

Final Report for the project entitled, *Elder Adult Abuse and Animal Welfare Issues: Development, Field Testing, and Dissemination of Assessment Protocols*

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Executive Summary: With funding from the Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, A KeyBank Trust, and in collaboration with the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services, we developed a general protocol for assessing animal welfare issues in the lives of elder adults. We also developed a follow-up protocol that can be used in cases where elder adults have expressed concern about the welfare of their animals (including threatened and actual harm). Drafts of the protocols were reviewed by Utah Adult Protective Services personnel as well as experts in the field of gerontology. Final versions of the protocols were developed based on these reviews. As part of this project, we conducted a national survey of state aging services and adult protective services agencies asking whether they include animal-welfare related questions in their evaluation/investigation forms (most do not). We are preparing a paper based on the results of this survey and will be submitting it for review at the *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*. We have also prepared an extensive PowerPoint training presentation for aging and adult services, adult protective services, and animal welfare agencies that will be posted on the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services Website, the Utah State University Department of Psychology and Social Work Program websites, and will be submitted for potential posting as a “Promising Practice” to the National Center on Elder Abuse. We have presented our work at national meetings of the National Council on Aging/American Society on Aging and the Gerontological Society of America. We also plan to make a presentation at annual meeting of the National Adult Protective Services Association next October.

The protocols will also be available at the websites listed above and may also be requested by email and other methods by contacting either of the co-PIs. All the above mentioned materials are included as appendices to this report and on a CD-ROM and will also be submitted to the American Humane Association for posting on their website dealing with the LINK®. Our hope is that these materials will enhance the lives of animals and the elder adults with whom they live.

Introduction

As we noted in our original proposal, there is a growing literature on the benefits of companion animals in the lives of elder adults. We are also aware that ensuring animal welfare may be challenging in cases where elder adult pet owners' own health and safety may be compromised. Except for assessments of animal hoarding, we could not find any models for the comprehensive assessment of animal welfare issues in cases where elder adults might be experiencing maltreatment. Based on the value that animal abuse assessment has had in understanding and addressing child maltreatment and intimate partner violence, we judged that such an assessment protocol for use in cases of elder adult maltreatment would be of value to professionals who work in the fields of aging and adult services and adult protection services (APS) and to animal welfare professionals who come into contact with elder adults. We also hope that dissemination of the protocol will highlight the need for human welfare agencies to attend to animal welfare issues confronted by elder adults. We believe this will have the potential to enhance the safety and welfare of both animals and humans.

Project overview

We emphasize that this project could not have been completed without the generous assistance of the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services and Adult Protective Services. We especially acknowledge the support and guidance provided by then Division Director Alan Ormsby, APS Director Diane Stewart, and a number of Division professionals who conduct field work and investigations. We also thank Utah State University student, Jylisa Doney, for her assistance in this project.

Following approval of the project by the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services liability management section (ethics review), we updated our review of the literature on animal welfare issues that may be implicated in cases of elder adult maltreatment. Our literature searches did not reveal any existing assessment protocols and so we drafted an original version our assessments based, in part, on the general literature on pets in the lives of elder adults and material derived from studies of animal abuse and domestic violence. The assessments focus specifically on animal welfare issues since existing APS forms already address issues related to various forms of elder maltreatment (physical, sexual, psychological/emotional, financial, neglect, and self-neglect).

The original version of the protocol contained three sections. The first was a general screening assessment that included questions about pet ownership or care of other animals (e.g., farm animals for which an elder adult might have responsibility), reasons for having a pet, concerns about being able to provide care for a pet, and experiences with threatened or actual harm to a pet perpetrated by another person. The second section included more specific questions about animal welfare including the elder adult's ability to provide food and other basic necessities for a pet, the ability to provide veterinary care and exercise (if appropriate), concerns about who would care for the pet if the elder adult is hospitalized or has to relocate to new housing (e.g., an assisted-living facility), concerns about controlling the pet's behavior, worries about what would happen to the pet when the elder adult is no longer able to care for the pet, and any other pet-related issues the elder adult wished to raise. The third section was designed to be investigative in focus to learn more about cases where a pet had been threatened or actually harmed by someone. Questions included soliciting information about how the pet was threatened or harmed, who the perpetrator was, the elder adult's judgment about the reason the pet was threatened or harmed, how the elder adult had dealt with these incidents, whether the incidents were reported to any agencies (e.g., law enforcement, humane society, APS), whether the pet needed and received veterinary care (if the pet survived harm), and how the elder adult thought he or she

would deal with any future threats to or harm of their pets. We also included a section where an investigator could document any evidence that might exist of animal hoarding (since this may relate to self-neglect and other mental health issues).

This original version of the assessment was reviewed by eight professionals in the Utah Division of Adult Protective Services as well as a number of prominent colleagues in the field of gerontology at Utah State University, the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Social Work, the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work Institute of Gerontology, and the University of Utrecht. We received excellent comments and suggestions for revision. There seemed to be consensus that a three-part protocol was too cumbersome and unlikely to be used by APS field workers. Therefore, we revised our initial assessment into a **main protocol** to explore general animal welfare issues as well as identify cases of threatened or actual harm to pets and, for cases where an elder adult did mention threats to or harm of pets, a **follow-up protocol** designed to obtain more information about these incidents. Both protocols also included a section where the interviewer indicated that, where appropriate, APS would try to address the concerns raised by the elder adult. Dr. Gary Patronek, Animal Welfare League of Boston, was kind enough to give us permission to use a checklist for caseworkers to assist those unfamiliar with pet care to identify animal welfare issues. Dr. Marie McCabe, American Humane's Human-Animal Bond Division Director, has also agreed to serve as a national resource for APS professionals who have questions about animal care and welfare. We have provided copies of both protocols as attachments to this final report. We are also preparing a directory of animal welfare agencies in the State of Utah, listed by APS regions, that could field referrals in cases where animal welfare issues have been discovered (e.g., in cases where an elder adult is worried about being able to afford food, the location of food banks that stock pet foods; if veterinary costs are beyond the financial ability of an elder adult, veterinary clinics that could provide pro bono or reduced cost veterinary services; safe havens programs that could shelter a pet if an elder adult needs to be hospitalized).

We have developed an extensive and comprehensive PowerPoint presentation on the topic of animal welfare issues and elder adults that covers both the benefits of pets in the lives of elder adults as well as animal abuse issues that may occur. The presentation also includes the rationale for developing the protocols and background information on animal abuse and the link to other forms of family violence and other crimes. We are continuing to work with the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services and Adult Protective Services to refine the content of the presentation. We may also develop more focused versions of the presentation for specific audiences (e.g., professionals involved in non-APS home visitation, animal welfare agencies). A copy of the current version of the presentation is included in a CD-ROM attached to this report.

During the course of developing the protocols, we have made presentations at the annual meetings of the National Council on Aging/American Society on Aging and the Gerontological Society of America. We hope to propose a presentation for the next meeting of the National Adult Protective Services Association in October 2009.

Other plans for dissemination include posting the protocols and PowerPoint presentation on the Utah Division of Aging and Adult Services Website and the Utah State University Department of Psychology and Department of Social Work, Sociology, and Anthropology websites. It will also be submitted for potential posting as a "Promising Practice" to the National Center on Elder Abuse's website and to the American Humane Association for posting on their website dealing with the LINK®. The protocols may also be requested by email and other methods by contacting either of the co-PIs. Utah State University's "Big File Transfer" capability will also allow us to send the

PowerPoint presentation (currently over 120 megabytes), via email, to interested parties. All materials acknowledge the support of the Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust.

A final budget report compiled by Ms. Sheila Jessie, Utah State University Department of Psychology Business Assistant, lists project expenditures and is attached to this final report.

Other project-related accomplishments

Given the lack of assessments of animal welfare issues and elder adults in the scholarly literature, we decided to conduct a national survey of APS agencies to determine their current practices on this topic. We believe that this is the most comprehensive survey yet undertaken on animal welfare issues in the context of elder adult maltreatment. We do not identify the individual responses and their corresponding states since we promised respondents anonymity. Forty-one of 50 state agencies responded to our survey (82% response rate) that included the following questions:

Table 1. Telephone Survey Questions for Adult Protective Service Agencies.

- 1 Are you comfortable with proceeding with this survey? Yes/No
- 2 In your screening process for elder abuse, do you ask if pets are present in the home? Yes/No.
If YES, do you ask about the kind(s) and number of pets?
- 3 Do you ask any questions concerning pet abuse or animal welfare in general? Yes/No
If YES, what is the wording of the question? Do you ask any additional or follow-up questions depending on the answers? Can you share the wording of these questions with us?
If NO, is there a reason for not including such a question?
- 4 Do you ask any questions about other pet welfare issues an elder adult might have (e.g., can't afford pet food/veterinary care, hard to exercise pet, pet has become difficult to control)? Yes/No.
If YES, can you share the wording of these questions?
- 5 Besides your screening protocol, are pet/companion animal issues included in any other protocols or assessments used by your agency, for example, investigation protocols? Yes/No.
If YES, can you share the nature of the protocol/assessments and the wording of the questions?
- 6 Would you like a copy of the survey report? Yes/No.
- 7 Would you like a copy of the assessment instrument? Yes/No.

Table 2: Adult Protective Services Telephone Survey Results

Question 1 simply asks if the respondent feels comfortable in proceeding.

Question 2: In your screening process for elder abuse, do you ask if pets are present in the home?

Yes: 19 (46.3%) **No:** 22 (53.7%)

Question 2A: If YES, do you ask about the kind(s) and number of pets?

Yes: 14 (73.7%) **No:** 5 (26.3%)

Question 3: Do you ask any questions concerning pet abuse or animal welfare in general?

Yes: 5 (12.2%) **No:** 36 (87.8%)

Question 4: Do you ask any questions about other pet welfare issues an elder adult might have (e.g. can't afford pet food/veterinary care, hard to exercise pet, pet has become difficult to control)?

Yes: 7 (17.1%) **No:** 34 (82.9%)

Question 5: Besides your screening protocol, are pet/companion animal issues included in any other protocols or assessments used by your agency – for example, investigation protocols?

Yes: 12 (29.3%) **No:** 29 (70.7%)

As can be seen from the results shown in Table 2, at most, states do little more than ask if pets are present in the home. Of the states that do ask about pets, only one asks about pet/elder-related concerns. Included in that state's assessments are three questions that specifically pertain to the issue being explored:

Do you think your partner/child is using your love of your pet to control you?

Are you with an individual who is abusing you/harming your pet?

If you wanted to leave, how can you/we make sure your animal is safe during your leaving?

Four other states said that, while they did not currently screen for this issue, they all thought it was important. Despite that lack of official inclusion on state-generated forms, respondents were quite interested in the topic and wanted to discuss it. One said, "I don't know why we don't ask [about pets], it seems very important because pets are a big part of an elder's life."

Even states without an explicit pet-related question do collect anecdotal information. Both if states did or did not include a pet-related question on their official state form, individual Adult Protective Services workers would add information to the form or note something that concerned them. For example, workers will note the presence of a dangerous animal as a safety-related issue for other workers or note a specific pet-related concern raised by a client.

Beyond the yes/no responses included in the telephone survey, there were qualitative responses that covered a wide variety of topics. For example, in answer to Question 2 ("in your screening process for elder abuse, do you ask if pets are present in the home?"), safety concerns appeared to be paramount. The presence or absence of dangerous animals might be noted at the same time and for the same reason that workers might note presence or absence of a weapon. In response to Question 3 ("Do you ask any questions concerning pet abuse or animal welfare in general?"), several states answered

that Adult Protective Services workers are free to raise the issue of abuse if they see signs of it. On the other hand, another state respondent said that pet abuse by itself would not be noted unless it appeared to be connected to abuse or exploitation of the elder.

In response to Question 4 (“Do you ask any questions about other pet welfare issues an older adult might have?”), comments indicated that, even if the question is not asked, the client may bring up a pet-related concern and if a client asks for some kind of assistance, the Adult Protective Services workers will try to provide the help or find the information necessary to solve the problem. For example, if a client needs alternate housing, the worker would try to generate a list of pet-friendly housing options. In response to Question 5 (“Besides your screening protocol, are pet/companion animal issues included in any other protocols or assessments used by your agency?”), respondents said that if there are signs of hoarding, the local Humane Society would be notified and then included in future negotiations with the client.

According to the qualitative responses from the telephone survey participants, the three most frequent pet-related concerns noted by Adult Protective Services workers were: an elder’s inability to manage his/her pets, older adults spending money on their pets instead of themselves, and the lack of a safe place for pets to stay during emergency situations or natural disasters. Because of several recent natural disasters, e.g. Hurricane Katrina, the last of these concerns, no “safe haven” for pets, appears to be getting both more news coverage and more constructive reaction. It is becoming commonplace to see media attention being paid to the issue of safe disposition of pets during a wide variety of emergency situations (e.g. fire, floods, housing crises). In fact, as one response to the negative publicity surrounding the lack of official planning for pets and pet owners following Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana has now passed a law that requires acceptance of pets in shelters and other states are working on changing their own laws.

We are currently completing a manuscript based on these survey results and our protocol development project and will be submitting it for consideration for publication to the *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect*.

Future plans for research and application

State agencies for aging and adult services and APS have data management systems in place. Since there are costs to adding protocol codes to existing data systems, we will pursue funding possibilities for incorporating our protocols into APS investigations. One agency that may have interest in such a process is the Administration on Aging.

We are also aware of smaller-scale opportunities to assess the value of our protocols. For example, the Home Outreach Pet Exams (HOPE) Program is a program of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Foundation (CVMF), including partnerships with the Colorado Association of Certified Veterinary Technicians (CACVT) and Senior Hub. “The HOPE Program will include basic pet health services through semi-annual in-home visits by volunteer teams of Colorado licensed veterinarians and certified veterinary technicians. Recommendations for additional care may include vaccinations, laboratory testing, and an annual dental prophylaxis through Harrison Memorial. A credit account of \$300 will be established, for each client, which may be used at CVMF’s Harrison Memorial to provide the recommended health services.” The current plans are for visits by a veterinarian and a veterinary technician. However, we are currently discussing with faculty associated with the Institute for Human-Animal Connection and the Institute of Gerontology at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, the possibility of including a social worker on the visitation team who could administer the protocols developed in this project.