

Do pets make you happier? Study shows they did not during the pandemic

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There is a general understanding that pets have a positive impact on one's well-being. A new study by Michigan State University found that although pet owners reported pets improving their lives, there was not a reliable association between pet ownership and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study, published in the [*Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*](#), assessed 767 people over three times in May 2020. The researchers took a mixed-method approach that allowed them to look at several indicators of well-being while also asking people in an open-ended question to reflect on the role of pets from their point of view.

Pet owners reported that pets made them happy. They claimed pets helped them feel more [positive emotions](#) and provided affection and companionship. They also reported negative aspects of [pet ownership](#) like being worried about their pet's well-being and having their pets interfere with working remotely.

However, when their happiness was compared to non-[pet owners](#), the data showed no difference in the well-being of pet owners and nonpet owners over time. The researchers found that it did not matter what type of pet was owned, how many pets were owned or how close they were with their pet. The personalities of the owners were not a factor.

"People say that pets make them happy, but when we actually measure happiness, that doesn't appear to be the case," said William Chopik, an associate professor in MSU's Department of Psychology and co-author of the study. "People see friends as lonely or wanting companionship, and they recommend getting a pet. But it's unlikely that it'll be as transformative as people think."

The researchers explored several reasons why there is not a difference between the well-being of pet owners and non-pet owners. One of them being that non-pet owners may have filled their lives with a variety of other things that make them happy.

"Staking all of your hope on a pet making you feel better is probably unfair and is maybe costly given other things you could do in your life that could improve your [happiness](#)," added Chopik.

More information: William J. Chopik et al, The Perks of Pet Ownership? The Effects of Pet Ownership on Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2023). DOI: [10.1177/01461672231203417](https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231203417)

Provided by Michigan State University

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