

Studying violence toward women and animals can help us develop strategies to prevent both

June 4 2024, by Laleh Dadgardoust, Colleen Dell and Renata Roma



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We live in a world where not everyone feels safe and respected, especially women. [Sexual violence and abuse](#) are significant global health issues.

Intimate partner violence continues to be a problem in Canada. [According to Statistics Canada](#), of the 117,093 victims of police-reported [intimate partner violence](#) in 2022, almost 80% were women and girls. [More than half](#) of women in the United States have experienced sexual violence involving physical contact.

Given these high rates of sexual abuse, it is imperative that we improve upon what we currently know about [violence prevention](#) and intervention strategies.

[Some have suggested](#) there is a connection between abuse of animals and abuse of women. That might not seem immediately obvious, but the way a person treats animals can be an indication of how they are likely to treat women.

Notions of masculinity

Part of the concern revolves around [traditional notions of masculinity](#), which dictate how men are expected to think and act. Considering the link between traditional masculinity and attitudes toward women and animals could provide valuable insights for developing new prevention and intervention strategies for sexual violence against women.

Traditional notions surrounding masculinity are often based on ideas about men being strong, heterosexual and avoiding roles and behaviors seen as feminine. The good news is that these ideas about masculinity are increasingly being challenged and changed. One example is the

American Psychological Association's guidelines for working with boys and men that confront masculine stereotypes.

Ideas about how men should think and behave often impact how women are perceived and treated. [People who adopt traditional masculinities](#) are more likely to support sexist ideas and disagree with gender equality. Research has shown that men who believe in [traditional gender roles](#) are more likely to justify and commit [violence against women](#), including [sexual violence](#).

Abuse of animals

Researchers have found that people who view animals in a negative way are [more likely to support traditional masculinity](#). A connection has also been established between how men [treat animals](#) and how they treat women. This connection reflects underlying similar attitudes [toward power, control](#) and [empathy](#).

Research has shown there is a [specific link](#) between violence against women and violent behaviors towards animals, and specifically [pets living in the same home](#). There [is also evidence](#) to suggest that some people who hurt animals likewise act violently toward women and girls. Women who report that their [male partners](#) are mistreating their pets are more likely to report being psychologically, physically and sexually assaulted [by the same partners](#).

There are not many studies addressing the role traditional masculinity plays in violence against animals or sexual violence against women. However, the [general link](#) between violence against women and animals suggests it is important to examine further.

Animals are often viewed as resources for human use, subjected to exploitation and mistreatment in industries like entertainment. [Research](#)

[indicates](#) men who think of women as objects are more likely to engage in sexual violence. The lack of agency and autonomy afforded in both cases reflects broader systemic inequalities. Recognizing this can be important for many reasons, such as identifying situations of violence.

Improving prevention strategies

Acknowledging how attitudes toward animals are intertwined with those toward women can help improve prevention and intervention strategies for sexual violence. Exploring these attitudes could provide meaningful insights about the link between traditional [masculinity](#) and violence against animals that can inform our understanding of sexual violence against women.

We can also gain greater insight into prevention and intervention strategies by tapping into the wealth of resources available on the link between violence against humans and violence against animals. These include the [well-being of pets during relationship breakdowns](#), [animal safekeeping programs](#) for individuals experiencing partner violence, emotional support animals for survivors of violence and integrating understanding about the [human-animal bond](#) in service provision for violence survivors.

Exploring violence towards animals and [sexual violence](#) toward women might initially seem far-fetched. However, [child protection legislation](#) in the United States originated from animal cruelty legislation.

Understanding the connection between the abuse of [women and animals](#) can make our communities safer and respectful spaces for all.

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