

Pet owners are sick more often and exercise less than other working aged people

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A common perception is that pet owner is a young person who is full of action, exercises a lot, and actively plays with a pet, particularly with a dog. The reality is different, however.

The association of pet ownership and health of working aged Finns (20-54 years of age) was studied at the University of Turku as part of a large research project entitled Health and Social Support (HeSSup). The findings were published in *PLoS ONE*, the new international online publication of the Public Library of Science.

At the total population level, pet ownership was most common among those 40 years of age or older, those whose lives are established and who are settled down as well as among those who live in single family houses and who have couple relationships. Pet ownership was slightly more often associated with a low rather than high social standing or education. Four of five people working in agriculture had a pet, with 41% of those representing other occupational groups having one.

Pet owners are part of the population group that based on their age or low socio-economic standing has plenty of different kinds of illness or disease related risk factors, including a greater Body Mass Index (BMI) than the rest. In this study, they smoked slightly more often and exercised less often than those not having pets. Dog owners did exercise more than those not having a dog, but it did not have an effect on the BMI. Pet owners in general had hobbies associated with hunting or moving about in nature more often than the rest.

Perceived health of pet owners was weak more often than that of those not having a pet. Illnesses, such as high blood pressure, blood pressure disease, diabetes, ulcer, sciatica, migraine, depression, and panic attacks were more common among them. Socio-demographic background factors and risk factors explained the differences between the two groups.

Motivating middle aged people, those belonging to lower social groups, and those living in the countryside to move about with their pets would likely have an impact on their health and reduction of illnesses. It may be assumed that exercising as a separate pursuit is an unlikely part of their free time activities in the way it is among more highly educated town people.

Source: Public Library of Science

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