

Self-Efficacy, Owner-Pet Relationship, and Social Support as Predictors of Pet-Owner Wellness

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ABSTRACT

The wellness of an individual is essential to consider, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study focused on pet owners and considered self-efficacy, owner-pet relationship, and social support as determinants of their wellness. There were 500 participants in the survey -- Filipino citizens currently residing in the Philippines, 18-65 years old, and owning a pet cat or dog for at least six months. The participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The respondents completed an online survey through Google Forms. The results of the study show that owner-pet relationship, social support, and self-efficacy are predicting variables of pet-owner wellness with 42.4% variance accounted for ($F [3, 496] = 122, p > .001$). Specifically, 32.1% accounted for self-efficacy, 9.6% for social support, and 0.6% for owner-pet relationship. The study's findings imply the importance of owner-pet relationships and belongingness through pets. Moreover, self-efficacy has the highest variance, accounting for 32.1%, which means that confidence to oneself contributes to maintaining pet owners' wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: owner-pet relationship, social support, pet-owner wellness, self-efficacy, pet-owners

INTRODUCTION

Pet Owners Choose To Adopt Pets For Significant Reasons. In General, They Believe That Pets Enhance Their Lives In Multiple Ways. Family Members Also Expressed That Pets Are Of Great Importance To Them At All Times. They Value Them Most During Crises And Losses (Chandler Et Al., 2015). Following The Global Threat Of The Coronavirus, Social Distancing Measures Such As Working From Home Policy Have Been Reinforced Worldwide (Dhama Et Al., 2020), And The Average Hours Per Day Spent At Home For The General Population Have Considerably Increased. Because Of This Factor, Pet Ownership Grew Sharply (Park, 2021). As More Families And Individuals Remain Stuck At Home, The Demand For Adopting Or Fostering Pets, Particularly Dogs, Has Risen Worldwide, From Canada To India. Between March And September 2020, The Number Of Foster Pets In U.S. Homes Increased By 8% (May 2021).

A "Covid-19 Pulse Study" Conducted By The American Pet Products Association Reported That 11.38 Million U.S. Households Have Gotten A New Pet During The Pandemic (Today's Veterinary Business, 2020). May (2021) Also Believed That People Opted To Turn To Pets To Help Them Endure This Challenging Time In History. Little Research Exists On The Association Of Owner-Pet Relationship, Social Support, And Pet-Owner Wellness Among Individuals Of Different Developmental Stages. Thus, To Add More Understanding During The Covid-19 Pandemic Setting. Therefore, This Research Aims To Determine The Predictors Of Pet-Owner Wellness. The Study Considered The Predictors Of Pet Owners' Wellness, Such As Self-Efficacy, Owner-Pet Relationship, And Social Support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humans, by nature, are social beings, and social support helps maintain their psychological and physical well-being. It reflects the centrality of belongingness to the lives of human beings (McConnell et al., 2011). Alsubaie et al. (2019) affirmed that the lack of social support is a known determinant of mental health problems. Humans desire and need to be surrounded by and interact with others. However, Bekker and Mallavarapu (2019) have found that although other people have received social support, it could also come from pets. Filipino adolescents have a wide source of social support, with different social support providers perceived as having a particular niche regarding the kind of social support they provide (Fernandez, 2012).

Owner-pet relationships are associated with positive mental health outcomes (Hussein et al., 2021; Hajek & König, 2019; Young et al., 2020). Pets can provide their owners with more than companionship. Studies reveal that pets can also help create human-to-human friendships and social support, suitable for long-term health (Wood et al., 2015). Around 40% of pet owners reported receiving one or more types of social support via people they met through their pets.

Several studies also suggest the role of the owner-pet relationship on pet-owner wellness. Research has demonstrated positive connections between pets and their owners' physical and mental health (Bao & Schreer, 2016). Furthermore, Beck (2014) noted that the human-animal interactions were affectionate and friendly among both parties. Cherry (2020) noted that self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Psychologist Albert Bandura described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. It can affect how a pet owner feels about himself and how he will successfully achieve an improved owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness.

Nationally and locally, the evidence is limited, confirming that owner-pet relationship and social support have a relationship with pet owners' level of pet-owner wellness during the pandemic. Furthermore, previous studies did not investigate the role of self-efficacy as a mediator for owner-pet relationships, social support, and owner-pet wellness. On the other hand, there were international studies that explored the owner-pet relationship among children, adolescents, people with chronic illnesses (Hayden-Evans et al., 2018), and elderlies (Gee &

Mueller, 2019), yet they only focused on a more specific aspect of a person's well-being (Mueller et al., 2021; Gan et al., 2019).

METHODS

The present study is quantitative research utilizing a descriptive-correlational design. The descriptive method determined the levels of owner-pet relationship, social support, pet-owner wellness, and self-efficacy. The participants of the study were Filipino pet owners residing in the Philippines. The present study utilized the purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling technique. The study has the following set of criteria: (a) a Filipino citizen; (b) currently residing in the Philippines; (c) ages 18 to 65 years old; and (d) should be owning a pet cat or dog for at least six months. The study was able to gather a total sample of 500 respondents. The samples selected fulfilled the set criteria.

The study received approval from the Ethics Review Board (ERB). Consequently, the study secured informed consent from the participants before they answered the online questionnaires. The researcher managed the Google Forms setting, allowing only one response per user. The responses were collected and submitted to the statistician for analysis. Mean and standard deviation measured the descriptive results of the study, whereas multiple regression analysis identified the predictors of pet-owner wellness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the predictors of pet owners' wellness. There were four considered predictors such as self-efficacy, social support, and owner-pet relationship. The regression results revealed that the three variables, namely self-efficacy ($t = 13.38$; $p < .001$), social support ($t = 7.86$; $p < .001$), and owner-pet relationship ($t = 2.45$; $p = 0.015$), are significant predictors of pet-owner. The results suggest that 42.4% of the variance in pet-owner wellness is accounted for by the three predictors ($F [3, 496] = 122$, $p > .001$), self-efficacy, social support, and owner-pet relationship. Thus, the better the pet owners' owner-pet relationship, and the higher their social support and self-efficacy, the better the wellness experienced by the pet owners.

Table 1
Model Coefficients of Pet-Owner Wellness

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p	ΔR^2
Intercept	0.8425	0.1944	4.33	<.001	
Self-Efficacy	0.5454	0.0408	13.38	<.001	0.321
Social Support	0.2022	0.0257	7.86	<.001	0.09608
Owner-Pet Relationship	0.1000	0.0409	2.45	0.015	0.00695

$$R^2 = .424, F (3,496) = 122, p < 0.001$$

This model explained that 32.1% of the variance in pet-owner wellness can be accounted for by self-efficacy. Previous studies also show that owner-pet relationship is a significant predictor of pet-owner wellness. The analysis of Grajfoner et al. (2021) suggests that the owner-pet relationship predicted 1% of psychological well-being ($F(3, 444) = 8.93, p < 0.001$) in a cross-sectional survey among Malaysian participants. It focused on human-pet interactions and tested how pets can help improve general well-being problems during prolonged periods of social isolation.

The results of this study are consistent with literature. The findings of Cheong et al. (2005) confirmed that individuals who have established a relationship with their pets seem to have a little bit greater self-esteem and self-efficacy on average than persons without pets. Research findings also demonstrated that having a pet around might boost one's self-esteem. Consequently, animals may also have an impact on one's self-efficacy. In another study by Oleksy (2018), findings emerged that dog ownership and self-efficacy levels have a positive relationship which implies that owning a dog helps boost their belief to oneself.

The result also reveals that social support can account for 9.6% of the variance in pet-owner wellness. This present study's findings are like the results of Adekanmbi et al. (2021), in which social support is a significant predictor of women's psychological well-being. The study's findings revealed that social support contributed about 16.8% variance ($R = .410, R^2 = .168, F = 56.018, p < .01$) to women's psychological well-being. Furthermore, support from friends and coworkers significantly improved overall self-efficacy, according to the findings of Wang et al. (2017).

Moreover, the findings of this study show that the owner-pet relationship predicts pet-owner wellness with 0.6% of variance accounted for. The present findings are like the study of Czyzowska and Gurba (2022), in which self-efficacy is a significant predictor variable ($R^2 = .76, p < .001$) of psychological well-being. It indicated an indirect influence of the presence of meaning of life on psychological well-being through self-efficacy.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

The present study offers a unique perspective from pet owners about how owner-pet relationship, social support, and self-efficacy have positively influenced their wellness. The high-level pet-owner wellness of the pet owners is contributed by the following factors: the healthy relationship they have with their pets, the high social support they receive from their family, friends, and significant others, and the confidence they have in themselves to complete a task. The present study's findings suggest that owner-pet relationships and social support benefit physical and mental well-being during periods of social isolation amidst a global pandemic.

Pet owners have shared their lives with non-human companions despite the negative effects brought by the global pandemic. Notably, human beings' desire to connect and care for animals continues. They have engraved in their hearts that they are indeed stewards of nature, just as the present study confirmed that pet owners appreciate the nature around them. In

addition, they could experience an acceptable level of pet-owner wellness because of the social support they receive and their established relationships with their pets. The study further proved that self-efficacy strengthened the role of the owner-pet relationship and social support in pet owners' wellness.

The results of the study further strengthened the theories used. In other words, the findings of this study support the Biophilia Hypothesis Theory, Holistic-Dynamic Theory, and Self-Efficacy Theory. The study affirms the biophilia hypothesis theory, showing that a perfect relationship with pets leads to higher pet-owner wellness. Further, the present study's findings confirm the theory's assumption that humans are inclined to care for other living beings. It further affirms the Holistic-Dynamic Theory, in which the pet owners' need for love and belonging was satisfied through social support, significantly increasing their wellness. Lastly, the present findings show that pet owners have a high level of self-efficacy as they tend to have immediate solutions to complex problems, which supports the self-efficacy theory. The COVID-19 pandemic is one factor that may have affected the respondents' attitudes and reactions. Because of social restrictions, people are discouraged from leaving their homes. Thus, going outside to get fresh air is impossible, and physical exercise is limited inside their houses, making them less likely to do outdoor activities.

Based on the present study's findings, the researcher has made several recommendations. Since the owner-pet relationship predicts pet-owner wellness, it is recommended that the respondents continue to nurture their relationships with their pets by keeping and taking care of them. The findings that pet owners love and consider their pets part of their family are seen as an intrinsic motivation to show kindness and affection to other animals. Also, appreciate the value of establishing relationships with humans and animals. Hence, authorities may develop programs and policies that enhance social relationships and recognize and include pets in the make-up of law, which will frame the society people share with them. Further research with larger sample sizes and including participants from various settings, such as community schools, industrial organizations, and treatment facilities, may be considered.

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