



More cat owners 'have degrees'

People who own a cat are more likely to have a university degree than those with a pet dog, a study by Bristol University suggests.

A poll of 2,524 households found that 47.2% of those with a cat had at least one person educated to degree level, compared with 38.4% of homes with dogs.

The study said longer hours, possibly associated with better qualified jobs, may make owning a dog impractical.

It also found that UK pet ownership was much higher than previously thought.

Cat and dog numbers were last estimated in a scientific peer-reviewed journal in 1989, which said there were 6.2 million and 6.4 million respectively in the UK.

“ Our best guess is that it's to do with working hours and perhaps commuting to work, meaning people have a less suitable lifestyle for a dog ”

Dr Jane Murray University of Bristol

But according to Bristol's Department of Clinical Veterinary Science, the populations today are likely to be about 10.3 million and 10.5 million.

Overall, it estimated that 26% of UK households owned cats and 31% owned dogs.

The study suggested a number of other characteristics, aside from education level, were associated with either cat or dog ownership.

Of those surveyed, dog-lovers were more likely to be male, living in rural areas and under the age of 55.

Age of children

But cat owners were more likely to be female and living in smaller or single-person households.

The age of children in a family also appeared to make a difference, with cats being more common than dogs in homes with children under the age of 10.

However Dr Jane Murray, a lecturer in feline epidemiology at Bristol University, said the variation in education level between owners was the most striking difference.

"We don't know why there is this discrepancy," she told the BBC News website.

"We did look at average household income but that wasn't significant.

"Our best guess is that it's to do with working hours and perhaps commuting to work, meaning people have a less suitable lifestyle for a dog.

"It's really just a hunch though."

Dr Murray, whose post is funded by the Cats Protection charity, said researchers hoped to repeat the study using the results of the 2011 census to get a clearer idea of trends in UK pet ownership.

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