

# SAFVIC ON THE SCENE

## THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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*"A moment later, Francine heard Nicky scream...Nicky was crying so hard she couldn't talk. I'd never heard a child cry like that. I...held her in my arms until she calmed down enough to tell me what had happened. Mickey (Francine's husband) had warned her that if he found the cat on the porch he'd wring its neck. When he caught her with it the second time he took it out of her arms and just broke its neck in his two hands" (McNulty, 1989).*

This is just one of many stories that are being told to women's shelters and law enforcement officers across Texas. Domestic violence is not as simple as one partner physically harming another. Instead, it consists of a complex range of controlling behaviors including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic maltreatment as well as isolation, male privilege, blaming, intimidation, threats, and minimizing/denying behaviors. In addition to controlling behaviors reported by women seeking shelters from violent relationships, a growing body of research indicates that some individuals who abuse their intimate partner also abuse their pets. Animal abuse is an important factor in domestic violence and is being used daily to manipulate victims into staying in violent relationships (Simmons, 2007). Beaten or neglected animals are indicators that abuse is occurring to other people in the household, whether it is towards a wife, girlfriend, or possibly children. Batterers will quickly learn that threats of violence towards animals serve to intimidate, control, and silence victims. Batterers will threaten, abuse, or kill pets:

- to demonstrate and confirm power and control over the family,
- to isolate the victims and children,
- to eliminate competition for attention,
- to force the family to keep violence a secret,
- to teach submission,
- to retaliate for acts of independence and self-determination,
- to perpetuate the context of terror,
- to prevent the victim from leaving or coerce her/him to return,
- to punish the victim for leaving, and/or
- to degrade the victim through involvement in the abuse (The Humane Society of the United States, 2007).

Most victims have been isolated from their family and friends, leaving their pets as their only other companion. Pets are usually the only ones who listen to them cry and comfort them when they are sad. Batterers target animals precisely because the victims are emotionally attached to their pets and thus hurting the animals is an effective way to intensify the emotional abuse (Favor, 2003).

Law enforcement officers have struggled to overcome the reluctance of some victims to leave their abusers. SAFVIC teaches officers the numerous factors why victims stay in a violent relationship, including financial reasons, complex emotional abuse, and also fear of retaliation against the victim or their children. Concern for pets is only one of many reasons why the victim may choose to stay in these violent situations. Threats of harm or even death to a family pet puts enormous fear on the victim which in turns delays the victim from leaving or seeking help, for concerns over the welfare of their pets left behind. In a study of 38 women in a domestic violence shelter in Utah, Ascione (1998) found that 74% of the women currently owned a pet or had owned a pet during the previous 12 months. Of these pet owners, 71% reported that their batterers had threatened to harm the pet and 57% reported that their batterers had actually harmed or killed the pet. Almost a fifth (18%) of the pet owners reported that they had delayed entering a shelter because of concern for their pets' safety. In yet another study of 107 women in a domestic violence shelter in South Carolina (Flynn, 2000), 43 women reported currently owning a pet. Almost half of the pet owners reported that their pets had been threatened or actually harmed and 8 of the 20 whose pets had been abused thus delayed entering a shelter due to concern for their pets' welfare. Because women's shelters do not accept pets, several victims delayed leaving the abuse to protect a beloved pet that may have been injured or killed if left behind.

Few studies have researched the circumstances in which children have witnessed not only the battering of their parent (usually the mother), but also abuse of their beloved pets, a combination that may compound these children's trauma and contribute to their psychological maltreatment. Chil-



## 2007 SAFVIC STUDENT SURVEY

**Welcome our  
newest SAFVIC  
Member!!**

Brooks Louton is our newest member of the SAFVIC Team. Brooks received her BA in anthropology and sociology from the University of Texas at Austin. She joined SAFVIC after working with sexual assault and family violence victims in residential treatment. Being the new Program Assistant, she provides support for the SAFVIC program. We are glad to have her as part of the SAFVIC Team. Please join us in welcoming her!!



**New 8-hr training for officers on how to better understand and investigate Cybercrimes.**

**Officers attending and successfully completing the SAFVIC for Cybercrimes will receive 8 hours TCLEOSE credit.**

To register, please visit [www.safvic.org](http://www.safvic.org).

The Sexual Assault and Family Violence Investigator Course (SAFVIC) was designed to reduce the incidence and prevalence of family violence and sexual assault. This year SAFVIC created the **SAFVIC Student Survey** to collect feedback from students to assist in identifying how the program has impacted sexual assault and family violence investigations. In addition, SAFVIC was interested in seeking out information about the impact of the course on officers' professional duties after taking the course. These results will assist the SAFVIC team in understanding how the program affects sexual assault, family violence, and stalking investigations and identify how to improve the needs of future students of the SAFVIC program.

The survey instrument was sent to 1529 individuals who completed the 24-hour course within the past two years. One hundred and seventy surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 11%. Of the responses, 32% indicated that they took the class less than six months ago; while the majority 55% indicated that they completed the course 7-12 months prior. Just under half of the respondents (48%) stated that they were patrol officers, while 24% were investigators and 15% were supervisors. A smaller number of respondents represented elected officials or agency heads (2%), administrators (2%), corrections (1%), or 'other' (8%).

The vast majority of students who responded felt that the course was useful (96%), well taught (96%), and that the course made them a better investigator (91%). In the 3 months prior to completing the survey, 76% of respondents indicated that they had used the skills that they had learned in the SAFVIC class. Seventy-eight percent of respondents indicated that the course changed their outlook on family violence crimes, while 75% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed that the SAFVIC course changed their outlook on sexual assault crimes. A smaller number of respondents, but still a majority (73%), indicated that they had changed their outlook on the act of stalking after completing the SAFVIC course.

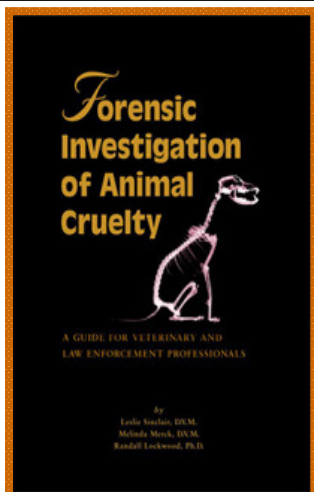
One of the goals of the SAFVIC program is to teach officers how to work with the community when dealing with sexual assault and family violence crimes. The curriculum includes a chapter on coalition building and SAFVIC was interested to see whether or not students had addressed the "community coalitions" component following the course. To determine the impact of the coalition building training, the survey asked respondents if they had contacted a local stakeholder such as a SANE or Victim Advocate since taking the SAFVIC program. Just under a third (29%) of students indicated that they had contacted a local stakeholder.

The majority of respondents (96%) indicated that they would recommend the SAFVIC class to others. When respondents were asked to list the most useful tool that they learned from the SAFVIC program, they listed the following:

- Interviewing skills
- Contact information for victim assistance
- Understanding why people stay in violent relationships
- DNA collection
- Documentation
- Drugs used to facilitate sexual assault
- SANE Nurses
- Defensive injuries
- Stalking dynamics and statutes
- Photographing evidence
- Law updates

The SAFVIC program has increased awareness and increased the knowledge among officers on the dynamics, histories, laws and investigative techniques of sexual assault and family violence across the state of Texas. More training and education is still needed and the SAFVIC program is dedicated to responding to this need. With the results of this survey, SAFVIC will be able to improve the contents of this course by including new topics and addressing student comments.

To view the entire 2007 SAFVIC Student Survey Report, please visit the SAFVIC website at [www.safvic.org](http://www.safvic.org).



## FEATURED BOOK:

### Forensic Investigation of Animal Cruelty: A Guide for Veterinary and Law Enforcement

The authors, two veterinarians and a psychologist with years of clinical experience in veterinary forensics, are acknowledged experts in their fields. Leslie Sinclair, D.V.M., is a forensics investigations and veterinary services consultant in Columbia, Md. Melinda Merck, D.V.M., and Randall Lockwood, Ph.D., are both with the ASPCA; Dr. Merck as a veterinary forensics consultant, and Dr. Lockwood as senior vice president for Anti-Cruelty Initiatives and Legislative Services. The book is a comprehensive introduction to the emerging field of veterinary forensic investigation. It also provides essential information and techniques that will help veterinary practitioners respond effectively when animal cruelty is suspected. The text is also an invaluable resource for animal shelter, investigative and law enforcement professionals.

## SAVE THE DATE...

### THE 3RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN

is the national clearinghouse of best practices for law enforcement, prosecuting attorneys, advocates, medical personnel and others who work in the area of crimes against women.

When: February 11-13, 2008

Where: Dallas, TX Hilton Lincoln Centre

The Dallas Police Department and Genesis Women's Shelter have partnered once again to present the annual Conference on Crimes Against Women. The goal of this conference is to improve the response of the criminal justice system to victims and to educate those on the front line. Participants will include representatives from local, state and national agencies and organizations from all over the United States. The value of this conference will have rippling effects on countless organizations nationwide. The long-term value is priceless.

The Conference offers training from top national experts, including FBI profilers and Secret Service electronic evidence experts, on investigating, assisting victims and prosecuting crimes against women. Collaborating agencies include: The Federal Bureau of Investigation, The Texas Rangers, The United States Secret Service, The United States Attorney's Office, Northern District of Texas.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Victim interview and interrogation techniques
- Investigating sexual assault cases
- Human trafficking
- Effective courtroom testimony in domestic violence cases
- Serial sexual assault and offender characteristics
- Family violence and the police
- Understanding the impact of trauma
- Protecting yourself and your family on the internet

The conference will also have interesting exhibits, innovative new police technology and other valuable resources.

New this year! SANE nursing track and limited seating to a Field Search seminar: an effective and free investigation tool.



## SAFVIC INSTRUCTOR COURSE

January 28 - February 1, 2008

TMPA Training Facility

Austin, Texas

40 hours TCLEOSE Credit  
TCLEOSE Course # 3265

Each applicant will be scored on a point system based on the following criteria:

- ◆ Level of TCLEOSE license certification
- ◆ TCLEOSE instructors certification
- ◆ Demonstrated interest in the field of sexual assault or family violence investigation
- ◆ Working knowledge of computers, especially Microsoft PowerPoint and Word
- ◆ Proven public speaking ability
- ◆ Positive role model within the department and the community
- ◆ Geographical location
- ◆ The 24-Hour SAFVIC is now a required prerequisite

This training is FREE to students accepted into the program! Upon successful completion of this SAFVIC Instructor Course, instructors will be eligible to recover the cost of lodging, meals, and travel during the course.

Application Deadline is  
December 10th.

To receive an application or to receive more information, please visit the SAFVIC website @

[www.safvic.org](http://www.safvic.org)  
or contact us  
@ 1-800-848-2088.

For more information, please visit [www.ccawonline.org](http://www.ccawonline.org).





*"Piecing together the tools needed to effectively investigate and prevent sexual assault and family violence."*

**MITCH LANDRY**  
Director of Grants & Special Programs

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**We're on the Web,**  
[www.safvic.org](http://www.safvic.org)

## FEATURED AGENCY:

The Genesis Women's Shelter knows that every 12 seconds, a woman is assaulted in the United States. Statistics show that one in four women will be victims of domestic violence. This is a tangible issue, one that is an equal opportunity epidemic, affecting all races, religions and socioeconomic levels. There is help and hope; there is opportunity for victims to become survivors and begin new lives, free from violence. There is also help and hope for those striving to break the intergenerational cycle of violence. And, there is help and hope for the greater community working to end violence, knowing that the first step is peace in the home.

The mission of Genesis Women's Shelter is to provide quality safety and shelter to battered women and their children through crisis intervention and short-term crisis therapeutics and to reduce the occurrence of violence against women and children in the greater Dallas area. Genesis is also committed to raising the level of community awareness regarding the pervasiveness and effects of domestic violence.

Since 1985, Genesis Women's Shelter has opened its doors to thousands of women and their children who have been victims of domestic violence. Originally founded as an emergency housing shelter, Genesis has since expanded the scope of services to provide individual and group counseling, play therapy and adolescent counseling, educational programs, transitional housing, non-residential counseling and case management, and community housing. All of these elements contribute to the continuum of care that Genesis provides to women and children at every stage of abuse and in their healing.

Shelter and support at Genesis Women's Shelter is free and confidential and is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. All programs are offered in English and Spanish, and available to victims of all races, religions and socioeconomic levels.

### GENESIS HOTLINE: 214-946-HELP

*Article provided by Lara Pettit Gaither, Director of Outreach and Community Development of the Genesis Women's Shelter*

(Continued from page 1)

Children who are in such homes are at a heightened risk for being abused themselves. Witnessing parent and/or pet abuse may increase their propensity for interpersonal violence and make children's cruelty to animals more likely to emerge as a symptom of their distress (Ascione, 1997).



Under Texas law, cruelty to animals only applies to "domesticated living creatures and wild living creatures previously captured." Texas Penal Code - Section 42.09 protects livestock and animals that are in custody, like household pets, but does not provide protection to wild animals such as deer, rabbits, squirrels, or birds. In order for an offender to be prosecuted, there must be one of two types of actions displayed, "intentional actions" and/or "failure to act." Acts of cruelty to animals include, but are not limited to: torturing an animal; failure to provide reasonable and necessary food, care, or shelter for an animal in the person's custody; and killing, seriously injuring, or poisoning an animal belonging to another without owner's consent. The penalty for cruelty to animals is a Class A misdemeanor, unless the person has already been convicted of cruelty to animals twice, then the punishment is raised to a state jail felony. There are several concerns with this statute, first being that this statute allows the owner of an animal to "kill, seriously injure, or administer poison" to his own animal. Since Texas is a community property state, and animals are legally defined as personal property, this allows an abuser to successfully make the argument that the animal is his property and therefore he has the legal right to kill, seriously injure or poison his

own animal. Unless the court can find that the conduct towards the animal was so egregious that it can be labeled as torture, law enforcement officers are faced with not being able to charge the offender for killing his own animal. Until Texas statutes address situations where animals are being used to threaten or torment a person, law enforcement officers can only document the abuse to animals in their reports in order to show a pattern of domestic abuse and animal abuse (Robbins, 2007).

Cruelty to animals should be viewed as a potential indicator that additional violence may also be directed at individuals within the home. Law enforcement officers can use this knowledge as a tool to better understand why victims are reluctant to leave the violent situation. Fear of harm or death to their animals can have an enormous effect on the delay of a victim to seek shelter or help. Along with this knowledge, officers can document abuse in their reports to show a pattern of domestic abuse and animal abuse.

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