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## **23. Animal cruelty and child welfare: The health visitor's perspective**

Dawn Hawksworth and Rachel Balen

Despite efforts to clarify and define core responsibilities, the role of the Health Visitor within the UK remains the subject of contentious current debate. Indeed, against a backdrop of enormous organizational change within the National Health Service, both at local and national level, the need to quantify services in the search for value for money remains high on the health and social care agenda.<sup>1</sup> However, while the monetary value of the Health Visiting service remains at present impossible to quantify, not least because long term health and social outcomes are difficult to measure, the value of this highly skilled member of the nursing profession's contribution to the public health role with children and families has recently been confirmed at government level.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the refocusing of responsibilities for the provision of Section 17 services to children and families in need, underpinned by the Children Act 2004, further strengthens the safeguarding role of Health Visitors and underlines the need to maintain the robust home visiting context traditionally associated with the profession.

A pragmatic approach to risk assessment associated with the role necessitates an assessment of wider environmental issues and consideration of complex family dynamics. Although not within existing practice guidelines, our personal interest in animal welfare issues and moral values has undoubtedly influenced our approaches to

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<sup>1</sup> AMICUS/CPHVA, Campaigning résumé May 2006, 'Health Visiting jobs meltdown', [www.amicustheunion.org/docs](http://www.amicustheunion.org/docs).

<sup>2</sup> R. Lowe, 'Facing the future: A review of the role of Health Visitors', (2007), [www.dh.gov.uk/cno](http://www.dh.gov.uk/cno).

this assessment process and **has** led us to **include the consideration of the** care and treatment of animals within families.

Having close contact within the homes of often vulnerable families in a socially deprived area, **one of us, as a practicing health visitor, has** observed direct cruelty to animals and **has** frequently witnessed signs that animals are suffering as a result of neglect. However, within the commonly used Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families<sup>3</sup> and the more recent Common Assessment Framework<sup>4</sup> it is not possible to identify material relating to the harming of animals that would inform assessment and planning. An extensive review of the relevant literature<sup>5</sup> reveals a lively debate focusing on a range of constructs that confirm the existence of an interrelationship between animal cruelty and child abuse, specifically associated with family violence. In addition, concern is expressed within the literature that cruelty to animals by children has potential implications for future harmful behaviour.

At practice level within the UK, the paucity of policies, procedures, and training around this subject area reflects the finding that the vast majority of research has been conducted within the USA. Indeed, while relevant bodies such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) are committed to raising awareness and influencing policy, the UK has produced little research evidence.

The emerging themes within the literature reveal a range of significant factors that suggest children may be at risk of significant harm in families that are also cruel

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<sup>3</sup> DFES, Framework for the assessment of children in need and their families (London: HMSO, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> DFES, *Every child matters – The common assessment framework for children and young people: Practitioners guide. Integrated working to improve outcomes for children and young people* (London: TSO, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> D. L. Hawksworth, *Animal Cruelty: A relationship with child abuse, family violence and later harmful behaviour*, MA Dissertation (University of Huddersfield , 2007).

to animals. For example, there is research evidence to support the view that animal and child abuse coexists within dysfunctional families,<sup>6</sup> together with a body of evidence connecting emotionally harmful parenting styles with childhood animal cruelty.<sup>7</sup>

While sampling and data gathering methods are frequently criticized,<sup>8</sup> there is sound evidence of a worrying trend connecting family violence with animal cruelty.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, although less prominent within the literature, there is some evidence that draws attention to an equally concerning connection with sexual abuse,<sup>10</sup> highlighting the developmental impact on children of witnessing animal cruelty.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> E. DeViney, J. Dickert, and R. Lockwood, 'The care of pets within child abusing families', *International Journal of the Study of Animal Problems*, 4 (1983), 321–329; A. Duncan, J. C. Thomas, and C. Miller, 'Significance of family risk factors in development of childhood animal cruelty in adolescent boys with conduct problems', *Journal of Family Violence*, 20 (4) (2005), 235–239.

<sup>7</sup> C. P. Flynn, 'Exploring the link between corporal punishment and children's cruelty to animals', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 61 (4) (1999), 971–981; C. D. Raupp, 'Treasuring, trashing or terrorizing: Adult outcomes of childhood socialisation about companion animals', *Society and Animals*, 7 (2) (1999), 141–159; S. Verlinden, M. Herson, and J. Thomas, 'Risk factors in school shootings', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 20 (1) (2000), 3–56; F. R. Ascione, C. V. Webber, D. S. Wood, 'The abuse of animals and domestic violence: A national survey of shelters for women who are battered', *Society and Animals*, 5 (3) (1997), [www.psyeta.org/sa/sa5.3/Ascione.html](http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa5.3/Ascione.html); L. A. Zilney and M. Zilney, 'Reunification of child and animal welfare agencies: Cross-reporting of abuse in Wellington County, Ontario', *Child Welfare*, 84 (1) (2005), 47–66.

<sup>8</sup> D. Solot, 'Untangling the animal abuse web', *Society and Animals*, 5 (3) (1997), [www.psyeta.org](http://www.psyeta.org); C. Miller, 'Childhood animal cruelty and interpersonal violence', *Clinical Psychology Review*, 21 (5) (2001), 735–749; M. R. Dadds, C. M. Turner, and J. McAloon, 'Developmental links between cruelty to animals and human violence', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 35 (3) (2002), 363–382; H. Piper, 'The linkage of animal abuse with interpersonal violence: A sheep in wolf's clothing?' *Journal of Social Work*, 3 (2) (2003), 161–177; P. Tiffin and C. Kaplan, 'Dangerous children: Assessment and management of risk', *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 9 (2) (2004), 56–64; H. Piper and S. Myers, 'Forging the links: (De) constructing chains of behaviours', *Child Abuse Review*, 15 (2006), 178–187.

<sup>9</sup> R. A. Prenky and D. L. Carter, 'The predictive value of the triad for sex offenders', *Behavioural Sciences and the Law* 2 (3) (1984), 341–354; Ascione *et al.*, 'The abuse of animals and domestic violence'; J. A. Quinslisk, 'Animal abuse and family violence', in F. R. Ascione and P. Arkow (eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999); P. Carlisle-Frank, J. M. Frank, and L. Nielson, 'Selective battering of the family pet', *Anthrozoös*, 17 (1) (2004), 26–42; C. L. Currie, 'Animal cruelty by children exposed to domestic violence', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 30 (4) (2006), 425–435.

<sup>10</sup> G. Duffield, A. Hassiotis, and E. Vizard, 'Zoophilia in young sexual abusers', *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 9 (2) (1998) 294–304; F. R. Ascione, N. N. Friedrich, J. Heath, and K. Hayashi, 'Cruelty to animals in normative, sexually abused, and outpatient psychiatric samples of 6–12 year old children: Relations to maltreatment and exposure to domestic violence', *Anthrozoös*, 17 (3) (2003), 194–212.

<sup>11</sup> C. A. Lacroix, 'Another weapon for combating family violence – prevention of animal abuse', in F. R. Ascione and P. Arkow (eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty: Linking the circles*

In addition to the focus on the child and family, further themes emerge focusing on the predictive nature of childhood animal cruelty revealing a more contentious debate, with many authors leaning heavily towards the serial killer link as evidence of a causal relationship.<sup>12</sup> However, while some authors dispute the connection between animal cruelty and later human violence,<sup>13</sup> a more convincing body of evidence exists suggesting a degree of connection with some form of later harmful antisocial behaviour, including human violence, sexual offending, non-violent crime and vandalism.<sup>14</sup>

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*of compassion for prevention and intervention* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999); Quinslisk, 'Animal abuse'; Raupp, 'Treasuring'; B. C. Henry, 'The relationship between animal cruelty, delinquency and attitudes towards the treatment of animals', *Society and Animals*, 12 (3) (2004), 185–207.

<sup>12</sup> P. Arkow, 'The correlations between cruelty to animals and child abuse and the implications for veterinary medicine', *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, 33 (8) (1992), 518–521; R. De Angelis, 'The vicious circle', *Animal Guardian*, 11 (3) (1998), 8–10; M. Merritt, 'Study links child and animal abuse', *Scotland on Sunday*, 28 June 1998, [www.proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index](http://www.proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index); J. Hardy, 'Man's best friend: killers start with pet torture says experts', *The Mirror*, 6 August 2001, [www.proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index](http://www.proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index); Verlinden *et al.*, 'Risk factors'; N. C. Sweeney, 'Animals and children caught up in a cycle of cruelty', *Justice of the Peace*, (13) (March 2004), 224.

<sup>13</sup> K. S. Miller and J. F. Knutson, 'Reports of severe physical punishment and exposure to animal cruelty by inmates convicted of felonies and by university students', *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 21 (1) (1997), 59–82; S. E. Tallichet, C. Hensley, and S. D. Singer, 'Unravelling the methods of childhood and adolescent cruelty to nonhuman animals', *Society and Animals*, 13 (2) (2005), 91–107.

<sup>14</sup> A. R. Felthous, 'Aggression against cats, dogs and people', *Child Psychiatry and Human Development*, 10 (3) (Spring 1980), 169–177; S. R. Kellert and A. R. Felthous, 'Childhood cruelty towards animals among criminals and non-criminals', *Human Relations*, 38 (1985), 1113–1129; D. Tingle, G. W. Barnard, L. Robbins, G. Newman, and D. Hutchinson, 'Childhood and adolescent characteristics of paedophiles and rapists', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 9 (1986), 103–116; A. R. Felthous and S. R. Kellert, 'Childhood cruelty to animals and later aggression against people: A review', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 144 (6) (1987) 710–717; Miller and Knutson, 'Reports'; C. T. M. Coston and B. M. Protz, 'Kill your dog, beat your wife, screw your neighbour's kids, rob a bank? A cursory look at an individual's vat of social chaos resulting from deviance', *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*, 26 (2) (November 1998), 153–158; A. Arluke, J. Levin, C. Luke and F. R. Ascione, 'The relationship of animal abuse to other forms of antisocial behaviour', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 14 (1999), 963–975; L. Merz-Perez, K. M. Heide, and I. J. Silverman, 'Childhood animal cruelty and subsequent violence against humans', *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 45 (5) (2001), 556–573; W. Flemming, B. Jory, and D. L. Burton, 'Characteristics of juvenile offenders admitting to sexual activity with nonhuman animals', *Society and Animals*, 10 (1) (2002), [www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.1/flemming.shtml](http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa10.1/flemming.shtml); C. P. Flynn, 'Hunting and illegal violence against humans and other animals: Exploring the relationship', *Society and Animals* 10 (2) (2002), [www.psyeta.org](http://www.psyeta.org); K. R. Beyer and J. O. Beasley, 'Non-family child abductors who murder their victims. Offender demographics from interviews with incarcerated offenders', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18 (10) (2003), 1167–1188; B. C. Henry, 'Exposure to animal abuse and group context: Two factors affecting participation in animal abuse', *Anthrozoös*, 17 (4) (2004), 290–305; M. Muscari, 'Juvenile animal abuse: Practice and policy implications for PNP's', *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 18 (1) (2004), 15–21.

Further exploration of the possible underlying factors associated with future harmful behaviour uncovers evidence relating to desensitization<sup>15</sup> and, more frequently, intrinsic factors such as conduct disorder.<sup>16</sup> The contrasting opinions within the literature suggest, however, that this is an underdeveloped argument that would benefit from further investigation.

Personal practice experience reflects several elements of the themes from the literature and also **serves** to highlight the key issues relating to primary health and social care policy, multi-agency practice/training, and information sharing. The following discussion of three examples from the health visiting practice of one of the authors represents the common threads of joint human and animal suffering and highlights the implications of these experiences for frontline practitioners.

### **Family A**

Family A consisted of two school age children, one child under five years, a mother, father and uncle. Educational staff had expressed concerns that the older children were extremely dirty, persistently infested with head lice and were becoming withdrawn. School staff had made attempts to visit the family home, which was concealed away from public view, but had not gained entry, noting that dogs were tied up in a small garden littered with animal faeces. In response to these concerns the

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<sup>15</sup> F. R. Ascione, 'Children who are cruel to animals: A review of research and implications for developmental psychopathology', *Anthrozoös*, 1 (4) (1993), 226–247; P. Beirne, 'From animal abuse to interhuman violence? A critical review of the progression thesis', *Society and Animals*, 12 (1) (2003), [www.psyeta.org/sa/sa12.1/beirne.shtml](http://www.psyeta.org/sa/sa12.1/beirne.shtml).

<sup>16</sup> J. Kelso and M. A. Stewart, 'Factors which predict the persistence of aggressive conduct disorder', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 27 (1) (1986), 77–86; Duffield *et al.*, 'Zoophilia'; F. R. Ascione, 'The abuse of animals and interpersonal violence – making the connection', in F. R. Ascione and P. Arkow (eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press); B. W. Boat, 'Abuse of children and abuse of animals: Using the links to inform child assessment and protection', in F. R. Ascione and P. Arkow (eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999).

school nurse agreed to a joint visit with the family to assess home conditions and address the hygiene/lice problems affecting the children.

The outside of the property gave many clues as to the chronic neglect of both children and animals that was unveiled inside. Just as the school staff had experienced, we were greeted by a pit bull terrier, tied up on a short rope. The dog had no shelter, access to food or water and was surrounded by its own faeces. However, in contrast to the image it was perhaps intended to portray, this dog was quiet and miserable, responding enthusiastically to our friendly gestures.

The scene inside served to explain the presentation of the children at school and reflects the evidence emerging from research of the coexistence of child and animal suffering, particularly vulnerable children and domestic pets.<sup>17</sup> In addition to dogs, the family owned a severely malnourished and frightened cat together with several fish. Animal faeces were not confined to the garden and contributed to an appalling risk of infection from a combination of human faeces, discarded used nappies, rotting left-over takeaway food, maggots and flies. The children slept in a single shared bed that was dirty, used a broken filthy toilet and had no access to hygiene products or dental care. On the initial visit to the house there was very little edible food available for the children and no evidence of food for the animals. Indeed, further assessment of the family revealed a diet of takeaway junk food, of which the left-over scraps were fed to the animals. The fish were also neglected and all later died.

While the mother showed embarrassment and a degree of remorse, the father's abusive and controlling behaviour was indicative of the evidence emerging from the

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<sup>17</sup> Ascione, 'The relationship of animal abuse'.

literature relating to family violence and animal cruelty.<sup>18</sup> While the importance of identifying children at risk of harm within violent families has been consistently highlighted within UK safeguarding literature,<sup>19</sup> together with recent important practice guidance,<sup>20</sup> the need to consider the care of animals is not included.

Family violence is arguably covert in its nature, underlining the importance of recognizing factors which may prompt professionals to take action. As highlighted by this case, the image of the dog outside this family home not only mirrored the treatment of the children but also serves to highlight the importance of overcoming the barriers erected by abusive parents who use fighting dogs to intimidate and warn off professionals – although the dogs in this case were not dangerous, it was clear that the father intended to use them as a deterrent.

Following urgent multi-agency referrals involving child protection services and animal welfare organizations, the children in this case were placed on the child protection register. The cat was eventually re-homed and the welfare of the dog was closely monitored by animal welfare officers. Furthermore, in an attempt to recognize the relationship between the care of both children and animals within this family, the child protection plan also contained instructions for health and social care professionals to check for animal access to food and water, although the relevance of this to the welfare of the children was questioned by other health professionals not involved in the case.

These differences of opinions – *‘not my role; someone else should do that; don’t like dogs anyway’* – are typical of the varying attitudes of health and social care

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<sup>18</sup> Ascione *et al.*, ‘The abuse of animals and domestic violence’; Carlisle-Frank *et al.*, ‘Selective battering’.

<sup>19</sup> DFES, ‘Framework for assessment’; R. Sinclair and R. Bullock, ‘Learning from past experiences: A review of serious case reviews’, (2002), [www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects](http://www.doh.gov.uk/qualityprotects).

<sup>20</sup> DFES, *Working together to safeguard children: A guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children* (London TSO, 2006).



professionals towards the welfare of animals that we encounter in practice, highlighting the need for the inclusion of issues relating to joint human and animal suffering within child protection training. Research by Staley indicates that animal cruelty is more likely to be identified by experienced members of the multi-agency team, although our experiences from practice, highlighted by this case, suggest that individual beliefs and moral values are more likely to influence professionals' responses to animal cruelty.<sup>21</sup> To echo Arkow's viewpoint,<sup>22</sup> those involved with vulnerable families and animals at ground level are obvious targets for specific training on the links between animal cruelty and human suffering, not least because of their close contact but also, as proposed by Faver and Strand,<sup>23</sup> with the exception of animal welfare officers,<sup>24</sup> **because** practice culture has traditionally focused on human welfare, underlining the need to broaden viewpoints beyond a narrow single-agency focus.

The mutual suffering experienced by both children and animals and contrasting approaches of professionals are also common features of the experience of working closely with *Family B*. However, specific elements emerging from the family history of the mother also serve to highlight the modelling and social learning theories associated with the phenomenon.

## **Family B**

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<sup>21</sup> C. Staley, *Child and animal maltreatment: A local study of multi-agency staff knowledge, experience and perceptions of the links between child and animal abuse*, MA Dissertation (University of Huddersfield, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> P. Arkow, 'The evolution of animal welfare as a human welfare concern', in F. R. Ascione and P. Arkow (eds.), *Child abuse, domestic violence and animal cruelty: Linking the circles of compassion for prevention and intervention* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> C. A. Faver and E. B. Strand, 'Domestic violence and animal cruelty: untangling the web of abuse' *Journal of Social Work Education*, 39 (2) (2003), 237–253.

<sup>24</sup> A. Arluke and C. Luke, 'Physical cruelty towards animals in Massachusetts', *Society and Animals*, 5 (1997), 195–204; M. Allen, B. Gallagher, and B. Jones, 'Domestic violence and the abuse of pets: Researching the link and its implications in Ireland', *Practice*, 18 (3) (2006), 167–181.

*Family B* consisted of two young parents and a baby living in a small two-roomed property. Both parents had a degree of learning disability and although both had extended family living in nearby areas, the couple were, prior to the birth of their baby, ostensibly living independently of family support or external agencies. Having concealed the pregnancy and presented late to maternity services, a rapid multi-agency response resulted in an urgent child protection case conference and registration on to the child protection register. An intense package of care was developed encompassing interventions from a range of professionals from health and social care, including parenting and psychological assessments. However, despite commendable efforts by all the professionals concerned, the significant risks to the baby from both physical and emotional harm resulted in removal and later adoption.

Initial discussions between all members of the child protection core group included some reference to the cats and kittens living at the property. The majority of concerns focused on the risks to the baby from either infection or injury from the cats, and from the poor general hygiene standard of the couple, made worse by the confined living space. However, the true picture of animal cruelty and the significance of this in terms of both risks to the baby and suffering of the cats emerged following more detailed assessment, facilitated through longer periods of home visiting and observation of direct animal cruelty such as throwing the kitten across the room and withholding food and water as the kitten had '*been naughty*'.

The differing perception of risk and value attached to the cats in this case represents a common feature of child protection assessments. For example, Parton et al.'s evaluation of 30 randomly selected case records serves to highlight the different interpretations of perceived risk in child protection work arising from a complex

presentation of common factors.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the implications of a flawed assessment, hampered by the timeframes dictated by UK legislation, are considered significant by Sheldrick.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, while animal welfare issues remain distinct from child welfare issues in health and social care practice and joint human and animal suffering is not generally considered relevant, it is not surprising that professionals under pressure fail to reach a consensus during the assessment process, further underlining the need for the inclusion of animal welfare issues within joint agency training.

Evidence emerging from the literature also suggests that the importance attached to animal cruelty within the assessment protocols of child and adolescent mental health services differs greatly in the UK (Bell 2001).<sup>27</sup> However, the documented concern recorded by the psychologist in the case of *Family B*, who also witnessed direct physical cruelty to the cats, undoubtedly influenced later care proceedings leading to the subsequent removal and adoption of this baby, suggesting an encouraging awareness of the relevant issues from not only this agency but also those involved at judicial level during care proceedings.

As with *Family A*, the welfare of the cats in this case was addressed through liaison with animal welfare officers. However, this example of multi-agency collaboration also uncovered valuable insight into the mother's own childhood, leading to greater understanding of her behaviour. For example, it was revealed that the mother had been known to animal welfare officers since her childhood. Similarly, her father was known to them for the neglect and cruel treatment of cats.

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<sup>25</sup> N. Parton, D. Thorpe, and C. Wattam, *Child protection: Risk and the moral order* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> C. Sheldrick, 'Practitioner Review: The assessment and management of risk in adolescents', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 40 (4) (1999), 507–518.

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The search for predictive behaviour and causal relationships has become increasingly important within child protection research<sup>28</sup> and features prominently within the literature pertaining to a progression or graduation theory associated with animal cruelty. However, closer inspection of the evidence reveals a lively debate around the exact causal nature of this relationship suggesting that although researchers have attempted to demonstrate a link, the exact nature of this association remains unclear.<sup>29</sup> While a critical view exists suggesting that the largely prognostic theme within the literature is based on nothing more than quasi-scientific presentation,<sup>30</sup> the rigorous research by Kellert and Felthous,<sup>31</sup> although dated, demonstrates the clear empirical association between childhood animal cruelty and later human violence reflected by this case.

As emphasized by Haden and Scarpa,<sup>32</sup> the aetiology of childhood animal cruelty, as with all human behaviour, is complex and multi-dimensional. The role and behaviour of parents are not surprisingly critical and have emerged as a consistent theme within the literature. For example, Currie sampled 47 victims of domestic violence where animal cruelty was a factor and concluded that the children exposed to the animal cruelty were more likely to be cruel to animals themselves due to the powerful role modelling of their parents.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Duncan et al.'s findings suggest

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<sup>28</sup> Parton *et al.*, 'Child protection'.

<sup>29</sup> Lacroix, 'Another weapon'; A. Duncan and C. Miller, 'The impact of an abusive family context on childhood animal cruelty and adult violence', *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 7 (4) (2002), 365–383; Dadds *et al.*, 'Developmental links'; M. R. Dadds, C. Whiting, P. Bunn, J. A. Fraser, J. H. Charson, and A. Pirola-Merlo, 'Measurement of cruelty in children: The cruelty to animals inventory', *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 32 (2004), 321–334.

<sup>30</sup> Piper, 'The linkage of animal abuse'.

<sup>31</sup> Kellert and Felthous, 'Childhood cruelty'.

<sup>32</sup> S. C. Haden and A. Scarpa, 'Childhood animal cruelty: A review of research, assessment and therapeutic issues', *The Forensic Examiner*, 14 (2) (2005), 23–32.

<sup>33</sup> Currie, 'Animal cruelty'.

that cruel and abusive behaviours witnessed at home directly influence the animal cruelty perpetrated by children.<sup>34</sup>

It would seem almost common sense to assume that the mother in this case learned harmful behaviour from her father, indeed the impact of role modelling is repeatedly referred to in the literature.<sup>35</sup> However, closer examination of parenting styles, attachment theories and coercive control, as illustrated by Print and Erooga,<sup>36</sup> facilitates an understanding of how, for some children, abusive environments interfere with the normal developmental trajectory. Studies highlighting statistical significance associated with witnessing animal cruelty and childhood animal cruelty serve to emphasize the modelling theory.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, according to Lacroix,<sup>38</sup> children who are brought up in homes where animals are abused learn to gain compliance through aggression, which interferes with the development of concern for the well-being of others or empathy. The mother in this case was typical of this theory, which emphasizes the importance of not only recognizing the interrelationship of human/animal cruelty but also the importance of timely interagency information-sharing.

## **Family C**

The importance of accurate interagency cross-reporting was also a prominent feature of the issues surrounding *Family C* and serves as a stark reminder of the potential risks to both children and animals when professionals fail to share important

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<sup>34</sup> Duncal *et al.*, 'Significance of family risk factors'.

<sup>35</sup> S. Zawistowski, 'The legacy of Mary Ellen', *ASPCA Animal Watch*, Fall/Winter 1992, 1–6; R. Agnew, 'The causes of animal abuse: psychological analysis', *Theoretical Criminology*, 2 (2) (1998), 177–209; C. P. Flynn, 'Acknowledging the zoological connection: A sociological analysis of animal cruelty', *Society and Animals*, 9 (1) (2001), 71–87; Muscari, 'Juvenile animal abuse'.

<sup>36</sup> B. Print and M. Erooga, 'Young people who sexually abuse: Implications for assessment', in J. Horwath (ed.), *The child's world: Assessing children in need* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Quinslisk, 'Animal abuse'; Henry, 'The relationship between animal cruelty'.

<sup>38</sup> Lacroix, 'Another weapon'.

information. *Family C* lived on a housing estate renowned for its high levels of deprivation, which at the time included some of the highest figures of reported crime, drug offences and vandalism in the area. Indeed, the family were also well known to the police for their criminal activity. The birth of the sixth child prompted health visitor involvement and represented a first significant experience of multi-agency practice involving animal welfare officers.

Initial visits to the family drew attention to the worrying pattern of neglectful parenting and animal cruelty often encountered when working with vulnerable families. The children were quiet and unkempt and shared cramped, dirty home conditions with a large number of dogs who were kept mainly out of sight but could be heard whimpering in other rooms. Liaison with the School Nurse revealed that unsatisfactory school attendance had been an area of concern for many years. Indeed, further assessment suggested that the children were often kept at home and expected to care for both siblings and their mother, a pattern of behaviour observed during visits. In response to concerns, the family were offered support and assistance from education, health, and social services which later resulted in registration on the child protection register following disclosure of physical abuse from one of the older children. However, the neglect of several dogs within the home and failure to treat an infected burn on one animal gave many clues as to the true picture of historical child and animal cruelty that emerged at a later date.

The interrelationship of animal cruelty, child abuse, and other criminal activity within this family reflects findings from a different angle of research within the literature. For example, Beirne<sup>39</sup> suggests that the subject of abused animals is becoming increasingly more pertinent as scientists attempt to apply both ecological

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<sup>39</sup> P. Beirne, 'For a non-speciesist criminology: animal abuse as an object of study', *Criminology*, 37 (1) (1998), 117–148.

and ethological principles to criminology research, although it is emphasized that this shift in focus represents only minor changes and numbers of studies remain low. An early study acknowledges the wider criminal associations with animal cruelty by the inclusion of a non-violent criminal sample alongside a violent sample and non-criminal sample, although findings from this study suggest only a modest relationship.<sup>40</sup>

Further inferences to harmful behaviour are outlined by Henry, who sampled 206 college students and concluded that those students who had either engaged in or observed animal cruelty were more likely to have participated in a variety of delinquent behaviours.<sup>41</sup> This phenomenon was also researched by Coston and Protz who, in an attempt to avoid self-reporting bias, meticulously examined the data of 958 animal cruelty records, demonstrating that, for this sample, 785 other emergency calls were also made in the previous two years, suggesting a strong association with other anti-social behaviour.<sup>42</sup>

This theme is also reflected in the rigorous examination of 153 criminal records by Arluke et al.,<sup>43</sup> suggesting that a narrow focus on the violence variable belies more complex factors that may be linked to other socially unacceptable behaviour. For example, using antisocial behaviour as the dependent variable, Arluke et al. found that 70 per cent of the animal cruelty (AC) group also committed at least one other offence compared with only 22 per cent of the control sample. The AC group were also 4 times more likely to have been arrested for property crimes, 3.5 times more likely to be involved with drugs, and 3.5 times more likely to have been arrested for disorderly behaviour.

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<sup>40</sup> Kellert and Felthous, 'Childhood cruelty'.

<sup>41</sup> Henry, 'Exposure to animal abuse'.

<sup>42</sup> Coston and Protz, 'Kill your dog'.

<sup>43</sup> Arluke *et al.*, 'The relationship of animal abuse'.

The types of crimes referred to in this research reflect the lifestyle choices of *Family C*, highlighting not only the challenges of working with such families but also the need to seek information from a wider network of agencies. For example, a referral to animal welfare officers in this case resulted in the discovery that the family were in fact banned from keeping dogs following a previous prosecution for cruelty. However, although *Family C* had two children at the time of this prosecution, child welfare agencies had not been informed, indicating both a lack of awareness and of cross-reporting guidance at that time.

Current UK health and social care policies, developed following the Laming Report,<sup>44</sup> have necessitated a more co-ordinated multi-agency response to child welfare concerns. However, the most recent government guidance on this approach does not represent an entirely new concept<sup>45</sup> as the reality of ‘working together’ has taken on a number of forms over recent years encompassing a range of collaborative terms that are often used interchangeably.<sup>46</sup>

An emphasis on collaborative efforts, aimed at identifying and assisting families where animal cruelty is suspected, should therefore feature prominently in training. Indeed, as emphasized by Tiffin and Kaplan,<sup>47</sup> it is acknowledged that in practice, families with children who exhibit high risk behaviours, such as animal cruelty, are often hard to reach, further underlining the importance of inter-agency communication and information sharing. However, it is noteworthy that the proposed solution to fragmented practice currently being rolled out in the UK<sup>48</sup> does not contain

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<sup>44</sup> Lord Laming, *The Victoria Climbié inquiry: Report of an inquiry by Lord Laming* (London: HMSO, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> DFES, *Working together*.

<sup>46</sup> R. Gardner, ‘Working together to improve children’s life chances: The challenge of interagency collaboration’, in J. Weinstein, C. Whittington, and T. Leiba, *Collaboration in social work practice* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Tiffin and Kaplan, ‘Dangerous children’.

<sup>48</sup> DFES, *Every child matters*.



a reference to information sharing with animal welfare agencies. Furthermore, despite containing very detailed guidance on specific dimensions that draw parallels with themes highlighted in the literature – development and behaviour of the child; parents’ capacity; family and environment – the subject of animal cruelty is not mentioned in the document.

The evidence in the literature of an established cross-reporting system between human and animal welfare agencies in the USA reflects a greater societal and cultural awareness of the significance of animal cruelty, borne out of a sustained effort between almost 100 health and social services, veterinary and humane collaborations.<sup>49</sup>

Joint working initiatives in the UK around the subject of animal and human welfare have received brief attention,<sup>50</sup> although recent efforts from the Links Group have served to raise the profile of information sharing around domestic violence and animal cruelty.<sup>51</sup> It could also be argued that the differences in mandatory reporting legislation evident in parts of America such as California, San Diego, Maine, and Maryland<sup>52</sup> only serve to illuminate the vast differences between UK and US practice. Similarly, with the exception of the NSPCC,<sup>53</sup> the majority of training material

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<sup>49</sup> Ascione, ‘The abuse of animals’; N. R. Fawcett, E. Gullone, and J. Johnson, ‘Domestic violence and animal abuse: Encouraging collaborative relations between animal welfare and human welfare agencies in Australia’, *Inpsych: The Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society*, 24 (2) (2002), 36–38; C. MacLennan, *First Strike targets links between animal and child abuse*, 2007, [www.animalliberationfront.com/philosophy/abuseLinked](http://www.animalliberationfront.com/philosophy/abuseLinked).

<sup>50</sup> BBC News, ‘Child abuse and cruelty “linked”’, 12 February 2001: [www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1165768.stm](http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/1165768.stm); Guardian Unlimited, ‘A safe house for animals: Special report Animal Rights’ March 2003, [www.guardian.co.uk/animalrights/story](http://www.guardian.co.uk/animalrights/story); NSPCC, ‘NSPCC and RSPCA join forces to tackle violence within family’, 2003, [www.nspcc.org.uk/html/home/information](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/html/home/information).

<sup>51</sup> J. Silk, ‘Animal cruelty clue to domestic violence’, *Care and Health News*, 2007, [www.careandhealth.com/pages/story](http://www.careandhealth.com/pages/story).

<sup>52</sup> Doris Day Animal Foundation, *The violence connection: An examination of the link between animal abuse and other violent crimes* (Washington DC: Doris Day Animal Foundation, 2004), [www.ddaf.org](http://www.ddaf.org).

<sup>53</sup> NSPCC (2005) ‘Understanding the links: child abuse, animal abuse, and domestic violence’, 2005, [www.nspcc.org.uk/inform](http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform).

reflects US policy and legislation,<sup>54</sup> highlighting a potential lack of transferability of this material.

Nevertheless, together with the case of *Family C*, several examples in the literature serve to highlight both the benefits and pitfalls associated with cross-reporting, suggesting that in spite of technical difficulties, it is worth pursuing a multi-agency approach to training around these issues.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, all three cases discussed in this paper share common features that highlight the need for a wide range of professionals encountering vulnerable children and animals to look beyond a narrow single-agency focus in response to the evidence emerging from research. Similarly, although not addressed in this paper, the contact by animal welfare agencies with vulnerable adults such as older people or those with mental health problems is clearly also an important consideration.

The format of child protection training in the UK acknowledges the benefits of a multi-agency focus, enabling those involved to share experiences and gain insight into different roles. The evidence of an interrelationship between animal cruelty, child abuse, family violence and later harmful behaviour emerging from the literature signals an urgent need for the inclusion of animal welfare agencies within these programmes. The technical and logistical aspects of multi-agency training are, not surprisingly, complex. However, the appalling suffering highlighted by the three case

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<sup>54</sup> American Humane Association, *A training guide for recognizing and reporting child abuse for animal control officers and humane investigators* (Englewood, CO: American Humane Association, 1995); American Humane Association (2007) *The next step: Exploring the link between violence to people and animals*, 2007, [www.americanhumane.org](http://www.americanhumane.org); P. Arkow, 'Canadian and Florida groups actively working on the link', *Latham Letter* (2001) 14, [www.latham.org](http://www.latham.org); P. Arkow, 'New training materials help professionals recognise non-accidental animal injury', *Latham Letter* (2003), 11–13, [www.latham.org](http://www.latham.org); Humane Society for the United States, *Animal cruelty and family violence: Making the connection*, 2004, [www.hsus.org/hsus-field/first-strike](http://www.hsus.org/hsus-field/first-strike); Humane Society for the United States, *Frequently asked questions about animal cruelty*, 2006, [www.hsus.org/hsus-field/first-strike](http://www.hsus.org/hsus-field/first-strike).

<sup>55</sup> C. J. Adams, 'Bringing peace home: A feminist philosophical perspective on the abuse of women, children and pet animals', *Hypatia*, 9 (2) (1994), 63–84; Boat, 'Abuse of children'; C. Ponder and R. Lockwood, 'Programs educate law enforcement on link between animal cruelty and domestic violence', *The Police Chief*, November 2000, 31–36.

examples discussed in this paper underlines the moral and ethical importance of pursuing what is clearly a significant safeguarding issue, in the interests of humans and animals alike.