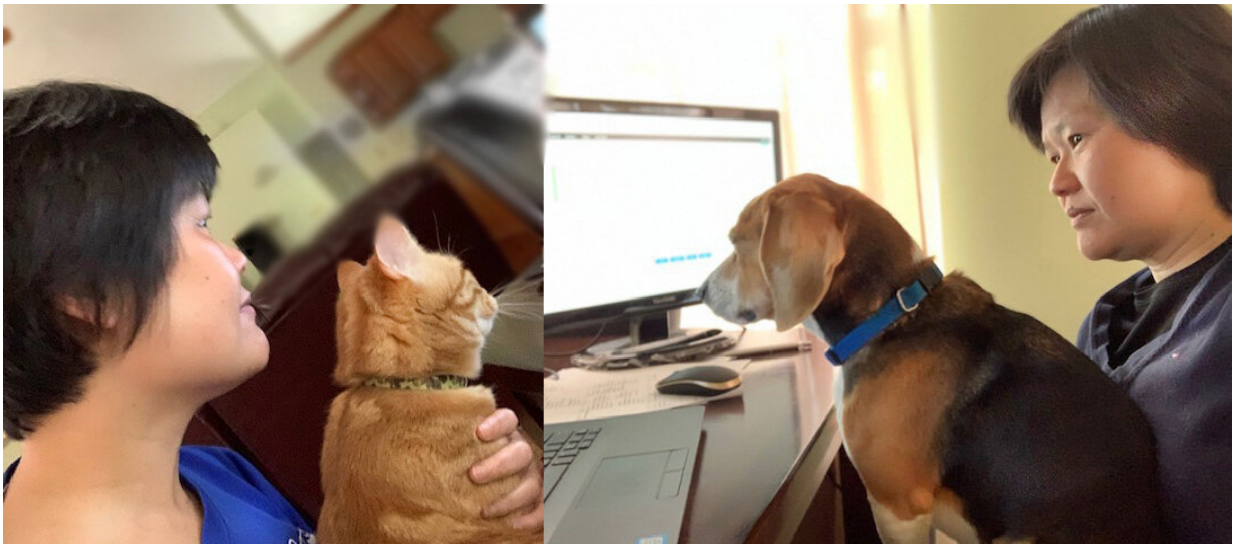


# Links between pet ownership, stress, and loneliness during COVID-19 explored

April 26 2023

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Working from home with pets during COVID-19. Credit: Hsin-Yi Weng, CC-BY 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

A new analysis suggests that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, U.S. dog and cat owners became closer to their pets, and a complex relationship unfolded between pet ownership, stress, and loneliness. Niwako Ogata and Hsin-Yi Weng of Purdue University, U.S., and their colleague present these findings in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* on April 26, 2023.

The COVID-19 [pandemic](#) provides a unique setting to explore pet-owner

relationships and potential links between pet ownership and mental health. Several prior studies have investigated these topics in the context of the pandemic, but with limited scope.

Ogata and Weng conducted a series of surveys to capture the dynamics of dog and cat ownership in the U.S.—prior to the pandemic, during the lockdown period of April to June 2020, the reopening of September to December 2020, and a [recovery period](#) from January to December 2021. The surveys included questions related to participants' closeness to the pet they felt most attached to, stress and [loneliness](#) levels, demographics, housing situation, personality, and other potentially relevant factors. Participants included 1,266 people with dogs and cats, 1,186 with only dogs, 1,128 with only cats, and 657 with no pets.

Statistical analysis of the survey responses showed that both dog and [cat owners](#) grew closer to their pets during the study period. However, links between pet ownership and mental health were more complex.

Compared to cat owners and participants without pets, dog owners experienced greater reduction of stress and loneliness during the reopening and recovery periods. Nonetheless, the researchers did not find statistically sound evidence that pet ownership eased participants' stress and loneliness levels during the pandemic, and cat owners generally had more stress and loneliness than other participants. However, separating out different types of loneliness showed that, compared to non-pet owners, pet owners reported less loneliness specifically related to [romantic relationships](#).

Further analysis suggests that the different results seen for dog versus cat owners may be explained by differences in the pet-owner relationship between these two groups.

The researchers will continue collecting similar data through 2023 in

order to capture any further changes in pet-owner relationships, stress, and loneliness.

The authors add, "People felt closer toward their pets during the COVID-19 pandemic even though the [pet ownership](#) did not mitigate stress and loneliness. Dog ownership and cat ownership acted differently on [mental health](#), but the difference between them could be partially explained away by the owner-pet relationship."

**More information:** Temporal patterns of owner-pet relationship, stress, and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effect of pet ownership on mental health: A longitudinal survey, *PLOS ONE* (2023). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0284101](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0284101)

Provided by Public Library of Science

Citation: Links between pet ownership, stress, and loneliness during COVID-19 explored (2023, April 26) retrieved 22 July 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-04-links-pet-ownership-stress-loneliness.html>

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