

Written evidence from the Naturewatch Foundation EO0046

Who we are:

1. Naturewatch Foundation has been campaigning since 1991 to end acts of animal cruelty and advance animal welfare standards, not only in the UK, but all around the world. Naturewatch Foundation is registered as a charity in England and Wales (1039679).
2. The author of this submission, Mark Randell, is a Campaign Manager at Naturewatch Foundation, and a former senior UK detective who trains police officers, the judiciary and animal advocates around the world on the impact and role of animals in wider issues such as violence against women and girls. As an experienced investigator, he also conducts covert investigations into issues such as the connection between animal sexual abuse and child sexual abuse.
3. Naturewatch Foundation is grateful for the opportunity to provide this written evidence, which addresses how increased knowledge of the animal–human abuse Link can help protect women and girls. This subject sits at the core of the charity’s ‘Protect Animals. Protect People’ campaign, which has reached the UK Houses of Parliament and New Scotland Yard, across Ukraine and into Moldova, Canada, Italy, Australia, the USA, and a sub-committee of the European Parliament. This is the subject of our written submission, which addresses questions 2, 3 and 5 of the inquiry.

United Nations General Comment 26

4. Before providing our written evidence, we wish to draw the Committee’s attention to an important recent development. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) has formally recognised the impact that witnessing violence, including violence inflicted on animals, can have on children. The UN CRC has responsibility for the interpretation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, on 22 August 2023, it published General Comment 26.¹ This legally binding General Comment states at Section G:

Right to freedom from all forms of violence.

‘Children must be protected from all forms of physical and psychological violence and from exposure to violence, such as domestic violence or **violence inflicted on animals.**’

5. This is particularly important because individuals who witness animal cruelty are significantly more likely to be perpetrators, and studies have shown that witnessing animal cruelty is the biggest predictor of violence in later life. Initiatives like GC26 can help end cycles of violence in society, providing meaningful steps are taken by member states to reduce and end violence towards animals. How the UK decides to implement and enforce GC26 will be hugely important.

Question 2: To what extent is there evidence that men who commit certain crimes go on to commit violent offences against women and girls?

6. It is well established that there is a Link between animal abuse and domestic abuse, and that animal abuse is often a pre-cursor to violent offending towards people. What follows outlines some of the evidence-base that supports a key principle of our campaigning that animal abuse awareness should be increased throughout the criminal justice system to help prevent and reduce violent offending in society, including violence towards women and girls.

Domestic abuse and coercive control

Animal abuse and domestic abuse

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crccgc26-general-comment-no-26-2023-childrens-rights>

7. Coercive control is the type of behaviour within domestic abuse that is most likely to lead to homicide. Animal abuse is used as a strategy to coerce and control victim-survivors, and animal abuse occurs in approximately half of all households affected by domestic abuse where animals are present within families.² In one US study, 71% of domestic violence victims reported that their perpetrator(s) was abusing their pets as well.³ Women in domestic violence shelters are 11 times more likely to report animal abuse by their partner than women not experiencing violence.⁴

Role of animals in the lives of victim-survivors

8. In 2022, the **UK Government said** of Domestic Abuse, “We take a whole family approach... It is essential that victims and survivors can access a wide range of support. They have suffered terribly and the help available to them can make all the difference.”⁵ Arguably, a “whole family approach” must include regard for animals within the family unit, both due to the intrinsic value of animals as sentient beings and given the significant role animals play in the lives of victim-survivors.
9. For example, victim-survivors experience an average of 50 incidents of abuse before getting effective help.⁶ However, individuals and families will often delay fleeing a violent situation due to concerns about the safety of their companion animal. One study reported that 35% of women delayed seeking refuge for this reason.⁷ Another found that 42% delayed leaving, 37% stayed, and 15% returned to an abusive relationship due to concerns about an animals' welfare.⁸
10. In 94% of households where animals were given as ‘gifts’ by the perpetrator to individuals or children, the animals were later abused. This suggests that the point at which animals entered a household, and whose decision it was to bring animals into the household, may determine why animals were abused by perpetrators.⁹
11. In cases where victim-survivors do leave without the animal, they remain at high risk of continued abuse and manipulation by the perpetrator through threats or actual harm to the animal. In some cases, victim- survivors may be coerced into returning to the person using violence to protect the animal from harm.¹⁰

Support for victim-survivors with animals

12. One study showed that women are either not aware that some animal welfare agencies provide emergency accommodation, or would not utilise this service if it was available. Keeping the whole family together, including the pet, during this critical time is paramount for victim-survivor well-being. Children, often rely on their pet to provide stability, security and companionship. Some refuges can accommodate companion animals under certain conditions, but this needs to be greatly expanded.
13. An issue facing families affected by domestic abuse who may have a pet in foster care or other accommodation is the difficulty in accessing rental properties where pets are allowed. Being forced to relinquish a pet for this reason after experiencing significant family abuse is extremely traumatic.¹¹ We are pleased that the Renters (Reform) Bill is currently making its way through Parliament, which would – if passed – introduce an implied term into assured tenancy agreements in England that tenants may keep a pet with the landlord’s permission, unless the landlord reasonably refuses. This is an important development and would help ensure the availability of more pet-friendly accommodation in the rental market for those who need it.

Impact of animal abuse on children and young people

² Ascione et al, 2007; Gallagher, 2008; Volant et al, 2008; Hardesty et al, 2013

³ US survey Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2011)

⁴ Ascione, Weber, Thompson, Heath, Maruyama and Hayashi 2007

⁵

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/624422988fa8f527785ed11c/E02735263_Tackling_Domestic_Abuse_CP_639_Elay_002_.pdf

⁶ Safelives Insights IDVA National Dataset 2019-2020

⁷ Fawcett NR, Gullone E, Johnson J (2002)

⁸ https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/files/316598264/Final_Copy_2021_28_09_Wakeham_M_PhD.pdf

⁹ Animal Abuse as a Strategy of Coercive Control - M. Wakeham 2021

¹⁰ Arkow, 2014.

¹¹ Tiplady CM, Walsh DB, Phillips CJC (2012)

14. Exposure to animal abuse continues cycles of violence. Individuals who witnessed animal cruelty were 8.14 times more likely to be perpetrators. Witnessing animal cruelty was the biggest predictor of later violence.¹² 62% to 76% of animal cruelty in the home occurs in front of children.¹³ Children exposed to domestic abuse were nearly three times more likely to exhibit cruelty to animals.¹⁴
15. A Naturewatch Foundation investigation¹⁵ into offences committed under Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 in England and Wales between 2019 and 2020 showed that on 73% of occasions where child sexual abuse was present, so too was animal sexual abuse. This is consistent with academic studies from universities in the UK and USA.
16. With families under investigation for possible child abuse, it was found that domestic abuse had occurred in 88% of these families.¹⁶

Summary

17. There is substantial evidence that those who abuse animals also abuse people, or go on to do so. This includes domestic abuse and coercive control, which disproportionately affects women and girls. For instance, one in four women in England and Wales between the ages of 16 and 74 have experienced domestic abuse. Tackling animal abuse should form part of any strategy to tackle domestic abuse. Animal abuse awareness throughout the criminal justice system will aid with prevention and detection of other violent offending. Reducing children and young peoples' exposure to animal abuse will also help break cycles of violence.

Questions 3 and 5: How effective is the police service and criminal justice system at responding to these offences and how might this be improved? To what extent is there evidence that escalating behaviours are a particular problem with the emergency services and other public sector organisations?

Investigation

18. The 'National Policing Requirement' directs police forces and Violence Against Women and Children is now a priority.¹⁷ The document emphasises information sharing and taking an holistic approach to investigation; phrases used include:
 - “**multi-faceted** investigations to identify perpetrators...take into consideration the wider pattern of behaviour”
 - “**Information is shared** across agencies”
 - “Build a **detailed intelligence picture**”
 - “**Share information and intelligence** with agencies”
 - “**Share information** ...in MARAC”
19. Evidence or allegations of animal abuse should be considered pertinent to any domestic abuse investigation. The welfare of animals present in a household subject to a domestic abuse investigation should also always be scrutinised. In practice, we think this rarely happens due to 1. limited animal abuse awareness amongst frontline personnel and 2. fears about the GDPR implications of sharing or requesting information from other agencies, including non-statutory bodies involved in animal and child protection. Increasing animal abuse awareness amongst frontline personnel would help ensure that investigations can be *multi-faceted* and that other specialist agencies, such as the RSPCA, can be engaged as appropriate.

Public protection

¹² DeGue and DeLillo 2009

¹³ Faver and Strand 2003

¹⁴ Currie 2006

¹⁵ Naturewatch Foundation, 'Sexual violence towards animals in England and Wales', September 2021.

¹⁶ Animal Legal Defense Fund, 2015

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strategic-policing-requirement-2023>

20. Schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 lists offences considered to be **precursors to further dangerous behaviour**. Over 100 offences are listed, but the only animal offence is Section 69 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which covers **some** forms of animal sexual abuse. The use of an object, like a knife to sexually abuse a horse (known globally to be a precursor to female sexual abuse) could only be charged under the Animal Welfare Act 2006, meaning the offender would not be referred to Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements that exist to help protect the public, including women and girls. We recommend that both s69 Sexual Offences Act 2003 be expanded in scope to include other forms of sexual abuse of an animal, and that sch 15 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 be expanded to include other serious animal welfare offences.
21. Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 came into law after a Sussex-based homicide case with a background of non-fatal strangulation and connections with 'Extreme Pornography'. The connection between animal sexual abuse and child sexual abuse is of course therefore very relevant to the protection of women and girls.

Police training, policy and external communication

22. The College of Policing guidance, updated in 2022, recognises 'Animal Abuse by the Suspect' as an associated factor within domestic abuse. As of 2023, police officers across England and Wales now complete a DARA (Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment) form, which includes asking whether the abuser has harmed pets. However, very few officers are trained on how pets (or a more accurate term animals) can be used as part of coercive control.
23. We believe to protect both animals and people, animal abuse awareness training should be given to any police officer likely to attend or investigate a domestic abuse case, to the judiciary and anyone else responsible for public protection. Our campaign work since June 2023 has sought to improve police training, policy and external communication to help protect animals, and therefore protect women and girls. So far 80% of police websites have been updated to provide information about support available for victim-survivors with animals, and police policy and training has also now been adapted. Police forces that have yet to take positive steps like these should be urged to do so.

Summary

24. Naturewatch Foundation's mission is ending animal cruelty and advancing animal welfare. For over 200 years, the connection between the abuse of animals and domestic homicide of women has been known, yet it has only relatively recently permeated police and criminal justice policy, processes and strategy to help protect women and girls. We would like to see animal abuse awareness be considered a part of the 'criminal justice toolkit' to aid with the safeguarding of people and prevention of violence in society.
25. Specifically,
 1. We would like to see more training for police and the judiciary on the important role that recognising animal abuse can play within safeguarding women and girls.
 2. We would like to see the court process fully appreciate this Link. For example, in cases where animal abuse by a perpetrator happens alongside violence against women and girls this must be brought to the attention of the sentencing judiciary and should be treated as a 'high harm' factor during sentencing.
 3. We would like to see Animal Welfare Act 2006 offences listed under Schedule 15 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, so that potentially dangerous offenders can be added to the MAPPA system to help protect the public.

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