Keeping Pets Safe in the Context of Intimate Partner Violence: Insights from Domestic Violence Shelter Staff in Canada

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Abstract

The connection between intimate partner violence (IPV) and abuse against animals is becoming well documented. Women consistently report that their pets have been threatened or harmed by their abuser, and many women delay leaving abusive relationships out of concern for their pets. Shelters are often faced with limited resources, and it can be difficult to see how their mandate to assist women fleeing IPV also includes assistance to their companion animals. Through quantitative survey results with staff from 17 IPV shelters in Canada, the current study captures a snapshot of the shelter policies and practices regarding companion animals. The study explores staff's own relationships with pets and exposure to animal abuse, as well as how these experiences relate to support for pet safekeeping programs, perceived barriers, and perceived benefits for the programs. Policy implications for IPV service agencies include asking clients about concerns about pet safety, clear communication of agency policies regarding services available for pet safekeeping, and starting a conversation at the agency-level on how to establish a pet safekeeping program in order to better meet the needs of women seeking refuge from IPV.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; animal abuse; domestic violence shelter staff; pet safekeeping

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Introduction

In 2015, 72,000 women in Canada experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) which was reported to the police (Burczycka & Conroy, 2017). Given that many incidents of violence are never reported, this likely represents only a small portion of all women who were abused by an intimate partner in that year. Many scholars, practitioners, and service providers view this violence through the lens of patriarchy, and understand it as part of a system of male dominance (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Faver & Strand, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Stark, 2007; Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye, & Campbell, 2005).

The majority of homes in Canada have pets (Canadian Pet Market Outlook, 2014). Although we do not know for certain what proportion of abused women also have pets, it is likely in line with the general population. A fairly large body of empirical research has demonstrated that pets in homes where IPV is perpetrated are also at significant risk of abuse: the rates of co-occurrence reported by samples of women in shelters in the US has ranged from 25% to 86% (Ascione et al., 2007; Author blinded for peer review; Carlisle-Frank, Frank, & Nielsen, 2004; Faver & Strand, 2003; Simmons & Lehmann, 2007; Strand & Faver, 2005) and from 42% to 73% in Canada (Daniell, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2005; McIntosh, 2004). The co-occurrence of these forms of abuse has been conceptualized by some scholars as being grounded in the interrelated oppression of women, children, and animals within patriarchy (e.g., Adams, 1995; Flynn, 2012).

That there is a connection between animal abuse and IPV is likely not news to many practitioners who work with abused women, as survivors often share stories of their experiences

with shelter staff (Ascione et al., 2007; Krienert, Walsh, Matthews, & McConkey, 2012; Wuerch, Giesbrecht, Price, Knutson, & Wach, 2017). However, there is little information available, particularly in the Canadian context, about how shelter staff are addressing the multifaceted issues posed by the frequent co-occurrence of these forms of abuse.

The current study explores Canadian shelter staff's awareness of animal abuse in the context of IPV as well as what services are in place to assist survivors with pets who are seeking safe shelter. This is the first study to access shelter staff across Canada, and as such, it aims to create a snapshot of pet safekeeping programs across the country, to identify important avenues for more detailed study, and offer evidence-based suggestions for policy and practice.

Survivors Relationships with Pets in the Context of IPV

For many women who experience abuse, the relationship with their companion animal can represent the only positive relationship in their life. Flynn (2000a, 2000b) notes that many women rank pets as family members or children, and experience stress and grief if they have to leave the animals behind with their abuser. The relationship between the woman and her companion animal can be so strong as to inhibit suicide, as was found by Fitzgerald (2007) in her study with 26 survivors of IPV. In light of the strength of the human-pet relationship, it is not surprising that women will delay leaving an abusive relationship out of concern for their pets. In samples of survivors in the US, 20% to 88% report they delayed leaving their partner due to concern for their pet(s) (e.g., Ascione et al., 2007; Faver & Cavazos Jr, 2007; Flynn, 2000b), and in Canada the proportion has ranged from 43% to 56% (Authors, blinded for peer review; Daniell, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2005; McIntosh, 2004). One limitation of this research is that it has relied on samples of women who are already in shelters; it is therefore unknown how many

women may never leave an abusive partner due to concern for their pet. This presents a challenge for shelters for survivors of abuse: their focus is on serving their human clients, and dealing with pets is not something that generally falls within their mandates. However, when women will not leave, or delay leaving, their abusers because of their pets it can be argued that ensuring safety for pets ought to be part of this mandate.

Some shelters have begun implementing pet safekeeping programs to address the needs of their pet-owning clients. These programs can include sheltering pets at a local animal shelter or veterinary clinic, foster care through private organizations and individuals, and less commonly, sheltering the pets on-site at the shelter for abuse survivors. In Krienert et al.'s (2012) survey of 767 domestic violence shelters in the United States, 57% did offer some form of assistance to women to find shelter for their pets, though only 6% allowed the pets to stay on-site at the shelter. The most noted barriers to implementing a safe pet program were lack of space and lack of resources (Krienert et al., 2012). Stevenson (2009), focusing on western Canada, found that approximately half of the domestic violence shelters offered some form of safe pet program, even when there was not an official policy. Ad hoc solutions (e.g., pooling resources to access a local kennel, contacting a local animal care agency, or a staff member fostering the animal) were the norm, and represented creative solutions to ensure the woman's and the animal's safety. More recently, Wuerch et al. (2017) explored challenges surrounding the provision of services to women with pets, including obstacles to pet safekeeping and agency needs to provide services. In interviews with nine domestic violence service providers and animal welfare agency staff in Saskatchewan, Canada, all respondents noted that they knew of women who had refused to go to a shelter because they could not bring their pets. The participants noted that even when programs

to shelter pets are in place, there can be barriers to accessing them, including the requirement to provide veterinary records and/or payment for services in some cases, and a limited length of stay for the animal in others.

Pet safety is one aspect of the day-to-day challenges that domestic violence shelter staff face in having to be responsive to a variety of situations with limited resources. Community resources can be a way to manage some of these challenges, though Vinton and Wilke (2016) found that domestic violence service provider knowledge about additional services in the community can be fragmented and incomplete, likely owing to lack of time to search out and catalogue available services and programs. Burnett, Ford-Gilboe, Berman, Wathen, and Ward-Griffin (2016) note that domestic violence service providers are constantly trying to manage varying needs of their clients, which include managing poverty, lack of education, precarious housing, and physical safety. Burnett et al. (2016) also note that all this is done by "creatively making something out of nothing by stretching their resources beyond what was intended" (p. 522). It is in this context that some shelter staff are attempting to address the concerns of women with pets.

The current study seeks to contribute to the literature in three primary ways. First, this study provides a snapshot of the shelter policies and practices, and staff knowledge thereof, vis-à-vis companion animals in a number of provinces across Canada. Second, the study makes a novel contribution by exploring staff member's own relationships with pets and exposure to animal abuse, including how these experiences relate to support for pet safekeeping programs as well as perceived barriers and benefits for the programs. Finally, we use this data to make recommendations for policy and practice.

Methods

Utilizing a comprehensive list of Canadian shelters (Public Health Agency of Canada,

2008), 40 shelters were contacted with the aim of maximizing representation across Canada,

including rural and urban shelters. Of the shelters contacted, 23 agreed to participate in the study.

The research was comprised of two parts. First, qualitative focus groups were with staff from

seven shelters, wherein the surveys were reviewed and discussed, and recommendations were

made regarding additional questions to include, question wording, and recruitment methods. The

surveys were revised accordingly and distributed to 17 shelters in nine provinces. The current

paper reports on staff responses to the revised surveys. Research Ethics Board (REB) approval

was obtained from the researchers' home institutions.

Data Collection

Shelter staff were briefed on the research protocol, including ethics (e.g., informed

consent, confidentiality). Hard copies of the surveys were mailed to the participating shelters

with a self-addressed stamped package for the surveys to be returned, along with a $25 gift card

for a local coffee shop to thank the shelters for participating in the research. The key staff contact

distributed the surveys to interested staff members, who self-administered the surveys in a

private location and sealed the completed survey in an envelope to ensure confidentiality. The

completed surveys were returned to the research team once all interested staff had participated.

Of the 216 staff surveys sent to participating shelters, 116 completed surveys were returned.

Variables

Demographic Variables. We collected sociodemographic information from participants,

including gender, racial identity, and level of education (all categorical variables), as well as age,

years of service, and lifetime number of pets owned (continuous variables). A description of these characteristics in the present sample can be found in Table 1.

Experiences with IPV and animal abuse. We asked participants about their own personal experiences with IPV and animal abuse. The response options are detailed in Table 2.

Awareness of Animal Abuse at Organizational Level. To gauge the degree of awareness of animal abuse at an organizational level, respondents were asked to provide information about how much of the training content they received in their current position focused on animal abuse in the context of IPV. The possible responses were: no content at all; a brief mention or comment; a short discussion; a unit or class; an entire course or workshop; and more than one course or workshop. Staff members were also asked about their individual awareness of the women in the community who did not use the shelter services because they could not bring their pets. Additional questions assessed the number of clients over the previous five year period who reported animal abuse or threats while at the shelter, left the shelter to care for pets temporarily, returned to abusive relationship to care for pets, delayed leaving out of concern for the pets, and for whom abuse of the pets was a factor in leaving the abuser.

Agency Services and Policies. Respondents were asked "does your transition house have an official policy of offering services to care for pets of abused women" (response options: Yes, there was an official policy; no official policy and no services provided; no official policy but informal partnerships with other agencies; no official policy but assist on case-by-case basis; and do not know). A follow-up question for respondents who replied 'no services provided' asked about the reasons why the shelter did not have an official policy to assist the pets of abused women who resided in the shelter (response options detailed in Table 3). Respondents who noted

that services were available to women with pets were asked about the style of program (referral to community program, arrangements made to board pet at animal shelter, veterinarian, or foster home, or pet allowed to accompany woman to the shelter). Details about communication to the clients about the availability of the pet safekeeping options, including questions on intake to the shelter were also gathered.

Support for Pet Safekeeping Programs. Likert-scale questions assessed the support for a policy allowing pets of women at other shelters (1 would not recommend to 5 strongly recommend), the level of support for allowing pets to accompany women to the respondent's own shelter, as well as the level of support for the designation of emotional support service animals (1 not supportive at all to 5 extremely supportive). Individual potential barriers to pet safekeeping programs as well as benefits were assessed using a Likert-scale ranging from 1 (not significant at all) to 5 (extremely significant).

Descriptive analyses were conducted on the demographic variables, the variables measuring awareness of animal abuse, and the agency services and policies. A series of bivariate analyses were conducted on demographic variables and support for pet safekeeping program variables, including Pearson correlations, t-tests, and chi-square test of group differences.

Results

Personal Experience with IPV and Animal Abuse

Of note, 93% reported some experience of IPV or other personal violence, and 65.5% indicate experience with animal abuse. The most commonly experienced form of animal abuse was abuse of the pet of an acquaintance, reported by 34.5% of respondents. Staff members also revealed that their own pet had been neglected (4.0%), abused (8.0%), and killed (4.5%). This

indicates a substantial proportion of shelter workers have some level of personal experience with animal abuse (see Table 2).

Awareness of Pet Abuse in Context of Abusive Relationships

The majority of participants reported that they had heard at least mention of animal abuse in trainings they had received: only 37.7% reported that their training contained no content related to animal abuse, whereas 36.0% cited a brief mention or comment regarding animal abuse, and 19.3% reporting that their training contained a short discussion of animal abuse.

The majority of shelter staff (74.8%) stated that they were aware of abused women in the community who did not access the shelter because they could not bring their pets with them. Many were also aware of survivors being concerned about their pet(s) while in shelter. Forty seven percent of staff reported that they were aware of between 1 and 10 women who left the shelter temporarily to return home to care for their pets, and 42.6% of staff were aware of between 1 and 10 women who learned their abuser was threatening or harming their pet while she was residing at the shelter. Seventy percent of staff responded they were aware of women who delayed leaving their abuser out of concern for their pets, while 47.8% of staff were aware of women for whom the threats or abuse to their pets were part of the motivation to leave the abusive relationship.

Agency Services and Policies

When questioned about whether the shelter had an official policy of offering services to care for the pets of abused women, only 25.9% stated that there was no policy and no services provided. Staff were also asked why there was no policy to assist women with pets (Table 3). The top reasons were staff and resident allergies (42.9%), lack of money (40.3%), and lack of

space at the shelter (36.4%). Interestingly, only 16.9% stated that staff resistance was a factor in the absence of a pet policy, and 16.9% responded that there was no need for a pet policy. The details provided by the staff for 'other reasons' generally fell into two categories: there used to be service provided for clients with pets ("used to have agreement with vet but clients couldn't pay") and limited need for program ("residents have been homeless and unable to have pets prior to coming here").

The most commonly reported pet related service offered was referral to a community agency or a program in the community that could help (46.6%), followed by making arrangements to board at the local animal shelter (43.1%). Boarding with a veterinarian (8.6%) and foster care for the animals (12.9%) were less frequently noted. Only 3 staff (2.6%) reported that women were able to bring their pets to the shelter, representing the single agency who allowed on-site sheltering of pets. Of the four staff members responding that other services were offered, two mentioned that "on occasion woman can bring pet until other options are explored," and two stated that the women were encouraged to make arrangements with friends or family to keep the pets.

Staff were questioned about if or when they asked clients about pet related concerns in three contexts: when clients call the shelter, on intake to the shelter, and as part of a risk assessment. Thirty respondents (25.9%) stated that women were never asked about pets when calling the shelter, 40.5% said women were queried 'a few times' or sometimes,' with 10.3% responding that questions about pets were 'frequently' or 'always' asked of callers, and 23.3% responded 'do not know/not part of my position.' A more equal distribution was seen in the inclusion of pets on risk assessments: 31.9% of staff said pet abuse was never included, 22.5%

(n=26) responded 'a few times' or 'sometimes,' and 28.4% (n=33) stating that pet abuse was 'frequently' or 'always' incorporated in evaluations of women's risk.

Although 12.9% stated that they 'did not know' or it was not part of their position, 71.6% of staff revealed that there was no question about pets on intake to the shelter. Of those who did have intake questions about pets, they were framed in three ways: if the pet had been the victim of abuse and/or threats; if the client had a pet that needed care; and instructions to the staff member to begin a dialogue about options for the safety of the pet. Safety planning that included pets was reported by 38.8% of staff, whereas 40.5% stated that pets were not included; the remainder were unaware if pets were incorporated in safety plans.

Staff responses to questions about agency policies and services for clients with pets illustrated a high degree of within-agency inconsistency (Table 4). The conflicting answers to questions about agency policies and services vis-à-vis pets far outweighed consistent responses from staff members at the same shelter.

Support for Pet Safekeeping Programs Allowing Pets to Stay with Clients at Shelter

Staff members were asked about their support for programs allowing pets to stay with women at the shelters (frequently referred to as co-sheltering). Respondents were significantly less supportive of allowing pets to stay with the clients at their shelter than they were of doing so at other shelters (t = 4.353, p < .001). Staff were questioned about their level of support for some pets being designated as service animals to support an abused woman with emotional and/or psychological difficulties (1 not supportive to 5 extremely supportive). Respondents were very supportive of emotional support animals with a mean score of 4.59 (SD = 1.37).

Separate correlations were run between level of educational attainment and lifetime

ownership of pets with the program support variables. The number of pets a staff member has owned in her lifetime was positively associated with increased support for animals being designated as emotional support service animals ($r = .320$, $p < 0.01$) as well as support for allowing pets at the respondent's own shelter ($r = .242$, $p < 0.05$). Conversely, the number of pets was not significantly related to support for programs at other shelters, while level of educational attainment was positively associated with support for pet programs at other shelters ($r = 0.189$, $p < 0.05$).

A chi square analysis was conducted to assess the significance of previous experience of animal abuse with support for safe pet programs. A positive response to awareness of women who have not come to the shelter because of their pets was significantly related to increased support for programs both at their own shelter ($\chi^2 = 13.351$, $p < .02$) and at other shelters ($\chi^2 = 19.791$, $p < .001$). Personal experience with animal abuse was recoded into two groups: no animal abuse and any animal abuse. Personal experience with animal abuse was not significantly related to support for safe pet programs at the respondent's own shelter, but support for programs at other shelters did approach significance ($\chi^2 = 10.524$, $p = .062$).

Staff were asked about possible benefits and potential barriers to programs allowing women's pets to accompany them to the shelter. Most of the barriers were rated as extremely or very significant by the respondents, as indicated by 11 of the 17 variables having a mean greater than 3.75 (overall range of 2.72 to 4.49) (Table 5). Correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between the importance of the perceived barriers with support for programs at other shelters as well as at the respondents' own shelters (Table 6). The relationships between support for programs at the staff members' own shelters and barriers tended to be

negative, meaning the higher the perceived significance of the barriers, the lower the support for

allowing pets at the shelter, with the effects being small to medium in size. In particular, the

strongest relationships were with concerns about noise ($r = -.319$, $p < .01$), animal-related

allergies ($r = -.289$, $p < .01$), and space required to house the animals ($r = -.289$, $p < .01$). Notably,

the only significant correlation with support for programs at other shelters was animal sociability

($r = .290$, $p < .01$); a higher score on support for pet programs at other shelters was significantly

related to a higher rating of importance for concerns about animal sociability with other

residents, including children. Separate correlations were also run between the barriers and

lifetime ownership of pets and education level of the staff members. As the number of pets

owned over the respondent's lifetime increased, the perceived significance of the barriers lack of

need for a program ($r = -.252$, $p < 0.05$) and noise concerns ($r = -.232$, $p < 0.05$) decreased. On

the other hand, the only barrier that showed a positive association with education was religious

or cultural concerns of having animals share space with residents ($r = 0.221$, $p < 0.05$), indicating

that as education level increased, the perceived religious or cultural barrier increased in

importance.

Respondents rated the perceived benefits of allowing pets to accompany women to the

shelter as extremely or very significant (means ranging from 4.11 to 4.42) (Table 7). Correlation

coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between the perceived importance of

benefits with support for programs at other shelters as well as the respondents' own shelters

(Table 8). The relationships between support for programs at the staff members' own shelters and

at other shelters were all positive, meaning the higher the perceived significance of the benefits,

the stronger the support for allowing pets to accompany women to shelters, with the effects being

small to medium in size. For programs allowing pets at other shelters, the strongest relationships were with the benefits of not allowing the abuser to use the pet at leverage (r = .414, p < .01) and making it easier for the client to leave the abusive relationship (r = .395, p < .01). The benefits of the client staying longer at the shelter (r = .353, p < .01) and not allowing the abuser to use the pet as leverage (r = .319, p < .01) were the strongest correlations with support for a pet program at one's own shelter. Correlations were also run between the perceived benefits and lifetime ownership of pets, with no significant association found between the variables.

Discussion

The oppression of women and animals are intertwined in patriarchal systems, and nowhere is this interconnection more apparent than in the co-occurrence of animal abuse and women abuse. Therefore, supporting the safety of pets of survivors of IPV is an important social justice endeavor, not just for the protection of the animals, but also for the women who care for them.

The first goal of this study was to capture the shelter policies and practices regarding companion animals. Like other studies (Hardesty, Khaw, Ridgway, Weber, & Miles, 2013; Krienert et al., 2012), the current study shows that Canadian IPV service providers have a clear awareness of the intersection of companion animal maltreatment and IPV in the community. The majority of respondents were aware of survivors who did not come to shelter because they could not bring their pet, and there is an organizational level of awareness evidenced through mention of pets in over half of agency training, but there are still very few questions about pets on intake to the shelter or when women call for service. The paucity of questions may lead women to believe that there is no support for their pets' safety, and therefore they may not ask staff for

assistance for their pets. Starting the conversation about pets with the clients means that staff will be aware of any concerns and risks on intake which can be managed on a case-by-case basis. Through asking women who contact the agencies about companion animals, including threats or harm to the pets, and compiling statistics on the responses, a better understanding of the needs of survivors and their community can be gained. In the absence of questions and data, Randour (2007) argues that "responders are operating in the dark, without the necessary knowledge they would need to plan effective prevention and intervention strategies" (p. 102). Echoing the policy recommendations of Krienert et al. (2012), Hardesty et al. (2013), and, Wuerch et al. (2017), clearly communicating the options available for pet safety and including pets in risk assessments and safety planning are avenues to build a knowledge base to better meet the needs of shelter clients with pets.

Another finding of note is the seeming confusion within shelters about the availability of services for clients with pets. For example, the format of pet service offered (i.e., boarding at veterinarian, foster home) at each shelter is difficult to assess due to the inconsistency in responses about whether the shelter had an official pet policy. The myriad responses about what formats the pet services take may be due to the differences at the individual, rather than shelter, level. Individual shelter staff may be taking the initiative in assisting women to find safety for their pets rather than adhering to a shelter-wide policy or practice. This is in line with the ad-hoc solutions commonly implemented by the shelters noted by Stevenson (2009), where the goal stated by the respondents was to do what they needed to do to get the woman safe. The inconsistencies in responses may simply be a result of creative problem solving on the part of staff, and lack of communication among staff members about available options for pet safety.

However, this represents an avenue for future research, including how staff access community resources, and how the ideas can be translated into official shelter policy for caring for pets of survivors and communication to those needing services.

The idea of creative problem-solving is connected to the survivor-defined advocacy model suggested by Davies and Lyon (2013) and Kulkarni, Herman-Smith, and Ross (2015). Survivor-defined advocacy emphasizes the voice of the survivor, focuses on providing individualized solutions to the challenges that women face, and attempts to address systemic barriers that inhibit women's ability to move into a safe and secure life (Davies & Lyon, 2013; Kulkarni, Herman-Smith and Ross, 2015). However, there are also barriers to implementing this style of IPV service provision, the primary ones being time and resources. When asked about why their shelter did not have an official policy to assist women with pets, many of the staff noted that there was simply not enough time to collaborate with other agencies, and not enough time or money to implement an established program to assist victimized companion animals. Given that space is often at a premium and funding is limited, when coupled with staff often filling multiple roles, these answers are not surprising.

The second goal of this study was to explore IPV shelter staff experiences with animal abuse and how these experiences are related to support for pet safekeeping programs. This is the first study to our knowledge to ask shelter staff about personal experience with pet maltreatment, and the results show that a substantial proportion of shelter workers have some level of personal experience with animal abuse. A particularly curious result was that personal experience with animal abuse had no significant association with support for a pet safekeeping program at other shelters or the staff member's own shelter. This runs contrary to the expectation that staff who

had been touched by animal abuse in their personal lives would be more empathetic and supportive of women with pets who also needed haven. However, it may be that the relatively high degree of exposure in among our sample to abuse survivors who refused going to a shelter because they could not bring their pets (74.8%), who had delayed leaving due to concern for their pet (70%), and who had left the shelter to return home to care for their pet (47%) has educated those who have not had personal experience with animal abuse about the significant toll that it can take.

Staff showed less support for allowing co-sheltering pets with women at their own shelter than at other shelters. This may be due to a perception of fewer barriers at other shelters, an intimate awareness of barriers at one's own shelter, or the perception that the need for a program may be greater elsewhere. Exploring the rationale for the difference in support is a key area for future research. Overall, most barriers to allowing pets to accompany women to the shelter were rated as important, though the most significant barriers were noise concerns, allergies, space within the shelter for the animals, and animal sociability. These are common concerns raised in the literature (Krienert et al., 2012; Stevenson, 2009), and are a good place to start a conversation within shelters about creative ways to manage these challenges in order to meet the needs of clients. Based on the findings of this study, the most supportive staff are those who have had companion animals in their lives, who also place less importance on barriers to pet safekeeping programs and more importance on the benefits. This has important implications for how to garner support for programs at agencies, in that staff who are pet owners, regardless if their own pets have been abused, are more supportive of such programs. Benefits to allowing women to stay at the shelter with their pets were all related to the safety of the woman in limiting the

abuser's power and easing the way out of a harmful relationship. These represent key aspects of the mandates of IPV service providers, and make a strong argument for shelters having a policy in place to support all family members in seeking safety from abuse.

As with all studies, this one has associated limitations and strengths. Most notably, our modest sample size resulted in insufficient statistical power to analyze agency-level characteristics and make those comparisons here. In addition, this was an exploratory study and sampled only a small proportion of Canadian domestic violence shelters. A clear strength of this study was the inclusion of staff personal experiences of animal mistreatment. While the connection between personal experiences of animal abuse and support for pet safekeeping programs was not statistically significant, this is a key area for future research in examining the differences in personal experience and the nuanced ways that this may affect how staff members responds to women whose pets also need safety.

Conclusion

One of the aims of the study was to generate evidence-based policy and practice suggestions. As noted throughout the discussion above, there are three specific policy recommendations arising from this research. First, asking questions about pet safety when women call the shelter for service, on intake, in risk assessments, and in safety planning would provide staff with more information about the needs of their clients. Importantly, asking a question about pet safety addresses a potential barrier to the woman's safety, thus helping to fulfill the mandate of IPV service agencies. The second recommendation is to make the policies and options available regarding pet safekeeping programs clear for staff. The degree of inconsistent staff responses means uncertainty about services for survivors, which can negatively

impact meeting their needs. Finally, it is time to begin conversations at the agency level about how to implement a pet safekeeping program. The barriers noted in this study, such as allergies, space, and money, can be managed through creative solutions and designing a safe pet program that fits the needs of the clients, the shelter, and the community (see http://alliephillips.com/saftprogram/).

Many women see their pets as family members, and when survivors will not leave abusive relationships out of fear for their pets, it is critical to have services in place to assist pets in finding safety as well. This research shows that IPV shelter staff are aware of the co-occurrance of pet maltreatment and IPV in the community, and are largely supportive of establishing pet safekeeping programs. Together, we need to ask the questions about pets and make the safety of all family members a priority.

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Table 1: Demographics of Shelter Staff

Demographic Variables	N	Percent
Gender		
% Female	115	99.1%
% Transgender	1	0.9%
Race		
% White	88	75.8%
% Aboriginal Canadian[a]	14	12.1%
% Black	5	4.3%
% South Asian	4	3.4%
% Other[b]	5	4.3%
Education		

% High school or less	9	7.8%
% Post-secondary (college, university)	85	73.2%
% Degree in progress	16	13.8%
% Post-graduate	6	5.2%
Staff Position		
Advocacy and Support[c]	110	95.0%
Administration/Management	14	5.0%
Multiple positions held	11	9.5%
Lifetime Pet Ownership	103	88.7%
	Mean	SD
Average Age (years)	42.53	13.08
Average Number of pets	9.13	6.05
Average Years of Service to Organization	9.20	8.82

[a] First Nations, Metis, Inuit, or self-identified a portion of racial heritage as Aboriginal.
[b] Includes Filipino, Latin American, Mixed Heritage, and one respondent who did not provide details under other.
[c] Includes crisis intervention worker, case management, youth advocate, social worker.

Table 2: Staff Experience with Intimate Partner Violence and Animal Abuse

What kinds of personal experiences have you had with violence and/or abuse?	Percent of Cases (n)
No experience	7.0% (8)
I have an acquaintance who is a survivor of IPV	58.3% (67)
I have an acquaintance who is a survivor of other violence	34.8% (40)
I have a close friend/family member who is a survivor of IPV	65.2% (75)
I have a close friend/family member who is a survivor of other violence	38.3% (44)
I am a survivor of IPV	39.1% (45)
I am a survivor of other violence	29.6% (34)
Other experiences of violence	6.1% (7)

What kinds of personal experience have you had specific to the mistreatment of pets?

No experience	34.5% (40)
Someone has neglected the pet of an acquaintance	19.8% (23)
Someone has abused the pet of an acquaintance	34.5% (40)
Someone has killed the pet of an acquaintance	10.3% (12)
Someone has neglected the pet of a close friend/family member	11.2% (13)
Someone has abused the pet of a close friend/family member	19.8% (23)
Someone has killed the pet of a close friend/family member	5.2% (6)
Someone has neglected my pet	6.9% (8)
Someone has abused my pet	13.8% (16)
Someone has killed my pet	7.8% (9)
Other experience of animal abuse	8.6% (10)

Table 3: Reasons for Lack of Official Pet Policy at Shelters

Reason	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Allergies	33	16.7%	42.9%
No Money	31	15.7%	40.3%
Lack of Space	28	14.1%	36.4%
Hygiene and Property Maintenance	22	11.1%	28.6%
Lack of Community Partnerships	22	11.1%	28.6%
Safety Concerns	14	7.1%	18.2%
No Need	13	6.6%	16.9%
No Time	8	4.0%	10.4%
Other Reason	8	4.0%	10.4%
Staff Resistance	6	3.0%	7.8%
Do Not Know	13	6.6%	16.9%
TOTAL	**198**	**100.0%**	**257.1%**

Note: Totals greater than 100% because respondents could select more than one response.

Table 4: Within-Agency Consistency of Staff Responses about Pet-related Policies and Services

Question	Shelters with Corresponding Staff Responses	Shelters with Conflicting Staff Responses
Official policy of offering services to clients with pets	2	15
Format of services offered to clients with pets	3	14
Clients asked about pets when calling shelter	3	14
Question about pets on intake to shelter	4	13
Pets are part of risk assessment	0	17

Table 5: Barriers to Implementation of Safe Pet Program at Shelters

Barrier	Mean	Std. Deviation
Financial	4.04	1.237
Insurance Liability	4.19	1.104
Use of Staff Time	3.85	1.131
Safety Concern	4.09	1.004
Fear of Animals	3.93	1.155
Allergies	4.49	0.808
Concern for Animal Wellbeing	3.60	1.239
Lack of Need for Program	2.90	1.392
Animal Sociability (behavior with children)	3.97	0.995
Property Damage	3.95	1.062
Lack of Staff Knowledge	3.32	1.232
Noise Concerns	3.29	1.209
Religious/Cultural Concerns	2.72	1.460
Ability of Client to Care for Pet	3.78	0.979
Abandonment of Animal	3.52	1.268
Space Requirements	4.20	1.049
Health of animals (vaccinations, disease)	4.47	0.703

Table 6: Bivariate Correlation Analysis of Support for Pet Programs and Impact on Perceived Barriers

Barrier	Support for Program at Other Shelters	Support for Allowing Pets at Own Shelter
Financial	.124	-.030
Insurance Liability	.051	-.159
Use of Staff Time	.058	-.168
Safety Concern	.051	-.191*
Fear of Animals	.008	-.208*
Allergies	-.174	-.289**

Concern for Animal Wellbeing	-.004	-.110
Lack of Need for Program	-.054	.045
Animal Sociability (behavior with children)	.290**	-.019
Property Damage	-.175	-.237*
Lack of Staff Knowledge	.010	-.240**
Noise Concerns	-.098	-.319**
Religious/Cultural Concerns	.142	-.027
Ability of Client to Care for Pet	-.040	-.202*
Abandonment of Animal	.059	-.082
Space Requirements	.004	-.289**
Health of animals (vaccinations, disease)	-.112	-.217*

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Table 7: Benefits to Implementation of Safe Pet Program at Shelters

Benefits	Mean	Std. Deviation
Easier for Client to Leave Abuser	4.40	0.884
Pet Source of Support for Women & Children	4.39	0.872
Pet Safe from Abuser	4.42	0.878
Client Stay Longer at Shelter	4.11	1.116
Abuser cannot use pet as Leverage	4.27	1.054

Table 8: Bivariate Correlation Analysis of Support for Pet Programs and Impact on Perceived Benefits

Benefits	Support for Program at Other Shelters	Support for Allowing Pets at Own Shelter
Easier for Client to Leave Abuser	.395**	.220*
Pet Source of Support for Women & Children	.321**	.232*

Pet Safe from Abuser	.267**	.289**
Client Stay Longer at Shelter	.378**	.353**
Abuser cannot use pet as Leverage	.414**	.319**

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).