

Attachment Security and Pet Ownership: Impact on Well-Being and Social Connectedness in Indian Adults – A Quantitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between adult attachment styles and emotional pet attachment and how this connection is related to the psychological well-being and social connectedness of Indian adult pet owners. Based on Bowlby's theory of attachment, the study examines whether individuals with secure and insecure attachment differ in the emotional relationships they develop with companion animals and the psychological results associated with them. A total of 200 Indian adults aged 18 to 45 participated in an online survey using incidental and purposive sampling method. Participants completed the Lexington Pet Attachment Scale (LAPS), the PGI General Well-Being Measure, Social Connectedness Scale, and the Attachment Style Questionnaire. Independent sample t tests showed no significant differences in pet attachment between the secure ($M = 46.6$, $SD = 13.6$) and the insecure ($M = 47.6$, $SD = 15.1$) groups, $t(198) = 0.209$, $p = .583$, and $d = 0.03$. Correlation analysis found that in those who are securely attached, the attachment with pets is moderately associated with greater psychological well-being ($r = .305$, $p = .006$) and social connectedness ($r = .460$, $p < .001$). In individuals with insecure attachments, however, no significant correlation between attachment to pets and psychological well-being ($r = .055$, $p = .553$) or social connectedness ($r = .042$, $p = .652$). These results indicate that people who are securely bound can derive emotional and social benefits through relationships with pets, but those who are insecurely bound may not experience similar benefits. The study provides culturally relevant insights into the interaction between humans and animals in the Indian context and supports the therapeutic potential of pet relationships, particularly for those with secure attachment style, in improving mental health and social belonging.

Keywords: *Adult Attachment Styles, Pet Attachment, Psychological Well-Being, Social Connectedness, Indian Pet Owners*

Pets, or companion animals, are those living in close relation with humans, usually within a household or a community, whose basic needs are fulfilled. They differ from working animals or livestock because pets are kept mainly for companionship and emotional association, not for their functional or economic value.

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While pets play a global role in improving the well-being of the human body, the interaction between pet owners varies depending on the cultural context. In India, the relationship between humans and animals has been accepted, and pet ownership is growing steadily. According to the TGM Pet Care Survey (2024), 71% of Indian respondents currently own at least one pet, indicating a sharp increase in pet ownership in India. More than half said they had more than two pets, which indicated that Indian families are becoming increasingly dog-like. These statistics show that people are starting to view pets as an integral social companion rather than just animals, and that India is an important place to study the security of attachments in relation to pet ownership.

Attachment Theory and Human- Pet Bonds

The theory of attachment, originally developed by John Bowlby in 1969 to describe the emotional attachment between infants and caregivers, was later generalized to cover all ages of relations.

There are four attachment styles:

1. **Secure Attachment:-** Individuals are comfortable with intimacy and trust. They seek to build healthy relationships with pets and are sure that their needs will be met.
2. **Anxious Attachment:-** The individual in this group suffers from intense intimacy, as they are afraid of rejection several times. For Comfort, they may become too familiar with pets.
3. **Avoidant Attachment:-** Individuals with this attachment pattern may avoid intimacy and value alone. Even pets can reduce emotional enmity.
4. **Disorganised Attachment:-** Avoidance and anxiety are characteristics of disorganized attachment. People of this type may need much affection, but fear harm, which can create unstable relationships—including with pets.

To survive, children are biologically predisposed to develop emotional ties with human caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). According to research, people who are safe with pets tend to achieve better results, such as improved emotional regulation and less stress. Alternatively, people with unstable attachment styles, especially those who are very anxious, may develop excessively compensatory or clingy relationships with pets. In accordance with this, the emotional benefits or challenges of pet relationships can be shaped by the orientation of attachment (Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer and Shaver, 2011).

Pet and Psychological Well Being

The General state of a person's mind, satisfaction with life, and ability to cope with stress and adversity are all elements of psychological well-being. The subjective experience of well-being is irretrievably linked to attachment, an elementary psychological process. While people with unstable attachment patterns tend to feel stressed, anxious and unable to share with others, people with stable attachment patterns often report greater satisfaction, emotional stability, and resilience in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The safety of the pet's attachment is a strong predictor of their happiness, and it has been found that those who have established a stronger emotional bond with pets also reported less psychological problems and greater satisfaction with life. Their work demonstrates that pets play an important role in mental health and highlights the therapeutic value of companion animals (Teo & Thomas, 2019). These findings provide evidence of an increasing notion that

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pet relationships are important social connections that can increase or replace human attachment.

Pet Ownership and Social Connectedness

Social Connections are fundamental elements of general mental health, including the connection of people to others in social environments, beyond psychological well-being. Individuals recognize companion animals as sources of social support and tend to identify them as providing comfort, feelings, and non-judgmental companions (Beck and Katcher, 1996; Serpell, 1996; Garrity and Stallone, 1998; Kruger et al., 2004).

But in today's more individualistic and fragmented social order, many people find it difficult to develop and maintain strong interpersonal relations. Animals can be a consistent source of emotional support and friendship in these situations and help to fill the social gap. According to Wood and colleagues, companion animals often function as social facilitators, promoting interpersonal communication and enhancing community engagement. (Wood et al., 2005). This helps pets not only meet the needs of psychological attachment, but also facilitate social integration and general psychological health.

The study examined the relationships between adult attachment styles and the level of attachment people develop with pets and the impact that these attachments have on emotional health, social connection, and sense of belonging. The aim of this study is to understand the psychological benefits of pet ownership better by examining these interrelated variables.

Today, pets are valuable sources of social and emotional support, as well as companions. Although Relationships with people have been known for years through the theory of attachment, few studies have studied how different attachment styles affect emotional relationships between people and pets. This imbalance is particularly evident in India, where pet ownership is increasing, but few psychological studies are being conducted in this area. Understanding the connection between pet-related behaviors and adult-related behaviors helps people understand how to manage emotions, manage stress, and cope with social isolation. Furthermore, there are significant studies and practical implications for the psychological effects of the association of pets on emotional and social well-being, such as increased feelings of belonging or reduced loneliness.

Therefore, the current study is essential to address the need for culturally relevant data, which not only emphasizes the psychological benefits of pet ownership but also provides evidence-based recommendations for mental health interventions that can be implemented using animal-assistance techniques to improve social interaction and well-being.”

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Wells and Treacy (2024) studied the contribution of personality traits, the Big Five and the Dark Triad, to predict the strength of pet attachment in 759 dog and 179 cat owners around the world. The results show that neuroticism and conscientiousness are associated with an increased attachment of pets, while Machiavellian is weakly correlated. It is remarkable that none of the features of Dark Triad was able to significantly predict the attachment of pets. The regression analysis also revealed that women, dog owners and people over 50 or under 18 reported more affection for their pets. These results suggest that core personality characteristics may have a significant impact on the bonding of pets, in contrast to dark

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personality factors, and suggest that other variables such as conventional attachment styles should be taken into account.

Barklam, E., and Felisberti, F., (2022) The government blockade during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic led to social isolation, with most people spending more time with pets at home. The relationship between pet ownership, pet relationships, and health was examined in two online surveys: one during the initial phases of the epidemic (May 2020) and the other one year later (September 2021). Resilience, optimism and satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence and relatedness) were tested as moderators. The first study consisted of an international sample of 495 participants (70% dog owners) and the second of 243 participants (57% dog owners) from the United Kingdom. Most participants reported that their pets had a positive impact on the first phase of the pandemic, providing them with emotional comfort. The ownership and attachment of pets are positively related to the well-being of low-resilient individuals. In contrast, participants with high resilience, who owned pets or had higher attachment to pets, reported lower health than non-pet owners and less attachment to people. Optimism and satisfaction with the basic psychological needs do not appear as moderators. While some relationships observed in the first study may have been unique to the outbreak, other observations were replicated in a British sample one year later after social restrictions were relaxed (The second study). The results of these two studies show that the increase in the number of pet-related points in one subscale, where pets play a more central role in the life of owners than humans, is directly related to a decrease in resilience and well-being, and a greater sense of loneliness. High Resistance combined with increased pet involvement or pet ownership may be disadvantageous. However, the ownership of pets and positive human-animal ties can be a protective factor for those with low resistance levels.

Teo, J., and Thomas, S., (2019) This study used Bowlby's attachment theory and Rogers' conditions as a starting point to investigate the psychological processes behind the assumed health benefits of pet ownership. Specifically, it contrasts the quality of life and psychopathology between pet owners and non-pet owners, and evaluates the contribution of the attachment of pets and their perception of empathy, unconditionally and consistency in human–pet relationships. The results showed that there were significant differences in QOL ornamental pathology between non-pet owners and pet owners. However, for pet owners, the security of pets is associated with a reduction in psychological distress and psychopathology. People who found Rogers's basic conditions of empathy and unconditional positive respect for their pets at a higher level has higher QOL. Bowlby's pet attachment insecurity model forecasts psychological distress and psychopathology, while Roger's core overall conditions significantly predict QOL. The results indicate that the ownership of pets itself is not sufficient to ensure better health. On the contrary, the psychological quality of the relationship between humans and dogs is important. These findings highlight the importance of Bowlby's and Rogers' theories in explaining how animal relationships can improve human psychological health.

Volsche, S., et.al., (2021) This research investigated the emergence of pet parents in India and their comparison with the United States, highlighting the habits of attachment and caring for dogs and cats. Pet parents tend to adopt in urbanized cultures with low fertility rates and broader life aspirations, as a kind of all parental care (care provided by people other than the biological parents of the offspring). 1,417 questionnaires (991 in the United States; 426) assessed attachment (through LAPS) and care practices (CARES). The results showed that

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pet parenting in India is increasing, with Indian participants reporting higher levels of attachment and greater use of care behaviors for affective reactions than US participants. The Americans reported a little more training. Cultural differences were observed in the use of language in the conversation about pets and social situations. Although there is generally a parent of pets in both cultures, the subtleties of philosophy and culture have a different effect on their expression, which requires continued cross-cultural research.

Faner, J, et. al., (2024) This research explores the interconnections between the attachment to animals, the empathy of animals and pro-social attitudes towards humans. It assumes that animal empathy is the mediator between pet attachment and prosocial behavior. A cross-sectional survey was conducted on 343 Filipino participants, mainly single female young adults with university education. Participants underwent a series of tests, including the Contemporary Companion Animal Bonding Scale, the Animal Empathy Scale and the Prosocialness Scale for adults. Our study confirmed our predictions and showed that animal empathy played an important mediator role in the attachment of pets and attitude towards humans. We found that closer attachment to animals was positively associated with increased animal empathy, resulting in a high level of pro-social attitudes. Such findings provoke speculation about the implications for understanding human-animal relationships and lead to the possibility of exploring new research paths.

METHODOLOGY

Aim of the Study

The current study aims to explore adult attachment style—secure and insecure—on how this impacts the emotional attachment people have with their pets, and how this attachment correlates with psychological well-being and social connectedness of Indian adult pet owners.

Objective of the Study

To examine how adult attachment styles—specifically secure and insecure— influence the emotional bond individuals develop with their pets, and whether people with different attachment orientations vary in the attachment they form with companion animals.

To investigate the relationship between the degree of pet attachment and psychological well-being across different attachment styles.

To explore the association between pet attachment and perceived social connectedness among individuals with varying attachment orientations.

Hypothesis

- Hypothesis 1: Individuals with secure attachment styles will report stronger attachment to their pets compared to individuals with insecure attachment styles.
- Hypothesis 2: There is a significant correlation between attachment to pets and psychological well-being among individuals with insecure attachment styles.
- Hypothesis 3: There is a significant correlation between attachment to pets and psychological well-being among individuals with secure attachment styles.
- Hypothesis 4: There is a significant correlation between attachment to pets and level of social connectedness among individuals with insecure attachment styles.
- Hypothesis 5: There is a significant correlation between attachment to pets and level of social connectedness among individuals with secure attachment styles.

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Sample

The sample of 200 participants were selected using incidental cum purposive sampling but they were only selected if they met the inclusion criteria which was be between 18- 45 years old, either have a pet for at least 6 months or more or take care of the strays for at least 6 months and more and able to comprehend the questionnaire in English.

Procedure of Data Collection

The current research data are collected through an online survey. The respondents were recruited by incidental and purposive sampling methods. Participants must be adults aged 18 to 45, have pets or take care of a stray for at least six months, and be able to read and understand English well. Before the survey began, participants received a form of informed consent explaining the purposes of the study, their voluntary participation, their confidentiality guarantees and their withdrawal rights at any time. The survey contains four standardized self-report questionnaires in a set order. The responses were anonymously collected and safely stored for analysis. After the completion of the survey, the participants thanked them for their time and effort.

Variables of the Study

The main independent variable of this research was adult attachment style, as secure or insecure. This variable was utilized for comparison between groups as well as for possible moderation within the relations tested.

Dependent variables were: Pet attachment, which describes the emotional relationship individuals have with their pets. It is continuous and pivotal to all other hypotheses. Psychological well-being, as the participant's overall mental health and emotional functioning. Social connectedness, indicating the level of interpersonally close and connectedness that the participants experience.

These variables aside, various demographic measures were gathered in order to situate the results. These comprised age, gender, length of time owning pets, and level of language proficiency. These were not tested directly but were utilized for the purpose of ensuring the maintenance of clarity and consistency in the sample.

Research Design

The current research uses exploratory and correlational research designs. The t -test was used to investigate patterns and understand how adult attachment styles – secure and insecure – are related to emotional attachment developed with pets. The design was appropriate because the research tried to explore a fairly understudied field linking attachment theory and pet ownership and psychological well-being. At the same time, a correlation model was used to study the force and direction of the relationships between variables such as attachment styles, pet attachments, psychological well-being, and social connection.

Research Tools

The Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale

Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) is a 23-item self-report scale designed by Johnson, Garrity, and Stallones (1992) to assess the emotional attachment people have with their companion animals. All items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale. The LAPS is organized into three subscales: General Attachment, People Substitution, and Animal Rights, consistent with the multiple dimensions of pet attachment.

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The scale exhibited good internal consistency, with a .94 Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale. Reliability of the subscales was also good, at .90 for General Attachment, .85 for People Substitution, and .80 for Animal Rights, showing good reliability across areas. Construct validity is supported by several findings: LAPS scores are correlated with interviewer ratings of pet attachment ($r = .64$), vary by predicted demographic variables (e.g., higher among women, older individuals, and those with lower numbers of social connections), and are significantly related to social network size and pet caregiving roles.

Attachment Styles Questionnaire (ASQ)

In this study, the attachment style questionnaire (ASQ) was used by Killian (2018), adapted from previous literature by Collins (1996) and Griffin and Bartholomew (1994). ASQ is a 20-question self-report aimed at assessing five attachment dimensions: Anxious-oriented, Fearful avoidance, Secure, Merging, and Dismissive-Ambivalent.

All items are rated on a 5 point Likert scale. The scores range from 0 to 16 and show the dominant attachment style in achieving 11 or higher scores on any given subscale. The highest score for one of the five subscales is the general hypothesis for the most fundamental attachment style of the person, although several high-adjusted subscales suggest that a range of attachments can characterize this participant.

ASQ has good internal consistency and reliability, and its subscale alpha is generally between 0.70 and 0.90, which indicates good reliability over its subscale. The reliability of test-re tests is moderate to high, indicating the stability of attachment styles over time. The scale shows convergent validity with other attachment scales (e.g., the Experience of Close Relationships Scale) and well distinguishes between structures such as dependency and avoidance. Predictive validity is evidenced through research correlating secure attachment to greater relationship satisfaction and insecure styles with relationship distress.

PGI General Well-Being Measure

PGI general well-being measures of S. K. Verma and Amita Verma is a 20-point self-report scale that evaluates the subjective perception of one's psychological and physical well-being over the past month.

Each question is answered in binary (yes/no) or Likert scale, depending on version, and items are usually scored in 0 (not present) or 1 (present).

The scale is highly internally consistent and is reliable for testing and re-testing, reflecting its stability over time. The effectiveness of the structure is determined through the correspondence with both the hedonic (for example, pleasure, happiness) and eudaimonic (for example, function, purpose) models of well-being. The scale also shows convergence validity by correlating with indicators such as the WHO-5 Well-Being Index and Life-Status Index and distinguishing between clinical and non-clinical samples.

Social Connectedness Scale

Lee, Draper, and Lee's Social Connectedness Scale (SCS) 2001 is a 20-point self-report of the subjective experience of intimate intimacy and belonging. It assesses the extent to which individuals are able to become a part of social networks and slide into social relationships. Respondents answer on a Likert scale of 6 points. Some items presented in negative form are reverse-scored, therefore a higher overall score always reflects a larger social connection.

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The SCS has excellent internal consistency, with the Cronbach alpha generally above .90, reflecting good reliability. It also has a strong test-retest reliability that ensures stability of the results over time. This scale has been widely validated in clinical, community and cross-cultural samples. It indicates the construct validity as a significant negative correlation with loneliness and social anxiety, and its convergence by a positive correlation with similar constructions like attachment security and perceived social support. Discriminator validity is supported by low correlations with peripheral traits like neuroticism, which validates the scale specificity.

Scoring

Participants' ratings were calculated based on the standardized instructions included in each scale manual. Higher ratings indicated higher levels of the constructs being measured (e.g., pet attachment, well-being, and connectedness). Initial scoring was done on raw data in Microsoft Excel, and initial statistical analyses (t-tests and correlations) were performed using Jamovi.

Attachment Style Questionnaire: Only the secure subscale of the Attachment Style Questionnaire (Killian, 2002) was utilized. Only the secure attachment subscale was utilized in this study for the classification of participants. Participants with a score of 11 or higher were classified as securely attached, while those with scores less than 11 were considered insecure. This dichotomous grouping allowed for easy comparison and is a standard practice.

Pet Attachment Scale: Total scores on the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) were handled as continuous, with greater scores reflecting more intense emotional attachment to pets.

PGI Well-Being Measure: Scores on the Mental Health Continuum – Short Form were added together to represent overall well-being and were treated as a continuous variable.

Social Connectedness Scale: Scores on the Social Connectedness Scale were added together and handled as a continuous measure of self-reported social connection.

Any reverse-coded items were pre-adjusted prior to analysis. All data were screened for scoring accuracy before statistical testing. Following that all statistical analyses were conducted in Jamovi, an open-source statistical package. Two broad categories of analyses were carried out in Jamovi:

- **Independent Sample t-Test:** The test is used to examine the difference in the score of pet attachment between participants who are classified as securely attached and insecurely attached (Hypothesis 1).
- **Pearson correlation coefficients:** Pearson's r was calculated to evaluate the relationship between continuous variables of the other hypothesis. To determine the desired outcome a significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used.

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RESULT

Table 1 Independent Samples T-Test Comparing Pet Attachment Scores Between Secure and Insecure Attachment Groups

Independent Samples T-Test

	Statistic	df	p	Mean difference	SE difference	95% Confidence Interval		Effect Size
						Lower	Upper	
Pet attachment	Student's t	0.209	1.583	0.437	2.097	-3.89	3.89	Cohen's d = 0.03

Note. $H_a: \mu_0 < \mu_1$

Table 2 Group Descriptive Statistics for Pet Attachment by Attachment Style

Group Descriptives

	Group	N	Mean	Median	SD	SE
Pet attachment	0	119	47.0	49.0	15.1	1.38
	1	81	46.6	43.0	13.6	1.51

The independent sample T test was used to compare the pet attachment levels between insecure and secure attachment groups. Insecure group which is 0: N = 119, M = 47.0, SD = 15.1. Secure group which is 1: N = 81, M = 46.6, SD = 13.6.

In the test, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups: $t(198) = 0.209$, $p = 0.58$, mean differences = 0.437, Cohen's $d = .03$ (extremely small effect size). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference is from -3.89 to 3.89. While, the normality assumption might not have been satisfied completely. The comparably large sample size might help decrease some worries of normality but should approach cautiously in analyzing the results. The t test indicated that there is no statistically significant difference in scores for pet attachment among participants under secure and insecure attachment styles ($p = 0.583$). The secure vs. insecure attachment style did not significantly predict emotional attachment to pets in this sample well, and thus the hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3 Correlation between Pet Attachment and Psychological Well-Being among individuals with insecure attachment style

Correlation Matrix

		Pet attachment	well being
Pet attachment	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	

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well being	Pearson's r	0.055	—
	df	117	—
	p-value	0.553	—
	N	119	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Pearson correlation was run between attachment to pets and psychological well-being between participants with insecure attachment styles (N = 119). Analysis showed a very weak positive correlation that was not statistically significant, $r(117) = 0.055$, $p = 0.55$. The association between attachment to pets and psychological well-being in individuals with insecure attachment was weak, positive and non-statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, there wasn't sufficient evidence to fulfill the hypothesis. Thus, the hypothesis that "there is a significant correlation between attachment to pets and psychological well-being among individuals with insecure attachment styles" is not accepted. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4 Correlation between Pet Attachment and Psychological Well-Being among individuals with secure attachment style

Correlation Matrix

		Pet attachment	Well being
Pet attachment	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	
Well being	Pearson's r	0.302**	—
	df	79	—
	p-value	0.006	—
	N	81	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The Pearson correlation test was done to examine the correlation between the attachment of the pet and psychological well-being in participants labelled as having a secure attachment style (N = 81).

The results show that there are moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlations of $r(79) = 0.302$ and $p = 0.006$. This finding revealed that individuals with a secure attachment style who establish a robust emotional bond with pets report a greater degree of psychological well-being. The correlation is moderate but significant at the 0.01 level, meaning that it is not likely that the correlation is due to chance factor. ($r = 0.302$, $p < .01$) The findings revealed that correlations are positive and statistically significant, the third hypothesis is supported and accepted.

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Table 5 Correlation between Pet Attachment and Social Connectedness among individuals with secure attachment style

Correlation Matrix

		Pet attachment	Social Connectedness
Pet attachment	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	
Social Connectedness	Pearson's r	-0.042	—
	df	117	—
	p-value	0.652	—
	N	119	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the association between pet attachment and social connectedness for participants with insecure attachment styles (N = 119). The analysis revealed a very weak negative and non-significant correlation, $r(117) = -0.042$, $p = 0.65$.

The findings indicate that among people with insecure attachment styles, emotional attachment to pets fails to show much association with their perceived level of social connectedness. The negative correlation is close to zero and not significant ($p > 0.05$) because it lacks statistical significance.

Since the lack of a statistically significant relationship renders Hypothesis 4 invalid, it is rejected. The findings are not enough to favor a connection between pet attachment and social connectedness for individuals characterized by insecure attachment styles.

Table 6 Correlation between Pet Attachment and Social Connectedness among individuals with secure attachment style.

Correlation Matrix

		Pet attachment	Social Connectedness
Pet attachment	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
	N	—	
Social Connectedness	Pearson's r	0.459***	—
	df	79	—
	p-value	<.001	—
	N	81	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

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Pearson correlation assessed the connection between pet attachment and social relationship between individuals who possess secure attachment style ($N = 81$). The correlation was moderate, positive, and statistically important at $r = 0.459$, $p < .001$.

Findings confirm that the participants who are securely attached are seen to feel higher emotional closeness with pets as well as have higher social connectedness to others. Moderately strong and positive correlations indicate that pet attachment enhances the sense of belonging and social integration of this group. Low p values $p < .001$ strongly support this correlation. According to the statistically significant correlation and the actual size, hypothesis 5 is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study is to investigate the role of adult attachment patterns (secure and insecure) in the emotional attachment to pets, and to understand how these attachments relate to the psychological well-being and social connection between Indian adult pet owners. The study focuses on three important psychological variables: pet attachment, psychological well-being, and social relationships. Pet attachment is an emotional bond between people and their pets and is probably influenced by their overall orientation of attachment. Mental well-being is the general indicator of emotional and mental health such as satisfaction and resistance to life. Social connectedness measures subjective feelings of belonging and integration into social networks. The study analyzes the interactions between these variables and the secure and insecure attachment style to understand the complex and meaningful functions that pets play in emotional and social functions.

Hypothesis 1 states that people with secure attachments report a stronger attachment to pets than people with insecure attachments. Contrary to expectations, independent sample t -tests showed no significant differences between the two groups ($t(198) = 0.209$, $p = 0.583$, and Cohen's $d = 0.03$), so the hypothesis was rejected. The finding disagrees with the conventional attachment theory hypothesis that secure individuals naturally develop healthy and robust attachments, including pets, in all environments (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2011). It agrees with the hypothesis that pet attachment may work on different dimensions than human interpersonal attachment, or that pet attachment is influenced by different important variables such as personality, life experience, or situational variables. For example, Wells and Treacy (2024) found that neuroticism and conscientiousness were a stronger predictor of animal attachment than traditional attachment styles, revealing that the psychological motivation behind human-animal relationships was different from human-animal relationships. Cultural explanations can also be part of this outcome. In India, the ownership of pets is more determined by changing social values, increasing individualism, and changing animal roles in family structures (Volsche et al., 2021). Pets are considered emotional substitutes for most Indian pet owners, regardless of their emotional and interpersonal attachment styles. This may be the reason why even people with insecure attachment styles reported levels of pet attachment similar to those of securely attached individuals. Previde, E, et. al. (2022) complements this complexity and emphasizes that human-animal relations are multidimensional and defined by empathy, human form and emotional needs, but not necessarily by secure or healthy emotional adjustments. In some cases, attachment to pets may arise from dysfunctions rather than from stability, which further diluted the alleged relationship between secure attachment and increased attachment of pets.

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Hypothesis 2 predicted a significant correlation between psychological well-being and pet attachment in people with insecure attachment styles. However, the results were very weak and there was no significant correlation ($r = 0.055$ and $p = 0.553$), so this hypothesis was rejected. This result contradicts earlier research suggesting that pets can compensate for human attachment insecurity by providing emotional support (Zilcha-Mano, et.al., 2012; Wu, et.al., 2018). One of these explanations is that it may be difficult for insecurely attached people to obtain consistent emotional benefits from their pets due to internal concern, a phenomenon supported by Hennemann and others. (2022), which found that unresolved attachment between humans can reduce the emotional benefits of pet relationships. Zebrowska, et al., (2024) provides a deeper contribution, demonstrating that although the intimate attachment of pets is capable of reducing psychological suffering, especially among survivors of trauma, these advantages seem to be greater among people with higher emotional attachment ability, indicating that not all those with insecure attachments reap the same benefits. Barklam and Felisberti observed in (2022) that the psychological benefits of pet ownership are indirectly mediated by internal aspects such as resilience and optimism. In the study, participants with low resilience benefited more from pet attachment than those with higher resistance and insecure disposition, and it was found that despite their high attachment, their well-being was lower. This indicates support for the suggestion that pet attachment itself would not be sufficient to counteract internal emotional disturbances associated with insecure attachment.

Hypothesis 3 examined the significant relationship between psychological well-being and the attachment of pets, but between adults with secure attachment. The hypothesis was confirmed to have a statistically significant moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.302$, $p = 0.006$). This has been replicated in earlier studies (Teo and Thomas, 2019; Barklam and Felisberti, 2022), demonstrating that individuals who are securely attached are better able to benefit from the emotional regulation and friendships that pets bring. Secure persons may already have the emotional resources to respond to pets in a mutually enriching way, thereby promoting increased subjective well-being. This supports previous research suggesting that secure attachments facilitate the establishment of emotionally resilient, healthy relationships, such as those with animals (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2011). This is found by Lu, et. al., (2023) found that high pet attachment in older adults protects against loneliness and encourages healthier lifestyles. Faner, et.al., (2024) also discussed how stronger attachment to pets builds empathy and prosocial attitudes, which probably contributes to overall emotional resilience among persons who are strongly attached. As a result, they are more likely to experience emotional stability, reduce stress, and enjoy their pet's relationship.

Hypothesis 4 investigates whether individuals with insecure attachments exhibit a correlation between pet attachments and social connectedness. The results again reflect a weak non-significant correlation ($r = -0.042$, $p = 0.652$). This indicates that attachment to pets cannot successfully eliminate the deficits in social belonging among people with insecure attachment styles, perhaps because their general relationship attachment style does not promote healthy social attachment, even to non-human beings. Contrary to some earlier studies, pets may play an important role as social facilitators (Wood et al., 2005), which may highlight the complexity of attachment dynamics. This result contradicts previous assumptions that pets may act as social facilitators or emotional alternatives to people with relational insecurities. Previous research, such as that of Zilcha-Mano and others. (2011) shows that companion animals promote the feeling of belonging and bridge emotional and social gaps in people's insecure or ununified human relationships. On the other hand, people with anxiety may become too dependent on pets and further alienate themselves from human relationships, such

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as Hennemann et al. (2022) identified in comparable groups. Barker, et. al. (2018) also found that insecure attachment, especially among female students, is associated with greater internal symptoms and emotional dependence on pets, without improving social functioning at the same time. This means that emotional attachment to pets is not always predictive of large-scale social integration. In addition, Northrope, et. al., (2024) argues that an insecure attachment to dogs may reflect an anxious behavior in human relationships, possibly strengthening social withdrawal rather than alleviating it.

The 5th hypothesis predicts a significant relationship between pet attachment and social connectedness in individuals with secure attachment. This hypothesis is well supported by statistical significance, moderate to strong positive correlations ($r = 0.459$, $p < .001$). This conclusion supports the idea that people with secure attachment tend to generalize warmth and interpersonal relationships with human and non-human relationships. Meehan et al. reported similar findings in (2017), proposed that pets should take an important place within the hierarchy of social belonging and promote a sense of belonging. In addition, McConnell et al.'s studies (2011) and Wood et al., in 2005, proved that they can be used to promote social interaction, community participation, and feeling of belonging, especially when owners have social tendencies, such as people who are securely attached. In addition, Chan and Wong (2022) found that secure human-pet bonds improve emotional regulation and social security, particularly when pets are considered to be "supplementary secure bases" that can improve personal and interpersonal function. Faner et al. (2024) concur with this opinion as they note that individuals who are safely tied exhibit higher animal empathy, intensifying the bond between human beings and animals and human beings.

One of the greatest strengths of the study is cultural applicability. A majority of literature up to date is from the Western world, but this study offers valuable insights regarding pet ownership and psychological relationships in the Indian context, an area unknown up to this point (Volsche et al., 2021). Their search is grounded on Indian socio-cultural context and offers a pertinent perspective of emotional and social roles of animal relationships that are different from one culture to another. The utilization of validated scales that possess good psychometric attributes like LAPS and social connectedness scales adds to the credibility of the study. In addition, the study employed a quite large sample size ($N = 200$) and multiple variables to allow for subtle explanations and hypothesis testing of the findings. By segmenting the participants based on the style of attachment, particular analysis and various results were achievable. The utilization of pet caretakers and owners of strays broadens the pet-human relationship definition beyond the common pet ownership and encourages more general representation of emotional relationships between humans and animals. Last but not least, it was possible to examine multiple facets in which attachment styles correlate with pet attachment, psychological well-being, and social bonds. This not only contributes new knowledge to the growing body of literature on human-animal relationships, but also offers an in-depth examination of how people's differences affect the emotional use of companion animals.

Research provides a valuable contribution, but not without its shortcomings. Firstly, the use of self-reporting measures may lead to potential socially desirable biases. Due to social or cultural pressures, subjects may exaggerate emotional connections with pets and mental well-being. Secondly, the sample was accessed through a purposeful and incidental sampling procedure via the Internet channels, which may restrict its generalization. Participants who are active in social media and digitally educated may not be generalized to a larger group of

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Indian pet owners. Furthermore, cross-sectional design does not allow causal inference. Although correlations have emerged, it is not possible to determine whether a better quality of life is enhanced by the attachment with pets or whether a high well-being is the reason for a stronger attachment of pets. Another limitation is the use of wide categories of insecure attachment styles. Although research distinguishes between secure and insecure adults, it does not specifically examine certain types of insecure attachment, which may conceal significant sensitivities to the relationship between such different patterns of attachment and pet attachment and mental outcome. Finally, a Shapiro-Wilk violation indicating non-compliance with some of the statistical assumptions of pet attachment scores indicates that some statistical requirements may not be fully met, so they may change the strength of the results.

The findings are of theoretical as well as practical significance. In India, clinicians and mental health professionals could find it easier to incorporate animal-assisted therapy into the intervention of clients possessing a secure attachment style and have the ability to respond positively towards such relationships. The research not only enhanced our knowledge of pets' emotional and relational meaning, but also had real-world implications for managing mental health professionals who were attempting to incorporate animals' companionship into treatments that fostered emotional resilience and social integration. By contrast, therapy may be required first for individuals with insecure attachments in order to treat the underlying insecurity of attachments prior to participating in pet-assisted therapy. Longitudinal models of research should be employed in future studies to examine temporal changes and to determine the causal effect. Qualitative methods, including interviews and narrative analysis, can also provide more insight into the emotional significance that individuals place on their pets, particularly for those who employ pets as substitutes for issues or non-existence of human relationships. In addition, subsequent studies can be improved by differentiating between the subtypes of insecure attachment, as anxiety, avoidance, and disordered styles can be linked to pet attachment in a different and psychologically meaningful manner.

Lastly, future researchers should control other moderating variables such as trauma histories, socio-economic status and personality to determine a more comprehensive model of human-animal attachment.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study is to investigate how adult attachment styles - particularly secure and insecure attachments influence individuals' emotional relationships with their pets, and how these relationships are associated with psychological well-being and social connectedness. The findings indicated that insecure and secure individuals showed no differences in pet attachment with pets, implying that emotional relationships with pets were not necessarily a result of the type of attachment style. However, the participants who were securely attached possessed a moderately strong positive relationship between the attachment of pets and social connectedness and psychological well-being. Conversely, these associations were tenuous and did not significantly affect those with insecure attachment. These findings suggest that even though pets have the potential to offer social support and emotional attachment, the depth and psychological benefit of these connections could be reliant on the capability for secure attachment. The study emphasizes the subtle nature of human-pet relationship and how the internal attachment schema can modulate their influence.

Implications of the present study are that including pet-assisted emotional support may be valuable in well-being interventions, particularly for securely attached people. At the same

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time, it also opens the question of the necessity for specialized strategies for those with insecure attachments, as they might not gain similar emotional benefits from relationships with pets. Future studies should continue to investigate individual attachment subtypes (e.g., avoidant, anxious) instead of classifying them generally as "insecure," and investigate longitudinal consequences of pet attachment. Qualitative findings might complement understanding of how individual experiences, cultural norms, and caregiving contexts for pets interact with attachment styles to shape well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

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