

SECONDARY VICTIMISATION IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM: FACILITY DOGS TO THE RESCUE

Abstract: Secondary victimisation of victims of crime, especially among vulnerable victims such as child victims and victims of sexual and gender-based violence, is a well-documented feature of interactions with the justice system. A range of international law instruments impose obligations on States to implement measures aimed at mitigating secondary victimisation; but leave discretion to States as to the form that these measures will take. This article explores the use of facility dogs as means of mitigating secondary victimisation among victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Having outlined the evidence of secondary victimisation as a phenomenon, and the scope of international law obligations to mitigate it, the article provides an overview of international literature on the efficacy of facility dogs, before presenting the results of the FYDO project – the first European pilot project to use and assess the efficacy of facility dogs as a means of mitigating secondary victimisation among victims of crime.

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Introduction

In the study of victims of crime, the concept of 'secondary victimisation' has become a prominent feature, albeit that the term has been used to describe multiple different phenomena. Condry notes that it may refer to the consequences of victimisation extending to another party, such as a close relative; or to 'processes or responses that cause further victimisation or compound their feelings of victimisation, a notion which is said to be of particular salience for victims of rape or sexual assault'.¹ It is the latter understanding of the term with which this article is concerned. Interaction with the justice system has been shown to have significant potential for re-traumatisation of victims of crime, especially child victims and victims of sexual or gender-based violence.² At all stages of the justice process, including interaction with police,³ forensic interviews,⁴ and most particularly giving testimony in court proceedings (when the evidence and credibility of victims is often subject to severe challenge), victims have the potential to suffer secondary victimisation. According to Herman, 'if one set out intentionally to design a system for provoking symptoms of traumatic stress, it might look very much like a court of law.'⁵ As such, international law increasingly obliges States to implement measures designed to make investigations and prosecutions less

¹ Rachel Condry, 'Secondary Victims and Secondary Victimization' in Shlomo Giora Shoham, Paul Knepper and Martin Kett, *International Handbook of Victimology* (Taylor and Francis 2010) 219-220.

² Gail Goodman and others, 'Testifying in Criminal Court: Emotional Effects on Child Sexual Assault Victims; (1992) 57(5) *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 1-159; Casey Holder, 'All Dogs Go to Court: The Impact of Court Facility Dogs as Comfort for Child Witnesses on a Defendant's Right to a Fair Trial' (2013) 50(4) *Houston Law Review* 1155-1187; David Crenshaw and others 'Developmentally and Trauma-Sensitive Courtrooms' (2016) *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 1-17.

³ Riana Losung and others, 'The Role of Empathy in Professional Quality of Life: a Study on Australian Police Officers Working in Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Investigation' (2021) 36 *Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology* 616-626.

⁴ Diane Walsh and others 'Job-Related stress in forensic interviewers of Children with Use of therapy dogs compared with facility dogs or No dogs' (2018) 5 *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 1-9.

⁵ Judith Herman, 'Justice From the Victim's Perspective' (2005) 11(5) *Violence Against Women* 571-602.

traumatic for victims (particularly of sexual crime) and more sensitive to their needs. While the headline obligation is reasonably clear, the law leaves a wide degree of latitude to states as to the means to be used to implement that obligation.

One method of mitigating trauma for victims of sexual crime that has been successfully implemented in North America is partnering victims with ‘facility dogs’, which are specially trained dogs that accompany victims to police interviews, forensic examinations, and court testimony. Evidence to date indicates that facility dogs have had a positive impact in the context of children who experience child sexual abuse (CSA). However, facility dogs have seen little use to date outside of North America, or in cases involving other categories of victims.

This paper will provide a report on the work of the FYDO project, which between 2021-22 piloted the use of facility dogs with victim support organisations in Belgium, France and Italy with financial support from the Justice Programme of the European Union. The work of the project included adult and child victims; victims of sexual offences as well as other crimes; and victims of domestic violence living in shelters. As such, the project broke new ground both geographically and in the range of victims who utilised the service.

Part 1 will set the scene by examining the evidence of the risk of secondary victimisation in the context of both children and adults interacting with the justice system. Part 2 will set out the range of obligations imposed on States by international human rights law and European Union law to implement measures aimed at mitigating this risk. Part 3 will examine pre-existing evidence of the benefits of animal-assisted therapy in general, and on the use of facility dogs with victims of child sexual abuse in particular. Part 4 will provide an explanation of the FYDO project design and research methodology, before Part 5 will analyse the results of the data collected during the two years of the FYDO project on the efficacy of facility dogs.

Part 1 – Secondary Victimisation

Child victims face psychological and emotional stress when interacting with the justice system, placing them at high risk of secondary victimisation.⁶ Testifying in court can create a feeling of isolation, as the courtroom itself is not child-friendly in its design, and witnesses may feel anxiety and shame being watched by strangers.⁷ Children who have suffered the trauma of CSA typically struggle to share details of their experiences with others⁸ and are likely to mistrust adults, which can hinder communication.⁹ This leads to difficulties answering questions in court, affecting the validity and reliability of evidence given.¹⁰

⁶ Holder (n 2).

⁷ Melissa Glazer, ‘Assessing the Perceptions of the Use of a Courthouse Facility Dog Program with Child and Youth Witnesses’ (2018), unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Western Ontario, <<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/5265>> accessed 7 November 2023; Crenshaw and others (n 2).

⁸ Crenshaw and others (n 2); Kamala London, ‘Disclosure of child sexual abuse: What does the research tell us about the ways that children tell?’ (2005) 11(1) *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law* 194; Erna Olafson and Cindy Lederman, ‘The State of the Debate About Children’s Disclosure Patterns in Child Sexual Abuse Cases’ (2006) *Family and Court Journal* 27-40.

⁹ Nancy Parish-Plass, ‘Animal-Assisted Therapy with Children Suffering from Insecure Attachment Due to Abuse and Neglect: A Method to Lower the Risk of Intergenerational Transmission of Abuse?’ (2008) 13(1) *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 7-30.

¹⁰ *ibid*, See also Christine McDermott and others, ‘From the Doghouse to the Courthouse: Facility Dogs as Trial Aids for Vulnerable Witnesses’ (2020) <

Children also struggle building rapport with professionals in the justice system, finding the experience of speaking to strangers about traumatic circumstances difficult.¹¹

The environment of the court room is often not appropriate for children, and a lack of specialised training for professionals can exacerbate the intimidating and confusing atmosphere.¹² Professionals are often not trauma-informed, placing children at risk for secondary victimisation.¹³ It is clear from an examination of the literature that children are vulnerable participants in the justice system and often do not receive adequate supports to mitigate the risk of secondary victimisation.¹⁴

Along with child victims, adult victims of violence experience increased stress when interacting with the justice system¹⁵ and are in need of additional supports.¹⁶ Professionals in the justice system have not always treated victims with respect, which can increase the risk of secondary victimisation for victims.¹⁷ Like children, adult victims also experience difficulty testifying in court and recounting traumatic experiences. Research has illustrated that professionals may fail to adequately communicate with victims at the various stages of the justice process, hindering their ability to effectively participate.¹⁸

From an examination of both child and adult victims in their interaction with the justice system, the increased risk of secondary victimisation discourages individuals from coming forward, hindering victims' access to justice. Without necessary supports, victims continue to be re-traumatised and re-victimised by the system.

Part 2 – International Law Obligations

On foot of the evidence discussed above, there has been an increasing awareness in recent years of the risk of secondary victimisation for victims interacting with the justice system,

https://www.ncsc.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/66326/from_the_doghouse_McDermott-Marsh-Miller-Forte.pdf > accessed 8 November 2023; Tiffani Howell and others, 'Integrating Facility Dogs into Legal Contexts for Survivors of Sexual and Family Violence: Opportunities and Challenges' (2021) 34(6) *Anthrozoös* 863-876.

¹¹ Elizabeth Spruin, Tammy Dempster and Katarina Mosova, 'Facility dogs as a tool for building rapport and credibility with child witnesses' (2020) 62 *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice* 100407.

¹² Alicia DeVault and others, 'Environmental Considerations for Trauma-Responsive Juvenile and Family Courts: A Review of the Literature with Recommendations for Practice' (2018) 69(2) *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 5-20.

¹³ Goodman (n 2).

¹⁴ Anna Gekoski, Miranda Horvath and Julia Davidson, 'The effectiveness and impact of the child protection and criminal justice systems in cases of intrafamilial child sexual abuse' (2016) 2 *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice* 54-66.

¹⁵ See eg Deirdre Healy, 'Exploring Victims' Interactions with the Criminal Justice System: A Literature Review', University College Dublin, October 2019 and Tiana Kelly, 'Courthouse Facility Dogs: An Intervention for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence' (2022) 17(1) *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health* 94-104.

¹⁶ Kerstin Braun, 'Legal Representation for Sexual Assault Victims – Possibilities for Law Reform?' (2014) 25(3) *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 819-837; Fiona Raitt, 'Research Report for Rape Crisis Scotland: Independent Legal Representation For Complainers in Sexual Offence Trials' (2010).

¹⁷ Naama Katz, Dana Pugach and Shulamit Ramon, 'Relationships between lawyers and victims of crime: Forming a new context' (2022) 28(2) *International Review of Victimology* 141-166.

¹⁸ Julie Brown, Damien McKenna and Edel O'Kennedy, 'Only a Witness: The experiences of clients of One in Four in the criminal justice system (June 2022) <

<https://www.oneinfour.ie/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=491615e8-9c8f-4126-ad86-d057838625a6>> accessed 7 November 2023.

particularly in certain categories of cases (such as CSA). International law has responded by imposing a range of obligations on States to implement measures to mitigate this risk; this has been seen in the work of the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) and the Council of Europe. This section will briefly outline some of the most relevant legal instruments, court decisions and other documents.

Directive 2012/29/EU (‘the Victims’ Rights Directive’) imposes legally binding obligations on EU member states to take measures to assess the needs of individual victims and provide them with the support they need as they navigate the justice system. The Directive calls on member states to provide ‘[s]pecialist support services ... [which] take into account the specific needs of victims’, and emphasises the importance of ‘supporting the victim to recover from and overcome potential harm or trauma’ and of ‘a supportive environment that treats them with dignity, respect and sensitivity.’¹⁹ It recognises that ‘[s]ome victims are particularly at risk of secondary and repeat victimisation’,²⁰ including victims of human trafficking, violence in close relationships, sexual violence or exploitation, gender-based violence, and victims with disabilities.²¹ It notes that ‘child victims tend to experience a high rate of secondary and repeat victimisation’²² and have ‘specific protection needs’ as a result.²³ As such, it calls for a child-sensitive approach to victims.²⁴

The Directive states that ‘[o]nly through individual assessments, carried out at the earliest opportunity’, can a risk of secondary victimisation be effectively identified.²⁵ As such, Article 22 of the Directive obliges member states to:

ensure that victims receive a timely and individual assessment ... to identify specific protection needs and to determine whether and to what extent they would benefit from special measures in the course of criminal proceedings ... due to their particular vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimisation.²⁶

Individual assessments must take into account the personal characteristics of the victim and the type or nature and the circumstances of the crime.²⁷ Such assessments should be carried out for all victims to determine whether they are at risk of secondary and repeat victimisation, of intimidation and of retaliation and what special protection measures they require. Child victims ‘shall be presumed to have specific protection needs due to their vulnerability to secondary and repeat victimisation’, but shall nevertheless be subject to an individual assessment to determine whether and to what extent they would benefit from special measures.²⁸ Where victims are identified as vulnerable to secondary and repeat victimisation, Articles 22 and 23 identify a range of special measures that should be offered to protect them during criminal proceedings.

¹⁹ Council Directive 2012/29 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime [2012] OJ, L315/57, Recital 38 (‘the Victims’ Rights Directive’).

²⁰ *ibid*, Recital 55.

²¹ *ibid*, Recital 57.

²² *ibid*, Recital 57.

²³ *ibid*, Article 22(4).

²⁴ *ibid*, Article 1(2).

²⁵ *ibid*, Recital 55.

²⁶ *ibid*, Article 22(1).

²⁷ *ibid*, Article 22(2).

²⁸ *ibid*, Article 22(4).

The Victims' Rights Directive is the most detailed and legally strongest instrument from the perspective of EU Member States (including all States that were part of the FYDO project). As an EU Directive, it is binding on Member States as to the result to be achieved, while leaving national authorities the power to choose the form and methods to achieve the result. Failure to fully implement the Directive can result in the European Commission taking infringement proceedings against the Member State in question in the European Court of Justice. Proceedings against Ireland were closed in April 2020 following the commencement of the Criminal Law (Victims of Crime) Act 2017;²⁹ proceedings against Belgium, France and Italy were ongoing as of June 2020.³⁰ However, the Victims' Rights Directive is far from the only international law instrument to emphasise the importance of measures aimed at mitigating secondary victimisation for victims of crime in general, and child victims in particular. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC) has been signed and ratified by all States included in the FYDO project, and Article 4 obliges States Parties to undertake 'all appropriate legislative, administrative, and other measures for the implementation of the rights recognized in the Convention'. Article 39 of the CRC provides that States Parties shall provide appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery of child victims. In its General Comment No 13 in 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child explained that this means that States Parties must ensure the protection of child victims and witnesses and enforce law and judicial procedures in a child-friendly way.³¹

The Council of Europe has also been active in this space. All four states involved in the FYDO project are members of the Council of Europe and have signed and ratified the Conventions discussed herein. The 2007 Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse ('the Lanzarote Convention') provides that States Parties must take the necessary measures to assist victims of CSA in their physical and psychosocial recovery.³² Furthermore, it stipulates that states parties must adopt a protective approach towards victims of CSA, ensuring that the investigations and criminal proceedings do not aggravate trauma.³³ To similar effect, the 2011 Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention²) provides that States must aim to avoid secondary victimisation and address specific needs of vulnerable persons,³⁴ and that specialist women's support services must be provided to all female victims of violence and their children.³⁵ Finally, when interpreting the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), the European Court of Human Rights has made reference to the CRC and emphasised the importance of rigorous and child-sensitive investigation of alleged ill-treatment of children, and of effective and child-friendly justice.³⁶ It has also made reference to the Lanzarote Convention when finding that investigations that caused secondary victimisation, and failed to take into account the

²⁹ See < https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/INF_20_547 > accessed 7 November 2023.

³⁰ See < https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j4nvhdscs8bljza_j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vl9tqit0vcsr > accessed 7 November 2023.

³¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No 13: The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence*, UN Doc No CRC/C/GC/13, 18 April 2021.

³² The Victims' Rights Directive (n 19), Article 14.

³³ *ibid*, Article 30.

³⁴ *ibid*, Article 18.

³⁵ *ibid*, Article 22.

³⁶ *CAS and CS v Romania* (26692/05, 20 March 2012).

particular vulnerability of a child victim of sexual abuse, amounted to a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR.³⁷

In summary, multiple international law instruments impose binding obligations on States to implement measures to mitigate the risk of secondary victimisation of victims in the justice system. Most European States are bound by several of these instruments; many are bound by all of them. As such, these international law obligations are an essential aspect of State responses to the needs of victims across Europe. Having said that, the aim of mitigating the risk of secondary victimisation and implementing child-friendly and child-sensitive procedures is often stated at a high level of generality, leaving a wide degree of latitude to individual states to decide on what measures will best achieve these aims. The following section will examine evidence that indicates that the use of specially trained facility dogs offers potential to act as a particularly effective means of mitigating the risk of secondary victimisation.

Part 3 – Specialised Support: Animal-Assisted Therapy and Facility Dogs

The benefits of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) are well-documented and wide-ranging. Multiple studies indicate that merely being in the presence of animals can decrease heart rate and blood pressure and improve responses to stress; these effects are magnified through direct contact such as stroking a pet.³⁸ Longer term health benefits can also accrue, including prevention of ill-health and improved recovery from illness.³⁹ The benefits are not just physical; contact with animals contributes to psychological well-being by ameliorating the effects of potentially stressful life events, facilitating social interaction and enhancing feelings of autonomy, competence, and self-esteem.⁴⁰

These positive impacts have been well documented in the specific context of people in stressful and traumatic situations. Multiple international studies have demonstrated that AAT can lower stress and mitigate trauma in a variety of settings. For example, AAT has proved beneficial for individuals such as victims of crime;⁴¹ patients in an emergency department;⁴²

³⁷ *B v Russia* (36328/20, 7 February 2023).

³⁸ For a review of the literature see Deborah Wells, 'The Effects of Animals on Human Health and Well-Being' (2009) 65(3) *Journal of Social Issues* 524-525.

³⁹ *ibid* at 525-527.

⁴⁰ *ibid* at 527-530. See also June McNicholas and Glyn Collis, 'Dogs as catalysts for social interactions: Robustness of the effect' (2000) 91 *British Journal of Psychology* 61-70.

⁴¹ Marianne Dellinger, 'Using Dogs for Emotional Support of Testifying Victims of Crime' (2009) 15 *Animal Law* 171-192.

⁴² Ben Carey and others, 'Outcomes of a controlled trial with visiting therapy dog teams on pain in adults in an emergency department' (2002) 17(3) *PLoS ONE* e0262599.

university students⁴³ exam preparation;⁴⁴ children with disabilities;⁴⁵ and people (including children or adolescents) undergoing psychiatric treatment.⁴⁶ The literature focusing particularly on the mitigation of stress and trauma in children will be explored below.

Impact of AAT and Facility Dogs on Children

AAT has considerable benefits for children. Interactions with dogs has been shown to alleviate stress in children in a variety of settings.⁴⁷ For example, the use of AAT in educational settings has been shown to enhance children's wellbeing,⁴⁸ assist in their learning⁴⁹ and improve their relationships with others.⁵⁰ Children with disabilities have also shown positive effects from interacting with animals. Hill and others found that canine-assisted occupational therapists working with children on the autism spectrum reported that 'involving their therapy dog facilitated the development of a secure relationship, supported autonomous task involvement and increased children's sense of confidence.'⁵¹ Although the therapists noted that the inclusion of AAT was not 'magic', and required considerable skill and training, they found that the relationship between the dog and the child 'appeared to act as a bridge to accelerate the rapport built between the child and the therapist.'⁵² The dog was described as 'a safe, non-threatening friend that was different from another human adult.'⁵³

⁴³ Emily Thelwell, 'Paws for Thought: A Controlled Study Investigating the Benefits of Interacting with a House-Trained Dog on University Students Mood and Anxiety' (2019) 9 *Animals* 846; Robert Baird, Christine Grové and Emily Berger, 'The impact of therapy dogs on the social and emotional wellbeing of students: a systematic review' (2021) 39(2) *Educational and Developmental Psychologist* 180-208; Angela Moe, "'Sunny Makes Everything Okay": Therapy Dogs as a Pedagogical Tool in Sensitive Classes' (2021) 33(3) *Journal of Criminal Justice Education* 388-405.

⁴⁴ See Sandra Barker and others, 'A Randomized Cross-over Exploratory Study of the Effect of Visiting Therapy Dogs on College Student Stress Before Final Exams' (2016) 29(1) *Anthrozoös* 35-46; John-Tyler Binfet and others, 'Reducing university students' stress through a drop-in canine-therapy program' (2017) 26 *Journal of Mental Health* 1-8; Emily Wood and others, 'The feasibility of brief dog-assisted therapy on university students stress levels: the PAWS study' (2018) 27(3) *Journal of Mental Health* 263-268.

⁴⁵ Bonnie Mader, Lynette Hart and Bonita Bergin, 'Social Acknowledgments for Children with Disabilities: Effects of Service Dogs' (1989) 60(6) *Child Development* 1529-1534; Janelle Nimer and Brad Lundahl, 'Animal-Assisted Therapy: A Meta-Analysis' (2007) 20(3) *Anthrozoös* 225-238

⁴⁶ Anke Prothmann, Manuela Bienert and Christine Etrich, 'Dogs in child psychotherapy: Effects on state of mind' (2006) 19(3) *Anthrozoös* 265-277; Melissa Hunt and Rachel Chizkov, 'Are Therapy Dogs Like Xanax? Does Animal-Assisted Therapy Impact Processes Relevant to Cognitive Behavioral Psychotherapy?' (2014) 27(3) *Anthrozoös: A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animals* 457-469; Laura Sikstrom and others, 'Increasing participation in research with therapy dogs: A qualitative study at a large urban mental health and addiction hospital' (2020) 15(8) *PLoS ONE* e0238096.

⁴⁷ Molly Crossman and others 'The Influence of Interactions with Dogs on Affect, Anxiety, and Arousal in Children' (2020) 49(4) *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology* 535-548.

⁴⁸ Christine Grové and others, 'Therapy Dogs in Educational Settings: Guidelines and Recommendations for Implementation' (2021) 8 *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 1-14.

⁴⁹ Linda Henderson and others, 'An evaluation of a dog-assisted reading program to support student wellbeing in primary school' (2020) 118 *Children and Youth Services Review* 105449.

⁵⁰ Mary Renck Jalongo, Faithe Permenter and Kristina Conrad, 'Facility Dogs in Educational Programs for Young Children: Definition, Rationale, Issues, and Implementation' (2022) 51 *Early Childhood Education Journal* 997-1009.

⁵¹ Jessica Rachel Hill, Jenny Ziviani and Carlie Driscoll, "'The connection just happens": Therapists' perspectives of canine-assisted occupational therapy for children on the autism spectrum' (2020) 67(6) *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* 550-562.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.* See further Courtney Jorgenson, Casey Clay and SungWoo Kahng, 'Evaluating preference for and reinforcing efficacy of a therapy dog to increase verbal statements' (2020) 53 *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis* 1419-1431.

AAT in healthcare/therapeutic settings for children has also demonstrated positive outcomes, including in paediatric hospitals,⁵⁴ dental treatment,⁵⁵ and in the treatment of addiction and mental health issues.⁵⁶ Dietz and others evaluated the use of AAT in group treatment for child sexual abuse, reporting that “children in the groups that included therapy dogs showed significant decreases in trauma symptoms including anxiety, depression, anger, post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, and sexual concerns.”⁵⁷ Research from Crenshaw and others found that therapy dogs greatly improved and hastened the therapeutic process.⁵⁸ The children had no problem trusting the dog, so in turn they trusted the therapist who had brought the dog into the therapeutic setting.⁵⁹

As explored in part 2 above, children can find interacting with the justice system to be an extremely difficult experience, as it can involve a high risk of secondary victimisation. Interaction with the criminal justice system, and most particularly giving testimony in court proceedings, has been shown to have significant potential for re-traumatisation of victims.⁶⁰ Children who are victims of crimes such as CSA typically struggle to share details of their experiences with others⁶¹ and are likely to mistrust adults, which can hinder communication.⁶²

In this context, the use of facility dogs has been shown to provide multiple benefits. Facility dogs are dogs selected and trained to a specific standard by specialist organisations and handled by trained handlers to support vulnerable victims in their recovery. There is a large body of international research demonstrating the positive effects of facility dogs for children at all stages of the criminal justice process, including the court waiting room,⁶³ forensic interviews, and courtroom testimony.⁶⁴ The presence of a facility dog accompanying the child

⁵⁴ See, eg, Kerri Rodriguez, Jessica Bibbo and Marguerite O’Haire, ‘Perspectives on facility dogs from paediatric hospital personnel: A qualitative content analysis of patient, family, and staff outcomes’ (2022) 46 *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* 101534; Maria Lindström Nilsson and others, ‘Children report positive experiences of animal-assisted therapy in paediatric hospital care’ (2019) 109 *Acta Paediatrica* 1049-1056; and Yongshen Feng and others, ‘Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy on Hospitalized Children and Teenagers: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis’ (2021) 60 *Journal of Paediatric Nursing* 11-23.

⁵⁵ Bashyam Nalini and Chandrabhatla Srinivas Kumar, ‘Animal-assisted Therapy as a Potential Tool for Management of Dental Anxiety in Children: A Questionnaire-based Cross-sectional Study’ (2022) 16(2) *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research* ZC30-ZC34.

⁵⁶ Kate Trujillo and others, ‘Engaging Adolescents: Animal Assisted Therapy for Adolescents with Psychiatric and Substance Use Disorders’ (2020) 29 *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 307-314.

⁵⁷ See, eg Tracy Dietz, Diana Davis and Jacquelyn Pennings, ‘Evaluating animal-assisted therapy in group treatment for child sexual abuse. *Journal of child sexual abuse*’ (2012) 21(6) *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 665-683; Miguel Monfort Montolio and Javier Sancho-Pelluz, ‘Animal-Assisted Therapy in the Residential Treatment of Dual Pathology’ (2020) 17 *International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health* 120; and Miguel Monfort and others, ‘The Efficacy of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Patients with Dual Diagnosis: Schizophrenia and Addiction’ (2022) 19 *International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health* 6695.

⁵⁸ David Crenshaw and Kara Cannelli, ‘Reflections on ‘Stealth Therapy’ in Therapeutic Residential Care’ (2020) 37(3) *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth* 244-264.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Goodman (n 2); Holder (n 2); Crenshaw (n 2).

⁶¹ Crenshaw (n 2); London (n 8); Olafson and Lederman (n 8).

⁶² Parish-Plass (n 9).

⁶³ Elizabeth Spruin and others, ‘The use of therapy dogs to support court users in the waiting room’ (2019) 29(3) *International Criminal Justice Review* 284-303.

⁶⁴ Allie Phillips and Diana McQuarrie, ‘American Humane: Therapy Animals Supporting Kids (TASK) Program Manual’ (2009), < <https://www.americanhumane.org/app/uploads/2016/08/therapy-animals-supporting-kids.pdf> > (accessed 7 November 2023); Elizabeth Spruin and others, ‘Exploring the Impact of Specially Trained Dogs on the Court Experiences of Sexual Offence Survivors in England and Wales: An Exploratory Case Study’ (2020) 26 *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 501-507.

leads to decreased biological stress indicators.⁶⁵ The dog provides comfort and assists a child witness to remain calm so that they can cognitively process and respond to the questions.⁶⁶ The animal can provide a bridge between a child and a social worker during questioning about a traumatic event.⁶⁷ This increased sense of comfort leads to higher levels of social interaction and a safer environment for disclosures to take place.⁶⁸ Dogs can help make the experience of forensic interviews less stressful not only for the child, but also the interviewer, judge, jury, clerks, prosecutors and defence counsel, witnesses and observers.⁶⁹

Impact of AAT and Facility Dogs on Adults and Professionals

Research has also demonstrated the benefits of AAT for adults who have experienced trauma. Studies have reported that AAT has provided improvements for both staff⁷⁰ and patients in a variety of healthcare settings such as an emergency department,⁷¹ a mental health and addiction hospital⁷² and in paediatric hospitals.⁷³ In particular, staff self-reported that the introduction of AAT ‘was associated with higher perceived personal accomplishment’ and ‘working with a facility dog was associated with more positive emotions, better perceived mental health and less depression’.⁷⁴

AAT has also been used to assist adults with cognitive difficulties,⁷⁵ such as Alzheimer’s.⁷⁶ Boitier and others carried out a study examining the effects of AAT on a patient who was in a minimally conscious state.⁷⁷ AAT was found to improve behaviour, with the patient showing “higher arousal and increased awareness in the presence of an animal.”⁷⁸ Similarly, Hediger and others examined the effect of AAT on patients undergoing treatment for an acquired brain injury.⁷⁹ Improvements in social behaviour, positive emotions,

⁶⁵ Cheryl Krause-Parello and Erika Friedmann, ‘The Effects of an Animal-Assisted Intervention on Salivary Alpha-Amylase, Salivary Immunoglobulin A, and Heart Rate during Forensic Interviews in Child Sexual Abuse Cases’ (2014) 27(4) *Anthrozoös* 581-590; Cheryl Krause-Parello and others, ‘Examining the Effects of a Service-Trained Facility Dog on Stress in Children Undergoing Forensic Interview for Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse’ (2018) 27(3) *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 305-320.

⁶⁶ Crenshaw (n 2); McDermott (n 10); Spruin (n 64).

⁶⁷ Elisabeth Reichert, ‘Individual Counseling for Sexually Abused Children: A Role for Animals and Storytelling’ (1998) 15(3) *Child and Adolescent Social Work* 177-185.

⁶⁸ *ibid.* See also Phillips and McQuarrie (n 64); Prothmann (n 46); Gabriela Sandoval, ‘Court Facility Dogs – Easing the Apprehensive Witness’ (2010) 39 *The Colorado Lawyer* 17-23 and McDermott (n 10).

⁶⁹ Walsh (n 4); Ariel Meyer, ‘Judges’ perceptions of facility dogs in the courtroom’ (2022) 73(1) *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 41-55.

⁷⁰ Daniela Acquadro Maran and others, ‘Animal-Assisted Intervention and Health Care Workers’ Psychological Health: A Systematic Review of the Literature’ (2022) 12 *Animals* 383-397.

⁷¹ Carey (n 42).

⁷² Sikstrom (n 46).

⁷³ Clare Jensen and others, ‘The effects of facility dogs on burnout, job-related well-being, and mental health in paediatric hospital professionals’ (2021) 30 *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 1429-1441; Lindström Nilsson and others (n 54); Rodriguez and others (n 54).

⁷⁴ Jensen (n 73).

⁷⁵ Sun Ju Chang and others, ‘Animal-Assisted Therapy as an Intervention for Older Adults: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis to Guide Evidence-Based Practice’ (2021) 18(1) *Worldviews on Evidence-Based Nursing* 60-67.

⁷⁶ Antonio Santaniello and others, ‘Animal-Assisted Therapy as a Non-Pharmacological Approach in Alzheimer’s Disease: A Retrospective Study’ (2020) 10 *Animals* 1142-1151.

⁷⁷ Jacqueline Boitier and others, ‘Is Animal-Assisted Therapy for Minimally Conscious State Beneficial? A Case Study’ (2020) 11 *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 491-497.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Karin Hediger and others, ‘Effects of animal-assisted therapy on social behaviour in patients with acquired brain injury: a randomised controlled trial’ (2019) 9 *Scientific Reports* 5831.

communication and motivation were shown in the presence of an animal.⁸⁰ Rodríguez-Martínez and others found that patients with dementia, multiple sclerosis, stroke or a spinal cord injury all demonstrated both physical and emotional improvements following AAT.⁸¹ AAT also demonstrated positive effects for adults with mental health difficulties.⁸²

Incarcerated individuals have also felt the benefits of AAT. Collica-Cox and others examined a jail-based parenting course for imprisoned women, integrated with the use of AAT.⁸³ The study found that ‘the presence of therapy dogs appeared to encourage communication, trust, and connectedness between group members.’⁸⁴ This in turn benefited the families of the women, as it allowed them to communicate more openly with their relatives.⁸⁵ Similarly, in a Canadian study, the researchers found that the use of AAT benefited the inmates’ mental health, improving communication, motivation and relationships.⁸⁶

Like children, adults who are victims of trauma can also have difficulty discussing their experiences.⁸⁷ This proves challenging when coming into contact with the criminal justice system, particularly when providing a statement to police, undergoing forensic interview or when giving evidence in court. Thus, the use of AAT/facility dogs has been explored for adult victims of trauma in these settings to assist with the difficult process. Adult victims of sexual offences have reported both physical and emotional benefits following interaction with facility dogs.⁸⁸ According to Spruin and others, ‘[p]articipant focus was shifted from focusing on the negative connotations associated with being in the court environment and having to give evidence, to thinking about the therapy dog and interacting with her.’⁸⁹ AAT has allowed adult victims to ‘feel more comfortable opening up about their experiences’ which in turn led some perpetrators to plead guilty.⁹⁰

Professionals working in the justice system have also reported both physical and mental health benefits following working with facility dogs, decreasing the risk of vicarious traumatisation.⁹¹ For example, judges have described facility dogs in courtrooms as ‘morale boosters’, meaning the intimidating atmosphere of the courtroom is lessened due to their presence.⁹² The use of facility dogs can improve staff morale,⁹³ offering emotional support for professionals who work in this high-pressure environment.⁹⁴ In the context of forensic

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ María Rodríguez-Martínez and others, ‘Evidence of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Neurological Diseases in Adults: A Systematic Review’ (2021) 18 *International Journal of Environmental Research in Public Health* 12882.

⁸² Monfort (n 57).

⁸³ Kimberly Collica-Cox and George Day, ‘When Dogs Make the Difference: Jail-Based Parenting With and Without Animal-Assisted Therapy’ (2022) 33(6) *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 608-638.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ Colleen Dell and others, ‘Prisoners Accessing Relational Connections with Dogs: A Just Outcome of the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dog Program at Stony Mountain Institution’ (2019) 8 *Annual Review of Interdisciplinary Justice Research* 13-68.

⁸⁷ Kelly (n 15).

⁸⁸ Spruin (n 64).

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Howell (n 10).

⁹¹ Walsh (n 4).

⁹² Meyer (n 69).

⁹³ Howell (n 10).

⁹⁴ Kelly (n 15).

interviews, professionals have reported that the use of facility dogs ‘allows the interviewer to build a better rapport with the witnesses’, helping the interviewer to build trust.⁹⁵

Challenges Related to the Use of Facility Dogs

Although the benefits of AAT/facility dogs have been well documented, it is important to acknowledge the difficulties that can surround their use. As noted by Collica-Cox and others, ‘[w]ithout an accrediting body responsible for creating and overseeing national standards, therapy animal organizations are forced to create their own guidelines, creating inconsistencies within the field.’⁹⁶ Due to the fact that this is a relatively new field of research, there are lessons to be learned. Without proper guidelines as to the nature of the animal’s role and staff expectations, safety concerns can exist.⁹⁷ However, by creating clear guidelines prior to the introduction of an AAT or facility dog programme on the process to be followed during implementation, ethical and safety concerns can be avoided.⁹⁸ In line with this, staff should receive necessary supports when implementing AAT, including the necessary training required to work with facility dogs.⁹⁹ In the absence of correct training, both staff, the animal and the party receiving AAT may be put at risk.

It is important that individuals have a choice to opt out of the process. Grové and others have noted that individuals may have allergies to a certain animal or may find animals to be unsanitary.¹⁰⁰ Some may have a fear of dogs due to a previous negative experience.¹⁰¹ Others may just not want to participate. AAT cannot be effective if it does not suit the individual in need of support. AAT will not be suitable for everyone and should not be applied as a one size fits all approach.

While some lawyers have expressed concerns that the presence of a facility dog may cause a distraction or elicit bias on the part of jurors,¹⁰² the evidence indicates that these concerns can be satisfactorily addressed so that they do not lead to an unfair trial¹⁰³ (for example by keeping the dog out of sight or providing additional jury instruction)¹⁰⁴ and are far outweighed by the benefits provided by the presence of the facility dog.¹⁰⁵

Summary of Existing Evidence

⁹⁵ Spruin (n 11).

⁹⁶ Kimberly Collica-Cox and George Day, ‘Dogs as Therapeutic Partners, Not Therapeutic Tools: Ethical Considerations for AAT in the Correctional Setting’ (2021) 10 *Social Sciences* 432.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.* See also Grové (n 48).

⁹⁹ Phillips and McQuarrie (n 64).

¹⁰⁰ Grové (n 48).

¹⁰¹ Meyer (n 69).

¹⁰² Sarah Bowers, ‘The Use of Therapy Dogs in Indiana Courtrooms: Why a Dog Might Not Be a Defendant’s Best Friend’ (2013) 46(4) *Indiana Law Review* 1289-1315; Abigayle Grimm, ‘An Examination of Why Permitting Therapy Dogs to Assist Child-Victims when Testifying during Criminal Trials should not be Permitted’ (2013) 16 *Journal of Gender, Race and Justice* 263-292.

¹⁰³ Kayla Burd and Dawn McQuiston, ‘Facility Dogs in the Courtroom: Comfort Without Prejudice?’ (2019) 44(4) *Criminal Justice Review* 515-536; Meyer (n 69).

¹⁰⁴ Crenshaw (n 2); Holder (n 2); Noreal Weems, ‘Real or Fake: Animals Can Make a Difference in Child Abuse Proceedings’ (2013) 2 *Mid-Atlantic Journal on Law and Public Policy* 117-131; Matthew Kaiser, ‘Sit, Stay, Now Beg for Me: A Look at the Courthouse Dogs Program and the Legal Standard Pennsylvania Should Use to Determine Whether a Dog Can Accompany a Child on the Witness Stand’ (2015) 60 *Villanova Law Review* 343-382.

¹⁰⁵ Glazer (n 7).

From an examination of the literature in relation to both adults and children who have engaged with AAT in a variety of settings, it is clear to see the numerous advantages generated by AAT in general and facility dogs for victims of crime in particular. Participants have reported positive physical, mental, social and emotional outcomes, finding that facility dogs are non-judgemental friends who can provide both support and love to those who need it.

The use of facility dogs as a form of support for both victims and professionals interacting with the justice system has a wide range of benefits, mitigating both the risk of secondary victimisation and vicarious traumatisation. Although negative consequences have been explored in relation to the use of facility dogs, these can be mitigated through clear guidelines relating to implementation. Thus, implementing the use of facility dogs in this setting can be a great advantage, offering support for individuals in this difficult process.

Part 4 – FYDO project: Design and Methodology

The FYDO project aimed to assess the efficacy of facility dogs as a means of mitigating secondary victimisation for victims of crime through a mixed-methods survey of victims and staff members participating in three pilot facility dogs' projects (one with a police service in Belgium; one with a victim support service in France; and one with a domestic violence shelter in Italy). An Irish pilot project was included in the original consortium but was forced to withdraw due to restructuring following the Covid-19 pandemic. The pilot programmes and the associated research were provided with financial support from the Justice Programme of the European Union. The research was designed and supervised by academic researchers with expertise in children's rights law and psychology. Ethical approval for the project was granted by the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork. Victims using the various services were invited to participate in the research by completing two questionnaires (one before their police interview or courtroom testimony, and another afterwards), assessing their well-being and anxiety on a validated Likert scale and answering a number of open qualitative questions regarding their feelings at the time of the interview and the impact of the facility dog (where used). Simplified versions of the questionnaires and the participant information sheet were produced for participants under the age of 13. Staff of the various services were asked to complete pre-interview and post-interview questionnaires regarding their observations on the emotional state of the victims and the impact of the facility dog (where used). Where victims were accompanied by a parent or support person, this person was also invited to complete a questionnaire.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Where participants were under the age of 18, informed consent was obtained from both the participant and a parent or guardian. All data was anonymised; only basic demographic detail (i.e. age and gender) was collected, along with the details of the category of case involved (i.e. sexual offence/domestic violence/witness of crime/other).

The data collected to date has two limitations: first, the sample size is relatively small. Second, while efforts were made to collect data from victims who used a facility dog and victims who did not, the number of participants to date who did not use a facility dog has been too small to act as a reliable control group. As a result, the quantitative data presented below must be treated with some caution and was primarily collected to help corroborate and enhance the

credibility of the qualitative data.¹⁰⁶ This data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows (Version 26) to examine the descriptive statistics. Correlational analysis was also performed to assess the statistical relationship between variables, and in particular, the relationship between the dogs' impacts on victims and use over an extended period. The emphasis will be placed on the qualitative data and the self-reported experiences of victims who worked with facility dogs. This qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis, and particular attention was paid to whether the data showed variations based on demographic characteristics or the category of crime involved. The following analysis is based on questionnaires collected from a total of 66 victims; 3 parents/supports persons; and 10 victim support staff.

Part 5 – FYDO Project: Results and Analysis

Qualitative analysis

The qualitative data was generally consistent and showed that most victims found the presence of a facility dog helpful and re-assuring during their interactions with the justice system. Two main effects were identified: the dog had a calming effect on victims who were finding the situation stressful, and in turn, this assisted victims to express themselves more effectively. For example, a 15-year-old female victim of sexual abuse described herself as 'stressed' before her interview; following the interview, she reported that she felt 'Pretty good ... I felt at peace ... I feel confident and the dog is there ... he allowed me to remain serene.' Similar comments were made by others:

Pre-interview: 'I'm empty sometimes. I feel like a raft lost on the open sea.'

Post-interview: 'The dog helped me to express myself more clearly ... his presence allowed me not to be intimidated, I hardly ever looked for my words, the words came by themselves in fact ... I noticed that I cry less when she is present.' (Female, 54, victim of domestic violence)

A 63-year-old male victim of burglary commented that '[Name of dog] came to visit and I loved getting to know him. He's nice and good. I used to have dogs too and it was nice to cuddle and pet a dog because that was a long time ago.' In line with the findings of previous studies, the calming and soothing effect of the dog during the most difficult moments of a police interview was a notable feature of the data; one victim stated that the dog 'radiates calm', while another stated:

Yes, the dog helps a lot during the interview, he allows you to pause when the emotion is too much ... he helps to soothe painful moments, when we recount our experience and what it feels like. (Female, 37, victim of domestic violence)

At the same time, it should be noted that not all of the participants attributed positive experiences during their interviews to the presence of the facility dog. A minority of participants focused instead on the role of the victim support professional:

I was happy that the dog was there but as I was already confident, I was very comfortable with the psychologist, [name of dog] didn't necessarily make me

¹⁰⁶ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd edn, Sage 1990).

feel better ... It was great fun to see a dog, I would rather say that it added more. (Female, 21, victim of sexual abuse)

The use of facility dogs over an extended period of time with victims living in a domestic violence shelter was a novel aspect of the FYDO project. The data is very encouraging about the benefits of this approach, with participants speaking positively about the impact of the dog both on the adult victim of domestic violence, and on children that are accompanying them in the shelter:

Most helpful, in all kind of meetings at the shelter there should be a facility dog, it is of great help for children who are traumatised and need the unconditional love of a dog. (Female, 40, victim of domestic violence)

I like to have the dog near me, I feel more safe and to touch the dog makes me feel quieter and less afraid. (Female, 50, domestic violence)

I feel better and safer if the dogs are with me ... Dogs are good for my son, he loves dogs and he can concentrate when the dogs are present ... (Female, 30, victim of domestic violence)

... I prefer to deal with dogs rather than humans. Dogs are good also for my children, it helps them being more relaxed and happy. For me the presence in the shelter of the dogs has been by far the best thing that happened in months. (Female, 30, victim of domestic violence)

A number of victims spoke about a feeling of trust towards the facility dog, or attributed positive traits to how the dog behaved towards them:

... for me the presence of the dog is extremely important, it helps me express emotions that I cannot express with people, it gives me solace ... I know I can trust him and he can trust me. (Female, 55, victim of domestic violence)

Although I prefer cats, these dogs have been a great help for me, especially because I need their kindness ... (Female, 30, victim of domestic violence)

There were relatively few variances in the data regarding the experiences of victims of different genders or ages, or victims of different crimes. The main variation that appeared was that teenagers and adults were more consistently positive about facility dogs than young children, who had more mixed views – for example, the contrast between these two experiences of the facility dog:

[Name of dog] is cute, he is a really calm and good dog and I immediately felt less rushed thanks to him. (Male, 7, victim of sexual abuse)

No. I like small dogs but this one is too big and I'm scared of it. (Female, 6, victim of sexual abuse)

The data collected from parents and support persons was limited in sample size and should be treated with caution for that reason; nevertheless, the data that was collected was positive about the impact of the facility dog, including an indication that it made it easier to make the initial decision to access supports for the child, notwithstanding the risk of secondary victimisation:

By explaining to me well what to use the dog for during these sessions, this greatly contributed to the desire to go to the session with the psychologist for my daughter ... it calms the situation and the anxiety. I feel comfortable in her presence and I see that it brings joy to my daughter even if she has to remember the painful facts that she would have felt in her life. (Female, 43, mother of victim of sexual abuse)

Victim support professionals shared the perception that the presence of a facility dog had a beneficial calming impact on victims:

The dog helped the victim to feel calmer and made her laugh ([name of dog] drank water for 3 minutes so we could joke about it). Yes, the victim is very comfortable with having [name of dog] around.” (Female, 27, victim support staff)

[Name of dog] was able to help the victim relax and reassure him. I think that the dog also made it possible to make the link with me because the victim was very afraid of meeting a psychologist. (Female, 27, victim support staff)

Quantitative Analysis

Analysis of the quantitative data enabled a deeper understanding into the impact that participants felt the facility dog had on their experiences in the justice system. This mixed method approach also ensured a triangulation of the data that was obtained, providing stronger validity in the interpretation of the results.¹⁰⁷ To further ensure that the quantitative results did not unintentionally bias the themes generated from the qualitative data, a trained researcher who was unfamiliar with the study or outcomes of the qualitative data performed the analysis that is presented below.

The results and key themes identified in the qualitative data presented above were further supported by the quantitative data collected from victims and support professionals. In particular, the results from victim support services indicated that all victims who utilised a facility dog agreed that the dog made them feel safe and comfortable during the interview process ($n = 26$; 100%).¹⁰⁸ The vast majority also agreed ($n = 24$; 92%) that the dog helped them to talk more openly about their experiences, with two (8%) victims being unsure of the dog's impact. The positive impact that victims felt the facility dog had on them was also emphasised by the victim support professionals. Where facility dogs were used, all victim support professionals agreed ($n = 26$; 100%) that the interviews went well, the victim was cooperative and was able to effectively communicate information. All but one professional also agreed ($n = 25$; 96%) that the victim appeared relaxed, exhibiting signs of a positive emotional wellbeing throughout interview. Similar to the victim responses, when support professionals were specifically asked about the impact the facility dog had on the victim during interview, the vast majority agreed ($n = 24$; 92%), that the dog aided victims in opening up about their experiences and providing a more comfortable environment. Two

¹⁰⁷ Bojana Lobe, 'Integration of online research methods' in *Information technology/social informatics collection* (University of Ljubljana 2008).

¹⁰⁸ $n = 26$ signifies 26 participants.

* The content of this publication represents the views of the authors only and is their sole responsibility. The European Commission does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

professionals indicated that they did not ‘agree’ or ‘disagree’, but that they were ‘unsure’ of the dog’s impact.

The quantitative data collected from adult victims living in a domestic violence shelter ($n = 18$) was explored further to investigate any extended impact the facility dog might have over time. Results from the correlational analysis found a strong positive relationship between the length of time the victim had been interacting with the dog and their overall levels of anxiety. Specifically, the longer the victim had been using the facility dog at the shelter, the more likely it was to see a significant drop in their overall anxiety levels ($r_s = .397, p = .028$). Victims who had been at the shelter for 6 months or more showed a mean anxiety score of 51.3 (SD = 12.6), compared to those who had been there under 6 months, who had an average of 55.2 (SD = 14.4). While the decrease in anxiety could be influenced by other environmental factors in the shelter, these results, coupled with the qualitative insights highlighting the benefits the dog provided over an extended period, provide encouraging outcomes into the positive they could have on victims of domestic violence. Further exploration into the extent of this impact in making victims feel safer and more relaxed would therefore be valuable.

Conclusion

The international body of evidence regarding the benefits of facility dogs as a means of mitigating secondary victimisation of victims in the justice system is increasing all of the time. The results of the FYDO project bolster this evidence in new contexts – particularly in respect of adult victims of domestic violence (including while living in shelters). The strongest findings of the research are that facility dogs help victims to feel calm and less upset; as such, they mitigate the difficulty of speaking about and recounting traumatic experiences of violence or sexual abuse and act as an aid to effective communication. Related to this, the research also produced evidence that the availability of facility dogs made it easier for victims to seek therapeutic interventions from psychologists. Participants described facility dogs as kind’ and expressed feelings of trust towards them. Professional staff of victim support services agreed that the presence of facility dogs had a positive impact on the experience of victims when engaging with their services.

Part 2 of this article explained the range of international law instruments that oblige States to take measures aimed at mitigating the risk that victims of crime in general (and victims of sexual abuse or domestic violence in particular) will experience secondary victimisation when interacting with the justice system. The evidence produced by the FYDO project helps to advance the case for national governments to support the introduction of facility dogs as part of their efforts to discharge their obligations under EU, UN and Council of Europe human rights law. Moreover, when read together with broader literature on animal-assisted therapy, it is evident that there is scope to adapt the use of facility dogs to a range of new contexts including especially vulnerable victims, such as victims with disabilities and victims of human trafficking. Additional potential for the use of facility dogs exists in other fields where people have experienced significant trauma – for example, during the assessment of asylum claims by refugees fleeing war or other forms of persecution.