Realigning the domestic violence planet; bringing speciesism into focus – Starting a conversation on a new intersectionality and victimhood’,

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Background
For many people who leave abusive relationships, the options open to them regarding their pet’s safety & well-being are very limited.

A recent development in the response to address pets fleeing domestic violence alongside other family members are coordinated efforts between charitable organisations & vet practices to provide shelter, fostering, & adoption services and required treatment.

McDonald et al (2015) explored the impacts of experiencing companion animal abuse by children, finding that this form of abuse often was a coercive, power, & control tool used against the child’s mother.
Domestic violence: considered a crime (civil and criminal law); range of support “violent male partner”

Child protection: (public law) welfare approach; state intervention in abusive families; “Mother seen as failing to protect”

Child contact: (private law); negotiated or mediated outcome; “good enough Father”
Some researchers have long championed Children’s rights in the field. Government’s VAWG strategy now recognises young people as victims as a distinct issue.

Government’s Domestic Abuse Bill (2019) commits to better addressing young people’s needs alongside improvements for children (NB falls short recognising ‘independent agency’ though calls continue to progress this research, policy & practice agenda)

These steps can & should be embedded within a strategy to identify companion animals to victims as those given independent agency.

**Impact**

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**Children and Pets: The Hidden Victims of Domestic Violence & Abuse (DVA): Where Action & Activism Merge!**

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**Power & Control Wheel (Pence & Paymer, 1993). The original wheel identified a set of behaviours adopted by abusive partners in order to maintain control & power**

**Behaviours include:**

1. Coercion & Threats
2. Intimidation
3. Emotional Abuse
4. Isolation
5. Using children
6. Economic Abuse
7. Male Privilege
8. Minimising, denying harm, blaming

**Our interpretation builds on this**

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**Anthropocentrism vs Speciesism and towards an animal and human symmetry approach**

- One way to shift the focus to include animals in the same way as children is to consider a broader ontological debate on anthropocentrism & speciesism.

- An anthropocentric perspective of companion animals has provided some developments towards their protection e.g. pet fostering to victims seeking to escape/flee.

- This is aligned with a hierarchal concept of speciesim placing humans at the top of a policy agenda comparative to non-human species. A speciesist perspective emphasises the rights of animals to independent agency in the same way as humans. Translates into policy & criminal law regarding the treatment of animals as victims of animal cruelty. These services already exist e.g. animal organisations taking responsibility for prosecutions of animal cruelty.

- We contend that the treatment of companion animals/pets should – not unlike the developments regarding children as victims of DVA – be incorporated into the same approach to developing & tackling strategies to address DVA.
Explaining Our Power & Control Wheel & Thinking Differently

- **Coercion & Threats**: Threaten to harm/kill 'pet' if you leave or assert (intention) 'independence'

- **Emotional Abuse**: Calling your pet names, giving away/killing a pet to 'remove' (primary) source of comfort & unconditional love/companionship

- **Intimidation**: Harming or killing a pet & threatening same thing 'happening' to you if you don't comply with the abuser's demands

- **Minimizing, Denying, & Blaming**: Blaming your or the pet's behaviour as necessitating the abuser's cruelty, Killing a pet & saying it doesn't matter because the pet was old etc

- **Legal Abuse**: Trying to take possession of a pet for which you have been the primary caretaker; Filing charges of pet theft

- **Isolation**: Refusing to allow you to take your pet to your vet, Prohibiting you to allow your dog to socialise with other dogs

- **Economic Abuse**: Refusing to allow you to spend money on adequate pet food &/or vet care (then blaming you when the neglect is noticed by authorities)

- **Using Children**: Harming or killing the children's pet to intimidate them. Blaming the 'disappearance' of the family pet on you to create a wedge between you & the children
We argue then, that reframing our anthropocentric hierarchy largely embedded within 'western' society is an important step forward to potential reframe & thus develop intervention & practice strategies to tackle companion animals and DVA.
ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE
MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS