



Beneficis i riscos de les relacions de les persones amb animals de companyia

26 D'ABRIL DE 2024

L'ACADÈMIA DE CIÈNCIES MÈDIQUES



- 10:00 - 10:15 BENEFICIS DE LA CONVIVÈNCIA AMB ANIMALS DE COMPANYIA. UNA NOVA VISIÓ: EL VINCLE HUMANS-ANIMALS. MANEL LÓPEZ, DEGÀ DE LA FACULTAT DE VETERINÀRIA DE LA UAB.

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Barcelona, 26 d'abril de 2024

Early History of the Human-Animal Bond

Hunter-gatherer societies dominated early human civilization, creating opportunities for human involvement and interactions with the animals in their environment. It is likely these first interactions were centered on humans obtaining **resources** from animals, such as meat, bones, and skins. However, as humans continued to coexist with animals, humans found similarities between themselves and the animals they encountered. Humans also became more invested in the activities of animals, such as identifying migratory patterns, food sources, and behavior. Animals were eventually included in cultural ceremonies through worship, sacrifice, and symbolism. The increased interaction with animals led to **anthropomorphizing**, or ascribing human characteristics to animals, which was reinforced by physical appearances such as facial features (i.e., eyes, mouth) that were attributed to human emotions. Anthropomorphism contributed to **domestication**, especially with animals that demonstrated a connection through gaze or facial features. As humans formed closer bonds with animals, specific traits such as docility, manageable size, and juvenile features were desirable, and those animals were permitted to join human encampments. Humans soon learned they were capable of **selecting** specific animals to breed and propagate these traits, transforming species of animals to meet human wants and needs.



As humans continued to invest in the propagation of domestic animals, the roles of some animals changed from utilitarian to companionship, introducing the concept of a **pet**.⁶ Pets are generally considered animals that are not primary food sources, yet provide pleasure and/or companionship. This companionship fosters **attachment**, fulfilling an innate human need to bond.⁹

Gray PB, Young SM. Human–pet dynamics in cross-cultural perspective. *Anthrozoös* 2011;24(1):17-30.



El terme: vincle humans-animals

Leo Bustad, the dean of Washington State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, together with the psychiatrist Michael McCulloch, they developed the Delta Society to foster research on the value of our relationship with animals; indeed, **Bustad coined the expression the *human-animal bond***. He shamelessly borrowed the wording from the often-discussed *mother-infant bond*. Both bonds indicated a relationship that is essential and mutual. It took a strong collaboration of a leading veterinarian and a respected physician for society to look past the biases in both fields. This was long before the present concept of One Health.

The Impact of a Monograph: The Origin of the Expression the "Human-Animal Bond" and the Importance of Compassion. Alan Beck, 2020.



What Is the Human-Animal Bond?

According to the Human Animal Bond Research Institute ([HABRI](#)), the human-animal bond is “a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship between people and animals that is influenced by behaviors that are essential to the health and well-being of both.”² The emotional, psychological, and physical connections people have with animals and the environment are also incorporated into the definition of the human-animal bond.²

Relationships between humans and animals vary, ranging from non-pet animals used in production and service to the most doted upon family pets, with the majority of animal owners in the middle of this range.³ Therefore, relationships and attachment can vary among people and the animals in their lives. These relationships are also situational and conditional, depending on how humans view the animal.⁴ For example, a dedicated dog owner may enjoy a medium-rare steak, but balk at the thought of eating horse meat. The historical and scientific context behind the human-animal bond provides a deeper understanding of the relationships between humans and animals, offers insight into how fulfilling this bond can be, and helps the veterinary team better integrate the bond into clinical culture.



Benefits of the human-animal bond



It is increasingly recognized that companion animals can bring physical and mental health benefits to their owners. Studies suggest that pet ownership may lower stress levels, help to fight depression, boost exercise and reduce the risk of heart attacks and strokes. A strong human-animal bond is also beneficial for the companion animal; owners are more likely to take their pets for routine examinations and notice physical and behavioural changes indicative of disease.

- **Human health:** benefits reported include fewer allergies in children, bodyweight management and improved cardiovascular health.
An examination of the possible physical activity and short-term health benefits associated with dog walking.
Human-Animal Interaction Bulletin 2018

Pet ownership and survival in the elderly hypertensive population.
Journal of Hypertension 2017
- **Animal health and welfare:** promotion of responsible pet ownership has improved animal health and welfare.
Behavioral and physiological reactions in dogs to a veterinary examination: owner-dog interactions improve canine well-being.
Physiology & Behavior 2017

A happier rat pack: the impacts of tickling pet store rats on human-animal interactions and rat welfare.
Applied Animal Behaviour Science 2018
- **Mental well-being:** interactions with pets can improve mood, help to fight anxiety and relieve stress. The use of animal assisted therapy (AAT) is on the rise.
Self-disclosure with dogs: dog owners' and non-dog owners' willingness to disclose emotional topics.
Anthrozoös, 2016

Patient benefit of dog-assisted interventions in health care: a systematic review.
BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine 2017
- **'One Welfare':** A new term 'One Welfare' is emerging, extending the 'One Health' concept beyond physical health, recognising that animal welfare and human well-being are intrinsically connected.
One welfare: a framework to improve animal welfare and human well-being.
CABI 2018

Application of Fraser's "practical" ethic in veterinary practice, and its compatibility with a "One Welfare" framework.
Animals 2018

Implementing One Welfare: A compulsory Endeavor for One Health



Introduction

- Overview of One Welfare

Mentre que One Health se centra en els aspectes físics de la salut, One Welfare amplia aquesta visió per incloure el benestar emocional i psicològic. One Welfare postula que el benestar dels animals i els humans està interconnectat i afecta aspectes emocionals i socials de les comunitats (de l'entorn).


Predisposició a la malaltia!!

Exemple: El paper dels animals de companyia en les vides humanes demostra clarament aquest concepte. Una cura de qualitat per a les mascotes no només millora la seva vida, sinó que s'ha demostrat científicament que redueix l'estrès i millora el benestar emocional dels humans que els cuiden.





Original Articles

Associations between the Psychological Characteristics of the Human–Dog Relationship and Oxytocin and Cortisol Levels

Linda Handlin , Anne Nilsson, Mikael Ejdebäck, Eva Hydrbring-Sandberg & Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg

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III. The Science Behind One Welfare

- **Emotional and Psychological Well-being: Animals and Humans**

També hi ha proves creixents que **la interacció amb animals pot tenir profunds impactes en el benestar emocional i psicològic humà**. Activitats com **teràpia amb mascots** s'ha demostrat científicament que redueixen els nivells d'estrès i ansietat en humans.

Exemple: Múltiples estudis epidemiològics han demostrat que **els tutors de mascotes sovint tenen taxes més baixes de depressió en comparació amb els que no tenen mascotes**. Es creu que el mecanisme implica l'augment de l'activitat física, la interacció social i el vincle emocional entre mascotes i propietaris, que contribueixen al benestar mental.

La teràpia assistida amb equins pot millorar significativament els resultats de salut mental de les persones amb trastorn d'estrès posttraumàtic (TEPT).



Healthy Pets, Healthy People

[Print](#)

Keeping Pets Healthy Keeps People Healthy Too!

Studies have shown that the bond between people and their pets can increase fitness, lower stress, and bring happiness to their owners. But there's something else you should know.

Pets sometimes carry germs that can make people sick. The diseases people get from animals are known as zoonotic (zoe-oh-NOT-ic) diseases. [Learn more about the benefits and risks of having pets.](#)



How to keep pets & people healthy



Introduction

- Overview of One Welfare

Per què **One Welfare** no s'ha de considerar un complement opcional, sinó una part integral del **paradigma One Health**.

Exemple: En el sector agrícola de Nova Zelanda, la implementació de polítiques **One Welfare**, com la millora de les condicions de vida de les vaques lleteres, no només ha elevat el benestar dels animals, sinó que també ha portat a un augment de la producció de llet, demostrant la viabilitat econòmica d'enfocaments centrats en el benestar (i la reducció de l'ús d'antimicrobians!)

We do not need to wait for clinical signs. A bad state of welfare predisposes to suffer diseases!

II. The Shortcomings of One Health without One Welfare

- **Limitations in Addressing Zoonotic Diseases**

Un enfocament de salut que ignora les normes de benestar pot augmentar inadvertidament els riscos de transmissió de malalties zoonòtiques. **Les condicions estressants per als animals sovint redueixen les respostes immunitàries**, fent-los més susceptibles a malalties que després poden passar als humans.

Exemple: S'ha demostrat que les males condicions de benestar a les granges avícoles exacerben la propagació de la grip aviària (i la infecció per *Campylobacter*). **L'amuntegament i l'estrès poden comprometre el sistema immunitari de les aus, donant lloc a una transmissió ràpida que representa una amenaça directa per a la salut humana.**

II. The Shortcomings of One Health without One Welfare

- **Impact on Medical Treatments**

Descuidar el component de benestar en les poblacions animals pot afectar l'eficàcia dels tractaments mèdics, no només per als animals sinó també per als humans. **Els ambients estressants poden interactuar amb el metabolisme de la medicació i l'aparició de soques resistents als antibiòtics.**

Example: En ramaderia industrial, **descuidar el benestar animal sovint condueix a l'ús excessiu d'antibiòtics com a mesura compensatòria de les males condicions de vida.** Això s'ha relacionat amb un **augment de soques resistents als antibiòtics**, que suposi un risc tant per a la medicina veterinària com per a la medicina humana.

The Human–Companion Animal Bond: How Humans Benefit

Erika Friedmann, PhD*, Heesook Son, MPH, RN

KEYWORDS

- Animal assisted therapy • Pet therapy
- Animal-assisted activities • Stress reduction • Pets
- Assistance animals • Assistance dogs • Companion animals

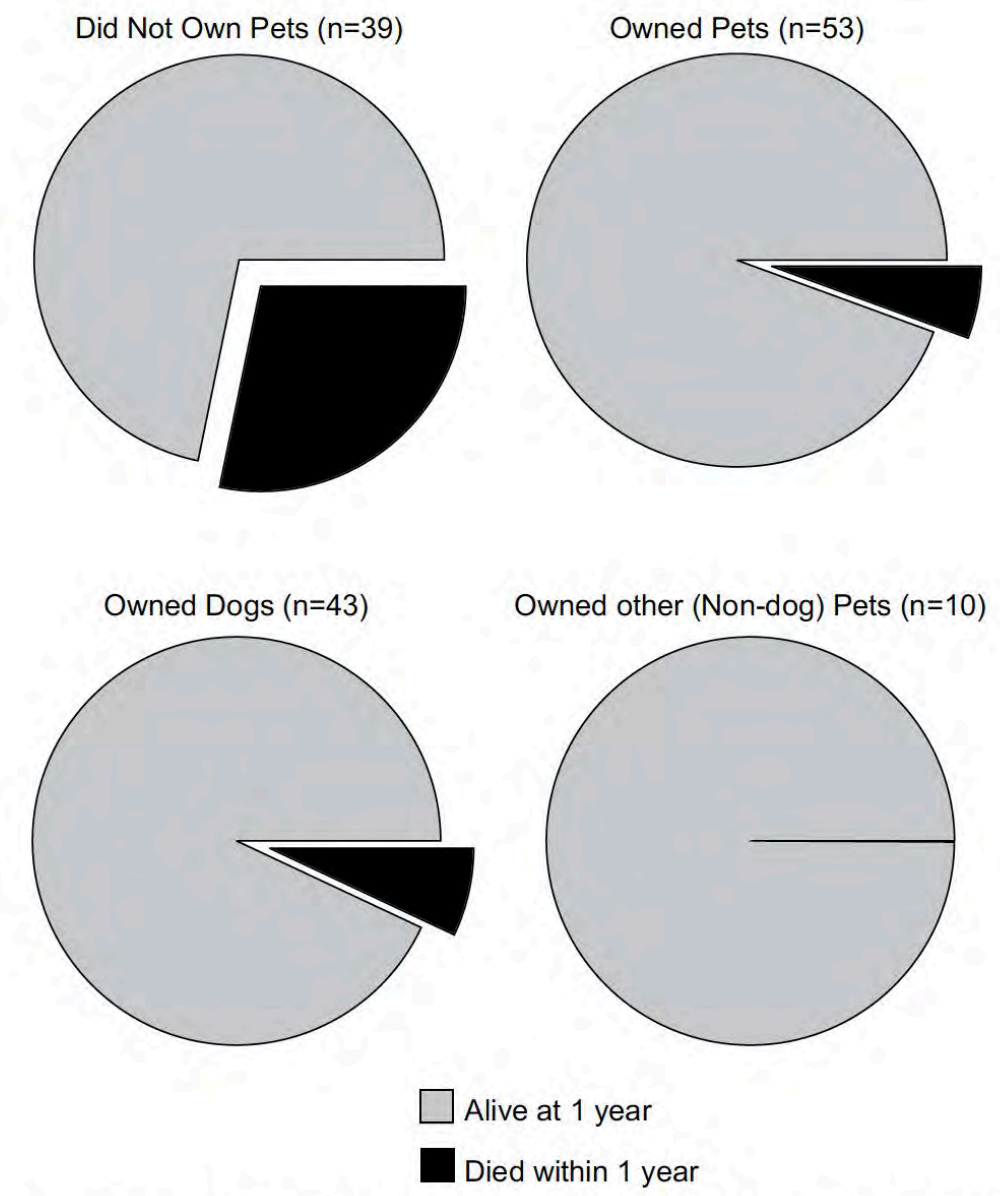


Fig. 2. One-year mortality of patients admitted to a coronary care unit according to pet ownership status at admission. Mortality was significantly lower in pet owners ($P < .01$), dog owners ($P < .05$), and dog non-owners. ($P < .05$) than in pet non-owners. (Data from Friedmann E, Katcher AH, Lynch JJ, et al. Animal companions and one-year survival of patients after discharge from a coronary care unit. Public Health Rep 1980;95:307–12.)

Walk or be walked by the dog? The attachment role



Catarina F. Martins^{1,2*}, Luís Silva^{1,2}, Jorge Soares^{1,2}, Graça S. Pinto^{1,2}, Catarina Abrantes^{1,2}, Luís Cardoso^{3,4}, Maria A. Pires^{3,4}, Hélder Sousa^{5,6} and Maria P. Mota^{1,2}

Abstract

Background The human-animal bond has been recognized as having positive effects on the health and well-being of both humans and pets. The present study aims to explore the influence of attachment on physical activity (PA), lifestyle, and health outcomes of dog owners (DO), highlighting the mutual benefits resulting from the relationship between DO and dogs.

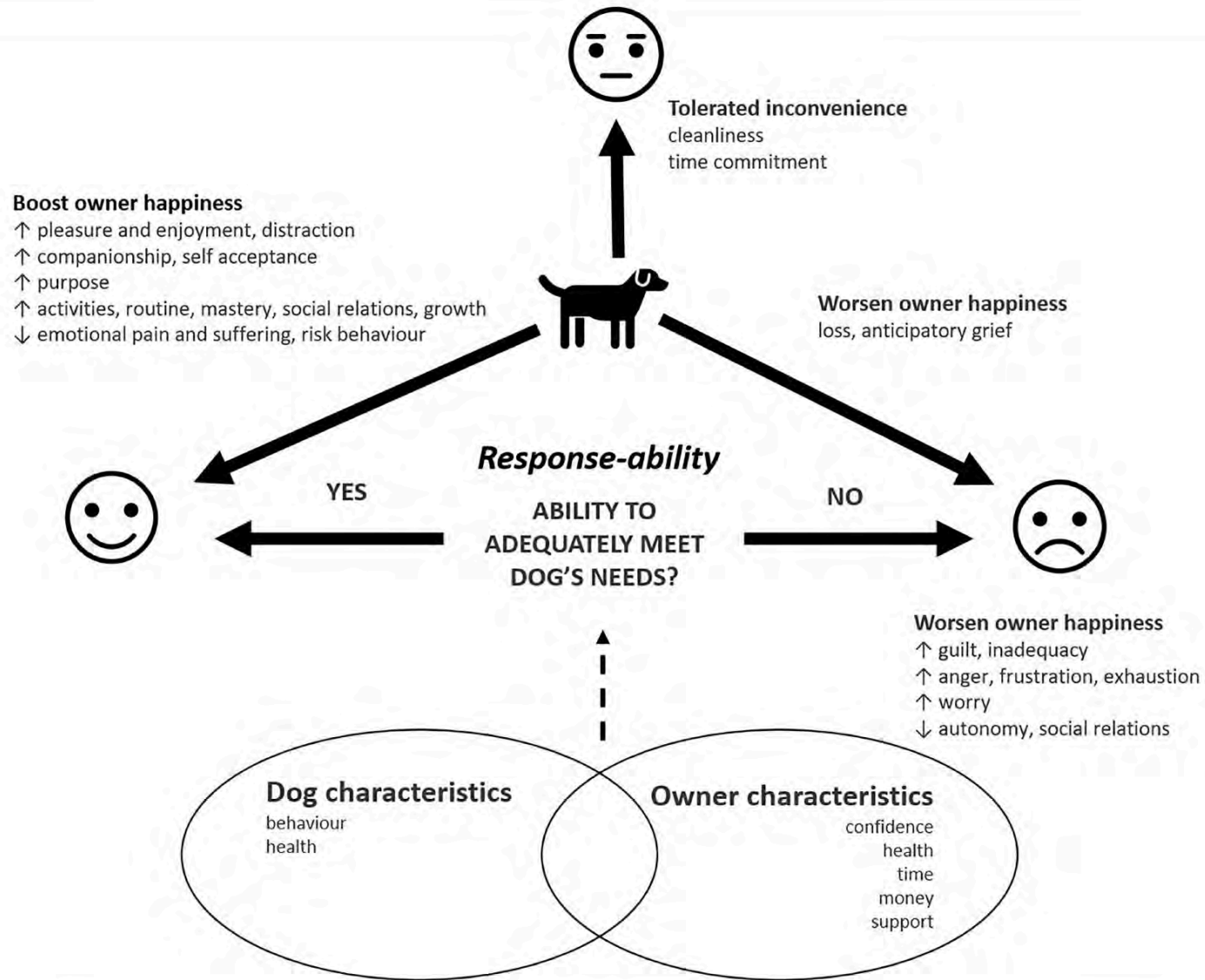
Methods Thirty-eight DO and their dogs participated in this study. Socio-demographic data, the Self-Rated Health (SRH), FANTASTICO Lifestyle Scale, and the Lexington Attachment Pet Scale (LAPS) were assessed. PA was measured in both the DO and the dogs, using an ActiGraph GT3X accelerometer in the context of daily routine. Descriptive statistics and Spearman rank correlation analyses were performed to examine the associations between LAPS, PA levels, socio-demographic variables, lifestyle behaviors, and SRH.

Results Significant correlations were found between the dog owners' light-level PA and the pets' vigorous level of PA ($\rho=0.445$, $p=0.01$). Furthermore, the importance of the pets' health ($\rho=-0.785$, $p=0.02$) and the LAPS subscales, namely proximity ($\rho=0.358$, $p=0.03$), and attachment ($\rho=0.392$, $p=0.01$), were related to taking the pet for a walk. Regarding lifestyle, DO with a healthier lifestyle had a better self-assessment of their health using the SRH ($\rho=0.39$, $p=0.02$). Moreover, DO with better lifestyles also exhibited greater concern for their pet's health ($\rho=0.398$, $p=0.01$).

Conclusions This study emphasizes that individuals who adopt healthier habits tend to perceive themselves as healthier and exhibit greater concern for their pets' health. The attachment between DO and dogs is important in promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors and engagement in PA. Our results highlight that the presence of a dog is associated with a higher level of PA in DO, depending on the strength of the human-animal bond.

Keywords Accelerometry, Companion animal, Dogs, Health, Lifestyle, Pet ownership, Physical activity

This positive association between dog ownership and health has important implications for **community health**, as it can potentially contribute to the **reduction of healthcare costs at a broader level**. In this regard, our findings add nuances to current research by recognizing that the benefits of having a dog should be seen as a spectrum of multiple mutual influences between the dog and the owner, ultimately resulting in a healthy lifestyle for both and a reduction in non-communicable diseases.




Dog ownership contributes to both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing in multiple ways, including supporting owners through periods of poor mental health and providing purpose. However, the burden of responsibility and owner and dog characteristics can create challenges, and owners may benefit from support in caring for their dogs and reducing problematic behaviors

FIGURE 1 | Thematic model of positive and negative impacts of dog ownership on owner wellbeing from qualitative analysis of open-text responses.

Dogs and the Good Life: A Cross-Sectional Study of the Association Between the Dog-Owner Relationship and Owner Mental Wellbeing

Aikaterini Merkouri¹, Taryn M. Graham², Marguerite Elizabeth O'Haire³, Rebecca Purewal² and Carri Westgarth^{1,2*}

Short-Term Interaction between Dogs and Their Owners: Effects on Oxytocin, Cortisol, Insulin and Heart Rate—An Exploratory Study

Linda Handlin , Eva Hydrbring-Sandberg, Anne Nilsson, Mikael Ejdebäck, Anna Jansson & Kerstin Uvnäs-Moberg

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The aim of this exploratory study was to determine heart rate and the levels of oxytocin, cortisol, and insulin in dogs and their owners in response to a short-term interaction. In addition, the dogs' behavior was studied. The owners' responses were compared with those obtained from a control group. Ten female volunteers and their own male Labrador dogs participated in an experiment during which the owner stroked, petted, and talked with her dog during the first 3 minutes. Blood samples were collected from both dog and owner before (0) and at 1, 3, 5, 15, 30, and 60 minutes after the start of the interaction. Blood samples were analyzed by EIA. Heart rate was monitored telemetrically. The data were analyzed using linear mixed models and paired *t*-tests. The dogs' oxytocin levels were significantly increased 3 minutes after the start of the interaction ($p = 0.027$). Cortisol levels were significantly increased after 15 and 30 minutes ($p = 0.004$ and $p = 0.022$, respectively), and heart rate was significantly decreased after 55 minutes ($p = 0.008$). The dogs displayed normal behaviors during the experiment. The owners' oxytocin levels peaked between 1 and 5 minutes after interaction ($p = 0.026$). No such effect was seen in the controls. Cortisol levels displayed a significant decrease at 15 or 30 minutes in both owners and controls, and insulin levels did so at 60 minutes ($p = 0.030$, $p = 0.002$ and $p = 0.002$, $p < 0.0001$, respectively). Heart rate decreased significantly in the owners at 55 and 60 minutes ($p = 0.0008$) but not in the controls. In conclusion, short-term sensory interaction between dogs and their owners influences hormonal levels and heart rate. However, further studies need to be performed in order to better understand the effects of interaction between dogs and their owners.

Associations between the Psychological Characteristics of the Human–Dog Relationship and Oxytocin and Cortisol Levels

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The aim of the present study was to explore possible correlations between dog owners' relationships with their dogs, as measured with the Monash Dog Owner Relationship Scale (MDORS), and oxytocin and cortisol levels in both the owners and their dogs. Ten female owners of male Labrador Retrievers completed the MDORS. The scores obtained from the single items, subscales, and total score of the MDORS were calculated. Ten blood samples were collected from each dog owner and her dog during a 60-minute interaction. Blood samples were analyzed for oxytocin and cortisol by Enzyme Immuno Assay (EIA) and mean values of oxytocin and cortisol were calculated in both owners and dogs. The MDORS scores obtained were correlated with basal and mean oxytocin and cortisol levels. The correlation analysis revealed some relationships between the scores of items in the MDORS that reflect the character of the dog–owner-relationship and the owners' hormone levels. For example, higher oxytocin levels in the owners were associated with greater frequency in kissing their dogs ($r_s = 0.864, p = 0.001$). Lower cortisol levels in the owners were associated with their perception that it will be more traumatic when their dog dies ($r_s = -0.730, p = 0.025$). The correlation analysis also revealed some relationships between the scores of items in the MDORS and the dogs' hormone levels. For example, greater frequency in owners kissing their dogs was associated with higher oxytocin levels in the dogs ($r_s = 0.753, p = 0.029$). Six items in the subscale Perceived Costs, as well as the subscale itself, correlated significantly with the dogs' oxytocin levels ($r_s = 0.820, p = 0.007$), that is, the lower the perceived cost, the higher the dogs' oxytocin levels. In addition, significant correlations between the oxytocin levels of the owners and the dogs were demonstrated. Possible mechanisms behind these correlations are discussed. In conclusion, the scores of some items and the subscales of the MDORS correlated with oxytocin, and to a lesser extent cortisol, levels in both the owners and dogs.

An Examination of Changes in Oxytocin Levels in Men and Women Before and After Interaction With a Bonded Dog

Suzanne C. Miller, Cathy C. Kennedy, Dale C. DeVoe, Matthew Hickey, Tracy Nelson & Lori Kogan 

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Oxytocin (OT) is a neuropeptide increasingly recognized for its role in bonding, socialization, and stress relief. Previous research has demonstrated participants' OT levels increased after interacting with or petting a dog, suggesting OT is at least partially responsible for the calm, relaxing feeling that participants experienced during this intervention. The purpose of our study was to more closely examine changes in oxytocin levels in men and women in response to interaction with their own dog after being separated from the dog while at work all day. This condition was compared with a reading control condition, without the presence of the dog. Because the workplace is a common stressor, participants were examined after work to evaluate how interacting with a pet may help decrease stress, as evidenced by increases in serum oxytocin levels. Ten men and ten women participated in the study. Serum oxytocin levels were obtained before the participants had contact with their dogs and then again after 25 minutes of interaction with their dog. The same protocol was followed for the reading condition except that instead of interacting with their dog, participants read nonfiction materials selected by the researchers. Serum oxytocin levels increased statistically more for women who interacted with their dog when compared with women in the reading condition ($p = 0.003$). There was no significant increase in oxytocin level in men after interaction with the bonded dog compared with the reading condition; in fact, male oxytocin levels decreased after both the dog and reading conditions. These results suggest that men and women may have different hormonal responses to interaction with their dogs. It is unclear to what degree OT reactivity was affected by hormones, personality traits, or interpersonal relationships; factors which warrant further research.



Article

The Role of Oxytocin in the Dog–Owner Relationship

Sarah Marshall-Pescini ^{1,2,*}, Franka S. Schaebs ^{3,*}, Alina Gaugg ¹, Anne Meinert ²,
Tobias Deschner ³ and Friederike Range ^{1,2}

Our approach: saliva sampling

Abstract: Oxytocin (OT) is involved in multiple social bonds, from attachment between parents and offspring to “friendships”. Dogs are an interesting species in which to investigate the link between the oxytocinergic system and social bonds since they establish preferential bonds with their own species but also with humans. Studies have shown that the oxytocinergic system may be involved in the regulation of such inter-specific relationships, with both dogs and their owners showing an increase in OT levels following socio-positive interactions. However, no direct comparison has been made in dogs’ OT reactivity following a social interaction with the owner vs. a familiar (but not bonded) person, so it is unclear whether relationship type mediates OT release during socio-positive interactions or whether the interaction per se is sufficient. Here we investigated OT reactivity in both dogs and owners, following a socio-positive interaction with each other or a familiar partner. Results showed neither the familiarity with the partner, nor the type of interaction affected OT reactivity (as measured in urine) in either dogs or owners. Given the recent mixed results on the role of oxytocin in dog-human interactions, we suggest there is a need for greater standardization of methodologies, an assessment of overall results taking into account ‘publication bias’ issues, and further studies investigating the role of relationship quality and interaction type on OT release.

Pet ownership and mental health in United States adults during COVID-19

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The COVID-19 pandemic was associated with declines in mental health and increased interest in pet ownership. We aimed to extend past theories and research linking pet ownership and mental health by investigating whether pet ownership was associated with mental health during the initial phases of the COVID-19 pandemic in a sample of American adults. We also tested whether the association of pet ownership and mental health was moderated by relationship status. Participants were 2,906 American adults who were recruited for an online survey study between May 2020 and May 2021. Pet ownership was assessed via dichotomous self-report (yes/no) and mental health was assessed using a 13-item questionnaire. The sample was 69.2% female with an average age of 46.0 years. 36.1% of the sample owned a pet and 68.5% of the sample was currently partnered. There was no overall association of pet ownership and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic (estimated mean difference (EMD) = 0.35, 95CI = -0.10, 0.80, $p = 0.12$). However, we found evidence for an association that was moderated by relationship status. Pet ownership was associated with better mental health among partnered individuals (EMD = 0.76, 95CI = 0.21, 1.30, $p = 0.006$). There was no association of pet ownership and mental health among unpartnered individuals (EMD = -0.41, 95CI = -1.20, 0.37, $p = 0.30$). Our findings suggest that relationship status may represent a critical moderator of the link

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<https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1217059/full>

Dolores Marcial-Modesto^{1†}, Brian N. Chin^{1*†}, Elizabeth D. Casserly¹, Shelby M. Parsons² and Brooke C. Feeney²

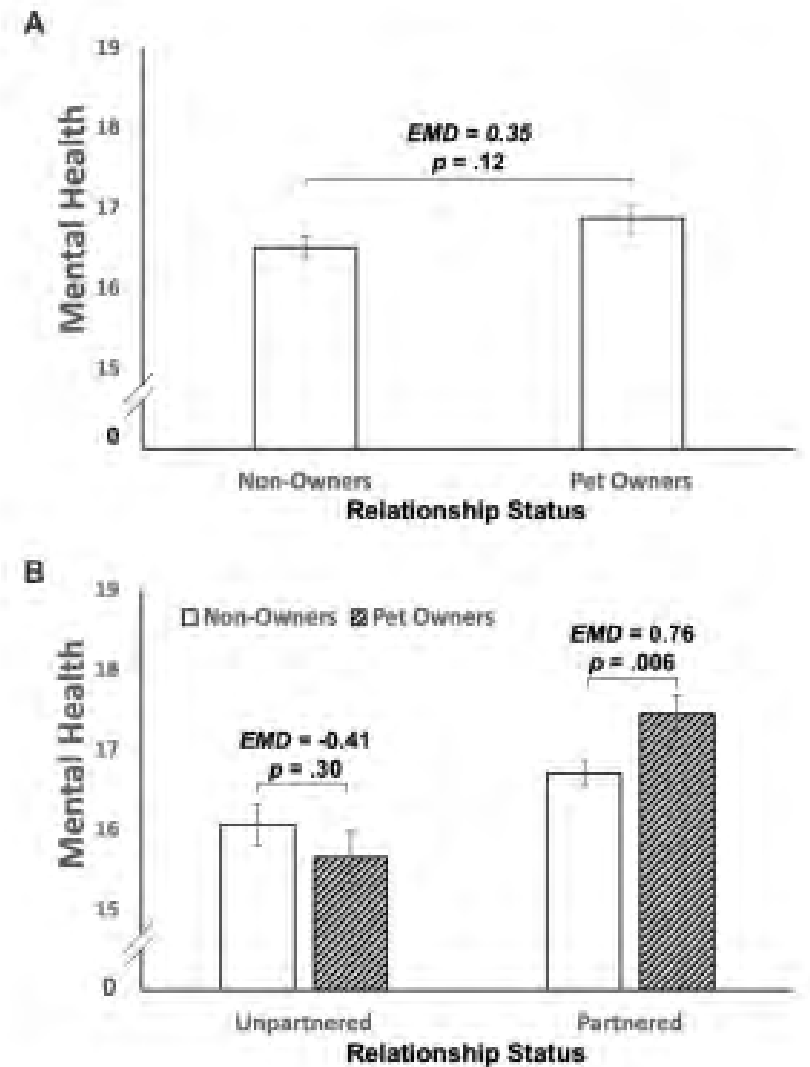


FIGURE 1 Association of pet ownership and mental health in the overall sample (A) and separately in partnered and unpartnered participants (B). This figure shows the estimated marginal mean mental health scores by pet ownership when controlling for age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and parenthood status. Between-group differences were tested using the estimated mean differences (EMD).



Pets Alleviate Stress

Owning a pet is linked to significantly lower heart rate and blood pressure in response to stress. In one study of cardiovascular reactivity to stress, those with pets had significantly lower resting baseline heart rates and blood pressure and faster recovery of these parameters to baseline after cessation of stress.¹

A national poll of older adults (50-80) conducted by the University of Michigan asked about the health benefits of pets. The majority of pet owners believed that animals connect them to other people, provide companionship, reduce stress, help them be physically active, and cope with physical and emotional symptoms, including pain. Many respondents reported that their pets positively contribute to their health and well-being. Among pet-owning respondents, 79% reported reduced stress, 73% reported a new sense of purpose, 65% reported easier connections with others, and 64% reported they are more physically active.²

Pets Fight Depression

According to a [HABRI survey of family physicians](#), 87% said their patients' mood or outlook had improved as a result of pet ownership. Another study found that pets, through serving as a distraction from typical symptoms and encouraging activity, helped people cope with depression and other long-term mental health issues.³

Research has also demonstrated that pet owners laugh more – one study found that those with dogs or cats laughed more in their daily lives than people without pets. Pet owners reported laughing more on a daily basis, including reactions to their pet and spontaneous laughter, compared to non-pet owners.⁴





Pets Address Social Isolation & Loneliness

Pets can provide people with the kind of social support that can help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. A [survey](#) commissioned by HABRI and Mars Petcare⁵ found that 85% of respondents (pet owners and non-pet owners) believe pet interaction can help reduce loneliness and 76% agree human-pet interactions can help address social isolation.

A 2016 study explored the role of pets in the social networks of people managing a long-term mental health problem. The study found that pets contributed to individuals developing routines that provided emotional and social support.⁶

In older adults, the role of pet ownership may provide a sense of purpose and meaning, reducing loneliness and increasing socialization. These benefits may also increase resilience in older adults against mental health disorders, which may positively influence their mental health outcomes.⁷

Pets Improve Physical Fitness & Encourage Activity

Research demonstrates that owning a dog can lead to lower rates of obesity and increased weekly exercise. One study⁸ analyzed data from the 2005 Michigan Behavioral Risk Factor Survey to assess the overall impact of dog walking on the level of total walking and leisure-time physical activity, including exercise and recreational activities. Results found that dog walking was associated with a significant increase in walking activity and physical activity. Compared with non-dog owners, the odds of obtaining at least 150 minutes per week of total walking were 34% higher for dog walkers, and the odds of doing any physical activity were 69% higher.





Pets Facilitate Healing & Resiliency

Several studies have demonstrated an association between pet ownership and a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases and heart-related health issues.⁹ Dog ownership has been associated with a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease and a reduced risk of mortality.¹⁰

Pet ownership has also been linked to increased coronary artery disease survival.¹¹ In a study of individuals with one or more cardiac risk factors, pet ownership was associated with greater adaptability to disturbances in the cardiovascular system.¹² A study of 2,400 cat owners concluded there was a significantly lower relative risk for death due to cardiovascular diseases, including stroke and heart attack, compared to non-owners during a 20-year follow-up.¹³

In good times and in bad, we can turn to our pets for comfort, joy and support. HABRI hopes that in sharing this information, more people will benefit from the human-animal bond as a source of support in this time of need. For more information about the health benefits of pets, visit www.habri.org.

[habri.org](http://www.habri.org) | [f](#) [t](#) [in](#) [@](#)

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Consideration of the human-animal bond typically focuses on the benefits of companion animals to human health and well-being, but it is essential that in realizing these benefits the welfare needs of the animals, both physical and mental, are also met. Positive emotional relationships with animals are likely to increase recognition of animal sentience and so help create positive attitudes toward animals at the societal level, but, at the individual level, the animals to which humans are bonded should also benefit from the human-animal relationship. A strong human-animal bond may benefit animal welfare (e.g., by motivating an owner to commit time and funds to necessary veterinary medical treatment), but may also be the source of compromised welfare. Highly bonded owners may, for example, be reluctant to permit euthanasia on humane grounds, and the anthropomorphic nature of many human-companion animal bonds can contribute to the development of problem behaviors and obesity. The challenge for the veterinary profession is to ensure that widespread positive sentiment toward animals, which the human-animal bond generates, is translated in to human behavior and actions that are conducive to good animal welfare. This, it is suggested, can be achieved through adequate veterinary education in veterinary and animal welfare science, ethics, and communication.

Other Perspectives on the Human-Animal Bond

Animal Welfare and the Human-Animal Bond: Considerations for Veterinary Faculty, Students, and Practitioners

Sean P. Wensley

CONCLUSION

Consideration of the HAB typically focuses on the benefits of companion animals to human health and well-being, but it is essential that in realizing these benefits the welfare needs of the animals, both physical and mental, are also met.

Through adequate training, veterinarians must be capable of scientifically assessing whether welfare needs are being met, and must also be in no doubt about the presence and importance of emotionally meaningful HABs. There must be recognition that such bonds do not automatically result in good animal welfare, and in some cases can be the source of poor welfare. Veterinarians are uniquely placed to directly communicate with animal owners, and their opinions are highly respected.⁶⁵⁻⁶⁷ Veterinarians therefore have exceptional potential—via robust training in veterinary and animal welfare science, ethics, and communication—to play a key role in nurturing HABs that are beneficial to both humans and animals alike.

REVIEW



Considering the human-animal bond in developing One Health guidelines and standards for companion animals in humanitarian crises

Andrew O'Carroll^{1*}, Carrie La Jeunesse² and Lynn Lieberman Lawry¹

Abstract

Establishing international One Health guidelines and standards for the evacuation and care of small companion animals in humanitarian crises is essential to protect the overall well-being of people and pets impacted, improve efficacy and safety of response operations, safeguard public health and biosecurity, and mitigate the impacts of free-roaming pets on the environment and biodiversity. Given predictably larger scale and more frequent crises due to climate change and human conflict or violence, it is increasingly important to consider and plan for the impacts that invariably result when both people and pets are displaced.







One Health impact statement

Currently, there is a prominent focus on One Health approaches to plan for and respond to emerging infectious disease threats as they impact human physical and public health. Much less attention has been paid to all-hazards disaster preparedness and planning (DPP) that comprehensively addresses the myriad additional ways humans, other animals, and the environment are impacted by co-displacement of pets and people.


If applied, One Health approaches to DPP for humanitarian crises would address a broader range of risks and harms and build the cross-disciplinary collaborations and platforms necessary to truly plan and prepare for "all hazards." This approach also provides an exceptional opportunity to elevate One Health understanding among both professionals and the public when disaster planning initiatives are developed with, and shared among, communities around the world.


Keywords: disasters, One-Health, human animal bond, veterinary, displaced persons, conflict, natural disaster


The LGBTQ+ People-Animal Bond: A Systematic Review of the Effects of Companion Animals on LGBTQ+ People

Marcos Díaz Videla , PhD , Rafael Delgado Rodríguez, PhD , Rafael Martos-Montes, PhD , David Ordóñez Pérez, MD  & Paula Calvo, PhD 

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ABSTRACT

LGBTQ+ people tend to experience prejudice, stigma, and discrimination, which increases their risk of developing mental health difficulties. Support networks, including companion animals, can be used to cope with these challenges. We performed a systematic review of studies related to the effects of human-animal interactions on the LGBTQ+ population. The review included 18 empirical studies; the findings showed that participants tended to view companion animals as family members, as well as providers of love, acceptance, and social support. Thus, companion animals could alleviate stress and increase resilience. However, certain costs were also cited and, under some circumstances, poorer health was observed. The results are discussed considering three unique aspects of the “LGBTQ+ people-animal bond”: (1) it promotes self-acceptance, (2) provides a sense of protection against sexuality-based stigma and social acts of aggression based on sex or gender, and (3) exposes animal guardians requesting animal care services to potential discrimination. By characterizing the LGBTQ+ people-animal bond, more effective responses to meet their needs and promote inclusion may be achieved.

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The Role of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Enhancing Patients' Well-Being: Systematic Study of the Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence

Ramendra Pati Pandey¹ ; Himanshu^{2,3} ; Gunjan^{2,3} ; Riya Mukherjee^{2,3} ; Chung-Ming Chang^{3,4} 

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 Authors' Response to Peer-Review Reports <https://med.jmirx.org/2024/1/e55899>

Abstract

Background:

Animal-assisted therapy, also known as pet therapy, is a therapeutic intervention that involves animals to enhance the well-being of individuals across various populations and settings.

Objective:

This systematic study aims to assess the outcomes of animal-assisted therapy interventions and explore the associated policies.

Methods:

A total of 16 papers published between 2015 and 2023 were selected for analysis. These papers were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic of animal-assisted therapy and their availability in scholarly databases. Thematic synthesis and meta-analysis were used to synthesize the qualitative and quantitative data extracted from the selected papers.

Results:

The analysis included 16 studies that met the inclusion criteria and were deemed to be of moderate or higher quality. Among these studies, 4 demonstrated positive results for therapeutic mediation and one for supportive mediation in psychiatric disorders. Additionally, all studies showed positive outcomes for depression and neurological disorders. Regarding stress and anxiety, 3 studies indicated supportive mediation, while 2 studies showed activating mediation.

Conclusions:


The overall assessment of animal-assisted therapy shows promise as an effective intervention in promoting well-being among diverse populations. Further research and the establishment of standardized outcome assessment measures and comprehensive policies are essential for advancing the field and maximizing the benefits of animal-assisted therapy.

Conclusions:

The overall assessment of animal-assisted therapy shows promise as an effective intervention in promoting well-being among diverse populations. Further research and the establishment of standardized outcome assessment measures and comprehensive policies are essential for advancing the field and maximizing the benefits of animal-assisted therapy.



Review
**The State of Animal-Assisted Interventions:
Addressing the Contemporary Issues That Will
Shape the Future**

Aubrey H. Fine ^{1,*}, Alan M. Beck ²  and Zenithson Ng ³

Even before Florence Nightingale (1869) used animals in a therapeutic setting, the Quaker York Retreat in England, the first recorded use of animals in a therapeutic setting in 1792, utilized rabbits and poultry. In the early 19th century, groups were beginning to train dogs to assist blind people in navigating their world.



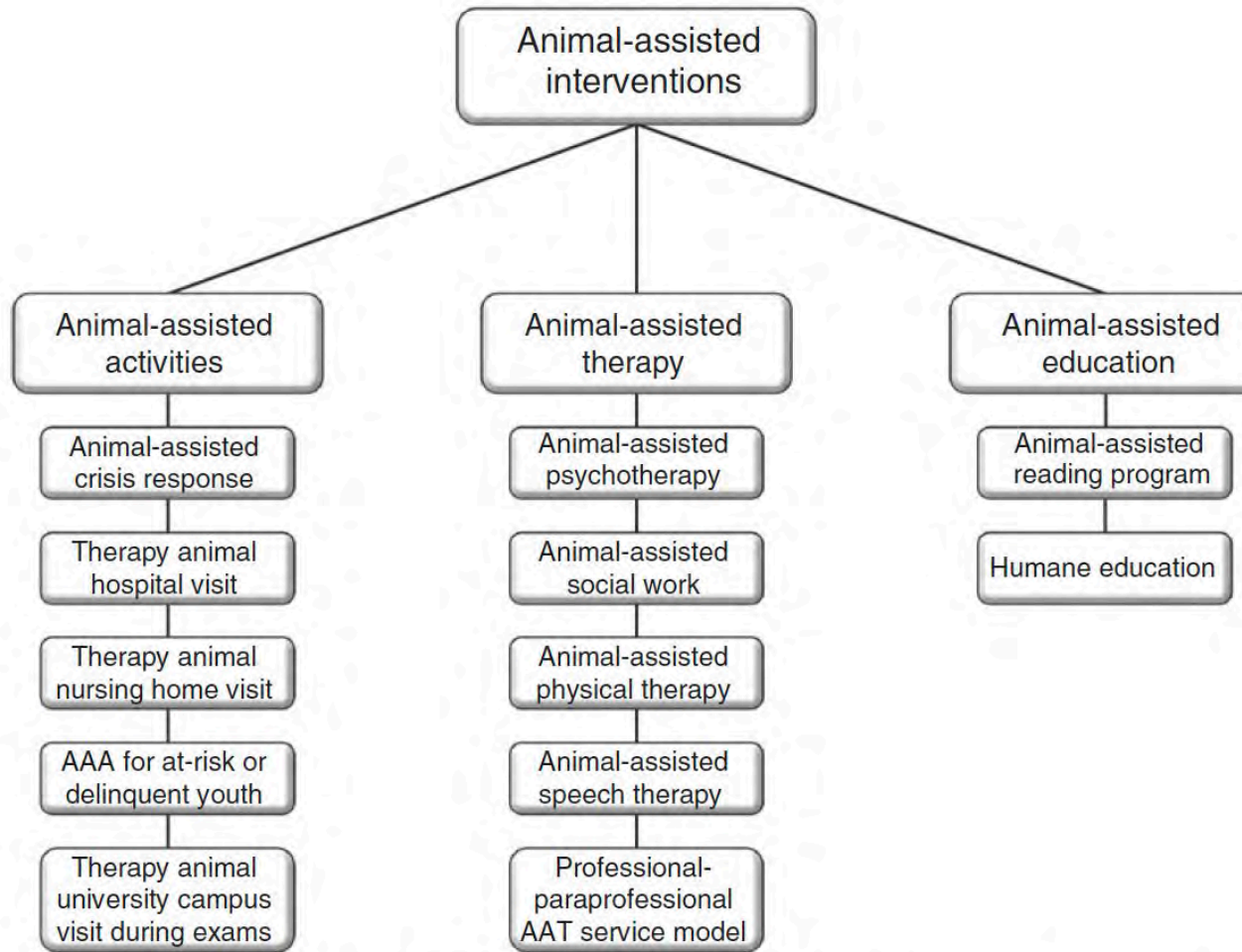


Figure 1 The spectrum of animal-assisted interventions includes AAA, AAT, and AAE. Examples of sub-categories are provided for each form of intervention.

Animal-Assisted Interventions: Entering a Crossroads of Explaining an Instinctive Bond under the Scrutiny of Scientific Inquiry

AH Fine, CA Poly State University, Pomona, CA, USA

TK Mackintosh, PGSP-Stanford Psy.D. Consortium, Palo Alto, CA, USA

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Table 4

Studies of the effects of therapy animals published from 1990 to the present

Author	Participants	Design	Animal-Related Situation	Outcomes	Results
Lutwack-Bloom ⁴⁷	68 residents in two long-term care settings	Experimental pre- and posttest design, repeated measures	One group received visits from volunteers with a dog. The control group was visited by a person only.	Mood changes and depression	People receiving visits from volunteers with a dog had improved moods. There were no differences in depression.
Barker ⁴⁸	20 health care professionals	Experimental design, repeated measures	Visits with a therapy dog (20- versus 5-minute visits) compared with 20 minutes of rest	Serum cortisol, epinephrine, norepinephrine, salivary cortisol and IgA, and lymphocyte count	There were reductions in serum and salivary cortisol when the dog was present. There was no difference between 5-minute and 20-minute visits.
Cole ⁴⁹	76 inpatients who had advanced heart failure	Experimental three-group design, repeated measures	Therapy dog accompanied by a visitor compared with a visitor only or no visitor	Hemodynamic measure, neurohormone levels, and state anxiety	The dog group had greater decreases in systolic pulmonary artery and pulmonary capillary wedge pressures and anxiety levels than the visitor-only group and than the no-visitor group. The dog group had greater decreases in epinephrine and norepinephrine levels than the no-visitor group.
Orlandi ⁵⁰	178 oncologic patients	Quasi-experimental pre- and posttest design	Patients chose whether to have chemotherapy in the animal-assisted activities room or in the adjoining room	Anxiety, depression, somatic symptoms, arterial blood pressure, heart rate, and arterial oxygen saturation	Depression improved only in the animal-assisted activities group. Arterial oxygen saturation improved in the animal-assisted activities group but worsened in the control group.




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The Human–Companion Animal Bond: How Humans Benefit

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The human–animal bond is extremely important to most clients of small animal veterinary practices. Pet ownership, or just being in the presence of a companion animal, is associated with health benefits, including improvements in mental, social, and physiologic health status. This article provides the research data regarding the human health benefits of companion animals, animal-assisted therapy, animal-assisted activities, and assistance animals; reviews measures that can be taken to enable safe pet ownership for the immunocompromised, and discusses the veterinarian’s role in supporting immune-compromised clients and clients who have assistance animals. Client education and enhanced veterinary care can reduce the risk from zoonotic diseases, even for the immunocompromised.

Human-Animal Bonds I: The Relational Significance of Companion Animals

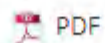
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First published: 23 November 2009 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2009.01296.x> | Citations: 263

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Abstract

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The importance of human-animal bonds has been documented throughout history, across cultures, and in recent research. However, attachments with companion animals have been undervalued and even pathologized in the field of mental health. This article briefly surveys the evolution of human-animal bonds, reviews research on their health and mental health benefits, and examines their profound relational significance across the life course. Finally, the emerging field of animal-assisted interventions is described, noting applications in hospital and eldercare settings, and in innovative school, prison, farm, and community programs. The aim of this overview paper is to stimulate more attention to these vital bonds in systems-oriented theory, practice, and research. A companion paper in this issue focuses on the role of pets and relational dynamics in family systems and family therapy (Walsh, 2009a).

The Link between the Nature of the Human–Companion Animal Relationship and Well-Being Outcomes in Companion Animal Owners

by Annalyse Ellis ^{1,*} ✉, Sarah C. E. Stanton ¹ ✉, Roxanne D. Hawkins ² ✉ and Steve Loughnan ¹ ✉

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Simple Summary

Past research regarding the impact of companion animals on well-being has yielded variable results, with some studies finding that companion animals have a positive impact on mental well-being and others finding neutral or negative impacts. This study explored potential causes for these contradictory results, measuring the relationship science concepts of attachment, self-expansion, perceived responsiveness, and perceived insensitivity within the human–companion animal relationship, as well as mental health outcomes of depression, anxiety, and affect; and loneliness as a mediator between the relationship science concepts and the mental health outcomes. Attachment, self-expansion, and perceived pet insensitivity all significantly predicted at least one mental health outcome. We also found that loneliness mediates the relationship between attachment, self-expansion, and perceived pet insensitivity, and all of the mental health outcomes. Our results indicate that these relationship dimensions play a role in the well-being benefits derived from having a companion animal.



Exploring the contribution of animal companionship to human wellbeing: A three-country study

Damien W. Riggs · Nik Taylor · Heather Fraser · Elizabeth Peel

Abstract: While it is often assumed that animal companions unilaterally contribute to the wellbeing of their human companions, research has to date been equivocal. At best it appears to be that animal companionship may add an extra dimension to human lives, and thus human wellbeing. In this paper we report on a quantitative study conducted in 2021 that surveyed 2090 people with animal companions living in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Participants responded to measures asking about their wellbeing and psychological distress, their connectedness to other humans, and their interactions with and attachment to animals. Regression analysis found that relationships with humans was associated with reduced psychological distress ($\beta = -.594$, $p = .001$), while relationships with animals ($\beta = .205$, $p = .001$), particularly cats ($\beta = .077$, $p = .001$), was associated with increased psychological distress. Regression analysis also found that relationships with other humans ($\beta = .522$, $p = .001$), interactions with animals ($\beta = .142$, $p = .001$), and bonds with animal companions ($\beta = .128$, $p = .001$) were associated with increased wellbeing. We conclude by considering the groups for whom relationships with animals are most likely to offer unique benefits, and suggest the importance of continuing to examine why it is that relationships with animals are both intertwined with, yet distinct from, human-human relationships.

Keywords: animal companionship; attachment; human wellbeing; psychological distress; wellbeing

RESEARCH

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Walk or be walked by the dog? The attachment role

Catarina F. Martins^{1,2*}, Luís Silva^{1,2}, Jorge Soares^{1,2}, Graça S. Pinto^{1,2}, Catarina Abrantes^{1,2}, Luís Cardoso^{3,4}, Maria A. Pires^{3,4}, Hélder Sousa^{5,6} and Maria P. Mota^{1,2}

Abstract

Background The human-animal bond has been recognized as having positive effects on the health and well-being of both humans and pets. The present study aims to explore the influence of attachment on physical activity (PA), lifestyle, and health outcomes of dog owners (DO), highlighting the mutual benefits resulting from the relationship between DO and dogs.



Methods Thirty-eight DO and their dogs participated in this study. Socio-demographic data, the Self-Rated Health (SRH), FANTASTICO Lifestyle Scale, and the Lexington Attachment Pet Scale (LAPS) were assessed. PA was measured in both the DO and the dogs, using an ActiGraph GT3X accelerometer in the context of daily routine. Descriptive statistics and Spearman rank correlation analyses were performed to examine the associations between LAPS, PA levels, socio-demographic variables, lifestyle behaviors, and SRH.

Results Significant correlations were found between the dog owners' light-level PA and the pets' vigorous level of PA ($\rho = 0.445, p = 0.01$). Furthermore, the importance of the pets' health ($\rho = -0.785, p = 0.02$) and the LAPS subscales, namely proximity ($\rho = 0.358, p = 0.03$), and attachment ($\rho = 0.392, p = 0.01$), were related to taking the pet for a walk. Regarding lifestyle, DO with a healthier lifestyle had a better self-assessment of their health using the SRH ($\rho = 0.39, p = 0.02$). Moreover, DO with better lifestyles also exhibited greater concern for their pet's health ($\rho = 0.398, p = 0.01$).

Conclusions This study emphasizes that individuals who adopt healthier habits tend to perceive themselves as healthier and exhibit greater concern for their pets' health. The attachment between DO and dogs is important in promoting healthy lifestyle behaviors and engagement in PA. Our results highlight that the presence of a dog is associated with a higher level of PA in DO, depending on the strength of the human-animal bond.

Keywords Accelerometry, Companion animal, Dogs, Health, Lifestyle, Pet ownership, Physical activity

Exploring the more-than-human in trans people's lives: Connections, sociality, being and animal companionship

Salem Skelton  and Damien W. Riggs 

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ABSTRACT

Background: A growing body of research has explored the benefits of animal companionship to trans people, yet too often this research reinforces human exceptionalism, and fails to explore what it means for trans people to engage in more-than-human relationships. Conversely, trans theorists have increasingly turned to consider what it means for trans people to lay claim to the category 'human', wrapped up as it is in normative claims to gender and sociality.

Aims: This paper aims to investigate how trans people make sense of their relationships with non-human animals, so as to provide a critique of the binaries of animal/human and nature/culture.

Methods: 27 binary trans or non-binary people living in Australia were interviewed about their experiences with family, with a specific probe question focused on animal companions. Thematic analysis was used to explore experiences of the more-than-human among the participants.

Results: Three themes were developed: (1) Animals as facilitators of connections to the 'natural world', (2) Coming to understand animal ways of being, and (3) Challenging norms of animal ownership.

Conclusions: The paper concludes by calling for ongoing theorization about more-than-human relationships as experienced by trans people and their animal companions. Specifically, there is a pressing need to think through what it means to claim the category 'human' when it is so often premised upon exclusion.

KEYWORDS

Animal companions; human exceptionalism; more-than-human; trans people

Editorial: The benefits and challenges of pets for adults with disability or long-term health conditions

Jessica Bibbo^{1*}, Cathleen M. Connell², Polly Yeung³ and Carol Opdebeeck⁴

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KEYWORDS

pets, adulthood (18 years and older), aging, human-animal bond, human-animal interaction (HAI)

Editorial on the Research Topic

[The benefits and challenges of pets for adults with disability or long-term health conditions](#)

Living with a pet is a common and highly sought after form of human-animal interaction. However, the role of pets in the daily lives of adults remains understudied. Much of the empirical literature focuses on animal-assisted interventions or the impact of pets on specific groups (e.g., children, young adults, older adults, residents in long-term care facilities). The overall aim of this Research Topic was to focus on the everyday experiences of pet ownership in adulthood. The four original papers in this issue address how factors at the individual and societal levels shape pet ownership.



Dogs and the Good Life: A Cross-Sectional Study of the Association Between the Dog–Owner Relationship and Owner Mental Wellbeing

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Merkouri A, Graham TM, O’Haire ME,

Dog ownership is believed to benefit owner wellbeing but, contrary to popular belief, there is limited evidence to suggest that simply owning a dog is associated with improved mental health. This mixed-methods study investigates whether dog owners with stronger relationships with their dogs experience better mental health. Participants ($n = 1,693$, adult United Kingdom dog owners) completed an online survey. Owners’ health was measured using the validated PROMIS questions regarding depression, anxiety, emotional support, and companionship. The dog–owner relationship was measured using the validated MDORS scale, which has three subscales: interaction, emotional closeness, and perceived costs. Univariable and multivariable linear regression analyses were conducted, adjusting for confounding factors. Additionally, positive and negative impacts of dog ownership on mental wellbeing were coded from open questions using thematic analysis. A stronger dog–owner relationship was associated with greater feelings of emotional support and companionship but poorer mental health in terms of anxiety or depression. However, the perceived costs (burden) subscale was consistently associated with better mental health outcomes. Direction of causality cannot be inferred as people with poor mental health may acquire dogs to help relieve symptoms, which qualitative analysis supported. Key themes included positive impacts on owner wellbeing and happiness through providing purpose, companionship and self-acceptance, pleasure and distraction, as well as lessening emotional pain and suffering and reducing risk behaviors. However, negative