

New study reveals the profound impact of forced separation between humans and their pets

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Pet owners forced to be separated from their animals in crisis situations, including those who are victims of domestic violence, are suffering from

a lack of support services needed to protect them.

These are the findings of a new review of 27 years of international research, published in the journal [Anthrozoös](#), which unveils the increased risks to both safety and psychological well-being when people are faced with the threat of forced separation from their pets.

The results provide important insights towards addressing the challenges arising from domestic violence, homelessness or [natural disasters](#) that can threaten the bond between humans and their pets.

The new study, out today, was carried out in Australia by James Cook University Ph.D. candidate Jasmine Montgomery and Associate Professors Janice Lloyd and Zhanming Liang,

"Our results reveal the strong emotional attachment between people and animals may result in vulnerability for both in circumstances where this bond is threatened," explains lead author Montgomery.

"When people are being forced to separate in the context of a crisis situation, such as natural disaster, homelessness or domestic violence, it can result in [psychological distress](#) and the risk to their health, and well-being and safety are really impacted.

"Sadly, the review also confirmed that a common outcome for pets in cases of domestic violence was maltreatment and/or death."

The research team examined 42 studies on the human-animal bond and situations of separation in scenarios involving domestic violence, homelessness and natural disasters.

Montgomery said their findings highlight the concern for pets' safety and well-being and a lack of support are key factors that make people

reluctant to flee their home when affected by domestic violence.

"In a lot of cases of domestic violence, there is evidence to suggest that people will delay leaving their relationship to protect their pet," she said.

"This is often because there's a lack of shelters or housing places which can accommodate pets, or a lack of trust placed in formal support systems that they won't be separated from their pet.

"In those cases where threats to pets are made, victims can be lured back by the perpetrator which places significant risk to their safety as well."

Natural disasters were equally challenging, with the possibility that a person would return for their pet during a period of danger or stay behind to protect their pet—putting themselves and others at risk.

Tellingly, the review found human "superiority" and disparities over who is responsible for pet welfare were embedded in systemic supports for people and their pets needing help during a crisis.

Montgomery said a shift in mindset was needed to factor in the needs of pets, and the complexities they entail, when it came to planning for crisis situations and providing services that support victims at these times.

"Often, it's expected people will choose human interests over animals at all costs, without consideration of the shared human-animal bond," she said.

"What we need to start doing is taking our pets, and the value of our pets, very seriously. And, as a collective in the community, sharing that responsibility and placing the needs of pets in those areas of policy development, legislation, service provision and housing to help prevent unacceptable outcomes such as animal maltreatment or death."

To mitigate the risks associated with forced separation, the team identified several key recommendations including:

- Incorporating questions about pets in services assisting women experiencing [domestic violence](#) to seek refuge; providing housing for women, children and pets together; and increasing collaboration with services that can help with animals.
- Enhance natural disaster evacuation plans to include resources such as transport and shelters that accommodate both people and their pets.
- Ensure the availability of pet-friendly accommodation for people in homelessness situations.

This latest study serves as a crucial resource for professionals and organizations committed to addressing the challenges posed by forced separation, providing a comprehensive overview of the human-animal bond and its impact on individuals in vulnerable situations.

However, the authors highlight certain limitations of the study, including a focus on English-language peer-reviewed articles, potentially overlooking diverse cultural perspectives, and the complexity of animal-related keywords possibly leading to the omission of relevant articles.

More information: A Scoping Review of Forced Separation Between People and Their Companion Animals, *Anthrozoös* (2024). [DOI: 10.1080/08927936.2023.2287315](https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2023.2287315)

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