

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PET ATTACHMENT, COMPASSION, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN EARLY ADULTHOOD

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Abstract. Indonesian people who keep animals increase every year this is because keeping animals is beneficial for their owners. The aim of this research is to determine the relationship and influence of pet attachment and compassion with psychological well-being in early adulthood. This research is quantitative research with a correlational design. The subjects in this study were 306 early adult cat owners in the city of Bekasi using accidental sampling. Data collection methods use interviews and psychological scales. The research instruments used were psychological well-being, the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), and the compassion scale. Data analysis uses correlation tests and multiple regression tests. The correlation results show that there is a weak negative relationship between pet attachment and psychological well-being ($r = -0.114$, $p < 0.047$), and there is a significant positive relationship between compassion and psychological well-being ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.000$). Pet attachment and compassion contributed 25.1% to psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.251$; $F(2, 0501) = 50.839$; $p < 0.000$).

Keywords: Compassion, Pet Attachment, Psychological Well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing trend in pet ownership in Indonesia. According to data from Euromonitor International, in 2022 there were 4.80 million pet cats owned by Indonesian citizens, a significant increase from only 2.15 million cats in 2016 (Prasetyo, 2023). People have come to see pets as companions, with many considering them as family members. This human-animal companionship presents potential mental health benefits, as pets can provide individuals with social support (As'ari, 2021). Tang and others (Asmarany & Setiawan, 2022) explain that owning a pet offers many advantages, including an increase in individual happiness through shared activities with the animal. Similarly, research by Compton (Hambarsika, 2023) describes pet ownership as a form of social support that can enhance both physical health and psychological well-being. Zilcha-Mano and others (Tyrestafani & Soetjningsih, 2022) describe pet attachment as a specific type of human-animal relationship characterized by a reciprocal emotional bond in which both the pet and its owner become mutually dependent. In this relationship, the owner plays a vital role in shaping the pet's behavior and socialization.

Interviews conducted on November 26 and 28 and December 3, 2023, with five cat owners, revealed that two of the five respondents perceived their pets as substitutes for human companionship, particularly during times of loneliness, which aligns with the "people substituting" dimension. All five respondents also demonstrated care for their pets' health and provided regular meals, indicating strong adherence to the "animal rights/animal welfare" dimension. Fitriana (Eliza & Atmasari, 2022) notes that the bond between humans and their pets is characterized by mutual affection—humans provide attention and love, while pets reciprocate with affection and emotional support. This resonates with respondents' testimonies, who reported feeling increased happiness due

to the playful and charming behavior of their cats, which reflects the "general attachment" dimension.

These interview findings align with research by Hafizah & Hamdan (2021), which found that cat owners tend to have high levels of psychological well-being, including secure attachment and positive self-regard. Psychological well-being refers to the extent to which individuals experience joy, peace, comfort, positive relationships, and effective problem-solving. Individuals who can fulfill their needs and manage their lives are considered to have a clear life purpose, which contributes to psychological well-being.

Brown & Katcher (Wahidah and others, 2020) suggest that pets provide their owners with a sense of psychological safety, allowing them to develop trust in others. Amiot & Bastian (2020) also found that pet owners experience better psychological well-being and physical health than non-pet owners. According to Ryff & Keyes (Tyrestafani and others, 2022), psychological well-being plays a crucial role in mental health, fostering positive relationships and helping individuals achieve life goals through better regulation of thoughts, behavior, and emotions. Individuals with high levels of psychological well-being tend to form healthy interpersonal bonds, accept themselves, and maintain control over their lives.

The dependent variable in this study, psychological well-being, is influenced by two main factors: pet attachment and compassion. Individuals with high psychological well-being often have positive interpersonal relationships, highlighting the importance of social support, such as attachment to pets. Spending time with pets may foster positive emotions and reduce negative ones. McConnell (Indriani & Erwanda, 2021) argues that pets' constant presence around their owners contributes to enhanced psychological well-being through emotional closeness. Compassion is another contributing factor to psychological well-being. Showing compassion strengthens interpersonal relationships and builds more meaningful connections. Radley & Figley (Oktawirawan & Yunanto, 2020) found that compassion correlates with individual well-being, as helping others fosters a sense of purpose and enhances one's own positive feelings-ultimately contributing to psychological well-being.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Pet Attachment

The foundation of pet attachment theory is rooted in Bowlby's attachment theory originally developed to explain human relationships. Bowlby (Rosila & Andriani, 2023) described attachment as an emotional bond formed within an individual toward another person. Furthermore, Bowlby (Tyrestafani and others, 2022) suggested that attachment behavior can sometimes be redirected toward substitute objects when the primary attachment figure is unavailable-provided that the substitute fulfills the role of a secure base. In such cases, pets often serve as substitute attachment figures because they offer stable and trustworthy relationships.

Johnson and others (1992) defined pet attachment as the interaction and emotional connection between family members and their pets. This relationship is characterized by reciprocity and mutual attention, resulting in interdependence between owner and pet (Optriarni & Coralia, 2023).

Zilcha-Mano described pet attachment as a reciprocal bond between humans and their pets. This relationship reflects a certain level of interdependence in which the owner plays a crucial role in the socialization and behavioral development of the pet (Hafizah & Hamdan, 2021). Garrity and others similarly defined pet attachment as the emotional relationship and interaction between the pet owner, other family members, and their pets (Hambarsika & Hardika, 2023).

2.2 Compassion

According to Kanov and others (Strauss and others, 2016), compassion is a vital aspect of organizational life, as organizations serve as environments where compassion

is both given and received by individuals. Feldman & Kuyken (Strauss and others, 2016) further defined compassion as a mental orientation that enables individuals to perceive, understand, and emotionally resonate with the suffering of others, accompanied by a desire to alleviate that suffering with kindness, empathy, patience, and willingness.

Gilbert (Agustinus and others, 2020) explained that compassion is a feeling of being emotionally moved by a deep awareness of others' suffering, coupled with a desire to reduce that suffering. Neff defined compassion as an openness to the suffering of others, followed by the intention to help ease their pain (Oktawirawan & Yunanto, 2020). Dalai Lama described compassion as a state of openness to others' suffering, embodied in a personal commitment to help them (Desiningrum and others, 2020).

2.3 Psychological Well Being

According to Ryff (1989), psychological well-being is defined as an individual's capacity to accept themselves as they are, establish warm and fulfilling interpersonal relationships, maintain autonomy and control over their social environment, set life goals, and continuously actualize their personal potential. This psychological capacity can be enhanced by focusing on self-actualization and the optimization of individual potential. As a result, individuals are able to function positively and achieve happiness and life satisfaction (Prabowo, 2017).

Schultz (Ramadhani, 2016) stated that psychological well-being is the positive functioning of an individual, referring to goals or directions pursued by a healthy person. Meanwhile, Singh et al. described psychological well-being as a parameter of positive mental health, making it essential for individuals to develop it. Individuals with high psychological well-being tend to have a positive self-evaluation, the ability to manage their external environment, the capacity to form warm relationships with others, resilience to pressure, a sense of life purpose, and the ability to maximize their potential (Renggani & Wideasavitri, 2018).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study involved 306 early adult cat owners residing in Bekasi City. The sampling technique was based on the Krejcie and Morgan table, using a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error. This method was chosen due to the absence of verified institutional data that could provide accurate statistical parameters needed for analysis. Data collection was conducted through interviews and psychological scales.

The research instruments included the Psychological Well-Being Scale, which had a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ranging from 0.543 to 0.828; the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.928; and a compassion scale developed by the researchers based on Gilbert's theory (Agustinus and others, 2020).

Data analysis involved Spearman's rank correlation tests to assess the relationships between pet attachment and psychological well-being, as well as compassion and psychological well-being. Multiple regression analysis was also used to examine the influence of pet attachment and compassion on psychological well-being in early adulthood.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that for the pet attachment variable, 25 participants (8%) had low levels of attachment, 238 participants (78%) had moderate levels, and 43 participants (14%) had high levels. For the compassion variable, 48 participants (16%) had low levels, 209 participants (68%) had moderate levels, and 49 participants (16%) had high levels. Meanwhile, for the psychological well-being variable, 45 participants (15%) scored low, 208 participants (68%) scored moderate, and 53 participants (17%) scored high.

Table 1. Variable Descriptions

Variable	Categorization					
	Low		Moderate		High	
	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Psychological Well-being	45	15%	208	68%	53	17%
Pet attachment	25	8%	238	78%	43	14%
Compassion	48	16%	209	68%	49	16%

Table 2 shows a weak negative correlation between pet attachment and psychological well-being ($r = -0.114$, $p < 0.047$). This indicates that the higher the pet attachment, the lower the psychological well-being, and vice versa. In contrast, there is a moderately strong positive correlation between compassion and psychological well-being ($r = 0.419$, $p < 0.000$), suggesting that higher compassion is associated with higher psychological well-being.

Table 2. Correlation Test Results

Variable	Spearman's r	p
<i>Pet attachment – Psychological Well-being</i>	-0,114	0,047
<i>Compassion– Psychological Well-being</i>	0,419	0,000

Table 3 shows that pet attachment and compassion together explained 25.1% of the variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = 0.251$; $F(2, 501) = 50.839$; $p < 0.000$). Pet attachment did not significantly affect psychological well-being ($\beta = -0.044$; $p < 0.337$), while compassion was a significant predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = 0.649$; $p < 0.000$).

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis

Variable	β	p
Constant	31.174	0,000
<i>Pet attachment</i>	-,044	0,337
<i>Compassion</i>	0,649	0,000
F	50,839	0,000
Df regression	2	
R	0,501	
R ²	0,251	
Adjusted R ²	0,246	

Dependent variable: Psychological Well-being

Based on the results of the first Spearman rank correlation hypothesis test between pet attachment and psychological well-being, it was found that there is a weak negative correlation. This indicates that the higher the level of pet attachment, the lower the psychological well-being of cat owners, and vice versa. These findings are supported by Hafizah and Hamdan (2021), who noted that cat owners may experience stress due to undesirable pet behavior, such as fighting or urinating inappropriately during mating periods. This aligns with the preliminary findings of the present study, in which some participants reported anxiety over their cats being sick or missing, and expressed frustration when their cats scratched them or misbehaved during mating season.

This is further supported by research conducted by Wulandari and Pohan (2023), which found that cat owners experience stress when their pets defecate in inappropriate places, damage belongings, or suffer from unresolved health issues such as diarrhea or

fungal infections—or even during pet loss. Strizhitskaya et al. (in Wulandari & Pohan, 2023) suggested that if such issues are not properly managed, they may lead to chronic stress and emotional instability. When emotional instability is prolonged, it can result in a significant decrease in an individual's psychological well-being.

In addition, stress among cat owners can be attributed to the emotional burden and responsibility of caregiving, particularly when faced with challenging pet behavior. According to Lustig & Camer (Juliadilla & Hastuti, 2018), although many studies show that pets can fulfill emotional needs, they may also increase stress and emotional exhaustion. In other words, not all emotional needs can be met solely through interactions with pets. This finding aligns with Ryff's theory (Wulandari & Pohan, 2023), which states that various factors—including certain types of stress—can negatively affect psychological well-being. Therefore, higher stress levels may lead to lower psychological well-being.

According to Compton (Nurlayli & Hidayati, 2014), pets can serve as a form of social support. However, preliminary findings in this study revealed that some participants, despite long-term pet ownership, felt their pets could not fully replace human interaction, as pets sometimes behave in annoying ways. Thus, pets may not provide complete social support, which is more commonly found in relationships with family, friends, partners, and community (Nurlayli & Hidayati, 2014). This is consistent with research by Li and others (Duma, 2022), which suggested that pet ownership does not automatically benefit every individual.

The second Spearman rank correlation test between compassion and psychological well-being showed a moderately strong positive relationship. This means that higher levels of compassion are associated with higher levels of psychological well-being, and vice versa. These findings are supported by Klimecki (Lopez and others, 2018), who found that compassion increases positive affect, helping individuals enjoy life more and thus boosting their psychological well-being. Morgan (Lopez and others, 2018) also found that adults who engage in compassionate behavior tend to report increased happiness.

Oktawirawan & Yunanto (2020) further explained that, within Javanese culture, compassion (*welas asih*) is believed to promote happiness. Individuals who demonstrate compassion and are willing to help others often experience satisfaction and joy in their actions. Thus, the more acts of kindness an individual performs, the greater the sense of comfort and happiness they feel. Dermibatir (Atikasari, 2021) found a positive correlation between happiness and psychological well-being: higher happiness is typically associated with higher psychological well-being, while decreased happiness tends to correspond with a decline in well-being.

The results of the third hypothesis test using multiple linear regression showed that pet attachment and compassion together influence psychological well-being by 25.1%. According to Ryff (Syaiful & Sariyah, 2018), psychological well-being is influenced by demographic factors such as age, gender, culture, socioeconomic status, social support, evaluation of life experiences, and personality traits. Other studies have found that additional variables affecting psychological well-being include gratitude (Prameswari & Ulpawati, 2019), locus of control (Harjati, 2021), thankfulness (Fatmala and others, 2022), and psychological capital (Hafilia & Priyambodo, 2022).

A Mann-Whitney test was conducted to examine gender differences in pet attachment, and the results showed no significant difference (Sig. = 0.182). Of the 115 male participants, 8 (7%) had low attachment, 93 (81%) had moderate attachment, and 14 (12%) had high attachment. Among the 191 female participants, 17 (9%) had low attachment, 145 (76%) moderate, and 29 (15%) high. This aligns with research by Shams et al. (2021), who found that gender does not affect pet attachment. However, preliminary observations indicated that female participants tended to exhibit stronger attachments to their pets—for example, sleeping beside their cats even though the pets had their own cages, and regularly showing affection by petting them. This aligns with findings from Cross and Madson (Tsania et al., 2023), who stated that women tend to

have higher pet attachment due to a greater tendency to seek emotional connection, including with pets.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was also conducted to analyze the effect of pet ownership duration on attachment and psychological well-being. The results showed significant differences based on how long participants had owned pets (Sig. = 0.000). Specifically, 37 participants (12%) had owned pets for 1 year, 50 (16%) for 2 years, 57 (19%) for 3 years, 42 (14%) for 4 years, 47 (15%) for 5 years, 21 (7%) for 6 years, 16 (5%) for 7 years, 3 (1%) for 9 years, 6 (2%) for 10 years, and 27 (9%) for 10–20 years. Most participants (57 or 19%) had owned their pets for 3 years.

According to Smolkovic (Hafizah et al., 2021), owning a cat for more than 3 years affects the level of attachment. In early adulthood, pet ownership exceeding one year may impact the relationship between attachment and psychological well-being due to the diverse interactions and increased care demands, which foster stronger emotional bonds between owner and pet (Hambarsika et al., 2023). However, long-term ownership may also lead to anxiety about pet loss, especially if the pet is perceived as a vital part of the owner's life, which could negatively affect psychological well-being (Wahidah et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the psychological well-being of early adult cat owners is generally at a moderate level. Likewise, levels of pet attachment and compassion among the respondents also fall into the moderate category. This study also found a negative correlation between pet attachment and psychological well-being, a positive correlation between compassion and psychological well-being, and a significant influence of both pet attachment and compassion on psychological well-being.

Several recommendations can be drawn from this research for various stakeholders. First, it is advisable for cat owners to pay greater attention to their psychological well-being, especially considering that cat ownership may decrease well-being when the pet exhibits undesirable behavior. Thus, attachment to pets does not always have a positive impact on psychological well-being. Second, future research should aim to gather more in-depth data, clearly define respondent criteria, and include only those who truly have a strong attachment to their pets. Moreover, future studies are encouraged to further explore other variables that may contribute to psychological well-being.

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