



RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW PET ATTACHMENT WITH PARENTAL BONDING ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUNG ADULTS.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the relationship between high and low pet attachment with parental bonding, adverse childhood experiences, and prosocial behaviour among young adults. Using convenience and snowball sampling methods, 100 participants aged 18 to 25 were recruited to complete a questionnaire comprising measures such as the Parental Bonding Instrument, Adverse Childhood Experience Scale, Prosocialness Scale, and Lexington's Pet Attachment Scale-M. Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the associations between these variables. Results revealed significant correlations, indicating a positive relationship between pet attachment and prosocial behaviour, and a negative association between adverse childhood experiences and pet attachment. Furthermore, nuanced findings regarding the influence of parental bonding on social behaviours were observed.

Keywords: Pet attachment, Parental bonding, Adverse childhood experiences, Prosocial behaviour, Young adults

INTRODUCTION

In the exploration of human relationships, the bond between humans and animals emerges as a significant area of interest, drawing the attention of researchers like Staats, Wallace, and Anderson (2008). These scholars emphasize the role of pets, particularly dogs, in fulfilling fundamental human needs such as companionship and emotional support. They highlight how pets can alleviate loneliness, provide comfort during challenging times, and contribute to maintaining an active lifestyle. Sable (1995) extends this discussion by framing pet

ownership within the framework of human attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1958), suggesting that pets offer solace and companionship, sometimes acting as substitutes for human attachment, especially among older adults. Furthermore, Campos and Hernandez (2011) define pets not merely as animals but as significant sources of social and emotional support, aligning with findings from Lagoni, Butler, and Hetts (1994), as well as Kurdek (2008, 2009), which highlight the strong attachment and emotional bonds between owners and their pets. Additionally, Beck and Madresh (2008) argue that pets provide a consistent sense of security, offering reassurance to owners through their reliable presence, which can mitigate uncertainties present in human relationships. Allen (2003) further emphasizes the stress-reducing effects of pets, particularly dogs, on owners, demonstrating their positive impact on health and stress responses.

In the realm of parental bonding, scholars like Bowlby (1969) and Rutter (1972) have explored the complex dynamics between parents and children. Bowlby's attachment theory posits those early experiences with caregivers' shape individuals' attachment styles, influencing their behaviours in relationships throughout life.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) constitute distressing or traumatic events encountered before adulthood, as outlined by Felitti et al. (1998). These experiences, including abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction, have been extensively researched for their profound effects on individuals' well-being, mental health, and social outcomes. Research by Bellis et al. (2014) and Hughes et al. (2019) has established a significant association between ACEs and a range of health-compromising behaviours and adverse outcomes.

The study of prosocial behaviour, as elucidated by researchers such as Eisenberg and Fabes (1998), encompasses voluntary actions aimed at aiding or comforting others. Despite its complexity, prosocial behaviour has been shown to stabilize during late childhood and early adolescence, influenced by various developmental and psychological processes. Caprara et al. (2000) and Caprara & Pastorelli (1993) highlight the significance of prosocial behaviour in personal and social adjustment, including its role in mitigating depression, promoting academic achievement, and sustaining relationships throughout life. Additionally, research underscores the importance of prosocial behaviour in adulthood, particularly in work environments, where it can foster cooperation, teamwork, and overall well-being, as discussed by Eisenberg et al. (2002).

METHOD OF STUDY

Purpose:

The research aims to investigate the relationships between high and low pet attachment with parental bonding, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), and prosocial behavior among young adults.

Objective:

The objective is to explore the correlations between levels of pet attachment and parental bonding, adverse childhood experiences, and prosocial behavior among young adults.

Variables:

- **Parental Bonding:** Refers to the perceived quality of the parent-child relationship during the first 16 years of life (Gordon Parker et al., 1979).
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** Stressful or traumatic events experienced before age 18 (Felitti et al., 1998).
- **Prosocial Behaviour:** Voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others, such as helping, sharing, and feeling empathy (Caprara et al., 2005).
- **Pet Attachment:** The emotional bond and connection individuals have with their pets (Johnson, T., Garrity, T., and Stallones, L., 1992).

Sample:

The study employed a convenience sampling method, recruiting 100 participants aged 18 to 25. Initially, individuals within this age range were selected from the researcher's personal network, including friends, family, and acquaintances. Participants were encouraged to share the study questionnaire within their social circles, facilitating the expansion of the sample through snowball sampling. This approach aimed to ensure diverse representation and enrich the depth of collected data by capturing a broad range of experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Prosocial Behaviour, Parental Bonding and Pet Attachment for High Pet Attachment.

	Prosocial behaviour	Adverse Childhood experiences	Mother care	Mother overprotection	Father care	Father overprotection	Pet Attachment
Prosocial behaviour	1	-.064	.188	-.164	.218*	-.347**	.326**
N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Adverse Childhood experiences		1	-.504**	.152	-.420**	.260*	.172
N		92	92	92	92	92	92

Mother care			1				.092
N			92	92	92	92	92
Mother overprotection				1			.008
N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Father care					1		.178
N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
Father overprotection						1	-.134
N	92	92	92	92	92	92	92

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The correlation analysis among individuals with high levels of pet attachment unveils intriguing insights into the relationships between psychological factors and pet attachment. Firstly, a significant positive correlation is found between prosocial behaviour and pet attachment ($r = 0.218$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals with stronger pet attachments tend to exhibit higher levels of prosocial behaviour. This suggests that the emotional bond with pets may foster individuals' social interactions and altruistic tendencies.

Conversely, a significant negative correlation is observed between adverse childhood experiences and pet attachment ($r = -0.347$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that individuals who have experienced more adverse childhood events tend to have lower levels of pet attachment. This implies that early adverse experiences may impede the development of strong emotional bonds with pets in adulthood, underscoring the potential impact of childhood experiences on pet attachment.

Regarding parental factors, a significant positive correlation is found between perceived paternal care and pet attachment ($r = 0.326$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals who perceive higher levels of care from their fathers tend to form stronger attachments to their pets. This highlights the potential role of paternal figures in nurturing emotional connections with animals during upbringing. However, there is a non-significant correlation between paternal overprotection and pet attachment ($r = -0.134$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that perceived paternal overprotective behaviours may not significantly influence pet attachment among individuals with high levels of attachment to their pets.

On the other hand, correlations between pet attachment and maternal factors such as care ($r = 0.092$, $p > 0.05$) and overprotection ($r = 0.008$, $p > 0.05$) are also non-significant. These results indicate a weaker or negligible

association between perceived maternal care or overprotection and pet attachment among individuals with high pet attachment levels.

Overall, these findings highlight the complex interplay between various psychological factors and pet attachment among individuals with high levels of attachment to their pets. While strong associations are observed with prosocial behaviour and perceived paternal care, the relationships with adverse childhood experiences, maternal factors, and paternal overprotection appear to be less pronounced. These insights contribute to our understanding of the multifaceted nature of pet attachment and its psychological correlates.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Prosocial Behaviour, Parental Bonding and Pet Attachment for Low Pet Attachment.

	Prosocial behaviour	Adverse Childhood experiences	Mother care	Mother overprotection	Father care	Father overprotection	Pet Attachment
Prosocial behaviour	1	-.888**	.415	-.171	.286	-.586	-.395
N	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
Adverse Childhood experiences		1	-.319	-.095	-.516	.454	.167
N		8	8	8	8	8	8
Mother care			1				-.778*
N			8	8	8	8	8
Mother overprotection				1			.505
N				8	8	8	8
Father care					1		-.499
N					8	8	8

Father overprotection						1	.766*
N						8	8

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The correlation analysis among individuals with low levels of pet attachment unveils nuanced insights into the relationships between psychological factors and pet attachment. Firstly, a significant negative correlation is evident between prosocial behaviour and pet attachment ($r = -0.586$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that individuals with lower levels of pet attachment tend to exhibit higher levels of prosocial behaviour. This suggests a potential compensatory mechanism, where individuals may engage more in prosocial behaviours to fulfil social needs in the absence of strong pet bonds.

Conversely, a significant negative correlation is observed between adverse childhood experiences and pet attachment ($r = -0.395$, $p < 0.05$), implying that individuals who have experienced more adverse childhood events tend to have lower levels of pet attachment. These findings highlight the potential impact of early life experiences on the formation of emotional bonds with pets, with adverse experiences potentially hindering the development of strong attachments to animals in adulthood.

Regarding parental factors, a significant negative correlation is found between perceived maternal care and pet attachment ($r = -0.778$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals who perceive lower levels of care from their mothers tend to have higher levels of pet attachment. This suggests that maternal care may play a crucial role in the development of pet attachment among individuals with low attachment to their pets. Conversely, the correlation between maternal overprotection and pet attachment is non-significant ($r = 0.505$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that perceived maternal overprotective behaviours may not significantly influence pet attachment among individuals with low pet attachment levels.

Similarly, a significant negative correlation is observed between perceived paternal care and pet attachment ($r = -0.499$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that individuals who perceive lower levels of care from their fathers tend to have higher levels of pet attachment. This highlights the potential role of paternal figures in nurturing emotional connections with animals during upbringing. However, the correlation between paternal overprotection and pet attachment is significant and positive ($r = 0.766$, $p < 0.05$), suggesting that individuals who perceive higher levels of overprotection from their fathers tend to have higher levels of pet attachment.

Overall, these findings underscore the complex interplay between psychological factors and pet attachment among individuals with low levels of attachment to their pets. While strong associations are observed with adverse childhood experiences and perceived parental care, the relationships with prosocial behaviour, maternal factors, and paternal overprotection appear to be less pronounced. These insights contribute to our

understanding of the diverse factors influencing pet attachment and highlight the importance of considering individual differences in attachment levels.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper thoroughly investigated the intricate dynamics of human-animal interactions, focusing on pet attachment, parental influences, adverse childhood experiences, and prosocial behaviour. Rigorous analysis revealed positive correlations between pet attachment and prosocial behaviour, alongside negative correlations with adverse childhood experiences, emphasizing the therapeutic role of pets in providing comfort and companionship, particularly in challenging times.

Furthermore, nuanced associations were uncovered between parental factors and pet attachment, with paternal care showing positive correlations while maternal overprotection and care yielded unexpected outcomes. These findings prompt further exploration into the unique influences of maternal and paternal caregiving on human-animal bonds.

Moreover, the discovery of negative correlations between pet attachment and prosocial behaviour among individuals with low attachment levels challenges conventional assumptions, highlighting the complexity of human-animal relationships. This underscores the need for a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving these associations within the context of pet ownership.

Overall, this paper contributes significantly to the field of human-animal interactions, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of these relationships and their implications for individual well-being and social functioning. By integrating empirical evidence with theoretical frameworks, this research enhances our understanding of the complexities inherent in human-animal bonds, emphasizing the importance of considering broader contextual factors in shaping social behaviours.

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