

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON LONELINESS AND WELL-BEING IN PET OWNER AND NON-PET OWNER HOUSEWIVES IN MIDDLE ADULTHOOD

BY

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Article History

Received: 31/08/2022

Accepted: 04/09/2022

Published: 06/09/2022

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Abstract

In the present cross-cultural study Well-being has always been an important concept for study and research. It is said to determine psycho-social functional of individuals. The objective of the study is to see if there is any difference in the level of loneliness and well-being. And to see if there is any relation between loneliness and well-being in pet owner and non-pet-owner middle adulthood housewives. In the present study 60 middle adulthood women within the age group of 40 to 60 years was included. They were divided into two groups Pet owners (N=30) and non- pet owner (N=30). They were selected on the basis of the criteria of inclusion and then all the women interested in the study were requested to fill in responses for loneliness and well-being scale. To fulfill the objectives, UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, D, Peplau, L.A. & Ferguson, M. L. 1978), and Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale- (Ryff 1989). Then the data was subjected to appropriate statistical analysis such as descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent t-test). Pearson correlation was also computed in this case. The result of the present study showed that both the group (Pet owner and non-pet owner middle adulthood housewife) differs significantly in well-being but not in loneliness. Here non-pet owner group has significantly low well-being. Where there is no such difference in loneliness in both the groups. Where correlation is considered between loneliness and well-being, it is positively correlated in pet owner group but negatively correlated in non-pet owner group and is higher in this group.

Keywords: Loneliness, Well-being, Pet owner, Housewife, Middle Adulthood

Introduction

Middle age or Middle Adulthood is the period between early adulthood and old age, usually considered as the years from about 45 to 65. While prominent psychologist, **Erikson (1963)** provides a widely accepted range, based on his theory of life stage development, which is 40 to 65 years. Numerous changes may take place within the young adulthood and middle adulthood stage of life. People belonging from the middle adulthood age group might become more sensitive to diet, excess amount of stress and, might be in the need of rest. Chronic health problems and diseases can also play a vital role in this time. In this stage of life, an individual might start experiencing a sense of mortality, sadness, or loss which is common at this age. The start of the process of aging can be visible around this stage which can be more rapid in women.

Women experience menopause in the years surrounding the age of fifty, which ends natural fertility.

A housewife indicates a woman who is not involved in any type of lucrative or official work. The married women's best was thought to be her home. In India, housewives are expected to perform their duties after getting married. But after a certain time, this leads to boredom, an increase in irritability, anger and which is also sometimes accompanied by various physical and mental problems as they do not get sufficient credit for the job. Housewives works many unpaid hours as a part of their marital responsibility and are often found to be dependent on her husband for financial support. In India, especially in Hindu family the traditional status of a woman as a homemaker that makes their position in the society

and provides meaning to their activities within the social, religious, political, and economic structure.

Middle adulthood is the age between 40-65 years. During this time, individuals experience many physical changes that signal that the person is ageing, including grey hair, hair loss, wrinkles and age spots, vision and hearing loss, and weight gain.

Erik Erikson refers to this period of adulthood as the generativity versus stagnation stage. Individuals may have some cognitive loss. This is the age when a person re-examines their life by taking stock and evaluating their accomplishments. Married couple in the mid-life stage often describes their marital satisfaction in the terms of taking a drop. Most of them generally proclaim that their marriages are not as happy as it was during the early years of their life. Problem in interpersonal relationships, being cynical towards love and “empty nest” syndrome which is a feeling of, lack of purpose in life or emotional stress in response to all the children leaving home. This results in psychological problems like disturbances in emotions, depression, loneliness, and feeling of anxiety that affect their well-being.

Animals share our homes as companions whom often we treat as members of our family (Walsh, 2009). The human and nonhuman animal worlds are inexorably linked (DeMello, 2012; Scruton, 2006).

Companion animals, as one of the most important animal types, have more opportunities than other animal types in interacting with humans. These opportunities and direct interaction experiences may allow owners to better comprehend companion animals' behaviors, emotions, health conditions, energy requirements, and benefits to people. A broad list of research topics concerning the relationship between companion animals and owners have demonstrated the therapeutic, physiological, and psychological benefits that companion animals bring to the owners. For instance, companion animals are helpful to reduce humans' risk of blood pressure and heart disease, improve people's survival rates, increase their physical activity and provide emotional and social support.

They are also helpful to reduce people's stress level, increase self-esteem in children and adolescents and decrease depression associated with spousal loss (Herzog, 2011; McNicholas et al, 2005; Serpell, 1991; Wells, 2007). Companion animals are considered as family members by approximately 90% of pet owners (Cohen 2002, Carlisle-Frank and Frank 2006). As mentioned earlier that compared to non-owners, owners have more opportunities (e.g., observing, talking, playing, walking, and feeding) to communicate with their animals and therefore it would be easier to understand their animals' behaviors, feelings, emotions, and requirements (Martens et al., 2016).

LONELINESS

Loneliness is a complex and unpleasant emotional response to isolation. Loneliness includes anxious feeling about a lack of connection with people in the present, which also continues into the future. There are various causes of loneliness that include social, mental, emotional, and physical factors. Loneliness has

been often found to be linked with depression and is thus a risk factor for suicide. Loneliness can be of two types:

- i. Feeling lonely vs. socially isolated - There is a difference between feeling lonely and socially isolated. An example for this can be a loner. Loneliness is a subjective experience whereby if a person thinks they are lonely, then they are lonely. Loneliness can be thought of as a disparity between one's essential and achieved levels of social interaction while solitude is simply the absence of contact with people.
- ii. Transient vs. chronic loneliness - The other important typology of loneliness focuses on the time perspective. In this respect, loneliness can be viewed as either transient or chronic and referred to as state and trait loneliness. Transient as the word implies is a temporary state of loneliness, caused by something in the environment and, can be easily relieved. Chronic (trait) loneliness is more permanent in nature which is caused by a person and, is not easily relieved.

Durkheim (1897) has described loneliness, specifically the inability or unwillingness to live for others, i.e. for friendships or selfless ideas, as the main reason for what he stated as egoistic suicide. In adults, loneliness can be a major factor of depression and alcoholism. Loneliness is often negatively correlated with self-rated health in adults (Alpass & Neville, 2003).

WELL-BEING

Well-being can be defined as the experience of good health, happiness, and opulence which includes having good mental health, having better life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose in life. More generally, well-being can be defined as feeling well. Well-being is something which is looked for by just about everyone because it includes so many positive things like feeling happy, and healthy, staying socially connected, and being purposeful. It can be difficult increasing one's well-being without having proper knowledge of how to do it and what to do.

Well-being is of six major types. They can be defined as follows: Researchers from different disciplines have examined different aspects of well-being that include the following: Emotional Well-Being, Physical Well-Being, Social Well-Being, Workplace well-being, Economic well-being, and Psychological well-being.

The problems of depression and loneliness are more in housewives of middle adulthood. Working women of middle adulthood have their own social network and have a personal space to breathe but housewives are usually homebound and in Kolkata, more attention is paid to the education of children (both girls and boys) as a result mostly adult children leave home for further studies or for marriage or for a job which makes middle-aged housewives more susceptible to depression and loneliness, which again creates an impact on their well-being.

It is interesting to note that during a 1987 technology assessment workshop NIH concluded that all future researches on human health should consider the presence or absence of a pet in their house. According to Beck & Katcher, 2003 future studies of

human health should not be considered complete if the animals with which they share their lives are not included.

In the middle years of life, couples change and grow in different directions. In many cases, spouses are completely incompatible from the very start. Conflicts in interpersonal relationships, growing out of love and reduction in the expectancy from their spouse and “empty nest” (it is a feeling where a lack of purpose in life or an increase in the emotional stress level is seen in response to all the children leaving home) altogether results in psychological problems like anxiety, depression, loneliness that has an overall effect on well-being. At this stage, social support and companionship in today’s era can be obtained by having a pet animal at home. Thus the importance of the present study lies in finding out the benefit of having a pet in home and their companionships effect on the psychological well-being of the middle adulthood housewives. A broad list of research topics concerning the relationship between companion animals and owners have demonstrated the therapeutic, physiological, and psychological benefits that companion animals can bring to humans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of the literature gives an impression that research has taken numerous interests in divergent problems in middle age women but hardly any studies been done on Loneliness and Well-being in Pet owner and Non-pet owner housewives in Middle adulthood in Kolkata.

LONELINESS

Zasloff RL, Kidd 1994 showed relationships among loneliness, pet ownership, and attachment. A study was conducted where a sample of 148 adult female students, consisting of 59 pet owners and 89 nonowners were studied where insignificant differences were found in the loneliness factor as reported by pet owners and non-owners group. A two by two analysis of variance showed that those women living with only pets, with other family members and pets, and with family but without pets were significantly less lonely than those women living entirely alone. No such significant differences were found in loneliness and pet attachment scores between dog and cat owners; though women living with only a dog were significantly more attached to the pet, than those living with other people and a pet. On the contrary women living only with cats were found to have significantly less attachment to their pets than those living with a cat and other people in the family. The above findings suggests that having any pet can help to reduce the feeling of loneliness, particularly for women living alone, and can make amends for the absence of human companionship.

An online survey was done having a sample of 132 Canadian dog and cat owners as well as non-pet owners who lived alone. Factors on which measurement was done are human social support, emotional attachment to pets, loneliness, and depression. Results indicated that neither the factors of pet ownership nor attachment to pets predicted the loneliness or depression levels of individuals living alone. However, when the interaction of pet ownership and human social support was examined it predicted that dog owners

with high levels of human social support significantly showed less loneliness than non-pet owners and revealed small effects on psychological health. Furthermore, when the interaction of pet attachment and human social support was examined it predicted simple effects on psychological health, which revealed that pet owners with low levels of human social support had high attachment to pets. This predicted significant higher scores on loneliness and depression factor. These findings highlight the complex nature of the relationship between pet ownership and psychological health. (Nikolina M. Duvall Antonacopoulos and Timothy A. Pychyl. 01, May 2015)

WELL-BEING

Well-being, well-being, or wellness is the positive condition of an individual or group. Naci et al. (2015) stated that wellness can be referred to diverse and associated dimensions of physical and mental well-being along with social well-being that reaches beyond the long-established definition of health. It includes choices and activities aimed at maintaining physical energy, mental readiness, gaining social satisfaction, and a sense of accomplishment.

According to Friedman & Thomas (1995) some studies reveal that mental health is well maintained among people who live with animals than those who do not have pets. Some studies support a direct relationship between pet ownership and health.

A study conducted by the Swedes having a sample of 40,000 found that pet owners suffered more from psychological problems like anxiety, chronic tiredness, insomnia, and depression even though they were physically healthier than non-pet owners (Müllersdorf, Granström, Sahlqvist, & Tillgren, 2010).

Pets in the life of older women can also bring positive effect in their physical and psychological health. (Cheryl, 2012).

Majority of the empirical research provides conflicting evidence about whether living with pets results in better mental and physical health, due to some flaws in methodology.

Constant growing research literature on examining the health impact of human in association with animal interaction is largely debatable due to contradictory findings and methodological shortcomings. Several studies have found that owning or interacting with a pet (mostly a dog) has benefits for an individual that includes enhanced mental health outcomes such as decreased anxiety and improvement in physical health outcomes such as better immune response and good health. While other studies have certified negative effects of owning pets including dog bites, spreading of various disease, and have also shown an association with asthma and other allergies, which again can be linked with a higher incidence of heart attacks. Yet other studies have not found any significant link between pet owners and health issues.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To study if there is any difference in the level of loneliness of middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife.

2. To study if there is any difference in the level of well-being of middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife.
3. To study the relationship between loneliness and well-being in middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife

- iii) They were assured of confidentiality of the information provided by them.
- iv) They were informed of the results of the study as far as practicable.
- v) Acceptance and non-judgmental attitude was maintained.
- vi) Autonomy of the participants was accepted.
- vii) Cultural context and background of the participants was respected.

METHODOLOGY

HYPOTHESIS

1. There is no significant difference in between middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife in the level of loneliness.
2. There is no significant difference in between middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife in the level of well-being.
3. There is no significant relationship between loneliness and well-being in middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife.

SAMPLING

In this study 60, middle adulthood women within the age group of 40 to 60 years would be included. They would be divided into two groups Pet owners (N=30) and non-pet owner (N=30). They would be selected on the basis of the criteria of inclusion and then all the women interested in the study would be requested to fill in responses for loneliness and well-being. In this study, snowball sampling would be done as pet middle adulthood housewife pet owners would be contacted through known pet owners to get participants from north, south, east, and west of Kolkata.

Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method that does not have the probability involved for example simple random sampling (where any particular participant can be chosen). Moreover, the researchers used their own judgment to choose participants.

INCLUSION CRITERIA:

1. Housewives who are within the age group of 40-60 were only part of the study.
2. They all had their children but not staying with them.
3. The husbands must be alive and staying with the spouse.
4. Pet owner had cat/ dog/ rabbit as their pets only.
5. Their minimum education was graduation.
6. They were from any family structure and from any cultural background.

EXCLUSION CRITERIA:

1. Housewives less than 40 years and above 60 years was not a part of this study.
2. Widows, divorced, and single mothers were also not included in the study.
3. Housewives who did not have any children also were not requested to participate in the study.
4. Data from any male participants was not obtained.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

- i) Rapport was established with the participants.
- ii) They were properly briefed about the objectives of the study.

TOOLS

UCLA Loneliness Scale (1978):

The loneliness scale of UCLA was introduced by Russell, D, Peplau, L.A. & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). The scale was intended to measure an individual's subjective feelings of loneliness as well as addressing the feelings of social isolation.

Participants rate each of the 20 item as either O, S, R, N. Each of them can be described as

O signifies that ("I often feel this way"), S signifies that ("I sometimes feel this way"), R signifies that ("I rarely feel this way"), and, N signifies that ("I never feel this way").

Two times since its first publication the measure has been revised. First to create reverse scored items. And the second time to simplify the words.

Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale- 42 items version- Ryff (1989)

In a study, the 42-item version of the scale was utilized. The test is self-administered and can be administered within half an hour. The scale consists of statements, positive and negative related to six different dimensions of Psychological Well-being. The six dimensions Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose in life, Positive relations, and Self- Acceptance. Then the participants rate each item on a six-point scale basis. Depending on how much they agree or disagree with a particular statement. The RPWBS reliability coefficient was found to be 0.82. For the dimensions of Self- acceptance, Positive relation, Environmental Mastery, Autonomy, Purpose in Life, and Personal Growth coefficient values were found to be 0.71, 0.77, 0.77, 0.78, 0.70, and 0.78 respectively. The statistical significance of all the participants was seen to be ($p < 0.001$). The Satisfaction in Life, Happiness in life, and Self-esteem with RPWBS correlation the coefficient were also discovered 0.47, 0.50, and 0.46 respectively which also showed statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). It is a classic measurement scale of well-being.

ADMINISTRATION

A rapport was established with them. They were found to be co-operative and active during the test session. UCLA Loneliness Scale and Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale- 42 items version- Ryff, were administered on them.

SCORING

Scoring was done according to the scale manual respectively.

RESULT: Summary table 1: Table of Mean and SD calculation.

	Pet owner middle adulthood housewife		Non-pet owner middle adulthood housewife	
Scales	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Loneliness	24.7	2.76	26.3	1.78
Well-being	156.7	21.49	138.2	12.53

Summary Table 2: Table of t-Test and Correlation calculation.

	t- value	P-value	Significance
Loneliness in middle adulthood pet owner housewife and non-pet owner housewife	2.62	0.01-2.66	The result is insignificant and the hypothesis is accepted.
		0.05-2.00	
Well-Being in middle adulthood pet owner housewife and non-pet owner housewife	1.49	0.01-2.66	The result is significant and the hypothesis is rejected.
		0.05-2.00	
	r-value	P-value	Significance
Loneliness and Well-being in middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife	Pet owner 0.00	0.01- 2.763	The correlation between loneliness and well-being in middle adulthood housewife pet owner is positive and non-pet owner is negative. The result is significant and the hypothesis is rejected
	Non-pet owner -0.06	0.05- 2.048	

INTERPRETATION

The Mean value of Loneliness is 24.7 and SD value is 2.76 which is little below average according to the norm. The Mean value of Well-being is 156.7 and SD value is 21.49 which is above average according to the norm.

The Mean value of Loneliness is 26.3 and SD value is 1.78. The mean value is average according to the norm. The Mean value of Well-being is 138.2 and SD value is 12.53. The mean value is below average according to the norm.

The t-value of Loneliness in middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife is 2.62. It is insignificant at 0.05($p > 2.00$) level and thus the null hypothesis is accepted.

The t-value of Well-being in middle adulthood pet owner and non-pet owner housewife is 1.49. It is significant at 0.05($p < 2.00$) level and thus the null hypothesis is rejected. This can be supported by Friedman and Thomas (1995) where they stated in their study that mental health is well maintained among people who live with animals than those who do not have pets.

The correlation value of Loneliness and Well-being in middle adulthood pet owner housewife is 0.00. The result is significant at 0.05($p < 2.048$) level and thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

The correlation value of Loneliness and Well-being in middle adulthood non-pet owner housewife is -0.06. The result is significant at 0.05($p < 2.048$) level and thus the null hypothesis is

rejected. The relation between loneliness and well-being is higher in non-pet owner housewife than pet owner housewife. As loneliness can lead to the development of different physical and psychological chronic ailments in women and which in return affects their well-being. This can be further supported by the findings of Cheryl (2010) where it was stated that pets in the life of older women can bring positive effects in their physical and psychological health.

CONCLUSION

In the present study both the group (Pet owner and non-pet owner middle adulthood housewife) differs significantly in well-being but not in loneliness. Here non-pet owner group has significantly low well-being. Where there is no such difference in loneliness in both the groups. Where correlation is considered between loneliness and well-being it is positively correlated in pet owner group but negatively correlated in the non-pet owner group and is higher in this group.

LIMITATION

1. Sample size taken is small, large sample would increase reliability of the result.
2. Failures to replicate are especially prevalent in areas of science in which studies are characterized by small and homogeneous samples, a wide diversity of research designs, and small effect sizes.
3. In this case, only self-reports are obtained from pet owners and non-pet owners but as understanding of the

pets emotional view is totally not possible thus bias result may be given.

4. Many studies of human-animal interactions are based on self-reports of pet owners. While these can be useful. Self-report sometimes produces results that are at odds with more objective indices of health.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

1. Large sample can be taken so that the result can be generalized.
2. Further studies can be conducted on anxiety, stress, and life satisfaction area which are not being covered.
3. Other important variables like pet owner and non-pet owner staying alone and with family not covered could be studied.
4. The emotion attachments of pet owner and non-pet owner staying alone and with family can also be studied.

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