

## Beyond Pet Ownership: How Dimensions of Pet Attachment Predict Stress and Life Satisfaction



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### Background

- There are mixed findings on whether pet ownership is associated with lower levels of stress and great life satisfaction
- One reason for the mixed findings may be the importance of pet attachment (i.e., the emotional bond between a human and their pet) rather than simply pet ownership.
- The current study aims to examine whether aspects of pet attachment (i.e., love, emotional regulation, personal growth, and negative impact from a pet) predict stress and life satisfaction among college students

### Method

#### Participants:

- 161 undergraduate students from a four-year institution
- 73.9% of the sample were female, 20.5% male, 4.4% were non-binary or third gender, and 1.2% were other gender not listed
- 69.6% of the sample were freshman, 14.3% sophomores, 11.2% juniors, and 5% seniors

#### Measures:

- **Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale:** Measures positive and negative aspects of relationships with pets and contains four factors: love, emotional regulation, personal growth, and negative impact. High scores in the negative impact subscale indicates less negative impact/stress of owning a pet and high scores in love, personal growth and emotional regulation subscales indicates high levels of pet attachment.
- **Perceived Stress Scale:** Measures global perceived stress. High scores indicate high levels of perceived stress.
- **Satisfaction With Life Scale:** The cognitive aspect of life satisfaction within the individual. Higher cumulative scores indicate greater life satisfaction.

#### Procedure:

- All participants provided informed consent.
- Participants completed an online survey.
- Participants earned course credit as compensation.

### Results

- Two multiple regressions were conducted.
- Emotional regulation ( $\beta = 2.66, p = .003$ ) positively predicted stress.
- Personal growth ( $\beta = -4.12, p < .001$ ) negatively predicted life satisfaction.

### Discussion

- Not all aspects of pet attachment are uniformly beneficial and may function differently depending on how individuals rely on their pets for emotional support
- The quality and function of attachment in human-animal relationships need to be considered rather than pet ownership alone
- Future research should examine these relationships longitudinally and explore the potential mechanisms (e.g., over-reliance on pets for emotional regulation, reduced human social support) as well as differences across types of pets and level attachment

# Emotional regulation from pet ownership predicts stress, and personal growth from pet ownership predicts life satisfaction

