



Big Data: Real Voices, Shared Insights

Report 1: Family Pets and Domestic Abuse

We analysed over 64,000 civil protection witness statements to share evidence-based insights into domestic abuse and risk/harm to family pets



National Centre for Domestic Violence

Making Domestic Abuse Socially Unacceptable

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(Anonymised quotes used with permission)

1. Foreword

Every day at the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV) we speak to those who are living with coercion, control, and violence. Their words, often raw, always brave, remind us that domestic abuse is rarely confined to one person. It ripples out, touching children, families, and often the animals who are part of their lives.

For many victim-survivors, pets are a source of comfort, loyalty, and unconditional love. Perpetrators know this, and too often they exploit that bond. Threats or harm to animals become another weapon of coercion and a way to trap survivors in dangerous situations or to punish them for seeking freedom. Survivors should never have to choose between their safety and the safety of the animals they love. We should also recognise how vital family pets are for the wellbeing of children, especially when home feels unsafe. I cherish the memories of my own childhood pets, Bob the dog and Suki the ginger cat, who emotionally sustained me through a challenging early environment and were often my only source of solace.

This report shines a light on those experiences, drawing on one of the largest collections of survivor voices ever analysed in the UK. It is not just data; it is testimony, it is evidence, and it is a call for change. We cannot respond to this alone. Real progress depends on collaboration across the domestic abuse, housing, veterinary, and animal welfare sectors; partnerships with organisations already at the forefront of this work, as well as the courage of policymakers to close the gaps in law and practice. By working together, we can dismantle this cruel barrier to safety and create a future where survivors and their pets can escape abuse, together.

— Charlotte Woodward, Head of Training & Development (NCDV)



2. About NCDV

NCDV is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company with over 20 years' experience helping victim-survivors obtain civil protection orders through the courts. We have helped secure around 30% of all Non-Molestation and Occupation Orders in England and Wales in recent years. We provide one of the biggest pro bono teams in the country, helping those who cannot access a solicitor. Our service is free, fast, efficient, and designed to work alongside safeguarding efforts, and we offer a signposting service to those who engage with us. We also deliver training on civil orders and domestic-abuse programmes. Last year, we trained almost 15,000 police, professionals, and employers.

3. Context & background

NCDV is launching a series of **Big Data Reports** to share findings from one of the largest collections of witness statements ever analysed in the domestic abuse sector. This dataset provides an unprecedented view of the risks, patterns, and lived realities disclosed by victim-survivors. By examining themes such as use of drugs and alcohol, threats to kill, non-fatal strangulation, risks and threats to children, child contact disputes, use of weapons, and cruelty to family pets, we aim to provide evidence that informs policy, professional practice, and frontline response. We want to turn victim-survivors' words into evidence and evidence into action. **Big Data: Real Voices. Shared Insights.**

In the UK, domestic abuse is defined as a pattern of harmful behaviour between people aged 16 or over who are, or have been, partners or family members. It can take many forms – physical violence, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological harm, controlling or coercive behaviour, and economic abuse. Domestic abuse is not limited to intimate partners; it can also involve parents, children, siblings, or other relatives.¹

Domestic abuse does not only affect people. Threats or harm directed towards family pets can be used as another weapon of control, intimidation, and fear. Pets are often deeply loved members of the household, and perpetrators exploit this bond, knowing that causing distress to an animal causes equal or greater distress to the victim-survivor. For many, concerns about their pet's safety can prevent them from leaving an abusive relationship or forcing them to return.²

This report explores what the current literature says on this topic; the methods used to interrogate the data; how our findings compare with other studies; our assessment of the implications for policy and practice, and how NCDV intends to turn our evidence into action with a programme of work.

4. Executive summary and at-a-glance highlights

NCDV's analysis shows that cruelty, threats, or risk to pets is a recurring feature of domestic abuse, with serious implications for both survivor safety and animal welfare. Protecting people cannot be separated from protecting the animals they love. Tackling this issue calls for collaboration across services, housing providers, veterinary practices, animal welfare charities, policymakers, and safeguarding forums, each bringing unique expertise and opportunities to reduce barriers to safety.

NCDV will play its part through a phased roadmap that includes raising awareness, developing training for veterinary teams, creating professional toolkits and campaigns, and promoting pet-friendly refuge and fostering options for survivors. The wider sector can play an equally vital role by weaving pet considerations into practice, policy, and safeguarding responses. By uniting our efforts, we can ensure that pets are no longer exploited as tools of coercion and that survivors are free to build safer futures without leaving loved animals behind.

What we analysed: 64,046 witness statements.

Headline finding: 6.51% explicitly mention threats, harm, or risk to pets – this is a conservative minimum estimate given the legal-document context.

Why it matters: Pet-related abuse is a tactic of coercive control, a barrier to leaving, and a marker of heightened risk to adults and children.

How this compares: Survivor-facing surveys show much higher rates; differences are explained by sampling, what gets recorded in legal statements, and definitions used.

Practice implications:

- Safe signposting to organisations that offer assistance.
- Add pet questions to risk assessments, safety plans, and staff training.
- Consider pet risk in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) / child protection processes.
- Housing: proactively offer pet-inclusive options (refuge, fostering).
- Veterinary settings: key frontline for spotting indicators and safe signposting.

Policy & law:

- Support Ruby's Law (campaign for explicit protection for pets in civil protection orders).
- Ensure pets (along with children) are included in Domestic Abuse Protection Order (DAPO) evaluation/design.

NCDV's roadmap (A-B-C): Awareness and training; Broadcasting the message; Communicating with survivors.

Call to collaborate: Cross-sector action (support services, housing, vets, animal welfare, policy, safeguarding forums) so no one has to choose between personal safety and their pets.

“When Housing said no pets, I went back home. I chose my dog because she'd always chosen me.” — (62F)

Aggression and emotional abuse towards animals disclosed in witness statements

Content note: distressing content involving a family pet

- Dog collapsed from distress in response to the Respondent's aggression.
- Shouted at and intimidated dogs until they urinated.
- Threw the Applicant's dog from a vehicle and drove away.
- Released donkeys and pigs onto a public road, creating risk of injury.
- Disturbed a deceased cat's resting place.
- Subjected a puppy to prolonged shouting; the puppy experienced a seizure.

Anonymised, non-exhaustive examples drawn from Applicant witness statements; wording minimised to avoid graphic detail.

5. What the literature shows

- 5.1 The relationship between domestic abuse and risk of harm to family pets is well established and known as “The Link.”
- 5.2 **Evidence of “The Link”.** Systematic reviews and empirical studies across multiple countries have shown a strong link between all forms of domestic abuse and coercive control and the mistreatment of animals, where threats or harm to pets are frequently used to coerce or frighten victim-survivors.^{3,4,5}
- 5.3 **High prevalence in survey samples.** Sector surveys report high rates of animal harm or threats in domestic abuse contexts. Many frontline professionals report encountering these issues frequently, and a large share of victim-survivors report threats or harm to pets.^{6,7} These surveys show figures higher than seen in court witness statements, which is addressed in section 8.
- 5.4 **A coercive tactic and barrier to safety.** Studies document how perpetrators use pets to coerce victim-survivors; to instil fear and compliance; and to punish victim-survivors by harming an animal they care about. This theme is particularly relevant, with further research currently being undertaken.⁸ A lack of pet-friendly accommodation options creates a practical barrier to seeking safety. There is also growing recognition of the need for a cross-sector response from agencies such as police, refuge/safe accommodation services, veterinary services, and animal welfare charities.⁹

UK study currently underway

University of Bristol are currently working on pioneering research that explores the use and abuse of animals by perpetrators in domestic abuse-related deaths. This includes homicide, suicide and unexplained deaths. The overall aim of this research is to reduce harm to people and animals, and domestic abuse-related deaths where there are animals involved.

This study has been funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) as part of the UK Government's commitment to reducing violence against women and children.

This research focuses on developing a more detailed understanding of:

- How perpetrators of domestic abuse use and abuse animals as part of the dynamics of the abuse.
- The impact that this behaviour has.
- How animals can be effectively integrated into evidence-based safety and response plans across human and animal health and welfare sectors (for example, domestic abuse services, police, veterinary teams, animal welfare agencies and social care services).

The study will make legislative, policy, and practice recommendations which inform the implementation of an effective integrated approach to safeguarding people and animals victimised by domestic abuse.

Contacts: Dr. Mary Wakeham and Dr. Natasha Mulvilhill (University of Bristol)

6. Big Data: interrogation and findings

6.1 Our analysis was based on a large-scale review of witness statements submitted in applications for civil protection orders.

Key features of the dataset and approach:

Sample size: 64,046 witness statements analysed.

Timeframe: cases randomly selected from NCDV case records spanning the last seven years.

Eligibility: all statements were from victim-survivors aged 18 and over.

Demographics: the average age of victim-survivors in the sample was 32–35.

Method: a structured keyword search was applied to identify statements containing references to pets.

Keywords: included terms linked to *risk, threats, or harm* to animals or pets.

Output: 4,167 statements (6.51%) contained explicit mentions of cruelty, threats, or risks to family pets.

6.2 **Data protection and ethics:** This analysis used de-identified witness statements drawn from NCDV's case management system. Direct identifiers (for example names, addresses, contact details, case numbers) were removed and indirect identifiers minimised. Processing took place in a secure, role-based environment, limited to trained staff, and findings are reported only in aggregate. All processing complied with the UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. The lawful bases were legitimate interests (Article 6(1)(f)) for service improvement and sector learning. An appropriate policy document and retention schedule are in place. A Data Protection Impact Assessment was completed prior to analysis.

Threats to kill pets disclosed in witness statements

Content note: *distressing content involving threats to pets.*

- Ran a bath and threatened to drown the family cats.
- Sent a photo of themselves pointing a shotgun at a horse.
- Threatened to slash a dog's throat.
- Threatened to place the Applicant's dog on railway tracks.
- Threatened to "drop-kick" a cat and to strangle it using wire.
- Threatened to break the dog's neck.
- Threatened to kill kittens with a hammer, put them in a sack, and throw them into a lake.
- Threatened to set fire to the house with cats inside.
- Threatened to hang the Applicant's dog.
- Brandished knives at cats' necks and tails.
- Threatened to throw a puppy from a third-floor window.
- Threatened to shoot horses and to slit a horse's throat.
- Placed dog in a tumble dryer while threatening to switch it on.
- Threatened to torture and snap the dog's neck.

Anonymised, non-exhaustive examples drawn from Applicant witness statements; wording minimised to avoid graphic detail.

7. How our findings compare with other studies

- 7.1 **Our figure:** 4,167 mentions out of 64,046 statements = **6.51%**. This reflects explicit mention *within witness statements submitted for civil protection orders*, i.e., a legal document context.
- 7.2 **Our analysis:** In 64,046 witness statements from domestic abuse victim-survivors, 4,167 statements (approximately 6.5%) mentioned threats, harm, or risk to family pets.¹⁰
- 7.3 By comparison, surveys conducted by Dogs Trust report that 60–70% of victim-survivors have experienced threats or harm to pets, while a Cats Protection survey of 409 professionals found that 78% identified pets as a barrier for victim-survivors seeking to leave abusive situations.^{6, 7} These figures highlight the different ways in which pet-related abuse is recorded and reported across datasets and perspectives.
- 7.4 **Why our percentage is lower than existing survey figures:**
- **Sampling differences.** Survey studies often sample victim-survivors who are already engaged with domestic abuse services or animal welfare projects (for example, foster projects or domestic abuse support services). Those samples are enriched for cases where pets were a known issue and therefore report higher prevalence. Our sample is judicial/written witness statements, which will undercount because victim-survivors may focus their statement on certain legal facts, abuse towards themselves or children only, or simply not mention pets even if they were threatened.¹¹ Also, those taking witness statements may not specifically ask questions about pets which are not generally considered within civil protection orders.
 - **Reporting and documentation bias.** Witness statements are legal documents drafted under stress and in many cases with legal support; victim-survivors may avoid mentioning additional trauma, or practitioners may not prompt for pet-related information once eligibility is already met by other abuse themes. This differs from ongoing emotional-support contexts, where the survivor’s fuller story informs support planning.
 - **Differences in definitions.** Some research measures “threats to pets”, “incidents of harm”, or “pet-related barriers to leaving”, while our coding looked for explicit mentions of cruelty, threats, or risk. Broader definitions yield higher prevalence estimates.⁹
- 7.5 **Takeaway:** the **6.51%** figure is a conservative, evidence-based minimum estimate for pet-related risk recorded in formal legal statements. It complements, rather than contradicts, higher rates reported by survivor-focused surveys and sector professionals.

Although we think of family pets in terms of dogs, cats, birds and small caged animals, there are families with other types of animals, such as horses, chickens, and goats. Moving to a new property or making arrangements for their safety and care can be complex and challenging.



8. Implications for policy and practice

8.1 **Abuse of pets is a safety issue and an indicator of broader coercive control.** Where pets are threatened or harmed, this is frequently a marker of escalated risk to adults and children. Recognising and acting on pet-related abuse can therefore be a critical part of safeguarding.¹² This is well recognised within specialist services but may not be widely known among the wider range of organisations and professionals that encounter victim-survivors as part of their work.

8.2 **Practical considerations:**

- Include questions about threats and harm to pets within the range of **risk assessments** used by organisations, if not already present.
- Expand the information already available about domestic abuse on **organisational websites and printed materials** to include risk and threats to pets.
- Include the link between domestic abuse and harm to pets in **domestic abuse training programmes**.
- Routinely consider risk and harm to pets in **safeguarding partnership meetings** such as Child Protection and MARAC (Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences).

8.3 **Accommodation needs:**

Housing and homelessness services play a critical role in safeguarding victim-survivors. In line with Chapter 17.66 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities it is essential that housing authorities continue to be sensitive to the importance of family pets. The Secretary of State recommends that housing authorities “give careful consideration to this aspect when making provision for applicants who wish to retain their pet”.¹³ The fear of leaving pets behind is a valid safeguarding concern and should not be treated as a reason to limit or discharge statutory duties. Pet-inclusive refuge or fostering options should be proactively explored to remove this barrier to safety.

Accommodation policies and practices should proactively consider pets, including the availability of pet-friendly refuges and other accommodation, or animal fostering options, to ensure victim-survivors can access safe housing without having to compromise the welfare of their animals. By integrating pet considerations into housing support, services help remove a significant barrier to safety and uphold both survivor and animal welfare.

8.4 **Veterinary settings as a frontline contact point:**

Veterinary teams may see animals with unexplained injuries or behaviour changes, or clients exhibiting signs of fear and coercion. This places vets and practice staff in a unique position to identify and signpost domestic abuse victim-survivors. International and UK guidance increasingly recommends cross-sector awareness and training.^{4, 11, 14}

8.5 **Civil protection orders:**

NCDV supports the expansion of existing civil protection measures such as Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders, to explicitly include family pets. The abuse or threat of abuse towards animals is not only an indicator of coercive control but also a barrier to safety for many victim-survivors. Extending these orders to cover pets would provide much-needed protection and send a clear signal that the justice system recognises the role of animal cruelty in domestic abuse.⁵

8.6 Ruby's Law:

Additionally, NCDV endorses Ruby's Law, a campaign established in memory of Ruby, a dog killed in the context of domestic abuse.¹⁵ The central objective of Ruby's Law is to ensure that all civil protection orders – particularly Non-Molestation and Occupation Orders – can provide explicit legal protection for pets belonging to victim-survivors. The campaign seeks to:

- Recognise pets as vulnerable family members within the scope of domestic abuse legislation.
- Prevent perpetrators from using threats or harm towards pets as a coercive control tactic.
- Enable courts to impose conditions that protect the welfare of animals alongside the safety of adult and child victim-survivors.
- Close a significant gap in current legislation, where pets are often overlooked despite their central role in household life and in the decision-making of those seeking to leave abuse.

By embedding these protections in law, Ruby's Law aims to reduce barriers to leaving abusive situations, improve consistency in judicial practice, and ensure the family unit, including pets, is safeguarded.

8.7 Domestic Abuse Protection Orders (DAPOs)

NCDV recommends that **children and pets are explicitly included within the evaluation of DAPOs**. These new orders, introduced through the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 and currently being piloted, omit children and pets from the scope of the order. Excluding them risks undermining the orders' effectiveness and misses an opportunity to design the most flexible and responsive protection.

Expanding domestic abuse protection orders in this way would not only enhance victim-survivor safety but also align with the UK Government's strategic commitment to halve violence against women and girls.¹⁶

Examples of pet-related violence disclosed in witness statements

Content note: *distressing content involving a family pet.*

- Forced the Applicant's and the dog's faces together, causing injury.
- Poured hot water over a rabbit.
- Punched a dog in the head during an assault.
- Kicked a kitten in the face, causing severe injury.
- Beat a chained dog with a rolling pin.
- Threw a budgie's cage against a wall with the bird inside.
- Grabbed a dog by the neck and threw it across a room.
- Poured bleach into a fish tank, endangering fish, and a turtle.
- Kicked the Applicant's dog down the stairs.
- Fired a catapult at the Applicant's cat.
- Threw a guinea-pig hutch with the animals inside.
- Confined dogs in a shed without food or water.

Anonymised, non-exhaustive examples drawn from Applicant witness statements; wording minimised to avoid graphic detail.

“She would leave voice messages of the dog whining and frantically barking. I tried to rescue him, but he was legally her dog. It was terrible; he must have thought I abandoned him.” – (23M)

9. Working together: strengthening the response

9.1 NCDV’s analysis shows that cruelty, threats, or risk to pets is a significant factor in many cases of domestic abuse. Protecting survivors also means protecting the animals they love. While NCDV will play our part through our A-B-C roadmap in section 11, meaningful progress depends on cross-sector collaboration. We invite partners to consider the following areas for joint action:

- **Support services:** integrate questions about pets into risk assessments, safety planning, and staff training.
- **Housing and homelessness services:** ensure policies consider pets, remove barriers for survivors seeking safe accommodation, and connect with fostering schemes.
- **Veterinary practices:** strengthen awareness of domestic abuse indicators, engage with training, and signpost to relevant services.
- **Animal welfare charities:** build partnerships with domestic abuse organisations, expand fostering networks, and share awareness materials.
- **Policy and decision-makers:** support initiatives like Ruby’s Law and ensure that pets are included in future policy frameworks and evaluations (e.g. Domestic Abuse Protection Orders).
- **Multi-agency forums:** ensure that pet-related risks are considered in Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs), in child protection processes, and safeguarding partnerships.

Together, the sector can ensure that pets are no longer used as tools of coercion and that survivors can access safety without leaving loved animals behind.

“I had to get myself out, my kids out, the dogs out, and the cat. I remember thinking, no one’s dying today, and no one’s getting left behind.” – (29F)

10. Organisations working at the intersection of animal and human abuse

- 10.1 Growing recognition of the connection between domestic abuse, sexual violence and animal harm has led to the emergence of organisations embedding *animal-inclusive safeguarding* across all systems that respond to violence and abuse. These pioneers highlight that animals are not peripheral to the story of abuse but often central to it, as sources of emotional support, targets of coercive control, and vital indicators of escalating risk.

Across the UK, a growing network of charities and partnerships is addressing the link between domestic abuse, sexual violence, and harm to animals. These organisations provide practical fostering options for survivors, campaign for better cross-sector understanding, and deliver specialist training to professionals in both the domestic abuse and animal welfare fields.

Each organisation listed below supports a shared aim: to ensure that victims are not forced to choose between their own safety and the safety of their pets. Their work highlights the importance of collaboration between human-safeguarding and animal-protection systems, a vital step toward truly holistic responses to abuse.

Professionals are encouraged to familiarise themselves with these services and establish local referral pathways wherever possible. Many also offer training and awareness resources that can enhance staff confidence in identifying risk and supporting survivors.

10.2 Loop and the Centre for Animal-Inclusive Safeguarding (Loop Safeguarding)

Founder: Maya Badham

Website: www.loop-safeguarding.org

Email: mayabadham@loop-safeguarding.org

Loop Safeguarding is an award-winning organisation working to close loopholes in knowledge, policy, and practice across sectors and globally. Its mission is to ensure that animals are included within *whole-family* and *whole-systems* approaches to preventing and addressing all forms of violence and abuse.

Services include high-quality training on the intersection of animal cruelty and interpersonal abuse, expert-witness reporting, organisational consultancy and guidance, research partnerships, and chairing of Domestic Abuse-Related Death Reviews.

“Curiosity didn’t kill the cat – it saved the cat, the dog, and the human.

By embedding animal-inclusive safeguarding into everyday professional practice, fostering professional curiosity, and including animals within policies and wider strategic goals, we can strengthen our overall response to violence and abuse, protect more survivors, and ultimately save lives — regardless of species.”

— Maya Badham, Founder of Loop Safeguarding

10.4 Protect Animals. Protect People (PAPP) – Naturewatch Foundation

Website: www.naturewatch.org

PAPP is a national campaign led by Naturewatch Foundation to highlight and address the link between animal abuse and domestic abuse. Research shows that perpetrators often harm or threaten pets to control victims, making animal abuse a key early warning sign of wider violence and coercive control.

The campaign focuses on:

- **Advocacy** – calling for mandatory police training and inclusion of animal abuse in safeguarding frameworks.
- **Support** – working with partners to ensure safe refuge and foster care for animals in domestic abuse cases.
- **Knowledge** – amplifying survivor voices, raising public understanding, and influencing policy at both UK and international levels.

“Animals are part of our homes, our communities, and our closest relationships. They offer love and loyalty, yet their suffering too often goes unseen, especially when abusers use them to control or harm victims. As a former senior detective, I recognise that protecting animals is also protecting people. This report from NCDV is an opportunity for public protection that we cannot ignore.”

— *Mark Randell, Protect Animals. Protect People (PAPP), Naturewatch Foundation*

10.5 The Links Group

Website: www.thelinksgroup.org.uk

The Links Group is a national charity that raises awareness of the link between the abuse of people and animals through collaboration, research, training, and advocacy.

Since 2001, the team has been at the forefront of UK awareness-raising in this field, training thousands of professionals each year across human and animal health and welfare sectors — including veterinary teams, domestic abuse services, police, and social care. The group has also developed free training and resources for professionals.

The Links Group includes expert witnesses who provide crucial testimony in cases involving both human and animal abuse. It also supports and sets best-practice standards for specialist domestic-abuse animal fostering services across the UK.

Links Accredited fostering services

The Endeavour Project – endeavourproject.org.uk

Provides confidential pet fostering for people escaping domestic abuse across the North West of England. Endeavour ensures animals are cared for in safe, loving homes until their owners can be reunited.

Cats Protection Lifeline – cats.org.uk/what-we-do/cp-lifeline

Offers free, confidential cat fostering for survivors of domestic abuse, enabling people to reach safety while their cats are cared for by trusted volunteers. Operates across multiple UK regions.

Dogs Trust Freedom Project – dogstrustfreedomproject.org.uk

Provides a free fostering service for dogs belonging to people fleeing domestic abuse. Dogs are temporarily placed with volunteer foster carers until their owners are rehoused and ready to be reunited.

Refuge4Pets – refuge4pets.org.uk

Supports people in Devon and Cornwall escaping domestic abuse by providing specialist fostering for any pet type — dogs, cats, or small animals. The service removes a key barrier to safety and recovery for survivors.

These services foster animals for victim-survivors of domestic abuse when they need to escape to safety but cannot take their pets. Collectively, they have more than 75 years of expertise and support thousands of people and animals every year.

10.6 RSPCA

Website: www.rspca.org.uk

Provides advice, education and reporting routes for cruelty and neglect cases, with links to local branches. The RSPCA also campaigns for stronger legislation and awareness around the connection between animal cruelty and domestic abuse.

“I’ll never forget LuLu, my dog. We were forced to rehome her when we moved to a refuge. 30 years on, I still cry about her.” – (38F)

11. Data to delivery: NCDV Roadmap



11.1 NCDV has committed to a phased A-B-C plan that supports the findings of this report and the wider evidence base on the link between domestic abuse and animal cruelty.

11.2 A - Awareness & training

Develop a FREE short training module (60 minutes) for vets and practice staff on:

- Legal protections: awareness of civil protection orders (such as Non-Molestation Orders and Occupation Orders) with referral to NCDV for free, fast legal applications.
- Understanding coercive control: how perpetrators use pets as a tool to intimidate or coerce victim-survivors.
- Practical pathways: how to gain in-depth understanding through training/partnership with national and regional organisations leading in this area of work.
- How to contact animal welfare charities offering fostering and/or advice.

11.3 B – Broadcast the message

Strengthening awareness of the link between domestic abuse and harm to animals by:

- Updating our website with dedicated information about this topic.
- Using social media to share data insights and related content.
- Producing digital assets for professionals – as part of NCDV Professional Resources.
- Collaborating with animal welfare charities, veterinary associations, and domestic abuse networks to amplify messaging.
- Promoting and sharing the **Ruby's Law** campaign to expand civil protection orders to safeguard both survivors and their pets.
- Including the link between domestic abuse and harm to pets in all NCDV training packages.

11.4 C – Communicate with victim-survivors

- Promote the options available to those using NCDV's services (fostering schemes, pet-friendly refuges where available).

12. Limitations of our analysis

- **Underreporting in witness statements:** the 6.51% figure reflects explicit mentions in legal witness statements and therefore likely underestimates the true prevalence of pet-related threats or harm among all victims seeking protection.
- **Context specificity:** our dataset is limited to victims who went through the civil protection-order process; survivors who never apply for court protection, including some of the most isolated, are not included.
- **Coding boundaries:** our search focused on mentions of cruelty, threats or risk; more subtle forms of pet-related control (economic restriction on pet care, threats implied but not recorded) may not have been captured.

Animal deaths disclosed in witness statements

Content note: distressing content involving the death of animals.

- Killed a puppy by strangulation during an outburst.
- Kicked the Applicant's dog down the stairs, causing its death.
- Placed two pet kittens in a sealed bucket: both suffocated.
- Ran over the family dog and threatened to burn the body.
- Killed around 20 chickens.
- Threw a phone at a cat, causing a fatal head injury.
- Killed a sheep with a plank of wood; also kicked a pet goat in the head.
- Strangled and killed the family rabbit.
- Kicked the Applicant's elderly dog; injuries led to euthanasia.
- Smashed a fish tank and deliberately killed the fish.
- Threw live piglets and poisoned a cat, causing death.
- Inflicted fatal head trauma on a pet Chihuahua.
- Kicked and punched a dog repeatedly and poisoned rabbits, resulting in deaths.

Anonymised, non-exhaustive examples drawn from Applicant witness statements; wording minimised to avoid graphic detail.

13. Conclusion

Although our review of 64,046 witness statements shows a conservative prevalence of **6.51%** for explicit pet-related threats or cruelty, this should be considered alongside higher rates reported in survivor-facing surveys and sector research. Together, the evidence is clear: animal abuse is a significant feature of many domestic abuse situations and is frequently used as a tool of coercive control. Veterinary teams are therefore a critical partner in the safeguarding ecosystem.

Partnership work with organisations working in this field, and veterinary practices through training, helping to raise awareness within the wider domestic abuse sector, and signposting victim-survivors to sources of practical help and support offers a practical and impactful route to improving safety for both people and animals. A call to action to all those who encounter people impacted by domestic abuse as part of their work, will further help to broadcast the pervasive and serious link between domestic abuse and animal abuse.

14. References and Resources

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