

**National Adult Protective Services Resource Center
NAPSA/NCPEA Research Committee
Research to Practice Brief
Research Summary**

Title - Adult Protective Services and Animal Welfare: Should Animal Abuse and Neglect Be Assessed During Adult Protective Services Screening?

Authors - Terry Peak, Frank Ascione, and Jylisa Doney

Source - Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect, 24 (1), 37-49, Jan-March 2012

Summary of Research - The purpose of this study was to survey Adult Protective Services (APS) representatives to assess how animal abuse issues are addressed in the context of elder abuse across the United States. The ultimate goal was to then take this information and develop an assessment protocol to collect information on animal welfare in cases of elderly abuse in Utah.

A phone survey was conducted with APS representatives from 41 states. The study found that 51% of respondents do not ask any questions relating to pets. Only one state asked about pet related concerns, beyond the initial inquiry of whether the household had a pet. Four states felt the issue of animal welfare was important, though they did not screen for it. Those without specific pet questions allowed for the collection of additional information; APS workers were able to add notes of their concerns not otherwise covered in the assessment. Safety concerns were the most commonly reported: the three most reported concerns were the owner's inability to care for pets, owners spending money on pets instead of themselves, and what to do with the animal in the case of an emergency situation. Typically, when presented with concerns from clients regarding pets, APS workers would attempt to provide additional resources to address the problem.

Overall, the research revealed the complicated nature of addressing animal welfare in elder abuse cases. The study raised questions as to whether the focus of pet-related assessment should be on the welfare of the animal or the welfare of the elderly owner. Furthermore, the source of the pet-related concern is not simple; an animal may be used to coerce the elderly victim or the elderly victim themselves may be the inadvertent perpetrator when they become unable to care for the animal, such as in the case of animal hoarding. The study concluded that the results suggest more information is needed to address the problem.

Practice and Policy Implications - Using the information from this study, researchers developed an assessment tool to screen for animal welfare concerns in elder abuse cases. This screening included general questions as well as specific items to identify issues relating to pet management and care. In suspected instances of animal abuse, a follow-up assessment was developed to collect further information and identify the possible perpetrator. Current versions of the assessment tool can be found online at <http://www.napsa-now.org/resource-center/research/putting-research-into-practice/animal-welfare/>

For Further Reading

Boat, B. W., & Knight, J. C. (2000). Experiences and needs of adult protective services case managers when assisting clients who have companion animals. *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect*, 12(3/4), 145–155.

Cook-Daniels, L. (1999). The connection between animals and elder abuse. *Victimization of the Elderly and Disabled*, 2, 37, 46–47.

Rosen, B. (1995). Watch for pet abuse—it might save your client's life. *Shepard's ElderCare/Law Newsletter*, 5, 1–9

The National Adult Protective Services Resource Center (NAPSRC) is a project (No. 90ER0002/01) of the U.S. Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), administered by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or DHHS policy. For more information and other Research-to-Practice briefs: http://www.apsnetwork.org/national_resources/resource_center.htm.



This National Adult Protective Services Resource Center (NAPSRC) research summary is part of a series sponsored by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA) and the National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (NCPEA) joint Research Committee. The purpose of this research summary is to provide direct access to findings in order to enhance practice and clarify policy choices.

This brief released 5/2013

Prepared by:

Danielle Richards
Research Consultant