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Research Article

Analyzing The Role of Fur-Friends in Mental Well-Being: Comparing Mental Well-Being of Pet Owners and Non-Owners

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of companion animals in mental well-being by comparing pet owners and non-owners in selected areas of Cavite and by exploring how emotional attachment to pets relates to well-being among owners. Grounded in biophilia, attachment, and ecotherapy perspectives, the study addressed whether having a companion animal supports healthier emotional functioning. A descriptive-comparative-correlational research design was employed. Data were collected using standardized self-report measures of mental well-being and pet attachment and were analyzed through chi-square tests and Spearman correlation analysis.

Results revealed a significant difference in mental well-being between groups. A majority of pet owners reported above-average mental well-being, while most non-owners fell within the average range, with the difference reaching statistical significance. Among pet owners, levels of attachment varied across domains, with higher emotional closeness and reliance on pets compared to lower engagement in animal welfare and rights. Correlation analyses showed that all attachment domains were positively and significantly associated with mental well-being, indicating that stronger emotional bonds with pets consistently aligned with higher psychological well-being.

Based on these findings, the program “FURtitude FUR-ever Well” was developed to promote mental well-being through structured therapy-animal interactions, relaxation activities, community involvement, and responsible pet care. Overall, the study highlights companion animals as meaningful emotional supports and underscores the importance of the quality of bond between human and animal in fostering mental well-being.

Keywords: *Emotional support, Fur-friends, Human-animal bond, Mental well-being, Pet attachment, Pet ownership*

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Background

Mental well-being has become a major public health concern rather than a purely personal matter. Conditions such as stress, anxiety, and depression affect large segments of the global population and have wide social and economic consequences. These concerns are shaped not only by clinical factors but also by everyday pressures such as economic uncertainty, social isolation, and changing family structures. As awareness of these challenges grows, attention has expanded beyond formal mental health services toward everyday sources of emotional support that help individuals cope and maintain psychological balance.

One area that has received increasing attention is the role of companion animals in supporting mental well-being. In periods of isolation and uncertainty, many individuals turned to pets for comfort, routine, and emotional stability. This has encouraged research into the bond of human and animals and its potential contributions to emotional regulation, stress reduction, and social connection. Companion animals are now commonly viewed as emotionally significant members of the household, often referred to as “fur-friends,” a term that reflects a broader cultural shift toward treating pets as family rather than property.

Existing research suggests that interactions with commonly domesticated animals, particularly dogs and cats, are associated with positive psychological outcomes such as reduced stress and improved mood. These benefits are thought to arise from emotional attachment, caregiving routines, and the sense of companionship that pets provide in daily life. However, not all individuals share these experiences, as a considerable portion of households do not own pets. This raises questions about whether differences in mental well-being exist between pet owners and non-owners under ordinary, non-crisis conditions.

In the Philippine context, pets are widely regarded as family members, and pet ownership continues to increase, especially in provinces such as Cavite where veterinary services and responsible pet care programs are accessible. Despite this cultural relevance, local studies that directly compare mental well-being be-

tween pet owners and non-owners and examine the role of emotional attachment remain limited. Philippine-based studies also highlight how pet attachment strengthened during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Santos and Lim (2023) observed that many Filipino households developed what they describe as “sustained pet attachment,” where pets became consistent sources of emotional comfort, routine, and companionship during periods of social isolation. As families spent more time at home, pets increasingly assumed roles similar to emotional companions, helping individuals cope with uncertainty and stress. Even after the pandemic restrictions eased, these strengthened bonds persisted, suggesting that the human–animal relationship had evolved from simple ownership into a more emotionally integrated form of companionship. This sustained attachment may partly explain why pet owners often report higher levels of emotional well-being compared with individuals without pets.

The study compares mental well-being between pet owners and non-owners in selected areas of Cavite and examines how emotional attachment to companion animals relates to mental well-being among young adults.

Statement of the Problem

This research primarily aims to determine the relationship between pet attachment levels and the mental well-being levels of fur-friends owners.

Additionally, the study seeks to compare the mental well-being of individuals with pets to those without.

Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of mental well-being of pet owners and non-pet owners?
2. What is the level of pet attachment of pet owners in terms of:
 - a. General Attachment;
 - b. People Substitute;
 - c. Animal Welfare; and
 - d. Overall Pet Attachment
3. Is there any significant difference between the level of mental well being of pet owners and non pet owners?

4. Is there any significant relationship between pet attachment level and mental well-being of pet owners?
5. What is the proposed program that will address the role of pet ownership and pet attachment in mental well being based on the findings of the study?

Methods

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-comparative-correlational research design to examine the relationship between pet ownership and mental well-being. This design allowed for the comparison of mental well-being outcomes between pet owners and non-pet owners, as well as the examination of the relationship between pet attachment and mental well-being among pet owners.

Participants were selected using a combination of quota sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Quota sampling was used to ensure an equal number of respondents in both groups, while purposive sampling enabled the researchers to intentionally select individuals who met the study's inclusion criteria. A total of 210 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 105 pet owners and 105 non-pet owners from five selected cities and municipalities in Cavite which are, Imus, Bacoor, Dasmariñas, Tanza, and Kawit. Using quota sampling, 42 respondents were recruited from each locality, equally divided into 21 pet owners and 21 non-pet owners, to ensure balanced representation across areas and comparability between the two groups.

Sources of Data

The primary data for this study were collected from residents of selected cities and municipalities in Cavite, aged 18–25, comprising both pet owners and non-pet owners. Data were gathered using a Demographic Profile Sheet, which recorded information on age, sex, city/municipality, type of pet, duration of ownership, and frequency of interaction; the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS), which measured participants' mental well-being; and the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), which assessed the degree of emotional attachment among pet owners.

Secondary sources, including published and unpublished articles, theses and dissertations, peer-reviewed journals, online books, and data from credible government websites, were also utilized to provide theoretical grounding and support the analysis and interpretation of findings in the literature review and discussion sections.

Research Instruments

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) Scale. The WEMWBS is a 14-item scale developed to monitor mental well-being in the general population, focusing entirely on the positive aspects of mental health. It measures an individual's thoughts and feelings related to their mental well-being over the previous two weeks before answering the questionnaire, providing a snapshot of their recent overall well-being. More recent validation studies indicate that the scale retains strong psychometric properties in diverse populations and settings (e.g., Marmara et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2023).

Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS). The Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) is a 23-item self-report questionnaire developed by Johnson, Garrity, and Stallones (1992) to measure the emotional attachment between individuals and their companion animals. It includes three subscales: General Attachment, People Substituting, and Animal Rights/Welfare, which capture aspects such as affection, companionship, emotional reliance, and the perceived importance of pets in an owner's life. Respondents rate each statement using a Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, with higher scores indicating stronger attachment to pets. The scale has demonstrated good reliability and validity in assessing human-animal attachment across various populations.

Data Analysis

This study used quantitative statistical analysis for the interpretation of the gathered data. Statistical analysis is appropriate for identifying patterns, differences, and relationships that will be used to answer the research questions of the study (Pallant, 2020). This data analysis approach allowed the researchers to

properly familiarize themselves with the data obtained from the participants and to organize the results according to the variables examined in the study. Statistical analysis involves the systematic processing of numerical data to produce meaningful and interpretable results from the gathered responses.

The researchers gathered data using standardized questionnaires to obtain the necessary information from the participants. Once the data collection was completed, the gathered data were checked, cleaned, and reviewed to ensure accuracy and completeness before analysis. Each response was manually checked to gain a clearer understanding of the data and to identify any missing or inconsistent entries. The responses were then encoded and organized into a data set for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency were used to summarize the levels of mental well-being of pet owners and non-pet owners, as well as the levels of pet attachment among pet owners.

Prior to inferential analysis, the data were tested for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test to determine the appropriate statistical procedures. The results indicated that the mental well-being scores were not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$). To facilitate comparison between groups, the well-being scores were categorized into levels (above average, average, below average, and very low). Because the mental well-being variable was treated as categorical rather than continuous, the Chi-square test of independence was used to determine whether a significant difference existed between pet owners and non-pet owners. Parametric tests such as the t-test or ANOVA were not applied because these tests require normally distributed continuous data. These statistical procedures allowed the researchers to identify patterns, tendencies, and relationships within the gathered data and to arrive at meaningful interpretations of the results.

Participants of the Study

The study involved 210 young adults from selected areas of Cavite—Tanza, Imus, Dasmariñas, Bacoar, and Kawit including 105 pet owners and 105 non-pet owners, all aged 18 to 25. Both groups had a similar age distribution

and were predominantly female. Among pet owners, dogs and cats were the most common pets, though some participants cared for rabbits or multiple species, allowing the study to capture a range of human–animal interactions.

This age group was chosen due to its developmental relevance. Young adults face academic pressures, shifting roles, and emerging responsibilities, making social connection and emotional support particularly important. Anchored in Erikson’s psychosocial theory, this stage involves navigating identity formation and the transition to relational intimacy, highlighting the potential role of pets as stable and nonjudgmental sources of comfort, routine, and emotional grounding.

Participants’ familiarity with self-assessment and survey tools enabled reliable reporting on mental well-being and, for pet owners, pet attachment, providing insight into how companion animals may support coping, resilience, and psychological health during this formative life stage.

Sampling Technique

A total of 210 young adults from selected cities and municipalities in Cavite—Imus, Bacoar, Dasmariñas, Tanza, and Kawit—participated in the study, comprising 105 pet owners and 105 non-pet owners. Participants were recruited using a combination of quota and purposive sampling to ensure balanced representation across localities and adherence to inclusion criteria: (1) residents of the selected areas, (2) aged 18 to 25 years, (3) for pet owners, ownership of at least one domesticated fur animal for six months or more, and (4) for non-pet owners, no current pet ownership or caretaking responsibilities.

Sample size was determined through an a priori power analysis using G*Power, targeting a medium effect size ($d = 0.50$), a significance level of 0.05, and a statistical power of 0.95. Data were collected primarily via pen-and-paper surveys, with online forms used as needed. This sampling strategy ensured that both subgroups were adequately represented, enabling a balanced comparison of mental well-being between pet owners and non-pet owners. Data collection spanned approximately one to two months.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set by the Psychological Association of the Philippines and Cavite State University. It complied with Republic Act No. 10029, or the Philippine Psychology Act of 2009, which mandates the protection of participants’ welfare, rights, and dignity. Throughout the research process, participants were treated with fairness and respect, and no psychological, physical, or emotional harm was incurred.

The study was guided by the Code of Ethics for Psychologists of the Psychological Association of the Philippines, particularly the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, integrity, and social responsibility. Transparency and accountability were maintained in the collection, analysis, and reporting of data.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Consent forms were provided in English and explained in both English and Filipino to ensure full understanding. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the measures taken to protect confidentiality.

Participant anonymity was ensured by assigning codes and excluding identifying information from all records and reports. All data were stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the researchers. Data handling and disclosure followed the Data Privacy Act of 2012, or Republic Act No. 10173. Raw data were used solely for the purposes of this research, while aggregated data were shared only with authorized academic personnel for analysis and evaluation.

Result and Discussion

Table I. Description of respondents’ level of mental well-being of pet owners and non-pet owners.

Mental Well-being Level	Pet Owners		Non-Pet Owners	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Above Average	56	53.3%	19	18.1%
Average	38	36.2%	58	55.3%
Below Average	5	4.8%	12	11.4%
Very Low	6	5.7%	16	15.2%
Total	105	100%	105	100%

Table I presents the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents’ mental well-being levels, measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). Among pet owners (n = 105), the majority exhibited above-average mental well-being (53.3%), followed by average (36.2%), below-average (4.8%), and very low (5.7%) levels. In contrast, most non-pet owners (n = 105) reported average mental well-being (55.3%), with smaller proportions showing above-average (18.1%), below-average (11.4%), and very low (15.2%) levels, indicating that pet owners tend to have slightly higher mental well-being.

Mental well-being encompasses positive emotions, life satisfaction, psychological functioning, and the ability to maintain healthy relationships (Tennant et al., 2007). The results suggest that pet owners experience more frequent positive emotions, greater resilience,

stronger life purpose, and better stress management, contributing to higher overall life satisfaction. These findings align with previous research showing that pet ownership is associated with enhanced emotional regulation, reduced loneliness, and improved coping (Herzog, Hurley & Morris, 2022; Friedmann, Thomas, & McCune, 2023).

Non-pet owners generally displayed average mental well-being, with moderate life satisfaction and coping abilities. While some prior studies reported lower well-being among non-pet owners (Mueller, Gee & Bures, 2022; Wood, Martin, Christian et al., 2023), this study found that non-pet owners maintained moderate emotional functioning, highlighting that positive mental well-being can also be fostered through other factors such as social support and stress-management strategies.

Overall, the findings suggest that pet ownership may slightly enhance mental well-being by providing emotional support and improving coping, though individual differences such as pet type, ownership duration, and personal

traits can influence the strength of the owner-pet bond. For non-pet owners, alternative strategies to promote emotional well-being remain important, emphasizing that multiple pathways exist to support mental health.

Table II. Description of respondents' level of pet attachment of pet owners

PET ATTACHMENT SUBSCALES	MEDIAN	LOW LEVEL		HIGH LEVEL	
		f	%	f	%
General Attachment	2.52	49	46.7%	56	53.3%
People Substitute	2.55	32	30.5%	73	69.5%
Animal Rights/Welfare	2.71	91	86.7%	14	13.3%
Overall Pet Attachment	58	52	49.5%	53	50.5%

Table II presents the distribution of pet owners' levels of attachment across the subscales of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), using a median split. Among 105 pet owners, 56 (53.3%) reported high levels of General Attachment, 73 (69.5%) reported high levels in the People Substitute dimension, and only 14 (13.3%) exhibited high levels in Animal Rights/Welfare. Overall pet attachment was nearly evenly split, with 53 (50.5%) classified as high and 52 (49.5%) as low. These results indicate that pet owners demonstrate particularly strong attachment when pets serve as substitutes for human relationships, moderate emotional bonding in general attachment, and comparatively lower concern for broader animal welfare.

General Attachment reflects the emotional closeness and affection toward one's own pet, People Substitute captures the role of pets as sources of companionship and emotional support, and Animal Rights/Welfare reflects concern for animals beyond one's own pet (Johnson, Garrity & Stallones, 1992). The findings suggest that pet owners rely on their pets for comfort, companionship, and emotional stability, experiencing reduced loneliness and integrating pets into daily routines. High People Substitute scores align with previous research showing that pets can buffer loneliness and provide social support (Gmeiner & Gschwandtner, 2025; Kretzler & Hajeck, 2022). In the Philippine setting, cultural practices also influence how the human-animal bond develops. Many Filipino households keep pets either indoors as companions or outdoors as guard animals,

particularly dogs. Indoor pets are often treated as family members and are more frequently involved in daily interactions such as play, caregiving, and emotional companionship. In contrast, outdoor pets may primarily serve functional roles such as protection of the household. These differences in living arrangements may influence the intensity of emotional attachment and the frequency of interaction between owners and their pets. As noted by Santos and Lim (2023), Filipino pet owners increasingly demonstrate stronger emotional integration with pets, particularly when pets are treated as companions rather than solely as working animals.

Lower scores in Animal Rights/Welfare suggest that attachment is primarily personal, focusing on the individual pet rather than broader ethical or welfare concerns, consistent with prior findings that pet owners may prioritize their own pets over general advocacy (Torres & Reyes, 2023). The balanced overall attachment levels indicate variability in the strength of owner-pet bonds, influenced by factors such as pet type, duration of ownership, personality, social needs, cultural context, and environmental stressors (Lopez & Santos, 2023; Fernandez, 2024).

Overall, the results imply that pet ownership provides emotional support and companionship, particularly for individuals with limited social networks, but highlight the need for educational initiatives promoting broader animal welfare awareness. Individual, cultural, and contextual factors play key roles in shaping the owner-pet relationship and its benefits.

Table III. Test of difference between pet owners and non-pet owners in terms of level of mental well-being.

x²- STATISTICS	df	P-VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE	DECISION
29.3	3	<0.001	Significant	Reject Null Hypothesis

Table III shows the test of difference between pet owners and non pet owners in terms of level of mental well being. A Chi-square test was conducted to examine differences in mental well-being between pet owners and non-pet owners. Data were not normally distributed, so levels were used and a non-parametric test applied. The results showed a significant difference ($\chi^2 = 29.3, df = 3, p < 0.001$), indicating that mental well-being varies according to pet ownership.

Specifically, pet owners tend to have higher mental well-being than non-pet owners, suggesting that pets provide emotional support, reduce stress, and improve coping. These findings align with previous studies, including Philippine-based research, highlighting the positive effects of human-animal interaction. The results support the potential role of pets in mental health initiatives, though benefits may vary depending on pet type, attachment, and context.

Table IV. Test of relationship between pet attachment level and mental well-being level of pet owners.

PET ATTACHMENT SUBSCALES	SPEARMAN RHO CORRELATION	df	P-VALUE	SIGNIFICANCE	DECISION
General Attachment	0.444***	103	<0.001	Significant	Reject Null Hypothesis
People Substitute	0.445***	103	<0.001	Significant	Reject Null Hypothesis
Animal Rights/Welfare	0.553***	103	<0.001	Significant	Reject Null Hypothesis
Overall Pet Attachment	0.444***	103	<0.001	Significant	Reject Null Hypothesis

Table IV presents the Spearman Rho correlations between pet attachment and mental well-being among pet owners (n = 105). The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated non-normal data distributions (p < 0.05), so non-parametric correlations were employed. Significant positive relationships were found across all domains: General Attachment (r = 0.444, p < 0.001), People Substitute (r = 0.445, p < 0.001), Animal Rights/Welfare (r = 0.553, p < 0.001), and overall pet attachment (r = 0.444, p < 0.001). These results indicate that higher pet attachment is associated with higher mental well-being, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

(r = 0.445) represent moderate positive relationships with mental well-being, while the Animal Rights/Welfare dimension (p = 0.553) demonstrates a strong positive relationship.

Based on commonly used correlation interpretation guidelines (Pallant, 2020), correlation values between 0.30 and 0.49 indicate moderate relationships, while values of 0.50 and above indicate strong relationships. In this study, the correlations between General Attachment (p = 0.444) and People Substitute (p

Moderate positive correlations in the General Attachment and People Substitute dimensions suggest that stronger emotional bonds with pets, and reliance on pets as sources of comfort and companionship, are linked to improved daily emotional functioning, stress coping, and resilience. The slightly stronger correlation observed in the Animal Rights/Welfare dimension indicates that caring for animals beyond one’s own pet may enhance empathy, moral purpose, and life satisfaction, contributing to mental well-being. Overall, higher total pet attachment corresponds to better psychological outcomes, likely because pets provide consistent emotional support, companionship, and a sense of purpose.

These findings align with prior research showing that pet attachment reduces stress, depressive symptoms, and loneliness, while supporting emotional and social well-being (Powell et al., 2020; McConnell et al., 2021; Krause-Parello et al., 2022; O’Haire et al., 2023). The results highlight the potential of pets as informal support systems and suggest practical implications for mental health interventions, including incorporating human-animal interactions, promoting responsible pet ownership, integrating animal welfare education, and considering cultural and social contexts to maximize the psychological benefits of pet attachment.

Table V. The study’s findings revealed notable differences between pet owners and non-pet owners in mental well-being and pet attachment. Pet owners exhibited higher mental well-being, consistent with literature highlighting the emotional support, stress relief, and psychological benefits of human-animal interaction, while non-pet owners tended to show average to lower levels of well-being. Additionally, pet owners demonstrated strong emotional attachment to their pets but lower awareness of broader animal welfare, indicating a gap between personal affection and responsible care.

In response, the FURtitude FUR-ever Well program was designed to address these findings through targeted interventions. The Pet Interaction and Mindfulness Session provides guided breathing and grounding exercises with therapy animals to enhance stress reduction and emotional regulation among non-pet owners. The Animal Welfare Awareness Seminar educates pet owners on responsible ownership, animal rights, and proper care practices, complemented by Story Time with Shy Animals, which allows participants to practice compassionate interaction while socializing timid animals. To provide non-pet owners with direct emotional support from animals, the Adopt-a-Pet for a Day activity pairs participants with shelter animals for supervised bonding.

Collectively, these interventions aim to improve mental well-being, foster empathy and responsible pet care, and promote positive human-animal interactions. By addressing both

the emotional needs of participants and the welfare of animals, the program integrates research findings into practical strategies that support psychological health and compassionate animal care.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that companion animals play a meaningful role in supporting mental well-being among young adults in selected areas of Cavite. Pet owners generally exhibited higher levels of mental well-being than non-pet owners, indicating that pet companionship is associated with better emotional balance and psychological health in everyday life. The significant difference between the two groups suggests that having a pet may serve as a natural buffer against stress and emotional strain, particularly in non-crisis settings.

Among pet owners, patterns of attachment further clarified how the bond between human and animals contributes to well-being. Stronger attachment in the general attachment and people substitute dimensions highlights pets as consistent sources of comfort, companionship, and emotional security. Although concern for broader animal welfare was less pronounced, overall attachment to pets was positively associated with mental well-being. These findings indicate that the strength and quality of emotional bonds with pets are closely linked to higher levels of psychological well-being, social support, and emotional regulation.

The significant positive relationship between pet attachment and mental well-being underscores the importance of viewing companion animals not merely as household additions but as meaningful emotional resources. The results support theoretical perspectives that emphasize attachment and interaction between human and animal as contributors to emotional resilience and psychological stability.

Based on these findings, the proposed program “FURtitude FUR-ever Well” offers a relevant and evidence-based approach to promoting mental well-being through structured interactions. By integrating therapy-animal engagement, mindfulness activities, and responsible pet care education, the program responds directly to the study’s implications and

highlights the practical value of companion animals in enhancing mental well-being among young adults.

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