

# Interrelated violence in multispecies families: a challenge for the Social Work approach

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## **Abstract**

This article presents the research findings on interrelated violence and the view from Social Work completed in Colombia in March 2024. The qualitative study is in the hermeneutic paradigm and relies on a documentary review of digital press news in Spanish-speaking countries. Through the analysis, the study establishes a categorical delimitation that highlights the following key result areas: the typification of violence in a time window between 2016 and 2024, the context of the social problem, the subjective position of the victims, aggressor and zoo-lidarian community, the care routes for gender-based violence and animal abuse, and the challenges for the approach from Social Work. In this sense, the main findings refer that in the international framework, the countries in which there was a greater trend of interrelated violence were Spain followed by Mexico, and at the national level, the city of Cali followed Bogota; how gender-based violence, domestic violence or animal abuse are typified - seen in an isolated and not convergent manner, which reduces the connotation of interrelated violence; and the challenges of Social Work for the psychosocial approach.

**Keywords:** Animal abuse; Interrelated violence; Intimate partner violence; Multispecies family; Social work.

# **Violencias interrelacionadas en familias multiespecie: un reto para el abordaje desde el Trabajo Social**

## **Resumen**

Este artículo presenta los hallazgos de la investigación sobre violencias interrelacionadas y la mirada desde el Trabajo Social, finalizada en Colombia en marzo de 2024. Es un estudio de corte cualitativo, situado en el paradigma hermenéutico, y bajo una revisión documental de noticias de prensa digital en países de habla hispana, se hizo una delimitación categorial que desde el análisis señala como ejes de resultados: la tipificación de la violencia en una ventana de tiempo entre el 2016 al 2024, el contexto de la problemática social, la posición subjetiva de las víctimas, agresor y comunidad zoo-lidaria, las rutas de atención por violencia de género y maltrato animal, y los retos para el abordaje desde el Trabajo social. En este sentido, los principales hallazgos refieren que en el marco internacional los países en los cuales se presentó una mayor tendencia de violencias interrelacionadas fue España seguido de México, y a nivel Nacional en la Ciudad de Cali seguido de Bogotá; la manera en que se tipifica el hecho por- violencia de género, violencia intrafamiliar o maltrato animal – visto de manera aislada y no convergente, que reduce la connotación de violencia interrelacionada; y los retos del Trabajo Social para el abordaje psicosocial.

**Palabras clave:** Maltrato animal; Violencia interrelacionada; Violencia de género; Familia multiespecie; Trabajo Social.

**Summary:** 1. Introduction, 2. Methodology, 3. Findings, 4. Conclusions, 5. Bibliographic References.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, pets are an important part of families and are considered a new member that challenges traditional conceptions of families. This has led to a new relationship involving other species, generating a paradigm shift in postmodern families.

With the linkage of animals in the family environment, it is essential to consider some aspects that influence the lives of human beings, such as their dynamics, rules, roles, attitudes, and emotions in everyday life. It is also fundamental to consider the domains of animal welfare that families preserve for caring for their companion animals, including feeding, veterinary care, natural expression of behavior, and protection against physical threats. Collectively, these elements modify the development of the bond and the affective ties that develop between family members.

In this context, as in other family typologies, internal conflicts may arise, leading to new forms of violence. This violence is not only directed at humans but also affects companion animals, a phenomenon known as interrelated violence. According to Ascione (1997, cited by Jegatheesan *et al.*, 2020), there is a significant connection between animal abuse and interpersonal violence. This suggests that animal abuse may serve as a precursor or an indicator of other forms of violence within the family, such as child abuse and intimate partner violence. In this sense, interrelated violence is a phenomenon that has been present throughout human history and has recently emerged as a social issue of study.

This phenomenon is based on the connection between gender-based violence and animal abuse or cruelty, as it involves situations that cause physical, psychological, and emotional harm to those affected. In this regard, the Instituto Distrital de Protección y Bienestar Animal (2022) states:

[...] that the analysis of interrelated and gender-based violence should take into account the approach to animal abuse, based not only on the recognition of their sentience but also on the importance of the bond formed between them and their caretakers. These women, who are also victims, are often forced to flee from their abuser without having a place where they, along with their children, can be received—let alone their dog or cat, which may also be considered part of the family. (p. 1)<sup>1</sup>

However, during the conceptual approach to this type of violence, evidence shows that, due to the emerging nature of this field of study, no clear definition has been established for this typology. While the relationship between human violence and animal abuse is addressed, there is no unified concept, which creates gaps in understanding for the institutions responsible for

<sup>1</sup> Translation by the authors.

guaranteeing the rights of women and animals. These gaps hinder the development of psychosocial and/or legal actions that include both human and non-human victims in terms of support and, consequently, justice. Therefore, within this type of violence, gender-based or domestic violence—predominantly—becomes evident, highlighting the need to strengthen its conceptualization of animal abuse.

The United Nations General Assembly (1993) states that gender-based violence is:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (p. 2)

In this regard, this perspective highlights that gender-based violence encompasses any action that threatens life, primarily affecting women. However, it can also be directed at men or individuals from the LGBTIQ+ community. This phenomenon can also be identified as domestic violence, which involves other family members and is sometimes directed at women (mothers, wives, or daughters). Ruling T-967/14 of the Constitutional Court of Colombia defines domestic violence as:

Violence arises from physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, or economic harm inflicted among family members within the household. This may occur through the actions or omissions of any family member. (p. 2)<sup>2</sup>

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In addition, Mayor-Walton and Salazar-Pérez (2019) argue that it is “the set of behaviors of abuse to one family member against another, in which their physical and psychological integrity is affected, and that aims to control the violated family member” (p. 99).

However, in cases of either form of violence, particularly when they intersect within multispecies families, the physical or psychological harm inflicted on women tends to be more visible. In contrast, the harm suffered by companion animals—despite their status as victims—often remains unacknowledged within the context of these events. As noted by Fernández (2013) and Velasco (2017):

In today's societies, the dominant thinking is centered on the supremacy of human beings over other living beings, so aggression against animals is considered of less importance and gravity than that against other people. (cited by Córdoba, 2022, p. 94)<sup>3</sup>

Leaving aside the fact that they are also part of a vulnerable population subjected to dominance and subjugation.

<sup>2</sup> Translation by the authors.

<sup>3</sup> Translation by the authors.

According to Hardesty *et al.* (2013), in situations of intimate partner violence and animal abuse, a coercive dynamic known as violent, coercive control occurs, in which the abuser uses companion animals as a tool to intimidate, frighten, terrorize, and exert control over the victims – primarily women, boys, and girls. Based on the theory of differential coercion (Soria 2021, cited by Córdoba, 2022)

Violence is understood as a form of punishment. This means that individuals who grow up in environments where coercion and violent punishment are the primary methods of discipline are likely to adopt these same techniques in the future when educating both people and other animals. (p. 91)

In this field of study, research identified four studies on this topic within the national context of Colombia and 26 at the international level. These studies show a greater tendency in English-speaking countries, led by the United States and followed by the United Kingdom. In the Spanish-speaking context, Spain is the most representative country, followed by Argentina and Mexico.

Regarding the topics addressed, we identified three main lines of study. The first focuses on power relations and the various forms of coercion exerted on a partner and children, which, in a connected manner, include acts of violence against animals. A study conducted by Collins *et al.* (2018) found that 21 participants reported instances of animal abuse by their aggressors as a means of coercion in response to behaviors they found upsetting. These behaviors included answering phone calls, reacting to verbal or physical aggression, refusing to engage in sexual relations, or going out without them. In such situations, the aggressor consistently or immediately displayed insensitivity toward the woman and the companion animal. In addition, the use of coercive tactics by the aggressor made it difficult for the woman to provide the necessary care for the companion animals, fearing that such actions could trigger further violence against her or the animal.

Another of the studies revealed, according to Ascione *et al.* (2007, cited by Hardesty *et al.*, 2013), that “between 40% and 92% of people sheltered in domestic violence shelters have companion animals, of this group 47% and 86%” (p. 2) reported that their abusers had threatened to hurt or kill their companion animal. In this way, animals can be used as a coercive tool that prevents the victim from leaving their home in the context of abuse for fear of retaliation against their companion animals and themselves (Hawkins *et al.*, 2022). According to Córdoba (2022), these forms of violence are used as a means of emotional blackmail against the direct victim of abuse, serving as a mechanism to inflict harm and psychological suffering on the partner. In other circumstances, “the abuser uses animals, as he also does with the children or with things appreciated by the partner, to make her suffer” (Bernuz-Beneitez, 2015, p. 105).

The second thematic line focuses on the psycho-emotional effects that children have experienced when exposed to animal abuse during situations of domestic and/or gender-based violence. In this regard, Allen *et al.* (2006) and Arkow (2014) mention that situations in the home can cause emotional distress in children since bonds with companion animals can be used to control and abuse the victims through threats and actions that endanger the animals and generate fear towards them. Another study describes that "68% of abused women also reported mistreatment of their animals, with 87% of these incidents occurring in their presence and 75% in the presence of their children, with the purpose of control and psychological coercion" (Querol, 2012 cited by Caravaca-Llamas, 2020, p. 57).

Concerning the information above, witnessing animal abuse during childhood can influence the reproduction of violent patterns in adulthood, either towards other humans or companion animals. In this regard, social learning theory explains that new behaviors can be acquired both through direct experiences and by observing the behaviors of others. For this reason, Córdoba (2022) states that witnessing an act of animal cruelty may "generate curiosity or lead to imitation by the child, resulting in desensitization to this type of behavior, as well as a decrease in their empathetic capacity" (p. 90). In the study by Collins *et al.* (2018), 23 female participants reported having observed their children mistreat pets and perceived this behavior as a consequence of witnessing violence against animals. This suggests that the child may be replicating the abuse inflicted by the aggressor. In this regard, Querol (2012, cited by Caravaca-Llamas, 2020) states that "children who witness domestic violence mistreat animals two to three times more often than children who do not experience domestic violence" (p. 57).

The third thematic line focuses on women's safety planning and how owning a companion animal influences their decision to leave a situation of violence. This is driven by the victim's concern and affection for their animal. In this regard, Querol (2012, cited by Caravaca-Llamas, 2020) states that "between 25% and 54% of abused women are unable to leave a violent situation due to concerns for their companion or farm animals" (p. 57). Thus, according to the study by Giesbrecht (2021), 93% of animal welfare professionals stated that concerns about the safety of animals influenced the victim's decision to leave a relationship in which intimate partner violence was occurring. This is because "battered women find in their companion animals a source of emotional support during the abuse" (Flynn, 2000b, cited by Hardesty *et al.*, 2013, p. 3).

In this context, studies highlight how the coercion exerted on women and their companion animals creates a paralyzing state that hinders women from distancing themselves from their aggressors and seeking professional or institutional support in shelter facilities. This is due to the circumstances and the associated psychosocial impact on both the women and their children, as well as the fear of recurring episodes of violence against their animals.



Therefore, further exploring this field of study is essential, as it has gained increasing relevance globally due to the close relationship between humans and companion animals. This connection can become a factor of vulnerability in the context of gender-based violence, highlighting the need for its understanding not only for research purposes but also for intervention from Social Work in interdisciplinary collaboration to address both human and non-human victims comprehensively.

## 2. Methodology

This study follows a qualitative approach, allowing the “data to be rich in meaning and exhibit great diversity” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 20). This, in turn, enables an understanding of the phenomenon of interrelated violence through the analysis of narratives in news reports from digital media outlets. The scope of this research is descriptive, as it aims to address “phenomena, situations, contexts, and events; that is, to detail how they occur and manifest, specifying their properties, characteristics, and the profiles of individuals, groups, and communities” (Hernández-Sampieri, 2014, p. 97). In this case, the study analyzes the actors involved in the phenomenon, including the human victim, the family, the community, and the relevant authorities in cases where interrelated violence is identified.

The study was framed within a hermeneutic perspective, focusing on the analysis of texts, where narrative “has the task of making the existence of each moment accessible in its being, of communicating it to existence itself, and of attempting to clarify the self-alienation that affects existence” (Heidegger, 1999, cited by Garzón-Rodríguez, 2010, p. 41). This approach enables the interpretation of the multiple dimensions of interrelated violence from the subjective standpoint of social actors and the power dynamics that shape this social phenomenon.

The methodological process was supported by a documentary review guide structured into categories of analysis, such as time, event, context, and type of violence according to the newspaper, support pathways, and the subjective position of social actors. Based on this instrument, a news search was done in Spanish-language digital media, including newspapers, online newspapers, radio stations, and digital magazines. We conducted this research using the Google web search engine, applying specific categories for identification, such as “domestic violence and animal abuse”, “gender-based violence and animal abuse”, and “vicarious violence and animal abuse”. Through these searches, we identified 30 news reports detailing their distribution by country and digital media outlet in Table 1.



**Table 1. Sources of Information.**

Context / No. of news	Digital media	Country
International (15 news)	El país	Spain
	La Razón	
	Sdpnoticias	
	La voz de Cádiz	
	Cadena SER	
	El Correo de Andalucía	
	Diario de Sevilla	Mexico
	El Confidencial	
	Milenio	
	El imparcial	
	El Heraldo	
	Periódico Correo	
National (15 news)	El sol de Parral	Peru
	Infobae	
	T13	Chile
	Revista Semana	Colombia
	El Espectador	
	Noticias RCN	
	El Tiempo	
	Infobae	

Source: own elaboration.

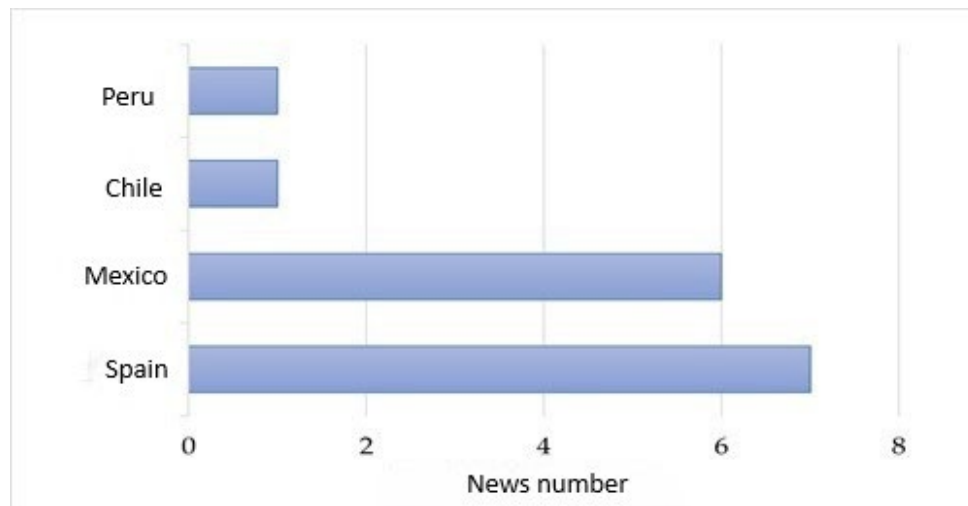
This information was organized and processed for analysis, generating analytical codes that allowed the interpretation of the data for the presentation of the results.

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### 3. Findings

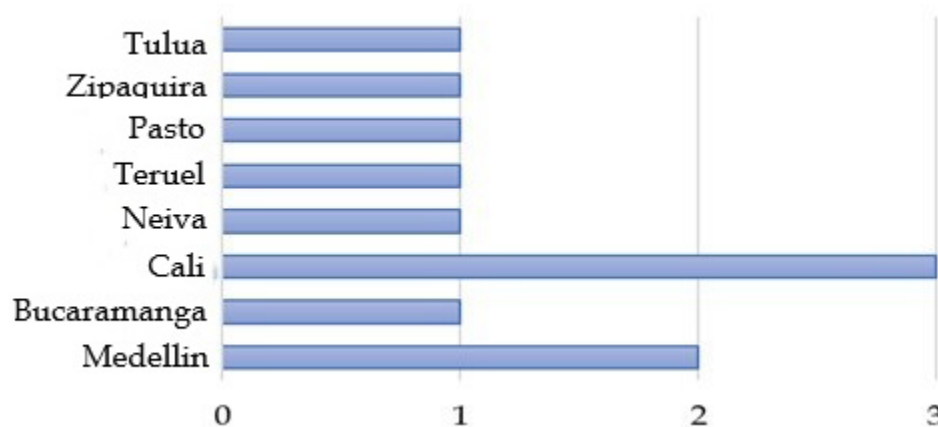
The results presented here are oriented under three topics: the time window in which the events of interrelated violence occur, the social actors' subjective position, and the care routes deployed during the event's development.

Based on the analysis of digital newspapers, the study identified trends in cases of interrelated violence linked to domestic or gender-based violence. As for the context in which the events take place, at the international level, the most frequent cases are in Spain, followed by Mexico, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Number of Cases of Interrelated Violence at the International Level.**

Source: own elaboration.

At the national level, in Colombia, most cases are reported in Cali, followed by Medellín. At the same time, a smaller number is registered in six other territories of the country, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2. Number of Cases of Interrelated Violence in Colombia.**

Source: own elaboration.

Although this type of violence is not always reported in digital media, a significant number of cases have been identified. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the context of these regions concerning reported figures on gender-based violence, domestic violence, and animal abuse to understand the scope of the issue despite the low number of complaints, as shown in Tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2. Context and Classification of Violence at the International Level.**

Country	Types of Violence	Description
Spain	Gender based violence	According to the Ministerio de Igualdad (2022), a total of 49 femicides committed by a partner or former partner were recorded in 2022. Of these, 20 cases (40.8%) had a history of one or more prior reports. Additionally, in 69.4% of cases, the victim and perpetrator cohabited, while in 65.3%, they were in a romantic relationship.
	Animal abuse	In 2022, the highest number of animal abuse crimes was recorded, with 1,615 complaints. Of these, 317 cases (19.6%) occurred in Andalusia (Pérez, 2023), one of the autonomous communities in Spain with the highest rates of animal abuse and gender-based violence.
Mexico	Domestic violence	According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI, 2023), "family violence occurs approximately twice as often in girls as in boys and increases as women get older" (p. 5).
	Gender-based violence	According to INEGI (2021), the National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (ENDIREH 2021) reveals that 70.1% of women aged 15 years or older have suffered at least one incident of violence or discrimination in at least one setting.
	Animal abuse	Animal abuse is one of the most frequent phenomena since "7 out of 10 domestic animals in Mexico are victims of some form of abuse" (Giles-Navarro, 2023, p. 1). Of Mexico's 32 states, according to Giles-Navarro (2023), Yucatán, Oaxaca, and Chiapas do not have animal abuse laws, unlike the other 29 states, and only 0.01% of reported cases are sanctioned (Berlanga, 2021 cited by Giles-Navarro, 2023, p. 2).

Source: own elaboration.

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**Table 3. Context and Classification of Violence at the National Level.**

City	Types of Violence	Description
Cali	Gender based violence	Femicide cases in the Valle del Cauca department have decreased; however, in 2023, 57 cases were recorded, of which 19 involved a perpetrator who was either known to the victim or affiliated with drug trafficking gangs (Observatorio Colombiano de Femicidios, 2023). According to the Observatorio de Género del Valle del Cauca (OGEN, 2024), 324 cases of sexual violence were reported in the department, with the highest incidence in Cali, although only 165 cases were officially documented.
	Animal abuse	According to the Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali (2024), more than 1,200 animals have been attended for attention, protection, and care through outpatient services, emergencies, and surgeries at the Special Administrative Unit for Animal Protection - UAEPA.
Bogota D.C	Domestic violence	According to the Procuraduría General de la Nación (2024), 21 women were victims of femicide in January, 11 of them murdered by their partner or ex-partner. Likewise, according to Revista Semana (2024), between January and September 2023, 3,268 individuals accused of domestic violence were acquitted, while 2,007 were convicted for this crime.
	Gender-based violence	According to the Observatorio Colombiano de Femicidios (2023), there were 74 fatal victims of femicide, with the perpetrator being most commonly an acquaintance (34 victims), followed by a hired killer (13 victims). In 2023, reports indicated that partners perpetrated 66.83% of violence cases, while domestic violence accounted for 37.70% (National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences, 2023, as cited by Fundación Paz & Reconciliación [Pares], 2023).

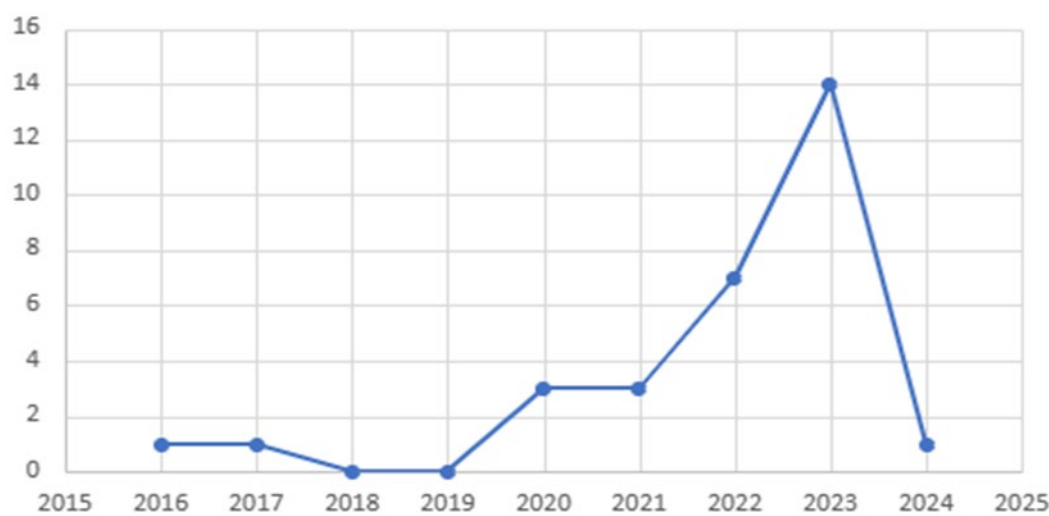
Animal abuse	According to the Observatorio Ambiental de Bogotá (2023), in 2022, the IDPYBA, through the Anti-Cruelty Squad, conducted 5,036 visits to locations with suspected cases of animal abuse, assessed 6,427 animals, and carried out 579 seizures. Additionally, the Legal Assistance Center for Animal Protection and Welfare handled 545 cases reported by citizens, with dogs and cats being the most affected species.
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Source: own elaboration.

The statistical description of reported cases in each context of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and animal abuse is clear. However, the public and private institutional frameworks that compile this data do not account for the intersections between gender-based violence and animal abuse as a form of coercion against women. This represents a structural gap in ensuring the rights of both human and non-human victims and in the necessary adjustments to public policies to prevent and respond to this social issue.

Based on this, the timeline of the news collected from 2016 to 2024 in Spanish-language digital media is presented below. In this time frame, as shown in Figure 3, one news report appeared in both 2016 and 2017, maintaining a steady trend. No reports emerged in 2018 or 2019. However, in 2020 and 2021, the number increased to three news reports, coinciding with a rise in violent incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. This pattern aligns with data from Colombia, where “emergency calls related to domestic violence increased by 112% from November 2019 to the same month in 2020” (García-Hernández *et al.*, 2021, p. 1). In 2022, the trend extended significantly to seven reported cases. By 2023, this figure doubled to 14 cases. Finally, in March 2024, one case emerged.

Figure 3. Trend in News Reports on Interrelated Forms of Violence.



Source: own elaboration.

To analyze this phenomenon, we can observe that the trend in reported cases remained relatively stable between 2016 and 2021. However, from that point onward, there was an increase in reported cases. This rise is not only linked to the social context generated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the conditions of confinement but also to international factors. In Mexico, the increase in social violence has been influenced by the presence of criminal groups involved in drug trafficking. In Colombia, particularly in Cali, the events of the social uprising and the convergence of outlaw groups have contributed to this issue, shaping “the structural violence that creates the conditions for the explosions of subjective violence” (Žižek, 2009, p. 51).

These cases, reported by digital press outlets, were analyzed through narratives that help understand the subjective position of the social actors involved in interrelated violence. This form of violence is defined by the psychic structure of each individual within the context of the social and cultural conditions that influence them, shaping their particular way of perceiving the world.

The subjective position of the victims reflects the relationships established in the form of “social-symbolic violence that appears as the opposite, as the spontaneity of the environment we live in or the air we breathe” (Žižek, 2009, p. 51). Through this violence, silences, omissions, or naturalizations are perpetuated over time through anticipatory aggressions that mark the path to tragedy. An example of this is what this woman describes: “He argued with me because I gave the dog meat and chicken, and he was rude to me because I called her’ daughter” (Q’hubo, 2023), which raised doubts about the safety of her pet, as she had already noticed her partner’s resentment toward the animal. This led her to feel the need to protect it, as her daughter recalls in the following account: “Strangely, my mom that day told me to ‘protect Lolita with my life’. I thought it was a bit exaggerated and did not pay much attention, but later I understood it was a premonition” (Q’hubo, 2023). This occurs because the aggressor “surpasses the boundaries of the familiar, following exactly the direction of the horrifying or unfamiliar, understood as ‘subjugating’ power” (Žižek, 2009, p. 88).

The perpetrator’s behavior towards the animal was naturalized in the previous case. Additionally, the woman recognized the violent situation, which, although not explicit, planted doubts and distrust towards her partner. However, the analysis revealed that the victim was in a state of denial, one of the stages that can occur when idealizing love and, consequently, her partner. This clouded the signs of violence directed both at her pet and herself, allowing actions that threatened her integrity and that of her animal. She did this to avoid pain or facing the reality of a possible breakup, as women victims cannot perceive themselves within the cycle of violence, as Walker (2016) states.

The person experiences emotional numbness and, whenever possible, avoids making things worse. These avoidance responses may take the form of depression, dissociation, denial, minimization of fear or harm, decreased activities, isolation from people, or other indications that another person is controlling their lives. (p. 53)

The above reveals an idealization of love and, consequently, of the aggressor, believing that he would be incapable of causing harm to the woman, much less to her pet, due to the close bond between them on a human-animal level. As seen in one of the cases in Mexico, the victim states: "In my heart, he was the person I loved, and my mind could not believe that he, the kindest person I thought he was, could not be the same person who had killed Mila by beating her..." (Milenio Digital, 2023). After the murder of her pet, the victim realized she had been immersed in a cycle of violence where her pet had been previously abused. However, this was only revealed after the tragic event, as these situations were initially perceived as isolated incidents. As she states: "(...) I only left the photos of Mila, and when that was all that remained, I realized it was not an isolated event, but rather months of mistreatment towards her" (Milenio Digital, 2023).

This situation is one of the typologies of violence mentioned by Han-Chul (2016), which "instead of showing itself with ostentation, violence hides modestly. Even so, it continues to be exercised, even if it is not publicly exposed" (p. 18). However, the victim undergoes a subjective shift, where the situation moves from being symbolic to real, taking action by leaving the relationship and filing a report against the aggressor of both her pet and herself.

Maybe I could have done something for Mila, but I understand that I was in a massive circle of violence that did not allow me to see it; now I know that Francisco used "our love" to harm us. Today, I decided to speak for myself, for my healing, and, most importantly, for our little animals. (Milenio Digital, 2023)<sup>4</sup>

This position assumed by the victim in the face of this violent event and what it represented for her life is not only a form of self-care but also care for others since it places in the public sphere an event that occurred in her private life, alerting her situation and the aggressor.

As a result, the victims assume that animal abuse is an event that must be punished, so they decide to report the aggressor in order to obtain justice for their companion animal. Such is the case of a victim in San Cristóbal Sur – Bogotá, who said about her ex-partner: "I want him to be behind bars. (...) She was my life... she killed my dreams, my illusions" (Mercado, 2023). This evidences the woman's call for justice for her companion animal because of her close emotional bond with the animal and its meaning in her life.

The above is articulated with interspecies justice since animals are sentient beings that need special protection, given that historically, they have been categorized as objects or properties from a perspective in which they are instrumentalized for the benefit of human beings. Likewise, this search for justice is accompanied by the protection of animal rights, advocating that animals should live free from mistreatment and recognizing "animal life: from admiration, from compassion, from indignation...and from hope" (Nussbaum, 2023, p. 361).

<sup>4</sup> Translated by the authors.

Regarding the subjective position of the aggressor, some accounts show that the perpetrators exerted power and control over the victims, intimidating them with threats that sometimes led to physical assaults, which then escalated to direct acts of violence against their pets as a form of coercion towards the women.

Some cases show that the aggressor carried out the violent act in the victim's absence; however, it is common for these acts to occur in the presence of the person being targeted. This generates fear and reinforces the aggressor's position of power, as the victim feels compelled to comply to ensure their companion animal's safety, which complicates the reporting process. In these cases, the aggressor, according to Lledó-Rando (2024), uses coercive control to exert and maintain control over the victim, generating serious effects on her mental health since there is a constant threat that something will happen if she does not comply with the victimizer's demands.

Likewise, it has been found that this situation of violence not only develops against women but also children through animal abuse, as reported in the press: "It was determined that the aggressions against the animal were recurrent and that the crime was carried out in the presence of the dog's owner and her two children, whom she forced them to be at the time" (Rodríguez, 2024). This, in the words of Han-Chul (2016), is direct violence that "operates as a badge of power. In this case, violence is not hidden. It becomes visible and shows itself" (p. 17).

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Furthermore, there were reports of victims being attacked after ending their relationships with the aggressor. In an attempt to prevent the victim from leaving and continue exerting power and control, the aggressor used the victim's pet to force her to return, threatening to harm the pet, as occurred in the following case.

(...) the detainee began to look for her to come back and insisted on maintaining the relationship, but she chose not to answer the insistent messages and phone calls. Given such insistence, Sarahí's family told her that maybe the young man wanted her for something urgent, and that was when she agreed to answer a call on Saturday, June 12, in which Luis Alberto "N". began to threaten her, saying that if they did not get back together, he would kill her pet: "If you do not come back with me, I am going to kill 'Carmelo,' so it is up to you, you asked for it". (El Imparcial, 2021)<sup>5</sup>

This is explained through the theory of frustration and aggression hypothesis, from which Luis Alberto experiences frustration by Sarahí's response of not wanting to continue with the relationship, not responding to his messages and calls, triggering aggression "as a potentialized of the discomfort caused by frustration" (Rodríguez-Orozco, 2016, p. 4), manifesting it in threats that intimidate not only his integrity but also that of his pet. This expression of aggression is linked to the perpetrator's perception of the pet as a tool of coercion to make the woman comply

<sup>5</sup> Translation by the authors.



with his desires. This is often reflected in the bond established with the pet, which adds a layer of control over the victim.

The analysis also revealed that the aggressors used social media and/or mobile apps to inform the victim about the aggression they were carrying out against her pet, as illustrated in the following quote: "According to the investigation between 2020 and 2021, the man reportedly assaulted the canine and sent via cell phone videos as a way of intimidating his partner" (Infobae, 2022a). This shows how the methods of exerting violence have evolved, as it becomes clear that the aggressor's intention is for the victim to witness what they are capable of, especially in cases where there was no longer any contact with the aggressor. In these situations, taking such actions led the victim to re-establish communication with them.

Within the development of the news reports, only one case is identified in which the aggressor was found to have psychological issues due to the use of psychoactive substances. In contrast, the other aggressors carried out the violent act with a clear intention to harm the victim. This aligns with the view of Ferrer and Bosch (2005, cited by Alencar-Rodrigues & Cantera-Espinosa, 2012), who states that "it cannot be considered that the cause of abuse is a mental disorder" (p. 121).

According to the above, the aggressors justify their actions or deny the charges pressed by the authorities, demonstrating a desensitization to the other, as they fail to acknowledge the pain caused by their violent actions. Furthermore, it is established that the pet is used to harm the human victim, exploiting the emotional bond between the person and their pet. This supports the argument made by Turinetti and Vicente (2008, cited by Alencar-Rodrigues & Cantera-Espinosa, 2012), who states that "the adoption of violent behavior is intentional and has a goal" (p. 121). This is exemplified in a case reported by the Spanish digital newspaper La voz de Cádiz (2023), in which the animal's aggressor justified throwing the pet out of the car during an argument with his partner, claiming his intention was not to harm the woman directly.

In this context, the analysis identified three ways in which aggressors construct their subjectivity after the violent event. The first way refers to the act of providing veterinary care for the pet after injuring it. As reported by this news source: "After the incident, the man realized the severity of his actions and took the pet to a nearby veterinary clinic, where it later died" (Hernández-Torres, 2023). In this subjective position, it can be inferred, according to the Transtheoretical Model of Change, that the aggressor is in the contemplation stage. In this phase, the aggressor experiences a sense of guilt or remorse for the severity of their actions, marking a moment of awareness in which they recognize their behavior as negative, seeking an alternative to repair the harm caused to the companion animal. However, there is ambivalence about what they want to change as they transition between recognizing positive and negative behaviors (Northeast and Caribbean Addiction Technology Transfer Center [ATTC], 2021).

In the preparation and action stage, taking the companion animal to the veterinarian may be a form of self-protection. While the intention to harm the human victim through the animal is clear, the aggressor recognizes the consequences of their actions. Therefore, they will take steps to handle the situation in a way that benefits them concerning the repercussions their actions may trigger at a family and/or legal level. As ATTC (2021) states, the person is taking measures that will lead to change, thus achieving their goal of addressing the desired issue: avoiding repercussions rather than helping the companion animal.

In the second way, during the violent act towards the animal, the aggressor seems to interrupt his reality and disconnect, blinded by the violence. He does not feel intimidated by the presence of the police or the community. Even in front of them, he continues attacking the animal: "In a moment of rage and in the presence of the Police, Rojas Camacho attacked the pets" (El Espectador, 2016). The above indicates a sign of desubjectivation, where the aggressor disconnects from their reality and is dominated by their more primitive emotions. From the Theory of Subjectivation perspective, this suggests that the individual loses their sense of self and acts automatically or impulsively, stripping away their identity and personal responsibility. As Ramírez-Zuluaga (2015) states, "the subject disappears as the fundamental and original form of experience itself" (p. 141), leading to their dissolution.

The third waypoint to the fleeing attitude after committing the violent act occurred when "Brayan Stick Durán attempted to flee after the reprehensible murder toward the southern highway, but it was the immediate action of the police officers that prevented him from escaping" (Infobae, 2022b). This behavior is an act of denial of what happened and of resistance to assume the effects of its facts.

In this situation, it can be inferred from the reports by digital media outlets that Brayan Stick was under two types of pressure, which are described by Escobar-Córdoba (2006) per the General Strain Theory. The first type relates to "failure to achieve positively valued goals [...] and the presentation of negative stimuli" (p. 31), which is connected to the aggressor's difficulty in finding employment. The second type is linked to the argument that occurred between him and the victim before she was killed, which triggered anger and frustration that he later expressed through physical aggression toward the woman and her pet. This is because "an increase in pressure leads to an increase in anger" (Escobar-Córdoba, 2006, p. 31).

Similarly, the individual fled as a defense mechanism. Upon realizing the violent actions, he attempts to reject or deny reality and its consequences, reflecting an inability to confront them. This produces a resistance mechanism in his thoughts and feelings, allowing him to avoid facing his behavior's legal and emotional repercussions.

Another of the subjective positions identified in the study is those we have called "zoolidarian community", understood as an initiative that, within its construction and organization,

seeks to advocate for the rights of domestic and wild animals, promoting care and protection through the participation and support of the community. This includes activities such as environmental education, protection of endangered species, which through advocacy actions, we demonstrate responsibility towards other forms of animal life, reflecting love and zoo-lidarity.

This collective subject position varies according to the context in which it develops, identifying three central characteristics that account for the actions of zoo-solidarity communities in the face of interrelated acts of violence: denunciation, sisterhood, and being overseers.

The denunciation is characterized by alerting the authorities since it is some neighbors who, upon becoming aware of the situation, communicate with them and ensure that a timely intervention is carried out. During a violent action, women often find it difficult to ask for help from the authorities, which is why reporting becomes a fundamental pillar in providing care and protection to victims.

Zoo-roridad (sister-zoo-d) was only evidenced in one news story and is characterized by providing help to the animal companion. Upon witnessing the situation, the individual decides to assist the animal and take it to the veterinarian for medical care, thus ensuring its well-being and protection. Additionally, it serves as a support network for the human victim in psycho-emotional aspects, as evidenced in the following case: "In a video circulating on social media, the community is seen trying to help the dog, which ultimately dies from the blows" (Infobae, 2022c). The overseers carry out a monitoring process of the violence, especially the case of animal abuse, using different resources such as appealing to the media, as evidenced in one of the cases: "by the inhabitants of the neighborhood this event is rejected, and they also alerted that the man was released hours after the capture" (Infobae, 2022c). Thanks to this dynamic, society's awareness is promoted, demanding justice for human and non-human victims. In this way, these media and social networks create pressure and social sanctions against animal abuse.

This mechanism becomes a way to combat injustices, similar to formal reports. However, according to some accounts, law enforcement agencies sometimes fail to meet the community's expectations, releasing the aggressor and leaving the case unpunished, as this news report states: "According to the mother's defense, the municipal police did not arrest him the day he was attacking the animal. He was only recorded while hearing the officers loading their weapons and capturing him in the act" (Ortíz, 2023b, par. 4).

In addition, these types of violent situations or events, mainly when they occur in the public sphere, generate an impact that affects those who witness them. Some news reports show that people react differently to what they observe: "The case of 'Chaco' has left the neighbors shocked, animal rights activists angry, and his family worried" (Ortíz, 2023a, par. 13). Likewise, through the news, some opinions were gathered from individuals who witnessed the situation, such as neighbors and competent authorities, who described the events as unacceptable: "He started

stabbing anything he could find in front of him. And since there was nothing else, he went after the dog. That is something you should not do to either a person or an animal” (El Espectador, 2021).

In the context of the characteristics of the zoo-lidarian community, individuals do not always act with clarity regarding the available support routes for cases of gender-based violence or animal abuse. In some cases, they react instinctively. Therefore, the following presents the routes identified through the analysis, as well as the gaps related to them.

When acts of violence occur, response protocols are activated according to the context in which they occur within the framework of existing legislation. The analysis shows that although a mechanism exists for filing complaints, there is no pathway to ensure comprehensive care for human and animal victims. This creates limitations and challenges in the “restoration of rights” for those affected. Additionally, when disseminating information on how to file a report, it is important to specify which entities to contact. Although several agencies are responsible, the process's first step is intuitive, such as calling emergencies and helpline numbers. However, there is no diagram or straightforward narrative outlining the process for victim support, protection, and follow-up, considering the diversity of the population targeted by the news.

In many cases, the news primarily focuses on explaining the violent incident and its reasons, dedicating only a small portion to detailing the path taken by the authorities. The headlines often include eye-catching phrases to attract a larger audience, leading to misinformation and generating interest in the severity of the events but not in the case's background.

Although the authorities involved in the situation are highlighted, the process for declaring the aggressor guilty of the crimes committed is not mentioned. The audience lacks clarity regarding how the judicial process unfolds in these cases or what constitutes animal abuse and its connection to human violence, as only the sentence imposed on the perpetrator is noted.

Regarding the actions of the judicial system, although there is a conviction for animal abuse, there is no apparent connection to gender-based or domestic violence; these are addressed separately or only as one of these crimes. Other measures, such as a restraining order or charges against the perpetrator, may be applied when no conviction is reached. However, the judicial situation does not progress, allowing the perpetrator to remain free. This can affect the integrity of the victim and other animals.

The main gap identified in this study is how digital news media produce short articles that aim to capture readers' attention by reporting sometimes sensationalized events, offering little information to guide individuals on the appropriate actions to take in response to violence. The coverage is often superficial and lacks clear guidelines for those affected or for the zoo-lidarian

community. Additionally, the limited information tends to focus on either gender-based violence or animal abuse separately rather than addressing the intersection of both issues, even though, politically and legally, they are still approached differentially.

Regarding the psychosocial gaps in the approach from Social Work, there is no clear route for providing support to victims of this type of violence. The case is not followed up in a way that addresses this issue; it is instead summarized by the animal abuse incident and the perpetrator's judicial process. However, it is unclear what happens to the person involved, what measures are taken to provide comprehensive care, or how the aftermath of violence is addressed for both the individuals and the community.

From the perspective of Social Work, it is essential to consider intervention and research on this issue to support actions in cases of interrelated violence. Including companion animals within the family context represents a paradigm shift in how relationships are built among family members, which alters family dynamics. This also impacts the public sphere, particularly in community spaces, where bonds are formed that contribute to creating a zoo-lidarian support network.

Building on the previous point, given the lack of policies and laws addressing this intersection of violence, Social Work needs to promote the creation of coordinated programs between institutions responsible for animal welfare and social services dedicated to supporting victims of violence. Additionally, ensuring access to veterinary care for companion animals injured in these incidents is crucial.

## **4. Conclusions**

The conclusions of this research are presented on two levels: conceptually, as a social issue related to gender and justice for animals, and disciplinarily, as a challenge for Social Work intervention.

Given that this is a long-standing social issue that has only recently been studied, it is essential to continue contributing to this field to further develop the conceptual and theoretical understanding of interrelated violence as a category.

As a social issue, the study of interrelated violence made it possible to identify trends in digital press reports from Spanish-speaking countries between 2016 and 2024. Internationally, Spain had the highest prevalence of reported cases, followed by Mexico. At the national level in Colombia, the highest number of cases occurred in Cali, followed by Bogotá. Additionally, the news reports categorized incidents separately as gender-based violence, domestic violence, or animal abuse but never as interrelated violence. They did not describe the mistreatment of companion animals as a connecting factor to gender-based violence. Furthermore, the study

highlighted the subjective positions of victims, perpetrators, and the community, particularly in their zoo-lidarian responses to these victimizing events.

This contributes to gender and animal welfare studies by presenting interconnected violence as an intersectional phenomenon that competent authorities must address from that perspective. Therefore, this study outlines the available support pathways for these cases and highlights the shortcomings in media coverage, often prioritizing sensationalism over education. In other words, the media are not used to orient the population about the channels for reporting and the psychosocial care routes for affected women or access to medical and veterinary care for their pets when they survive.

The findings presented constitute a key challenge for Social Work in education, intervention, and research. It is essential to identify, study, and analyze the dynamics that emerge in gender-based violence and animal abuse to develop methodological proposals that enable a comprehensive approach rather than addressing them separately, as has been done until now.

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