

# The good and bad of pet ownership

 *Minh-Hoang Nguyen*, AISDL

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7520-3844>

On social media, we may come across videos and pictures of pets that are so cute that they can relieve our stresses and bring smiles to our faces. But, do you know that pets can benefit humans much more than just relieve our stress?

A review of studies on the pet-human health connection shows that pet ownership and interaction with pets are linked to a variety of favorable physical outcomes [1]. For example, an analysis of 618 samples in the United States (US) discovers that adolescents owning a dog(s) are more likely to obtain higher physical activity levels [2]. Another study in Australia suggests that adolescents engaging in dog walking and pet play are more likely to meet national physical activity recommendations than those who do not [3]. The American Heart Association even concludes that pet ownership, particularly dog ownership, is associated with decreased cardiovascular disease risk [4].

Besides physical outcomes, there is evidence supporting the positive effects of pet ownership on mental health, especially among disadvantaged populations. Rhoades, Winetrobe, & Rice [5] find that homeless people owning pets in Los Angeles have fewer symptoms of depression and loneliness than non-pet-owning peers. Meanwhile, US military veterans with HIV/AIDS think dogs help improve their well-being through physical activity, companionship, responsibility, and stress reduction [6]. For normal populations, owning pets can create opportunities for the owners to form new social connections, from which they can receive social support (e.g., emotional, informational, appraisal, and instrumental support) [7]. Moreover, people with greater pet attachment during childhood also report higher empathy toward animals [8].



A dog and a cat friendly lying together, taken by Arantz (CC-BY-SA-3.0);

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cat\\_and\\_dog.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cat_and_dog.JPG)

However, owning a pet does not always bring good outcomes. A recent study of 263 Australians discovers that owning a pet can be a burden during the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in poorer quality of life. This result may be attributable to the concern of meeting the pets' social and behavioral needs during lockdown conditions. The study also indicates no association between pet ownership and loneliness [9]. In another scenario, pet ownership negatively affects homeless people's opportunities to utilize housing and job-finding services [5].

Animal-human interactions (specifically pet ownership) have positive and negative sides depending on the context and people's mindsets [10,11]. Owning a pet is like exposing oneself to information related to animals [12]. If people perceive the benefits of such information (e.g., dog walking and pet play), they are more likely to acknowledge and receive the benefits brought by pets. Otherwise, they will likely feel uncomfortable and perceive being with a pet as costly (e.g., dirtiness, noise). Notably, studies about the effects of pet ownership are mostly conducted in Western countries, where people generally have good impressions of pets. In some Asian cultures, pets are often stigmatized as unsanitary,

so the positive effects of pets found in Western countries might not apply to other cultures.

## References

- [1] Matchock RL. (2015). Pet ownership and physical health. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, 28(5), 386-392. [https://journals.lww.com/co-psychiatry/Abstract/2015/09000/Pet\\_ownership\\_and\\_physical\\_health.9.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/co-psychiatry/Abstract/2015/09000/Pet_ownership_and_physical_health.9.aspx)
- [2] Sirard JR, et al. (2011). Dog ownership and adolescent physical activity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 40(3), 334-337. [https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797\(10\)00704-X/fulltext](https://www.ajpmonline.org/article/S0749-3797(10)00704-X/fulltext)
- [3] Martin KE, et al. (2015). Not just “a walking the dog”: Dog walking and pet play and their association with recommended physical activity among adolescents. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 29(6), 353-356. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.4278/ajhp.130522-ARB-262>
- [4] Levine GN, et al. (2013). Pet ownership and Cardiovascular risk. *Circulation*, 127, 2353–2363. <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/10.1161/cir.0b013e31829201e1>
- [5] Rhoades H, Winetrobe H, & Rice E. (2015). Pet ownership among homeless youth: Associations with mental health, service utilization and housing status. *Child Psychiatry & Human Development*, 46, 237–244. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10578-014-0463-5>
- [6] Kruger KS, et al. (2014). Perceptions of companion dog benefits on well-being of US military veterans with HIV/AIDS. *Southern Medical Journal*, 107(3), 188-193. <https://sma.org/southern-medical-journal/article/perceptions-of-companion-dog-benefits-on-well-being-of-us-military-veterans-with-hiv-aids/>
- [7] Wood L, et al. (2015). The pet factor - companion animals as a conduit for getting to know people, friendship formation and social support. *PLoS ONE*, 10(4), e0122085. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0122085>
- [8] Rothgerber H, Mican F. (2014). Childhood pet ownership, attachment to pets, and subsequent meat avoidance. The mediating role of empathy toward animals. *Appetite*, 79,

11-17. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0195666314001597>

[9] Phillipou A, et al. (2021). Pet ownership and mental health during COVID-19 lockdown. *Australian Veterinary Journal*, 99(10), 423-426. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/avj.13102>

[10] Vuong QH, Nguyen MH, La VP. (2022). *The mindsponge and BMF analytics for innovative thinking in social sciences and humanities*. Berlin: De Gruyter. <https://books.google.com/books?id=EGeEEAAAQBAJ>

[11] Vuong QH. (2022). *Mindsponge theory*. <https://books.google.com/books?id=OSiGEAAAQBAJ>

[12] Nguyen MH, et al. (2022). Introduction to Bayesian Mindsponge Framework analytics: An innovative method for social and psychological research. *MethodsX*, 9, 101808. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2215016122001881>

