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Neuroticism and Religious Coping Uniquely Predict Distress Severity among Bereaved Pet Owners

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Abstract:

A growing body of literature grounded in contemporary psychological theory suggests that personality and religion have a significant impact on the emotional well-being of the bereaved. Although this approach has been validated in human bereavement research and proposed by specialists in the field, it has not been empirically examined in the context of pet loss. This is surprising given the large number of people who own pets, and the high emotional value placed on animal companions in society today. Thus, the purpose of this study was to fill a void in the literature by examining the influence of neuroticism and religious coping on pet bereavement distress (PBD) while controlling for other variables of interest. A total of 510 adults who had lost a pet completed an online survey measuring pet-related characteristics, demographics, social desirability, religious variables, pet attachment, death anxiety, bereavement distress, neuroticism, and two forms of religious coping. A standard multiple regression analysis yielded a robust model (adjusted $R^2 = 0.52$) which supported our hypotheses that a tendency to experience negative emotions (neuroticism) and using religion to deal with loss in an unsupportive and negative manner (negative religious coping) would be unique predictors of PBD. Negative religious coping was also the strongest predictor in our model. In addition, death type, time since pet death, pet attachment, social desirability, death anxiety, spirituality, and positive religious coping also explained unique variance in PBD. These findings not only emphasize the significance of considering personality and religion as unique factors that also impact pet bereavement, but also demonstrate the importance of controlling for other variables of interest when conducting this kind of research. Limitations and consideration of future research are also discussed.

Keywords: [PERSONALITY](#); [PET BEREAVEMENT](#); [RELIGION](#)

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