

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ANIMAL CRUELTY IN  
PUERTO RICO: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to all the women participants in this study. They let me in during challenging times offering unknowingly, so much light through this period of their lives. I wish them happiness and the freedom they deserve.

A special gratitude goes to Gloria Bermúdez and Mireya Haddock. Gloria, it was a real pleasure to have the opportunity to meet you. Mireya, thanks for generously retelling your story by providing official evidence of your domestic violence court case. I want to also dedicate this work and thank all the administrators and counselors who made this study possible.

And last, but not least to my husband Carlos L. Colón and my 7 year-old son Carlos G. Colón Vázquez for the love and support throughout my studies. I love you and thank you from the bottom of my heart.

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Nancy Y. Vázquez-Soto

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Violence against women is one of Puerto Rico's most critical social problems and for this reason, anthropological thought is critically necessary. Some women in Puerto Rico are vulnerable to situations of violence and control through domestic violence while their animals become involved in the same tangle of abuse. Women's voices about their animals have not been heard simply because nobody has inquired. I asked women survivors of domestic abuse whether or not their male partners had engaged in any type of animal cruelty against household and domesticated animals. My intention in conducting this research was to examine, both from an anthropological and from a gender perspective, the correlation in Puerto Rico between domestic violence and animal cruelty through ethnographic work. Interviews with professional shelter staff were conducted as well to establish whether or not women seeking shelter talk about their pets being hurt by their male partners—and if so, what consequences that abuse has for the women. My main objective was to determine whether the results of research that had been conducted in other cultures that demonstrated a link between animal abuse and domestic violence findings would be translatable to Puerto Rican culture. There is a remarkable void in this area of study in the Caribbean and Latin America that needs to be addressed and this study is a contribution toward analysis, dialogue, and change.

Keywords: Puerto Rico, domestic violence, violence, women, animal, abuse, cruelty, patriarchy

## Table of Contents

<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A. Violence</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>B. Methodology</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>C. Terminology</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>II. The Topic: Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>A. Animals as Objects of Study</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>B. Depictions of Women and Animals in Puerto Rican Culture</b>	<b>12</b>
i. Music	12
ii. Print media	15
<b>III. Three Preliminary Case Studies</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>A. The Shelter Director</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>B. A Voice from the Law</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>C. Gloria</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>IV. The Survey: Connecting Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>A. Questionnaire Responses and Analysis</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>B. Partners Threatening to Hurt Pets</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>C. Destruction of Property</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>D. Other Animal-Related Incidents</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>E. Other Animal-Related Acts Considered Abusive</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>F. Women Rethinking the Idea of Entering a Shelter</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>V. The Counselors</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>A. Women Seeking Shelter</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>B. Children and Pets</b>	<b>40</b>
i. Women talking about their animals	41
<b>C. Counselors Questionnaire Results</b>	<b>42</b>
i. Counselors' awareness of the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse	42
ii. Intake forms and the animal question	43
iii. Do women mention pets during counseling?	43
iv. Pattern of animal abuse	44
v. Percent of homes where the connection exists	45
vi. Situation of women in Puerto Rico and the patriarchal system	46
<b>VI. Conclusions and Recommendations</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>52</b>

## I. Introduction

“Me amenazó de muerte matando a mi perro. Antes agredía a mi mascota pues sabía que yo la quería.” (*“He threatened to kill me by killing my dog. He would first beat my pet because he knew I loved her.”*)

The welfare of animals in Puerto Rico is a topic that is deeply important to me, as someone who grew up in the culture. I became aware of and identified a void in the research on this subject prior to writing my proposal for admission to the Master’s program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at Indiana University. As I was contemplating my thesis topic, I read a study on the relationship between human violence and animal abuse that focused on domestic violence and animal cruelty. The study was a U. S. national survey carried out in 1997 that suggested a link between domestic violence and cruelty toward animals (F. Ascione, 1997). The next year, in a follow-up study of a Utah shelter for abused women, 71% reported their partners threatened, harmed, or killed at least one of their pets (F. Ascione, 1998). My interest piqued, I decided to research existing sources on this topic in the context of Puerto Rican culture, but was unable to find any. The research revived memories of my life in Puerto Rico, and I realized how important it was to me and to the plight of women and animals there that I choose this as my topic. Those memories are still vivid and helped provide context for my choice of this topic. I knew that the lack of research meant that I would need to do first-hand research, that I would have to go back and observe a culture in which I was (and still am, through family ties) a participant. Ultimately, this research consisted of in-depth interviews with 68 women in Puerto Rican shelters and centers for women survivors<sup>1</sup> of domestic violence.

Animals were an ever-present part of growing up in Puerto Rico—I remember that my grandparents and most neighbors always had dogs, chickens, roosters, and pigs. Cats were meant

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<sup>1</sup> According to Josefina Pantojas, a lawyer and committee member of Casa Protegida Julia de Burgos, the new focus is to use the term “survivor” rather than “victim.”



to live outdoors. At home, we only had dogs. I remember animals in the streets and beaches as if they were just part of the scenery. All this remained an unexamined part of my childhood environment for many years. More brutally and vividly memorable was a neighbor who owned roosters for cockfighting and was abusive toward his wife. There are other vignettes that capture an overall cultural disregard toward animals and people: in elementary school, a male child older than me threw a cat in the air to see if it would fall on all four legs like people would say. Later in life, through the lens of experience and my research, I recalled that same child was regularly beaten by his father, and that he ended up in jail as an adult. Growing up as part of the culture and going back as an observer while fulfilling the need to maintain ethnographic integrity has been a great challenge. The only way to successfully and accurately gather data was to attempt to distance myself from these memories—while allowing my knowledge of the culture of Puerto Rico to help me frame my research. I planned my research fully aware of my need to achieve and project neutrality as I formed my interview questions and conducted interviews.

## A. Violence

Puerto Rico did not invent the wheel of violence but historically, socially, and culturally it still supports certain privileges for men who head households. Like many other places in the world its people struggle with economic and social problems. Official reports of domestic violence and fatalities<sup>2</sup> and of animal neglect and cruelty<sup>3</sup> have increased. Researchers such as Frank Ascione and Clifton Flynn suggest that in places with such high crime rates, there are correlating high animal cruelty rates. W. J. Fielding, among others, suggests that in homes with

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<sup>2</sup> See “Tendencias Puerto Rico” for [statistics on violence](#). The population of Puerto Rico in 2008 was estimated at 3,954,037. That same year there were 68,746 reported crimes. From these crimes 10,492 were violent crimes, 807 were homicides, 9.7% more than the previous year. 94% of males perished on drugs-related crimes and fights. There were 20,389 domestic violence cases in which 28 women lost their lives, roughly 3 women every two weeks and 18.3% more than the previous year.

<sup>3</sup> See Emmy winner “[100,000](#)” documentary on the stray animal overpopulation in Puerto Rico.

domestic violence, animals as well as people are at high risk of a violent attack. Even though “domestic violence research has reached unprecedented heights, relatively little is known about how spouse abuse functions outside traditional Western regions of study such as North America and Europe” (Flake, 2006). While the correlation between domestic violence and animal cruelty has been thoroughly studied in the United States, scant research has been conducted on this issue in Australia (Volant, 2008), Latin America (Vaca-Guzmán, 2004) and the Caribbean (Fielding, 2010). The Argentine study conducted by Vaca-Guzmán clearly demonstrated that animal abuse is often present in cases of family violence. The study in the Bahamas by Fielding also indicated that “in homes with domestic violence, dogs as well as people are at higher risk of intentional harm and/or neglect.” Unfortunately, correlative animal cruelty case numbers in Puerto Rico are not available. Torres-López’s survey research about the perception of people on stray animals in Puerto Rico tells us most see stray animals as a public health threat (Torres-López, 2008). But there are no statistics on animal cruelty cases in Puerto Rico, nor studies linking human violence and animal abuse. Puerto Rico has a demonstrable tradition of animal abuse and neglect but no formal research has been done internally to support what I have seen all my life in the streets and the media.

I conducted my research first-hand, traveling to Puerto Rico to visit shelters and centers for women survivors of domestic violence, and conducting in-depth interviews and submitting a questionnaire to 68 participants. My intention in conducting this research was to examine, both from an anthropological and from a gender perspective, if there was a correlation in Puerto Rico between domestic violence and animal cruelty. My main objective was to determine whether the results of research that had been conducted in other cultures—and that had clearly demonstrated a link between animal abuse and domestic violence findings—would be translatable and relevant

to Puerto Rican culture. Several studies suggest that some men abuse animals to show their partners they control the relationship and are capable of hurting them as well. I wanted to understand if and how that result might express itself in Puerto Rico. I proposed asking women survivors of domestic abuse whether or not their male partners had engaged in any type of animal cruelty against household and domesticated animals. An additional aspect of my research was interviews with professional shelter staff, conducted to define whether or not women seeking shelter talk about their pets being hurt by their male partners—and if so, what consequences that abuse has for the women.

Once that research was conducted, I would have the material necessary to make recommendations for addressing the problem, which I do in the conclusion of this thesis. I propose changes in several arenas: protocols at women’s shelters; legislation protecting women, children, and animals; a comprehensive computerized system for recording data about the abuse of these currently largely unprotected groups, and research on men’s view about the connection between cruelty toward animals and family violence. Ultimately, to improve the lives of women who seek shelter, steps must be taken to raise consciousness of the connection between abuse of women and animal cruelty. Without data to demonstrate the connections, these women, children, and animals are simply “the disappeared,” and will for the most part either continue to make the choice to suffer or even die at the hands of their abusers, or stand by helplessly while their companion animals are abused.

In Puerto Rico, the household is the place where most crimes against women take place. In 2006, 77% of homicides against women happened in their residence<sup>4</sup> and 65.3% of these crimes were committed in the afternoon when children are home from school (Rodríguez

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<sup>4</sup> See *Tendencias Puerto Rico*, an online university project on statistic and data about Puerto Rico and its municipalities lead by the University of Puerto Rico: [place of homicide](#)

Figuroa, 1999). I intend to illustrate how violence in the home incorporates the family “pet” and other animals, and how cruelty toward them is a form of intimidation that allows some men to exert power and control over women. My first-hand research with survivors of domestic violence provided crucial insight: it exposed incidents of domestic abuse that had not been recorded before, illustrating family dynamics, how violence erupts, and how animals get trapped in the tangle of abuse.

## **B. Methodology**

The first-hand sources for this study are women survivors of domestic violence in Puerto Rico who reside in and receive services from domestic violence shelters, and the professional staff who treat them. The required forms were submitted to the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (IRB) at Indiana University, Bloomington on February 3, 2009. I translated all the documents submitted to the IRB. Professor Lessie Frazier from the Department of Gender Studies served as my research sponsor and dissertation committee chair. The questionnaire and interview questions for sheltered participants are a modified extract of the “Battered Partner Shelter Survey/Pet Maltreatment Survey” carried out by Frank R. Ascione (2007). The professional staff’s questionnaire and interview questions are a modified version of Ascione’s first survey on domestic violence and animal cruelty (F. Ascione, 1997).

The study deals with the sensitive topic of violence and for this reason it was not uncommon for interviewees to refuse to speak about such intimate details of their lives. Researching violence against women and animals has been a daunting task. I struggled with many questions, including how to ask the participants about their experiences witnessing violence toward animals: How would they react? How would I remain neutral and not become overwhelmed by their stories? According to Ellsberg, “The degree to which openness is achieved

depends partly on study design issues such as whether questions are clearly worded and easy to understand and how many times during the interview a woman is asked about violence” (Ellsberg, 2001). My main concern was to make my interview subjects feel comfortable and speak candidly; I did not want to appear to be just another person asking questions for “a study,” or to make them feel used. After brief casual conversations on topics related mostly to the weather, I asked the participants how long they have been residing at the shelter. This particular question seemed welcomed by all and made them feel comfortable opening up and reacting regarding how they felt at the shelter and their plans for the future and for reconstructing their lives. I began the interview questions and they were answered with ease, except for three of the participants interviewed who did not want their voices recorded for fear their aggressors might find out or that it could somehow be used in the courts against them. The interviewees were also interested in me as a person and where I came from and asked me such questions. The questionnaires and interviews with the professional staff went effortlessly as well. The professional staff members (counselors) were very receptive of my study, even offering information about other shelters, which I immediately contacted.

My first call was made to an organization called “*Coordinadora Paz Para la Mujer*” (*Coordinator Peace for Women*),<sup>5</sup> which proved to be a great starting point. They provided the list of the seven shelters under their umbrella that I contacted: *Casa de la Bondad*, *Casa Protegida Julia de Burgos*, *Casa Protegida Luisa Capetillo*, *Hogar Ruth*, *Hogar Nueva Mujer Santa Maria de la Merced*, *Hogar Clara Lair*, and *La Casa de Todos*. The other shelters and centers recommended were *Hijas de Jairo*, *Instituto Pre Vocacional e Industrial*

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<sup>5</sup> The “*Coordinadora*” (as it is called by shelter workers) is a non-government organization (NGO) that offers educational services and support to seven shelters for women survivors of domestic violence and sexual harassment and is affiliated with gender research centers, feminist organizations, government agencies on women, and individual feminist activists. See <http://www.pazparalamujer.org>.

(CAPROMUNI), Hogar La Piedad at Fundación de Desarrollo Comunal de Puerto Rico (FUNDESCO), and Proyecto Matria. I also contacted two other individuals related to Coordinadora, including Olga López-Báez, a lawyer who litigates on behalf of women survivors of domestic violence through the Legal Services of Puerto Rico office. López-Báez is interested in the link between domestic violence and cruelty toward animals. A police officer who coordinates and dispatches other officers to domestic violence cases throughout the island was also recommended. A total of twelve shelters and centers for women became part of this study. I spoke over the phone with four shelter directors and personally interviewed one who was herself a survivor of domestic violence.

The participants were each given a questionnaire and interviews were conducted for qualitative engagement. A total of 68 participants filled out the questionnaire; six of those were interviewed and only three of those were audio recorded. I also submitted a questionnaire to 37 shelter counselors; all completed the questionnaire. Six of them were interviewed and three were audio recorded. A shelter director was interviewed but not audio-recorded per her request. The questionnaires and interviews were confidential, with the exception of one participant who works as counselor in the children's area of a shelter. She expressed voluntarily that she wanted her story to be known. I used her name per her eagerness and approval. I transcribed each interview the same day it took place.

The chief difficulties encountered in this project were mostly due to administrators' reluctance to allow such research in the shelters and to the participants' unwillingness to talk for fear of being recognized by their partners or having their names revealed. Given the fact that I have family members living in Puerto Rico lodging and transportation were not an issue.

### C. Terminology

I will use the term “participants” throughout the paper when referring to women living at and receiving services from the shelters and centers, as it is widely used by the professional staff and directors. I will refer to the professional staff as “counselors” since, for the most part, that is how they refer to each other.

Lenore E. Walker defines an abused woman as “a woman who has been physically, sexually, or seriously psychologically abused by a man in an intimate relationship, without his regards of her rights in order to coerce her into doing what he wants her to do” (L. Walker, 1990).

Like Beck, I recognize that the term “pets” is no longer a politically correct term and that “companion animals” is now the accepted substitute (Belk, 1996; Hirschman, 1994). But the participants in this study refer to their animals as “mascotas” (pets) and not “animales de compañía” (companion animals). The latter term is not widely used in Puerto Rico. The term “human animal” is used extensively in human-animal studies to describe human beings while “non-human animal” is used to describe what have previously been called simply “animals.” I will use these terms where needed.

Animal abuse is defined as “a non-accidental, socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal” (Ascione, 1993). Most of the cases in this study pertain to the control, expression of aggression, displacement of hostility, and retaliation against animals and women which are some of the motives of cruelty exposed by Kellert and Felthous (1985) in their study. According to Levi-Strauss, “animal species, with their many observable differences and habits offered conceptual support for social differentiation” (Levi-Strauss, 1963). This statement has encouraged some

anthropologists and other scholars to observe how animals are perceived culturally and socially and to not limit themselves to merely glimpsing them as if part of the scenery. Unfortunately, there has not been enough interest in the connection between domestic animals and animal abuse.

Elizabeth Marshall-Thomas, whose book “The Hidden Life of Dogs” is based on observing dogs interact with each other and among other species, expresses her opposition to the tendency to resist anthropomorphism, asserting that “our aversion to the label is misplaced” because “using the experience of one's species to evaluate the experience of another species has been a useful tool to many of the great wildlife biologists.... The more experienced the investigator, the more useful the tool” (Marshall-Thomas, 1993). She has stimulated us to question our own personal views and perception of animals, the role they play in societies, and, most pertinent to this study, animal cruelty through the lens of domestic violence. Her views on anthropomorphism have been a useful tool for this study.

## **II. The Topic: Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty**

“El maltrato fue primero a mi persona y a mi propiedad y luego a mi mascota que tanto amor le tenía.” (*“He begun by abusing me and my property and then the pet I loved so much.”*)

“Hace un año mi ex-compañero me mató el perro en una discusión conmigo.” (*“A year ago, my ex-partner killed my dog while we were having an argument.”*)

- *From participants' accounts*

It is striking to acknowledge that domestic violence research in Latin America has not been a thorough topic of study in Anthropology. Alcalde explains that ethnographers in the field are exposed to hearing and witnessing all sorts of events not related to their research, such as violence against women (Alcalde, 2003). I add to the equation that ethnographers are also



exposed to witnessing human-animal relationships that might include violence and cruelty toward animals. But since we have different criteria for how we perceive animals, “it is hardly surprising that people disagree about whether certain acts constitute cruelty. The most common explanation is that suffering’s subjectivity guarantees a struggle over what it means. Since animals cannot speak for themselves people must guess their inner states, opening the door to a flood of divergent interpretations (A. Arluke, 2006).” Most of the participants in this study somehow have an affinity with their animals such that they feel empathy with the animal’s fear, physical pain, and neglect, connecting it to the abuse they suffered. They often wanted to protect the animals the same way they would protect a child.

I agree with Alcalde’s argument that battered women’s lives directly deal with topics in which anthropologists express profound interest: power, class, gender, sexuality, conflict, violence, and the transformation of these through agency and resistance. Alcalde contends that from an ethnographic research perspective, one of the striking aspects of the treatment of intimate partner violence against women is that it is one of the most widely felt (by those who experience it) problems of the world. At the same time it is one of the most invisible problems (Alcalde, 2007). It is an invisible problem as it is mostly manifested in the home, where family dynamics converge (and where any non-human animals are mostly kept). Within this invisibility these animals also become the silent and isolated victims of domestic violence in Puerto Rico, easy targets for rage, anger, and frustrations.

### **A. Animals as Objects of Study**

The participants in this study who were asking for shelter for their animals and also witnessed the abuse their animals endured acted upon it by seeing the connection between the way they were treated and the way the animals responded to abuse. Treating animals as equal to

humans can be challenged from a biological perspective since non-human animals have different needs than human animals and therefore, “the ambiguity of the way we perceive animals invite a wide range of opinions and feelings on whether cruelty (and suffering) occurred and, if so, to what degree” (Arluke, 2006). But are we in a position to contest the feelings of a battered woman whose world has been shaken by the acts of cruelty committed against her, her children, and her animals? Some of the participants in this study feel their animals’ physical pain and neglect and make the connection with the abuse they suffered. Their animals made them aware of the abuse they suffered while they identified themselves with the animals and the way they were cruelly treated. They wanted to protect their animals from more abuse, but the actual domestic violence law does not protect women’s animals nor provide restriction orders against abusers who commit animal cruelty. In my research, I do not see women equating themselves with animals (neither do I compare them to animals); rather, I’m stressing the fact that some of the participants of this study became aware of their dangerous situations by the way their partners abused them and their animals. They realized they were suffering similar abuse and acted upon it by getting out of the relationship with their pets and sometimes without them.

The discussion regarding what constitutes animal cruelty and whether or not it is perceived as important in certain situations, leads me to an interview over the phone with a female police officer who coordinates domestic violence cases throughout Puerto Rico. She told me about a call she received in which a man physically abused his wife. One of the police officers who went to investigate the case said the woman told them her male partner put her small dog in a microwave oven, which initiated the argument and the eventual aggression against her. The initial 9-1-1 call the police officer received did not mention animal cruelty but the police officers were informed of the newly amended animal law, reported the incident, and the

man was accused of animal cruelty as well as domestic violence. Either the 9-1-1 dispatcher was informed about the dog situation and did not inform the police or was informed but unconcerned about informing the police officer. She said some police officers were aware of the newly amended animal law but complains there is insufficient police personnel to enforce it. The case was one of the few in which animal abuse has been reported by a police officer. Animal abuse is not exclusively contained within the household, but affects animals everywhere in Puerto Rico. The officer has seen an increase in animal cruelty cases not only related to domestic violence but also other cases in which people call about animals found burned, poisoned, beaten, or stabbed to death.

## **B. Depictions of Women and Animals in Puerto Rican Culture**

### **i. Music**

*“Historically, Puerto Rican/Caribbean music has ignored the topic of domestic violence. There are many examples that represent men as an aggressive subject toward feminine figures from the old music genres to the most recent ones” (Lizardi-Sierra, 2007).*

This study is based on the theoretical frame of patriarchy over women. B. Premo explains its complexities within a Latin American context: “The term patriarchy could never be rigid or stable...as its formidability in Latin America meant that mothers as well as fathers and female slave masters as well as priests could exert control over others based on socially constructed notions of what natural familial authority entailed even if only momentarily or conditionally (Premo, 2005). Understanding this, the theoretical framework I have adopted proposes that the deep-seated patriarchy in Puerto Rican culture may enable violence against women and animals. Patriarchy is used in this study to describe the household authority of males characterized by the placement of women as subordinates to their fathers, husbands, or any male considered above them within the social stratum.

The role of animal metaphors, "in which a human being is equated with an animal of another species," and related obscenity in popular culture has been studied, especially with respect to animal abuse (Leach, 1964). Some music genres in Puerto Rico, such as salsa, consolidate the position of women in a patriarchal society. Such is the case of the song "Mi Jaragual"<sup>6</sup> ("My Land"), popularized by Ismael "Maelo" Rivera. One of the verses says: "Un cacique patriarcal, viendo mi perro guardar mi tesoro y mi mujer ... Que inmenso, ser el dueño de la finca y la mujer." (*"A patriarchal chief, with my dog guarding my treasure and my woman ... how immense being the owner of the land and the woman"*). In this verse, the woman is considered property in the same way as the land. Interestingly, the dog has been given the task of guarding and taking care of the woman and the land. The dog becomes the eyes, an extension of the speaker when he is not present. Two very prominent writers in Puerto Rico, García-Ramis and Vidal Rodríguez (García-Ramis, 1987; Vidal-Rodríguez, 2002) mention this song while explaining that it places women under the patriarchal veil but the animal topic is completely removed from the discussion.

The music genre called reguetón has emerged in the recent years in Puerto Rico and some of its lyrics depict violence against women and animals. Some of these lyrics blame women as being instigating consensual or nonconsensual sexual advantages while calling women as cats, doves, and *perras* (female dogs or bitches).<sup>7</sup> Some of the lyrics also suggest men see themselves as pitbulls, tigers, and horses while imagining being conquerors of women who play hard to get. The kind of woman described in some of the lyrics pays no attention to them not because they

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<sup>6</sup> Mi Jaragual by Ismael Rivera from the Album "Vengo por la maceta"

<sup>7</sup> Music is used during therapy sessions for men accused of domestic violence in Puerto Rico to facilitate discussions on the topic of violence, recognizing that music is one of the most popular vehicles in Puerto Rico of reaching the masses. "The music played was uncensored and was charged with sexist and derogative lyrics toward the female gender. It proved to be successful in the production of male thoughts on violence" (Vidal-Rodríguez, 2002).

are not manly enough but because she is a tease. In some of these songs men have the right attributes to catch these loose women who dance “*perreo*”—a sexually charged dance in which men dance behind women, mimicking the sexual intercourse of dogs. While men make a great deal of their sexual prowess, women must comply with their desires. In the next song titled “*Perro Caliente*” (“Dog in Heat”) the singer compares himself with a pitbull.<sup>8</sup> The image portrayed in the song is attached to the stereotypes of these dogs as strong, powerful warriors who do not let go of their prey while fighting.<sup>9</sup>

**“*Perro Caliente*” - Alexis Y Fido<sup>10</sup>**

<i>Yo soy un pitbull</i>	<i>I am a pitbull</i>
<i>y todo lo que toco rompo.</i>	<i>and everything I touch I break.</i>
<i>La que se me pega la cojo</i>	<i>If she get's too close I'll fuck her</i>
<i>y la descompongo.</i>	<i>and take her apart.</i>
<i>La cojo, la mojo,</i>	<i>I fuck her, I make her wet,</i>
<i>si tiene “gistro” rojo.</i>	<i>if her “g-string” is red.</i>
<i>La voy a devorar,</i>	<i>I'll devour her,</i>
<i>esta noche me antojo...</i>	<i>tonight I'm capricious...</i>
<i>Anda con el bozal</i>	<i>Have your muzzle ready</i>
<i>por si acaso me enojo</i>	<i>in case I get angry.</i>

In another reguetón song titled “*Gata Fiera*”<sup>11</sup> (ferocious female cat) the woman is being scolded for being too loose for not complying sexually. The singer calls the woman a treacherous female cat who will be his prisoner and will not escape because he is not afraid of her; she started the game but now she must acknowledge that she lost the battle and must let him “play” some more.

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<sup>8</sup> A music video from Puerto Rican reguetón singer Daddy Yankee shows pitbulls (an illegal dog breed in Puerto Rico) in a housing project in Puerto Rico being provoked to attack a lizard.

<sup>9</sup> In my study, a participant recalled seeing kids in her neighborhood fight Dobermans and pitbull-type dogs. In Puerto Rico, dog fights are considered a crime and “pitbulls” are demonized as inherently aggressive. For further reading on outlaw dogs see Twining, H., Arluke, Arnold, Patronek, and Gary. (2001). Managing the Stigma of Outlaw Breeds: A Case Study of Pit Bull Owners. *Society & Animals*, 8(1).

<sup>10</sup> Songwriters Raul Alexis Ortiz-Rolón; Joel Martínez; Anthony Calo; Aaron Peña; Published by SONY/ATV Tunes LLC

<sup>11</sup> Songwriters, Delgado, Hector Luis Published by © Universal Music Publishing Group

The kind of language employed in these songs when referring to the women being conquered (or attempting to conquer) speaks of possession, property, and predation, with the sole intention of establishing power over the other and for reasons of pride and honor. For some women, these lyrics completely devalue their personae. Leach observes that there is "a universal tendency to make ritual and verbal associations between eating and sexual intercourse," and "the way in which animals are categorized with regard to edibility will have some correspondence to the way in which human beings are categorized with regard to sex relations" (Leach, 1964). While some might suggest that these lyrics are harmless and amusing for their catchy tunes and contagious rhythm, they should not be overlooked but treated as a category of analysis.

## ii. Print media

The cases chosen as print media examples are only four of the many cases of human violence and animal abuse I have been gathering from newspapers. The first case<sup>12</sup> deals with collective animal abuse and the abuse of power. It took place in the town of Barceloneta, Puerto Rico where the mayor hired a private animal control agency to remove all domestic animals from public housing. The animals were taken away from their owners and tossed down a bridge without following proper euthanasia protocol. In a second case<sup>13</sup>, an elderly man stabbed a dog to death simply because the dog, according to a witness, entered his garage. A third case<sup>14</sup> give details of a pitbull-type dog shot by a police officer without provocation; in the fourth<sup>15</sup>, an article reports a domestic violence case in which a police officer killed his wife, mother-in-law, and the family dog. I tried to find the outcome of this last case but could not find updates.

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<sup>12</sup> Vargas, Yaysa and Selsky, Andrew O. (2007) Pet massacres carried out in Puerto Rico, *USA Today*

<sup>13</sup> Maldonado-Arrigoitia, W. (May 2009). Golpea con un tubo y acuchilla a perro en Camuy. *Primera Hora*.

<sup>14</sup> Criollo-Oquero, A. (2011). Denuncian abuso policiaco contra pitbull. *El Nuevo Día*.

<sup>15</sup> Martínez, Andrea (2006) Posponen juicio contra ex policía, maltrato de menores, maltrato de animales. *El Nuevo Día*.

Animal Protection Law #154<sup>16</sup> was amended in 2008 but it is rarely enforced and there are no formal statistics of animal cruelty cases. The newly amended law is “a modernist law because the punishment is more severe when a person who has committed abuse toward an animal has been previously guilty of other offenses related to any animal protection law, domestic violence, child abuse or elderly abuse or committed the crime in the immediate presence of children” (Alvarez, 2010). Alvarez adds that the law not only intends to protect animals but human beings as well, for it is based on studies of the relationship between human violence and animal cruelty. It is one thing to have a thoughtful law supported by studies conducted in other cultures, and another to enforce it. As earlier established, there are no formal studies linking human violence and animal abuse in Puerto Rico. For this reason, I have to rely on newspapers articles of cases of human violence and animal cruelty as well as domestic violence and animal cruelty. Ascione (1997) and Flynn (1999) suggest that in homes where violence is prevalent, animal abuse might be also. There is vast research in the U.S. on this connection but somehow Puerto Rico has been overlooked.

### III. Three Preliminary Case Studies

#### A. The Shelter Director

*“There is a pattern to the way women are killed, like in recent cases where women were killed in front of their children with guns or knives, facing the killer, taking with them the last image of their faces to the tomb.” - Shelter Director*

The shelter director interview was conducted on the condition of anonymity. This interview strikes me as compelling as she gives a clear glimpse inside the minds of the professionals who deal with cases of women survivors of domestic violence in all its

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<sup>16</sup> See Animal Protection Law 154:  
[http://saveasato.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=48](http://saveasato.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=20&Itemid=48)

manifestations, and who is herself a survivor. While working at the shelter she realized she was just one more statistic on domestic violence as she experienced psychological and emotional abuse. Her husband would make denigrating comments about her appearance in front of the children, family, and friends to ridicule and humiliate her. He was in charge of all family finances and did not allow her to handle money. She stated that “women do not realize that not being able to know how much their partners earn, not being able to have cash, credit cards, checks with their names on them, and not being able to have at least an ATM card is a form of control over their lives.” She filed for divorce and little by little gained confidence and independence and through work she preserved the focus needed to raise her children.

It was extremely important for her to make a statement about all the women who have lost their lives at the hands of their partners. She emphasized the way some women have been killed in incidents of domestic violence while saying that she sees a pattern to the way they are killed; in front of their children and facing the killer. She told me about a center for men who batter, created to help them with anger management. This group “retrains and re-educate men who batter from the power and control angle as well as society’s expectations” (Román-Tirado, 2003). But it is unknown if they educate men on animal cruelty or if they ever ask if they have hurt or killed animals in domestic violence disputes. The director is well aware of women seeking help who do not want to leave their pets behind and have decided to stay in the home, as well as women who have come to the shelter with their pets. She told me they receive calls from women asking for shelter for themselves, their children, and their pets. They have also received several cases in which animals were killed by the participants’ male partners.

Generally, domestic violence has been seen as an issue of heterosexual couples and little has being exposed on same-sex relationships. One of the last questions asked was related to



whether or not they accept Lesbian women in the shelter. She says they do accept them but that some of the rules were somewhat different than the other women. No explanation was given.

## B. A Voice from the Law

“Cuando ella comenzó a narrar en la corte la manera en que su ex-pareja mató a su perro, el juez le indicó, que no dijera mas... el juez y las personas presentes no podían creer que un ser humano matara a un perro a pedradas.” (*“When she begun narrating in the court the way her ex-partner killed her dog, the judge said ‘do not say more’... the judge and the people in the room could not believe that a human being could stone a dog to death.”*) - Olga López-Báez, Lawyer

I met with Olga López-Báez, a lawyer who works for *Servicios Legales de Puerto Rico*, a non-profit organization that offers legal support for low-income people and who also coordinates the office for *Litigación Efectiva para Mujeres Víctimas de Violencia Domestica* in the same organization. She is part of a group of individuals and shelter directors who are planning to create a safe place at shelters for pets women do not want to leave behind. The organization’s name will be called *Mujeres y Mascotas (MUMAS)* (*“Women and Pets”*). It will be using the guidelines from “Safe Havens for Pets” (Frank R. Ascione, 2000). She conducted a survey among shelter directors asking whether or not women have brought pets, receiving many positive responses. She then realized there was a real need to help women with pets escape violent situations. Throughout her legal career, López-Báez has worked on several cases of pets injured or killed in cases of domestic violence. Gottman tells us that “the most violent batterers tend to behave sadistically toward pets and rely heavily on destruction of property as an intimidation tactic (Gottman, 1998).”

She recalls a 1998 case in which a woman sought help when her male partner stoned her dog “Popy” to death. Mireya Haddock became aware her life was in danger and sought legal help. Mireya’s case is still vivid in her mind and she says, “the way she looked at me in the eyes while telling, screaming repeatedly, *“me mató al perrito y ya no lo tengo conmigo”* (*“he killed*

*my puppy and my puppy's no longer with me*") prompted the lawyer to use animal abuse as part of the defense in her case. It proved to have an effect in the court she had not experienced before explaining how the judge and the people in the room reacted astounded to Haddock's accounts on the way her partner stone her dog to death. For affidavit on the case, see Appendix on pages 43-44. Mireya Haddock kindly endorsed the affidavit for other women to read and understand that they are not alone and not to feel ashamed to tell their stories.

López-Báez recalls a phone call she received from a private-practice colleague to consult in a case of a wealthy family in which the man drowned his wife's female dog in the pool and left the animal there so she could see it. She contends with certainty that domestic violence occurs in every sphere of society and that it is not limited to poor or uneducated people. She adds that motive is an indicator of the dangerousness of the perpetrator. Therefore, it is urgent to help the survivor with a safety plan, take that women out of the situation, obtain a protective order, find all the resources available, help her with divorce, and charge the abuser through the animal protection law. She contends that sadly, in some cases women in high levels of society prefer to avoid making public the abuse they suffer for sake of the honor of the family.

The third case was a domestic violence case in which sexual abuse was the norm. It was a difficult case in which the woman did not want to leave the home to seek shelter and leave her pet behind. The shelter staff accommodated the pet. This case was very disturbing, maybe the worst she had ever seen. She says, "I must tell you how the sexual aggression took place because it is contained in the research on domestic violence and animal abuse I have read. He took a bottle of a perfume for males called *Brut Faberge* and introduced it into her anus and vagina lacerating the areas and threatening to kill her pet dog as well." Walker tells us that "it is not unusual to use sexual coercion to shame and humiliate the woman, making it easier for them to

gain their desired psychological control” (L. E. Walker, 2009). In this case, the brutal treatment of the body through rape and torture enmeshed with the psychological and emotional aggression of a threat of killing an animal separates both, the attacker and the victim away from what is common and somewhat normal in society. The aggressor deprives its victim of freedom both becoming encapsulated in what Frazier describes as a “space of death” in which aggressor and victim create “a perverse kind of intimacy [and] it is referred to as death because it includes the removal of the person from his or her social context, [in an] attempt to dismantle his or her sense of personhood... and the threat of complete annihilation” (Frazier 2006). Somewhere entrapped within the space of death, an animal has been placed and used as a trading object. The animal becomes a prized object valued in a derisive way and seen as important and relevant when planning such aggressions and good to use as he pleases. The threat was clear; submit to the attack or the pet will be killed. The victim is silenced and forced to participate and enter the coldness of the space of death with the uncertainty of the outcomes with the purpose of protecting, as much as possible herself and her pet.

In other cases, she tells of a woman whose male partner would constantly threatened to kill her cat until one day he squeezed the cat with such force that he broke the cat’s leg so badly it had to be amputated. She also learned from another lawyer a case in which a man would hit his wife’s dog so relentlessly with a broom he caused multiple fractures. And last, a case in which a 33 year-old woman and mother of thirteen children who was married to a religious man sought protection from him because she could not take more physical and emotional abuse. To López-Báez this was an astonishing case of the double personality trait in which publicly the man acts as a role model admired by many but turns abusive in the intimacy of the home. She says he

killed the woman's birds, mistreated her hens, and because of his religious beliefs would not let her use contraception.

López-Báez's next endeavor is asking the courts for amendments to the existing Domestic Violence Law 54<sup>17</sup> to include animals in protective orders when women fear for their pets' safety. She directed me to an article on restraining orders for pets by Arkow (2007), which states that "as a result of growing scientific documentation of the frequent co-occurrence between animal abuse and intimate partner violence, state legislatures and courts are beginning to recognize the need to legally protect the animal victims of family violence. The inclusion of companion animals in domestic violence protective orders is the next logical step in this effort." López-Báez meets with members of "Coordinadora" and other members of MUMAS with the goal to begin helping abused women with pets.

### C. Gloria

*"Le metía horrible por el cuerpo por aquí [costado] al animal (caballo)... Y le dada, olvídate con el martillo le metía por aquí [se toca el hombro] al caballo eso era maltrato olvídate horrible." ("He'd hit the horse horribly right here [pointing to her side]... and hit the animal (horse) with a hammer right here (pointing to her shoulder) that was a horrible abuse." - Gloria Bermúdez*

Through the path of ethnography we can enter worlds unknown to us, such as the worlds of women whose accounts of violent situations in their lives include animals. The participants interviewed in this study were all open and supportive. They began informally and I was treated warmly. The rapport between each one of the participants and me developed quickly, giving me a sense I had met them before. They gave me access to a part of their lives nobody had sought to reach before. I inquired about the animals they shared their lives with and cared about, and they willingly made their voices heard.

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<sup>17</sup> See LexJuris de Puerto Rico: <http://www.lexjuris.com/>

The interview with Gloria took place in one of the offices at the shelter. The office was in a very small wood house with a living room that served as a waiting room with a loveseat, four small offices, and a bathroom. It was a sunny day, as are most days in Puerto Rico, with clear blue skies and a temperature in the 80s. The office in which the interviews took place had no air conditioning, leading me to believe that was the case in the other rooms as well. There was a small fan blowing more heat than cool air into the interview room. While interviewing Gloria (her real name, revealed by her request) there were some identifiable noises in the background such as women talking in the other rooms, birds chirping and singing, and the sounds of some children playing and some crying.

Gloria is a fascinating woman and the moment she walked into the room it seemed to me that she was clear and determined regarding everything she was going to say. Gloria greeted me with a kiss, as is the custom in Puerto Rico; immediately after that I explained my study to her. Gloria has long black hair and her skin tone is a subtle bronze color. Her eyes are like magnets and her voice is firm, deep, and strong. She works at the shelter as counselor in the children's area but is also a survivor of domestic violence twice as in recent days she was abused by her male partner. Her turbulent childhood experiences make her relate with the children she tends to at the shelter, for the stories they tell are very similar to hers. Among the six participants interviewed, only Gloria knew about the studies on the relationship between domestic violence and cruelty toward animals. She took a workshop where it was briefly mentioned but made a lasting impression on her, though she did not make the connection between her experiences and the study until talking with me.

It is hard to describe non-verbal gestures with precision but in this case they revealed a load of contained emotions. Gloria was a teenager when she eloped and married her first

husband, the man who later became her aggressor. They owned cows, horses, and dogs. She is a survivor of psychological, emotional, and physical violence. Regarding the latter, she explains that he once pulled her hair and dragged her across the street from her neighbor's home to her house in front of her children. To my first question, if her partner ever threatened to hurt any animals, she replied:

“Sí, abusaba mucho de los animales, de los caballos, le daba así [patada] con la pata a mis perros. Era bien abusivo si con los animales y hasta con mis hijos. Porque él llegaba a la casa y si mi hijo estaba ahí pegaba a pelear, lo pateaba y lo tiraba allá. Mis hijos lo veían, se ponían a temblar y se escondían debajo de la cama. Era una cosa horrible, horrible, horrible. Yo no puedo hablar de eso porque yo lloro, eso yo todavía lo recuerdo.”  
*(“Yes, he abused animals a lot, the horses, he would kick the dogs like this [kick inflection]. He was very abusive, with the animals and even with my children. He would get home and if my son was right there [pointing at the floor] he would begin arguing and kicking him and throwing him around. My children would see him coming home and they would shake in fear and hide under the bed. It was a horrible thing, horrible, horrible! I can't talk about it because it makes me cry, I still remember that.”)*

It was clear in her mind that the way he mistreated the animals—not to mention her children—was wrong, but she felt impotent and helpless and did not know what to do because, as she says it was her reality and she had to deal with it as much as it was possible. Gloria continued talking about the way he abused the horses and the sadistic tendencies she observed, an emotional moment for her because she still remembers the way he used the horse whip on his sons as well. She explains the ill-treatment he gave the horses by stating that;

*“He'd hit the horse horribly right here [pointing to her left shoulder] ... kick the dog [foot inflection] and hit the horse with a hammer right here [pointing to her shoulder and head].”*

Most of the participants in the study have an affinity with the animals and feel empathy with the animal's fear, physical pain, and neglect, and they make a connection with the abuse

they suffered. For Gloria, the acts of cruelty her ex-husband committed against the animals and her kids still haunt her. In the same way he abused the animals, he abused her and the children. The whip he used to beat the animals, he used on his own children as well. “Animals share with children a tie of profound vulnerability. Both, too, are usually the first to feel the brunt of human callousness” (Scully, 2002). When children witness all sorts of acts against animals at such a tender age it could have a great impact in adulthood, manifesting in different ways such as “the continuation of the cycle of abuse toward animals and their own kind” (F. R. Ascione, 2005). Gloria also said he hit the horses with the “escofina”—a solid metal tool he used to file down the horse’s hooves, and “the way they reacted and screamed while they were struck with it is still vivid in my mind,” she says. “A kick . . . just hurts, and like animals, we scream. When injured or abused, animals shriek, squeal, squawk, bark, growl, whinny, and whimper. Some shake, perspire, and lose breath when in danger” (Scully, 2002).

Gloria’s mother mistreated her and for this reason she eloped from home. Her marriage lasted 18 years. She has five children from that relationship. She said she did not know better at that time because she was very young and depended on him financially, which kept her in the cycle of abuse. Gloria was unaware of what domestic violence was and thought the abuse was just a normal part of being married. “In the Puerto Rican culture the family is conceived as tightly woven where family members are mutually supportive and the mother is the thread that holds the family together” (Nieto, 2000). Gloria went to her mother for support but her mother’s beliefs on the role of women and mothers in the family and society in general did not serve her well. These sexist ideologies come from the patriarchal social structures that teaches women not to oppose their husbands because they are the owners and “*los trapos sucios se lavan en la casa*” (“*you wash the dirty clothes at home*”) (Vidal-Rodríguez, 2002). Gloria tried many times

to leave him by asking her mother for help but she was rejected. Her mother was simply following society's expectation that women must follow the rules and orders of their male partners. But Gloria's mother was also violently abused by her husband (Gloria's father) and by her second husband, Gloria's stepfather:

“Entonces cuando ella se juntó con mi padrastro ya yo estaba grandecita y si vi violencia porque él la corría a ella con un mocho porque él tomaba y se volvía como loco. Yo me iba con mi mama corriendo por los cañaverales y por los guayabales y él como un monstruo detrás de nosotras con un mocho.” (*“When she lived with my stepfather I was a teenager and yes, I saw violence because he would run after her with a machete when he was drunk and go crazy. I would run with my mother through the sugar cane and guava fields while he was chasing us with a machete, like a monster.”*)

Through her teenage eyes, he was a cruel and perverse person capable of inflicting fatal wounds on the body of his own wife, and at that tender age she feared her mother was doomed to be killed that way. Gloria believes that coming to terms with what she suffered has helped her cope with the reality of domestic violence and also learned that not all men are violent. She clearly understands her case should be heard and that women should open their eyes and be alert against the monster that is domestic violence. She adds that talking about it helps her psychologically and might help other women and men to seek help and to watch out when their partners are abusing animals. Gloria shares her home with birds. She loves to hear them sing and says that abusing animals is not right, that what she experienced with her aggressor beating the dogs and the horses was intolerable and will always be a traumatic memory. She states this behavior could be an indicator of something worse to come and that children should be protected from witnessing such cruelty because, since she still remembers what she went through as a child, she contends that “children these days might not be able to cope with it because I'm still trying to cope with it after all these years.”



#### IV. The Survey: Connecting Domestic Violence and Animal Cruelty

“Pateaba a mi perra después de maltratarme emocionalmente.” (*“He would kick the dog right after he mistreated me emotionally.”*)

“Empezó con palabras obscenas y luego maltrató a los animales y luego me empezó a maltratar físicamente a mí y lo que le rodeaba a su lado.” (*“He begun by verbally abusing me, then mistreated the animals and then started physically abusing me and everything around him.”*)

These are only two of the many accounts I gathered in shelters and centers for women survivors of domestic violence in Puerto Rico. Women and children are not only exposed to violent episodes like these but have also been forced to witness their own animals being killed. In 1977, Lenore E. Walker, author of several breakthrough studies on battered women, described a case of a woman in the U.S. whose husband forced her to act like an animal. She explains, “one woman described life-threatening physical assaults during acute battering incidents, one of which resulted in a broken neck. Yet to her, the psychological degradation that she suffered was far more humiliating and painful. She reported that her worst battering experience was when her husband forced her to the floor on her hands and knees and coerced her into making sounds like an animal” (Walker 1977). She was forced to perform an animal act for his diversion, situating animals and women in a category of inferiority; she was pushed to the ground, to the lowest and filthiest place where animals have been placed for centuries.

Caring and empathy have similarities in meaning. Noddings (1984) refers at one point to caring as involving stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's and at another point she refers to caring as a displacement of interest from one's own reality to the reality of the other. The next questionnaire responses have been illustrated exactly the way they were expressed by the participants, laden with a deep understanding of the deviations the animals had to endure as well.

## A. Questionnaire Responses and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered to 68 participants residing and receiving services at twelve shelters and centers for abused women in Puerto Rico. Their ages range from 21 – 57 years old. The level of education varies, twenty-eight of them having a high school diploma, seven reaching junior high, nine holding a bachelor's degree, two holding a master's degree, and one with a technical degree. Fifteen of the respondents left this response blank. The majority of the participants referred to themselves as single. Forty-eight (n=48), or 77%, responded that they currently own pets and (n=50) 80% said they had pets during childhood. Dogs appear to be the favorite animal in their households, followed by cats, birds, rabbits, horses, fish, and a lizard.

Some of the forty-eight who responded affirmatively they currently own pets left the following comments on the question of what happened to the pets in their care:

*“Lo tuve que dejar en casa porque me albergué.” (“I had to leave him behind when I came to the shelter.”)*

*“Uno me lo mataron y el otro lo tuve que regalar cuando quedé albergada.” (“One was killed and I had to give away the other one when I came to the shelter.”)*

*“Uno se encuentra en un refugio para animales y el otro con mi mamá.” (“One is with my mother and the other one at an animal shelter.”)*

*“Unos han muerto, otros se desaparecieron, o se regalaron, y otros los botó mi compañero.” (“Some have died, others disappeared, or were given away, and others my partner threw out.”)*

*“El padre de mis hijos lo regaló [el gato] sin mi permiso.” (“The father of my children gave [the cat] away without my consent.”)*

One woman gave her pet away once she entered a shelter, another woman had to leave her pet in her home, another took one pet to an animal shelter (where animals are likely to be euthanized) while the other was kept by her mother. Women at shelters in Puerto Rico usually do not have options other than to leave their pets behind with the aggressor and with family

members assuming they might take good care of the animals. Some might decide on delaying entering shelters in order to find a good place for their animals first. It would be critical to know how many women, while waiting, lost their lives. The participants commented:

*“Muerto. El me lo mató [el pez]. Me lo echó por el inodoro.” (“Dead. He killed [the fish]. He flushed it in the toilet.”)*

*“Hace un año mi ex-compañero me mató el perro en una discusión conmigo.” (“A year ago, my ex-partner killed my dog while we were having an argument.”)*

*“Eran de mis hijos. El los envenenaba o los ahorcaba.” (“They were my children’s [dog and cat]. He would either poison or hang them.”)*

A woman expressed that her male partner killed her fish just because he could. A dog was killed in the midst of a heated argument in the household. This man got so angry he redirected his aggressive tendencies and ended up committing the crime of killing a living creature that belonged to his partner. The perpetrator who cruelly treated his children’s pets by poisoning and hanging I speculate might need to visualize or experiment with the reactions of those who witnessed the crime and to demonstrate he was in control. Assuming the children were present during the crimes perpetrated by their father against their pets we can assert that, according to the Animal Protection Law 154, he also abused them, because the law establishes that when children are present during animal abuse it is considered a form of child abuse. In households where violent behavior is manifested against animals children might be exposed and treated belligerently as well. “Social workers investigating child abuse may be trained to evaluate the circumstances in which animals live” (Hutton, 1983). Various U.S. states require cross-reporting of child abuse and animal cruelty.<sup>18</sup> I could not find any information regarding any established protocol or policy on cross-reporting from animal welfare agencies and social workers in Puerto Rico. One of the counselors interviewed confirms there are no procedures or

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<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.animallawcoalition.com/animal-cruelty/article/1015>

guidelines in place to observe or ask about animals in the house. They are missing an opportunity to uncover violence in the house through observation of the conditions of any animals there and the way they are treated. Puerto Rico's crime statistics reveal a great deal of violence, and "the co-existence of violence, power, and control in all violent situations suggests that these issues are likely operating in the abusive treatment of animals, as well" (Solot, 1997).

## **B. Partners Threatening to Hurt Pets**

*"Sí, en el momento que abandoné la casa y me fui buscando refugio." ("Yes, the moment I left the house to seek shelter.")*

*"Emocionalmente me maltrataba y luego pateaba a la perra. Pero físicamente no me maltrató." ("He would emotionally abuse me and would kick my dog afterward. But he did not mistreat me physically.")*

As some research suggest, some batterers are often cruel to animals and would begin threatening to hurt them. I wanted to ask the participants whether or not the batterers would threaten to hurt animals. Eighteen participants (n=18), 28.5%, responded to their male partners' threats to hurt and/or cause injury to animals. They offered detailed responses on the questionnaire's comment section and these are a few of them:

*"Sí, le dio al perro y a mí me tiró con un zapato." ("Yes, he beat the dog and then threw a shoe toward me.")*

*"Al animal solamente, ese día (de la agresión) solamente. Llegó tomado y cogió al perrito por el cuello." ("At the animal only, that day (of the aggression) only. He came in drunk and grabbed the puppy by the neck.")*

*"Me amenazó de muerte matando a mi perro. Antes agredía a mi mascota pues sabía que yo la quería." ("He threatened to kill me by killing my dog. [He] would first assault my pet because he knew I loved her.")*

*"Él le dio una pela con una correa al perro." ("He beat the dog with a belt.")*

*"Sí. En la casa de la mamá él tenía, mejor dicho, tiene gallos y cuando él ve que los perros se acercan en vez de protegerlos de alguna manera que los perros no los dañen solo comienza a agredirlos con lo primero que encuentra." ("Yes. At his mother's house he had, well, he still has roosters and, when he sees the dogs getting too close to the roosters, instead of protecting them he beat them with whatever he finds.")*

“Empezó con palabras verbales [obscenas] y luego maltrató a los animales y luego me empezó a maltratar físicamente a mí y lo que le rodeaba a su lado.” (*“He began by verbally abusing [obscenities] me then mistreated the animals and then he started physically abusing me and everything around him.”*)

“El maltrato fue primero a mi persona y a mi propiedad y luego a mi mascota que tanto amor le tenía.” (*“He mistreated me first, my property, and then my pet who I loved very much.”*)

According to Vaca-Guzmán’s 2004 study in Argentina, the perpetrator abuses pets to inflict suffering on the members of the family, as a manifestation of power over the family, as a warning of what he is capable—or simply because the animal becomes an object in which to manifest his aggressiveness: “Once the barrier becomes a path of animal abuse the abuser may move on to human beings in the family or elsewhere for the cruelty toward animals socializes the aggressor, turning into more episodes of cruelty.” In this study, the sequence of abuse leans toward men threatening and abusing animals before perpetrating abuse toward women.

### **C. Destruction of Property**

The question of the destruction of property was added to see if the participants would add any animal cruelty incidents in their responses. Animals are considered property under most animal protection laws. But the P.R. Law 154 for the protection and wellbeing of animals rejects the term property for animals and adopts a more humane approach that states that animals are sentient beings that deserve humane treatment. According to Ganley (1985), four kinds of battery against women have been identified and one of them includes property and animals. The author places property and animals in the same category, implying they have the same attributes. None of the participants included the destruction or killing of animals in their responses. Their comments have to do with material possessions such as cellular phones and furniture and most deal with breaking these objects. The participants clearly see a distinction between property and

animals. Twenty-four (n=24) or 38% reported destruction of property. These are some of the responses:

“Recuerdo en una Navidad se puso furioso y el árbol de Navidad lo sacó con todo y adornos y lo tiró a patio. Fue algo cruel ya que los niños entendían el significado del arbolito de Navidad y me preguntaban si los Reyes Magos le dejarían sus regalos.” (*“I remember one time during the holidays when he got angry and took the Christmas tree with all the ornaments and threw it in the yard. It was a cruel thing because the children understood the significance of the Christmas tree and asked me whether or not the Three Kings would bring them their gifts.”*)

“Rompió una puerta de la cocina, porque yo le había dicho que no lo amaba y quería terminar nuestra relación. Él buscó el hacha y rompió la puerta.” (*“He broke the kitchen door because I told him I did not love him anymore and wanted to end the relationship. He broke the door with an ax.”*)

“Una vez yo estaba en (pueblo de la Isla) en la casa de la esposa de mi hermano y mi agresor me llamó por el celular y me dijo que si yo no volvía a la casa me iba a vender el Home Theater.” (*“Once I was . . . at my brother’s wife’s home and my aggressor called me on the phone to tell me if I did not return home he would sell my home theatre [system].”*)

“Rompió mi celular porque él lo pagaba.” (*“He broke my cellular phone because he paid for it.”*)

“Me rompía las cosas de mi casa como puertas y muebles.” (*“He would break things in my house such as doors and furniture.”*)

#### **D. Other Animal-Related Incidents**

The rationale behind the question is to observe any level of awareness about animals other than their own. I kept a response from one of the participants who shared the experience of her own dog getting hit by a car the day of the domestic violence disturbance when she left her home, and the emotional turmoil felt for the dog no longer with her. Apparently, her partner was not abusive toward animals but during the violent outburst her pet was killed by a car and the participant longs for the lost dog and remembers how it happened with deep sorrow:

“Ese día [de la agresión] al abrir el portón de mi casa mi perrita [nombre] salió y un carro que pasaba la vio pero no se detuvo y la pisó lo cual le causó la muerte. Jamás olvidaré su

última mirada. Al narrar esto estoy viviendo ese momento de dolor y pérdida.” (*“That day [of the aggression] while opening the gate of my house my dog [name] got out and got hit by a car that did not stop and crushed her, killing her. While narrating it, I am reliving that painful moment of loss.”*)

The attachment she developed with her pet was so unique it still causes extreme pain. As Flynn (2000) explains, “The pets often initiated interactions, sensing that they were needed after a violent episode. At other times, some animals attempted to protect women during an assault. In addition, pets were clearly stressed emotionally when their human friends had been abused.” Her animal might have been the only emotional support for her during abusive episodes.

Three participants commented on men’s relationships with their roosters: the first one said her partner killed a rooster; the second one narrated the way her partner killed a rooster by twisting the neck to speed up death; the third commented on the purchase of roosters in the neighborhood by young men to fight them in “galleras” (cockfights) to earn money. Cockfighting is a tradition that came from Spain during colonization and remains ingrained in Puerto Rican society.

During another interview a woman from the US mainland who came to Puerto Rico to live with the man she says used to call “her love” told me her neighbors killed her two Chihuahua dogs by way of poisoning. Animal Poisoning is punishable under the Animal Protection P.R. Law 154 and is a 3<sup>rd</sup>- or 4<sup>th</sup>-degree felony. Lastly, animal abandonment is common in Puerto Rico and one of the participants is well aware of this commenting that abandoned animals suffer hunger in the streets. Animal abandonment is a crime punishable as a 4<sup>th</sup>-degree felony and carries a maximum sentence of 3 years imprisonment and if the animal suffers physical injury and/or causes death as a result, it carries a 3<sup>rd</sup>-degree felony with 8 years maximum of imprisonment. These are the comments:

“Mató los gallos.” (*“He killed the roosters.”*)

“A él le gusta la peleas de gallos, guarda gallos en los bajos de la casa. Al enfermarse uno de los gallos él lo cogió, le torció el cuello y lo mató para apresurarle la muerte.” (*“He likes cockfights, keeps roosters in the basement. When one of them got sick he grabbed him and twisted his neck to speed up the death.”*)

“Los vecinos envenenaron a mis Chihuahuas.” (*“The neighbors poisoned my Chihuahuas.”*)

“Peleas de perros y los perros hicieron daño a la propiedad.” (*“Dogfights and the dogs damaged the property [house]”*).

“Amigos míos han puesto sus perros a pelear.” (*“My friends have fought their dogs.”*)

“Abandono de perritos en (pueblo de la Isla) y animales que pasan hambre porque son tantos en el hogar.” (*“Dog abandonment in [town] and animal suffering hunger because there are so many in the house.”*)

#### **E. Other Animal-Related Acts Considered Abusive**

The question regarding other abusive acts related to animals was formulated to get a sense of the level of awareness when it comes to any animal around them. In this case, more specifically I asked about animals, other than their own. The question caused them to remember incidents of abuse against their own animals by their partners and even cases in which they knew of other instances of cruelty toward animals. These are some of the comments:

“En el barrio donde yo vivo hay muchachos que tienen perros Doberman y pitbulls y los ponen a pelear con otros perros de las misma raza.” (*“In the barrio where I live there are kids who have Doberman and pitbull dogs and fight them with others of the same breed.”*)

“Sí. Conocí a dos señoras donde a una él le abría la jaula para que los pájaros se fueran y a la otra él le sacaba el gato afuera para que los perros del vecino lo atacaran.” (*“Yes. I knew two women [one of whose partners] would open the birdcage so the birds would fly away and the other [whose partner] would take the cat outside to be attacked by the neighbor’s dogs.”*)

“Una vez se le dañó la guagua y comenzó a decirme que por culpa mía se había dañado y luego notó que la perrita se había comido el control remoto y le dio una patada a la perrita tirándola al otro lado.” (*“One time his truck broke down and he said it was my fault and then noticed the dog had chewed up the remote control and he kicked her throwing her in the air.”*)



“Sí, cuando reventó a un gallo contra la pared y se explotó el animal y después ahorcó a un perro con una soga.” (“Yes, when he threw a rooster against the wall and the animal exploded and later when he hung a dog with a rope.”)

## **F. Women Rethinking the Idea of Entering a Shelter**

Research studies indicate that some women rethink the idea of leaving the home to seek shelter because they do not want to leave their pets behind (Flynn, 2000; Ascione, 2005). These studies indicate that women delay getting to a safe place because they fear their partners will kill their pets. For the participants in this study these men are aware of the bond between their partners and the animals and between their children and the animals and use intimidation tactics such as physical abuse toward an animal as a way of manipulation and control.

López-Báez brought in a second domestic violence case in which sexual abuse and threats to kill the pets were the norm. The victim refused to leave the home without her pet even though the abuse was extreme. She had been delaying seeking shelter because her male partner threatened to kill her dog. As López-Báez states, “it was a horrible case to deal with because she did not want to leave the home to seek shelter and leave her pet behind.”

The first ever protection order expedited to an animal in Puerto Rico happened in 2009 when a woman victim of domestic violence asked the courts for her pet to be included in the protective order as well because the dog was also abused by her male partner (Hernández-Pérez, October 2009). The animal was placed temporarily in a foster home because women’s shelters do not provide services for those who seek shelter with their pets. Some women do not have family members who are willing or want to care for the animals while they stay at the shelter. As Ascione (2000) states, “Safety, confidentiality, pet ownership, locating pet sheltering, financial, veterinary, pet transportation, women’s post-shelter housing, publicity, staff training, animal abuse, and even ethical issues challenge those considering development of pet sheltering

programs.” These are some of the comments gathered on the questionnaire pertaining to this subject of participants rethinking the idea of seeking shelter:

“Uno se encuentra en un refugio para animales y el otro con mi mamá.” (*“One [cat] is at an animal shelter and the other one with my mother.”*)

“Cuidando con un amigo.” (*“A friend is taking care of [the dog].”*)

“Perro tuvo que ser entregado al albergue.” (*“The dog had to be taken to the [animal] shelter.”*)

“Cuando pasó el incidente se los llevaron los vecinos.” (*“My neighbors took [the dog] away when the incident happened.”*)

“Se quedaron en casa de mi mamá.” (*“[Dogs, birds, and rabbit] stayed at my mother’s house.”*)

“Uno me lo mataron y el otro lo tuve que regalar cuando quedé albergada.” (*“One [a dog] was killed and I had to give away the other [a cat] when I went to the shelter.”*)

“Lo tuve que dejar en casa porque me albergué.” (*“I had to leave [a dog] behind at home because I went to the shelter.”*)

## V. The Counselors

“Llegó una participante que expresó que su esposo había degollado a su gato y lo había puesto en la bañera y la había llamado para el baño para que viera la sorpresa que le tenía. Este hombre le subía un caballo arriba a la sala en el hogar para maltratarla. Ella adquirió sarna por el caballo.” (*“A woman said her husband slit her cat’s throat, placed the animal in the toilet and asked her to come to the bathroom because he had a surprise for her. This man would also bring a horse into the living room to mistreat her. She developed mange acquired from the horse.”*) - Interview with a counselor

“Su ex-pareja le mató a una de las perras y ella se quería traer la otra al albergue.” (*“Her ex-partner killed one of her two female dogs and she wanted to bring the other dog to the shelter.”*) - Counselor questionnaire response

Counselors working in shelters for women survivors of domestic violence have the responsibility of ensuring the welfare of the women who take the first step and make the phone call that might change their lives forever. They observe first-hand the conditions in which women are left after a domestic violence incident. Women are at the highest level of danger

when they leave their partners (L. E. Walker, 1980) and some must carefully plan their departure by analyzing the best time to escape without their partners' awareness. The counselors were very receptive of my study as they had many stories to tell about women and their animals and about other co-worker's experiences with the topic. While visiting one of the shelters the director gave me the forms they made available to women at the shelter. None of the forms ask any questions about animals. Such questions are essential keys to better serving the population of women who own pets and must leave their homes for their own safety, and that of children and pets.

The first contact and initial interview form, which includes physical, emotional, sexual, threats, and restriction of liberty as forms of abuse, was taken, I suspect, from the DAIP (Domestic Violence Intervention Program) model from Duluth, Minnesota. The DAIP created a graphic, "Power and Control Wheel"<sup>19</sup> that is widely used as an educational tool by domestic violence prevention advocates around the U.S. The wheel was created in 1980 and divides abuse into nine categories; the intimidation category adds pet abuse as a form of intimidation and isolation. In the appendix of Vidal-Rodríguez's 2002 book about women and their struggles in the new millennium in Puerto Rico, she adds a power and control wheel very similar to the DAIP, but does not cite the source nor even mention in the intimidation hub the abuse of animals as in the original DAIP, though the author briefly mentions that some men force women to have sex with animals.

### **A. Women Seeking Shelter**

There is a critical interval between the moment women make the decision to leave the abusive relationship—and begin the actual process of gathering important documents—to the moment they actually leave. It becomes a matter of life and death to women; during this critical moments counselors help victims plan leaving their abusive relationships by following some

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<sup>19</sup> See Domestic Violence Intervention Program (AID) and [The Duluth Model Wheel](#).

simple steps, such as getting important documents like social security numbers, birth certificates, medications, and children's documents. In cases in which women decide not to get shelter that day, they do not call women back unless the woman asks to be called at a certain time. If their partners pick up the phone counselors do not present themselves as shelter workers but ask for a different name as a precautionary method. The escape plan counselors use does not include animals or any possible arrangements or recommendations for women and their pets. None of the shelters researched in Puerto Rico cite animals in the escape plan protocol for women and their pets or on any intake form. One of the counselors interviewed said she has had cases in which women have asked what to do with their animals. She reflects:

*"I had a case in a shelter where I used to work of a woman who had parakeets and a cat and she did not know what to do once she realized animals were not allowed in shelter facilities. I had to consult with the shelter director because the woman told her she knew once he gets back home and finds out she is no longer there, he was going to free the birds and kill the cat and she was very concerned. We said, "Oh God, what are we going to do?" Because there was no way we would make her reason she had to leave her pets behind. We worked all day on the case and obviously she did not come to the shelter that day because she was not going to tell him she was leaving him so she stayed in the house one more night."*

She decided to stay in the home for the sake of her pets, enduring one more night of terror with a man who at any moment would turn violent: "Women may delay entering domestic violence shelters because of concern for the welfare of their pets left behind" (C. P. Flynn, 2000). For some, it is incomprehensible to think that a woman would decide to stay, risking her life just for an animal. I can infer from the counselor's account that they felt the woman committed a transgression because, as the counselors says, "nobody could make her reason" that she had to leave and realize her life was more important than any animal. But how and why would you tell a woman who is already a victim of violence and wants to be a survivor to comply with a hierarchical structure that requests her to leave her pet behind? What if the animal has been her

sole source of comfort after a beating? What if, while protecting the animal, she is also protecting and liberating herself from all the violence they endured? The counselor added the woman called her the next day to tell she found a friend who agreed to take her pets. While she was telling me this I remembered an interview I had with a participant who told me she had been at the shelter with her children for six months. In this case the neighbors took care of her pets the day of the domestic violence. Given the fact that some women might stay longer than they might expect, what if her friend can no longer take care of the animals? What is she going to do? The counselor continued the story and said that after two days at the shelter her friend told her she could no longer take care of the pets. She frantically called a family member but the person declined to take the animals because she could not have a cat indoors. The counselor continued:

*“She cried so much for those animals. She adored her pets very much! She talked with her friend again and her friend changed her mind and kept the pets for a few more days. She then got in touch with other family members who took her and her pets in, so she left the shelter to be with her pets.”*

This woman had to deal with the reality of being a victim of domestic violence who owns and care for her animals. Not only that, she had to think and re-think, making the decision to call and find a safe place for herself and her pets away from her home. Despite being overwhelmed with the circumstances surrounding her situation she did not give up, and at the end she reunited with them.

But not all stories have happy endings. One counselor stated in the questionnaire that she had a participant who had a cat and because animals are not allowed in shelters she had to leave her behind. Her aggressor, who never loved the animal, refused to give it back to her and was not feeding her. L. Walker (1990) states, “As a way to terrorize and control their women, batterers have been known to hold pets hostage... and the psychologically manipulative techniques employed by batterers... [have] the effect of accelerating and exacerbating their daily experience

of terror.” Another counselor said a participant’s ex-partner killed one of her dogs and she wanted to bring the other to the shelter. The system in place that serves women and children does not accommodate the needs of women who also have animals in their care. I do not see it as an intentional prejudice by the shelter workers. What I see is a prevalent lack of funding and resources for counselors and the women and children they take in their care. Because of this, caring for animals is out of the question. Moreover, it is not part of our culture to place animals in such a seemingly privileged place. Our social structure has dictated that animals are not relevant; therefore, they should not be taken into consideration. Yet it must be considered that those critical moments—in which the woman had to spend one more day in danger in the household—could be her last day alive.

A counselor stated that “they have received participants who have shown up with their pets but expressed that they do not really want to talk about them for at that moment they come in with harsher problems . . . than their pets.” Another counselor affirmed that even though the question about animals is not in the in-take form they do their best to obtain as much information as possible related to the violent event during the counseling. A similar result was gathered in Vaca-Guzmán’s (2004) study in Argentina in which family violence specialists stated that they did not specifically ask victims of family violence about violence toward pets during counseling. The study says that generally women are so absorbed in their own problems they do not talk about anything else other than themselves. Given the fact that participants could spend up to a week or more sheltered and assuming they are in a very deep emotional turmoil during the interview session, some information about their experiences and the animals left behind might escape their minds. During this time, if the animal question has not been asked the animal’s fate might be in jeopardy. This could result in a serious emotional setback. In addition, some women

may not talk about their animals because they fear insensitive reactions from friends and shelter staff workers. They might feel misunderstood worrying people might think they care more about animals than their own lives. But the mere fact of bringing animals to shelters means the animals possess significance. Animals become the catalyst for some participants' decisions to leave a violent relationship, a crucial force behind that decision.

## **B. Children and Pets**

Some counselors have received women who have talked about their pets, and their children have also talked about how much they miss them. A counselor mentioned their concerns about children being cruel to animals. Children feel the impact of the changes in their lives when they suddenly have to leave everything behind. At the same time women may experience a sense of guilt having to remove children from their home, the seemingly safe place for the family. In a shelter for abused women and children in the U.S., 32% of the women reported their children had hurt or killed a family pet (F. Ascione, 1998). A counselor commented in the questionnaire that a woman commented that her son would grab lizards, tear up their tails, and kill them, and that he enjoyed doing it. Fernando Tapia's 1971 study informs us that abused children mistreated animals themselves. But what really stimulates a child to behave this way? It is puzzling to think the mother expressed that he enjoyed torturing and killing the animal. While it is true that "without proper intervention, children may indeed graduate to more serious abuses including crimes against people" (Hensley, 2003) while practicing on animals, and that "he might [merely] be curious about animals" (F. R. Ascione, 2005), we can also argue that this boy might be copying a behavior not only seen in his parents, but in the extended family, the media, and even at school.

### **i. Women talking about their animals**

The question of whether or not women talk about their pets during counseling provoked a wave of comments among the counselors. Their commentary suggests the stories women tell about their pets during counseling were still intact in the counselors' memories. On this question, 19 of 37 counselors responded affirmatively offering insightful comments, 15 answered negatively (only one offering a comment), and 4 counselors left it blank. The counselor who responded negatively nevertheless said that she had women wanting to leave their homes to come to the shelter but who expressed concerns and decided not to because they did not want to abandon their pets and/or did not have resources to have someone care for them. One of the victims told a counselor of the way a participant's male partner mistreated a goat and a horse. The participant suspected he had sex with the goat. In Walker's U.S. study, women reported being forced to engage in unusual sexual acts such as inserting objects in their vaginas and having sex with animals (L. E. Walker, 2009). Vidal-Rodríguez (2002) briefly mentions Walker's study in her book on sexual aggression against women, but she does not go further to ask women in her study if such was the cases with them, if their partners had engaged in acts against animals.

Bestiality is taboo in many societies while in others it might be a motive for comic stories. While listening to one Puerto Rican radio station over the Internet, in one of the programs they asked the audience to call to tell their stories on craziest things they have ever heard, a man called saying his best friend lost his Dalmatian and was terribly sad for the loss. He did not understand why his friend was so extremely sad until, under a vow of secrecy, his friend confessed that he used to have sex with the dog when he could not get "carne" ("meat," meaning women). They all exploded in laughter thinking he was joking but he seriously insisted it was the



truth. The DJ kept laughing at the issue and others proceeded to tell their own stories of other people having sex with hens, horses, etc., joking that they would do it in an extreme case of lust.

### **C. Counselors Questionnaire Results**

The questionnaires were filled out by 37 counselors at the 12 shelters and centers for women residing and receiving services. As stated in the methodology section, the professional staff's questionnaire and interview questions are a modified version of Frank R. Ascione's first survey on domestic violence and animal cruelty (F. Ascione, 1997).

#### **i. Counselors' awareness of the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse**

The first question asked the counselors if they had heard any studies on the connection between domestic violence and animal cruelty. Thirteen (n=13) or 35% of them expressed they had heard of the correlation between domestic violence and animal cruelty, whereas nineteen (n=19) or 51% had not heard of such studies before. Thirteen (n=13) or 35% did not make any comments but one commented that women said not all aggressors retaliate against animals. The counselors who had heard of such studies commented that it was prevalent in the women they treat as a mode of emotional abuse. Another counselor mentioned that in many cases it is one of the many ways male partners cause harm to women's property or their pets as a form of emotional abuse. One commented that whoever abuses an animal could abuse anybody else and that violence has no parameters, an aggressive person is always aggressive. Thirteen had heard about the connection from other counselors. For instance, one heard of a man who would strike a participant's pet because he knew he was also abusing her and then threatened to kill her by killing her pet. Just one of them does not know if there is such connection with the women at shelters but have read it from mental health magazines. One said that have heard only on the connection between violence against animals and human violence in general but does not have

specific data or more information. The counselors who said they had not heard of such studies commented that they had cases of participants involved in such situations from the women they have treated but that no one has come up with problems in which an animal was involved.

## **ii. Intake forms and the animal question**

The second question asks whether or not the intake form inquires about any animals in the household. All responses were negative as none of the shelters and centers asks whether participants own or care for animals. For this reason 100% of the responses were negative, but several commented that some participants talk about their pets and worry for the ones left behind in the homes; that they mention they had to leave their pets with family members; that during the initial counseling they try to get as much information as possible about the violent incident; that in certain cases they had taken measures to bring participants' pets to family members or counselors who have temporarily taken animals to their homes; and that women have talked about their dogs, roosters, cats, birds, horses, and other animals.

## **iii. Do women mention pets during counseling?**

On the third question, whether or not women mention pets during counseling, (n=20) 54% responded positively, while (n=15) 40% responded negatively and (n=2) 5% left it blank.

The ones who responded positively added in the comments section that they had received participants who had shown up with their pets but expressed that it does not mean they want to talk about them; that they had received women who had talked about their pets, and whose children had talked about how much they miss them; that in one case the aggressor abandoned the family dog; that a space was provided at the shelter for a participant's pet while she was a resident; that support was offered to a victim in a legal case in which the aggressor was found guilty and charged with battery and animal cruelty; that a participant pleaded with them to keep

her pet at the shelter; that a participant said her partner would beat up her pet leading to heated discussions that would end with her being verbally and emotionally abused; that during a heated discussion the woman's pet ran away getting hit and killed by a car; that a participant was forced to leave her cat behind because animals were not allowed in shelters; that a man tried to take away one participant's pet and would boast that he was going to hit or kill the pet; that a husband would beat up the dog, grabbing the animal by the tail, throwing it away, and hitting it with a broom stick; that one aggressor threw a participant's dog from a second floor; that a woman's ex-partner killed one of her dogs and she wanted to bring the other to the shelter; that others had talked about dogs and other animal abuse; that women had talked about their pets but not about any abuse toward them; that women had called family members to learn the status of their pets and to claim them; that some have called family members to ask about their pets and had given them to family members to care for them; and that another remembered animal abandonment.

#### **iv. Pattern of animal abuse**

The fourth question asks counselors if they have observed any pattern of animal abuse. The question was formulated to see if I could distinguish levels of awareness of animal cruelty. The question was not well phrased therefore misunderstood creating a wide range of interpretations. An outstanding (n=30) 81% of the counselors responded they had not seen any pattern of abuse and from these only six offered comments. The few comments are a sign the question was ambivalent. Three (n=3) 8% responded affirmative and offered comments and (n=4) 10% left it blank but two of them offered comments. A counselor answered that women had shown love toward their animals. She inferred from the question that I was asking about women's treatment of animals: a clear example the question was not well formulated. Even though there is no pattern of abuse they offered insightful comments.

The few with affirmative responses commented that they had cases of women talking about it and they commented that happens in 20% of the cases; that every two women have talked about animal abuse that promoted later abuse against them; and that a child would tear up a lizard's tail and killed it and that he enjoyed doing it. The only one of the two who left it blank commented that they do not have any information but knew from another counselor that one of the participants killed the family dog by way of strangulation.

#### **v. Percent of homes where the connection exists**

The fifth question asks if they could provide a percentage of homes where the connection between domestic violence and animal cruelty exists. Twelve responses (n=12) or 32% were affirmative and 12 commentaries were given, fifteen (n=15) or 40% answered negatively with no comments added, and 7 (n=7) or 18% left it blank with no remarks.

From the affirmative commentaries twelve said that sometimes during arguments animals are mistreated with motives of retaliation and/or anger; that there was a connection because nowadays women as well as animals are being abused; that in the majority of homes where there is violence it manifests itself in other areas; that in 25% of homes with domestic violence the perpetrator retaliates against animals to intimidate his victims; that the connection exists in approximately 20% of the cases; that she had heard of three cases in her three years of work experience; that it could exist in between 20 - 30% of the cases; that she understands it happens but not much information is gathered about it; that it exists in 5% of cases based on one case in which a woman narrated about animal abuse in the home by her partner; that she had only assisted in one case with animal abuse; that it exists roughly 25% of the time.

## vi. Situation of women in Puerto Rico and the patriarchal system

The last question asked their opinion about women's situation in Puerto Rico from their point of view as counselors working in shelters for women survivors of domestic violence. The options given to choose were: Worse, Same, or Improved (while working as counselors), with a section for comments. Twenty-two counselors (n=22) or 59.5% responded it is getting worse, while (n=9) 24% responded it is still the same, and (n=4) 10% commented it has improved.

Most responses referred to the disadvantageous situation of women within the patriarchal system, which prescribes and expects certain behaviors, the failure of legal system to protect them, a lack of political power, and their own concerns about the lack of resources available to give parental orientations on the treatment of children because there have been many children killed by their parents.

This study is based on the argument that the deep-rooted patriarchal system in the Puerto Rican culture perpetuates the view that women are inferior to men. This argument is supported by the counselors who participated in this study, who agree that;

1. Women still earn less than men and the economy makes women more prone to be abused and become silent.
2. Some men treat women as inferior and discriminate against them.
3. In the workplace, prejudices abound on the role of women, especially surrounding the role of women in the house. The prejudice against women in the house and workplace, as breadwinner and wife, is passed on from generation to generation and prevents women from becoming fully successful.
4. The laws are not rigorous enough with the aggressors. The way the cases are processed is wrong and makes women feel like they are allowing the abuse because

somehow they like it. The rudeness with which the court and judges treat women makes them apprehensive and fearful of denouncing their partners. In addition, the state does not consider women's wellbeing, violates their rights, and interferes with their bodies. It is important to add that some of the counselors see women letting their emotions rule their decisions to go back to the aggressors.

5. Women lack political power and the shortage of women legislators takes away the power to make decisions that would affect women's lives.
6. There is a feeling the shelter system fails to accommodate children's needs because there has been an increase in child abuse cases. The shelter system does not include animals of women who seek help even though they receive many requests. Most of the times they cannot do much.

## **VI. Conclusions and Recommendations**

In this paper, I have offered an overview of domestic violence and of attitudes toward women and animals in Puerto Rico, showing how a disregard for animal welfare can endanger women who are trying to escape situations of abuse. I have recounted specific stories of women survivors, as well as of shelter staff and representatives of the legal system. I examined the correlation in Puerto Rico between violence against women and animal cruelty and it was clearly demonstrated; there is a connection between animal abuse and domestic violence. It is relevant to Puerto Rican culture and it express itself in Puerto Rico.

Through this research, I have ascertained that critical changes are needed to improve the safety and lives of women, children, and animals in domestic abuse situations and in shelters in Puerto Rico. These changes need to include more progressive laws, but larger cultural change

can start at the grassroots level, with intake procedures and resources at the women's shelters.

My research shows that the following changes need to be implemented:

- Shelter protocols and policies should be examined to make allowances or find safe housing for companion animals. This study discovered that none of the shelters for abused women in Puerto Rico ask about the animals women left behind on their in-take form or during counseling; even though the majority of the counselors responded that many women do talk about their animals without being asked.
- The laws on the books must be enforced. The Animal Protection Law must add animals and protect them through restrictions orders.
- Data collection on animal cruelty incidents and database of women at shelters seeking protection for their pets as well must be improved in order to change laws and attitudes toward animals. Though over 100,000 stray dogs roam the streets and beaches of Puerto Rico, no agency has been assigned to carry out studies and provide statistics.
- Legislation to improve the lives of women using data collection must be passed.
- Education must be increased by means of campaigns spreading the word about the connection between domestic violence and animal abuse, and about the proper treatment of animals.
- Training of police officers on domestic violence and animal cruelty laws must be increased.
- Studies of children in violent homes must be undertaken. Even though children were initially not included in the study, they were present through the voices of counselors who talked about children and expressed their concerns. While there was only one

comment from a counselor on child abuse and animal cruelty, further research is needed for the reason that child counselors in Puerto Rico might not be aware of the studies.

- Shelters take in Lesbian women and their well-being should be protected as well. Therefore, studies on same-sex relationship violence and abuse against animals are needed.
- Men's voices on violence against women and animals must be heard. My study does not include interviews or questionnaires with the men the participants say committed the acts of cruelty toward animals. A different study is needed to know what men have to say about the connection between cruelty toward animals and family violence.
- More research is required to study women engaging in animal cruelty while enduring domestic violence episodes.
- More extensive studies on the connection between violence against women and animal cruelty in Puerto Rico from other academic perspectives.



## Appendix

### DECLARACION JURADA

Yo, **MIREYA HADDOCK ORTÍZ**, mayor de edad, divorciada y vecina de San Juan, Puerto Rico bajo el más formal juramento, **DECLARO y HAGO CONSTAR:**

1. Mi nombre y demás circunstancias personales son las antes expresadas.
2. No conocí a mis padres biológicos, por lo que fui criada por Doña Julia La Puerta Galarza y Don José Dolores Díaz Aponte.
3. Que he residido toda mi vida en la Comunidad del Caño Martín Pena.
4. Que estuve casada en un primer matrimonio y procreé dos hijos y una hija, todos mayores de edad.
5. Que mantuve a mis hijos/as haciendo pasteles y luego vendiéndolos.
6. Que por presiones familiares ya que vivía en pecado según la religión de estos, me casé en segundas nupcias en el 1993 con el señor Víctor Manuel Figueroa Maldonado, que en paz descanse.
7. Que previo al 1993 estuve 18 años conviviendo con él, por lo que viví con el señor Figueroa un total de 23 años.
8. Que durante la convivencia y el matrimonio no procreamos hijos/as.
9. Que al inicio de mi relación con Víctor, mi vecina me regaló un perrito que le puse de nombre Popy.
10. Que Popy se dejaba retratar y estuvo conmigo por más de 16 años.
11. Que durante los primeros años de convivencia con Víctor todo marchaba bien, puesto que él trabajaba y llegó a ser cocinero de la Fortaleza bajo la administración de Hernández Colón.
12. Que posteriormente comenzó a beber y a usar drogas, por lo que lo botaron del trabajo.
13. Que durante ese período se inició el maltrato físico y verbal conmigo.
14. Que llegó el momento en que lo tuve que forzar a que abandonara el hogar y comenzó así a deambular por las calles de Hato Rey y Santurce.
15. Que Víctor deambulaba porque ni su misma familia lo quería.
16. Que el 21 de abril de 1998 solicité una Orden de Protección por la amenaza de muerte que mi esposo me hizo.
17. El Tribunal emitió la Orden de Protección (OP-98-1713), porque entendió que Víctor me había maltratado física y verbalmente.
18. Que recuerdo que para esos mismos días Víctor pasó por la casa y mató salvajemente a pedradas a mi perrito Popy.
19. Que dicho acto me dolió hasta el tuétano y que fue una de las razones por las cuales fui al Tribunal a solicitar la Orden de Protección.
20. Que desde ese momento de la muerte de Popy pensé que si mi perrito que ya estaba viejito y Víctor lo había matado como lo mató, entonces de verdad mi vida corría peligro.

21. Que la familia de Víctor al igual que los hermanos de la Iglesia me dieron apoyo y el profesor de la Facultad de Derecho de la Universidad Interamericana, Lic. Enrique Vélez Rodríguez me recomendó ir a la Oficina Legal de la Comunidad a ver a la Lic. Olga López Báez.
22. Que la licenciada Olga López Báez me representó en la Vista de Orden de Protección y luego en el divorcio por trato cruel, Caso KDI-1998-2797 (701), Tribunal de Primera Instancia Sala de San Juan.
23. Que toda la vida he tenido perritos y otros animales, pero Popy siempre fue especial.
24. Que me gustan tanto los animales que una vez llegó al balcón de mi casa un pajarito "lovebird" con una patita rota. Yo lo curé poniéndole una paletita de madera de Payco y Mimi (su nombre) estuvo conmigo por un tiempo. La Mimi hasta bailaba al son de la música cristiana.
25. Que al momento no tengo mascotas, porque no tengo los medios económicos para mantenerlos.
26. Que creo que la violencia doméstica esta brutal y no se debe permitir.
27. Que las mujeres víctimas de violencia doméstica deben de buscar ayuda y no quedarse en esas relaciones.
28. Que todo lo declarado es la verdad a mi mejor entender y los hechos expuestos son ciertos y verdaderos por constarme de propio y personal conocimiento. Así lo juro y suscribo conociendo la penalidad que conlleva el falsear la declaración jurada.

**Y, PARA QUE ASI CONSTE**, suscribo y juro la presente, en San Juan, Puerto Rico, hoy 19 de mayo de 2009.

**MIREYA HADDOCK ORTÍZ**  
**DECLARANTE**

**AFFIDAVIT NÚMERO:** 1,002

Jurada y suscrita ante mí, la declaración que antecede, por Doña Mireya Haddock Ortíz, de las circunstancias personales antes expresadas y a quien por no conocer personalmente se identifica mediante su tarjeta de identificación electoral #0089911, expedida por la Comisión Estatal de Elecciones de Puerto Rico, la cual me muestra voluntariamente y en la que aparecen su firma y su voto. **DOY FE.**

En San Juan, Puerto Rico, hoy 19 de mayo de 2009.



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