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Research Paper

A Comparative Analysis of Emotional Intelligence in Dog Owners' Vs Non-Dog Owners in Tamil Nadu

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ABSTRACT

People in the modern society lack emotional intelligence, which includes both understanding one's own emotions and knowing how to communicate them. Numerous factors, including self-awareness and the environment, predict emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise and manage our emotions and other's emotions. Pet ownership and emotional intelligence was not examined in Tamil Nadu, according to the research gap. Methodology: A quantitative research design is used in this study with a p-value 0.05. The emotional intelligence scores were evaluated using the Schutte self-report emotional intelligence test. For statistical analysis, the t-test and descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation were employed. The results indicate that there is a considerable difference in emotional intelligence between pet owners and non-owners in Tamil Nadu. Emotional intelligence level is also predicted by the number of years spent with dogs in Tamil Nadu. This study has ramifications for the future, including the development of therapy related to dogs and animal aided therapy to improve emotional intelligence.

Keywords: *Emotional Intelligence, Pet Ownership, Emotion, Dogs*

Emotional intelligence (EI) is the capacity to identify, comprehend, and control one's own emotions as well as to be sensitive to those of others. Emotional intelligence (EI) involves using feelings to make thoughtful, well-rounded decisions, not just being emotionally sensitive. It entails self-awareness, self-control, drive, empathy, and social skills—all of which support successful communication, dispute resolution, problem solving, and fostering relationships. In his 1995 book Emotional Intelligence, Dr. Daniel Goleman introduced the idea of emotional intelligence (EI), outlining its basic elements and real-world applications in a range of contexts, such as interpersonal relationships and the workplace. The Emotional Competency Inventory, which evaluates a person's emotional intelligence using Goleman's five main dimensions, is one of the most popular instruments for measuring emotional intelligence. The five dimensions are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Psychological research has generally recognized the significance of emotional intelligence in a number of areas, such as interpersonal relationships, personal growth, and workplace

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success. The idea is further developed in Bar-On's EQ-i Model of Emotional Intelligence (2000), which introduces a self-report measure that evaluates social and emotional competency using five scales: intrapersonal EQ, interpersonal EQ, stress management EQ, adaptability EQ, and overall mood EQ. These elements assess a person's capacity to control their emotions, engage with others in social situations, manage stress, adjust to shifting conditions, and keep a positive attitude. The idea that emotional intelligence (EI) is essential to a person's overall well-being is further supported by Orioli and Cooper's EQ Map (2000), which looks at how a person's emotional intelligence profile affects life satisfaction, health, and relationships both personally and professionally.

Many researchers have explored the role of pets in enhancing the emotional intelligence and its impacts on emotional well-being. The study of human animal interaction has given more attention in recent days. Researchers have investigated the benefits of pet ownership on mental health and emotional regulation. The numerous research found that interacting with pets and spending time with pets reduces cortisol levels, enhances relaxation and emotional balance. (The power of Pets, 2024). The study by Aragunde-Kohl et al. (2020) suggest that pets have an impact on the biopsychosocial well-being of their owners by enhancing deep emotional connections and providing companionship, which enhances emotional resilience and social interactions. Kacker and Srivastava (2018) explored the relationship between attitudes toward pets and emotional intelligence, concluding that pet lovers exhibited higher levels of EI compared to non-pet lovers. Daly and Morton (2003) found that pet ownership plays a vital role in strengthening human-animal bonds, which, in response, influences an individual’s emotional stability and empathy. Research by Divyanshi Bhatt and Manoranjan (2022) found that there were significant differences in emotional intelligence levels between pet owners and non-pet owners and found that pet ownership had a significant impact on creativity. These findings indicate that pets may directly influence emotional intelligence, they can enhance other cognitive and emotional abilities that contribute to overall psychological well-being.

In addition to fostering emotional intelligence in neurotypical individuals, pets have been found to have significant benefits for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), who often struggle with emotional regulation and social interactions. Ward et al. (2017) conducted a study on adolescents with ASD and found that those who were responsible for their pets exhibited fewer symptoms of depression and demonstrated better friendship quality. Likewise, Sato et al. (2019) conducted a large-scale longitudinal study involving 31,453 children and found that pet ownership during early childhood played a role in the development of emotional expression and self-regulation, both of which are essential components of emotional intelligence. Kerns et al. (2023) also highlighted that strong relationships with pets could enhance the quality of social connections with parents and peers, indicating that pet ownership may serve as a supplementary factor in social-emotional development. Gender differences in emotional intelligence and pet attachment have also been explored. Khalid and Naqvi (2016) found that women scored higher in empathy and pet attachment compared to men, suggesting that gender may play a role in the way individuals develop emotional intelligence and bond with animals. Their research further indicated that pet attachment significantly predicted empathy, with stronger attachment to pets being associated with greater compassion, emotional responsiveness, and social awareness.

The impact of pet ownership on emotional intelligence (EI) remains underexplored, with mixed findings and unclear mechanisms, especially regarding gender differences and ASD. Existing studies focus on personality and social factors but overlook environmental influences like pet ownership. Notably, no research has examined this relationship in Tamil Nadu. This study aims to bridge these gaps by exploring pet ownership's role in EI development.

This study aims to analyze emotional intelligence (EI) among dog owners and non-dog owners in Tamil Nadu, examining gender differences and the relationship between EI and the total duration of dog ownership. The objectives include assessing the link between EI and dog ownership, exploring gender-based differences in EI, and evaluating how long-term pet ownership influences EI. The study hypothesizes a significant relationship between EI and dog ownership, no significant gender difference in EI among dog owners and non-owners, and a correlation between EI and the duration of owning a dog.

These findings collectively suggest that emotional intelligence is a multifaceted construct influenced by various internal and external factors, including personality traits, social interactions, and environmental stimuli such as pet ownership. By integrating existing research on emotional intelligence models and empirical studies on human-animal interactions, this study aims to explore the impact of pet ownership on the development of emotional intelligence. Additionally, the study will examine how gender differences influence the relationship between pet ownership and EI. Understanding these dynamics may provide valuable insights into the broader implications of emotional intelligence in personal and professional contexts, as well as its potential applications in therapeutic interventions and social-emotional development programs.

METHOD

The study employed a quantitative-cross sectional research design, which entails comparing and analysing different groups or condition at a single point of time and analyse relationship between using numerical data and statistical methods. This study was conducted from December 2024 to March 2025. The participants were people who own dogs and who don't own dogs from Tamil Nadu. The ethical concern was obtained from the participants. Convenient sampling was utilized to gather the sample, a method often employed in quantitative research to select participants based on accessibility and availability. The study was conducted among those who met the inclusion criteria and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Male and female participants between the ages of 18 to 59 years
- Those who are from Tamil Nadu
- Those who can comprehend the English language.
- Those who are willing to give informed consent.

Exclusion criteria:

- Participant who is under treatment for mental illness.
- Participants who own pet other than dogs

Assessments

Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) developed by Schutte, N. S., Malouff, J. M., Hall, L. E., Haggerty, D. J., Cooper, J. T., Golden, C. J., & Dornheim, L.

(1998) measuring general Emotional Intelligence (EI). This self-assessment tool will give you an overall rating of your Emotional Intelligence. The SSEIT includes a 33-item self-report using a 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) scale for responses. This test has Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 for the 33-item scale and a test-retest reliability of 0.78.
General demographic details were obtained along with questions related to owning a dog and their durations were asked.

Procedure
Participants who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected from Tamil Nadu. Participants who agreed the informed consent. The sample consisted of 212 participants. Administered the study questionnaire, all the participants accepted for the ethical concern and a total of 212 responses were taken for analysis.

Statistical analysis
Data were statistically analysed using the statistical package for social services software (SPSS), Version 19.0. Descriptive statistic was used to analyse the characteristic of the variables, inferential statistics like independent sample t-test (2-sample t-test) was used to find out the significant mean difference between the demographic variables and Pearson's correlation were used to analyse the variables and The Pearson correlation method was used to explain the relationship between variables. Simple percentage analysis was used with a 95% confidence level, and a significance of $P < 0.05$ was considered to be statistically significant.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the profile of the participants when grouped accordingly to gender. Based on the table 48% are male and 52% are female. The biggest belongs to the female population. The table shows that the profile of the participants is grouped according to place of residence; Based on the table, 74% of them are urban and 26% of them are rural, majority of the sample belongs to urban living. Totally 49% of dog owners and 51% non-dog owners were involve in the study, majority were non-dog owners. Among that dog owners, 66% of them are owning male dogs and 33% of them are owing female dogs, majority were male dog owners. All the variables are normally distributed after testing their homogeneity, bell curve, kurtosis and skewness, additionally Q-Q plot was examined and Kolmogorov Smirnov test, Shapiro wilk test was examined, results were supporting that data collected were normally distributed

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of participants when grouped according to demographic variables

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	102	48%
	Female	110	52%
Place of living	Urban	156	74%
	Rural	56	26%
Owing dog	Dog owners	105	49%
	Non-dog owners	107	51%
Dog's gender	Male dog	70	66%
	Female dog	35	33%

Independent sample t-test (2 sample t-test) was done between emotional intelligence with the variables, Dog owners, non-dog owners and gender. The result as shown in table 2, that there is significant difference in owning a dog ($p > 0.001$), the gender difference in emotional intelligence is not statistically significant ($p < 0.972$). As the difference in emotional intelligence and owning dogs are statistically significant, by looking at the mean value, dog owners have higher emotional intelligence than the non-dog owners.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test between Emotional intelligence and the variables

Factors		N	Mean	SD	F	P
Owning dog	Dog owners	105	132.90	18.581	10.545	0.001
	Non-dog owners	107	104.81	23.344		
Gender	Male	102	119.25	25.066	0.01	0.972
	Female	110	118.24	25.697		

Pearson's correlation test was done between the emotional intelligence and the total months of owning a dog, The results as shown in the table 3, moderate positive correlation was seen between the variables, which shown of the if the value of total months of owning dogs increases the score of emotional intelligence increases.

Table 3: Correlation between Emotional Intelligence and Total months of dogs owning

Variables	1	2
1. Emotional Intelligence	-	
2. Total months	.502**	-

DISCUSSION

1. Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence of Dog Owners and Non-Dog Owners

The results indicate a statistically significant difference in emotional intelligence (EI) between dog owners and non-dog owners ($p = 0.000$, $df = 210$). The mean EI score of dog owners ($M = 132.90$, $SD = 18.581$) is notably higher than that of non-dog owners ($M = 104.81$, $SD = 23.344$). These findings suggest that individuals who own dogs tend to have higher emotional intelligence than those who do not.

One possible explanation for this relationship is that dog ownership fosters emotional awareness, empathy, and social bonding. Studies have shown that interacting with pets, especially dogs, enhances emotional regulation by increasing oxytocin levels and reducing stress (Handlin et al., 2011). Dogs require caretaking and social interaction, which may help develop EI skills such as empathy, emotional regulation, and interpersonal communication (Miller & Lago, 2019). Additionally, the companionship provided by dogs may serve as an emotional support system, helping owners manage stress and build resilience (McConnell et al., 2011).

These findings align with previous research indicating that pet ownership can positively impact psychological well-being and social-emotional skills (Antonacopoulos & Pychyl, 2010). However, future research should explore the causality of this relationship, as individuals with higher EI might be more likely to own dogs rather than dog ownership itself enhancing EI.

2. Gender Differences in Emotional Intelligence

The independent samples t-test revealed no significant gender differences in emotional intelligence ($p = 0.972$, $df = 210$), with mean scores for males ($M = 119.25$, $SD = 25.066$) and females ($M = 118.24$, $SD = 25.697$) being relatively similar. This suggests that gender does not play a significant role in determining an individual's emotional intelligence in the given sample.

These findings contrast with some prior studies suggesting that females generally score higher in EI due to their greater emotional awareness and expression (Cabello et al., 2016). However, other research has argued that gender differences in EI are minimal or context-dependent, influenced more by individual experiences and environmental factors than by biological sex (Joseph & Newman, 2010).

The absence of gender differences in this study might be attributed to the homogeneous nature of the sample, where both males and females may have had similar experiences in emotional learning and expression. Additionally, the influence of dog ownership on EI might overshadow potential gender-related variations. Future research could examine whether specific dimensions of EI (e.g., emotional regulation, social awareness) differ by gender, rather than looking at EI as a whole.

3. Relationship Between Total Duration of Dog Ownership and Emotional Intelligence

A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.502$, $p = 0.000$) between the total duration of dog ownership and emotional intelligence. This suggests that the longer an individual has owned a dog, the higher their emotional intelligence tends to be.

This finding supports the idea that long-term exposure to pet companionship strengthens emotional intelligence over time. Owning a dog requires consistent emotional engagement, such as responding to the pet's needs, interpreting their behavior, and forming an emotional bond (Julius et al., 2013). These interactions may gradually enhance self-awareness, empathy, and social skills.

The statistically significant relationship between dog ownership duration and EI highlights the potential long-term psychological benefits of pet companionship. However, the moderate correlation suggests that while dog ownership contributes to EI development, other factors such as upbringing, personality traits, and social experiences also play a role (Phelps et al., 2018). Future longitudinal studies could further investigate how different durations of dog ownership impact specific components of EI.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study highlights a significant relationship between dog ownership and emotional intelligence (EI), demonstrating that individuals who own dogs tend to have higher EI than non-dog owners in Tamil Nadu. This suggests that pet companionship may play a role in enhancing emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Additionally, while gender differences in EI were not found to be significant, the duration of dog ownership showed a moderate positive correlation with EI, indicating that long-term exposure to pet interactions may contribute to emotional development. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the psychological benefits of pet ownership, particularly in fostering emotional well-being and interpersonal skills. The study underscores the potential of human-animal

interactions in promoting emotional intelligence, which could have broader implications for psychological well-being and social functioning. Overall, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on the emotional and psychological benefits of pet ownership. Encouraging responsible pet ownership could serve as a valuable avenue for enhancing emotional intelligence, ultimately benefiting both individuals and society.

Limitations and suggestions for future research:

- This study employed a cross-sectional approach, which limits the ability to establish causality between dog ownership and emotional intelligence (EI). Longitudinal research is needed to determine whether dog ownership actively enhances EI over time.
- The study relied on self-reported measures, specifically the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT), which may be subject to social desirability bias or inaccurate self-assessment.
- The sample was selected using convenience sampling, which may not be fully representative of the broader population. This limits the relevance of the findings.
- The study did not account for other psychological or environmental factors that may influence EI, such as personality traits, social support, or mental health history.
- While the study examined dog ownership, it did not consider variables such as the breed, temperament, or specific interactions between the owner and the pet, which could play a role in EI development.
- Future research should adopt a longitudinal design to examine how dog ownership impacts EI over time and whether the effects are sustained in the long run.
- Incorporating observational or behavioural assessments of EI rather than relying solely on self-report measures could provide more accurate and unbiased findings.
- Expanding the sample to include a more diverse population, both geographically and socioeconomically, would improve the external validity of the results.
- Future studies should consider other factors such as personality traits, attachment styles, and coping mechanisms to better understand the link between pet ownership and emotional intelligence.
- Research could explore whether different types of pet ownership (e.g., cats, birds, or other animals) have similar or distinct effects on emotional intelligence.
- Controlled experiments or intervention studies where participants engage in structured pet interaction programs could help determine the direct impact of pet ownership on emotional intelligence.
- Conduct intervention studies to determine the efficacy of targeted treatments
- Examine emotional intelligence in various cultural contexts, healthcare systems, and socioeconomic conditions to uncover distinct difficulties and facilitators of emotional intelligence in diverse groups.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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