

# Pilot study to determine the prevalence of abuse towards animals when women are victims of domestic abuse in Scotland.

Elaine Henley\*, Deborah Goodwin

Southampton University, School of Psychology, United Kingdom.

\* eh1102@soton.ac.uk

Research conducted in the USA (Ascione, 1996), has shown when a woman is a victim of domestic violence her pet may also be abused. Fears of repercussions against her pet were cited as a reason for staying with the abuser. This pilot study aimed to apply Ascione's methods in Scotland to investigate whether similar results would be obtained and to draw attention to this issue.


## METHODS

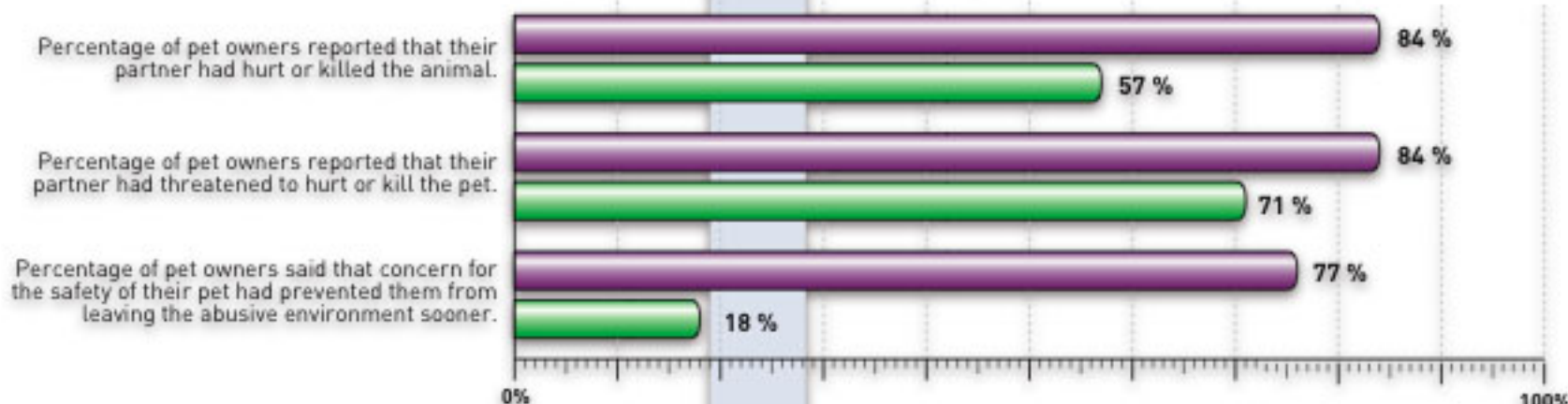
The sample group comprised 33 women seeking refuge at North Ayrshire Women's Aid between 10th March 2004 and 10th July 2004. The sample group included pet owners (n=13) and non-pet owners (n=20). Participation in this study was voluntary.

The women's key worker interviewed women seeking refuge two days after they had sought refuge. The women were then asked a series of questions that aimed to establish; pet ownership; any abuse of pets; if concern about pet welfare had affected their decision to leave; the location of pets left behind and if a Pet Fostering Service was used; if not, did they know of such schemes.

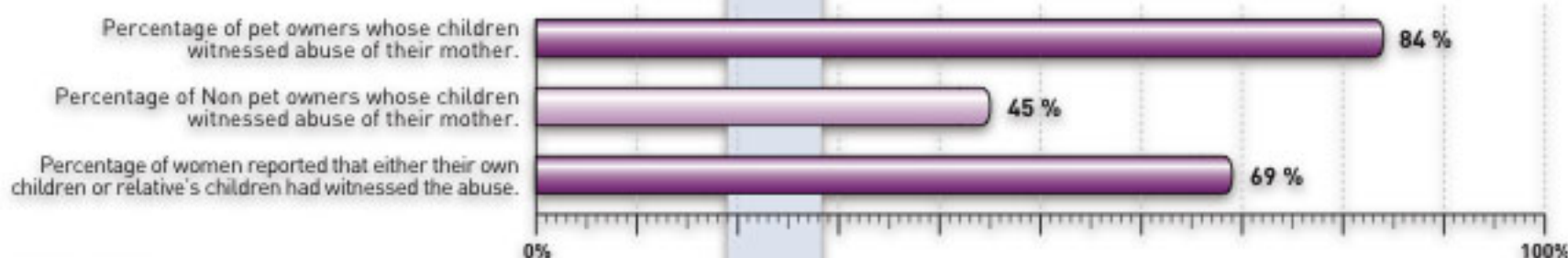
This was the first visit for 69% of pet owners to a Women's Aid Refuge, 53% of pet owners had children living with them.

## RESULTS

 = Scottish Study results  = Ascione (1996) study



 = Scottish pet owners  = Scottish Non pet owners



## DISCUSSION

These results present an initial investigation of the prevalence of pet abuse in Scotland when women are victims of domestic violence. It is hoped that this pilot study will generate further research into the link between the abuse of women, children and animals in Scotland and generate multi-disciplinary policies that help to combat this problem. Although these pilot study results should be interpreted cautiously, they suggest that the prevalence of abuse towards animals may be greater in Scotland than in the USA. The authors suggest that further research should be conducted in order to ascertain if this is the case and to investigate contributory factors.

## REFERENCE

Ascione (1996) *Battered women's reports on their partners and their children's cruelty to animals*. 4th International conference on family violence, Durham, New Hampshire.

The first author wishes to thank Claire Shorthose BVMS MRCVS for encouragement, the workers of North Ayrshire Womens Aid and the women who took part in this study. - *In memory of "Skunk"*