

'Dog people' may do better in lockdown

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Researchers examining why dog owners living alone during COVID restrictions were less lonely think it may have to do with the type of person who owns dogs rather than having a dog itself.

Dr. Jessica Oliva is a lecturer in psychology at James Cook University.

She said a previous study found Australian [dog owners](#) living alone were less likely to be lonely than non-dog owners living alone during the first COVID-19 lockdown.

"Responses detailing how being a pet owner affected participant lockdown experiences suggested this might be due to dog owners leaving the house more to walk their [dogs](#), producing opportunities to socialize and exercise," said Dr. Oliva.

"We wanted to explore whether the relationship between dog-walking and loneliness is connected to mindfulness."

She said mindfulness is the ability to keep the mind attending to what is occurring in the present moment, and calmly acknowledging and accepting feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

The team surveyed 534 dog owners, [cat owners](#), and those without pets living alone in Australia during the second lockdown period.

"We found both dog and cat ownership positively impacted feelings of loneliness for people living alone and that dog ownership, in particular, is associated with decreased loneliness during a lockdown," said Dr. Oliva.

"A significant relationship was also seen between increased mindfulness and decreased loneliness."

She said they did not find evidence for this being related to dog walking. However, given the restrictions on exercise associated with the second lockdown in some places were inclusive of dog walking, this may have impacted regular dog-walking frequency and duration, making walking the dog less enjoyable.

"It's possible the lower levels of loneliness observed in dog owners is

more related to the type of personality associated with being a person who owns a dog than the dogs themselves," said Dr. Oliva.

She said "dog people" have been found to significantly differ from "cat people" on all the "Big Five" [personality traits](#), and so it is possible that "dog people" are also more resilient to [social isolation](#) and the impacts of a lockdown.

"The association between higher levels of mindfulness and lower levels of loneliness are consistent with previous research that suggests that mindfulness alleviates or prevents [loneliness](#)," said Dr. Oliva.

"This means that efforts to find ways to increase the state of [mindfulness](#) during social isolation are important."

Provided by James Cook University

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