Are People with Pets Happier Than Those Without

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Abstract

This essay discusses whether or not pets, specifically dogs, make people happier. To find this out, the researcher surveyed an English 3000 class at Dalton State, someone with a pet, someone who has had a pet but currently does not, and someone who has never had a pet. The researcher will look at these results and what scholarly sources say to decide whether or not people with pets tend to be happier than those without pets.

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Are People with Pets Happier Than Those Without

Millions and millions of people all over the world have a pet. This is not a fairly new occurrence either. People have had pets pretty much since humans figured out how to domesticate wild animals. At first, these pets started out being used for work, and then they became used for mere companionship. This trend first started with royalty and the wealthy, but, as time went on, the trend of having a pet went down to everyone. It is also not a new idea that pets bring joy into peoples’ lives, which is why many people insist on having a pet. The researcher, who has pets, wants to test the belief that pets make people happier. To test this, the researcher looked at reliable sources and surveyed different types of people.

To begin the research, the researcher looked at what others have said about pets and happiness. More specifically, the researcher looked at how dogs affect the happiness of their owners. To begin with, the researcher found that many studies have found that pets not only “[reduce] stress and loneliness” but can make the owners “ultimately enjoy a happier life” because pets increase the well-being of humans’ lives in so many ways (Peng, Chi, & Lou, 2017, 39:1). The researcher also found that, according to Pew research (2007), eighty-five percent of people consider their pets to be part of the family, and also according to Pew research (2010), ninety-four percent of people feel close to their pet. This extraordinary bond that people have with pets is what contributes to pets making humans happier because they serve as something to love and also a source of love. This idea that owning a pet “can improve human health, psychological well-being, and longevity” is known at the “pet effect,” and, even though it has not been scientifically proven, many people will argue that have had many positive effects from owning a pet (Herzog, 2011, 236). After looking at this, the researcher can conclude that many
people believe that pets make them happier, but it has not been proven. Because of this, the researcher decided to look at her own results.

To start out, the researcher surveyed an English 3000 class at Dalton State college. This gave a broad look at different kinds of people to get an overview of how people felt about the connection between pets and happiness. The surveys were anonymous so that people could be as honest as possible. The survey included the following questions: do you own a pet, do you feel happy when you pet an animal, would you say petting an animal is a stress reliever, why do dogs make such good therapy and companion animals, and overall, do you think owning a pet makes you a happier person. All of these questions allowed the researcher to gauge an understanding of the people being interviewed and their feeling towards pets. To further the research, three people outside of the class were interviewed. The first person interviewed currently has pets. This person was asked questions about why they own a pet, how they feel about their pet, and if they thought their pet makes them a happier person. The second person interview had a pet previously but does not currently have a pet. They were asked why they did not currently have a pet, how they felt about their previous pet, and if they felt happier when they had their pet. The third person interviewed has never had a pet. They were asked why they had never had a pet, if they ever plan on having a pet, and if they think pets make people happier. These three individuals gave the researcher a view of pets from three different perspectives.

The researcher started out by examining the results from the class survey so percentages could be compared and examined. One of the first questions asked was whether or not the person owned a pet. Fifty-six percent of the class owned a pet, and forty-four percent did not. The second question inquired on how people felt when petting an animal. The vast majority of the class, 87.5 percent, said they felt happy when petting an animal. The third questions asked if
petting an animal was a stress reliever and why. Most people said yes because it gives them a “calming” and “relaxing” feeling (English 3000, personal communications, April 24, 2018). The fourth question asked why dogs, in particular made such good therapy and companion animals. The answers ranged quite a bit. The answers included: “they are loving,” “caring,” “filled with joy,” and “they are positive and happy beings” (English 3000, personal communication, April 24, 2018). The final question and the one examined the most asked their opinion on whether or not they believed owning a pet made them a person happier. 87.5 percent of the class said they do believe that people are happier with pets than without. This question served as the most important in the researcher’s findings.

Along with looking at the class results, the researcher also looked at the results of the interviews. The first person was asked three questions in total. She was asked why she owned a pet, how she feels about her pet, and if she thinks her pet makes her happier. This person responded with that she owns a pet because she has “always loved being around animals” and that she loves her current pet like “it is a part of her family” and that she believes her pet definitely makes her a happier person because the pet “brings so much joy into her life” (Selena
Cline, personal communication, May 1, 2018). The second person was also asked a total of three questions, these questions included: why do you not currently have a pet, how do you feel about your previous pet, and were you happier when you had your pet. This person responded by saying that he had a dog a few years ago and would love to have another dog but cannot because of where he lives, and he does not think he is less happy because he does not have a pet, but he definitely agrees that pets bring an extra bit of joy into people’s lives (Zack Pugh, personal communication, May 1, 2018). The third person interviewed was asked why she has never owned a pet, if she will ever get a pet, and her opinion on if pets make people happier or not. She said she did not have a pet growing up because her parents would not let her, but she plans on getting one as soon as she moves into her own house because she believes having a pet will make her a happier person (Alyson Hannah, personal communication, May 3, 2018).

After looking at all the results collected, the researcher is able to conclude that the majority of people believe that pets make them a happier person and that pets relieve stress in some way. An interesting finding is there was not a connection between people’s opinion on pets and happiness and whether or not they currently own a pet or have never owned a pet. Even people without pets said they believed that owning a pet would make them happier. Most people believe this because pets are seen as stress relievers. Referring to dogs, people like to pet and play with them because it causes them to forget what is going on in their own lives for a second and just feel pure joy. Pets are also full of energy and happiness which rubs off on the humans around them. All of the people interviewed, even those who said pets do not make them happier, said that dogs are able to make such good therapy and companion animals because they are full of love and receiving all of this love makes people’s life better, and it just makes them happier in general. The two people that said having a pet does not make them happier said they did not
think they were any less happy because they did not own a pet, which is a valid argument, but some would argue that having a pet would just add joy to their already joyous life. According to the research, the cuteness and loving nature of most pets is what bring joy into people’s lives, and this is what makes so many people want to have a pet.

Even though the research concludes that pets make people happier, it is not very accurate because it is very opinion based. To really see if this were true or not, a test would need to be done to calculate whether or not a person was happier with a pet than they are without one. It is also hard to measure this because happiness is an abstract term so that is another weakness with the study. Another weakness is that the sample size was very small, so it most likely does not supply the researcher with an accurate look on how a lot of people actually feel. To really draw a conclusion, the researcher would like to expand the sample size and do more of a study on how pet owners act versus how non-pet owners act. This would provide pretty interesting results to see how personalities of the two may differ. In conclusion, it can be said that people believe that pets make them a happier person.
References


