

## Stress Among Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners During Covid-19

Ria Raina<sup>1\*</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research is to examine if there is a difference in stress experienced by pet owners and non-pet owners during covid-19. Pets are stress busters, spending a few minutes with them work as a mood lifter. In this increasingly demanding and stressful situation, pet for humans can act like pillars of emotional support and influx of positive energy. A sample of 100 individuals (n=100), consisting of 50 pet owners and 50 non pet owners participated in this study. They were mainly college students aged between 18-24 years. The Perceived stress scale was the standardized tool used to measure the stress among respondents and sampling technique used was simple random sampling. After data collection, the responses were scored using the test manual and then scores analyzed using an independent sample t-test. The result pointed out that there was no significant difference in perceived stress among non-pet owners and pet owners during covid-19. The pandemic has been equally stressful for both the samples.

**Keywords:** *Stress, Pets, COVID-19*

While the second wave of covid-19 is coming to an end, the virus has impacted the human kind not only on a physical level but also on a deeper psychological level. With the numbers of cases rising-falling on the trot, there are plentiful reasons for feeling stressed. The changes in lifestyle, disruption in day-to-day activities, fear of contacting the virus, health of loved ones, the uncertainty about the future, and the isolation has certainly increased stress and anxiety among populations.

Stress is a coping mechanism of our body. When our body's coping resources and skills exhausts it results in Physical, emotional or psychological reactions which is basically stress. Stress is not necessarily harmful; a limited amount of stress helps us to be vigilant and maximize our performance outcomes, but when it surpasses the normal amount, it can have detrimental effects on the overall functioning.

The covid-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in a diverse way. From social distancing to isolation all these precautions are really important, but end up making us feel more strained. Pandemic induced stress is something very common and is experienced by all. Though the pandemic has affected every stratum of the population, Researches have highlighted that the stress experienced by persons with limited adaptive capacity, lower economic status, limited

<sup>1</sup>Bachelors' student, Amity Institute of Psychology and Allied Sciences, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

\*Corresponding Author

Received: June 06, 2021; Revision Received: June 22, 2021; Accepted: June 30, 2021

## Stress Among Pet Owners and Non -Pet Owners During Covid-19

social support, and pre-existing mental health conditions might be higher than among those who do not share these characteristics (Gopal et al.,2020).

Some studies pointed those students and individual who are unemployed are highly susceptible to COVID stress and its mental health implications (Acebes,2020). The youth have been dealing number of pandemic-related consequences, such as closures of universities and loss of income, that is leading to deprived mental health and stress. The pressure to perform well academically, change into online mode of teaching, reduced interactions, apprehension about the future and various other factors have been sufficient enough to cause stress among college students. The youth is considered one of the most dynamic phases of one's life. With the youngsters being confined at homes, lack of activity and excitement is certainly adding to the total baggage of stress.

stress is one of the major mental health issues experienced in India during the pandemic. Frontline workers, children, people with mental illness are the most vulnerable to experience stress (Roy et al.,2020)

A population study in India about stress and its sources was conducted. It highlighted that Out of sample of 1073 individuals, 65.7% of individuals experienced high stress during the pandemic. stress is more evident in lower income groups and young people. The major sources of stress is worries about the future, Financial obligations, fear of getting infected, and movement restriction. (Fenn et al.,2021)

The stressors are many, but only source of immediate support for people is their family and their pets. They can act as buffer to stress and enhance the overall wellbeing during this challenging time.

Pets don't expect much from humans. Just the basic requirement of food, water and some compassion is enough for them. With nearly no effort at all, pets bring about so much delight into our lives. The health benefits of having animals at home goes far beyond stress reduction. They for humans are like a sight of emotional support and influx of positive energy. This can be implicated with this finding – the covid period witnessed a significant Increase in pet adoptions and fostering worldwide (Ratschen et al.,2020)

Research has proven that having a furry partner at home significantly reduces the risk of heart attack and strokes. Just a 10-15 minute of interaction with your animal boosts the production of essential neurotransmitters in our body and significant reduction in stress hormone cortisol. They help us live an active lifestyle and controlling our cholesterol and blood pressure e levels also.

Pendry et al. (2019) conducted a research titled “animal visitation program reduces cortisol level of university students”. A sample of college students were separated into 4 clusters. The first group received a 10-minute interaction with cats and dogs. The second group was asked to observe the first group while they interacted with animals. The third group was shown the slideshow of pictures of the same animals and the fourth group didn't receive any intervention. On evaluating the cortisol samples found in each group, it was found that the students who had directly interacted with animals showed significantly less cortisol in their saliva's than any of the group.

## Stress Among Pet Owners and Non -Pet Owners During Covid-19

We humans are social creatures, we strongly rely on companionship not just for our survival but also for our overall wellbeing. In the current scenario, where we are home bound, isolated and away from human touch pets provide the much-needed support. Recent research in the area emphasize that human-animal touch induced positive feelings of relaxation, comfort, and a sense of cross-species reciprocity (Young et al.,2020). A recent research has pointed that 90 percent of respondents who undertook a survey, felt that pet was a major emotional support for them during the lockdown and almost 96 percent of them felt that pet helped them stay active and fit (predit, 2020)

Gan et al. (2019) in research titled “Pet ownership and its influence on mental health in older adults” examined the influence of pets on mental health of adults. Results findings suggest that “pet have significant role for elderly, they provide companionship, give a sense of purpose and meaning, reduce isolation and promote socialization”.

Brooks et al. (2018) in research titled “The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence” examined whether living with pets improved the overall health and helped them in managing a long-term mental health condition. This result of the review suggests that pets provide benefits to those with mental health conditions.

Latz et al. (2019) in a research titled “Pet ownership and stress among university student.” The relationship between pet ownership and stress levels among college students was investigated. The findings revealed that having a pet was related with a decreased degree of stress. According to studies, pet owners enjoy a higher and better quality of life than people who do not own a pet.

Ratschen et al. (2020) investigated the human-animal interactions and their consequences during the lockdown. Having a pet was strongly connected to sustaining greater mental well-being, reduced stress, and lowering feelings of loneliness throughout the lockdown, according to the findings.

### *Objective*

To compare the level of reported stress among pet owners and non-pet owners during the covid-19 pandemic.

### *Hypothesis*

There exists a significant difference in stress experienced during covid-19 between pet owners and non-pet owners.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### *Sample*

The sample consisted of one hundred college students (n=100). The fifty of them owned pets (n=50) and other fifty (n=50) didn't owned pets. The participants were between ages 18-24 years. The mean age of the participants was 21. The simple random sampling technique was undertaken for the sampling process.

### *Instruments*

**Perceived stress scale-** it is a popularly used Self-report instrument developed by Cohen. (1983). it is a standardized tool used for accessing how individuals perceive stress. It points the degree to which circumstances in one's life are appraised as stressful. It uses a five-point

## Stress Among Pet Owners and Non -Pet Owners During Covid-19

Likert scale where the respondent needs to answer how frequently they felt in a certain way during the last month. The options range from never to very often.

### Procedure

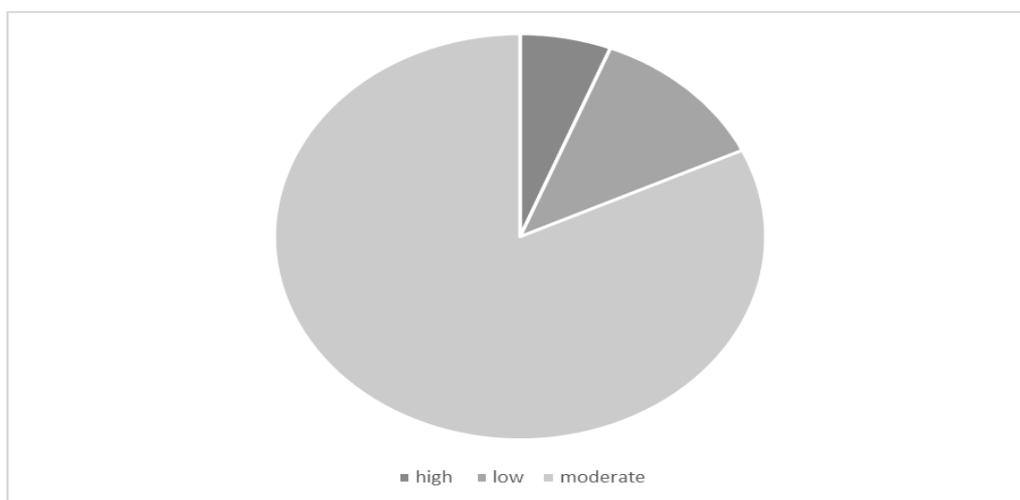
The data collection was done using google forms. First section provided all the information regarding the purpose of study and about the confidentiality of the content. The perceived stress scale was incorporated in the next section. The obtained data was tabulated on MS excel and then analyzed using inferential statistics i.e., an independent sample t test

## RESULTS

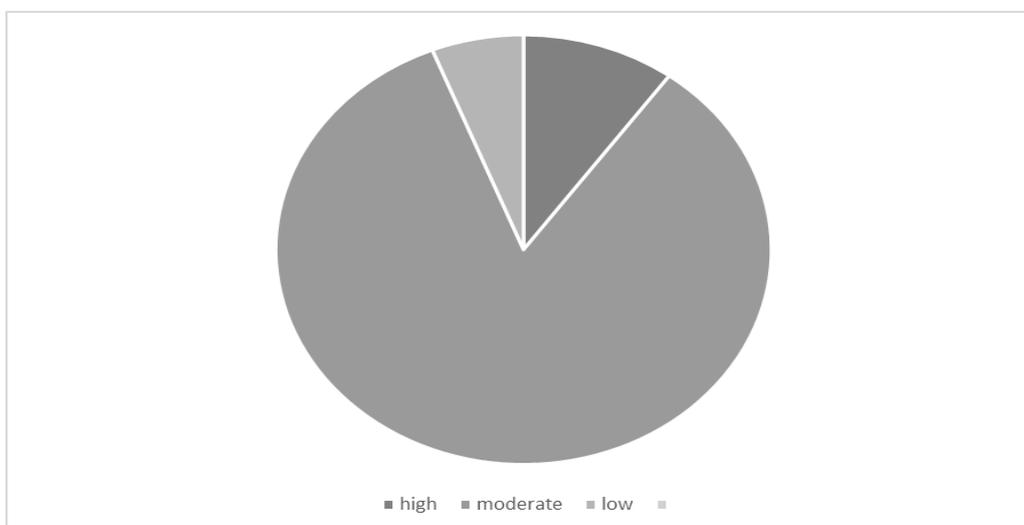
After the tabulation of data, independent t -test was administered, which gave the following result-

**Table No. 1 Comparison of stress among pet owners and non-pet owners**

Group	N	MEAN	SD	df	t- ratio	Significance
PET OWNERS	50	20.64	3.99	98	0.085	Insignificant at both levels (0.05 & 0.01)
NON-PET OWNERS	50	20.72	5.23			



**Graph No. 1 Stress in Pet Owners**



**Graph No. 2 Stress in Non-Pet Owners**

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the current research was to examine if there is a significant difference in stress experienced between respondents who owned pets and respondents who didn't during the covid-19 pandemic. The sample was mainly college students aged between 18-24 years. After the data collection the interpretation was done using inferential statistics, an independent sample t -test was administered on the collected data.

The result of the analysis pointed out that there was no significant difference in the perceived stress of pet owners and non-pet owners during the pandemic. It has been seen that both pet-owners and non-pet owners experienced same amount of perceived stress during the covid-19 pandemic, so the null hypothesis has been accepted. The mean stress for pet owners is 20.64 and 20.72 for non-pet -owners. the standard deviation for pet owners is 3.99 and that for non-pet owners is 5.23. the t-value is 0.085, which is found to be insignificant at both the levels (0.05 and 0.01) as it is lesser than table value. This specifies that there is no significant difference between both the sets.

The graph no-1 shows the level of stress experienced by pet owners, most of them experienced moderate level of stress, while a few experienced a low level of stress and a very small percentage experienced high stress. The graph no-2 highlights the level of stress experienced by respondents with no pets, a large percentage of people experienced moderate stress while, only a few experienced low stresses. The respondents who experienced high stress were higher in group-2 (people with no pets) than in group-1 (people with pets).

These contradictory findings strongly emphasize on the exploration of other related aspects like level of attachment with the pet, time spent in a day and the type of pet they have.

Wright (2018) conducted a research titled “The relationship between pet attachment, perceived stress and life satisfaction: An online survey.” The findings of the study revealed that there was no difference in stress levels between pet owners and non-pet owners. However, there was a strong link between pet attachment and stress perception. Respondents who are more devoted to their pets are less stressed than those who are not. As a result, the degree of attachment might be a crucial aspect in comprehending the situation.

Other studies point that the greatest benefit of stress relief is experienced by the person who acts as the primary care giver of their pet (Utz, 2014). Wells (2015) conducted a research titled “relationship between pet ownership and stress relief during the academic semester”. Findings emphasized that that there was no such difference in the stress levels experienced by pet owners and those who don't have pets during the pandemic.

## CONCLUSION

The current study was conducted to explore if there exists a significant difference in the level of stress experienced between pet owners and non-pet owner during Covid-19. The analysis revealed that there is no such difference between both the groups in terms of stress levels.

## REFERENCES

Brooks, H.L., Rushton, K., Lovell, K. et al. The power of support from companion animals for people living with mental health problems: a systematic review and narrative synthesis of the evidence. *BMC Psychiatry* 18, 31 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-018-1613-2>

## Stress Among Pet Owners and Non -Pet Owners During Covid-19

- Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 385-396.
- Fenn, J., Chacko, N., Thomas, T., Varghese, H. V., & George, S. (2021). Stress, sources of stress and coping during the Covid-19 lockdown: A population study from India. *Indian Journal of Social Psychiatry*, Vol.37(1), DOI: 10.4103/ijsp.ijsp\_155\_20;57-63
- Lantz, M., DVM; Smith, Maia P, PhD; Bidaisee, Satesh, DVM. *International Public Health Journal*; Hauppauge Vol. 11, Iss. 4, (2019): 425-430.
- Nancy R. Gee & Megan K. Mueller (2019) A Systematic Review of Research on Pet Ownership and Animal Interactions among Older Adults, *Anthrozoös*, 32:2, 183-207, DOI:10.1080/08927936.2019.1569903
- Pendry, P., & Vandagriff, J. L. (2019). Animal Visitation Program (AVP) Reduces Cortisol Levels of University Students: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *AERA Open*, Vol-5(2)
- Ratschen, E., Shoesmith, E., Shibab, L., Silva, K., Kale, d., Toner, P., Reeve, C., & Millis, S. D. (2020) Human-animal relationships and interactions during the Covid-19 lockdown phase in the UK: Investigating links with mental health and loneliness. *plos-one*, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0239397>
- Ratschen, E., Shoesmith, E., Shibab, L., Silva, K., Kale, d., Toner, P., Reeve, C., & Millis, S. D. (2021) The Influence of Human–Animal Interactions on Mental and Physical Health during the First COVID-19 Lockdown Phase in the U.K.: A Qualitative Exploration. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, Vol-18:3, pages 976.
- Roy, A., Singh, A. K., Mishra, S., Chinnadurai, A., Mitra, A., & Bakshi, O. (2020). Mental health implications of COVID-19 pandemic and its response in India. *The International journal of social psychiatry*, 20764020950769. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764020950769>
- Roux, L. C. M. & Wright, S. (2020) .The Relationship Between Pet Attachment, Life Satisfaction, and Perceived Stress: Results from a South African Online Survey. *A multidisciplinary journal of the interactions of people and animal*, Vol-33(3), <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2020.1746525>
- Utsav Raj, Ambreen Fatima. "Stress in Students after Lockdown Due to COVID-19 Threat and the Effects of Attending Online Classes." Research gate (2020): [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341267580\\_Stress\\_in\\_Students\\_after\\_Lockdown\\_Due\\_to\\_COVID-19\\_Threat\\_and\\_the\\_Effects\\_of\\_Attending\\_Online\\_Classes](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341267580_Stress_in_Students_after_Lockdown_Due_to_COVID-19_Threat_and_the_Effects_of_Attending_Online_Classes). World Health Organisation .
- Utz, R. L. (2014). Walking the dog: The effect of pet ownership on human health and health behaviors. *Social Indicators Research*, 116, 327-339. doi:10.1007/s11205-013-0299-6

### **Acknowledgement**

The author(s) appreciate all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

**How to cite this article:** Raina R. (2021). Stress Among Pet Owners and Non -Pet Owners During Covid-19. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(2), 2085-2090. DIP:18.01.205.20210902, DOI:10.25215/0902.205