



*'How easily your cat could fall from the balcony'*

Investigating the experiences of, and the bond between, children and companion animals, in the context of domestic violence in Sweden

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"I certify that all material in this dissertation which is not my own work has been identified with appropriate acknowledgement and referencing and I also certify that no material is included for which a degree has previously been conferred upon me. "

## **Abstract**

The relationship with a companion animal can be especially important for a child living with domestic abuse. Animal abuse often occurs alongside child abuse, but when children must go into transitional housing at refuges for victims of domestic abuse, usually their animals are not allowed to accompany them. There is a lack of research on the effect of the separation, on both children and animals. In Sweden, there is today a growing interest in refuges to start allowing accompanying animals, but there is a lack of research on the experiences of accompanying animals. In this study, semi-structured interviews were performed with four participants from refuges, three of them allowing companion animals, as well as with a canine behaviourist specialising in canine trauma. It was combined with self-introspection/autoethnography. Four main themes emerged. Theme one showed that the bond between abused children and companion animals can be very strong and that companion animals are often a source of support. I argue that in relationships between children and animals, the roles of who is acting as the Safe haven and Secure base in a secure attachment relationship, can be interchangeable. Theme two showed that the animal can be used as part of coercive control by the abuser, and that it is especially effective when the child has a strong attachment to the animal. Theme three showed that to be separated from their animals can be very traumatic for a child and I argue that the separation can be a cause of children developing 'childhood traumatic grief'. Theme four showed that my informants' experience was that accompanying animals in refuges display relatively few problematic behaviours.

Key words: Domestic violence, Companion animal abuse, Child abuse, Attachment, The link, Refuges

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Research by McDonald, Graham-Bermann, Maternick, Ascione, Williams (2016)

demonstrated the importance of investigating the child-companion animal bond of children who have been victims of domestic violence, as this will affect their emotional development.

Their research showed that children who witness cruelty towards animals in their homes have a higher likelihood to develop emotional problems, compared to children who have experienced domestic violence, but not violence towards companion animals.

The bond to a companion animal matters for children, who often see animals as family members, and perceive the animals as social support (Fawcett, 2002; Melson, 2003; Pierce, 2016; Tipper, 2011). Research shows that this relationship can matter even more when the parents are deficient in caretaking (Alper, 1994; Purewal, Christley, Joinson, Meints, Gee, Westgarth, 2017). However, in Sweden, as in many countries, companion animals are not usually able to accompany their owners into transitional housing in refuges for victims of domestic abuse who must flee from violent relationships. In some cases, thanks to the organization 'Voov – Veterinarians caring about victims of abuse', companion animals can be offered to stay at temporary emergency homes while their owners are at the refuge, and there are also a growing number of refuges that offer the possibility to house animals in place. However, many victims are still told by the Police and Social Services that they must leave their companion animals behind, if they must flee.

Since companion animals are viewed as property by the law, they are not offered protection as victims of violence (Diesen, 2016). The same link that has been shown in several international studies has been supported by Swedish research as well; that many women will

choose to stay within a violent relationship, due to worrying about their animal's safety (Holmberg, 2004).

Companion animals suffer from abuse, both psychologically and physically (Flynn, 2012, Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015). There is a strong link between animal abuse and co-occurring child abuse (Currie, 2006; Flynn, 2010; Gupta 2006; Randour, 2011). In Sweden, it is estimated to be around 729,000 dogs and 1.2 million cats, living as companion animals (Manimalis, 2017). Many of these animals live in homes with children, and since it's estimated that 10-15% of Swedish children have experienced physical violence at home (Nilsson, Nordås, Pribe, Svedin, 2017), this is likely to affect many companion animals.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

This study aims to investigate what the bond between children and companion animals, who has experienced domestic violence, entails, and how the violence can affect both parties. Its aim is also to address what the effect can be on children in temporary housing, due to the separation from a companion animal attachment figure. The effect on separation from companion animals is understudied in this area and I find it important to explore, as most children who must go to refuges must be separated from their companion animals. There is, to my knowledge, no research on the effect on children who are allowed (or not) to bring companion animals with them into refuges. Animal-allowing refuges are uncommon in the United States (Komorosky, Woods, Empie, 2015) and there are no refuges allowing accompanying companion animals in the UK (though there exist pet fostering programmes, similar to Voov's programme) (Scott-Park, 2018). While there are no statistics from Sweden on how many refuges currently allow companion animals, several sources from refuges



empathized that there is a growing interest among refugees to start this practice. (Personal communication with informants from refugees, 2018).

I also intend to research how being able to follow owners into a refuge can affect companion animals, a topic which, for the reason above, has not been researched previously. Animals have often been studied for their effect on humans (Sanders, Arluke, 1993, Taylor, 2012) however, I want to explore their situation considering them as “embodied actors in their own worlds” (White, 2013:100). Since the interest in allowing animals in Swedish refuges is growing, I find it particularly important to research the effects on children and animals alike.

I will explore the topic via a literature review of the themes as well as through performing semi-structured interviews, with four employees working at Swedish refuges, as well as a canine behaviourist who has specialized in canine trauma. I also intend to explore it via self-introspection and autoethnographic research, mainly on my own children’s attachment to companion animals. The main themes emerging from my interviews will be discussed and compared to previous research.

### **1.3 Definitions:**

Domestic violence constitutes “any behaviour that causes damage to another person (physical, sexual, emotional or financial), causes someone to live in fear, or damages property, a person or pets (Tiplady, Walsh, Baulch, 2013:93). I choose to define it as involving “sexual assaults, verbal assaults, every type of emotional abuse, and physical abuse” (Raynor, Saint-Onge, 2007:3).

For child abuse, I shall use the definition “violence towards a child that includes physical, sexual, and/or emotional aspects” (Clark, 2004:54).

Animal abuse is defined by Tiplady (2013:3) as “the deliberate harm, neglect or misuse of animals by humans, resulting in the animals suffering physically or emotionally.” It can involve physical abuse, deliberate neglect, sexual abuse and/or verbal abuse/threats (Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015).

For this study, I use the word ‘animal’ instead of the more cumbersome ‘nonhuman animal’. I prefer to use ‘companion animal’ rather than ‘pet’, as I think it conveys the importance of the relationship to the animal, rather than just the presence of an animal in the home, better. However, ‘companion animal’ and ‘animal’ will henceforth be used interchangeably. I will use the word ‘owner’ instead of ‘caretaker’ or ‘guardian’, since the question of ownership of an animal is often of importance for this subject.

The abuser will normally be described as a male in this report. Even though female perpetrators of both animal and child abuse do exist, my informants work with persons where the violence is severe enough to pose a death threat, and they all concluded that in these cases the abuser is most often a man. There might be unrecorded cases of people with diverse genders and/or sexualities, where women are perpetrators or men are victims, as recent research showed the link between human directed and animal directed violence exists in these relationships as well (Taylor, Riggs, Donovan, Fraser, Signal, 2018), however, that question is out of scope for this study.

#### **1.4 Overview of the dissertation**

The first chapter is the introduction, where I also describe definitions of the terms that I use. The second chapter is the methodology section, where I present my initial and revised research plan, as well as the participants of the study and the methods I have used. The third chapter is a literature review on themes that I found relevant to the topic. In the fourth

chapter, I present my results, first my themes, and then an on-following discussion where the themes are discussed in the light of previous research on the topic. The fifth chapter is a conclusion as well as suggestions for further research and practice implications.

## **Chapter 2 - Methodology and research plan**

### **2.1 Initial research plan**

My initial idea was to interview children who stayed at refuges, but this proved impossible due to that the Swedish law states that children can only be interviewed if both guardians give informed consent. As an adjustment, I changed to focussing on the experience of administrators and employees of refuges for victims of domestic violence. For the companion animal side, my initial plan was to interview people working for a pet fostering programme, for animals who must be temporarily placed in emergency homes while their owners stay at a refuge. I contacted the organization in question but could not find any interested participants. I therefore found an alternative in interviewing a canine behaviourist, who specializes in canine trauma.

### **2.2 Final research plan**

The topic was explored via a literature study and self-introspection/autoethnographic research, as well as semi-structured interviews with participants from four refuges, and an interview with a canine behaviourist. My overall research methodology was inspired by phenomenology; “to grasp the singular aspects of a phenomenon or event and explore what is given in experiences” (Van Manen, 2014:27). It is also informed by narrative inquiry, which can involve autoethnographic experiences, interviews and more. “Going beyond the use of narrative as rhetorical structure, that is, simply telling stories, to an analytic examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates” (Duff, 2002:208).

I decided on interviewing employees of refuges, both from those that allowed and did not allow accompanying animals. I also decided on combining my data with autoethnographic research, where I found this suitable, when comparing my results with relevant literature.

Autoethnographic research is “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011:1). It is emerging as an important way to research children, and involves “retrospectively and selectively writing about epiphanies that are made possible by being part of a culture or possessing a certain cultural identity” (Shillington, Murnaghan, 2016:3).

However, using personal experience means that not only oneself, but also close, intimate others, will be implicated by the research (Adams, 2006). Considering these “relational concerns” (Ellis, 2007:25), I felt obligated to show my text and ask for permission to use it, when this was possible. The persons mostly figuring in my notes are my children and companion animals. I explained as carefully as I could what this means to my sons, and was given their permission. I have also asked my father to read and give consent, as both his dog and himself figure in the text.

For the interviews, I employed a semi-structured and narrative process, in which the interviewees could expand on topics that corresponded with their experiences. Interviews are a suitable choice to explore experiences and opinions, even for complex issues, when the aim of the research is to understand it in depth (Denscombe, 2017). One should be aware though, that the data collected will be affected by “the specific context and the specific individuals involved” (ibid:221). The identity of the researcher can also affect interviewee statements, however, I found that my informants were more inclined to share information because I am a) a woman and b) currently working for an organization in this field.

### **2.3 Participants of the study and ethical considerations**

I contacted a mix of animal-allowing and non-animal-allowing refuges via email, and their contact information was found by googling the phrase “shelter for women”. I received positive responses from five places, but one chose to withdraw from the study before the interview, with no reason given. Several responses were from employees who were positive to the topic being explored, but who were unable to participate. The most common reason for this was time constraints, but three responses stated that they had no experience of the subject.

Three of the four respondents who wanted to participate were working at animal-allowing refuges and one worked at a non-animal allowing refuge. Two of the refuges which allowed animals had long experience of the area and one had started more recently. I decided not to state the exact length of their experience as this could endanger their anonymity, since there are still quite few refuges allowing animals. They were sent an information sheet with a description of the study combined with a consent form, where they were asked to give informed consent to their answers being used for this report, and possibly as published material and in lectures. They were informed that all details would be stored in a password protected file in Dropbox, and that only anonymized names would be used for the report. All participants signed the consent form and mailed it back to me. I have identified them by the letters A-D, to preserve their privacy in this report.

The canine behaviourist is the only one in Sweden with this specialty, and therefore her anonymity could not be guaranteed, something which she agreed upon. She was sent the information sheet and consent form that the other participants received, which she signed

and sent back. She had long experience of the topic and had worked with traumatized dogs for more than ten years. In the result section, I will refer to her as 'The canine behaviourist'.

I reviewed and complied with the ASA ethical guidelines (ASA, 2011). Apart from obtaining informed consent, and considerations on anonymity/confidentiality, consideration also involved the anticipation of harms. Considering that domestic violence is a sensitive subject, I reviewed whether there was any risk of potential harm to my participants. Since all informants spoke about their professional, and not personal, experiences, I considered this risk to be low. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason.

The research plan and the information sheet and consent form have been reviewed and approved by The Ethics Committee at The University of Exeter. The information sheet and consent form can be found in Appendix A.

#### **2.4 Interview proceedings and Data Analysis**

The interviews were either performed in person and recorded, or performed by phone, and written down as we spoke, as my recording device did not work for telephone conversations. The interview questions for employees and administrators of refuges, as well as for the canine behaviourist, are found as Appendix B and C, respectively.

Immediately after the interviews, I took field notes on what I had experienced during the conversation. The interviews were then transcribed as well as translated to English, since they were all done in Swedish. I analysed the data by looking for themes and patterns, and colour coded the themes that I found. Four key themes were identified. Some of the themes consisted of subthemes, which are presented along with the main theme.

The themes were then compared to research that I had found while doing my literature review, and a discussion of themes was written. Alongside this, I reviewed notes that I had taken during the past year, on self-introspection and my observations of my own children's bond with companion animals. These were analysed in the discussion of themes as well.

## **2.5 Reasons for my interest**

My own interest in this subject is twofold. My professional interest comes from the work I have been involved in since 2016 via the organization 'Se Sambandet' (Se Sambandet, 2018), a national centre of knowledge about the link between violence towards humans and animals. Previously, I have worked with Humane Education materials, which, combined with becoming a mother, spurred my interest in the child-animal bond.

On a personal level, I have experience of violence, both psychological and physical, and my companion animals have been a very important part of my process of recovering from these experiences. I did not experience abuse as a child, but my working experience led me to start focussing on the situation for children and animals in the context of domestic violence, which made me realize that there is a lack of knowledge about this subject.

## **2.6 Reflexivity**

Being involved in the topic professionally, meant I had to take great care not to let my preconceived opinions of the subject affect the outcome of the research. However, as already mentioned, being involved in the field also helped me to get access to information.

I also had to be reflexive about my own experiences, as I know I have certain triggers.



Lynch (2017) described the risk of developing secondary trauma/compassion fatigue, when hearing stories of trauma and abuse. Carefully taking notes on how I feel in a reflexive diary has been important for me during research. For making sure that I cope well with hearing a torrent of stories of abuse, I also talk regularly about this to a colleague and we make sure to warn each other if we see any sign of the other not coping.

## Chapter 3 - Literature study

### 3.1 The Link

Domestic violence can be defined as involving “sexual assaults, verbal assaults, every type of emotional abuse, and physical abuse” (Raynor, Saint-Onge, 2007:3). Another definition is “any behaviour that causes damage to another person (physical, sexual, emotional or financial), causes someone to live in fear, or damages property, a person or pets (Tiplady, Walsh, Baulch, 2013:93). Domestic violence and child abuse coexist (Saunders, 2003) and child abuse can be defined as “violence towards a child that includes physical, sexual, and/or emotional aspects (Clark, 2004:54). In Sweden, 10-15% of Swedish children have experienced physical abuse at home (Nilsson, Nordås, Pribe, Svedin, 2017)). A worldwide prevalence of child physical abuse is estimated to be 22.6% (Stoltenborgh, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Alink, IJzendoorn, 2015). However, it should be noted here that in Sweden, all kinds of corporal punishment are forbidden by law. This makes the definition of physical violence towards children different in Sweden, compared to countries where some corporal punishment of children is allowed. The association between fathers' corporal punishment and sons' childhood animal cruelty was shown by Flynn (1999) and sheds light on one area where the differing laws can create different outcomes. The subjects from Flynn’s study were not considered abused by American law but would have been, had they lived in Sweden.

Animal abuse is the deliberate harm, neglect or misuse of animals by humans resulting in the animals suffering physically or emotionally (Tiplady, 2013). It can involve physical abuse, deliberate neglect, sexual abuse and verbal abuse/threats (Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015).

Abuse of animals is a common pattern in family violence and partner violence (Currie, 2006; Flynn, 2010; Gupta, 2006; Randour, 2011) as well as child sexual abuse (Arkow, 2013).

Domestic and sexual violence is overwhelmingly committed by men against women (Walby, Allen, 2004; World Health Organization, 2017). Gender is the indicator for being a victim or an abuser, it is not a socioeconomic problem (Tiplady, Walsh, Baulch, 2013). Interrelated forms of violence within a family are most likely to involve a male abuser (Henry, 2006).

Domestic violence is by some viewed as part of the system of male dominance over women (Faver, Strand, 2003; Stark, 2007; Walton-Moss, Manganello, Frye, Campbell, 2005) and the correlation of different forms of abuse within the same family have been interpreted as a manifestation of the interrelated oppression of women, children and animals (Adams, 1995; Flynn, 2012).

However, child abuse can also exist in families with no partner violence, and mothers can also be perpetrators. A large Swedish research study showed that when only one parent displayed violent behaviour, it was slightly more than 2.5 higher likelihood for it to be a father or a stepfather, compared to a mother or stepmother (Nilsson, Nordås, Pribe, Svedin, 2017:35). In cases with child abuse with only a female abuser, to my knowledge, no research has been done to investigate the prevalence of co-occurring animal abuse. Males are however much more represented in animal abuse cases overall, except for cases of animal hoarding (MacKinnon, 2005; Tiplady, 2013).

Domestic violence is about power and control, “by exerting power over somebody it is possible to control them through fear, intimidation and/or threats, and abusing animals can be part of this coercive control” (Tiplady, Walsh, Baulch, 2013:93). Abusers can use threats and harm companion animals, as a way of controlling the female victim (Arkow, 1996;

Ascione, 1999; Flynn, 2000). Cruelty to animals can be an indicator for interpersonal violence, especially domestic violence and child abuse, and is well supported by research (Ascione, Lockwood, 2001; Ascione, 1998; Ascione, Arkow, 1996; Deviney, Dickert, Lockwood, 1983; Faver, Strand, 2003; Flynn, 2000; Gupta, 2006; Ponder and Lockwood, 2000). Significant overlap between different forms of abuse in the family has also been shown by DeGue and DeLillo (2009), who found that 60% of the participants in their study, who had witnessed or perpetrated animal cruelty as a child, also had experience with child maltreatment or domestic violence. Their research showed that animal abuse is a strong indicator of co-occurring child abuse, but the opposite might not as often be the case. The researchers concluded that animal abuse is often part of the psychological violence toward a partner or children; it points to an underlying family dynamic of devaluing dependant household members. In a Dutch study (Garnier, Enders-Slegers, 2012), the researchers found that animal cruelty was significantly more common in violent relationships and that 60% of the affected women reported that their children had also witnessed the abuse toward companion animals.

Companion animals matter to children, and their importance could be heightened for children living in the context of violence (Magid, 2008; Purewal et al., 2017). It seems like it is particularly the animals' importance that makes them such an effective instrument for control; perpetrators of both physical violence toward, and sexual abuse of, children can exploit the emotional bond between children and their animals to threaten them to silence (Coorey, Coorey-Evings, 2018; Diesen, 2013). Research by Boat (1999) also showed that abusers can harm companion animals, to control the behaviour of abused children.

Holmberg's research (2004) has shown that abused women in Sweden often hesitate to leave an abusive relationship, due to concern for their companion animal's safety, which is well supported by other studies as well (Allen, Gallagher, Jones, 2006; Ascione, 1998; Fawcett, Gullone, Johnson, 2002, Flynn, 2000; Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015). When having children, women are almost twice as likely to leave a violent relationship as women without children are, despite having to leave their animals, according to research by Strand and Faver (2005). When having to choose the safety of children, women has been found to have to put less importance on companion animals (Roguski, 2012).

There is a link between experiencing domestic violence in childhood and committing animal cruelty (DeGue and DeLillo, 2009). One possible factor might be the "dissociation hypothesis" which suggests that exposure to animal abuse may decrease emotional empathy; the ability to 'feel with' the other, while strengthening cognitive empathy; the ability to interpret and predict other's intentions (Daly and Morton, 2008). It was further researched, with the same results, by Daly and Morton in 2018, supporting their hypothesis of a dissociative effect between the feeling and the interpreting aspects of empathy, which might develop as a survival instinct in subjects of abuse. Dadds, Whiting, and Hawes (2006) found an association between animal cruelty and psychopathic/unemotional personality traits. Decreased empathy has also been shown as a factor in aggression towards women and children, among sexual offenders (Simons, Wurtele, Heil, 2002), suggesting that it is a factor in committing violence towards both humans and animals. However, findings are not unanimous, research by Henry (2006) showed that people who commit animal abuse did not have significantly less empathy towards humans, compared to a control group of people who had not committed animal abuse. Research on whether empathy towards humans is directly transferred to empathy towards animals, and vice versa, is not consistent, the two

types of empathy have been shown to have a significant but modest link, and they are unlikely to tap a single, unitary construct. (Paul, 2000).

### **3.2 The bond between children and companion animals**

Young children often consider animals as friends (Fawcett, 2002) and as part of the family and social network (Melson, 2003; Morrow, 1998; Pierce, 2016; Tipper, 2011). Companion animals are perceived as supportive and comforting, holding an emotional meaning for children (Fawcett, 2002:224; Melson, 2001) and constituting a deep and meaningful relationship (Bryant, 1990).

Research by Kosonen (1996), showed that for nearly half of children at the age of 9–12 years, companion animals provided a more important relationship than friends, grandfathers, and teachers. When 49 children in research by Tipper (2011) were asked about who mattered for them, 90% mentioned animals, without animals being the focus of the study. The children spoke about a different range of animals as kin, family, friends and acquaintances. Sometimes, animals might be more important to children than adults understand, in another study, children who were asked to take photos indicating their well-being, were more likely to include companion animals, compared to the photos their teachers and parents took (Sixsmith, Gabhainn, Fleming, O’Higgins, 2007).

A systematic review of the research on the child-companion animal bond found evidence for an association between companion animal ownership and a wide range of emotional and cognitive benefits, especially social competence and self-esteem, as well as low sense of loneliness. The correlation was higher, the stronger the attachment to the animal was. The same study showed inconclusive findings regarding anxiety and depression (Purewal et al.

2017). It seems the nature of the relationship, rather than whether owning a companion animal or not, affects depression and anxiety levels in children.

Animals are a unique source of support for adult owners too (Meehan, Machavelli, Pachana, 2017). When you cannot talk to anyone else, an animal is safe confidant (Hafen, Rush, Reisbig; McDaniel, 2007) maybe due to the nonjudgmental nature of animals. Affect attunement (to share and match an experience of inner state) has been observed in child-animal interactions (Myers, 1998) and the support of companion animals can facilitate resilience in young persons (Walsh, 2009). Children often turn to their companion animals for emotional support (Purewal, et al. 2017; Russell, 2017).

Fawcett (2014:268) describes the relationship between children and nonhuman animals as a “kinship imaginary” – an interspecies ethics built upon shared experiences. However, not all children feel kinship with animals, and when it comes to companion animals, the way children engage with them, and how this affects them, can also be affected by the way the animals are treated by adults (Poresky, Hendrix, Mosier, Samuelson, 1987).

### **3.3 Attachment**

Attachment theory developed from Bowlby (1969; 1973) to explain infants’ relationships to their care givers, and it was later employed to explore human relationships with nonhuman animals (Rockett, Carr, 2014). An attachment relationship can be either secure or insecure/avoidant, insecure/ambivalent or disorganized (Julius, Beetz, Kotrschal, Turner, Uvnäs-Moberg, 2013).

There are specific criteria to be met for an attachment relationship to be considered secure (Ainsworth, 1991, cited in Julius et al. 2013:131):

- The attachment figure acts as a secure base of comfort and reassurance.
- The attachment figure acts as the safe haven and is approached in the case of emotional stress.
- That maintenance of proximity is associated with positive emotions.
- That separation from the attachment figure is associated with negative feelings.

All these criteria have been found to be fulfilled between companion animals and adult owners (Meehan et al, 2017). There is strong support for the theory that the relationship between dogs and human owners can be described as a secure attachment (Edwards, Heiblum, Tejada, Galindo, 2007) even though research is ongoing as to how the specific attachment style of dog owners affects their dogs (Rehn, Beetz, Keeling, 2017). The strength of the dog-owner bond has been measured with biomarkers; physiological effects such as oxytocin levels and blood pressure (Handlin 2010; Julius et al., 2013; Odendaal and Meintjes, 2003). There is also support for the idea that children can be securely attached to their dogs (Jalongo, 2015; Kurdek, 2008,) and can develop attachment relationships to other companion animals (Melson, 2003).

Some research has also shown that cats can be securely attached to their owners (Edwards et al. 2007; Julius et al., 2013). Other data, using the same test used with dogs and children, has pointed to the difference between an affectionate bond and an attachment. An affectionate bond is defined as a relatively long-lasting relationship where the partner is important as a unique individual and cannot be interchanged, while an attachment



relationship is an affectional bond with the added aspect of security and comfort obtained from the relationship (Ainsworth, 1989). In a study on cats (Potter, Mills, 2015) the researchers argued that cats do have strong affectional bonds with their owners but that they are autonomous compared to dogs and not attachment-like dependant on their owners for safety. However, the setup of an experimental situation which is suitable for dogs and humans might not be the best way to study cats; the cat-human bond is generally less researched compared to dogs and we know much less about these relationship dynamics (Shreve, Udell, 2015).

Some researchers suggest that no companion animals fulfil all four criteria for secure attachment relationships, but that they offer “attachment related functions” (Sable, 2012:94). The definition of attachment in different studies varies, which might be one reason why the data is inconclusive (Rockett, Carr, 2014). From an ethological perspective, attachment is sometimes described as “an affectionate tie between two individuals that promotes a balance of proximity-seeking and independent activity (Udell, Brukbaker, 2016:329). This perspective differs from the one used within the field of human psychology, where an affectionate bond is considered something different than an attachment relationship, and which is otherwise normally used for attachment research on human-animal relationships (Rockett, Carr, 2014). The results differ depending on which definition is used.

An insecure attachment relationship is characterized by that a child perceives the parent as rejecting and unsupportive (Julius et al. 2013). Male children with insecure attachment to parents seem to benefit more from interacting with a friendly dog than a human (Beetz, Julius, Turner, Kotrschal, 2012) as this interaction lowered their cortisol levels more,

indicating the stress reducing effect on biomarkers, of interacting with animals. Kurdek (2008) found no significant correlation between adult's attachment toward a companion animal, and their attachment toward their parents and partners. The same conclusion was drawn in a study of children by Julius, Beetz and Niebergall (2010) and further identified by Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer and Shaver (2011). When it comes to human-human relationships, normally insecure attachment-related behaviours are transmitted into the next relationship (Julius et al.,2013). However, the studies by Kurdek (2008), Julius, Beetz and Niebergall (2010) and Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer and Shaver (2011) indicate that the cycle of transmission is either broken in, or not transmitted at all to, human-animal relationships. In other words; a child with an insecure attachment to caregivers can still develop secure attachment relationships with animals.

### **3.4 The child-animal bond in the context of violence**

Holmberg's research (2004) showed that in Sweden, a high proportion of staff at refuges have experienced that women describe violence committed against their animals, and that their children talk about it as well.

For many abused children, animals are the only source of comfort and safety, and seeing them being harmed has a profound effect on children's wellbeing (Loar, Colman, 2004).

Animals can act as a support system, and a buffer to reduce stress, they are sometimes the one person in these children's lives who truly sees them, something which is correlated to better chances of normal development (Magid, 2008). A person can be severely traumatized but as an adult "earned secure" (healed from trauma and able to have secure relationships) by having had healing emotional experiences of caregiving, and this can be with an animal (ibid:348).

That animals are more significant to a child when the parents are deficient in care-taking is supported by research (Alper, 1994; Purewal et al. 2017). Children may feel more at ease with expressing their feelings with animals, in families where a range of feelings are forbidden (Alper, 1994). Research on young people who are homeless sheds light on the importance of emotional support from companion animals, when living in vulnerability (Rhoades, Winetrobe, Rice, 2015, see also Irvine, 2016 on the bond between animals and homeless people of differing ages).

Research by McDonald et.al. (2016) showed that abused children who had experienced violence toward animals at home had a higher likelihood of developing severe emotional problems than those who had not experienced animal abuse. The researchers discussed reasons such as the heightened importance of the child-animal bond when living with abuse, making it emotionally very painful to see one's animal being abused. However, Nebbe (1997) compared adults who had been abused as children with those with no history of abuse, and showed that subjects abused as children but who had a strong human-animal bond in childhood reported more nurturant behaviours compared to abused subjects who had had no such bond. Also, lower anger levels and less likelihood of abusing animals and children as an adult, was reported for those who had had a strong human-animal bond.

“The qualitative information supported the premise that relationships with animals were very important to some of the abused subjects when they were children. The animals were viewed as supportive, as a tool used by the abuser, as a threat to the abused child, and as part of the healing process. Sometimes these views overlapped” (ibid:ix).

Taken together, this indicates that it is very emotionally distressing for children to witness animal abuse at home, but that a strong emotional bond with an animal can still later in life serve as a protective factor. More research would be needed to explore both long-term and short-term effects on children, on witnessing animal abuse at home.

### **3.5 Effects on the animals**

Animals have more and more been researched as social actors who are engaged in their own relationships, having their own life stories (Birke, 2016; Charles, 2014; Alger, Alger, 2003; Arluke, Sanders, 1996) and having agency. To display agency means “the ability to think, act and make choices or change” (Coulter, 2016:79). This shift in perspective is applicable when researching families affected by domestic violence; when researching family dynamics only from an anthropocentric perspective, the connections with animals are lost (Melson, Fine, 2006). Walsh (2009:497) argues for a shift to a biocentric orientation “encompassing our connections with other species”.

However, much of the research on human-animal bond has been focussed only on the human side of the equation or how animals affect humans (Sanders, Arluke, 1993; Taylor, 2012). Despite animal abuse by owners being a world-wide problem, it has received little attention in research (McMillan, Duffy, Zawistowski, Serpell, 2015). Research by Flynn (2012) shows that animals who are victims of violence suffer both physically and emotionally, also through being separated from their human companions. Companion animals are attuned to the emotional climate of a family and are sensitive to affective states of family members (Walsh, 2009). Dogs have been found to respond to the sound of a human infant crying with increased levels of the stress hormone cortisol, just like humans do (Yong, Ruffman, 2014). Cat behaviour is influenced by human moods as well, and cats have been found to behave

sensitively to human depressive moods, leading them to engage in more allorubbing (Rieger, Turner, 1999).

Companion animals show their reactions to living with violence with different behavioural changes, such as running away, being aggressive or seeking proximity to the abused person (Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015). Research has shown the most common reactions are general fear, and aggression toward the abuser (ibid) and in dogs significantly higher cases of aggression and fear-related behaviours, even to unfamiliar dogs, as well as hyperactivity and repetitive behaviours, has also been shown (McMillan et al. 2015). Research looking at injured animals diagnosed with NAI (Nonaccidental injury) by veterinarians show that veterinarians suspect NAI in injured animals who show excessive fear of strangers or of men (McGuinness, Allen, Jones, 2005). Other effects seen in dogs are PTSD - Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a long-term stress disorder, following an event that causes “intense fear and/or helplessness” (Day, Day, 2013:135). It is important to help animals as early as possible, since their trauma can otherwise escalate into PTSD. Other behavioural effects seen in abused companion animals are acute and generalized stress disorders, as well as panic disorders (ibid).

### **3.6 The law**

Animals are considered property by Swedish law, and research by Diesen and Diesen (2013) has shown that despite animal welfare and anti-abuse laws, companion animals “lack basic rights when it comes to them being victims of domestic abuse” (ibid:334). Despite witnesses and documents, animal abuse cases are often “consumed” in domestic violence cases, as the

penalty for animal abuse is so much lower than for violence towards humans (Ibid:340). “The juridical comes into conflict, despite shared vulnerabilities” (Diesen, 2018<sup>1</sup>).

Even though animals are not granted automatic protection as victims of violence, there are non-profit organizations working with ‘pet-fostering’ programmes or temporary housing of animals. The organization specialising in placing companion animals in temporary emergency homes is called ‘VOOV’, which stands for Veterinarians caring about victims of abuse, and was started by veterinary students interested in the field of interrelated violence towards humans and animals. There are also some rehoming organizations for dogs that work with cases from The Police.

### **3.7 Separation**

The loss of an attachment relationship could “unleash a process of grief and mourning that feels almost unbearable” (Sable, 2012:96). Traumatic effects of forced separation from companion animals has been researched in the context of disasters, such as the hurricane Katrina, and economic crises, forcing people to abandon their animals (Walsh, 2009).

Effects of children’s forceful separations from companion animals is not a well-researched area, but research has been done on separation due to the animal’s death, such as Russell (2017) focussing on children’s act of remembering and responding to companion animal deaths and its significance for future and ongoing relations with humans and nonhumans.

Animals also have their own reactions to loss and can exhibit distress and grieflike behaviour at the loss of a significant other (Pribac, 2013).

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Diesen is a lawyer, specialising in sexual crime, violence towards women and children, the link between animal abuse and domestic violence, and the legal status of animals.

Research on women who were forced to give up their animals when becoming homeless points at the trauma, pain and other negative effects this had on their children (Labreque, Walsh, 2011). Many of these women had fled from domestic violence. Riggs, Due and Taylor (2017) studied children who had migrant or refugee backgrounds and showed how they mentioned the loss of companion animals, when talking about their homeland.

## Chapter 4 - Results

### 4.1 Theme 1 - The strong bond between abused children and companion animals

The first theme that emerged was the strength of the bond between children and animals who had experienced abuse. The relationship was described as a very strong bond and a close relationship; “It’s very close, a comforting and meaningful relationship.” The way an animal can be the one person that the child could cry in front of, and tell how they really felt for, was described by several informants. “If you have had an animal to talk to, you have sort of had a talking partner in animal shape and it’s easier for them to open up later”.

The informants from animal-allowing refuges mentioned that the children talked about their animals as a real part of their family and expressed how happy they were that the animals could join them. One informant emphasized especially how important it was that ceremonies were held if an animal had died, or that a sick or injured animal could see a veterinarian. “It is just as important to children as it is with a little brother or sister, there is no difference there.”

The special roles that can emerge within the relationship were also described by all informants from animal-allowing refuges, emphasizing how the animal provided support and listened to the child, acting like a best friend. “To hear your confessions and be the one who can actually comfort you.”

“Many of these children also feel that they are needed for their animals, if they are not there, the rabbit won’t get food or the cat cuddle and so, you become a valuable person yourself for the animal, through them. [...] And many children might only have the animal to trust, it’s the one they tell



everything [...]. They experience a lot of support, but they also feel that they are protecting their animals, it's a combination of feeling protected and being the protector." [Informant A]

From the animal's point of view, the bond with the human family members was also described as strong but healthy by the informants from the refuges, however, the canine behaviourist pointed out the risk of a dog developing unhealthy "hyper-attachment", when living with domestic violence. She described a dog, from a case in a family where she suspected domestic violence, as always being by the side of the child and how she perceived the relationship as "not completely natural, more like a band-aid".

The abuser's relationship with animals was viewed as non-existent by several informants; even though the abuser could have one or more animals of his own, it was not perceived as a bond. "It is about control and power and that kind of person, who owns an animal, wants control and power over their animal as well."

There was a difference in how people's worry about their animals' safety was perceived, all three informants from refuges that allowed animals talked in length about how mothers and children alike worry if they are not accompanied by their animals. However, the informant from the refuge not allowing animals, had a different experience, and she was surprised by that sometimes women coming to her workplace did not seem worried about the safety of their animals.

"There have been two cases where I have reacted to that it hasn't been mentioned as a problem for those I spoke to, that there are animals left with the man who they flee from. [...], I would have worried if those were my animals." [Informant D]

This differed from the experience of the other informants; that when there was no worry over the animal's situation, it was usually because it was the abuser's own animal.

"I have had people staying here who have animals but are not worried about them, who don't feel they must bring them, but often, in that case, that's because it's the abuser's dog and they don't have any relationship [..]. In that case, the animal won't be the problem." [Informant A]

However, informant D also pointed out on several occasions during the interview that she had experience of people worrying, of people who had placed their animals safely with Voov's pet Fostering Programme, as well as of one woman who chose not to leave because she couldn't imagine leaving her dog behind. She described that people at the refuge were all at different points of processing the violence, and therefore at different stages of grasping the full extent of what was happening.

A subtheme which was raised was the problem of some refuge's lack of systematic questioning of whether there had been any animals in the family. This became evident also when I was looking for informants for the interviews and received several replies from refuges stating that they had no experience of the topic. When I asked whether they systematically ask about any animals left behind, those who replied said no, but that they thought the matter would come up by itself during discussions. This, however, was not the experience of my interview informants.

"I need to be better on asking questions. I have learned that it won't come up by itself. We haven't really reached the area of animals yet, we always ask immediately about children, but not animals" [Informant D – non-animal-allowing refuge]

“There were no routines in order, to ask whether there had been any companion animals in the family. It all only became clear afterwards, through the reactions and effects. [Informant C, talking about her previous experience of working at a refuge not allowing animals.]

#### **4.2 Theme 2 - Using the relationship with animals to control children living with abuse**

The second emerging theme was how the relationship could be used to control victims' behaviour. That animals were abused in families where domestic violence occurs, was the experience of all the informants. “Of course, I see an extreme link between violence towards humans and animals, it's extremely clear.” Many examples of how the abuser had used animals to control the behaviour of victims of abuse were raised in the interviews. Examples were provided of how children were cautioned against mentioning the violence or sexual abuse going on at home, as well as threats against the child's animal to affect the child to want to come back, if they had left. “In general: animals are being used to affect, to control people”. Threats of what would happen if the children and mother did not come back home, such as that the animal would die, was described as common. It also became clear that threats against animals were often used to prevent from leaving. “Children don't have much of a say in this but the women, they would not have left if they wouldn't have been able to bring the animals. Because the abuser has threatened to kill or hurt the animal.” Death threats against companion animals was described as a common and effective way of the abuser to gain control. “And they will say these things directly to the children, so that they can influence their mother not to go or to come back”.

“For the child, it’s just been really important that the cat is with me. And then the mother has told us that the abuser has held the cat in his scruff and told the child that it so easily could fall from the balcony. And then the child doesn’t want to leave the cat. [...] So that creates a lot of damage. And the only solution is for the mother to be able to bring the animals. If you are four or five years old and experience that, it makes you really angry at your mum.” [Informant B]

Connected to this is the necessity of hiding the violence from others. The canine behaviourist referred to a case where she suspected violence towards the mother, children and the dog. After having given advice to the family, she was contacted by the woman, who said that they could not continue talking like that when the man was in the room, and that he wouldn’t accept her to try to implement changes in their treatment of their dog. After that call, she did not contact the canine behaviourist again.

Another point raised was that it was precisely the strength of the bond, that made it into such an effective tool for control.

“If you have an attachment, then that animal is family. And in those cases, the animals have been used to get the abused person. That’s what it looks like in a relationship with violence, the abuser will aim for things or persons that you have a strong emotional connection to.” [Informant A]

A subcategory arising was the way some children start abusing animals themselves. All informants said this was not common and that they had seen few cases, but that it could happen, and some had noticed tendencies among some children. It was described as a way of mirroring the abuser’s behaviour or dealing with difficult emotions.

“The child knows that daddy’s power lies in the threat of violence. They know they are powerless, and suddenly, they might find themselves in a situation where they have the power, and they have learned what to do with that.” [Informant B]

#### **4.3 Theme 3 – The trauma of separation**

The third theme was the effect on children of having to be separated from their animals. The informants described the experience of being separated from your companion animal, when leaving an abuser, as very traumatic and a disaster for children, especially since they lost the only one who really knew them. “You cannot protect, nor be protected and I find many children focus on the fact that they have not been able to protect their animals.”

When being able to bring animals to the refuge, the children were described as having a better chance of emotional stability, and it was perceived as having a healing effect. The anxiety that children experienced when having to leave their animals behind was described as severe, by informants who now worked at animal-allowing refuges but who had previous work experience of refuges where animals were not allowed. Several informants also brought up how children worrying over their animals lack of safety increased the risk of victims of abuse to return. Sometimes the way children worried and tried to find solutions meant that the mother would start to think it must be better for the child to return home.

“There was a lot of worry and deep anxiety. Since you lack control and you’ve been abused yourself, so you know what that means. The vulnerability of someone you have left.” [Informant C]

Some animals posed more problems than others, and especially horses were mentioned. One informant's refuge had a cooperation with stables whose owners were understanding of the safety restrictions, but she also pointed out how uncommon this was even among refuges that allow accompanying animals. A further complicating factor with horses was the matter of ownership and the financial situation with expensive animals, where the abuser was often the one with money. This created a threat, even if it was experienced as rare that he would hurt the horses, unless the children and mother threatened to leave. "They will only leave if we can help the horses to be rehomed temporarily. If we can't do that, they will stay. We have experienced both situations. "

#### **4.4 Theme 4 - The animal perspective**

The fourth theme emerging was the perspective of the animals, which by all informants from animal-allowing refuges was described in detail, even before I got to the interview question of how they experienced the animal's situation. The informants described a wide range of species of animals (fish, hamsters, birds, rabbits and more) who had stayed at the refuges, however, dogs and cats were by far most common. The animals were repeatedly described as innocent victims, their situation and reactions often compared to children's, in their vulnerability and in being unable to defend themselves against an attacker. They were also perceived as being sensitive to energies and affects, just like children.

The behavioural reactions mentioned were fear, stress-related problems, and in dogs also defensive behaviours.

“They have been beaten. If you consider PTSD they have this clear trigger reaction to for example raised arms, and it’s so serious because they have feared for their life really.” [Canine behaviourist, taking about cases working with previously abused dogs.)

There were differences in reactions noted, depending on the breed and size of the dogs. Smaller dogs and cats were described as more fearful. Larger breeds of dogs, especially the ones of a breed, or mix of breeds, with strong herding and guarding traits, were more often noted to protect the abused person. “They might go in for protecting the mother or the children, mainly the children actually”. Species differences were also noted, one informant empathized that cats were sometimes difficult, as they were so suspicious and wouldn’t trust the staff at the refuge.

Despite the reactions described, all three informants from animal-allowing refuges pointed out that they had very few or non-existent problems with the animals, and that it usually worked out well, if they were just treated well at the refuge. The strong bond that the animal had with their owners was perceived as part of this stability, despite the difficult circumstances.

“The animals coming here have been surprisingly calm [...] Somehow, they have been given some safe space and comfort, so that the dogs especially, they are not acting out as you would have expected.” [Informant A]

However, it became evident during the interviews that all refuges had at least someone among the employees who had extensive knowledge of animal behaviour and knew how to make the environment animal friendly. All informants of animal-allowing refuges pointed out that there was hard work involved in preventing problems, but that they had prepared

for bringing in animals in several ways. Examples of preparations was establishing a network of animal behaviourists and veterinarians, and providing the apartments with things that would be needed, such as litter boxes, food bowls, blankets and toys. The informants also described how they acted with animals to avoid problematic situations, such as always making sure that they called the doorbell and announced when they came inside, so the animal saw that they were invited inside by the owners. Putting great care in not making sudden movements was another example given on how to help the animals to gain some control over their new environment.

The informant from the refuge which did not allow animals pointed out that the main reason was that their housing was shared, and that they would need several separate apartments to start allowing animals (this was a goal for the refuge). The animal-allowing refuges all had separate rooms or apartments for people coming with animals.

The canine behaviourist had experience of two types of abuse, intentional (general violence toward a dog) and nonintentional (harsh training methods used by a dog owner, who had a good relationship with, and empathy for, the animal, but was desperate to correct problematic behaviours). Her interpretation was that the dogs themselves perceived this difference. "I think dogs seem to understand the difference, even when the violence is the same."



#### 4.5 Discussion of themes

Theme 1 'the strong bond between abused children and companion animals' demonstrated that the bond can be strong and experienced as meaningful and supportive by children, with the animal being the person who really sees them. This description of the bond is consistent with previous research on abused children's relationship with companion animals (Loar and Colman, 2004; Magid, 2008) as well as research on children and companion animals in general, showing how they are perceived as family members (Fawcett, 2002; Melson, 2001, Bryand, 2015, Pierce, 2016; Purewal et.al, 2017). The importance of an animal who listens, which was described during the interviews, is also in line with research showing how an animal can be the source of support, when parents are deficient in care-giving (Alper, 1994; Purewal et.al. 2017). Social support is about "being loved, cared for and belonging with" (Verheggen, Enders-Slegers, Eshuis, 2017:26) and this can happen with an animal, and not just humans.

It is particularly interesting that what was described was the importance of the relationship with a certain animal, which shows that bringing in animals in general, such as therapy animals to refuges, despite bringing positive effects for the children (Parish-Plass, 2008) might not heal the loss of a certain relationship. "Animals help to shape the identity of humans because they bring selves of their own to the interaction" (Irvine, 2004:78).

Melson (2001) argued that children are more intuitive about the fact that both humans and nonhumans are animals (see also Craig, 2014). At the same time, they are sensitive to and affected by the actions and opinions of surrounding adults. Children thus create their own culture, both drawing on and resisting the norms established by adults (Fawcett, 2014) and at my household, I've seen both sides. My sons started asking ethical questions in an early

age, knowing that we did not consume animals in our home, they pointed out to me that I do kill animals, such as head lice. When I said that I kill animals who otherwise can hurt us, they aptly pointed to the fact that I sometimes killed Spanish slugs, who did not hurt us, only our vegetables. I have stopped doing that after this discussion. I also see that in ways, sometimes hidden to me, they are affected by the norms that I show them. For a month, I wrote down every interaction that they had with our dog and our cat, and then searched for patterns in my notes. A certain pattern that emerged was that if they wanted to be close to our dog, they would ask me to move her to their side. They never did this with our cat because, as they said, “she comes and goes as she likes”. This made me slightly uncomfortable, since it was clearly an interpretation of the norm that I had established by the differing treatment of a dog and an outdoor cat, and by this, I had subconsciously taught them to interpret their need of autonomy differently.

The child-animal bond can also be considered an attachment relationship, especially since the animals’ roles as supportive and comforting was emphasized. “To feel attached is to feel connected, protected and safe” (Sable, 2012:98). One informant spoke about children being both the protected and the protector in the relationship, and I find this to be of particular importance to the question of attachment. When researching human-animal attachment, the question is often whether a relationship between a human and an animal can be considered an attachment at all, or whether it can be considered a secure attachment. The question is often whether animals see their owners as a secure base/safe haven. Acting as a secure base means giving the type of support that meets the other’s needs for exploration, autonomy and growth (Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, Shaver, 2012) and to act as a safe haven means someone you approach in the case of emotional stress (Ainsworth, 1991).

While most research focusses on whether the animal can see the human as the Secure base /Safe haven, some studies have focussed on the animal being the emotional support for the human instead. This has been researched on adult animal owners (Meehan, Massavelli, Pachana 2017; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, Shaver, 2012; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, Shaver, 2011,) as well as on children and dogs (Jalongo, 2015).

In studies on secure attachment between adults, both persons act as the safe haven and secure base for the other, which differs from children's secure attachment to adults, where the adult is the secure base and the safe haven for the child in a secure attachment relationship (Julius et.al., 2013). What about a child's attachment to a companion animal then? The description of children being "both protector and the protected" suggests that the roles of the person acting as a Secure base/Safe haven versus the one seeking comfort can be interchangeable in child-animal relationships. It could be that children who live with domestic violence or other factors creating vulnerability, more often have attachments relationships with companion animals where the roles of who is protecting whom interchange.

When I consider my own children's bond with companion animals, it is clear to me that the animals in their lives take very different roles. Their bond with our two companion cats constitutes what I consider a secure attachment, and it is evident that they seek their company for comfort and reassurance if they are distressed and experience them as protective. This was also the case with our dog Chia, who passed away recently. Chia was a caring, independent and self-secure dog, which is also the case with our cats, Panter and Pocahontas. My sons sometimes worry that the cats will be in a traffic accident, and they were very distressed when Chia was ill, but this is also the case with me, their mother; they

can worry about me being sick or an accident happening when we are not together.

However, our animals do not seek comfort or reassurance from them when they are stressed, but my sons can go to them if they are emotionally distressed.

Their father and I are separated and they also have a strong bond with their father's dog, Lily. Lily, however, is a very insecure dog who suffers from intense separation anxiety. When I dog-sit her, she is usually distressed and waits for her owners to come back. However, if I dog-sit her while my children are with me, she is much more relaxed, which I interpret as her having an attachment to my children. It is evident that she will look for reassurance from them and consider them to be a secure base, while my children would not go to her for reassurance, the way they do with my animals. This doesn't have so much to do with Lily's age, as with her personality.

When I was a child, my relationship with companion animals was of huge importance to me. For five years, when I was bullied in school, my animals at home were my only friends. It was very important to me to take the best care of them, protect and even save them (I took in animals who my neighbours could not keep) while at the same time, they were in many ways acting as my safe persons. My interpretation is that in an attachment relationship between a child and an animal, it is possible that sometimes the child is acting as the secure base, sometimes the animal is, and sometimes the roles interchange.

During the interviews, most descriptions of the attachment between companion animals and children were described as 'natural' and 'sound' by the informants. One reason for the development of secure attachments to animals, in families where attachment between humans might be insecure due to the trauma of violence, might be that the cycle of transmission of insecure attachment from human-human attachment relationships seems to

be either broken or not transmitted at all in human-animal attachment (Julius, Beetz, Niebergall, 2010; Kurdek, 2008). However, even if this is usually the case, the internal working model regarding attachment to humans might sometimes be transmitted to human-animal relationships (Julius et al, 2013) which can explain the kind of “hyper-attachment” between a girl and a dog, described by the canine behaviourist. An ambivalent attachment can result in the constant seeking of closeness and support from the animal (ibid) which the dog might respond to. Other possible factors affecting such a development can be that abuse has been shown to be a trigger for separation anxiety in dogs (Serpell, Jagoe, 1995) and that abused dogs have been shown to display more attention-seeking behaviour than control groups of non-abused dogs (McMillan, et al. 2015).

The informant’s description of the abuser’s lack of relationship with companion animals aligns with research on the subject, showing that abusers view pets as property or possessions (Eisikovits, Buchbinder, 2000). This was also the experience of several informants from animal-allowing refuges, that when people were not worried about their animal’s safety, it was because they had no relationship to the animal since the animal only belonged to the abuser. However, the experience of the informant from the refuge not allowing animals differed a bit, as she described her surprise over how some victims did not seem worried about their own animals. Her own interpretation was that people are in different stages of processing the extent of the violence, and that everyone doesn’t have strong bonds to their animals. Other possible explanations could be that there is a lot of shame in having to seek help and it might be too much of a social stigma to focus on animals in that situation (for a comparison, see Irvine, 2013, on the social stigma of being homeless). This might be one explanation for the differing experience of staff from animal-allowing refuges, since if you came there, you would not have to be ashamed about your relationship

with your animal or over having had to leave your animal behind. Research has shown that women who are abused can be forced to kill their animal to protect them from worse violence, and that they can sometimes take out their own anger on their animals (Walker, 1984). Such occurrences can be further reasons for guilt and difficulties in dealing with the situation. However, more extensive research with larger sample sizes from both animal-allowing and not animal-allowing refuges would be needed to find out whether this difference is significant.

The subtheme of theme 1 was the lack of systematic questioning of whether there had been animals in the family, in refuges that did not allow animals. This aligns with research by Ascione, Weber, and Wood (1997), showing that only 27.1% of interviewees, women staying at refuges for victims of domestic violence, reported that their refuges included questions about companion animals and their treatment in their intake interview protocols. This is connected to a general lack of systematic interview methods, of Swedish Social services and the Police. Humane education material and therapeutic materials aimed at children who have committed animal abuse successfully use animal-related stories and material to enhance empathic skills and help children to be able to talk about their experiences (Faver, 2010). It is often easier for a child to talk about him/herself via a story about an animal (Faver, Alanis, 2012). Considering this, it is surprising that there are no national guidelines for when Swedish Police and Social services interview children about domestic violence. It is common that children's ways of trying to talk about their animals, which could lead to them sharing more of their experiences, are ignored and that they are not asked about animals in the family (Diesen, Diesen, 2013).

Interviewer: “Rocko, what’s that?”

Child: “He is a dog”

[Excerpt from an interview with a child who had been abused at home, trying to talk about the importance of spending time with his dog. The interviewer did not ask more questions about the dog. (Diesen, 2018).]

Despite evidence of the importance of animals in the lives of children, the child-animal relationship is often not valued (Melson, 2011). Animals are often viewed as replaceable, sometimes due to their short lifespan (Townley, 2017) or because it is expected that animals have “flexible personhood” (Shir-Vertesh, 2012:428), that their importance should decrease when the life situation of their human owners demands it. However, my informant’s description of what they had seen of the bond between children and animals indicated that the animals were not replaceable at all.

The second theme ‘using the relationship with animals to control children living with abuse’ identified several key points; that the informants from animal-allowing refuges all saw clear evidence of the link and that the abuser often used threats against animals to control children’s behaviour. This is in line with previous research of the co-existence of animal abuse and child abuse (Arkow, 2013; Currie, 2006; Flynn 2010; Gupta, 2006; Randour, 2011; Saunders, 2003) and how abuse of animals can be part of coercive control (Arkow, 1996; Ascione, 1999; DeGue, DeLillo, 2009; Tiplady, Walsh, Baulch, 2013). Interviews with children affected by abuse (McDonald, Collins, Nicotera, Hageman, Ascione, Herbert Williams,

Graham-Bermann, 2015) showed that children identified threats against animals as being intended to influence the mother's actions, which is consistent with what my informants described. McDonald et al. (2015) also showed that abused children often communicated worry about their animals, which is in line with the data from my interviews.

The informants also mentioned the risk that the victims return to the relationship, due to worrying about their animals. This supports previous research; it has been shown that animal abuse can continue even after the relationship has ended (Roguski, 2012) and that it can be used as a punishment for leaving the relationship, especially aimed at the animal to whom both woman and children have the strongest attachment (Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015). It was emphasized by my informants that it was the emotional connection to the animal that made it into such an effective tool for control. This was in line with research showing that companion animals owners who had been abused reported their animal as more emotionally important; the abuser uses the animals that the victims have a strong emotional bond with (Flynn, 2000). It also aligns with research on how the emotional significance of an animal to a child can be exploited by an abuser as a way of controlling the child's behaviour (Boat, 1999; Coorey, Coorey-Evings, 2018).

The risk of staying in a violent relationship when unable to bring companion animals was also emphasized by my informants. This experience is in line with previous research on how women often hesitate to leave due to this (Ascione, 1998; Fawcett, Gullone, Johnson, 2002; Holmberg, 2004; Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015).

“You might leave for a short moment but no longer since you know the animal will be hurt, since they are used as a method of control and



punishment, and they know that, somehow people just know that.”

[Informant C]

The subcategory of the second theme was children who start abusing companion animals as a reaction to domestic violence. Research by DeGue and DeLillo (2009) showed a strong link between domestic violence in childhood and committing animal cruelty later in life.

Childhood cruelty to animals has been showed as more common among children who had been physically maltreated compared to those who had not, however, still only a minority of maltreated children were cruel to animals (McEwen, Moffitt, Arseneault 2014). However, research from refuges shows quite high numbers of children who had abused companion animals at some time, 37% according to research by Ascione et al (2007) and 32% in a study by Currie (2006). Both sample groups were children staying at refuges, who had had animals at home. This should be compared to research where care givers in normative samples of children were asked about prevalence of animal cruelty committed by their children, ranging from 5% (Ascione, 2005) to 11% (Ascione, 2007). However, it should also be compared to the prevalence of self-reported childhood animal abuse during interviews at school and university populations, which varied between 8.8% and 30% (Sanders and Henry, 2015).

My informants were all aware of the risk of children developing abusive behaviours after experiencing domestic violence, but they did not experience it as common. Their experiences indicated that it is less common compared to the relatively high numbers shown at American refuges (Ascione, 2007; Currie 2006). Larger sample groups and an extensive study of the prevalence of children in Swedish refuges who have abused animals would be needed in order to know if it is less common here. There are some important differences to

note as well, as the figures from American refuges are based on interviews with children and mothers who related to previous experiences, while my informants mainly spoke about what they saw signs of at their refuge.

My informant's view on the reasons for children committing animal abuse, a way of mirroring the abuser's behaviour or dealing with difficult emotions, is in line with research showing that domestic violence is detrimental to a child's ability to regulate emotions (Hounslow, Johnson, Kathan, Pound, 2010) and that role modelling (the child imitating violent behaviour) and "desensitization to violence" are factors influencing children to abuse animals (Faver, 2010:366; Hounslow et al., 2010:13).

The third theme 'the trauma of separation' demonstrated that my informants from animal-allowing refuges experienced the forceful separation of children and animals, when unable to bring animals to refuges, as very traumatic and painful. They related to previous experience of working in refuges that did not allow animals, as well as to the healing effects of being able to bring companion animals, which they experienced as occurring at their current work places. This supports research on the effect of forceful separations in other life events (Labreque, Walsh, 2011; Russell, 2016; Walsh, 2009) even though the specific effect on separation between abused children and their companion animals is understudied.

Research by McDonald et al. (2016) showing that children in refuges, who had experienced animal abuse at home, had a higher likelihood of developing emotional problems. One factor in this could be the effect of the separation the children had gone through, and the anxiety that this gave rise too. My informants described the on-following anxiety as severe. In a previous study (McDonald et al, 2015) nearly 78% of children, who stayed at refuges and had had companion animals at home where the animals had also been abused, reported they

had tried to protect their animals from abuse, sometimes leading to the violence being redirected towards them instead. The authors (ibid) suggested that the effect on children in refuges when having had to be separated from animals needs to be researched further. In a study by Ascione et al. (2007) 51% of interviewed children at refuges, who had had companion animals at home, also reported that they have tried to protect their companion animal from abuse.

Losing a companion animal is something that most children living with animals will experience at some point, and it will lead to mourning, if it was an animal one had a bond to. However, there is a difference between bereavement and grief, which is part of life, and traumatic loss, which can lead to the development of childhood traumatic grief (Mannarino, Cohen, 2011). Childhood traumatic grief is a condition that involves trauma symptoms which hinders the child's ability to go through normal grief processes (ibid:24). It can follow from experiencing a violent or very sudden death, or a situation where the child has not comprehended that a person was about to die. Losing a companion animal after having to leave them with an abuser does not necessarily mean the animal is going to die, but it has several components which adds to making it a possible cause for trauma, and I argue that the loss of a significant relationship can be just as painful as if the animal dies. Since the bond can be especially strong when the child has experienced trauma, the grief that stems from separation is very painful (see Russell's (2017) research on how dealing with an animal's death is more difficult, the stronger the attachment was). As such, Russell's words (2017:88) are just as applicable here "A companion animal's death is significant for their [children's] present and future relationships with human and nonhuman animal others, and as such, becomes an experience of great pedagogical importance in our interspecies world".

However, an abused child coming to a refuge after having left an animal behind might be aware that the animal is in danger, yet not get any information on what has happened to the animal, and might be plagued by worry and anxiety. My informants pointed out that the children are aware of the risk of the abuser hurting the animal, which can further add to it being highly traumatic. That many children confide in their companion animals (Purewal et.al., 2017; Russell, 2017) means that they lose a very significant person. This is not always understood by those meeting the child, since the child-animal bond is not often prioritized.

One informant pointed out that she experienced many children focused on having been unable to protect their animals. This is in line with research on childhood traumatic grief, showing that many children with this condition will blame themselves for the death of a loved one (Mannarino, Cohen, 2011). Research by Thompson, Every, Rainbird, Cornell, Smith and Trigg (2014) showed that many survivors of natural disasters experienced survivor guilt, when having had to abandon their animals.

Further complicating issues are that this loss of an animal happens at the same time as other major life changes of moving to a refuge. Multiple traumas might lead to complex grief (Thompson et al. 2014). The grief can also be 'disenfranchised', in that the loss of an animal is not always accepted as a cause for grief by society (Cordaro, 2012). As informant B put it; "Why don't you just buy a new rabbit? It is not the end of the world".

If I reflect on my own children's experiences of loss, it seems clear to me that children need to get answers and explanations that they can deal with, to be able to process what has happened. I have seen them experience both expected and unexpected loss and reflected on the on-following reactions. When my sons were nine and seven years old, my dad's dog, Elsa, turned ill very suddenly. The last time my children saw her she was healthy and

energetic as always but when she got ill it had a very rapid progress and she died the next day, at the animal hospital. Despite my explanations on how old dogs of large breeds (she was a boxer) can get ill very fast, they were shocked and confused over what had happened. A few weeks after her death, my mother, who was suffering from terminal cancer, had to go into hospice. During the months she spent there, I could visit her many times with my sons, and they saw her gradually getting worse. When she was dying, they had been prepared for a long time, and even though they grieved hard for her, it was clear to me that they fully understood what had happened and they had very few questions.

A month after her death, my sons started writing a book together. The story line was that all the humans of our family were kidnapped, and the dogs (this included their cousin's dog as well) were left alone, and had to go through an adventure to save their humans. What I found interesting was that their grandmother was, without any discussion, already deceased when the story started, while the question of Elsa gave rise to a long discussion on whether she was alive or not. They decided on her being alive but losing her life during the story, in a heroic effort to save the other dogs. During the writing process of the chapter when she died, my sons talked about her death and they both cried. However, after writing that, they seemed relieved. After this, the death of Elsa was by them referred to as the death of a hero dog.

When I reread the whole book that they had written, some themes stood out to me. Writing about a process of kidnap seemed to me to be a way of dealing with what they had learned that year, by the two losses in our family; that family members can disappear. By constructing a narrative for Elsa's death, it seemed as if they had given themselves an explanation for her death that they could relate to, and a context it fit into. Writing the book

had a healing effect on their process of mourning. Later on, when we lost our own beloved dog Chia, it was very important for my sons to be there with her when she died and that I explained in detail why we had to euthanize her. I experience their mourning for her as strong but uncomplicated. This has made me remember my own first contact with death, as a four-year old when my dad came home from having to euthanize our dog. He was extremely distraught and we did not talk about what happened or mention her again. Death became a terrifying thing that I could not comprehend. To me, these experiences taken together, shows that death and loss is not necessarily traumatic for a child, even though it is very painful, but that it is very complicated to process when they don't understand it fully.

However, a child who has lived with domestic violence and has had to leave a beloved animal with the abuser, often won't get the answers and explanations needed to process what's happened. As the situation is in Sweden today, it is very arbitrary whether the child will meet someone who knows about the strength of the child-animal bond and the trauma it can be to have left an animal, without knowing if the animal will be safe. The other parent might be plagued with guilt or be caught up in the emotions evoked by the difficult situation, and too be unable to relate to the child's grief and anxiety.

The fourth theme 'the animal perspective' demonstrated that the informants had prepared in several ways for allowing animals, to avoid problematic behaviours from arising. The behavioural reactions that they saw, such as fear and stress-related problems, are in line with previous research on animal's reactions (Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2017; Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015; Day, Day, 2013). Witnessing abuse of humans can affect animals (Flynn, 2000) and the way my informants described animals as being sensitive to affects and emotions in the home aligns with research by Walsh (2009) on animal's sensitivity to the affective states

of family members, as well as research on responses to distressed humans by cats (Rieger, Turner, 1999) and dogs (Yong, Ruffman, 2014). This is something that I have experienced many times. The most recent example is with a friend of my son, our neighbour, whose parents are getting a divorce. The day after they told her, we walked together to the children's school. She was notably sad but did not want to talk about it. However, her cat, decided to join us all the way to school, trying to play with her every now and then. This is something her cat has never attempted before, she usually stays in the garden when we leave. It was clear to me that it was a reaction to the affective state of the girl.

The defensive behaviours that my informants noted some dogs displayed is consistent with research showing that companion animals in violent homes often protects the abused human from the abuser (Fitzgerald, 2007). However, what differs between my data and previous research, showing significant behavioural problems in previously abused animals (Day, Day, 2013; McMillan, et al. 2015; Tiplady, Walsh, Phillips, 2015), was that all informants from animal-allowing refuges described how surprised they were at how few behavioural problems they experienced with the animals, and how quickly they settled. The research on effects of abuse on dogs has been done on dogs who have moved from the household where they were abused, where there could be owners that they were attached too living as well. Given that research has shown that abused companion animals suffer from the separation from the owners they are attached to (Flynn, 2010; McMillan et al. 2015), an interesting difference to note here is that the animals at the refuges did not need to go through such a separation process. This was also the experience of one of my informants "The more separations, the more grief you carry, for humans. And with animals it is the same, I think." Another key point is the thorough preparations that all the refuges had done to prepare for accompanying animals, raising questions on how much these preparations,

and the availability of staff with knowledge of animal behaviour at the refuges, affected the outcome of what they saw.

The canine behaviourist spoke about her impression that dogs can perceive the differing motives behind any violence toward them, and the emotional states behind it. Thus, they perceive whether an owner has empathy for them, yet feels pressured to use physical correction, or use violence for other reasons, without emotions for the animal. While there is no research on dogs to compare this with, there is research showing that children do distinguish motives behind a perpetrator's behaviour when abusing animals, and that they prioritize motive over injury (McDonald et al. 2015). This calls for research on the reactions to violence on both children and animals needing to consider the motives behind the behaviour.

Finally, the topic of animal welfare in the refuges raises some complicated ethical questions. Drawing on Coulter's (2016:83) theory, originally made for working animals, on the poles of suffering and enjoyment and the continuum in between, shows the complexity of creating a good life for companion animals in this situation. Their welfare will be affected by widely different factors such as their personality and species, the amount of control and autonomy they have in their life and their previous life histories. Ethically, there should be a focus on more than avoiding suffering for the animal involved, yet, how much effort can we put into that, in a situation where it is literally a matter of life or death for the humans involved?

If you must go to a refuge you have a serious threat against you, often a threat against your life. You don't come here if there are smaller degrees of violence, in that case you can go to your mother or a cousin or something,



you come here to go under the radar, it's serious enough that you might be killed otherwise. [Informant A]

There are also some important issues that affect the animal's possibility of a good life after staying at the refuge. This was a subject that I just briefly touched on during the interviews, but I want to highlight some specifically troublesome areas that were mentioned here. To provide a companion animal with a good life, you need money to cover the cost and a safe place to live. Many previous victims of abuse need financial aid from Social Services, and these normally do not cover the cost of animals. It is difficult to find a place to rent after staying at the refuge, where you can bring animals, and if the animal has health issues stemming from previous abuse by somebody in the household, no insurance company will cover the cost of treatment.

## **Chapter 5 - Conclusion and implications**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of children and companion animals who have experienced domestic violence, by interviewing staff of refuges about their experiences, and comparing it with relevant literature. Autoethnographical research was also employed, to further explore the bond between children and animals.

Four main themes were raised from the findings of my data. The first theme 'the strong bond between abused children and companion animals' demonstrated that my informants' experience was that the child-animal relationship was very strong and mattered to children and that the animals were often acting as support, being the person that the children could honestly show everything to. This was in line with previous research. I have argued that the portrayal of children as being both protector and protected, along with my autoethnographical accounts, suggest that in a child-animal attachment relationship, the roles of who is acting as the secure base and the safe haven can be interchangeable, which makes it different from children's attachment to human adults.

All informants from animal-allowing refuges experienced that victims of abuse are severely affected by worry about their animal's safety, which is consistent with research showing that many victims hesitate to leave an abusive relationship if they can't bring the animals who they have a bond to. However, the informant from a non-animal-allowing refuge had mixed experience of this situation. Possible reasons can be due to the stage the victims are at processing the full extent of the violence, as well as guilt and shame surrounding the social stigma of caring about animals when humans are in danger. A subtheme was raised showing

that refuges which don't allow accompanying animals might lack routines on how to systematically ask about companion animals, which might affect victim's actions.

The second theme was 'using the relationship with animals to control children living with abuse' and it demonstrated that the informants had large experience on how an abuser uses the emotional bond between children and animals to control the behaviour of children, to hide the violence, wanting to stay with the abuser or to influence the mother to return. This is in line with previous research showing how the harm of companion animals is often part of coercive control of both adults and children, and that it is the strength of the attachment that makes this so effective. A subtheme raised was that some children start abusing animals as a reaction to violence, however, while the perceived reasons behind this behaviour was in line with previous research, the informants' experience was that this was uncommon, which is not consistent with previous research from the United States. A larger sample size would be needed to assess whether it is less common in Sweden compared to other countries.

The third theme 'the trauma of separation' demonstrated that my informants viewed children's forceful separations from companion animals as very traumatic and giving rise to severe anxiety and often guilt. It also demonstrated the healing effects of being able to bring animals to a refuge. The severe effects of separation indicate that this situation could be a factor in the development of 'childhood traumatic grief', hindering the child's ability to go through normal grief processes. I have argued that the loss of a relationship from a significant other may not be less painful than if the other one dies. My autoethnographic experience of my own children's reactions to loss has demonstrated that it could be of great importance to children to comprehend what happens when a person dies, something many children who have had to leave their animal with an abuser are not able to do. Their grief

can also be 'disenfranchised', in that the loss of a relationship with an animal is not acknowledged as a cause for grief by society.

The fourth theme 'the animal perspective' demonstrated that the animal-allowing refuges saw very few problematic behaviours in the animals staying at the refuges, which is not in line with research, especially on dogs, showing that they display significant behaviour problems as a reaction to abuse and/or domestic violence. However, the animals previously researched on reactions to abuse have usually been separated from their owners, which the animals in my study have not had to go through. I have argued that this could affect the animals, and that the animals' reaction to separation should be explored further. The refuges had all made extensive preparations for bringing in animals and admitted that it involved hard work, which might also affect the outcome.

## **5.2 Limitations**

The results of this study should be interpreted in the light of several limitations. The sample size is small, and the responses are not necessarily representative on a larger scale. Further studies with larger sample sizes would be needed to assess that information.

Also, the informants are those who voluntarily expressed their interest in taking part in this research, and they might be more interested in the child-animal bond than the general employee of a refuge. The data on animal's reactions was based on the informants' impressions, which might be affected by their own knowledge in, and experience of, animal behaviour. The data on children also comes from the informants and a more child-centered approach to a study, which directly interviews children and parents subject to violence, and/or adults who had these experiences as young, would provide more information on their own view of the situation.

Finally, my informants meet people and animals who have suffered from severe degrees of abuse and violence, since only those who need to, go into a refuge. Even if victims where the violence is less severe can call for advice and/or come to counselling there, the experiences they related to here was mainly from those who came to stay at the refuge and the findings might not be applicable to families affected by less severe degrees of violence.

### **5.3 Practice implications**

There is a growing interest in Sweden today for refuges to allow companion animals. Several of my informants described in detail how much preparation they had done, and how important it is, to have enough knowledge in animal behaviour. It is important to consider this, as well as research showing that companion animals can be severely affected by violence, and develop aggressive behaviours as well as serious emotional problems. An implication I would suggest is that an education in animal behaviour and the needs of common companion animals would be provided for all refuges who want to start allowing accompanying animals.

There is also a need for more education of those who meet victims of abuse, today it is arbitrary if a child who has or has had an animal will meet someone who is able to understand the bond between children and animals. This is applicable to the Social Services, The Police, animal inspectors and the County Administrative Boards, as well as employees and volunteers of refuges.

Acknowledging how important an animal can be for a child implies a need to expand the possibilities of animal owners who have suffered abuse, to be able to bring their animals with them when they leave a violent relationship. Knowledge concerning the risk that the

abuser will hurt or kill the animal as a punishment for leaving sheds light on what an important animal welfare question this is.

Knowledge concerning the trauma of separation implies a need for professional help for the children who suffer from the emotional trauma that can occur following separation from an animal. There are also important implications for what happens after animal owners, who are able to bring their animals, have left the refuge and how to help people become able to keep their companion animals and provide them with a good life.

#### **5.4 Future directions for research**

From my literature review, I detected several areas where more research is needed, assessing both the long-term and short-term effects on having a bond with an animal in a childhood involving abuse, and researching the effect of abuse on more animal species than dogs. Most of the research which has been done in this area has been on dogs and exploring the effect on other companion animals, such as cats, horses and rodents, is well needed.

From my own data, I also identified several areas of interest for further research. First, replicating the study with a larger sample size, as well as with humans and animals subjected to less severe forms of violence, would provide important knowledge. Future research should also involve interviews with people about their own experiences of this subject, if possible with children and/or mothers living at refuges, particularly to further explore the effect of separation from companion animals. Interviews with adults, who relates to their own childhood experiences, could also be used to provide further knowledge about experiences of the child-animal bond, and could be compared to previous research from other countries, such as the study done by Nebbe (1997).

Finally, some of the areas where my data differed from previous research would benefit from further research. There was a difference in how the respondent from the non-animal-allowing refuge perceived people's worry about their animals, compared to the informants from animal-allowing refuges. To investigate this further, a larger sample size would be needed on both sides. The animal-allowing refuges saw very few problem behaviours in the accompanying animals. This should be explored further, preferably involving participant observations in refuges. One specific key point of interest would be to compare these animals' reactions to animals placed in temporary emergency homes, to find out more about what impact separation from the owners can have.

## Appendix A

### INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Investigating the bond between abused children and their companion animals, with a special focus on the impact of separation.

#### 1. What is this project?

This project aims to research the bond between and the impact of separation of children and companion animals who have lived together in the context of domestic violence.

#### 2. Who is conducting this research?

I am a Masters student at the University of Exeter and this research forms part of my MA in Anthrozoology. My dissertation supervisors are Professor Samantha Hurn and Dr Fenella Eason. It is self-funded.

#### 3. What does being part of this study mean for me?

It will involve one interview, either face to face or by telephone. I would like to record this interview with your permission.



You can stop the interview at any time and you do not need to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Sections of the transcript of your interview may be published, either in journal articles or elsewhere, following this research. Your real name will not be used.

#### 4. Who can I contact for further information?

For further information about the research or your interview data, please contact:

Therese Lilliesköld, [tel204@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:tel204@exeter.ac.uk) or 0737-086662

If you have concerns/questions about the research you would like to discuss with someone else at the University, please contact:

Fenella Eason: [f.eason2@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:f.eason2@exeter.ac.uk)

#### 5. What will happen to my interview data?

Your interview data will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

The information you provide will be used for research purposes and your personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation. Your personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

a. Interview recordings

The digital recording of your interview will be deleted as soon as I am awarded my MA.

b. Interview transcripts and contact details

Interview data will be held and used on an anonymous basis, with no mention of your name.

Your personal and contact details will be stored separately from your interview transcript and may be retained for up to 6 months.

If you request it, you will be supplied with a copy of your interview transcript.

Third parties will not be allowed access to interview tapes and transcripts except as required by law or in the event that something disclosed during the interview causes concerns about possible harm to you or to someone else.

## CONSENT

I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the project.

I understand that:

- there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may withdraw at any stage;
- I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me;
- any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications or academic conference or seminar presentations;
- all information I give will be treated as confidential;
- the researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity.

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

.....

Email address of participant

.....

(Signature of researcher)

.....

(Printed name of researcher)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher. Your contact details are kept separately from your interview data.

## Appendix B

### Interview - Refuge

Date:

What is your role at your current place of work?

For how long have you been working within this field?

Does your shelter allow companion animals?

Why/Why not?

If not; do you give any suggestions on where companion animals can be placed temporarily, or other advice?

Have you had children staying here together with their companion animals? What are your thoughts on that experience?

Have you had any children staying here who have been separated from their animals?

If so, in what way?

Did you notice any reactions that you think comes from the separation?

What are your general thoughts, drawing on your experience, about what the relationship can look like between children and companion animals who have lived together in the context of domestic violence?

In what ways do you think, drawing from your experience, that companion animals can be affected by experiencing domestic violence?

In what ways do you think, drawing from your experience, that companion animals experience accompanying their owner into transitional housing?

Is there anything you would like to add?

## Appendix C

### Interview – Canine Behaviourist

Date:

What do you work with and what is your area of expertise?

How do you define PTSD in dogs?

What is your experience with dogs who have been abused by family members?

Can you draw conclusions on this area from other case studies of dogs, who have been abused by, for example dog trainers or other professionals?

Have you treated any dog with a history of abuse, for PTSD?

What are your thoughts on a dog's ability to cope with a history of abuse?

Do you think it's different for a dog if the abuser is a family member?



What is your experience when it comes to attachment to other family members than the abuser?

What is your experience, or your thoughts, on the dog's attachment to children in the family?

Have you had any cases of dogs who need treatment due to having been separated from their owners?

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