

## A comparative study of dog owners & non- dog owners in relation with psychological well being, stress and happiness

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### ABSTRACT

The human bond with animals has had an increasing focus in the area of veterinary sciences to the extent that it has now become important to understand this bond in a variety of other disciplines specially in the field of social sciences where its psychological effects are now being assessed to learn its impact on the overall well-being of an individual. The current investigation, therefore, attempts to compare Dog Owners and Non-Dog Owners in relation with their Psychological Well Being, Stress and Happiness. For this purpose, standardized scales were used for administration. The sample comprised of 30 Dog Owners and 30 Non-Dog Owners between the age of 18-28 years. The findings of the study showed a positive correlation between Happiness and Psychological Well Being. There came out a significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to Happiness. There also came out a significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to Psychological Well Being. There came out no significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to stress. Thus, this is an indication then having dogs at home place relates positively to Psychological Well-Being and Happiness.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Dog Owners, Psychological Well Being, Happiness*

*“Dogs’ lives are too short. Their only fault, really.”*

– Agnes Sligh Turnbull.

The existence of a dog in the life of an individual has a huge impact in their overall well-being. Dogs have also been associated with measures of psychological well-being, both through animal-assisted therapy and in the general population of dog owners (Beals, 2009). There has been some research-based evidence about positive effects of pet’s companionship to the human health (Gutiérrez, Granados & Piar, 2007). According to Siegel (1993) dogs may be more beneficial at times of stress, and that the amount of support they provide may be dependent on the strength of the person’s attachment to the dog. Animals have a way of interacting and connecting with humans on an emotional level. The human-animal bond is the exchange of approval and affection between an individual and animal (Ryneerson, 1978). It is now widely believed that pets enhance their owners’ health, sense of psychological well-being, and longevity (Herzog, 2011). The dog owners

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had higher physical activity levels than owners of other kinds of pets and those without any pets, suggesting that dogs may play a major role in promoting physical activity (Oka & Shibata, 2009). **When we interact with dogs, our oxytocin levels shoot up. Since this is the hormone largely responsible for social bonding, this hormonal “love injection” boosts our psychological well-being.** The reduction of stress due to the human-animal bond may be based on the non-judgmental stance of dogs. Dogs appear to reduce symptoms of depression and render people more resilient to stress. That is why dogs are often used as therapy animals (Cohut, 2018). Spending just a few minutes with a pet can lower anxiety and blood pressure, and increase levels of serotonin and dopamine, two neurochemicals that play big roles in calm and wellbeing. Pet owners also do almost double the amount of exercise – raising their heart rate five times a week compared to just three times for non-pet owners – and nine in 10 owners believe their pet is good for their health and wellbeing (Elsworthy, 2018). Dog owners also mentioned that they really enjoy spending time with their dogs and their companionship helps them get through tough times (Ingraham, 2019). However, the reason for such levels of happiness can be connected not only with owning a dog. The research showed that people who chose dogs were more likely to be easy-going and extroverted. So, their personality could also be what affects their perception of the world and makes them more satisfied with life (Bao & Schreer, 2016).

### ***Psychological Well-being***

Willis and Campbell (1992) add that Psychological Well-Being is “a positive condition of Spiritual Well-Being, in which people feel satisfied by themselves, their roles in life and their relationships with others. Ryff (1989) additionally highlights six aspects of Psychological Well-Being viz.,

- 1. Autonomy:** Autonomy is understood as self-determinant and independent behaviour.
- 2. Environmental Mastery:** This is understood as having the skill and competence of managing one’s environment effectively and choosing a surrounding suitable to their personal goals and needs. E.g., I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
- 3. Personal Growth:** Individuals high on personal growth are open to new experiences and have a realization of their own potential.
- 4. Positive Relations with Others:** Having warm and trusting relationships with others that are full of affection, intimacy and understanding. Individuals having positive relations with others are often described as ‘giving’ and one’s who are willing to share their time with others.
- 5. Purpose in Life:** Individuals with a sense of purpose in life have aims and goals having a sense of direction with goals having personal meaning to them that add value to their life.
- 6. Self-Acceptance:** This refers to the acceptance of one’s existence accompanied by a positive attitude towards oneself.

Research investigating mental well-being and human–dog interactions has examined the efficacy of animal-assisted therapies to improve psychological outcomes among institutionalised individuals (Wells, 2009). Owning a pet can help with your well-being – you live longer, healthier, and happier (Steenland, 2020)

### ***Stress***

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that stress occurs when people perceived that the demands from external situations were beyond their coping capacity. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that stress occurs when people perceived that the demands from external

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situations were beyond their coping capacity. Dog owners, for instance, are more likely to seek comfort from their pet in times of stress, more likely to play with their pet, and more likely to consider their pet a member of their family. Those differences suggest a stronger social bond with their pets, which could create a greater sense of well-being (Ingraham,2019).

### ***Happiness***

Happiness is “people's evaluations of their lives and encompasses both cognitive judgments of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions” (Kesebir&Diener,2008,). Dog people, in other words, are slightly happier than those without any pets and dog owners are more likely to engage in outdoor physical activity than people who don't own dogs, with obvious benefits for health and happiness (Ingraham,2019).

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this study is to derive a relationship of dog owners and non dog owners in context to their psychological well-being, stress and happiness.

### ***Hypothesis***

1. It is expected that dog owners will be high on Happiness as compared to non-dog owners.
2. It is expected that dog owners will be high on Psychological Well Being as compared to non-dog owners.
3. It is expected that dog owners will be low on Stress as compared to non-dog owners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Sample***

The sample consisted of 30 Dog Owners and 30 Non-Dog Owners between the age of 18-28 years from Chandigarh.

### ***Measures***

The following tests were used,

- 1. Psychological Well Being Scale:** The 18-item version of Psychological Well Being scale developed by Ryff and Keyes in 1995 was used. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Items were added after being scored.
- 2. Perceived Stress Scale:** The 4-item version of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen in 1983 was used to measure the stress levels of the respondents. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Items were added after being scored.
- 3. Subjective Happiness Scale:** The Subjective Happiness Scale is a 4-item scale which was developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper in 1999 to measure subjective happiness. Each of item was completed by choosing one of 7 options that finish a given sentence fragment. The options were different for each of the four questions. Items were added after being scored.

### ***Procedure***

The study was conducted with the help of google forms. The respondents were made aware of the purpose of study and were ensured of their confidentiality of their preliminaries to

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avoid dishonest responses. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the respondent.

### RESULTS

**Table 1. RANKS**

	DOG OWNER-1, NON-OWNER-2	N	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U
HAPPINESS	Dog Owner	30	35.13	311.000*
	Non-Dog Owner	30	25.87	
PSS	Dog Owner	30	29.92	432.500
	Non-Dog Owner	30	31.08	
PWB	Dog Owner	30	39.27	187.000**
	Non-Dog Owner	30	21.73	

Note: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$

**Table 2. CORRELATION**

	PSS	PWB
HAPPINESS	-.098	.544**
PSS		-.157

Note: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$

### DISCUSSION

The mean and standard deviation of the whole data came out to be 1.50 and 0.504 respectively. The findings of the study showed a positive correlation between Happiness and Psychological Well Being, ( $r = .544$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There came out a significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to Happiness, (311.000,  $p < .05$ ). Hence, the hypothesis that dog owners will be high on happiness is accepted. There also came out a significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to Psychological Well Being, (187.000,  $p < .01$ ). Hence, the hypothesis that dog owners will be high on psychological well being is accepted. There came out no significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to stress. The study of our interactions with animals is interesting, important, and challenging. Whether, and under what circumstances, pets make people happier and healthier is unclear. It is, however, clear that animals play a role in nearly every aspect of human psychological and cultural life (Herzog, 2011). A study conducted is suggestive of that that pet owners are much better, both in terms of well-being outcomes and individual differences, than nonowners on several dimensions. A study in 2006 by the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association determined that pet owners were happier, healthier and better adjusted than were nonowners. (Welsh, 2011).

### CONCLUSION

We all experience stress and happiness in our day to day lives. They further impact our Psychological Well Being. The study was conducted with the help of google forms. The respondents were made aware of the purpose of study and were ensured of their confidentiality of their preliminaries to avoid dishonest responses. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the respondents. The sample comprised of 30 Dog Owners and 30 Non-Dog Owners between the age of 18-28 years. The purpose of this study is to derive a relationship of dog owners and non-dog owners in context to their psychological well-being, stress and happiness. The findings of the study showed a positive correlation between Happiness and Psychological Well Being. There came out a significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to Happiness ( $p < .05$ ) and Psychological Well Being ( $p < .01$ ). There

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came out no significant difference between dog owners and non-dog owners in relation to stress. Thus, it can be concluded that the existence of a pet in our daily lives can improve on our overall Psychological Well-Being and can be an addition to our Happiness.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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