Pet ownership may slow cognitive decline in older adults living alone

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Pet ownership is associated with slower rates of cognitive decline among

older adults living alone, according to a study published online Dec. 26 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Yanzhi Li, Ph.D., from Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China, and colleagues explored the association of pet ownership with cognitive decline among 7,945 participants (mean age, 66.3 years) in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing.

The researchers found that pet ownership was associated with slower rates of decline in composite verbal cognition (β = 0.008 standard deviation [SD]/year), verbal memory (β = 0.006 SD/year), and verbal fluency (β = 0.007 SD/year). All three associations were modified by living alone. Among individuals living alone, pet ownership was associated with slower rates of decline for composite verbal cognition (β = 0.023 SD/year), verbal memory (β = 0.021 SD/year), and verbal fluency (β = 0.018 SD/year). But associations did not persist among those living with others.

"These findings suggest that pet ownership may be associated with slower cognitive decline among older adults living alone," the authors write. "Randomized clinical trials are needed to assess whether pet ownership slows the rate of cognitive decline in older adults living alone."

More information: Yanzhi Li et al, Pet Ownership, Living Alone, and Cognitive Decline Among Adults 50 Years and Older, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.49241