



Does Attachment with Pets and Animal Empathy really connect with Psychological Wellbeing? A Cross-sectional Study on Young Indian Adults

¹**Shruti Das**, *Research Scholar, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh*

neer23vaana@gmail.com

²**Lipsy Garg**, *Psychopedia, Chandigarh*

Lipsy.garg009@gmail.com

Abstract: Owning pet is found to have numerous health benefits in an individual's life which is based on the reports of several research findings. It has been said that empathy orientation towards animals has a reciprocal relationship with pet attachment, which in turn affects one's psychological wellbeing. Biologically, pet companionship or pet fondness helps an individual adult to cope with stress as hugging pets or cuddling pets are found to have a connection with the secretion of feel-good hormones; like oxytocin and serotonin. Different research had explored several benefits of having pets in home, where such unconditional bond with pets creates a sense of emotional and social bonding that tend to reduce the loneliness, increase happiness and overall, have found to impact one's quality of life and wellbeing. The present research aim is to explore the association between pet attachment, animal empathy and psychological wellbeing among those individuals who have pets compared to those who do not have pets. Snowball and purposive sampling method were employed to recruit a group of 70 participants within the age range from 19 to 30 years; included both males and females. Among these 70 participants; 30 were pet owners and the rest of the 30 were non pet owners. These 70 participants filled out the assessments of pet attachment life impact questionnaire, animal empathy questionnaire and psychological wellbeing questionnaire respectively. Independent sample t-test, correlation and descriptive statistics were run for all the participants. The t-test result suggests that pet owners have a very strong attachment with pets and which significantly and positively associated with love, regulation and personal growth sub dimensions of pet attachment and life impact scale than

non-pet owners. Moreover, the group descriptive table also showed that, pet owners had a pattern of comparatively high scores in pet attachment life impact scale, animal empathy scale and psychological wellbeing scale than those who are non-pet owners. The result of correlation also revealed that, the sub dimension of pet attachment was positively correlated with the sub dimensions of psychological wellbeing. On the other hand, the overall psychological wellbeing of an individual person was strongly and positively correlated with the empathic feeling factor of animal empathy scale. Such significant relationships depicted the fact that, animal empathy leads to make an attachment with pets, that eventually make an individual to be a pet companion or pet owner; which improves one physical and mental wellbeing, help to reduce one's emotional distress and anxiety, positively enhances one's happiness and psychological wellbeing.

Keywords: *Pet Attachment, Pet Owner, Pet Companionship, Animal Empathy, Psychological Wellbeing.*

1. Introduction

“ Until one has loved an animal, a part of one's soul remains unawakened’

~Anatole France

Pets are considered a very cute and domesticated animals which are primarily kept in home for emotional comfort, emotional dependability and due to love and empathy as well. There are several important determinants which are responsible of increasing pet humanization, where one becomes owner of pet and tend to treat pets as one of their family members. Based on different research and database, it can be said that, due to the rise of urbanization, social isolation, for changing relationship patterns and also for others predominant reasons; these little “fur babies” are becoming an important and valuable as well as reasonable being for emotional support and act as a stress busters as well (R, 2025). Pet owners are reportedly found to have less anxiety and have good psychological wellbeing than non-pet owners as human pet interaction tend to enrich one's life, reduce loneliness (Mishra & Kewalramani., 2025). Moreover, biologically, hugging and cuddling pets or human animal interaction triggers to secret oxytocin hormone within an individual, which is known as a love hormone that in turns reduce one's anxiety, emotional disturbances and leads to a better health and wellbeing (Beetz et al., 2012). According to Ryff, psychological well-being is essential to mental health since it promotes meaningful connections and aids in the achievement of life objectives by improving thought, conduct, and emotional control. People

who have high psychological well-being are more likely to maintain control over their lives, accept themselves, and have positive relationships with others.

The aim of this present study is to find out the relationship between pet ownership, pet attachment with psychological wellbeing and how the empathy towards pets is influencing psychological wellbeing of an individual being who are strongly attached with pets. It's evident based on the results of several research that, the constant presence of the pets, empathy and compassion towards pets tend to enhance interpersonal relationship which positively impact one's meaningful connections in life.

Pet Ownership

The term pet ownership can be defined as the legal and personal responsibility of an individual person or a family to take a good care of that pet in terms of not only physical and psychological wellbeing rather it also includes a broader range of animal's emotional and physical health; like veterinary care, diet and exercise safety and compliances. Such human animal bond is found to be mutually beneficial which promotes good health and wellbeing, reducing blood pressure and loneliness and gives much more reason to be happy. Since this kind of human animal interaction (HAI) or human animal bond or human animal companionships are just becoming the growing field in comparative psychology; this pet companionship or ownership is now considered as playing an influential and pivotal role for the intervention of animal assisted therapy (AAT) (Campbell et al., 2009).

Pet Attachment and Life Impact

There are plenty of benefits which are discussed in different studies regarding pet companionship, but the attachment with pets is a little confusing matter which is not well understood. According to Herzog (2007), the term attachment is more often used as a type or the nature of attitudes towards pets. In this current study the scale which is named as "Pet attachment and Life Impact Scale" developed by Cromer & Barlow (2013) has been used to find out the positive as well as negative aspects of relationship with pets, the relationship patterns with pets and the importance of pet attachment style on owner's life. One interesting finding shows that, pet owners who are securely attached with pets have comparatively lower rates of cardiovascular diseases even when they eat unhealthier non vegetarian foods than non-pet owners who have no such attachment with pets (Rown & Beck, 1994). Sometimes the human attachment interaction (HAI) is found to replace the societal relationships and bonding with other humans and such attachment with pets' act as a cause to decrease the anxiety and stress in a very tough time of life that eventually drives an individual to be more attached with pets (Stammbach & Turner, 1999). Pet attachment and its impact on life depicts that,

people who have a present bonding with pets are more likely to have a strong attachment with pets and score high on pet attachment life impact scale than those who are not that much attached with pets or had a pets in the earlier days of life (Cromer & Barlow, 2023).

Animal Empathy

Empathy and compassion are very crucial and core components of making any kind of relationship in our lives. Whereas, empathy with animals is the central concept in making human animal interaction and this empathy helps an individual to develop a strong positive attitude towards animals. Different studies asserted the facts, that, those who are showing empathy towards others are also likely to show empathy to animals as well (Paul, 2000). Further, this notion suggests that such animal human oriented empathy are based on different traits and attitude; like the dog owners are more likely to show empathy towards puppies, whereas, parents show more empathy to their babies (Angantyer et al., 2011). The concept animal oriented empathy is also determined by personality trait as well, like those who have a very poor quality of interpersonal relationship with others showing more empathy towards animals than humans (Giacomin et al., 2023). However, people with high empathy with animals are non-conformers to social hierarchies, are showing less criminal activities and more environmental sensitivity (Okutan, 2023). In this, present study, the shorter form of Animal Empathy Scale has been used to understand the concept of empathy within an individual and the impact of having animal oriented empathy on pet companionship; where the term animal empathy generally refers to the animal's capacity to understand the feelings and emotional attitude of owner and reciprocate the warmth towards the owner and it also defines the capability of owner to express emotional warmth to animals, taking care and doing welfare for animals as well (Okutan, 2023).

Psychological Wellbeing

Psychological wellbeing is a multifaceted construct, that includes an individual's overall wellbeing, happiness, satisfaction with life. In the present study for the purpose of understanding the concept of psychological wellbeing and its relationship with pet attachment, pet ownership; the short form of psychological wellbeing questionnaire has been incorporated, which was developed by Carol D. Ryff (2010). Carol Ryff's model of psychological well-being identifies six essential components: self-acceptance, healthy interpersonal relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal development. These characteristics encompass human strengths, positive functioning, and goal-setting, influencing people's perceptions of their wellness (Ryff 1995). In accordance, to the hedonic perspective, it mainly focuses on pleasure, positive emotion in life and

encompasses subjective wellbeing, overall life satisfaction and happiness. On the other hand, the eudemonic perspective describes that, wellbeing is not merely just to be feel good rather it encompasses a meaningful and purposefully existential life (Ryff, 1995). Besides these, people with higher psychological wellbeing (PWB) exerts a better coping skills in time of stress and are found to be much more resilient than those who does not have satisfactory life sensitivity and psychological wellbeing. Based on research studies, in a very concise manner, it affirms that, pet ownership and the attachment with pets act as a therapy in order to enrich the life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Xin & Marof, 2023).

2. Review of Literature

In recent era, several studies show that, people are now more inclined of having pets and increasingly turning to pet companionship due to rising urbanization, delayed marriages, different family dynamics; where, pet plays a pivotal role to provide an emotional support and positively impacting one's psychological wellbeing.

Several research have showed the facts that, the strong bondage with the pets having a positive impact on the psychological wellbeing and physical health of pet owners. Moreover, one American study on the relationship between pets and positive mental health, has explained that the pet owners are more satisfied with their lives than non-owners (Bao et al., 2016).

One of the influential studies which was conducted by the Masyhuri et al. (2023), on 78 cat owners noted that, there is a significant positive correlation between pet attachment and psychological wellbeing; where, pet attachment and emotional regulation had found to influence an individual's psychological wellbeing positively. On the other hand, a quantitative study which was conducted on 306 early adult cat owners of Indonesia; concluded that, there isa very weak negative correlation between pet attachment and psychological wellbeing (Pramintari et al., 2025). While talking about the dimension of pet attachment and its impact on wellbeing, the researcher Johnson et al. (1992), described, that 'pet attachment' is an emotional connection between family members and pets characterized by a reciprocal relationship where both parties give and receive attention. It comprises three components: 1) General attachment, where individuals feel happiness and connection with their pets; 2) People substituting, which refers to the pet's role which plays in their owners' lives; and 3) Animal rights/animal welfare, which is reflecting owners' knowledge and views on the welfare of their pets.

In such aspect of pet ownership and pet attachment, several researchers are explaining that, these two terms, 'pet ownership' and 'pet attachment' both are identified as reciprocal determinants while influencing one's life and overall health. Based on such above findings; one study which was based on focus group discussion with 35 dog owners and 58 dog human related activities affirmed that some specific human animal related activities are found to be a reinforcing factor of pet owner's mental state and the regulation of mood (Barcelos et al., 2020).

In such fast-paced world, people are facing daily life hassles and experiencing anxiety which is leading to societal isolation, which in turn negatively impacting one's physical and psychological wellbeing. One mixed method study by researcher Patil (2023) on pet dog owners between the age ranges of (19 to 30 years) concluded the fact, that dog owners had scored comparatively high on Ryff's scale of psychological wellbeing that measures multiple facets like Self-acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, environmental mastery, Purpose in life and Personal Growth than those who are non-pet owners. On the basis of extensive media coverage and the several studies are now suggesting that pets can improve owners' health, psychological well-being, and longevity, however some other studies concluding that there is some conflicting result and showing that there is no such significant positive relationship between happiness and wellbeing with those individuals, who are identified as pet owners (Herzog & H, 2011). So, similarly some interesting study asserted that, the owners of pets who are strongly attached with their pets have poor mental health than those who are not that much attached with pets and depicting the fact, that because of very strong bondage with pets in turn affecting one's social relationship with others societal individual and for that reason one become too much anxious and dependable on pets emotionally (Northrope et al., 2024). On the contrary, one rare study, which was based on pet attachment and human animal interaction was concentrating the fact, that, extreme attachment with pet birds does not confirms a good companionship or good pet ownership that, necessarily contributes good physical and psychological wellbeing, rather sometimes it shows detrimental effects on wellbeing (Trautann, 2023). In between all such findings, based on different literature review; one particular study which was conducted by researcher Cromer and Barlow (2013) on 651 pet owners to find out the impact of pet attachment by administering the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale (PALS), confirmed that the individuals who having present bondage or the relationship with pets comparatively scored high on PALS scale than those who had a former relationship with pets or not have any attachment with pets in current scenario.

In most of the studies, it has been found that empathy towards animals leads an individual to be attached with pets. Sometimes through the process of nurturing and while feeding stray cats and dogs one becomes owner of animals eventually, which also help a pet owner to culminate an empathic attitude towards animals. One quantitative experiment on 200 women of Iran has showed the results, that there is a significant relationship exists between empathic quotient and psychological wellbeing (Khajeh et al., 2014). Similarly, a study on 514 adults individual on Animal Empathy Scale concluded that, human who have showed an orientation towards pets since childhood are more inclined towards pet attachment in later life and become more empathic than those who are non-pet owners and explained that there are several potential and contributory factors or resources that create impact on human and animal relationships, pet attachment and as well as pet ownership (Paul, 2000).

3. Purpose

The purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between pet ownership, attachment with pets and its impact on life, empathy towards pets, and psychological wellbeing among young adults (19–30 years).

4. Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant positive relationship between pet attachment and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

H2: There will be a significant positive relationship between animal empathy and psychological wellbeing among young adults.

H3: There will be a significant positive relationship between pet attachment and animal empathy among young adults.

H4: Pet owners will report significantly higher levels of psychological wellbeing than non-pet owners.

H5: Pet owners will report significantly higher levels of animal empathy than non-pet owners.

H6: Pet owners will report significantly higher levels of pet attachment and life impact than non-pet owners.

5. Method

This present study is a retrospective study based on cross sectional quasi design; including two non-equivalent groups as participants, where one group which is named as

“Non pet owner” and another group which is known as “Pet owner” and there was no random assignment of the participants in these two groups. No treatment has been given neither the group of pet owners nor the group of non-pet owners as well. The main agenda was to examine whether there is any relationship between pet owners, pet attachment and empathy orientation towards pets and psychological wellbeing among young adults individuals.

5.1 Sample

The study used a sample of individuals from the Indian population, more specifically from Kolkata, between the age of 19 and 30, encompassing both males and females; also, both pet owners and non-pet owners as well. The study has a sample size of 70 participants and the purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling method have been used to draw the sample for this present study.

5.2 Measures

Pet Attachment and Life Impact Questionnaire: The pet attachment and life impact scale was used to measure the attachment with pets, who has lived with pets or ever has owned a pet at any point of life. This questionnaire was developed by Cromer and Barlow (2013) and consists of 35 items. The rating of the items is included as Not at all (1), Somewhat (2), Moderately (3), Quite a bit (4), Very much (5). The item number of 4, 11, 16 and 29 have reversed scoring, where 1 becomes 5, 2 becomes 4, etc. This pet attachment and life impact scale (PALS) has four sub dimensional scales; these are Love, Regulation, Personal growth, Negative Impact. The PALS demonstrates a high internal consistency with a strong alpha coefficient which is reported among the primary subscales; Love, Regulation and Personal Growth at 0.92, 0.86, and 0.83 respectively. Whereas, it has been also reported that there is a strong convergent and discriminant validity found among the test items.

Animal Empathy Scale: The Animal Empathy scale was used to examine the empathy orientation towards animals and human animal bonding and this scale was administered on those who are pet owners as well as non-pet owners in order to find out the relationship with empathy who are identified as pet parents and who are also identified as non-pet parents or non-pet owners. Animal empathy scale (AES) was developed by researcher Okutan in the year 2023. In this present study, the shorter version of this scale has been used which is consisting of 8 items only. The ratings are from number 1 to number 9, where number 1 is identified as Strongly Disagree and number 9 is identified as Strongly Agree. There are two dimensions which are belonging to this scale, one is Empathic Feeling Factor, and another one is Non-Empathic Feeling factor. It has been seen that; there is no such reverse scoring in this scale exists. Research has concentrated the fact that this scale

reports a good internal consistency and reliability where, Cronbach alpha is found out between 0.75 and 0.87 with a strong concurrent validity.

Psychological Wellbeing Scale: In this present study, the shorter form of Psychological Wellbeing Scale was used to examine the wellbeing dimension of an individual being. This scale has six sub dimensions; these are; Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance. Ratings of this scale is ranging from 1 to 7; where 1 indicates Strongly Agree and 7 indicates Strongly Disagree. Q1, Q2, Q3, Q8, Q9, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q17, Q18 should be scored as reversed. This 18 items Psychological Wellbeing scale was developed by researcher Ryff along with other researchers in the year 2010. (Ryff et al., 2010), which was accompanied by a measure in the SPARQTools.org measuring the mobility toolkit which provides the practioners curated instruments for assessing mobility from poverty and tools for selecting the most appropriate measures.

5.3 Procedures

In this present study, the data were collected through the Google Form. The questionnaire link was created and shared with participants through an online platform. Before of the data collection, participant's voluntary participation was ensured. The data were analyzed using the correlation analysis to understand the relationships among pet attachment, animal empathy and psychological wellbeing among young adults (19 -30) years. Also, independent sample T-test was performed between pet owners and non-pet owners' group to find out whether there was any differences exist between those who are pet companion regarding empathy towards pets, attachment with pets and also there is any association with psychological wellbeing; with those who are not pet owners or pet companion.

6. Results

Table 1: Descriptive of N, Mean and Standard Deviation

		Love	Regulation	Personal Growth	Negative Impact	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth (2)	Positive Relation	Purpose In Life	Self-Acceptance	Empathic Feeling	Non-Empathic Feeling
N	Pet Owner	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
	Non-Pet Owner	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35	35
Mean	Pet Owner	4.30	4.04	4.07	4.34	15.7	14.8	18.7	14.0	13.0	16.4	33.4	24.7
	Non-Pet Owner	3.03	2.90	2.81	3.99	14.7	14.7	17.4	13.9	13.8	15.9	31.9	22.5
Standard Deviation	Pet Owner	0.858	1.08	1.05	0.963	2.23	4.11	2.94	3.97	2.95	3.02	6.44	9.78
	Non-Pet Owner	1.56	1.56	1.52	0.915	4.08	3.11	3.27	4.09	3.19	2.98	3.68	8.88

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Both Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners

Correlation Matrix												
	Love	Regulation	Personal Growth	Negative Impact	Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth (2)	Positive Relation	Purpose In Life	Self-Acceptance	Empathic Feeling	Non-Empathic Feeling
Love	—											
Regulation	0.946***	—										
Personal Growth	0.940***	0.922***	—									
Negative Impact	-0.082	-0.121	-0.046	—								
Autonomy	0.076	0.028	-0.003	0.246*	—							
Environmental Mastery	0.321**	0.332**	0.347**	0.258*	0.177	—						
Personal Growth (2)	0.359**	0.230	0.356**	0.318**	0.354**	0.316**	—					
Positive Relation	0.111	0.075	0.136	0.364**	0.250*	0.356**	0.427***	—				
Purpose In Life	0.107	0.024	0.082	0.231	0.092	0.081	0.411***	0.330**	—			
Self-Acceptance	0.267*	0.247*	0.294*	0.308**	0.070	0.355**	0.218	0.575***	0.121	—		
Empathic Feeling	0.428***	0.399***	0.417***	0.139	0.109	0.274*	0.358**	0.097	0.136	0.173	—	
Non-Empathic Feeling	0.189	0.096	0.207	0.288*	0.055	-0.054	0.292*	0.311**	0.385***	0.083	0.036	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ **Table 3: Independent Sample T-test**

		Statistic	df	p
Love	Student's t	4.2065 ^a	68.0	<.001
Regulation	Student's t	3.5415 ^a	68.0	<.001
Personal Growth	Student's t	4.0336 ^a	68.0	<.001
Negative Impact	Student's t	1.5594	68.0	0.124
Autonomy	Student's t	1.2003 ^a	68.0	0.234
Environmental Mastery	Student's t	0.1639	68.0	0.870
Personal Growth (2)	Student's t	1.7290	68.0	0.088
Positive Relation	Student's t	0.0297	68.0	0.976
Purpose In Life	Student's t	-1.0892	68.0	0.280
Self-Acceptance	Student's t	0.7963	68.0	0.429
Empathic Feeling	Student's t	1.1390	68.0	0.259
Non-Empathic Feeling	Student's t	0.9725	68.0	0.334

Note. $H_a \mu_{PET OWNER} \neq \mu_{NON PET OWNER}$ ^a Levene's test is significant ($p < .05$), suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances**Table 4: Group Descriptive for both Groups Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners**

Group Descriptives						
	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Love	Pet Owner	35	4.30	4.53	0.858	0.145
	Non-Pet owner	35	3.03	3.35	1.556	0.263

Regulation	Pet Owner	35	4.04	4.56	1.078	0.182
	Non-Pet owner	35	2.90	3.00	1.563	0.264
Personal Growth	Pet Owner	35	4.07	4.40	1.049	0.177
	Non-Pet owner	35	2.81	2.60	1.516	0.256
Negative Impact	Pet Owner	35	4.34	5.00	0.963	0.163
	Non-Pet owner	35	3.99	4.25	0.915	0.155
Autonomy	Pet Owner	35	15.69	16.00	2.233	0.377
	Non-Pet owner	35	14.74	15.00	4.075	0.689
Environmental Mastery	Pet Owner	35	14.83	15.00	4.112	0.695
	Non-Pet owner	35	14.69	15.00	3.113	0.526
Personal Growth (2)	Pet Owner	35	18.66	20.00	2.940	0.497
	Non-Pet owner	35	17.37	18.00	3.273	0.553
Positive Relation	Pet Owner	35	13.97	13.00	3.974	0.672
	Non-Pet owner	35	13.94	13.00	4.087	0.691
Purpose In Life	Pet Owner	35	13.03	13.00	2.945	0.498
	Non-Pet owner	35	13.83	14.00	3.195	0.540
Self-Acceptance	Pet Owner	35	16.43	16.00	3.022	0.511
	Non-Pet owner	35	15.86	16.00	2.982	0.504
Empathic Feeling	Pet Owner	35	33.37	36.00	6.445	1.089
	Non-Pet owner	35	31.94	32.00	3.678	0.622
Non-Empathic Feeling	Pet Owner	35	24.69	24.00	9.779	1.653
	Non-Pet owner	35	22.51	21.00	8.879	1.501

7. Discussion of Results

The present study aimed to understand the relationship between pet attachment, animal empathy, and psychological wellbeing among young adults. Table 2 showed that there was a strong positive correlation between the Love and Regulation subdimensions of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale (PALS) ($r = 0.94$, $p < .001$). Strong positive correlations were also found between the Love and Personal Growth subdimensions ($r = 0.94$, $p < .001$) and between the Regulation and Personal Growth subdimensions ($r = 0.92$, $p < .001$). These findings imply a strong internal consistency among the Love, Regulation, and Personal Growth subdimensions of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale.

The correlation analysis further indicated that the Love subdimension was positively correlated with the Environmental Mastery dimension of Psychological Wellbeing ($r = 0.32$,

$p < .01$). Similarly, positive correlations were found between Regulation and Environmental Mastery ($r = 0.33, p < .01$), as well as between Personal Growth (PALS) and Environmental Mastery ($r = 0.34, p < .01$). In addition, the Negative Impact subdimension showed significant positive correlations with Autonomy ($r = 0.24, p < .05$) and Environmental Mastery ($r = 0.25, p < .05$) of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale.

Furthermore, the Love subdimension was positively correlated with the Personal Growth dimension of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale ($r = 0.35, p < .01$). Similarly, the Personal Growth subdimension of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale was positively correlated with the Personal Growth dimension of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale ($r = 0.35, p < .01$). In addition, Autonomy ($r = 0.35, p < .01$), Environmental Mastery ($r = 0.31, p < .01$), and Negative Impact ($r = 0.31, p < .01$) were positively associated with the Personal Growth dimension. These findings suggest that individuals who score higher on Autonomy and Environmental Mastery also tend to report greater personal growth.

The findings also revealed that the Negative Impact subdimension of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale was positively correlated with the Positive Relations with Others dimension of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale ($r = 0.36, p < .01$).

Moreover, the Love subdimension was positively correlated with Self-Acceptance ($r = 0.26, p < .05$), Autonomy (reported as Regulation in the original analysis; $r = 0.24, p < .05$), and Personal Growth ($r = 0.29, p < .05$) of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale. These findings suggest that greater love and affection towards animals are associated with higher levels of self-acceptance, autonomy, and personal growth, which may contribute to better psychological wellbeing.

Finally, the results showed that the Love ($r = 0.42, p < .001$), Regulation ($r = 0.39, p < .001$), and Personal Growth ($r = 0.41, p < .001$) subdimensions of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale were strongly and positively correlated with the Empathic Feeling Factor of the Animal Empathy Scale. These findings indicate that attachment to pets is closely associated with empathy towards animals. Individuals with greater empathy are more likely to develop stronger emotional bonds with their pets, experience a greater sense of connection with them, and engage more frequently in positive human–animal interactions, which may contribute to better mental health.

Similarly, the Environmental Mastery dimension of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale was positively correlated with the Empathic Feeling Factor ($r = 0.27, p < .05$), while the Personal Growth dimension of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale showed a significant positive correlation with the Empathic Feeling Factor ($r = 0.35, p < .001$). These findings

suggest that individuals with greater environmental mastery are better able to manage their surroundings, cope effectively with challenges, and demonstrate greater personal growth. Individuals with higher empathy towards animals may also be more inclined to own pets, and this emotional connection may help reduce stress and anxiety, improve coping with daily life challenges, and enhance overall psychological wellbeing.

Finally, the Negative Impact subdimension of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale was positively correlated with the Non-Empathic Feeling Factor of the Animal Empathy Scale ($r = 0.28, p < .05$). Furthermore, Personal Growth ($r = 0.29, p < .05$), Positive Relations with Others ($r = 0.31, p < .001$), and Purpose in Life ($r = 0.38, p < .001$) of the Psychological Wellbeing Scale were positively correlated with the Non-Empathic Feeling Factor.

The independent samples t-test revealed significant differences between pet owners and non-pet owners in the Love, Regulation, and Personal Growth dimensions of the Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale. These findings suggest that pet owners tend to develop stronger emotional attachments to their pets, which may be facilitated by greater empathy and affection towards animals. Such emotional bonds may positively influence psychological wellbeing, overall health, and life satisfaction.

The findings are also consistent with previous literature demonstrating that the relationship between humans and companion animals is characterized by emotional attachment, empathy, and mutual companionship. The concept of "pets" has increasingly evolved into that of "companion animals" to emphasize their emotional significance. Strong attachment to companion animals has been associated with enhanced quality of life, greater emotional support, improved psychological wellbeing, and better social relationships, with many owners considering their pets to be valued members of the family.

8. Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study aimed to highlight the relationship between pet ownership, pet attachment, empathy towards animals, and psychological wellbeing among young adults. Different studies have suggested that the connection with pets tends to reduce feelings of loneliness, which, in turn, positively influences mental and emotional health and overall wellbeing. In the Indian context, only a few studies have examined how attachment to pets contributes to a happy and healthy life; however, very few have explained how pet attachment and empathy towards animals influence the lives of young adults. Therefore, it is important to explore the experience of having a deep connection with companion animals

within a comprehensive framework in which all these factors are examined simultaneously. The present research has broad implications across several areas, particularly within the field of psychology. These implications are discussed below.

8.1 Enhancing Happiness and Psychological Wellbeing

Pets can enhance the happiness and wellbeing of young adults by providing companionship, reducing loneliness and stress, and promoting both physical and mental health. They offer emotional support, encourage physical activity, and may also improve cognitive functioning (Trolander & J.A., 2011).

8.2 Reducing Loneliness and Social Isolation

Pets can help bridge the gap in social connection, particularly for individuals who have lost friends or family members or who experience social isolation. Research indicates that people who own dogs are less likely to experience loneliness. For example, taking a dog for a walk provides opportunities to interact with neighbours and develop social relationships (Stanley et al., 2014).

8.3 Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Interaction with animals has been shown to lower blood pressure and reduce stress hormones such as cortisol. The presence of a pet can create a calming and comforting environment, thereby helping individuals manage stress and anxiety more effectively (National Institutes of Health, 2018).

8.4 Improving Mental and Physical Health

Pets can improve mood and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Simply petting a dog or cat can stimulate the release of endorphins, which improve mood, promote emotional stability, and enhance life satisfaction (Scheibeck et al., 2011).

In addition, pets encourage physical activity through activities such as walking or playing. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) News in Health, pet ownership has also been associated with lower cholesterol levels, reduced blood pressure, and fewer visits to healthcare professionals.

8.5 Enhancing Social Support

Pets can strengthen social support systems by encouraging interaction through shared pet-related activities or conversations with other pet owners. According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2018), pet ownership contributes to stronger social support networks and greater community engagement.

8.6 Implications for Public Policy

To promote public mental health, particularly in urban and underserved communities,

policymakers may consider supporting pet-friendly housing, subsidized veterinary services, and community-based pet welfare and adoption programs.

8.7 Implications for the Pet Industry

The findings of the present study may help guide the development of healthcare services, pet insurance, behavioural training programmes, and other pet-related products and services aimed at improving the wellbeing of both pets and their owners.

8.8 Future Research

Future research should investigate the long-term effects of pet ownership on psychological wellbeing through longitudinal studies. Researchers should also examine the influence of pet personality and behaviour, as well as socioeconomic and cultural factors, on the relationship between pet ownership and mental health. Cross-cultural studies would further enhance our understanding of how companion animals contribute to psychological wellbeing across different populations.

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