

Study finds animal empathy differs among men

June 7 2024



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James Cook University researchers investigating men's empathy towards animals have found higher levels in men who own pets versus farmers and non-pet owners. The study is published in [Animal Welfare](#).

Dr. Jessica Oliva is a senior lecturer in psychology at JCU. She said it was well established that women felt more animal empathy (AE) than men.

"Compromised abilities to feel empathy in men can have devastating effects on both animals and humans alike. Animal abuse was committed by almost half of all male perpetrators of intimate partner violence, according to studies of a US population.

"So increasing our understanding of the role human-animal interactions play in the development of AE has far-reaching implications, particularly in males," said Dr. Oliva.

The team analyzed 91 responses from three groups of adult men—[farmers](#), pet owners and non-pet owners.

Dr. Oliva said animal empathy levels differed significantly between groups, with those in the pet ownership experience group demonstrating higher AE levels than the other two groups.

She said the men were asked what they think has influenced their beliefs about how animals think and feel.

"Even though the majority of the farmers were university educated, textbook knowledge of animal biology, sentience, and/or cognition was endorsed least by this group, suggesting that they rely more upon their own personal experiences," said Dr. Oliva.

She said all three groups displayed evidence that interactions with animals in adulthood were most influential in shaping their beliefs about how animals think and feel.

"However, our results support the idea that not all experiences are worth the same, with the adult responsibility and sacrifice involved in caring for animals, without the expectation of financial gain, appearing to be most influential to the development of animal [empathy](#)," said Dr. Oliva.

More information: Georgia Anne Frampton et al, Support for the 'Pets as Ambassadors' hypothesis in men: Higher animal empathy in Australian pet-owners vs non-owners and farmers, *Animal Welfare* (2024). [DOI: 10.1017/awf.2024.25](https://doi.org/10.1017/awf.2024.25)

Provided by James Cook University

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