

## Psychological Wellbeing, Perceived Stress, Coping Strategy of The Bengali Young Adult Pet Owners

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### ABSTRACT

Humans and pet animals have always shared a strong bond. They provide companionship and support to each other. Pet-animals have a significant role in human life. The aim of the study is to explore psychological wellbeing, perceived stress, and coping of the pet-owners (dog or cat or both) and non-pet owners. Both male and female Bengali pet owners and non-pet owners, age ranging between 20-25 years, were chosen for this study. General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg, 1978), Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen S et al. 1983), Coping Check List 2 (Rao K et al. 1989) were used. Mean, S.D and t-Test findings indicate that the pet owners are more likely to possess good psychological well-being, use better coping strategies like problem focused, distraction (positive), acceptance/redefinition and perceived less stress than the non-pet owners. Pet ownership may create a positive contribution to health, behaviour and therefore the psychological well-being of the owners.

**Keywords:** *Pet Owners, Non-Pet Owners, Well-Being, Stress, Coping*

Humans and pet animals have always shared a strong bond. They provide companionship and support to each other. Pet-animals are the significant attachment figure of human life. Many Indians choose animals, specifically dogs and cats as pets. In India, the number of households with pet dogs and cats accounted for roughly 17 million and 1.5 million respectively in 2018 (Jaganmohan, 2019). The importance of the connection between people and their pets has even been discussed in Time Magazine (Gibbs, 2008). Gibbs (2008) mentioned the importance of the human-animal relationships in popular culture as well as in political culture. This type of relationship has been the subject of numerous myths and legends.

Some present studies show that probably 60-80% of dogs have a good sleep with their owners in the bedroom. This means the closeness of a relationship and could be a major change in our attitudes towards treating pets like family. India has developed a pet population of 10 million in 2011 from 7 million in 2006. On a mean 600,000 pets are adopted once a year (IIPTF, 2017)

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Animal-Assisted Therapy (AAT) is also a growing field that uses trained dogs or other animals to help children, adults and aged people endure or better cope with health problems and mental disorders. A study by Lundqvist M et al. in 2017 concluded that Dog-assisted therapy had the most effective potential in the treatment of psychiatric disorders among both young and adult patients. Dog-assisted activities had some positive effects on health, wellbeing additionally as in stress and mood.

Psychological well-being can refer to how individuals determine their lives. In step with Diener (1997), this evaluation is additionally within the sort of cognitions or within the range of effect. When somebody gives an evaluative conclusion about one's satisfaction with life, that is the cognitive part is an information-based appraisal of one's life. The affective part might be a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings like the frequency with which individuals experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. The concept behind this is often that nearly all people evaluate their life as either good or bad, in order that they're normally able to offer judgments. Additionally, people also consistently experience moods and emotions, which have a helpful or harmful effect. Thus, people have a tier of subjective well-being whether they're infrequently consciously given some thought to that, and so the psychological system offers virtually a seamless evaluation of what is happening to the person.

H. Selye (1936) defined stress as non-specific responses that result from a spread of assorted styles of stimuli. However, Selye's stress theory has only focused on physiological stress, and psychological factors haven't been considered. Research on life stress examined the link between diseases and life events. Many studies were conducted for clarifying the psychological factors related to stress, and the results revealed that psychological factors play a giant role within the occurrence of physiological and psychological stress responses. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) proposed that stress occurs when people perceived that the strain from external situations was beyond their coping capacity. Today, the widely accepted description of stress is that the technique of interaction from resolution desires from the environment.

Coping is defined as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The present study aims to explore the pet owner's psychological profile, namely, stress, coping, psychological wellbeing.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Objectives of the Study*

- Firstly, this study needs to explore whether there is any difference in psychological wellbeing among two groups of people –pet owners and non-pet owners.
- Secondly, to investigate perceived subjective stress among two groups of people –pet owners and non-pet owners.
- Thirdly, to investigate coping strategies among two groups of people –pet owners and non-pet owners.

**Participants:** The participants of this present study were 70 male and female. All participants were Bengali young adults, aged between 20-25 years, residing at North 24

Paraganas. The Control Group (CG), consisting of 35 participants who do not have any pets and the Study Group (SG) consisting of 35 participants who had pets (dog / cat or both) for more than 1 year.

### ***Testing tools***

Keeping in the view the purpose of the study, the following questionnaires were administered.

- **Socioeconomic Status Scale:** The measure of Socioeconomic Status was developed by Kuppaswami in 1984 and was again revised in 2012. This scale helps to assess the socio-economic status.
- **General Health Questionnaire:** The GHQ-28 was developed by Goldberg in 1978. This was used as a screening tool. It is a 28 item measure of emotional distress in a medical setting.

Through factor analysis, the GHQ-28 has been divided into 4 subscales. These are-somatic symptoms (item 1-7), anxiety insomnia (item 8-14), social dysfunction (item 15-21) and severe depression (item 22-28). It takes less than 5 minutes to complete. There are different methods to score GHQ-28. There are four options for each question. Here the score was counted from 0 to 3 for each response with a total possible score ranging from 0-84. Using this method, a total score of 23/24 is the threshold for the presence of distress.

Several studies have investigated reliability and validity of the GHQ-28 in various clinical populations. Test-retest reliability has been reported to be high (.78 to 0.9) (Robinson and Price 1982) and interrater and intrarater reliability have both have shown to be excellent (cronbach's  $\alpha$  0.9-0.95 Failde and Ramos 2000). The GHQ correlates well the Hospital Depression and Anxiety Scale (HADS) (Sakakibara et. Al 2009) and other measures of depression (Robinson and Price 1982).

- ***Perceived Stress Scale***

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) could be a classic stress assessment instrument. This tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a well-liked choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress.

Each item is rated on a 5-point scale starting from never (0) to nearly always (4). Positively worded items are reverse scored, and therefore the ratings are summed, with Higher scores indicating more perceived stress. PSS-10 scores are obtained by reversing the scores on the four positive items: as an example, 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, etc. then summing across all 10 items. Items 4, 5, 7, and 8 are the positively stated items.

Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein (1983) reported Cronbach's  $\alpha$  between .84-.86 for the PSS. Test-retest reliability for the PSS was .85. Correlation of the PSS to other measures of comparable symptoms ranges between .52-.76 (Cohen et al., 1983).

- ***Coping Checklist 2***

Coping' refers to efforts to master, reduce or tolerate the strain created by stress. People deal with stress in many ways. A variety of researchers has attempted to spot and classify the varied coping techniques that individuals use in dealing with stress. Their work reveals quite a form of coping strategy. People cannot remain during a continuous state of tension. The key to understanding stress and coping is individual perceptions of demands and therefore

the sufficiency of their coping responses to demands. Consistent with this transactional model, coping may be broadly divided into emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused (also called palliative) coping refers to strategies accustomed to moderate distressing emotions. In contrast, problem-focused coping refers to attempts to change the demands-coping imbalance.

Kiran Rao, D.K Subbakrishna, G.G. Prabhu has developed a coping measuring checklist which was called coping checklist 1, after some years coping checklist again revised and eventually coping checklist 2 was established by them. The coping checklist was 7 subscales, there's one problem-focused scale (problem-solving), 5 emotional- focused scales (Distraction positive methods, distraction–negative methods, acceptance/redefinition, religion/faith and denial/blame) and also the last one social support which is a combination of both problem and emotion-focused coping.

The scoring for every subscale is, therefore, the collection of the yes response (scored 1) on the subscale. The test-retest reliability is 0.74 and the internal consistency (alpha) ranges from 0.75 to 0.85 indicating adequate reliability.

### ***Procedure***

In the present study the participants were selected based on verbal consent and availability. They were selected from different areas of North 24 Paraganas. Purposive sampling was used for present study. After establishing the rapport, the selected subjects were administered the testing tools in the following order: Socioeconomic Status scale, General Health Questionnaires, Perceived Stress Scale, Coping Checklist -II. Finally, 70 complete data sheets were collected. Statistical treatment was carried out and data was interpreted following the results.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

- Statistical analysis of the data was done with the help of statistical package of social sciences, windows version 16 (SPSS 16)
- Descriptive statistics (Mean, SD) were done to show the nature of the data.
- Inferential statistics (“t” test) was used to find out the significant difference among the different groups.
- Levine’s test used to find the homogeneity of the different groups

## **RESULT**

Before going into the narration of the results obtained from the study, it is imperative to consider the socio-demographic details of the sample. In the present study the age groups of the samples were between 20-25 years. There were 13 males and 22 females in CG with the mean of 39.166 and 22.190 respectively and 16 males and 19 females in SG with the mean of 35.533 and 22.055 respectively. Socio economic statuses of the samples were in between middle to high socio-economic group. They had their educational life about 10 to 15 years.

**Table 1: Mean difference of the domains of well-being (General Health Questionnaire) between SG and CG.**

Domains	SG		CG		Significant (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Somatic Symptoms	2.0286	2.66222	7.1143	3.46216	.001
Anxiety Insomnia	2.8857	3.15083	8.2000	3.48779	.001
Social Dysfunction	7.0000	1.98524	7.6571	2.42466	.219
Severe Depression	2.0571	1.87778	6.7714	4.17334	.000

**Table 2: Mean Difference of Perceived Stress between SG and CG.**

SG		CG		Significant(2tailed)
Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
15.2000	6.38380	21.7714	4.47927	.001

**Table 3: Mean difference between the domains of Coping Check List SG and CG.**

Domains	SG		CG		Significant (2-tailed)
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
PROBLEM FOCUSED	7.2286	1.00252	6.2286	1.41600	.001
DISTRACTION(POSITIVE)	7.1143	1.79495	6.1143	1.40945	.012
DISTRACTION(NEGATIVE)	2.0857	1.40108	2.6000	1.39748	.129
ACCEPTANCE/REDEFINITION	8.3143	1.49059	6.8286	1.58087	.001
RELIGION/FAITH	2.7429	1.42133	5.0000	1.51463	.001
DENIAL/BLAME	2.9143	1.01087	5.6000	2.00294	.001
SOCIAL/SUPPORT	3.2000	.96406	3.6000	1.19312	.128

## DISCUSSION

### *Psychological Wellbeing of Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners*

Wellbeing is what allows people to function and participate fully in communal life. In 1948, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (Manderscheid et al. 2010).

From Table 1, it can be said that there is a highly significant mean difference on the Somatic Symptom, Anxiety Insomnia, and Severe depression scores between both CG and SG.

## **Psychological Wellbeing, Perceived Stress, Coping Strategy of The Bengali Young Adult Pet Owners**

It can further be said that the pet owners scored low on somatic symptoms, anxiety insomnia and severe depression as compared with those who don't have pets in their home. Here it can be said that in spite of the same age the pet can influence the well-being of the owners. The pets are often the simplest way of channelizing the negative outcomes of life which could also be the rationale of the well-being of the pet owners as compared with the non-pet owners. An identical study by Chaudhary S and. Srivastava S.K (2017) concluded pet owners are happier and have better psychological well-being than non- pet owners.

Pet interventions are classified as a style of Complementary/Alternative Medicine (CAM) by the National Institutes of Health that will facilitate the mind's capacity to affect the biological processes and symptoms through the biopsychosocial model (Johnson et al; 2002). The utilization of a dog with cancer patients was found to positively influence the consequences of dopamine, cortisol, oxytocin, prolactin, endorphin, and 9 phenyl ethylamine and to alleviate symptoms of depression (Odendaal, 2000), thus pet ownership impacts mental state in differing ways.

### ***Perceived Stress Among Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners***

Lazarus (1999) found that stress is often perceived as any variety of events that strains an individual's ability to cope. No one's life is free from stress irrespective of how sensible you're. McEwen (1998) explained that a controllable amount of perceived stress is of course healthy and would challenge the individuals to grow. However, too high a level of perceived stress may influence the functioning of the system (Cohen, 1996).

From Table 2, it may be observed that there's a highly significant mean difference in Perceived Stress between both CG and SG. CG group scored high on perceived stress in comparison to SG group. Thus, it can be said that people who have pets, perceived less stress in their life than those who do not have any pets. Pet ownership provides a pathway of reducing the strain by spending quality time with pets. This companionship and attachment with pets may act as a stress buster and help the pet owners to feel good. A study conducted by Staats et al, 2008 shows students reported that their pet helped them during a stressful study period or that their pet makes them feel less lonely.

### ***Coping Strategies of Pet Owners and Non-Pet Owners***

Coping refers to ways to handle stressful and troublesome circumstances. It also includes expelling effort to resolve problems and to cater to problematic situations.

Losing a beloved is incredibly painful, but one in all the most effective ways of coping is to have a pet. Cats are shown to assist people to recover from their loss more quickly, and show fewer physical symptoms of pain, like crying. Despite the fact that they're only animals, cats function as social support during difficult times. People in mourning reported reprimand pets to figure out feelings since it's often easier to speak to something that won't respond and can't judge than to a different soul. (Kathy et al, 2017).

Problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping and seeking social support are the common coping strategies one may use to handle the stressful situations (Kohlman et al.1997). Filling up questionnaire surveys, interviews, or written texts are often accustomed to understanding how people address stress.

The present study attempted to focus on the coping strategies among the pet owners and non-pet owners. From the Table 3, it may be observed that there's a highly significant mean

difference within the Problem Focused, Acceptance/Redefinition, Religion/Faith, Denial/Blame coping strategies but within the case of Distraction (Positive), Distraction (Negative) and Social/Support coping there's no significant mean difference between CG and SG.

The pet owners scored high in problem focused coping strategy, distraction (positive), acceptance/redefinition coping strategies. The non-pet owners scored high in religion/faith and denial/blame coping strategies. So, it can further be said that pet owners are using both problem-focused and also emotional focused coping to effectively deal with their life stressors. They try to analyze the problematic situation, work effortlessly to unravel the matter and also sometimes they avoid focusing or analyzing the situation to solve that effortlessly. But non-pet owners in present study use mostly emotional focused coping. Therefore, it may be said that the non-pet owners use denial, blame, and religious/faith to deal with the stressful situation.

Hoffman et al. (2018) showed that dogs that were perceived as bed partners were found to be less disturbing than humans, promoting stronger feelings of comfort and security. It's notable that almost all pet owners describe their pets as significant members of their family, and report that they provide comfort, friendship, and help to deal with stress.

### CONCLUSION

The comparative evaluation of the findings indicated that the pet owners are more likely to have good psychological well-being, use better coping strategies like problem focused, distraction (positive), acceptance/redefinition and perceived less stress than the non-pet owners. Pet ownership is thought to make a positive contribution to health, behaviours, and the psychological well-being of the owners.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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