Co-Sheltering Companion Animals in Emergency Women’s Shelters: From Model to Practice & Solutions

Sarah May Lindsay, BES, MA, PhD
lindsays@mcmaster.ca

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“Once I knew, I knew for sure; there is evil.”

(Author; “Marlo and Me”, Lindsay, 1985)
“When it was time, I had no choice. I was stuck.”

“Silver: post by 4”

(Authorre, photo; Lindsay, 2012)
Women’s shelters provide emergency housing, care, and programs for victims of intimate partner violence (IPV)

Companion animals are currently not admitted* to IPV shelters in Ontario

*3 exceptions (featured later)

56% women delay or do not leave their abuser because they cannot bring their companion animal with them
Shelter Mandate

Removal of all access barriers for women & children fleeing abuse

Co-sheltering “is a life or death issue.”
(SHELTER ED, 2018)
Recent Literature Review

Key Voices: OAITH
Amy Fitzgerald

Estimates of delay/remaining in abuse: 56-59% (Canada)

“56% of clients surveyed reported delaying leaving the abuser because of their pets.”¹

Alberta study: “59% of abused women who had animals delayed leaving out of concern for their animals.”²
“Control has been highlighted as a motivator for abuse . . . threats against children and pets as a tactic of control, as well as a diffusion of anger and aggression in an effort to manipulate the abused partner . . . (are) marker(s) of coercive controlling violence . . . the type of IPV most often seen in shelter samples.”

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Key Voices:
OAITH Report & Amy Fitzgerald

OAITH Report & Amy Fitzgerald
“Researchers . . . found that three quarters of the people working in shelters know of women who do not leave at all, because they [can]not bring their animals with them.” ³
“Shelters are often faced with limited resources, and it can be difficult to see how their mandate to assist women fleeing IPV also includes assistance to their companion animals.”
Recommendations to Shelters

Rochelle Stevenson & Team
The Study...

2018, Summer of Research

("On the Road Again", Stanger, 2018)
Part A: Policy Analysis

Part B: 17 Semi-Structured Interviews; Summer 2018
Information on shelter websites affects:
Safety-planning  Help-seeking

“Less than half of the websites mention pets, and only 1% of shelters report offering on-site pet programs.”

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Digital Media:
Survivors’ First Line of Defense

Key Voices:
Gray et al. (2018)
Part A: Policy Review

Co-sheltering policy review of 75 Ontario IPV shelters

Method: Content analysis of shelter websites
Findings: Policy Analysis

Subsection: 11 shelters interviewed

6 have no online pet policy or listed provisions

2 trailblazers who co-shelter
Findings Continued:

Policy Analysis (subsection interviewed)

- "Concern about pets, property, possessions" ("Why Women Stay")
- No pet policy online

1 mentions link: animal abuse & IPV

1 uses Link Toronto/affiliated with SafePet

1 uses SafePet Ottawa
Findings:

Pet Policies

Online

full sample

(n=75)
Policy Implications:

Accessibility

Lack of uniformity

Often found in FAQ or non-central area of website

• Women must “dig” for pet policies online

Barrier to safety planning
Part B: The Interviews

15 interviews with shelter workers

1 interview with OAITH employee

1 interview with SafePet president
Interspecies Bonds

“She wouldn’t leave her dog there . . . not with him. She couldn't; he’d kill it [sic].”

(IPV Shelter Employee, 2018)
The Interviewees:

Demographics

Ages: 23-50+

Female
(one exception: identified as non-binary)

Caucasian

Mix of married/partners; w/wo children

College most common education

Most spoke of positive childhood interactions w/pets
“The women are the same. And the women I encountered in addictions were the same women I encountered in the prison who were the same women I encountered in the community after I left.

It was similar women in different circumstances. And dealing with the same barriers over and over and over that were preventing them from ever being able to make change.”

(Shelter Director, 2018)
Findings:

3 shelters allowed pets in some form

- Co-shelter
- Separate on-site facility
- Second stage housing follows municipal pet guidelines
Findings: Remaining In-Shelter Interviewees (n=12)

- No pets allowed in shelter
- Occasionally, single pet permitted in-shelter, temporarily
The Interviewees:

Stories on the Ground

Exceptions are made to “no pet norm”

Key factors: species & urgency/safety
### Findings:

#### Types of Co-Sheltering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>In-shelter</strong></td>
<td>Full or almost full access</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On-site</strong></td>
<td>Separate kennels, visitation area</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Off-site</strong></td>
<td>Shelter-owned/managed space off-site</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Foster care</strong></td>
<td>Temporary and anonymous Safety concern: pets; foster workers</td>
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Co-Sheltering Facilities

Shelter A

“One of our primary goals is to eliminate as many barriers as possible for individuals accessing our services . . . we are very proud to be one of the first programs in the province to bring pets into the shelter with their owners.”

(Shelter ED, 2018; several years in practice –incognito)

Shelter B

Dedicated kennel/visitation space in-shelter

(opened Fall, 2018)
Challenges: Relying on family & friends

“I remember there was one time a woman, she had two cats and she was in shelter. She had left the cats with a friend... the cat wasn't fixed—one of the cats—so it would spray. The friend said, "I can't take care of this [sic] anymore," so the woman discharged herself and went back to her abuser [with her cats].”

(Shelter Worker, 2018)
Challenges with separate-facility/home pet care

“I've known women that it becomes a barrier to see their pet, because they don't have the money to get to their pet.

For example, one woman might be staying here, but she's from [xx], so she's got her pet somewhere in [xx]. And she wanted to go and see her pet. Now she can't afford to [take transit] all the time . . . that's a problem.”

(Shelter ED, 2018)
Interviews:

Why Are Co-Shelters Rare?

- Funding
- Space/Environment
- Health regulations
- Client conflict
- Employee Resources/Training
- Allergies; Fear
- Cultural Differences
- Species
- Number of pets
- Necessity varies
Barriers to Co-Sheltering

Frequently cited by interviewees

“That would be a capital project”

“No funding”

“No staff to facilitate or manage pets”

“Added stress on staff and clients”

“Unknown results”

“Client safety concerns...especially children”
Themes Uncovered

No uniformity
- no provincial (or national) co-sheltering policy

Shelters operate in silos
- infrequent collaboration with companion animal shelters

Affordable Housing Options
- shortage: second stage/other
- rental restrictions: pets
Non-admission of companion animal species to (almost all) women's emergency/IPV shelters in Ontario is a significant barrier to safe housing and protection from abusers for both human and nonhuman actors.
Companion animal species are increasingly recognized as family members; separation of individual members from the rest of their family in times of crisis is, at minimum, problematic.
Nonhuman and human shelters exist in political, academic & literary “silos”; these institutions are mostly separate, divided (essentially) by species.

To move beyond this barrier, intersectional/ interspecies coalitions are essential for the proposed theory-to policy-to-praxis (practice) agenda.
Now what?

Research to policy

Policy to practice

Praxis
URGENT: UNIFORM CO-SHELTERING PROVISIONS

Intersectional approach

Action Teams
- interdisciplinary implementation

Accountability
- mentorship
- training
- monitoring

Research to Action:
Study Recommendations
Dissertation:
(Not) Co-Sheltering Companion Animals in Intimate Partner Violence Emergency Shelters in Ontario, Canada: Maintaining Speciesism and Institutional Silos

Sarah May Lindsay, BES, MA, PhDc
lindsays@mcmaster.ca

McMaster University
Department of Sociology
Hamilton, ON