**Relationship Between Pet Attachment and Positive Mental Health Among Adults**

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Abstract:

The present study is intended to explore the relationship between pet attachment and positive mental health among adults. The study employed a correlational survey research design and sampled 150 adults comprising 85 girls (n = 150) and 65 boys (n = 150), aged between 18 and 30 (M = 22.80, SD = 3.74). Data was collected from a total of (N = 150) adults from the University of Sargodha, Lahore, and other different cities in Pakistan by using the purposive sampling technique. Only those participants were selected who were the owners of different pets. Psychometrically sound self-report measures in the English language, including the Pet Attachment Questionnaire, and the Positive Mental Health Scale were administered on the participants for measuring pet attachment, and positive mental health. Analysis revealed that all measures had satisfactory to high levels of internal consistency, and the both variables were related to one another in hypothesized directions. Correlational Analysis revealed that pet attachment was positively correlated with positive mental health among adults.

**Keywords:** Pet attachment, positive mental health, adults

**Introduction**

**Pet attachment**

Pet attachment refers to a close and emotional link that provide both physical and emotional support between a human and an animal is referred to as pet attachment (Bowlby, 2000). Emotional relationship starts from this bond (Zasloff, 2001). An incredible ability of pets to keep people happy and healthy (Becker, 2002). The owners feel emotionally at ease by having strong emotional bond with their pets. According to Field et al. (2009) attachment to pets is characterized by love, support and warmth. International research was conducted on mentally disturbed patient and physically ill patient their level of anxiety had reduced due to human animal bonds (Cole et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2009; Lang et al., 2010; Nepps et al., 2014). Parello (2012) he suggested that pets can compensate for their owners feeling of loneliness or isolation.

***Features***

There are four features described pet owner relationship.

1. **Companion.** Role of partner is played by pets. Pats are like a family member and companion for their owners (Hirshman, 1994; Holbrook et al., 2001; Stephens & Hill, 1996). Human-animal interactions are described as pet owner relationship (Muller, 2014).
2. **Symbolic.** Many owners display symbolic love for their pets. Throughout the pets-owner emotional connections, owners can feel love and affection through symbols from pets so that owners give more care to their pets (Enders-Slegers, 2005). Research indicates that in the contemporary society pets have become integral part of individual lives (Kwong & Bartholomew, 2011).
3. **Personate.** Many owners provide a beneficial treatment to their pets like siblings, infant and family member. Animals have frequently been personified in cartoons, stories and animated films (Berman, 1990).
4. **Self-concept.** Forming self-concept through interaction with pets the owner can build strong relationships with their family members, and other persons in the society more efficiently (Hart, 2000).

**Positive Mental Health**

Positive mental health refers to positive state of well-being where a person realizes his potentials and learn to cope up with daily challenges and difficulties of life and able to make contribution to social world (WHO, 2004). Michaud and Fombonne (2005) mental health are also characterized as a condition of overall well-being, where individuals acknowledge their capabilities, effectively manage typical life pressures, engage in productive endeavors, and contribute positively to their communities. WHO's definition of mental health, as outlined by (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Mental health is a condition of wellness in which person effectively work in his community, deal with stressors of life and he realizes his full potential (Raja et al., 2009). The concept of mental health encompasses positive components, and this viewpoint was formulated as a two continua model, as proposed by (Keyes, 2002). Keyes and Lopez (2002) as a hierarchical model comprising three interconnected second-order factors: emotional or subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being.

**Two continua model Of Mental Health**

Two continua models were given by (Keyes, 2005). Both continua reflect different psychopathologies. One side reflects the presence or absence of psychological problems and positive mental health is reflected on the other continuum it talks about its presence or absence. There is more chance of a person suffering from lower well-being if he has experienced more psychopathological symptoms. To find out the criteria for positive mental health it's not enough to have an absence of mental illness. The absence of mental illness does not indicate a productive and actualized life. Pleasurable activities are more related to the hedonic view of well-being but the challenges of life and achieving goals are part of the eudemonic view of well-being (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2005; Huta, 2005; Viterso et al., 2009; Waterman et al., 2008).

**Researches on relationship between study variables**

Research by Van Houte and Jarvis (1995) found a link between attachment to pet and social support. Some evidence suggests that people who score higher on attachment to pets have fewer social links (Stallone et al., 1990). And have some negative life events such as mourning. Research found that there is relationship between loneliness and pet attachment (Garrity et al., 1989). Numerous mental health advantages of pet attachment have been demonstrated, including less stress and anxiety, elevated mood, and enhanced social interaction (Allen et al., 2018).

**Rationale**

Along with other attachments experienced by people in Pakistani culture, there is pet attachment, where humans form emotional bonds with pets. In Pakistani culture, people now keep animals or pets for emotional support and as a source of enjoyment. Over the years, the intensity of emotional bonding of humans with pets has changed. A study on the relationship between pet attachment and mental health outcomes among adults in Pakistan, which included 100 participants, found that higher levels of pet attachment were associated with lower levels of psychological problems (depression, anxiety), as well as greater perceived social support (Israr et al., 2022).

The current study intends to fill this gap by exploring relationship between pet attachment, and positive mental health specifically within the Pakistani context is important to understand the cultural factors involved.

**Conceptual framework**

Pet attachment

*+*

Positive Mental Health

Subscales

Avoidant - -

*\_*

*\_*

Anxious

**Objectives of Research**

The current research has following objectives.

1. To investigate the relationship between pet attachment and positive mental health among adults.
2. To analyze the relationship between avoidant attachment and positive mental health among adults.
3. To analyze the relationship between anxious attachment and positive mental health among adults.

**Hypotheses**

There will be significant relationship between pet attachment and positive mental health among adults.

**H1.** Pet attachment will be positively correlated and positive mental health among adults.

H1(a).Avoidant attachment will be negatively correlated and positive mental health among adults.

H1(b).Anxious attachment will be negatively correlated and positive mental health among adults.

**Method**

**Research Design**

The current study was based on survey research design. Survey method was selected for data collection. Psychological questionnaire was distributed among adults to carry out the research. Data was collected through online survey sheet and by using questionnaire booklet.

**Sample**

The purposive sampling technique was used for data collection purposes. This technique involves the selection of representative subjects for the research. Ethical morals presented by the APA were used to collect data. The sample that was selected for the present study was adults (N= 150) from different cities in Pakistan. adults from the university of Sargodha were also included in sample. The sample includes both male and female adults. Sample of men who participated in survey were (n = 65) and sample of women was (n = 85). The participants of the study had an age range from 18 to 30 (M= 22.80, SD= 3.74).

**Instruments**

All the scales are used in the present study are self-report measures in the English language.

The details as follows:

**Pet attachment Questionnaire (PAQ)**

Pet attachment scale was used to assess pet owner relationship with specific pet (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). It is 7-point Likert type scale where 1=strongly disagree 2= moderately disagree 3= slightly disagree 4= neither agree nor disagree 5= slightly agree 6= moderately agree and 7= strongly agree. These 26 items measure the owner’s relationship with their pets. It included 2 sub-scales for measuring the attachment in pet-owner relationship. Avoidance and anxious orientation. This scale is reliable and valid measure of attachment to pets. Item no 1 should be reversed for the coding of this inventory. The cronbach’s alpha reliability is 0.77 for the current sample of adults.

**Positive Mental Health Scale (PMHS)**

This scale assesses positive emotional psychosocial well-being, with higher scores indicating better mental health (Lukat et al., 2016). Positive Mental Health Scale consists of nine items, each rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale, with higher scores indicating better mental health. One example item you provided is "I enjoy my life." The original version of this scale showed strong reliability, good convergent and discriminant validity with alpha coefficients of .92 and .93 among university students and the general population in Germany, respectively. The cronbach’s alpha reliability is 0.81 for the positive mental health scale of adults.

**Procedure**

Firstly, by mutual discussion with supervisor the topic was selected then the scales were finalized by different suggestions and final draft of the questionnaires were composed. Permission was obtained from the authors to use the questionnaires that are present in the current research. Additionally, a permission letter was obtained from the Department of Psychology to affirm the researcher's institutional affiliation with department. Subsequently, data was collected by using both physical and online modes. The participants were provided with clear and appropriate instructions for completing the questionnaires. There are no time restrictions in study to complete the questionnaires.

**Ethical considerations**

The informed consent was provided to participants clearly about their willingly participation, ensuring them they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The detailed information regarding study variable and objectives also mentioned in the informed consent includes procedures, potential risks, ethical and legal rights of both the researcher and participants.

**Results**

The main objective of the present study is to examine the relationship between pet attachment and positive mental health among adults. Data analysis was carried out using SPSS. Alpha reliability coefficients and Pearson correlation were computed to examine the relationships between variables.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of Scales and sub-scales (N = 150)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Scales | Sub-scales | *M* | *SD* | Range | Cronbach’s α |
| PAQ |  | 99.29 | 17.87 | 53-156 | 0.77 |
| PAQ | Avoidant | 49.42 | 9.39 | 22-77 | 0.75 |
|  | Anxious | 59.49 | 8.57 | 13-81 | 0.71 |
| PMHS |  | 32.53 | 5.87 | 12-45 | 0.81 |

*Note.* PAQ = Pet Attachment Questionnaire; PMHS = Positive Mental Health Scale.

Table 2 reveals psychometric properties of the scales of the variables used in the study (*N* = 150). The value of cronbach’s alpha for pet attachment scale 0.77 (< .80). in reliability analysis reveals that this scale shows satisfactory internal consistency. Positive mental health was 0.81 (> .80) show high reliability.

**Table 3**

*Pearson Correlation among Study Variables (N =150)*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Pet Attachment | \_ | .80\*\* | .75\*\* | .21\*\* |
| Avoidant |  | \_ | .10\* | -.11\* |
| Anxious |  |  | \_ | .23\*\* |
| Positive Mental health |  |  |  | \_ |

*Note.* \**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01.

Table 3 shows that pet attachment has significant positive correlation with positive mental health (*r* = .21, *p* < .01). Avoidant attachment has significant negative correlation with positive mental health (*r* = -.11, *p* < .05). Anxious attachment has significant positive correlation with positive mental health (*r* = .23, *p* < .01).

**Figure 1**

*Outcome Model*

*.21\*\**

Pet attachment

Positive Mental Health

Subscales

Avoidant - -

*--.11\**

.23\*\*

Anxious

**Figure 2**

*Summary of Findings*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Hypothesis** | **Status** |
| **H1** | Pet attachment will be positively correlated with positive mental health among adults. | Supported |
| **H2** | Avoidant attachment will be negatively correlated with positive mental health among adults. | Supported |
| **H3** | Anxious attachment will be negatively correlated with positive mental health among adults. | Not-  Supported |

**Discussion**

The present study tends to examine relationship between pet attachment and positive mental health among adults. The first hypothesis was suggested that pet attachment will be positively correlated with positive mental health indicating that when adults are closely attached to their pets, they show higher level of positive mental health. Findings from current study support this hypothesis. Activities with pets (walking with pets) improving their positive relation with others and human mental health (McNicholas & Collis, 2000; Wood et al., 2015). In Wisdom et al, (2009) in his study one participant was reported that caring for their pets was very beneficial and positive for their mental health. Pets tend to provide their owners with a sense of reassurance, reducing stress and negativity in their lives (Alonso & Hinijosa, 2005).

Second hypothesis was stated that avoidant attachment will be negatively correlated with empathy and positive mental health. Research findings supported this hypothesis and suggesting that people prefer more emotional distancing from pets when they experience avoidant attachment. adults they experiencing less avoidant attachment with pets they can easily understand the emotions of others specifically needs of their pets (Shorey et al., 2011). adults reported that pets provided them stress relief when they develop closeness and proximity to their pets (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2012). Greater well being experienced by adults when they owning a pet (McConnell et al., 2011). Having a strong relationship with pets enhanced the level of happiness and regulate their emotions (Gillum & Obisesan, 2010).

Third hypothesis, states that anxious attachment will be negatively correlated with empathy and positive mental health. Research findings doesn't support this hypothesis and suggesting that anxious attachment was positively linked with positive mental health. Although evidence indicates that anxious pet connection can have a negative impact on mental health outcomes, it can also have a good one. For instance, a study by Beck et al. (2019) discovered that people with anxious attachment styles to their pets reported feeling more comforted and supported emotionally by them, which was linked to fewer depressive and anxious symptoms.

**Conclusion**

The findings of the current study and on the basis of literature review, it is suggested that the participant’s type of attachment to pets is very important in determining positive mental health among adults. When adults show less avoidant toward pets they will experience positive mental health and overall satisfaction with life. On the contrary, if the individual has anxious pattern of attachment to pets, he would base his self-worth on appraisal and approval from other people; would be more important for him

**Limitations**

The results of this study are limited since it relies on simple statistics, has a small sample size, and uses a small number of variables that might not fully reflect the population. Additionally, bias may be introduced and the results' capacity to be applied broadly may be limited by the use of self-reported measurements and a narrow emphasis.

**Implications**

Despite the shortcomings noted above, the current study has important theoretical implications as social psychologist, family counsellor, child and adult’s counsellor and school counsellor can use this to reduce mental health problems.

**Suggestions**

To strengthen future researches, we can use advanced statistics, different areas to increase external validity and mixed methodology to make current research more comprehensive.

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