

## Aggression And Psychological Well-Being In Relation To Companion Animals Among Young Adults

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### Abstract

This study delved into the correlation between the aggression levels and psychological well-being of young adults, considering the presence or absence of companion animals in their lives. The research involved 140 participants, evenly split between 70 young adults without companion animals and 70 with them. Data collection utilized the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire and Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale, and analysis employed Pearson correlation.

Results unveiled that level of aggression tended to be higher in young adults without companion animals. Interestingly, there were no substantial variations in psychological well-being between the two groups. However, the statistical significance of these differences was somewhat limited, suggesting the potential influence of additional factors. The study also explored specific aggression domains and psychological well-being aspects. It was discovered that in young adults without companion animals, all aggression domains were notably higher.

Moreover, while levels of autonomy, personal growth, positive relations, and purpose in life were comparatively lower in young adults without companion animals, these differences did not reach statistical significance. Notwithstanding these noteworthy findings, the study has certain limitations, including a relatively small sample size, reliance on self-report measures, and a lack of consideration for potential confounding variables. Future research endeavors should aim to address these limitations to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between companion animal ownership and mental health outcomes.

**Keywords:** aggression, psychological well-being, companion animals, autonomy, mental health.

Pets that reside in our homes and serve as companions enjoy heightened legal protections compared to other animals, given the perception of them as integral members of our families. While commonly associated with dogs, cats, and fish, this category can extend to encompass horses, birds, and various other animals. Human-animal interaction promotes increased opportunities for exercise, outdoor engagement, and social interactions. Moreover, having a pet contributes to enhanced cognitive functions in older adults. Regular activities such as walking or playing with pets have been linked to reductions in blood pressure, cholesterol, triglyceride, and cortisol levels. Beyond the physical benefits, pets play a crucial role in managing loneliness and depression by providing companionship, fostering feelings of social support, and uplifting our mood.

The exploration of human-animal interaction has gained significant research focus in recent years, particularly concerning the potential positive impacts of companion animals on human well-being (Anderson & Koenig, 2018). Among the well-documented impacts of human-animal interaction on individuals of various ages, with or without specific medical or mental health conditions, are positive effects on: social attention, social behavior, interpersonal interactions, and mood; stress-related factors including cortisol levels, heart rate ( Handlin et al. 2011), and blood pressure; self-reported feelings of fear and anxiety ( Barker et al. 2003b; Lang et al. 2010; Berget et al. 2011); and overall mental (Nimer and Lundahl 2007; Davis et al. 2009; Na and Richang, 2003) and physical health, particularly in relation to cardiovascular diseases (Giaquinto and Valentini 2009; Headey 1999). Sparse evidence or a scarcity of publications is available regarding the positive effects of Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) on: diminishing stress-related factors like epinephrine and norepinephrine, enhancing immune system functioning, better pain management, fostering increased trustworthiness and trust toward others, mitigating aggression, boosting empathy, and improving learning. Two studies explored the impact of friendly dogs on aggressive behavior in a first-grade classroom through behavior observation and reports from the classroom teacher (Hergovich et al., 2002; Kotrschal and Ortbauer, 2003). The results indicated a decrease in aggressive

behavior when the dog was present compared to its absence. Human aggression is behavior that is directed against another person and is done with immediate intent to harm. Also, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target is motivated to avoid the behavior (Bushman et al 2001, Baron 1994, Berkowitz 1993, Geen 2001). The goal of aggression is to hurt another person physically or psychologically. It can take distinct forms which can range from physical fights, bullying, emotional abuse, assaults to violence and homicides (WHO, 2016).

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between aggression and psychological well-being among young adults, comparing those with and without companion animals. There is a scarcity of research exploring the impact of companion animals on mental health in India. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the potential beneficial effects of companion animals on both aggression and psychological well-being in young adults.

The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between aggression and psychological well-being in young adults, taking into account the presence or absence of companion animals.

So, in the light of previous researches, it was hypothesized that there will be significant difference in aggression and psychological well-being is anticipated between individuals without pets and those who own pets.

## METHODS

### SAMPLE:

A total of one hundred forty young, comprising 70 with companion animals and 70 without companion animals, aged 18-25 years, were purposefully chosen to meet the study's objectives. Individuals in their early adulthood who have companion animals, including dogs, cats, and/or fishes were included in this study.

### TOOLS

**Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)** was developed in 1992 by Arnold Buss and Mark Perry, is a self-administered psychological assessment tool crafted to gauge the extent and strength of aggressive behavior, thoughts, and emotions in individuals. Comprising 29 items, the questionnaire evaluates four distinct forms of aggression: Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Anger, and Hostility.

**Psychological Wellbeing (PWB) Scale** developed by psychologist Carol D. Ryff in 1989, is a the 42-item scale which measures six aspects of wellbeing and happiness. The six dimensions of psychological wellbeing measured by the PWB are: Self-acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, Personal growth.

**PROCEDURE:** Young adults aged 18-25, both with and without companion animals, participated in the assessment of aggression and psychological well-being through self-administered questionnaires. Recruitment was conducted through diverse channels, including social media platforms, to ensure widespread outreach to the intended population. Following the acquisition of informed consent, respondents completed the questionnaires online. Demographic details such as age and gender were collected, along with information regarding companion animal status. The scores for both aggression and psychological well-being were computed and subsequently compared.

**RESEARCH DESIGN:** The study employed an ex-post facto research design to achieve its research goals.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To identify outliers, the researcher utilized a boxplot. Following the removal of eight outliers, tests for normality and homogeneity were conducted, revealing that the data exhibited both normal distribution and homogeneity. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for two groups (those without and those with companion animals) concerning measures of aggression and psychological well-being.

**Table 1: Mean and SD of two groups (without and with companion animals) on measures of aggression and psychological well-being.**

MEASURS	Without	companion	With Companion animals	
	Animals (n= 66)	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Aggression</b>				
Physical Aggression	22.65	6.76	20.74	5.22
Verbal Aggression	14.67	4.36	13.85	3.85
Anger	18.42	5.82	16.59	4.95
Hostility	21.91	5.57	21.55	5.82
Total	77.65	17.06	72.47	14.87
<b>Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)</b>				

Self-acceptance	28.48	6.32	29.04	5.74
Positive relations with others	26.74	4.17	26.19	4.24
Autonomy	31.82	5.71	32.18	5.42
Environmental mastery	29.50	6.36	29.74	5.69
Purpose in life	29.56	5.89	29.67	5.69
Personal growth	27.94	6.74	27.61	7.45
Total	174.05	27.36	174.44	25.79

The analysis reveals a clear divergence in mean scores between two distinct groups, namely those with and without companion animals on domains of aggression e.g. physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and total score of aggression. Notably, the group that includes individuals with companion animals demonstrates higher mean scores compared to the counterpart group lacking such companions. The outcome of the study points towards a notable impact of animal presence on the reduction of aggression among participants. Individuals who have companion animals in their lives seem to experience lower levels of aggression.

Additionally, the measurement of psychological well-being, as reflected in the mean scores, shows a significant elevation in the group with companion animals. This suggests a positive correlation between the companionship of animals and higher levels of psychological well-being among the participants. The presence of these animal companions appears to contribute not only to a decrease in aggression but also to an overall enhancement of psychological well-being within this particular group. The findings from our study indicate that there is no link between owning pets and the mental health and well-being indicators as measured in the Denis-Robichaud (2022) study. Before the onset of the pandemic, Cui, Russell, Davern, and Christian (2019) conducted a longitudinal study that revealed no discernible contrast in stress and depression levels between individuals who owned dogs and those who did not.

**Table 2: correlation between two groups (without and with companion animals) on measures of aggression and psychological well-being.**

N=132		Presence of Companion Animals	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation coefficient
Aggression	No		77.65	17.06	-.020
	Yes		72.72	14.55	
Psychological Being	Well- No		174.05	27.36	0.058
	Yes		174.44	25.79	

In terms of total aggression scores, young adults without companion animals showed a higher mean score (M=77.65, SD=17.06) compared to those with companion animals (M=72.72, SD=14.55). Despite a negative correlation, it was not statistically significant, suggesting that individuals with companion animals tend to display less aggression than those without (Table 1).

When considering the overall scores for psychological well-being, no noticeable difference in means was observed between young adults who owned companion animals and those who did not. The mean scores for both groups were similar, indicating a comparable level of psychological well-being. This suggests that the presence or absence of companion animals did not appear to have a substantial impact on the overall psychological well-being scores of the young adults in the study. The similarity in mean scores highlights the need for a more in-depth analysis to explore potential factors that may contribute to psychological well-being, independent of companion animal ownership.

The apparent connection between owning pets and health is not directly tied; instead, factors such as personality traits, age, economic or health status play a role in the decision to have a pet. Thus, any observed link between pets and health may be a result of these influencing factors. However, there is a lack of conclusive evidence showing that these factors explain both the positive health effects and the inclination to own pets. This implies that reported health benefits associated with pet ownership might be due to specific aspects of having a pet.

In essence, the current study offers initial indications of a connection between owning companion animals and the aggression and psychological well-being of young adults. Nevertheless, the study's constraints, including a limited sample size, underscore the necessity for additional research to validate these findings and account for potential influencing factors. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the study propose a potential positive influence of companion animal ownership on the aggression and psychological well-being of young adults.

Subsequent research endeavors should delve into the potential mechanisms that underlie this association, aiming to enhance interventions targeted at enhancing the mental health and well-being of young adults. The current study omitted consideration of the duration of companion animal presence within families. It is plausible that an extended duration of companion animal ownership may amplify its impact on an individual's aggression and psychological well-being. Additionally, the study solely concentrated on young adults, suggesting that future investigations could broaden their scope to encompass a more diverse age range. This expansion would enable exploration of whether the relationship

between companion animal ownership and mental health outcomes remains consistent across various age groups. By addressing these gaps in knowledge, future research has the potential to offer a more thorough comprehension of the interconnection between companion animal ownership and mental health outcomes, thereby guiding interventions aimed at enhancing individuals' mental health and well-being.

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