with an animal, some may have allergies.”*

This commonly voiced hurdle could be considered the outcome of a decision that was made based on the utilitarian concept. Although various research, as well as the results of this study, conclude that accommodating victims’ pets would allow more victims to seek shelter, it may be argued that pet-friendly accommodations do not benefit all clients seeking shelter and therefore do not benefit the greater good of a particular shelter. Adding pet-friendly accommodations, in some cases, could lead to negative outcomes for the shelter staff and other clients, which ultimately may outweigh the positive outcome of



accommodating a victim's pet. Some shelters believe this cost-benefit analysis is especially true if the shelter does not commonly receive requests for pet accommodations from clients.

Teaming up with local animal shelters and veterinarian offices in order to overcome financial barriers and lack of space may be the only reasonable way to accommodate a victims' pet in these situations. However, in situations where the shelter cannot make accommodations due to the health and safety of other clients, does the cost really outweigh the benefit? Various responses indicated that based on previous experience, victims' pets provide support in often traumatic situations, and also present as barriers for leaving abusive situations. In addition, various responses attested to a change in the way pets are viewed by our society. Pets hold a higher status than other animals because they are so often viewed as a member of the family. So, when considering the cost and benefit of accommodating victims' pets, are the benefits of one client more important than another client and their pet? The client with allergies may be in potential danger due to the pet accommodation. However, if a client decides to stay in a violent situation in order to stay with their pet, both the clients and the pets' lives may then be in immediate danger.

### **Shelter Demographics**

When considering the research question of this study, the varying demographics of the sampled domestic violence shelters presented as a factor that could be useful for data analysis. As proposed in the methods section of this study, the following demographics were taken into consideration: the number of clients the shelter assists, the

geographic location of the shelter, and the population size and socioeconomic status of the neighboring communities.

Although the client volume at the sampled shelters did not fluctuate based on which region in the United States the shelter was located, there was an increase in client volume at the shelters located closer to cities. In addition, shelters located in the western part of the United States disclosed facing financial barriers when trying to accommodate victims' pets. Many of these shelters mentioned livestock or large animals as specific challenges in their responses.

Some of the shelters that disclosed experiencing financial barriers, indicated that finances were a problem until they were able to receive state or federal funding, or grant money. An organization that was mentioned more than once throughout the responses was Red Rover. This is an organization that, "provides temporary emergency shelter, resources, and financial assistance when animal and people are in crisis." (Red Rover, 2021). Red Rover provides assistance to individuals as well as agencies and organizations in need (Red Rover, 2021). In addition to this organization, there are federal programs and funding available to shelters as well. The Violence Against Women Act program, Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, and Victims of Crime Act fund provide federal funding for domestic violence shelters, law enforcement, courts, rape crisis centers, children's services, prevention, community outreach and other state and local programs that provide services for victims and families (NNEDV, 2017).

### **Next Steps**

The purpose of this thesis was to add to the current research and discussion surrounding the relationship between animal abuse and domestic violence. More

specifically, this thesis aimed to address how adding pet centers at domestic violence shelters would impact victims seeking shelter from an abusive situation. Although it cannot be proven from the data collected, it could be deduced that women that are not seeking shelter due to the lack of a pet accommodation, are more likely to be the victim of a violent situation at the hands of their abuser. Considering the themes that emerged from the responses collected during this study, there is not only a need for pet accommodation within shelters, but also for logistical and financial support for the shelters that cannot make these accommodations.

### ***Policy Implications***

More than half that responded were able to accommodate a victims' pet overnight. In addition, some of the shelters that could not make those accommodations on-site partnered with local animal shelters to make arrangements possible. This is an important finding, and according to the response from shelter M, these numbers reveal an improvement in recent years.

*“If the victim is just reaching out for the first time, they often reveal they stay because they did not know they could bring in their pets. Our agency began accepting pets inhouse in 2005. We were 14 shelter in the U.S. at the time. The need to include pets was determined due to the high volume of calls requesting shelter but would not leave their pet behind.”*

In addition to the apparent increase in the number of accommodations that can be made for victims' pets at domestic violence shelters across the United States, the way pets are viewed has also changed. Pets hold a higher status than other animals because they are so often viewed as a member of the family. Shelter BW attested to this change in view in the following response:

*“In the past decade pets have risen to the status of family member. Requiring a victim to leave a family member behind is not reasonable. Left behind pets are at very high risk for abuse and need protection”*

### ***Future Research***

Because of this change in view and status, in some states, family pets can be included in legal protective actions as well. Therefore, not only can the victim seek shelter with their pet, but they can take protective measures for their pets as well. Two responses that were received during this study attested to the implementation of these protective measures.

*“I would say that over half of our clients have animals and here in Wyoming it is now possible to include family pets as those protected by a Family violence protection order  
– Shelter AD*

*“Sometimes the animal is their service animal or their means of support. We sometimes include the animals in the order for protection. I would say this happens 10-15 times a year.”  
– Shelter BZ*

These protective measures illustrate positive improvements to the legislation behind domestic violence and animal abuse. However, these improvements are not federal and therefore not all states have made the same progress. For this reason, it is important to remember that with so many different beliefs and perspectives influencing the legislative process, laws tend to vary state to state. There are many factors that influence an individual’s beliefs and opinions including, religion, cultural differences, socioeconomic status, education level, celebrity influences, and media influences (Schoenfield, 2014). Another indication of progress surrounding the connection between animal abuse and domestic violence is reflected in the increase in related literature. Agnew (1998), called for increased attention and research related to animal-related crime.

Since his claim in 1998, numerous studies have been conducted and books published. Although Hughes (2019), claims there is still a need for additional studies related to animal abuse, the increase in literature in the past decade seems promising.

Ultimately, the hope for the future would include the ability for any person in an abusive situation to seek safety with their pet no matter their geographic location or the size and species of their pet. Along with the ease of access to safety, each state should be required to provide legal protective action for family pets that are at risk of harm.

### **Limitations of this Study**

Throughout this study, there were four noticeable limitations that need to be addressed. First, it became apparent when collecting shelter email addresses that the role of the staff member completing the questionnaire varied shelter to shelter. While making phone calls to various shelters to obtain email addresses that were not listed on their website, some shelters indicated a specific job title and person that would be most fitting to respond. However, other shelters were not as sure as to who would be able to complete the questionnaire. Some responses revealed a possible lack of experience or knowledge in that specific shelter from the respondent. For example, in response to the question, *“Has a potential client ever declined services or left accommodations because they feared for a pet at home?”*, two respondents answered, *“not that I’m aware of.”*

The second limitation was observed during analysis of the responses, and evidence can be observed in Appendix C. While 127 shelters were recorded to have responded to the question regarding overnight stays for victims seeking shelter from abusive situations, this entire sample group did not respond to all the remaining questions

in the questionnaire. For example, as mentioned, Appendix C illustrates the client volume of each shelter listed by US region. There are not 127 responses listed, however.

The third limitation was an error during collection process of the shelter contact information. As mentioned in the methods section, the sample of email addresses for the various shelters was collected by searching the internet for various facilities.

Specifically, a Google search was conducted of domestic violence shelters within each state across the United States. However, upon analyzing the responses, the omittance of shelters from the state of Missouri was brought to light. Unfortunately, due to an oversight there was no search done for shelters in Missouri, therefore no questionnaires were sent to any shelters within this state.

And finally, the last limitation that was observed was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the client volume at each shelter. Many of the responses surrounding questions involving client volume made mention to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it has impacted their annual intake numbers. Some shelters indicated that the client volume decreased due to less clients seeking shelter during the pandemic, for example in response to “*On average how many people seek overnight or longer services in a year?*”, shelter CU and shelter BH responded:

*“40-50 when not in pandemic”*

*“730 in 2020, 1100 in 2019 (COVID has had strange effects)”*

Other responses indicated that due to social distancing mandates related to the COVID-19 pandemic the shelter could not house the same number of clients as they normally would.

This is evident in responses from shelter AX and shelter AD:

*“In 2020 (uncommon numbers due to the pandemic and social distancing requirements) we had 178 victims stay in our safe shelter for one night or longer”*

*“The last year our numbers have been smaller due to COVID restrictions causing an inability to provide help to those from out of state”*

## **Conclusion**

The idea that domestic violence and animal abuse are connected is now not only supported by the research cited throughout this thesis, but also supported by the responses to this thesis' questionnaire. Various responses indicated that based on previous experience, victims' pets provide support in often traumatic situations, and also present as barriers for leaving abusive situations. The cycle of abuse that is cited by multiple researchers, perpetuates due to the involvement of various forms of abuse. An abuser threatens or harms a family pet, causing the victim to stay in the abusive situation and expose the child to the abusive situation, which could then lead to the child growing up to become violent themselves. Due to the responses received in this thesis from various shelters across the United States, the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse and the cycle of abuse it perpetuates is extremely evident.



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## APPENDIX A

### Survey Questions

You are invited to participate in a survey about the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse. If you decide to participate in this study, your participation will involve answering a short series of questions regarding services that are provided by your facility, as well as your knowledge gained by your professional experiences. Although you may not personally benefit, this study is important because your feedback will help determine whether there is a connection between domestic violence and animal abuse. And further determine whether pet friendly domestic violence facilities encourage more clients to seek services.

There are no foreseeable risks, and you may refuse to answer particular questions or withdraw from this study at any time. Your confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology being used. If you agree to participate, please click on the link below to continue to the survey. You will have the option to refuse to answer individual questions and may change your mind and leave the study at any time without penalty.

*Does your organization have a facility that can house persons who are trying to leave abusive relationships for at least one night?*

Yes or No

*If No: Can you arrange for overnight or longer stays for persons trying to leave abusive relationships at an off-site location?*

Yes or No

*If No: How often are you approached by persons seeking shelter from abusive partners?*

Daily

3-4 times a week

1-2 times a week

4-5 times a month

2-3 times a month

1 time a month

A few times a year

Never

Other \_\_\_\_\_

*If you are approached, how often do these individuals ask to bring a pet?  
Please explain:*

**End of Survey**

If Yes:

**The next few questions will be asking about the services offered by your facility as well as accommodations through partner organizations made by your facility.**

*On average how many people seek overnight or longer services in a month? (write in)*

*On average how many people seek overnight or longer services over the last year? (write in)*

*In your own words, how would you describe your facility and services, please include the type of services that you offer, and what your organizational mission is?*

*Does your facility allow clients to bring their pets with them for overnight or extended placements?*

Yes - please explain:

No - please explain:

If Yes: *Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations?*

Yes – such as: \_\_\_\_\_

No

If Yes: *What were some hurdles in setting up the pet accommodations?*

Please explain:

If No: *Is there a reason your facility does not accommodate pets? (for example: cost, space, interest, etc.)*

Please explain:

*If a pet is unable to stay with a client, can you make other accommodations for that pet or pets?*

Yes or No

If Yes: *Have you done this before?*

Yes or No - please explain:

If No: *Has a potential client ever declined services or left accommodations because they feared for a pet at home?*

Yes or No - please explain:

*How often does a client ask to bring a pet or ask if pets are allowed? (open ended) please explain.*

*Has a client seeking services to leave an abusive relationship ever disclosed that their pet was also harmed by the same individual?*

Yes or No

If Yes: *How often does this occur? please explain:*

*Has a client seeking services revealed that they stayed in an abusive situation due to fear of leaving their pet behind?*

Yes or No

If Yes: *How often does this occur? please explain:*

**The next few questions are about your role in the facility and your thoughts about the subject of pets and IPV.**

*What is your job title? (write in)*

*Which of the following best describes your position?*

Full time paid

Part time paid

Full time volunteer

Part time volunteer

A mix of paid and volunteer hours

*Which best describes your job function?*

Administrative staff

Counseling services

Crisis Intervention

Financial Advocacy

Housing Plan Management

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

*In your experience, do you think that allowing clients' pets into facilities with clients is important to domestic violence victims?*

Yes – please explain:

No – please explain:

*In your experience, do you think that allowing pets in shelters would encourage more clients to seek services?*

Yes – please explain:

No – please explain:

*Is there anything surrounding domestic violence, animal abuse, or accommodating a clients' pets that you would like to share?*

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback and time are greatly valued.

## APPENDIX B

### Phone Call Script

In the event I cannot locate an email address on a facilities website, I will call the facility and read the following script:

*Good morning/afternoon,  
My name is Emily Ryan, and I am a graduate student from Bridgewater State University. I am conducting research as part of my thesis and hope to send a brief survey to your facility for feedback. I could not locate an email address on your website, would you be able to provide me with the best email address that I should send my survey to?*

If the respondent has questions about what the survey entails or what the thesis is about, I will reply with the following:

*The research topic for my thesis is the connection between domestic abuse and animal abuse. The survey asks questions about the facility's policies and services offered to people seeking assistance for themselves but also their pets. This survey is completely optional, and all feedback will be kept confidential. The email I will be sending will provide further information.*



## APPENDIX C

### Shelter Client Volume by US Region

On average how many people seek overnight or longer services over the last year?				
Northeast Region				
25-50	51-100	Over 100	Over 500	Over 1000
	AA			
		AK		
			BS	
	K			
		BT		
AR				
		CE		
		R		
	Y			
AJ				
		AB		
South Region				
25-50	51-100	Over 100	Over 500	Over 1000
		AN		
			BY	
		CD		
	J			
			O	
CU				
			BH	
				S
				AU
		BX		
		BI		
		DD		
	BW			
		BV		
				AP
			AQ	
		BK		

On average how many people seek overnight or longer services over the last year?

Midwest Region					
Under 25	25-50	51-100	Over 100	Over 500	Over 1000
			BL		
			W		
				L	
					Q
	CF				
			DQ		
			AX		
			BD		
				BR	
			T		
		BZ			
AV					
			AW		
			Z		
		V			
		AE			
			P		
AM					
		AO			

West Region				
25-50	51-100	Over 100	Over 500	Over 1000
		N		
		BO		
		M		
		AS		
CB				
			BE	
		BU		
AZ				
		BG		
BP				
		X		
		DR		
		AF		
			BN	
		DC		
AI				
		BC		
CC				
				CJ
				AC
		BQ		
		BM		
	BF			

## APPENDIX D

### Pet-Friendly Accommodations by US Region

Shelter Location	Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations?	Does your facility have a pet-friendly space or any specific pet accommodations? Please Explain.
State		
<b>Northeast Region</b>		
Delaware	Yes	outside provider of sanctuary for pets if available
Maine	Yes	
Pennsylvania	Yes	We do not have specific pet accommodations, but we do have a nice yard and safe area for walking pets
Pennsylvania	Yes	We have a local vet's office that will lodge their pets.
Pennsylvania	Yes	ADA room for survivors with service animals, as well as our partnership with the local animal center
Rhode Island	Yes	We collaborate with a local animal shelter
<b>South Region</b>		
Arkansas	Yes	
Florida	Yes	We have a temperature controlled pet room with individual kennels
Georgia	Yes	Ahimsa House Pet Fostering
Kansas	Yes	DVACK has a living room specific to pets and their families so they can enjoy a more relaxed setting and spend quality time together
Kansas	Yes	We have a back yard
Louisiana	Yes	They must be on a leash and have a kennel
Oklahoma	Yes	dog kennels outside for age appropriate dogs

Tennessee	Yes	we do have closed in yards and are in safe areas that Prt [ <i>sic</i> ] could walk their pet in, and we could help with supplies and food.
Tennessee	Yes	Service animals have a space in the court yard for play and etc.
Texas	Yes	Dog kennel, cat house, fenced in yard
Virginia	Yes	specific shelter for clients with pets with a 'pet room' for keeping pets out of main living areas
West Virginia	Yes	we have a specific pet shelter
<b>Midwest Region</b>		
Illinois	Yes	it is service animal friendly
Indiana	Yes	We have a gated area with green space in the back.
Michigan	Yes	We allow pets like cats. We try to make other arrangements most pets because of space. We work with local per shelter
Minnesota	Yes	I have never had this happen. I would assume that if a client HAD to come to the center and brought their pet, it would be fine.
Nebraska	Yes	We rent a house. At times, we're able to allow well behaved dogs to stay in the shelter with their humans
Ohio	Yes	Fenced in yard, separated room with an outside entrance in the event an individual has a fear of animals
Wisconsin	Yes	If it is a service animal, we make accommodations, and we have adequate space outside
<b>West Region</b>		
Alaska	Yes	Outdoor kennel, and a fenced in yard.
Arizona	Yes	3 stalls outside facility for large animals and small animals can reside in house with the client
Arizona	Yes	we provide kennels and a dog run

Colorado	Yes	Pets are allowed in shelter.
Hawaii	Yes	Kennels/designated areas
Idaho	Yes	Indoor and outdoor kennels
Montana	Yes	If a pet is ineligible due to behavior or capacity limitations, we have an agreement with the local animal shelter to care for the pet until the owner establishes permanent housing.
New Mexico	Yes	we make accommodations for service animals (not emotional support)
Washington	Yes	We have one building with two rooms with exterior doors that exit onto a small "dog run"
Washington	Yes	fenced yard, fenced kennel
Washington	Yes	See answer to previous questions. Also, if our 3 pet rooms are filled, we have a contract with our local humane society to "board" pets there, with residents being able to do daily visits, while the resident is in our shelter. No charge.
Washington	Yes	Residents are housed in their own units with a locking door. Much like an apartment building.
Wyoming	Yes	we have an outside kennel and also allow pets inside with their owners. Cats can be left in an indoor kennel similar to what our local animal shelter has.
Wyoming	Yes	out/indoor doghouse - indoor cat shelter
Wyoming	Yes	pet specific bedroom and crates for pets when clients are not in shelter
Wyoming	Yes	The Shelter is pet-friendly, residents may have pets in their rooms. Outdoor shed/kennel/dog run are also provided.