




LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Depression scores among pet dog owners

Hinpetch Daungsupawong ¹, Viroj Wiwanitkit ²

¹ Private Academic Consultant, Phonhong, Lao People's Democratic Republic

² Department of Research Analytics, Saveetha Dental College and Hospitals, Saveetha Institute of Medical and Technical Sciences, Saveetha University, Chennai, India

Dear Editor,

We would like to discuss on “Low depression scores among pet dog owners – a comparative cross-sectional study from Anuradhapura Sri Lanka”.¹ This study looks at the important and understudied problem of dog companionship and its effects on psychological and cardiovascular health in South Asia, namely Sri Lanka. The scientists used a cross-sectional methodology to compare pet dog owners to non-pet dog owners, which was effective in identifying early differences in depression and cortisol outcomes. Dog ownership may reduce stress and improve mental health, according to significant findings on depression scores (which are lower among pet dog owners) and the negative relationship between pet bonding ratings and cortisol levels. However, several key study findings warrant further investigation and discussion.

First, this study is cross-sectional design makes it more difficult to prove causation. Although having a pet has been linked to better psychosocial health, can owning a dog actually lower depression, or is it just that dog owners are more likely to have moderate depression? To investigate the direction of this association, longitudinal research might be helpful. The results may also be impacted by additional variables like socioeconomic position, cultural views on dogs, and pre-existing mental health issues. Our conclusions might be improved with

a more sophisticated comprehension of these variables. Second, the study might be extended to look at a wider range of physiological indicators of stress and cardiovascular health, even though the authors emphasize the link between pet bonding and cortisol levels. Blood pressure, heart rate variability, and cholesterol levels, for instance, may offer more information about the cardiovascular advantages of pet keeping. Furthermore, qualitative information about participants’ emotional experiences and perspectives of their pet-owner relationship may enhance the results and offer a more thorough comprehension of psychosocial causes.

Future studies should also look at how owning a dog affects the physical and emotional well-being of various South Asian groups over the long run. A more thorough understanding might be obtained by comparing the psychosocial impacts of pet ownership in urban and rural areas, as well as cultural variations in pet ownership. Furthermore, examining any possible gender disparities in the connection between pet ownership and health may provide crucial information on how men and women differ in their interactions with their animals.

This study leaves room for future research on the beneficial health effects of dog companionship in Sri Lanka, especially with longitudinal studies that incorporate different physiological measures, cultural and gender differences, and other factors.

Corresponding author: Hinpetch Daungsupawong, e-mail: hinpetchdaung@gmail.com

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict.

Data availability

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Ethics approval

Not applicable.

References

1. Rathish D, Rajapakse J, Weerakoon K. Low depression scores among pet dog owners – a comparative cross-sectional study from Anuradhapura Sri Lanka. *Eur J Clin Exp Med.* 2024;22(4):785-800. doi: 10.15584/ejcem.2024.4.14