

## **Common Ground for Victims' Advocates in Domestic and Child Abuse**

Professionals in domestic abuse programs, also called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) prefer that victims decide for themselves when to leave a dangerous relationship. Children's Protective Services (CPS) however responds to child abuse allegations immediately. When both forms of violence co-occur, which happens often, the unplanned-for CPS intervention may expose the IPV and lead to recriminations against the mother.

These conflicting priorities sometimes produce other tensions. For instance some advocates have proposed exempting IPV victims from being charged with failure to protect their children. Child advocates counter that this could have disastrous consequences.

[This article](#) documents that children who are either exposed to domestic violence or experience physical abuse are twice as likely to become either IPV perpetrators or victims as adults. This suggests that advocates could unite around promoting preventive services for child maltreatment - hopefully leading to more collaborations over time.

Mark Your Calendars! On October 14<sup>th</sup> Safe Passage for Children will host the first Minnesota conference on family violence, featuring [Andrew Campbell](#), a leading authority on the intersection of Intimate Partner Violence, child maltreatment and animal abuse.

### **Narrative for podcast:**

The blog today is about family violence, which is the intersection or interrelationship between intimate partner violence, or IPV, and abuse and neglect of children, and abuse and neglect of animals. Some family violence people also add elder abuse.

I want to talk both about what we *know* regarding family violence and what we are *doing* about it. In brief, there is a lot of research that has accumulated over at least the last 25 years demonstrating the overlap and interplay among various types of family violence. This is something I myself was unaware until recently, even though I have been in the field of human services and more specifically child maltreatment for many years. That might be a clue about how prominent this body of knowledge has been in public policy conversations. In brief, despite all the work going on in this field the issue of family violence is barely on the public-policy radar, and efforts to implement programs that use this information are embryonic at best.

First let's talk about some of the work that is being done in this area., starting with the article that is linked in the blog today. It's entitled "Preventing Child Maltreatment: A Critical Strategy for Stopping Intimate Partner Violence in the Next Generation" from September 2014 by Merrill Cooper & Lana Wells. The suggested citation is University of Calgary, Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence. The goal of the Shift project is to significantly reduce domestic violence in Alberta using a primary prevention approach to stop first-time victimization and perpetration. In other words, deal with child maltreatment now to prevent IPV in the future.

This article is a review of the literature up to that point on the relationship between IPV and child abuse and neglect. Among other insights the article states, and I'm quoting here from p. 7:

“One of the largest, clearest and most compelling studies conducted to date found that any one of three childhood experiences—physical abuse, sexual abuse, or growing up with a battered mother—doubled the risk of domestic violence victimization or perpetration in adulthood. Having all three experiences increased the risk by three-and-a-half times for women and even more for men.”

This makes the point we are trying to make in today's blog. If advocates for victims of IPV could team up with advocates for victims of child maltreatment they could promote a greater investment in programs and services to prevent child maltreatment and intervene early enough to prevent harm to children that has lifelong consequences, including for future domestic violence.

The organization with the longest tenure in the field of family violence is the National LINK Coalition, which is at simply [nationallinkcoalition.org](http://nationallinkcoalition.org). The Link as it is sometimes called has been around for about 25 years, and at the website you will find plenty of resources that explore family violence. It also has material entitled a “Toolkit for Starting a LINK Coalition in Your Community”, which provides guidance on how to form and sustain a coalition for addressing the what they call the “pressing but under-acknowledged link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence”. We provide a [direct link](#) to this toolkit in the written script for this podcast, which will be on our website.

Earlier this year the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, at [ncjfcj.org](http://ncjfcj.org) sponsored a webinar entitled “Animal Abuse and the Link to Child Abuse and Neglect: Promoting Child Welfare Professional Awareness of Animal-Human Relationships.” The National Council is also running a number of projects with local courts, including here in Ramsey County Minnesota, to promote practices that recognize the impact of family violence such as having judges include pets in orders of protection, and encouraging shelters to allow dogs and cats. The NCJFCJ has issued the publication, [Enhanced Resource Guidelines](#) (ERG), which lays out these recommended practices for judges and others in the court systems in more detail.

Perhaps the most energetic evangelist around addressing family violence is Andrew Campbell. You can find him at [campbellresearchandconsulting.com](http://campbellresearchandconsulting.com). He is a powerful and persuasive speaker, and pre-COVID was doing 200+ in-person speaking events annually. We for our part have invited him to headline a half-day conference on family violence here in Minnesota on Friday October 14, 2022. Watch for information about this in upcoming months.

Campbell integrates research around IPV, child abuse, and animal abuse in interesting and creative ways. For one, he has mapped domestic violence and animal abuse calls by ZIP Code which shows an almost complete overlap. In addition, he has discovered that animal abuse frequently gets reported approximately one year earlier than child maltreatment. His hypothesis is that neighbors see animal abuse more frequently because animals may be kept outside, and also people are more reluctant to quote interfere with unquote family matters than they are to protect a pet. Think about that for a minute, and whether we would consider it “interfering” if the

person being assaulted were an adult. The obvious conclusion thought from Campbell's mapping exercise is that if animal control agents were mandated to report suspected child maltreatment, we would get a jump on protecting children. A year may not seem like much time, but timelines for children are not the same as for adults. An enormous amount of harm can happen in a year to a child that can affect their ability to live a normal or happy life. So getting in one year head start on protecting them is huge.

Campbell also puts together very insightful statistics. For example a study of domestic violence perpetrators indicates that 10% had threatened or attempted suicide, but the number goes up to 40% for those with a history of animal abuse. Relatedly, 35% of victims of domestic violence think that their partners might kill them, but the number jumps to 78% if there is a history of animal abuse. Also, 90% of IPV victims with pets say it would be easier to leave if they could bring their pets with them, but only 17% of shelters accept animals. This correlates with his other research on natural disasters, such as hurricanes and floods, which show that a common reason for people not to leave to go to a shelter is that they don't want to leave without their pets. Campbell himself talks openly about how his dog saved his life in his new book "Not without My Dog".

So, there is really a lot of work and some very compelling work going on in the field of family violence. Which makes us ask "What has been the impact of all of this work and energy around dealing with family violence?"

There have been some efforts to promote collaboration between the public agencies that deal with child maltreatment and animal abuse.

The National Link Coalition reports nine states in which child protection workers are mandated to report animal abuse and 12 states where the reverse is required, namely that veterinarians and other workers with animals are mandated to report suspected child abuse. Details are on a National Link Coalition webpage entitled "Cross Reporting by Reporter".

An article by the Animal Welfare Institute, [awionline.org](http://awionline.org), reported in June of 2021 gives a good snapshot of how this works in [Ohio, which passed a law](#) requiring cross-reporting between animal and child abuse.

Regarding implementation however, our conversations with animal rights advocates and IPV experts suggests that there is very little coordination and collaboration among public or nonprofit agencies to share information regarding violence in the household other than their primary client or concern. Our own early efforts to interest advocates for animals and for victims of IPV in a broader agenda have been discouragingly slow. We estimate that even if all forces aligned behind a common legislative agenda, it would take two or three years at best to get it implemented. The dream of having cross reporting among all victims' advocates and public agencies is years away.

Part of this of course is because all of our institutions are so siloed. Each agency whether public or nonprofit has to satisfy numerous regulations and reporting requirements from both funders and government. Meeting these requirements often becomes *the* job, rather than serving the victims that the program wants to focus on.

In addition, it's easy to focus on just the victims of primary interest to the organization. There are advocates with personal stake in the issues, funders, and a body of knowledge focusing on the specific area.

There are program considerations as well. We have heard frustration for example expressed by animal protection groups that IPV programs are reluctant to get involved in cross reporting because they are concerned that women will be "outed" before they are ready. Advocates for parents' rights don't want women to be charged with failure to protect their children by child protection agencies because they perceive them as victims. Our position, no surprise, has been somewhat in tension with this. We are willing to support giving a victim of domestic violence a pass once if there is a commitment to address the toxic relationship and a credible safety plan is in place, but if failure to protect children from domestic violence is a pattern, priority should be given to protecting the children.

Beyond these constraints, we see that in human services generally, and in child welfare particularly, there is a great deal of good high-quality research but very little effort to implement what has been learned. Public health and mental health do a good job of mapping their best practices to the highest quality research. That is probably because each of them has 1 foot in medicine and therefore 1 foot in the sciences. The tradition in human services however is not as disciplined. In our experience, very few professionals, even in higher-level management and staff jobs, are even familiar with current research in the field. Much less do they design or revise programs with this in mind. And if research exists that is contrary to favorite programs and practices, it is ignored.

The irony in all this is that we will not be very effective in addressing victims in each of our specialized areas unless we begin to work together across these closely related disciplines. In other words, if we want to make progress on each of our agendas, we need to make progress on all of our agendas together. That will require lifting our vision from our particular field of endeavor to focus on the systemic factors that drive family violence as a whole.

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