

An Examination of the Potential Role of Pet Ownership, Human Social Support and Pet Attachment in the Psychological Health of Individuals Living Alone

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Abstract:

While researchers have examined the relationship between pet ownership and psychological health among individuals in the general population, the few studies that have examined the possible psychological health benefits of pet ownership for individuals living alone have primarily been conducted among subgroups such as seniors. Using a community sample of adults who were living alone, we hypothesized that pet ownership (pet vs. no pet), emotional attachment levels to pets, and human social support would interact to predict scores on measures of loneliness and depression. A sample of 132 Canadian dog and cat owners as well as non-owners who lived alone completed an on-line survey containing measures of human social support, emotional attachment to pets, loneliness, and depression. Results revealed that neither pet ownership nor attachment to pets predicted the loneliness or depression levels of individuals living alone. However, when we examined the interaction of pet ownership and human social support in the prediction of psychological health, simple effects revealed that dog owners with high levels of human social support were significantly less lonely than non-owners. Furthermore, when we examined the interaction of attachment and human social support in the prediction of psychological health, simple effects revealed that among pet owners with low levels of human social support, high attachment to pets predicted significantly higher scores on loneliness and depression. These findings highlight the complex nature of the relationship between pet ownership and psychological health.

Keywords: [ATTACHMENT](#); [CATS](#); [DEPRESSION](#); [DOGS](#); [HEALTH](#); [HUMAN SOCIAL SUPPORT](#); [LONELINESS](#)

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