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35th INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR
ANTHROZOOLOGY CONFERENCE

ISAZ '26

CRACKING CODES AND BUILDING BRIDGES
JULY 1-3, 2026 — PARIS FRANCE



Wednesday, 1st Jul 2026

	Louis Armand Auditorium	Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
1:30 - 3:00pm	Welcome Speeches & Host Presentation				
3:00pm	Break				
3:15 - 4:15pm	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Welfare of Assistance Dogs	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: One Health & One Welfare	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companions Across the Lifespan & Families	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Shelters: Operations, Co-housing & Adoption	Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Animals in Care and Educational Institutions
4:15pm	Break				
4:30 - 6:00pm	Posters with Wine & Cheese				
6:30 - 7:15pm	La Villette - Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Educational Farm Guided Tour (registration required)				

Thursday, 2nd Jul 2026

	Louis Armand Auditorium	Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
8:15am	Final Registration and Badge Pickup with Coffee & Croissants				
9:00 - 10:00am	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Everyday Human–Animal Interaction, Affect, and Mental Health	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Human-Wildlife Interactions: Sharing Space & Policy	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Ownership Trends & Family Transitions	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Safety, Risk & Aggression Prevention	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Dog Behavior, Monitoring & Welfare
10:00am	Comfort Break				
10:10 - 11:10am	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Relationship Dynamics in Animal Assisted Services	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Animal Care: Perspectives & Distress	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Attachment, Compatibility & Owner Mental Health	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Violence, Safeguarding & Workforce Well-being	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Policy, Ethics, and Social Contexts of Human–Animal Relationships
11:10am	Break				
11:30am - 12:30pm	Keynote Talk: Isabelle Fromantin & Caroline Gilbert - The Story of a Shelter Dog Who Became a Care Companion				
12:30 - 2:00pm	Birds of a Feather Topic-Themed Social Lunch: Conversations That Connect				
2:00 - 2:30pm	Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Animal Assisted Services and Therapeutic Relationships	Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Frameworks for Conceptualizing Animal Care	Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Cat–Human Relationships, Agency, and Meaning	Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Public Attitudes, Perceptions, and Social Contexts of Human–Animal Relations	
2:30pm	Comfort Break				
2:40 - 4:10pm	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Service & Assistance Dogs: Veterans and Youth	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companionship: Human Aging, Health, & HIV	Symposium: At a loss for evidence: Designing ethical investigations to understand social animals’ experience of death and grief	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Cats: Cohabitation & Health	
4:10pm	Break				
4:30 - 5:30pm	ISAZ Annual General Meeting				
6:00 - 6:45pm	La Villette - Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Educational Farm Guided Tour (registration required)				

Friday, 3rd Jul 2026

	Louis Armand Auditorium	Room 1	Room 2	Room 3	Room 4
8:15am	Refreshments				
9:00 - 10:00am	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companion Animals and Student Well-being	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Equine-Assisted Services: Practice & Perception	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Trust & Perceptions	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Care, Connection, and Companionship Beyond Traditional Pets	
10:00am	Comfort Break				
10:10 - 11:10am	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Canine-Assisted Services Efficacy & Design	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Methods, Sampling & Disciplinary Breadth	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Cultures & Histories of Human–Animal Relations	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in Therapy, Education, and Sexuality	
11:10am	Break				
11:30am - 12:30pm	Keynote Talk: Luc Mounier - Scientific outreach to improve animal welfare				
12:30 - 2:00pm	Lunch				
2:00 - 3:30pm	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Adolescents, Anxiety & Animal-Assisted Therapy	Symposium: How People Understand Animal Emotion States Across Anthrozoological Contexts: Perception, Beliefs, and Consequences for Human–Animal Relations	Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Humane Education & Youth Perspectives	Symposium: Regulating the Human–Dog Interface: Law, Behaviour, and Public Safety	Workshop: Your Research, Your Voice: Podcast-Ready Communication Skills for Scientists
3:30pm	Break				
4:00 - 5:00pm	Early Career Award Winner Talk: Lauren Powell - Reframing sociodemographic variation in human–animal relationships				
5:00 - 5:30pm	Awards & Closing Ceremony				
7:00 - 10:00pm	Country Banquet (COMPLETE registration package ticket required)				

Welcome Speeches & Host Presentation

1:30 - 3:00pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

The Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Foundation president Laurence Parisot and ISAZ president Michelle Sydlowski will welcome you to ISAZ 2026. In addition, Foundation director Boris Albrecht will discuss the Foundation's unique role in supporting human-animal relationships in France.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Welfare of Assistance Dogs

3:15 - 4:15pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

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3:15 - 3:35pm

59 Navigating vulnerability at both ends of the leash: Experiences of One Welfare in Danish assistance dog partnerships

Associate Professor Charlotte Glintborg, Research Assistant Ida Kunzendorf, Associate Professor Tia Hansen

Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark

Abstract

Background: While assistance dogs in Denmark (AiDs) can provide support for individuals with mental health conditions, the reciprocal nature of this relationship remains underexplored. Unlike traditional companion animal relationships, AiD-partnerships involve unique stressors including public access work, task performance expectations, and the AiD-recipients reliance on the AiD for disability management – factors that may create distinct welfare considerations for both partners.

Aim: To explore how AiD-recipients experience and navigate the mutual welfare implications of their partnership in daily life, including potential tensions between the AiD's welfare needs and the AiD-recipient's disability-related needs.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews with 16 AiD-recipients in Denmark were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis within a One Welfare framework.

Results: Four themes were identified. "Navigating welfare" describes the reciprocal care between AiDs and AiD-recipients, where AiDs detected recipients' distress and recipients prioritized their AiD's well-being – though this mutual attunement could also burden the AiD. "Navigating public access" captures how AiDs enabled access to public spaces while encounters with the social environment created stress for both partners. "Navigating the system" reflects recipients' experiences of navigating an unstandardized system with variable training quality, unclear procedures, and limited support.

"Transitions" addresses critical transitions into and out of partnerships, including concerns about the AiDs' retirement and recipients' fear of being without support.

Conclusions: AiD-recipients actively navigate mutual welfare in their partnerships, demonstrating care for their AiDs while managing their own needs. However, achieving One Welfare is complicated by systemic gaps including lack of standardization, limited

recipient preparation in canine welfare, and absent support structures. The findings highlight that vulnerability exists at both ends of the leash and underscore the need for national standards that support the welfare in AiD-partnerships.

3:35 - 3:55pm

117 Developing an Assessment Checklist of Assistance Dogs' Welfare: Applying the Five Domains Model through Qualitative Methods and a Modified eDelphi Process

Emma Bassan^{1,2}, Laura Contalbrigo¹, Karl Weissenbacher³, Ludwig Huber²

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Abstract

As attention to animal welfare increases, professionals working with assistance dogs (ADs) are increasingly expected to monitor dog welfare throughout training and working life. Although several theoretical models conceptualise animal welfare, few have been translated into practical, profession-oriented tools applicable across ADs categories. This study aims to operationalise the Five Domains Model into a structured checklist that enables systematic welfare assessment and monitoring of ADs for people with disabilities.

A multi-stage qualitative design was applied in this study. First, 5 certified Italian AD instructors were involved in semi-structured interviews. The resulting transcripts underwent thematic analysis to extract a list of relevant welfare indicators. The list was integrated with the results of a previous literature review including the HERO checklist and the Guide Dogs UK internal protocol. Finally, a modified eDelphi process involving a panel of 20 international experts was conducted to evaluate and refine the items, ensuring consensus on their relevance and validity.

Thematic analysis initially identified 48 welfare indicators. Following integration with broader literature and existing protocols, the checklist was expanded to 76 items. These indicators are distributed across the first four domains: Nutrition (10 items), Physical Environment (12 items), Health (16 items), and Behavioural Interactions (38 items). The tool comprises 30 animal-based (Welfare-Status Indicators) and 46 environment-based indicators (Welfare-Alerting Indicators). These items underwent eDelphi rounds, which allowed for the further refinement of the final checklist structure.

This research resulted in a set of expert-validated items designed to build a structured AD welfare assessment tool for professional use. By operationalising the Five Domains Model, the checklist facilitates the identification of specific welfare risks for individual dogs, allowing for targeted interventions. These findings provide a robust foundation for a standardised tool that could be implemented by AD organisations to ensure the ethical monitoring of AD welfare.

3:55 - 4:15pm

131 A critical review of studies measuring welfare in dogs involved in animal-assisted services and working as assistance animals

Senior researcher Karen Thodberg¹, Postdoc Friederike Zenker², Professor Peter Sandøe²

¹Aarhus University, Tjele, Denmark. ²University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract

Introduction:

There is an increasing awareness of dog welfare in animal-assisted services (AAS). A dog in AAS typically works together with its owner who is responsible for safeguarding its welfare. By contrast, assistance dogs are selected and trained before being assigned to live with a recipient 24/7. In most countries, these dogs are not certified and there is no legislation clarifying who is responsible for ensuring their welfare. These two categories of animals therefore face different welfare challenges and the aim of this review is to compare results from studies of dog welfare in both settings.

Methodology:

We identified peer-reviewed papers (2000-2025) using the search term: '(animal-assisted or service animal or assistance animal or therapy animal or guide-dog) and welfare and dog'. Hereafter we selected papers reporting animal based measures.

Main findings:

We identified 88 papers of which thirty-two presented data of welfare measures. Only two of the studies involved assistance dogs. Most AAS studies observed signs of stress, and two thirds of these concluded that the dogs did not have welfare problems.

Implications:

Assistance dogs have a potentially large workload and it is often unclear who takes care of the dog if e.g. the recipient's health status changes. Finding only two studies looking at the welfare of this category of dogs underlines the need for more knowledge about how to best monitor and secure the welfare of assistance dogs.

The signs of stress observed in the existing AAS studies, were interpreted very differently. The majority concluded that the dogs were coping well being part of AAS. In order to improve future welfare assessments in AAS-settings, we suggest using more rigorous arguments about the dogs' welfare based on the data at hand.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: One Health & One Welfare

3:15 - 4:15pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

3:15 - 3:35pm

169 One Health and One Welfare in Social Work: A Scoping Review of Uptake, Operationalization, and Implications for Education and Practice

Janine Noorloos^{1,2}, Dr. Colleen McMillan³

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Abstract

Introduction:

Social work increasingly responds to challenges shaped by interconnections among human, animal, and environmental systems. One Health and One Welfare offer interdisciplinary frameworks aligned with social work's ecological and justice-oriented commitments; however, their uptake and operationalization within social work education and practice remain unclear. This scoping review examined how One Health and One Welfare are referenced, defined, and applied within social work–relevant academic literature, with attention to implications for education and practice.

Methods:

A scoping review was conducted following updated methodological guidance and reported in accordance with PRISMA-ScR. Searches were completed across Web of Science, PsycINFO, Social Services Abstracts, CINAHL, ProQuest Dissertations, and MEDLINE, supplemented by targeted web searching. Peer-reviewed sources explicitly referencing One Health and/or One Welfare in relation to social work education or practice were included. Two reviewers independently screened records and extracted data using a structured template. Descriptive statistics and thematic synthesis were used to analyze findings.

Main results:

Nineteen sources published between 2014 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria, indicating limited explicit uptake of One Health/One Welfare in social work scholarship. Most sources were conceptual or synthesis-based, with fewer empirical studies. One Health was referenced more frequently than One Welfare, and frameworks were commonly used as guiding concepts rather than operational practice models. Education emerged as a key entry point, though curricular specificity varied. Equity framing was common, while Indigenous knowledge systems were rarely integrated. Environmental dimensions were less consistently developed than human–animal relationships.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

While One Health and One Welfare resonate strongly with social work values, translation into teachable competencies, practice models, and evaluation strategies remains uneven. Advancing One Health–informed social work requires clearer operationalization, stronger environmental integration, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous and place-based knowledge systems. Social work education is a critical site for advancing practice-ready interdisciplinary application of these frameworks.

3:35 - 3:55pm

12 Amplifying Human-Animal Interactions in Disaster Communication: A Case Study of 2023 Nova Scotia Wildfires

Dr. Haorui Wu

Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada

Abstract

Introduction: With every individual a potential broadcaster and social media driving public awareness, this study explores the media's crucial role in framing animal-related issues during the wildfires in Nova Scotia (NS), Canada between May and June 2023. The study offers a unique insight into human-animal interactions during wildfires, a niche and specialized sub-field of disaster communication research.

Methodology: This presentation is based on a case study focusing on grey literature in the 2023 NS wildfires' risk communication and adopts a content analysis approach to analyze data from multiple sources, including social media outlets (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram), government websites, and local news organizations' publications.

Findings: The research highlights a range of practical examples of human-animal interactions, including companion animal guardians and companion animals, farm owners and farm animals, as well as wildlife, that improve mutual resilience. To date, there are no unified standards for developing media strategies related to supporting affected animals.

Implications: The study argues that amplifying human-animal interactions via media coverage features an effective risk communication approach, promoting the safety and inclusion of community development and enhancing human-animal welfare.

3:55 - 4:15pm

202 Veterinarians' Perspectives on how the Canadian Assurance Program ProAction Affects Human-Animal Relationships and Animal Welfare

Tunmise F. Ehigbor¹, Erin Wynands², Katherine E. Koralesky^{1,3}, Kathryn Proudfoot^{1,4}, Caroline Ritter¹

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⁴*Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada*

Abstract

Introduction: Farm animal welfare programs are commonly used worldwide to provide the public with assurance about farm animal care. In Canada, the Dairy Farmers of Canada proAction Animal Care program (ACP) requires farmers to meet certain program requirements. Farmers consult their herd veterinarians to clarify these requirements and to discuss how to implement management changes. Therefore, there is a need to explore veterinarians' roles in dairy farming policy and implementation. This study explores Canadian veterinarians' perceptions of how the proAction ACP affects their role in veterinary-client-animal relationships and animal welfare on farms.

Methodology: We conducted six virtual focus groups with 26 dairy veterinarians across Canada. Focus group discussions lasted an average of 45 minutes and were facilitated using a semi-structured question guide. We analyzed transcripts inductively using reflexive thematic analysis in NVivo 15, assigning codes to label sections of data and then organizing them into themes.

Main results/findings: Veterinarians perceived that the proAction ACP motivates improvements in animal welfare by using animal-based indicators and establishing a baseline standard of care. ProAction sparked conversations between veterinarians and farmers on topics such as animal care and standard operating procedure development, thereby positioning veterinarians as mediators in the farmer-animal relationship and fostering positive veterinarian-farmer relationships. However, veterinarians reported that

the program requirements had varied effects on animal care across farms, for example, they observed greater positive effects on some issues such as pain management, hock lesions, and housing, compared with other issues such as lameness. Veterinarians further indicated that program were rolled out differently across provinces and some wished for better support for consistent implementation across farms and provinces.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Overall, proAction standardizes care of dairy cattle and facilitates veterinary involvement in farmer-animal relationships. Veterinarians view the program as having mixed effects on animal welfare, depending on different farm contexts.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companions Across the Lifespan & Families

3:15 - 4:15pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

3:15 - 3:35pm

194 Companion animal roles across the lifespan: exploring role intensity and role salience

dr. Mayke Janssens, dr. Jannes Eshuis

Open University of The Netherlands, Heerlen, Netherlands

Abstract

Companion animals can fulfil a wide range of roles in people's lives, yet little is known about how the relative importance of these roles changes across the life course and household contexts. The present study adopts a lifespan perspective to examine how companion animal roles vary across life stages and family contexts, distinguishing between role intensity and role salience.

Using a cross-sectional sample of companion animal owners (N=528; age range 16-98), participants rated the extent to which 16 roles applied to their companion animal on a scale from 0 to 4. In addition, participants indicated their three most important roles. Life stages were defined by age, and family context was categorised based on partnership status and the presence and age of children living at home.

Across life stages and family contexts, affective roles demonstrated strong continuity. *Companionship* for instance showed high mean intensity scores across groups (M=3.0–3.4) and is almost universally prioritised, appearing in the top three roles for 80–95% of participants across groups. However, salience analyses also revealed pronounced life-course shifts that were less apparent in mean-level intensity scores. For instance, while the intensity of *support* showed continuously high scores (M=1.9–2.2), its salience dropped from inclusion in the top three roles for 53% of participants in emerging/early adulthood to only 15% in later life. In contrast, *health* showed a gradual increase in intensity (M=1.22–1.60), but a more pronounced increase in salience, rising from 14% in emerging/early adulthood to 27% in later life stages. Instrumental roles such as *commercial*, *competition*, and *food source* consistently showed low intensity and low salience.

Overall, these findings indicate that companion animal roles are dynamically re-prioritised in response to changing life circumstances. Role intensity and role salience

capture complementary dimensions of the human–animal relationship and should be considered jointly.

3:35 - 3:55pm

8 Examining human-animal relationships in foster homes in the United States: What are the benefits and the challenges for the family?

Mary Elizabeth Rauktis, Anthony Tudisco

University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, pa, USA

Abstract

Introduction: In the United States, foster care is the preferred option for children who have experienced parental maltreatment (childwelfare.gov), and over 70% of homes in the USA have one or more pets in the family home (AVMA, 2024). Although foster care professionals posit that children who have experienced maltreatment benefit from living with animals, this observation is not well supported, with only one study to date (Carr and Rockett, 2017). **Research Objectives** were exploratory and aimed to answer the questions of what the benefits and challenges are when animals are part of the foster placement.

Method: Sequential mixed-methods approach (quant+qual) was used. with a pilot study to assess the measures and procedures preceding the study. For the study, an online survey using standardized published measures and qualitative interviews produced fifty-five surveys and 15 interviews. Owing to missing data, forty-eight surveys were used in the final analytic sample. Due to the modest sample size, primarily univariate and bivariate analyses were conducted. The process of Thematic Analysis, assisted with dedoose software, was used to analyze interview and open-ended questions data and assist in developing a model of foster child-animal interactions.

Findings and Discussion: Foster parents believe that animals have a positive impact on foster children, serving as sources of comfort, companionship, teaching important emotional and relational skills. However, the majority of the children met screening criteria for emotional dysregulation, and about a third of the parents said that pets in the home were sometimes negatively impacted by a child's externalizing behavior. The foster parents were vigilant and tried to protect their pets, but in several cases, foster parents chose to have the child removed from the home. It is important that foster parent know their pet(s) signs of stress, have plans to keep everyone safe, and be trained in how to introduce pets to children.

3:55 - 4:15pm

46 Public perceptions of companion animals, attachment, *ikigai*, and intentions to acquire pets in Japan

Professor Mitsue Motomura

Osaka University of Economics, Osaka, Osaka, Japan

Abstract

Introduction. A key concept of One Welfare is that human well-being and animal welfare are interdependent, highlighting the importance of human–animal relationships. Previous research suggests various benefits of human-animal interactions. In Japan's rapidly aging society, declining pet ownership may therefore have broader social implications. This study examined public perceptions of pets, their associations with

ikigai (a sense of purpose in life), intentions regarding future pet ownership, and reasons for not wanting new pets in Japan.

Methodology. An online questionnaire survey was conducted. Participants comprised current pet owners, former owners, and never-owners (300 each; aged ≥ 20 years), with quotas matching the sex and age distribution of the Japanese population. Statistical analyses were conducted using R.

Main Results. The screening survey showed that 20.4% of respondents were current owners, 38.9% former owners, and 40.7% never-owners. Pet ownership status was not significantly associated with *ikigai*, whereas higher pet attachment among current owners was positively associated with *ikigai* (regression coefficient = 0.55, $p < 0.001$). Ordered logistic regression analyses indicated that former owners were less likely than current owners to perceive pets as family members (OR = 0.52, 95% CI = 0.36–0.77), with never-owners showing an even lower likelihood. Former and never-owners were less likely to intend to acquire a new pet. Chi-squared tests and post hoc analyses revealed that those who wanted but were unable to acquire a pet cited housing restrictions and concerns about aging, whereas those who did not want a pet mainly cited a lack of fondness for animals.

Conclusions. While pet attachment was associated with higher *ikigai* among owners, intentions to acquire a new pet varied by ownership status, suggesting a further decline in pet ownership in Japan. Addressing housing and age-related constraints may enable more people to own pets, benefiting both human well-being and animal welfare.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Shelters: Operations, Co-housing & Adoption

3:15 - 4:15pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

3:15 - 3:35pm

55 Reassessing Time Standards for Daily Animal Care in Shelters: Impacts on Staff Turnover Intent

Dr Allison Andrukonis¹, Dr Alexandra Protopopova²

¹University of Wisconsin - Madison, Madison, WI, USA. ²The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

Abstract

Introduction. The current animal shelter standards recommend allotting 15 min for daily care per animal: 9 min for cleaning and 6 min for feeding. Shelter managers use this number to make staffing decisions. However, these estimates are not based in empirical evidence, and, if insufficient, may contribute to poor animal care and staff wellbeing. Thus, the current study aimed to identify the daily tasks completed at animal shelters across the United States and evaluate the relationship between perceived time to complete daily tasks and employee turnover intent.

Methodology. Animal shelter employees answered an online Qualtrics survey, which consisted of questions about shelter-related factors, daily tasks, time allotted for daily tasks, perception of time allotted, workplace satisfaction, and turnover intent. Daily tasks were analyzed descriptively. A linear model was used to predict turnover intent.

Main Results. Participants (n=192) were from 38 different states and represented shelters with open, limited, and managed intake. Of the 46 listed tasks, 34 were reported to occur daily by over half of participants at their respective shelters. Aside from feeding and cleaning, the most commonly reported daily animal care tasks were medicating animals (96%) and some form of enrichment (96%). Turnover intent was highest in participants who perceived that staff did not have enough time to complete daily tasks ($t(55) = 2.07$, $p = 0.043$) and those working at open admission shelters ($t(55) = 2.26$, $p = 0.028$).

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. Most animal shelters are engaging in daily animal care tasks beyond just cleaning and feeding, suggesting that the current standard times are insufficient. Additionally, employees are more likely to want to leave their job if they feel like staff are not given enough time to complete daily tasks. Future research should identify a new time average for daily care per animal.

3:35 - 3:55pm

140 How do adopters of 'underdogs' experience and understand 'successful' adoptions?

Dr Katrina E Holland, Mr Cameron G Williams, Prof Robert M Christley, Dr Tracey Price-Allan

Dogs Trust, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction: While many dogs in the care of rehoming organisations are adopted within months, others take longer to find their forever homes. These dogs may have more specific requirements, including complex behaviour or health issues, meaning that they need adopters with the skills, expectations and circumstances to be able to successfully navigate potential challenges while a dog settles into their new home. At Dogs Trust - the UK's largest dog rehoming charity - dogs who have been awaiting a new home for 6 months or more are known as 'underdogs'. This study explored how adopters of underdogs made sense of their adoption and post-adoption experiences.

Methodology: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 people who had adopted a dog that had been in Dogs Trust's care for 6 months or more. Adopters had been living with their dog for 6-12 months. Transcripts were analysed through reflexive thematic analysis.

Main Findings: Three interconnected themes were constructed. First, "Helping a dog in need to thrive" captured how adopters framed their decision to adopt a long-stay dog as morally meaningful, positioning themselves as their dogs' champion and recognising value where others did not. Second, "Valuing progress over perfection" showed how adopters recognised and favoured gradual progress over idealised standards of behaviour. Finally, "Attuned understanding and family belonging" reflected how, through time and patience, adopters developed an emotionally attuned understanding of their dog, with them becoming a valued family member.

Principal Conclusions: For adopters of underdogs, successful adoption is constructed not as the absence of challenges, but as a relationship in which such issues are rendered meaningful and worthwhile. Rehoming organisations should focus marketing of underdogs on the specifics of a dog's personality and how much they bring to

interactions with their caregivers, whilst recruiting adopters with the resilience required to work through challenges, supporting them to recognise and celebrate progress.

3:55 - 4:15pm

227 Behavioral and history-based factors used by shelter staff to designate shelter cats as bonded pairs

Jennifer Link¹, Anastacia Paramo², Dr. Michael Brunt³, Dr. Carly Moody¹

¹University of California, Davis, Davis, California, USA. ²Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA. ³University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada

Abstract

Introduction. At intake, animal shelters may designate some cat pairs as “bonded”, meaning they must be adopted together due to a perceived emotional bond they share. Although keeping bonded pairs together is considered important for their welfare, data suggests these pairs experience longer shelter stays than cats adopted separately, increasing their risk of chronic stress, and in some regions, euthanasia.

Methodology. To elucidate how animal shelters determine “bonded” status, we surveyed animal shelter staff and volunteers involved in making bonded-pair designations across the United States and Canada. A mixed-methods online questionnaire (29 questions) collected participant and shelter demographics, beliefs about ideal and current social housing practices, perceived valence of cat interaction behaviors, and descriptions on how bonded pair designations are made at their shelter.

Main Results. Given the exploratory nature of this study, analyses used descriptive statistics. Participants (n=84) were primarily animal shelter employees in the United States (69%), women (91%), with a mean ($\pm$ SD) age of 40.6 $\pm$ 12.8 years old and 9.2 $\pm$ 6.5 years of shelter experience. Participants frequently reported that bonded pair decisions are based on behavior observed when housed together (61%) and cats being surrendered together (56%). However, few indicated use of a formal protocol (19%) and many reported housing cats individually (57%).

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. Since bonded-pair decisions are primarily informed by cat-cat interactions, future research should identify interactions that reliably indicate a social bond. This data may be used to produce evidence-based protocols for determining bonded status with the overall aim of guiding cat housing and adoption strategies that consider both animal welfare and timely adoption.

Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Animals in Care and Educational Institutions

3:15 - 4:15pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Session to feature lightning oral presentations each 5-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

3:15 - 3:25pm

144 Dog-Assisted Services in Nursing Home: Effects on Well-Being and Sociality of Residents with Disabilities

Héloïse Vesque-Annear¹, Marie Pelé¹, Anthony Piermattéo^{1,2}, Cédric Sueur^{1,3}, Angélique Stachowiak⁴, Alix Dubrulé⁴, Sarah Dharancy⁵, Marine Grandgeorge⁶

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Abstract

Introduction: In France, dog-assisted services (DAS, punctual presence) are more common than the permanent living of dogs in nursing homes. The literature highlights the beneficial effects of these interventions, although these effects may vary depending on the profile of the beneficiaries. This study aims to assess the impact of a dog and her handler (i.e. DAS professional) on the well-being and sociability of residents with disabilities in nursing home.

Methodology: Nine residents (mean age = 66.1±5.3 years), one educator, and one psychomotor therapist participated in ten weekly DAS sessions involving a 3-year-old golden retriever and her handler. Two stable groups of residents were formed (G1: n=5; G2: n=4) and remained unchanged throughout the study. Sessions lasted 45 minutes per group and took place in the afternoon with group order alternating every week. Sessions were video-recorded and coded using an ethological observational methodology. Dog behaviors, residents' self-directed behaviors and facial expressions, as well as social interactions between the dog, her handler, residents and caregivers were recorded using focal sampling and totalizing 72 behaviors. Social physical contacts among all were recorded every 5 minutes (scan sampling, N=100 scans/individual) during sessions to build social networks and quantify individual social connectivity.

Preliminary results: Videos analysis are still ongoing and intra-individual analyses and social network measures (e.g., number of interactions/individual) will be tested using generalized linear models (GLMs). But preliminary results suggest an increase in the frequency and duration of interactions with the dog (petting or brushing) and with the handler (communication), a decrease in self-directed behaviors among residents, and changes within the unit's social network as the sessions progressed.

Conclusions: This study proposes an ethologically grounded approach to quantify both behavioral indicators and social network changes during DAS in a vulnerable population. Results should highlight evidence-based recommendations for implementing structured DAS in nursing homes while considering residents' profiles and animal welfare.

3:25 - 3:35pm

212 The Impact of Therapy Dogs on School Climate: A Scoping Review

Dr. Jennie Dapice^{1,2}, Ms. Brianna Michaud-Nolan¹, Ms. Mary Cabral¹

¹University of New England, Portland, Maine, USA. ²University of Southern Maine, Lewiston, Maine, USA

Abstract

Youth mental health is an area of growing concern, as all children's lives are impacted by the current era of political, ecological, and public health upheaval. Schools now extend beyond educational support to provide holistic support that includes meeting students' nutritional and psychosocial needs.

The U.S. Department of Education defines school climate as a "broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student experience." A positive school climate can translate to a safe, supportive learning environment, and improve educational outcomes. In recent years, school based therapy dog programs have become increasingly common due to their documented benefits for individual students. This scoping review examined the existing body of literature on the impact of therapy dogs on school climate. Using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines for scoping reviews, 2,095 records were identified from multiple databases. Seventeen works published between 2015 and 2025 met the inclusion criteria: they were written in English, focused on U. S. schools, and addressed school climate or learning environment. The evidence consisted primarily of gray literature, including dissertations.

Collectively, the works indicated that therapy dogs positively influence multiple dimensions of school climate. Commonly reported outcomes included improvements in individual student well being, regulation, and engagement, enhanced school and classroom environments, and strengthened the school community. Program implementation varied widely, ranging from full time therapy dog accessible to all students to visits a few hours per week to meet with specific students. Regardless of implementation approach, all included works described positive impacts on schools, associated with the presence of therapy dogs.

3:35 - 3:45pm

190 OMANIMO: a framework for long-term and responsible inclusion of animals in nursing homes and residential special schools

Dr Johanna Ballé¹, Oriane Pivaudran², Romain Brasseau¹

¹Alliance Inter-Espèces, Paris, France. ²Humains & Compagnie, Paris, France

Abstract

The psychological isolation of dependent elderly people in nursing homes or children with multiple disabilities in residential special schools causes invisible suffering, which is often underestimated and mainly treated with medication. Today, more and more facility managers recognise the benefits of pets not only for residents, but also for care staff, families and volunteers. In France, the April 2024 Law on Ageing Well promotes the inclusion of animals by requiring nursing homes to accept residents' pets under certain conditions. However, a vast majority of nursing home managers are finding it difficult to implement the Act in practice.

We present Omanimo, a transdisciplinary project led by the French NGO Alliance Inter-Espèces, which aims to develop a framework facilitating the responsible and long-term integration of pets in retirement homes and medical-social establishments. Through stakeholder engagement, knowledge integration and systemic approaches, Omanimo will develop practical solutions, scenario pathways - for residents, animals, caregivers, etc.-, self-assessment tools and codes of ethics that will be freely available online for facility managers and caregivers.

With the involvement of relevant actors - facility managers, caregivers, animal welfare practitioners, residents and their families, volunteers - as well as scholars involved in human-animal relations, we will explore knowledge gaps, current practices, challenges, opportunities, and desires to include animals in ethical and sustainable ways. A cultural transformation, extending the presence of service animals to multi-species cohabitation in day-to-day life, while taking into account the needs of all parties involved, both human and non-human.

3:45 - 3:55pm

162 Bringing Personal Animals to Work in a Nursing Home: A Field Experience from the "3A Project"

Christel ELIES

SENEOS, Fouillooy, France. UPJV, Amiens, France

Abstract

The benefits of animal presence for older adults have been widely documented in the scientific literature, including meta-analyses.

The Louise Marais d'Arc nursing home (Bray-sur-Somme, France) has been involved in animal-assisted interventions for several years, implementing various approaches: a social support dog from the Handi'Chiens program (2006–2014), external animal-assisted activity providers, and a cat living in the Alzheimer's special care unit.

However, the nursing home has faced ongoing challenges related to staff turnover and reliance on external providers.

In response, a multidisciplinary working group (socio-educational manager, psychologist, nurse, and nursing assistants) developed an innovative internal initiative: the "3A Project" (Activities Associating Animals).

The model is based on a simple principle: during a dedicated workday, staff members bring their own animals (dogs or horse) to conduct structured activities with residents. Since 2023, 8 staff members have participated in this initiative with their animals, implementing a range of activities: individual visits, walks, tactile interaction sessions, and informal social engagement. Some residents have even taken part in adapted holidays accompanied by one of the project's dogs.

Observed outcomes suggest multiple benefits for residents: enhanced social interaction (among residents and with staff), improved communication, psychological well-being (reduced anxiety, emotional comfort, memory stimulation), multisensory stimulation—particularly among highly dependent residents—and increased motivation for care participation and mobility. Positive effects were also reported for staff members and, under appropriate conditions, for the animals.

However, the project has encountered organizational and ethical challenges, including managerial constraints, absenteeism, and signs of stress in some animals.

Drawing on this field experience, this presentation will propose practical recommendations to address the challenges encountered, alongside an ethical reflection on safeguarding animal welfare within care settings.

3:55 - 4:05pm

139 Cracking the Canine Communication Code: Motivation, Welfare and One Health in UK Schools

Dr Janet Oostendorp Godfrey, Prof. Helen E Lewis

Swansea University, Swansea, Wales, United Kingdom

Abstract

This lightning talk introduces the aims and emerging impact of the National School Dog Alliance (NSDA), founded in 2021, to address persistent gaps in teacher confidence and knowledge in canine-assisted education. Research highlights challenges in recognising canine body language, responding to stress signals, and providing appropriate enrichment in school settings (Lewis, Oostendorp Godfrey & Knight, 2023).

Using a research-informed knowledge-exchange approach, the NSDA combines practitioner research, curated case studies, and peer-led learning to support safe, ethical practice. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017,) the Alliance prioritises professional competence, autonomy and relatedness, aligning with the 'One Health' perspective that ascertains the interdependence of child wellbeing, canine welfare and wellbeing and school culture.

A flagship initiative, the UK School Dog of the Year Award, supported by the All-Party Parliamentary Dog Advisory Welfare Group (APDAWG) and the Pet Education Partnership (PEP,) functions as a practice-based exemplar rather than a performance metric. Discussion focuses on methodological and ethical challenges, including scaling welfare-informed practice, compliance-driven regulation, and balancing visibility, motivation and dog welfare in educational settings.

Posters with Wine & Cheese

4:30 - 6:00pm Wednesday, 1st July, 2026

Poster session for all poster presenters. All even numbered posters will present in the first 45 minutes of the session. All odd numbered posters will present in the final 45 minutes of the session.

Adjudication for the ISAZ Best Student Poster competition will occur during this session. Eligible students need to be present at their designated time to participate.

Be sure to also check out the digital posters from individuals who faced barriers to in person attendance!

Sponsored by:



1 Implicit Measure of the Relationship between Animals and Food: The Roles of Language and Diet

Dr. Valerie K Sims¹, Dr. Matthew G Chin¹, Gabriela Flores-Cruz¹, Max E.S. Coremans²

¹University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida, USA. ²University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

This study builds on work showing that people have implicit attitudes about the relationships between animals and food, and that these can be examined using a cognitive measure known as the lexical decision task. In this task, the participant is presented with two words and asked whether they are both real words. If the words are highly related, these reaction times are shorter than if the words are not related. Using this paradigm with novel stimuli can establish whether words are highly related for an individual. Research using English stimuli showed that being a vegetarian predicts response times to word pairs such as BEEF-ANIMAL and BEEF-FOOD. However, languages vary greatly in how they represent food related information. In English, BEEF is a euphemism for COW as a food, but some languages might use the word COW for both food and animal. To examine whether language affects how animal-related food words are stored, English, Dutch, Spanish, and French speakers completed a lexical decision task in their native language. All words were translated from English by bilinguals. A 4(Language) x 2(Category: Animal or Food) x 2(Order: Target First or Category First) x 4(Meat: Beef, Pork, Chicken, or Fish) ANOVA yielded a significant Language x Category x Meat Type interaction, $F(9,419)=2.66$, $p = .007$; partial $\eta^2=.06$. When Animal was the target category, there were larger reaction time differences as a function of language. Analyses of only English data showed using a Diet as a variable in the ANOVA in place of language yielded a significant Diet x Category x Order interaction, $F(4,134)=254$, $p = .04$; partial $\eta^2=.07$. Vegetarians, Vegans, and Pescatarians had reaction times showing closer relations between animals and food. Implicit measures may provide insight into how people cognitively represent the relationship between animals and food.

2 Do human and dog behaviors co-evolve under stress?: Cognitive Traits in Companion Dogs Predict Owner Mental Health During the Early Pandemic Period
Professor Sandra E Sephton¹, Professor Elizabeth D Cash², Professor David M Simpson¹

¹*Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, USA.* ²*University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA*

Abstract

Background

During the first months of the COVID 19 pandemic, university students faced abrupt transitions to online learning, social isolation, and elevated psychological distress. Companion dogs were central daily partners in this context. Yet, little is known about how specific dog cognitive traits relate to owner mental health under such stressful circumstances. Drawing on dyadic theory, we examined whether dog Communication, Empathy, and Cunning—assessed via the Dognition platform—predicted owner anxiety, depression, loneliness, and life satisfaction, and whether associations depended on owner academic functioning.

Methods

Dog-owning undergraduates ($n = 150$) completed validated self-report measures (GAD-7, PHQ-9, UCLA Loneliness Scale, SWLS) during the initial pre-vaccine lockdown. Dog cognition composites were standardized. GPA was log-transformed, standardized, and entered as a moderator. For each outcome, regression models included dog traits,

GPA, and trait $\times$ GPA interactions. Exploratory item-level regressions were conducted for the PHQ-9.

Results

Across all outcomes, dog cognition traits showed limited main effects. However, moderation by GPA was consistent. Students with lower GPA reported higher depressive symptoms when owning highly Cunning dogs, while higher GPA students showed the opposite pattern, including higher life satisfaction. Similar GPA-based divergence appeared for Communication (predicting depression) and dog Empathy (predicting anxiety). PHQ-9 item analyses indicated associations centered on core mood symptoms (hopelessness), with negligible links to somatic or suicidal items. Effect sizes were modest but coherent across outcomes.

Conclusions

During the uniquely stressful early COVID period, associations of dog cognition with student mental health were conditional. The same dog trait, particularly Cunning, was linked to higher depressive mood among academically vulnerable students and to greater life satisfaction among students with stronger academic functioning. Findings support a dyadic framework in which contextual stress and variation in human capacities moderate the associations between specific dog traits and owner well-being. This underscores the importance of exploring how specific dog traits interact with human characteristics, especially in stressful circumstances.

3 Self-Efficacy and Perceived Interdependence in Human–Dog Relationships Among People with Invisible Disabilities

Edwin Forbes, Reilly Johnston, Conor Barker, Catherine Reeve

Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada

Abstract

Introduction: Interdependence is an important relational quality for people with disabilities, as it can enhance quality of life by supporting social wellbeing, independence, and personal autonomy. While the close relationship between humans and dogs is well established, interdependence between people with invisible disabilities and their dogs remains underexplored. This study examined associations between dog- and owner-related variables and perceived interdependence in human–dog relationships among people with invisible disabilities.

Methodology: Participants were Canadian adults who self-identified as having an invisible disability ($N = 76$), recruited through social media and online forums.

Participants completed an online survey including validated measures of dog–owner relationship quality (MDORS), experiential avoidance (BEAQ), general self-efficacy (GSE), canine adaptability and resilience (LCARS), and a modified situational interdependence scale assessing interdependence with their dog. Multivariate multiple regression was used to examine the unique contributions of MDORS, BEAQ, GSE, and LCARS scores to multiple situational interdependence outcomes while accounting for correlations among outcomes.

Main Results: Multivariate multiple regression revealed a significant overall effect of general self-efficacy on situational interdependence, Pillai's Trace = .183, $F(5, 64) = 2.87$, $p = .021$, partial $\eta^2 = .18$. No significant multivariate effects were observed for relationship quality (MDORS), experiential avoidance (BEAQ), or canine

adaptability/resilience (LCARS). Follow-up univariate analyses indicated that higher self-efficacy was associated with greater perceived mutual dependence ($p < .001$) and stronger anticipated future interdependence with one's dog ($p = .011$). Dog adaptability and resilience showed a modest association with perceived conflict ($p = .049$), though this effect was not supported at the multivariate level.

Principal Conclusion: These findings suggest that perceptions of interdependence in human–dog relationships among people with invisible disabilities are shaped more by owners' self-efficacy than by relationship quality or dog characteristics alone. This highlights the importance of considering psychological resources alongside animal factors when supporting adaptive and sustainable human–animal partnerships.

4 Behavioural differences in domestic goats with and without human interaction

Akitsu Tozawa^{1,2}, Kasumi Ohyama¹, Yumi Yamanashi³

¹*Teikyo University of Science, Tokyo, Japan.* ²*Nippon Veterinary and Life Science University, Center for One Health, One Welfare, Tokyo, Japan.* ³*Kyoto City Zoo, Kyoto, Japan*

Abstract

Introduction. Many zoos offer animal interaction programmes for the purpose of social and emotional education in Japan. Domestic goats (*Capra hircus*) are particularly favoured as they are easy to handle and keep. During COVID-19 zoo closures severe interactions between goats and human. However, after the COVID-19 pandemic subsided, Interactions resumed. In this study, we investigated the behavioural differences in domestic goats in the presence of human interaction or not.

Methodology. Seven domestic goats were kept on the outdoor ground during 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. After the interaction programme resumed, sessions took place from 10:00 to 10:50 and from 14:00 to 15:30. Visitors to the grounds were able to interact directly with the goats, only touching softly. Maintenance behaviour was observed using instantaneous sampling in every three minutes from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm. Each expressed behaviour was compared using GLMMs.

Main Results. Proportion of the observation time of ingestive behaviour ($p < 0.05$), exploratory behaviour ($p < 0.05$) and moving ($p < 0.05$) during interaction suspension period were higher than after the resumption of interaction program. However, that of resting behaviour become higher at during interaction program.

Principal Conclusions. These findings suggest that activity levels decreased when domestic goats participating in the interaction program. High proportion of the observation time of resting behaviour indicate that goats were calm or their activity might be restricted due to the interaction program.

5 The Significance of Pets in the Emotional Worlds of Foster Children

Anthony Tudisco¹, Mary Elizabeth Rauktis²

¹*University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and Public Health, Pittsburgh, PA, USA.*

²*University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA, USA*

Abstract

Introduction While there is anecdotal evidence of the value of pets to children who have experienced parental maltreatment, little research has been conducted on how pets impact the emotional lives of children in foster care homes. Carr and Rocket (2017)

found that children experienced comfort from having pets and that pets potentially helped with attachment to foster parents. This poster reports the qualitative results of a mixed-methods study conducted with foster parents in two phases: first, a pilot phase with foster parents in North Carolina, followed by interviews with foster parents associated with a National Foster Parent Organization.

Method Fifteen qualitative interviews were conducted on the phone or internet (zoom) by the Principal Investigator and professionally transcribed and de-identified. Two individuals, one a PhD researcher, and the other a pre-medical and public health student repeatedly read the interviews and in a collaborative process, created a list of codes and subcodes that emerged. Qualitative software was then used to code and reveal themes. This poster presents the findings of how pets in the homes impacted children's emotional lives.

Findings All foster parents interviewed believed that the animals in the home are very important to the foster child, first as a bridge into the foster home and later as a source of comfort, protection and emotional growth. The two codes most closely associated were pets as objects of attachment and pets as companions and emotional support. The elements of attachment described fell into proximity seeking and emotional comfort.

Discussion Acknowledging animals as part of a foster child's emotional environment can lead to more holistic assessments of safety and well-being for children and pets when children who have experienced maltreatment enter into a foster home.

6 The Complementarity of Attachment and Caregiving: Development of the CACQ and Its Application in Dog Owners

MA Aneta Pełka

Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

Abstract

Introduction. Measuring caregiving for companion animals poses a significant challenge in human–animal relationship research. Despite the availability of related tools, there is a noticeable lack of validated instruments specifically designed to measure the caregiver's readiness to respond to the animal's attachment behaviours. This report presents the development and psychometric validation of the Companion Animal Caregiving Questionnaire (CACQ) and explores the functional link between attachment and caregiving systems.

Methods. The research was conducted in two stages. During the construction phase, a pool of 35 items was generated from a literature review and existing instruments, followed by expert-judge evaluation. In the validation phase (N = 233), the tool's factor structure was verified using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

Results. Statistical analyses confirmed a three-factor structure: Engagement, Satisfaction, and Overprotectiveness, accounting for 49.5% of the total variance. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (range: .668–.876). Crucially, the results revealed a clear complementarity between attachment and caregiving: anxious attachment was positively associated with overprotectiveness, whereas avoidant attachment was negatively associated with engagement and satisfaction.

Conclusions. The CACQ is a valid and reliable instrument for assessing caregiving patterns. The findings highlight the complementarity between attachment styles and

caregiving towards animals, offering significant implications for behavioural and therapeutic practices aimed at enhancing animal welfare and caregiver emotional competence.

7 Relationship between Dog Problem Behavior, Trainability, and Adolescent-Dog Relationship Quality

Ms. Seana Dowling-Guyer, Ms. Sophia Lew, Dr. Megan K. Mueller

Center for Animals & Public Policy, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, North Grafton, MA, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Adolescent-dog relationships may promote benefits to adolescents such as companionship and emotional regulation. However, relationship quality varies and may be influenced by factors such as the dog's behavior. Problem behaviors such as aggression may negatively affect relationship quality; even nuisance problem behaviors such as leash-pulling may have a cumulative negative impact. Yet limited research exists examining the relationship between dog behavior and adolescent-dog relationship quality.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional analysis of relationship quality measured by the Pet Dog Relationship Inventory (Affection, Nurturance, Companionship, Pets as Substitutes for People, Friction) completed by 221 adolescents and parent-reported dog behavior measured by the Canine Behavioral Assessment & Research Questionnaire. Aggression subscales were dichotomized as either absent/present whereas other problem behavior subscales (fear, leash-pulling) and trainability were categorized on a frequency scale (never/seldom, sometimes, usually/always).

Results: Overall, problem behavior scores were low. Mann-Whitney U tests revealed significantly lower scores for Affection ($U=2328$, $p=.032$), Nurturance ($U=2275$, $p=.024$), and Pets as Substitutes ($U=2342$, $p=.042$) when dog-directed aggression was reported. There were no significant differences by human-directed aggression. A Kruskal-Wallis test identified significantly higher Friction scores when chewing behavior sometimes occurred ($\chi^2(2)=9.82$, $p=.007$). Affection ($\chi^2(2)=7.68$, $p=.021$) and Companionship ($\chi^2(2)=6.41$, $p=.041$) scores were significantly lower when leash-pulling usually/always occurred. Relationship quality scores did not significantly differ by other nuisance behaviors (e.g., chasing, escaping). Companionship scores significantly increased when trainability behaviors occurred more frequently ($\chi^2(2)=6.96$, $p=.031$).

Conclusions: Relationship quality significantly differed by some types of behaviors. Adolescents living with dogs may be bothered by some dog behavior, which may negatively impact their relationship with their dog. Some problem behaviors could be due to human factors. Future research should examine directional relationships between dog behavior and adolescent-dog relationship quality to determine how best to optimize the relationship for both human and dog.

8 Relationships between dog caretaking, adolescent peer stress coping, and online support: A mixed methods study including parent perspectives

Linda Charmaraman¹, J. Maya Hernandez¹, Cecilia Miller¹, Gatsby Langston¹, Annie Chen¹, Tenzin Karma¹, Alyssa Gramajo¹, Beth Wilson^{1,2}, Megan K Mueller³

¹Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA, USA. ²University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN, USA. ³Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, Tufts University, Grafton, MA, USA

Abstract

Introduction. Although parents often guide adolescents' social development, parent perspectives on the intersections between pet caretaking and peer stress coping during adolescence remain under-investigated. The objective of this study was to include parent reporting to explore whether pet caretaking by adolescents was associated with peer stress coping and seeking online social-emotional support.

Methodology. Using a QUAN→QUAL approach, this mixed-methods study combined survey data from 514 US parent-adolescent dyads with Zoom interview data from a subsample of 41 parents. Multiple regression models assessed how parent perspectives of adolescent peer stress coping (RSQ-Peer stress; Connor-Smith et al., 2000) and social media use were associated with pet caretaking (PDRI; subscale Nurturance; Kerns et al., 2022); gender, age, and parent mental health were covariates. NVivo nodes were created through inductive and deductive processes as researchers refined primary and secondary codes identifying themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Results. Greater parental perception of adolescent's peer stress avoidance ($\beta=0.11$, $p=0.005$) and higher adolescent emotional support-seeking on social media ($\beta=.10$, $p=0.01$) were associated with greater dog nurturance. Interview data suggested dogs were nurtured physically (e.g., feeding, walking) and emotionally (e.g., calming anxiety, helping with sickness/injury). Many parents hoped dog caretaking would increase adolescents' physical and social activity. Over half of adolescents reported increased socialization with peers on social media through active engagement (e.g., commenting). Most adolescents who posted about their dog received social support. Several adolescents reported mutual support from caring for their dogs during times of peer stress; dogs provided adolescents with space to address their own social-emotional needs.

Conclusions. Our findings highlight the nuanced role that dog caretaking can play in adolescent peer relationship dynamics, both online and offline. These results can inform future peer coping interventions where pet caretaking is crucial in family life.

9 Young People's Experiences with Companion Animal Death during Emerging Adulthood: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Ms. Jillian Ludwig, Dr. Christine Y Tardif-Williams, Dr. Sandra L Bosacki, Dr. Dan Cui
Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Introduction: Few studies in the field of human-animal interactions explore how young people approaching adulthood (18-25 years), experience and navigate companion animal death (Kogan & Erdman, 2019). Emerging adulthood is often a stressful time for young people as they navigate many life changes (e.g., moving away from home), and often doing so alongside their companion animals who provide them with unconditional love and support (Charmaraman et al., 2020). Given this, companion animal bonds or losses would be especially salient during this transitional period. To address this

knowledge gap, we explored how young people navigate their grieving journey during the loss of their companion animal.

Methodology: We collected firsthand accounts of young people's personal stories of pet death and loss through qualitative methods. Six undergraduate students aged 18-25 engaged in semi-structured interviews sharing their experiences of companion animal death and grief. Questions focused around their memories of their relationships with their companion animal, their feelings about companion animal death and loss, and their thoughts about how companion animal death and grief have impacted their life.

Main Results/Findings: Interpretive phenomenological analysis of the interviews (Smith et al., 2022) revealed five main themes: 1) grief over a special companion animal relationship; 2) intrusive/negative grief feelings; 3) grieving while transitioning; 4) coping mechanisms; and 5) grief lessons/reflections.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field: Our findings position companion animal death, loss, and grief as a powerful emotional experience for many young people approaching adulthood as they navigate unique life stressors. Our findings inform the development of companion animal-themed grief supports for young people within educational and counselling contexts. Results can also help expand social-cognitive theory related to companion animal death and loss experiences among older youth entering the developmental period of emerging adulthood.

10 Race, Structural Inequality, and Human-Animal Relationships Among Black Americans: A qualitative study

Jada K Ford¹, Seana Dowling-Guyer², Dr. Megan Mueller², Dr. Shelby E McDonald¹

¹Colorado State University, School of Social Work, Fort Collins, CO, USA. ²Tufts University, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, North Grafton, MA, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Research in human–animal interaction has largely overlooked how race and structural inequality shape relationships with animals. Much of the literature assumes universal experiences of the human–animal bond, despite evidence of racialized inequality in access to animals, animal-related spaces, and animal care services. For Black Americans, relationships with animals exist within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. This qualitative study examines how Black Americans describe their relationships with animals and their experiences with animal-related institutions.

Methodology: Thirty-one Black or African American adults residing in the United States participated in semi-structured interviews conducted via videoconference. Participants were recruited through social media and community-led animal welfare organizations. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis informed by constructivist grounded theory.

Main results/findings: Five interrelated themes emerged: (1) empathy rooted in shared oppression, (2) social and emotional benefits of pet-keeping, (3) positive intergenerational narratives, (4) pet companionship as racialized privilege, and (5) racism in animal welfare and advocacy. Together, participants' quotes showed relationships with animals are both meaningful and structurally constrained. Participants described animals as sources of safety and emotional regulation in environments shaped by racism, shared family stories that reframed animals as protectors rather than

instruments of oppression, and described empathy for stigmatized breeds as solidarity within Black communities. Yet participants described these relationships as bounded by structural barriers, including housing policies, breed restrictions, economic barriers, and surveillance. Participants further identified animal welfare organizations as embedded in white supremacy, characterizing them as unwelcoming and resistant to conversations about race and power.

Principle conclusion and implications of the field: Racialized social structures shape access to and meanings of human-animal relationships among Black Americans. Our findings challenge dominant narratives of the human–animal bond and underscore anthrozoology’s need for historically and culturally grounded approaches addressing structural barriers to access, inclusion, and care.

11 How do Horses Perceive Equine-Assisted Intervention: a detailed behavioural comparison between EAI and riding sessions

Miss Lilas Comar, Dr Marine Grandgeorge, Miss Louise Dornic, Miss Juliette Menier, Dr Séverine Henry, Dr Céline Rochais

University Rennes, Rennes, France

Abstract

Introduction:

Equine-assisted intervention (EAI) continues to gain popularity for their therapeutic benefits to human participants, yet the welfare of the horses involved remains a critical concern. This study aims to evaluate the impact of different works on the expression of positive and negative emotions in equines during equine assisted intervention sessions, compared to classic riding school (RS) sessions.

Methodology:

We conducted detailed behavioural observations of 16 horses (3 females, 13 geldings; mean age: 18.4 ± 1.3 years; 70% ponies) from three riding schools. EAI sessions involved children with multiple disabilities, primarily autism spectrum disorders, whereas RS sessions involved neurotypical beginner children. At each riding school, four sessions (EAI and RS) were videorecorded. Horses’ gaits, postures, and behaviours, as well as the behaviour of children, educators and riding instructors, were analysed using standardised sampling methods. Generalised linear mixed models were applied using R software (significance threshold: $p < 0.05$).

Main results:

During EAI sessions, horses spent most of their time standing still or walking, whereas RS sessions involved higher physical activity, including more trotting and cantering (GLMM, $p < 0.05$). Behavioural and postural indicators associated with negative emotional states were observed in both contexts. However, during EAI sessions, horses displayed more behaviours associated with agitation and frustration than during RS sessions (GLMM, $P < 0.001$). These behaviours were closely related to actions by children and humans on foot, who more frequently exhibited behaviours likely to cause discomfort in horses (e.g., pulling on the reins, bouncing in the saddle).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

These findings emphasise the importance of increased attention to horses’ behavioural and postural signals in response to actions by beneficiaries (here, children) and accompanying humans. The detailed behavioural repertoire elaborated in this study

provides practical tools for EAI professionals. Improving recognition of equine behavioural signals could help to take into account equids' perspectives, and thus enhance equids welfare and human-equid relationship.

12 Examining longitudinal associations between pet ownership and behavioral problems among young adolescents

Dr. Angela Matijczak, Dr. Ai Bo

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Studies investigating the impact of pet ownership on child wellbeing have been mixed; some studies find worse mental health among pet-owning youth while other studies find no significant associations. Notably, many studies in this area have been limited by small sample sizes and cross-sectional designs. This study explores longitudinal associations between pet ownership and behavioral problems among a nationally representative sample of U.S. early adolescents.

Methodology: We used waves 1-5 (2017-2022) of the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) dataset 6.1 ($N=10,858$ child-caregiver dyads, M_{age} wave 3=12.9 years; 47.5% female). Measures included the Brief Problem Monitor (BPM) scale (waves 2-5) and pet ownership (waves 3-4) categorized by species owned (no pet, dog/cat, other pet). We conducted structural equation modeling using Mplus, controlling for key demographic variables.

Findings: Model fits were adequate. Autoregressive paths for pet ownership ($B=0.72$, $SE=0.01$) and BPM were significant ($B=0.89$, $SE=0.01$), indicating substantial stability across waves. Contemporaneous paths at waves 3 and 4 from pet ownership to BPM were mostly significant but the direction differed by pet type. Adolescents with higher behavioral problems are more likely to live in households with dogs or cats (W3: $B=0.32$, $SE=0.10$; W4: $B=0.51$, $SE=0.18$), while those with lower behavioral problems are more likely to live in households with other pets (W3: $B=-0.38$, $SE=0.19$; W4: $B=-0.40$, $SE=0.27$). Cross-lagged paths in either direction were not significant, suggesting that pet ownership did not predict subsequent changes in behavioral problems, nor vice versa.

Principal conclusions and implications: The complex relationship between pet ownership and youth behavioral problems varies based on pet species. Practitioners should avoid using a one-size-fits-all approach when working with pet-owning youth. Although pet ownership did not predict future behavioral problems, the positive association with dog/cat ownership highlights the need for further longitudinal and qualitative research to better understand species-specific patterns.

13 Employees' Perceptions of Office Dogs: Opportunities, Barriers, and Organizational Practices in the Netherlands

DVM Sandra C Haven-Pross^{1,2}, Lyke de Boer¹, Ir Anna L Jens¹, Dr Kathalijne Visser¹

¹Aeres University of Applied Sciences, Dronten, Netherlands. ²Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Abstract

Introduction: Dogs are popular pets in the Netherlands, with 16% of households owning one. As dogs are increasingly seen as family members and more than 70% of Dutch

adults are employed, questions have arisen about dogs in the workplace. Research highlights both positive and negative effects of dogs at work, emphasizing the need for effective policies. This study explores Dutch employees' experiences, focusing on benefits, risks, policies, and workplace arrangements needed to accommodate dogs. Methodology: A survey was conducted from October to mid-November 2025, adapted from Delanoeije (2025). It covered characteristics of the employee and the dog, workplace conditions, and experiences with dogs in the workplace. Data from 436 Dutch employees (315 dog owners, 121 non-dog owners) were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Main results: 206 respondents reported having dogs allowed in the workplace. Of 128 employees interested in bringing their dogs to work, key motivations included social interactions (n=93), balancing work and dog care (n=89), and preventing dogs from being left alone (n=66). Fewer cited stress reduction (n = 51) or increased productivity (n = 49). Most respondents had no dog allergy (n = 373) or fear of dogs (n = 377). Formal policies were rare; informal agreements prevailed, especially regarding dog-free zones and limits. Facilities for dogs existed, but hygiene and risk management provisions varied.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: Preliminary findings suggest that dogs in the workplace are valued for social and supportive roles and enhancing work–life balance. However, health and organizational factors remain important considerations, underscoring the need for clear policies to protect both employees and dogs. The study's sample may be biased, limiting generalizability. Still, using the same measurement instrument as in Belgium strengthens the practical value of these results and enables cross-cultural comparison in the future.

14 Where Do Dog Owners Seek Training Advice? Predicting Trust in Information Sources from Ownership Attitudes and Experience

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Abstract

Introduction

The internet has expanded access to dog training and behaviour advice, but little is known about how owners' attitudes and experience influence their choice of information sources. This study examined whether trust in different information sources could be predicted from owners' training attitudes and experience.

Methodology

A total of 823 UK dog owners completed an online survey rating trust in veterinarians, social media groups, animal welfare organisation websites, dog training books, AI tools, and dog training television programmes (0 = no trust, 100 = high trust). They also reported agreement with statements reflecting training attitudes (e.g., confidence in training, endorsement of physical correction), ownership experience (e.g., attendance at training classes, number of dogs owned) and demographics (age). Multiple linear regressions examined whether attitudes and experience predict trust in each source.

Main Findings

Owners' attitudes and experience predicted trust in various sources. Models explained moderate variance for animal welfare websites ($R^2 = .23$), veterinarians ($R^2 = .18$), and television programmes ($R^2 = .14$), but little variance for AI tools, training books, or social media. Endorsement of non-physical training approaches and no prior attendance at formal training classes were associated with higher trust in animal welfare organisation websites, veterinarians, and dog training television programmes. Endorsing breed-specific training and viewing training as necessary only when a problem occurs predicted greater trust in dog training television programmes. Lower confidence in training dogs predicted higher trust in both veterinarians and animal welfare organisations.

Principal Conclusions

Trust in training and behaviour information reflects owners' beliefs, confidence, and experience. While causality cannot be inferred, owners appear to seek sources aligned with their views, with less confident owners appearing to rely more on external authorities. Tailoring training messages to owner beliefs and using sources they already trust may improve uptake of effective, humane training guidance.

15 Neural signature of human–dog interactions: EEG correlates from comparisons with plant and replica dog in a within-subject, cross-over randomized trial

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Abstract

Background: Human–dog interactions (HDIs) are widely associated with emotional and physiological benefits, yet their neural underpinnings remain poorly understood. This study investigated cortical oscillatory dynamics during HDI compared to two control conditions: interacting with a plant and a realistic dog replica.

Methods: In a within-subject, cross-over randomized design, 29 healthy adults participated in three EEG sessions, each including all conditions. EEG power spectral density was analyzed across theta (4-8 Hz), alpha (8-13 Hz, including slow and fast sub-bands), and beta (13-30 Hz, including low and mid sub-bands) frequencies from ten electrodes covering prefrontal, frontal, central, parietal, and occipital regions.

Results: Our observations revealed distinct neural signatures for HDI. Compared to plant and replica conditions, dog interaction was characterized by reduced alpha power, particularly in occipital ($Mdiff = -1.24$, $p = 0.001$) and parietal ($Mdiff = -1.09$, $p = 0.002$) sites, suggesting increased attentional engagement. Beta power was enhanced in frontal ($Mdiff = 0.98$, $p = 0.011$) and central ($Mdiff = 1.09$, $p = 0.004$) electrodes during dog interaction, reflecting heightened cognitive processing and sensorimotor readiness. Theta activity showed regional differences, with lower occipital theta power during HDI ($Mdiff = -1.31$, $p > 0.001$) relative to controls, indicative of externally oriented attention.

Conclusion: These findings provide novel electrophysiological evidence that interacting with a real dog elicits unique oscillatory patterns distinct from those observed with non-sentient - living or non-living - controls. The results highlight the social and emotional salience of animals and advance understanding of the neurocognitive mechanisms

underlying human–animal interactions, with implications for applied contexts such as animal-assisted treatments.

16 Working Mechanisms of School Dog Interventions in Academic Settings: A Systematic Review and Biopsychosocial Framework

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Abstract

Introduction:

A common approach to Animal Assisted Education (AAE) integrates school dogs into academic settings to assist students with additional support needs. While research indicates that school dogs promote positive effects on children's development, working mechanisms underlying these effects remain unclear. The first aim of this systematic review was to synthesize the working mechanisms of school dogs that explain how and why such interventions are effective at supporting students with various support needs. We then used this synthesis to create a conceptual framework that combines these mechanisms into a biopsychosocial network model.

Methodology:

Following PRISMA guidelines, 68 papers were included that assessed the impact of school dogs on children's development in academic settings. Data was extracted from 68 empirical papers (including grey literature) to identify what support needs were targeted, methods of intervention, and potential mechanisms of change. We synthesized the data regarding intervention methods and context, safety and welfare considerations, and effects of interventions to support a comprehensive network model of working mechanisms. Additionally, we categorized support needs and outcomes by developmental domain to assess the impact of school dog interventions.

Findings:

Overall, school dog interventions display supportive effects when targeting developmental domains such as academic, physiological, social, emotional/ behavioral, and overall sense of wellbeing. Central themes that arose as mechanisms of change include social facilitation, attunement, intrinsic motivation, and reduction of physiological stress markers. All mechanisms identified appear to work together through various networks to support the overall development and wellbeing of the child.

Implications:

Our integration of mechanisms into a biopsychosocial network model supports future AAE research with school dogs by providing greater clarity and comprehension of school dog effects, while simultaneously encouraging implementation of mechanisms that may enhance current and future school dog interventions.

17 Touching a dog dampens negative affect in the human brain

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Abstract

Introduction: Although it is well established that human–animal interactions can reduce negative affect and stress in humans, the underlying mechanisms remain unclear. Thus, the present study pursued a possible role for touch.

Methodology: Participants completed four experimental blocks in which they viewed negative and neutral images and rated image valence. In two blocks, they were accompanied by a dog and instructed to stroke the dog in one of these blocks. In the other two blocks, the dog was replaced by a plush toy. Neural and autonomic responses were assessed using EEG and ECG.

Results: As expected, negative images were rated more negatively [$\beta = -22.7$, $SE = 1.28$, $t(40) = -17.67$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.76$] and elicited larger LPP amplitudes in the EEG [$\beta = 4.33$, $SE = 0.84$, $t(44) = 5.18$, $p < .001$, $d = .77$] when compared with neutral images. Importantly, this LPP effect, but not the subjective ratings ($ps > .46$), was attenuated by physical contact with the dog [$\beta = 4.47$, $SE = 0.97$, $t(44) = 4.63$, $p < .001$, $d = .68$], but not with the plush toy ($p = .25$). In addition, heart rate was elevated during touch blocks when compared with no-touch blocks in both the dog [$\beta = 1.16$, $SE = 0.42$, $t(41) = 2.76$, $p = .009$, $d = .43$] and toy condition [$\beta = 2.3$, $SE = 0.502$, $t(41) = 4.59$, $p < .001$, $d = .71$], possibly due to heightened physical activity.

Conclusion: Together, these findings indicate that, while subjective feelings remain unchanged, stroking a dog reduces neural indices of negative affect and thus represents a relevant pathway through which human–animal interactions benefit humans.

18 A controlled study of the impact of on-campus canine-led human-animal intervention for undergraduate psychological well-being.

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Abstract

Introduction. Studies show that canine-led human-animal interventions (CHAI) at universities are popular and positive for student psychological well-being. With a limited number of controlled studies here this study examines the efficacy of attending a CHAI for improving student mood and decreasing academic burnout, compared to a control condition.

Methodology. The mood, well-being, and academic burnout scores of 55 undergraduate students were assessed before and after participating in CHAI and control conditions. Participants experienced both conditions with the order of conditions randomly counterbalanced. The control condition consisted of sitting quietly in a room of other students for 10 minutes. The CHAI condition involved visiting 6 dogs and their handlers for as long as they liked during a free, drop-in, hour-long on-campus CHAI event. Before, between, and after conditions students completed the Brief Mood Introspection Scale (BMIS) and the World Health Organization well-being index (WHO), and the School Burnout Inventory (SBI).

Main Results. A mixed model ANOVA with order of condition (CHAI-first, control-first) as the between subjects factor and Time as the within subjects factor showed a consistent main effect of Time across measures that generally shows that student sense of overall well-being improved regardless of condition. However, interaction effects were found specific to the WHO ($p < .001$) and most of the BMIS subscales ($p = .008-.001$). Post hoc

analyses show that order matters: students who experienced the control condition first followed by the CHAI condition experienced the biggest gains to well-being and mood. Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. This controlled study consolidates findings that CHAI events can temporarily improve student mood and well-being compared to control conditions. The impact of order of condition raises questions about the value of better understanding order-effects and what this might mean for CHAI student engagement best-practices.

19 Developing a Model of Human-Pet Interaction in Urban India

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Abstract

Introduction: Indian society has always maintained a pragmatic coexistence with animals and the long standing moral and cultural norms promote non exclusion, tolerance and acceptance. These practices differ from the global north where human animal interactions are well regulated. Hence, pet owners in India are likely to have a different framework of responsibility, space and boundaries are definitions. Our study aims to develop a framework to understand Indian urban pet owners and pet interactions.

Methodology: A cross-sectional survey design was employed. Data from 600 pet parents from major Indian cities was obtained by convenience and snowball sampling. An initial pool of 50 items was developed to assess beliefs, attitudes and behaviors related to caregiving and prosocial practices. All items were rated on a 4-point forced response scale. A final sample of 538 participants was used. First, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on 269 participants identified the underlying latent structure. Items with low factor loadings, cross-loadings, or poor conceptual alignment were eliminated. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on remaining 269 participants. Model fit was evaluated using commonly reported goodness-of-fit indices.

Results: The EFA analysis resulted in a development of a 23-item scale that resolved into 5 factors, that explained 42% of the variance. The reliability was 0.81. The CFA results supported a five-factor measurement model that had the best overall fit relative to alternative solutions [CFI = 0.871, RMSEA = 0.059, SRMR = 0.058]. The five factors were named as Affective Attachment, Pro-social Engagement, Parenting, Space Negotiation and Objective Engagement.

Conclusions and Implications: This study provides the first validated model quantifying human-companion animal bonds in India. This model also highlights a unique factor related to spatial relations in human-pet interactions that can explain the pragmatic landscape of human-animal interaction in Indian society and provide insight to designing pet friendly spaces.

20 Reported post-adoption behaviour in dogs: The role of sex, age, and size

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Abstract

Introduction: Recording the prevalence of potentially undesirable behaviours reported in adopted dogs is important to inform steps to smooth the early transition period and reduce the risk of re-relinquishment. Here, we assess how dog demographics relate to the number of these behaviours reported post-adoption. Findings can advise rescue centres managing adopter expectations.

Methods: The Post Adoption Welfare Study (PAWS), operated by Dogs Trust, asks adopters to complete surveys at multiple timepoints post-adoption. Behaviour data were extracted from the 3-week survey to focus on the initial transition and the first instance of adopters discussing behaviour. 77.7% of adopters who received the 3-week survey, completed it. After data exclusions and independence checks, the final sample size was 11,425. Adopters reported which of 25 listed potentially undesirable behaviours they had observed. Associations between the number of behaviours reported and dog age, size, and sex, were analysed using a zero-inflated negative binomial model, including an age x size interaction.

Results: Adopters reported 0 – 25 (median = 6) potentially undesirable behaviours. Zero inflation was low with no significant model effects. Male dogs were reported to show higher numbers of behaviours than female dogs (IRR: 1.08, $p < 0.0001$). Size did not have a significant effect. Older dogs were reported to show fewer reported behaviours, with each month increase in age associated with a 0.49% lower expected number of behaviours ($p < 0.0001$). For small dogs, this decline with age was less steep than for large dogs (slope contrast: -0.009, Tukey-adjusted $p = 0.0015$) and medium dogs (contrast: -0.01, $p < 0.0001$).

Conclusions: These findings may help us to understand patterns in behaviours reported in dogs in the early settling period post-adoption, and this may help to manage adopter expectations, improve support services and prevent re-relinquishment. Further investigation is needed to explore the type and severity of behaviours reported.

21 Beyond Companions: Stakeholder Views on Collaborating with Assistance Dogs in PTSD Treatment

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Abstract

Introduction: Assistance dogs support individuals with disabilities (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Their work has expanded to mental health, helping with symptom management like interrupting nightmares or grounding during distress (Kiiroja et al., 2025). Although promising, this field has limited evidence and substantial uncertainty. Understanding stakeholder needs can improve implementation and broaden understanding of the work of psychiatric assistance dogs and potential limitations.

Methodology: A mixed-methods approach employing grounded theory and data collection from three participant groups (dog trainers, individuals affected by PTSD, and psychologists/psychotherapists, with 20 participants per group) was used. Interviews with trigger questions were conducted, complemented by standardized questionnaires (FERUS, MDORS, PAS, WHOQOL, AES, SWE, SEK-27). Quantitative analyses included sociodemographic data analysis, mean-difference testing, and regression

analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed using MAXQDA with a concurrent coding system, focusing on code frequencies, interpretative analysis within the text, and code-relation analysis.

Results: Preliminary qualitative analyses of code frequencies indicate the emergence of several overarching themes across the interviews. Five principal categories can be delineated: 1. challenges experienced by assistance dog recipients, 2. perceived support and relief attributed to assistance dogs, 3. prerequisites for owning and sustaining an assistance dog, 4. challenges faced by dog trainers, and 5. the role of assistance dogs within therapeutic contexts.

Significant group differences were found in attitudes toward working dogs ($F(2,50)=4.06$, $p=.023$, $\eta^2=.14$) and self-management skills ($F(2,50)=7.64$, $p=.001$, $\eta^2=.23$). Individuals affected by PTSD reported more positive attitudes toward working dogs, whereas professionals and dog trainers reported higher self-management skills.

Conclusions and Implications for the field: The findings highlight key stakeholder needs and identify areas where targeted support could facilitate the integration of assistance dogs in PTSD contexts and treatment. As such, they provide an important foundational basis for further research in the field.

22 Measuring personality and animal treatment attitudes using the PET scale

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Abstract

Introduction. Previous research has investigated the association between personality traits and different measures of animal abuse. These studies use explicit measures of animal abuse; however, there is some grey area where some may argue whether certain acts should be considered abuse, or could escalate later on in one's life to abuse. To investigate this grey area, we designed the Permissiveness of Ethical Treatment (PET) scale to measure one's permissiveness of animal treatment, focusing on behaviors that are controversial but often legal practices in the US. We hypothesized that agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism would be significant predictors of PET scores.

Methodology. A total of 303 participants completed a survey that consisted of the mini-IPIP and the PET scale. A stepwise multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data. The five dimensions of the mini-IPIP, age, and sex were used as independent variables, and scores from the PET scale as the dependent variable.

Main Results. The final regression model, consisting of eight predictors, yielded a significant model ($F(8, 294) = 4.02$, $p < .001$), with significant predictors from coefficients for agreeableness ($b = -2.806$, $t(295) = -2.23$, $p = .027$), sex ($b = 19.344$, $t(295) = 2.89$, $p = .004$), and age ($b = -2.110$, $t(295) = -2.04$, $p = .043$); and a significant interaction between agreeableness and age ($b = 0.122$, $t(295) = 1.98$, $p = .048$), with a small effect size ($R^2 = .09$, adjusted $R^2 = .07$). Coefficients for extraversion and openness, both as main effects and as interactions with sex were not significant.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field. Our results are partially consistent with previous findings on personality and animal abuse. The PET scale could be a useful tool for detecting abusive attitudes, although further research is needed to validate its reliability.

23 Four-Pawed Support: A multidisciplinary exploratory study of judicial assistance dogs

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, judicial assistance dogs have accompanied victims during criminal proceedings, primarily children interviewed in cases involving sexual offences. To date, no study has jointly examined the child, the interviewer, and the dog using an integrated human and animal ethology approach. This innovative project therefore proposes an integrated analysis of these three dimensions, following the concept of One Welfare.

Five forensic interviews with children (M = 14 years, SD = 2,74), related to ongoing cases, were observed at two sites. Interviewers' anxiety levels (N = 3) were assessed before and after the interviews using the STAI-Y. Children's non-verbal behaviours (N = 5; disengagement, anxiety, interactions) and dogs' behaviours (N = 2; stress, posture, interactions) were analysed across four phases of the NICHD protocol: pre-disclosure (introduction, rapport building, episodic memory), disclosure (investigation of the incidents), break (interviewer only leaving the room), and closing.

Preliminary results indicate an increase in both the duration and frequency of children's behaviours directed towards the dog during the break (χ^2_3 , $p < 0.05$), together with a non-significant decrease in anxious behaviours. The child's spatial positioning within the room influenced the frequency of contact with the dog. Dogs showed increased locomotor activity (χ^2_3 , $p < 0.01$) and more human-directed interactions (χ^2_3 , $p = 0.059$) during the break. No significant change in interviewers' anxiety levels was observed before versus after the interviews.

The break appears to be a key phase in the child-dog relationship and their mutual well-being. These findings also highlight the dog's transitional role, as well as the importance of optimising practices and more fully integrating the dog into the protocol. Increasing the sample size will allow these dynamics to be further clarified and will help address issues related to animal welfare and the dog's involvement in child-dog interactions.

24 From Shape to Sound: Head Morphology and Emotional Expression in Dog Vocalisations

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Abstract

Introduction. Emotions support adaptive behaviour by promoting reward-seeking and danger-avoidance, thereby enhancing survival. They also influence behaviour, including vocalizations, which can signal both emotional states and individual traits. Although morphology is known to shape vocal output, the combined effects of emotional state and physical traits on acoustic structure remain poorly understood. Owing to their

marked morphological diversity, dogs provide an excellent model for studying this interaction, particularly considering welfare concerns surrounding brachycephalic breeds.

Methodology. We investigated how vocalization types vary across emotional contexts and how head morphology affects their acoustic properties. Thirty-nine dogs with different head shapes were tested in five contexts: neutral exploration, positive play and petting, separation (distress), and exposure to a threatening stranger (agonistic).

Main results. We analysed vocal type, call duration, pitch, and noisiness. While all vocal types occurred across contexts, clear patterns emerged: whines and whistle whines were most frequent in distress, barks and growls in agonistic situations, and grunts in positive contexts. Acoustic features were significantly influenced by emotional context, head shape, and body weight. Brachycephalic dogs produced higher-pitched and noisier calls, except for whistle whines, which were less noisy.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. Overall, these findings indicate that both emotion and morphology shape canine vocal signals, highlighting their relevance for welfare assessment.

25 Dog training and behaviour professionals' self-representation in a polarised industry

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Abstract

Background: The dog training and behaviour industry is polarised, with conflict arising around the use of only reward-based methods versus the inclusion of aversion-based methods. This conflict can decrease communication and collaboration within the industry and increase difficulty for dog owners sourcing training/behaviour support. Understanding how professionals perceive and communicate their training approaches may provide insight into how to reduce polarisation.

Methodology: In 2023 Dogs Trust ran a survey with self-defined dog training and behaviour professionals. We conducted a reflexive thematic analysis using free-text responses from 244 participants to two questionnaire items: 'How would you describe your training methods to a potential client?' and 'How would you describe the dog-human relationship that you want to help your clients achieve?'. Our aim was to explore how dog training and/or behaviour professionals perceive and communicate their approaches to training to potential clients.

Results: We constructed four themes: (1) 'Professional's construction of identity', focused on how professionals define themselves in relation to the existing industry; (2) 'Who gets priority? Bond-centric vs. Dog-centric vs. Human-centric', focused on where priority is placed within the dog-human relationship; (3) 'Freedom through choice vs. freedom through control', centred around the role of choice in relation to enhancing dog welfare, and the concept of dogs being able to make 'correct' choices; and (4) 'Shared foundational values', focused on the common ground across the industry. During analysis, we noted that a subtheme around professionals opposing applying labels to their own methods appeared to be gendered.

Discussion: The shared values held by professionals using contrasting training methods further emphasizes fruitful ground for cross-cutting discussion to help reduce polarisation and increase collaboration in the industry. Increasing dogs' freedom (e.g., through enabling off-leash walks) was a major driver for use of potentially aversive methods or tools, highlighting potential areas for discussion regarding alternatives.

26 Considerations in Optimizing Therapy Dog-Handler Team Welfare in the Context of Canine Assisted Interventions

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Abstract

Introduction. Canine-assisted interventions (CAIs) have been widely adopted as a well-being resource in a variety of settings. Existing literature has predominately focused on canine stress, largely overlooking the welfare of the therapy dog-handler *team* in CAIs. Understanding *team* welfare is critical because when the welfare of both therapy dogs and their handlers is optimized, their ability to support human well-being is optimized. Additionally, optimizing therapy dog-handler *team* welfare ensures continued participation in program offerings and, the sustainability and effectiveness of CAIs.

Methodology. Drawing on our collaborative research applying CAIs with university students, we outline a welfare-centered framework for CAIs highlighting the reciprocal relationship between therapy dogs and their handlers. Formulated through an extensive review and synthesis of literature from an array of interdisciplinary fields, we share research findings, theoretical models, and propose best practices for optimizing therapy dog-handler *team* welfare within the context of CAIs across varied settings and clients.

Main results/findings. Insights from our research suggest that canine and handler welfare are interdependent and impacted by factors such as program design, assessment practices and training quality, and organizational support. Our framework highlights crucial therapy dog and handler welfare indicators and key factors compromising (e.g., overcrowding, canine or handler stress) and enhancing (e.g., canine consent, client education) therapy dog-handler *team* welfare. A recommendation arising from our framework is that CAIs that optimize both therapy dog and handler welfare are better positioned to support the well-being of the human participants they are serving.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field. Our proposed framework supports the conclusion that a reciprocal model that prioritizes both handler and canine welfare is paramount for ethical practice and ideally suited to supporting human well-being. Discussion focuses on the implications of these findings for researchers, practitioners, therapy dog handlers, and students entering the field of human-animal interactions.

27 The impact of human and dog presence on behavioural time budgets of feral rabbits in an urban environment

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Abstract

Introduction. Across British Columbia (BC), the abandonment and escape of intact pet rabbits have led to the establishment of expanding feral populations in urban environments, raising welfare concerns for both the rabbits and the surrounding ecosystem. However, little is known about the general behaviour of feral rabbits in these settings or how their behaviour changes in response to humans, dogs, and conspecifics. This study aimed to improve understanding of feral rabbit social behaviour under naturalistic, free-roaming colony conditions. We hypothesized that feral rabbits would allocate most of their time to foraging, and that interactions with humans, dogs, and conspecifics would alter this allocation.

Methodology. We conducted an observational study of rabbits living in free-roaming colonies at Jericho Beach Park (BC; Canada). Rabbit behaviour was assessed live using scan sampling with an established behavioural ethogram. The data were analysed using chi-square tests of independence.

Main Results. Feral rabbits spent most of their time (65%) foraging. Foraging increased when in proximity to other rabbits (55% to 91%, $p < .001$). Resting behaviour decreased in the presence of humans (2% to 1%, $p = .002$), and foraging decreased (68% to 33%, $p < .001$) and fleeing increased (3% to 14%, $p < .001$) in the presence of dogs.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. Feral rabbits spent more time foraging in groups compared to when alone. Human and dog presence altered their behaviour by decreasing foraging and increasing vigilance. Despite limitations such as differences in weather and observer bias, these findings provide insight into urban feral rabbit behaviour, anthropogenic influences, and suggest the importance of future research in comparing feral and captive rabbit behaviour.

28 Evaluation of the Human-Dog Bond Using the MDORS-M Scale Among University Students in Santiago, Chile

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Abstract

Introduction: The bond between human and dog in the Global South has been vastly unexplored: a bond that has been related to appropriate responsible tenure of companion animals. This study aimed to evaluate the human-dog bond in university students at Universidad de Las Américas, Santiago, using the Mexican version of the Monash Dog-Owner Relationship Scale (MDORS-M) characterizing the bond across four dimensions (active engagement, affective engagement, owner's emotional resilience, and perceived cost) and examine associations with sociodemographic and cohabitation variables.

Methodology: A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed with 312 dog-owning students completing a self-administered digital questionnaire containing the 28 item MDORS-M and demographic questions. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and group comparisons (ANOVA) in Jamovi.

Main results/findings: Participants reported high affective engagement (82.0% $\pm$ 0.16%) and emotional resilience (92% $\pm$ 0.11), moderate active engagement (64.0% $\pm$ 0.17) and moderate perceived cost (56.0% $\pm$ 0.17%). Women scored significantly higher than men in affective engagement ($p < 0.05$), active engagement ($p < 0.05$), and emotional

resilience ($p < 0.05$). Higher bond scores were also associated with cohabitation ($p < 0.05$), sleeping in the same room ($p < 0.05$) and the dog living indoors ($p < 0.05$). Perceived cost did not differ significantly across groups.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: The findings indicate a strong, emotionally centred human-dog bond among Chilean university students, particularly enhanced by close cohabitation and influenced by gender socialization patterns. This study provides the first application of the MDORS-M in Chile, offering culturally relevant evidence for anthrozoology in Latin America. Results support integrating human-dog bond awareness into student welfare programs and responsible pet ownership education. Further longitudinal and mixed-methods research is recommended to explore causal pathways and behavioral correlates of the bond.

29 The use of caretaker-assisted behavior trials to assess consistent individual variation in domestic cat (*Felis catus*) play behavior

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Abstract

Cat caretakers are encouraged to play with their cats to promote natural behaviors and strengthen the human-animal bond. However, little is known about how individual cats respond to a standardized method of caretaker-led object play. In this exploratory study, we used a citizen science approach to quantify individual cat responses to standardized play and related those responses to their demographics and background. We recruited adult cat caretakers residing in the United States via social media using convenience and snowball sampling. Study participants ($N=121$) completed a quantitative online questionnaire about their cats' demographics, cat management, hunting history, and play behavior in the home. Participants were then mailed a wand toy, and video recorded three, 2-minute videos of themselves, at least 12 hours apart, moving the toy in a figure-8 motion in front of their cat. We collected the cats' behavioral data in response to the toy, and used linear regression models to assess the relationships between survey variables and the cats' interest in the toy. Participating cats were mainly domestic breed (73.7%), with a mean of 5.1 years old. About half (50.4%) of the cats were being provided outdoor access (free-roaming or controlled), and 45.0% were reported to have hunted wild animals in the past. The majority of cats were rated by their caretakers as somewhat playful (54.1%), and were currently played with at least once a day (69.7%). Contrary to our predictions, neither the cats' outdoor status, hunting history, frequency of normal play, nor rated playfulness predicted their level of interest in the toy. However, we found significant age and trial effects, and immense individual variation, with individual cat identity predicting the majority of the variance in our data ($p < 0.001$). Our study highlights the importance of inter-cat differences in behavior, and has implications for the role of caretakers in cat behavior research, cat management, and cat-human relationships.

30 Formant Analysis of Human-Speech-Like Vocalizations in a Domestic Dog: A Longitudinal Case Study

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Abstract

Background and Aims

Domestic dogs (*Canis familiaris*) demonstrate remarkable vocal plasticity in human social environments, yet systematic acoustic documentation of speech-like vocalizations remains limited. This longitudinal case study examined whether spontaneous vocalizations produced by a domestic dog during human-directed communication attempts exhibit formant structures consistent with targeted English phonemes. We hypothesize that intensive socialization in complex social environments may facilitate vocal approximation of human speech.

Methods

Vocalizations from a single male dog ("Elvis") raised in a fraternity house were recorded over multiple years during naturalistic attempts to produce "I love you." From 16 recordings totaling 212 seconds, 76 discrete vocalizations were extracted using WebRTC voice activity detection with spectral noise reduction. Acoustic analysis employed Praat Parselmouth for formant extraction (F1, F2, F3). Vocalizations were evaluated for vowel phonemes corresponding to /a/ ("I"), /ʌ/ ("love"), and /u/ ("you"), with detection thresholds based on established human formant ranges.

Results

Vowel-like formant patterns were detected in 72.4% (55/76) of vocalizations. The /a/ phoneme was identified in 51.3% (mean F1=765Hz, F2=1977Hz; human range: F1=600-900Hz, F2=1800-2400Hz). The /ʌ/ phoneme appeared in 42.1% (mean F1=697Hz, F2=1283Hz; human range: F1=600-800Hz, F2=1100-1400Hz). The /u/ phoneme occurred in 11.8% (mean F1=430Hz, F2=954Hz; human range: F1=300-500Hz, F2=800-1200Hz). Complete three-phoneme sequences were observed in 2.6% of vocalizations, with 40.8% containing two or more vowels.

Conclusions

This case study provides acoustic evidence that canine vocalizations can exhibit formant structures within human phoneme ranges. The subject's high-density human social environment may have facilitated vocal learning through increased speech exposure. While single-subject findings preclude generalization, the quantitative methodology establishes a framework for investigating environmental influences on canine vocal approximation of human speech.

KEYWORDS: canine vocalization, formant analysis, human-animal communication, vocal learning, social environment

31 My dog is my child, my cat is my friend, and my turtle is just a pet - A multispecies questionnaire on the human-animal bond

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Abstract

Introduction: Over 352 million animals are kept as pets in the European Union. Dogs and cats are the most common, but ornamental birds, small mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians are also present in large numbers. In Western societies, the number of pets has increased alongside a cultural shift in which pets are increasingly viewed as

family members. However, most research on the human–animal bond focuses on a single species, therefore it is unknown which characteristics of pets affect their function in human households.

Methodology: This study aimed to compare owner perceptions of the human–animal bond across species using shared measurement tools. A total of 1081 adult Hungarian owners completed an online questionnaire distributed via social media. The questions of this survey focused on the characteristics of the bond between the pet and the owner: the function of the pet in the household, perceived social competence (handleability, friendliness, obedience) and anthropomorphic characteristics of the pet. K-means cluster analysis was applied to variables describing the function of the animal, while factor analysis was used for social competence and anthropomorphism. Additionally, Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn post-hoc tests were used for the comparison of species.

Main Findings: Cluster analysis identified two categories: human-like and animal-like. Most dogs (93.5%), horses (94.3%), and cats (84%) were assigned human-like functions, while reptiles predominantly occupied animal-like roles (Lizards: 74.1%, Turtles: 81.8%, Snakes: 77.4%). Factor analysis revealed one social competence factor, with dogs scoring highest and reptiles and hedgehogs lowest. A similar pattern emerged for anthropomorphism, although dogs did not differ significantly from horses and rats.

Principle Conclusions and Implications: Species perceived as more socially competent and anthropomorphic were more likely to fulfill human-like functions in owners' lives. This widens our understanding of the human-animal bond and what makes a pet a family member.

32 How animal species shape children's interactional behaviors in animal-assisted interventions

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Abstract

Introduction. Dogs, horses, guinea pigs, and rabbits are commonly used in animal-assisted interventions (AAI), yet they differ in sensory and behavioral characteristics that may shape children's interactions. While dogs and horses have been widely studied, few studies have compared children's interactions across different species, particularly in typically developing (TD) children. A better understanding of how children adapt their behaviors to different animals is essential for optimizing AAI programs. This study investigated the influence of animal species on the interactional behaviors of TD children by comparing interactions with four different species.

Methodology. Fifteen TD children (10±2,3yo) participated in four AAI sessions, each involving a different species (guinea pig, rabbit, dog, horse). Interactions were video-recorded and analyzed using ethological methods. Visual attention, physical contact, interindividual distance, and posture were recorded. Data were analyzed using non-parametric statistical tests and generalized linear models.

Results. A significant effect of species was found on children's behaviors. The horse elicited more gazes directed toward the environment ($p<0.001$), and the rabbit also promoted environmental gazes ($p<0.001$) compared to the dog and the guinea pig (both $p>0.05$). The dog encouraged greater visual orientation toward the practitioner, whereas

the guinea pig was most frequently observed by the children (both $p < 0.05$). Children generally remained within one arm's length of all species ($p < 0.05$). Physical contact was more sustained with the dog and the rabbit, and more intermittent with the horse and the guinea pig ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions. These findings show that animal species influence the interactional behaviors adopted by TD children. Taken together, we highlighted that the dog appears to act as a social catalyst, facilitating interactions with the professional, whereas the horse is more strongly associated with environmental exploration and spatial engagement. This interspecific variability highlights the importance of selecting animal species according to the objectives and the specific needs of the participants.

33 From Paws to Practice: Strengthening Competencies Through Animal-Assisted Counseling Training

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Abstract

Introduction: As interest in animal-assisted counseling (AAC) continues to grow, so does the need for high-quality training that meaningfully develops practitioner competence. Despite the expansion of AAC training programs, few studies have examined how structured AAC training influences knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for ethical and effective AAC practice. This study investigated the impact of a comprehensive AAC training program on the competency development of mental health practitioners.

Methodology: Fifteen mental health practitioners who completed a professional AAC training program at a Southwestern U.S. university participated in the study. The 120-hour program included 48 hours of in-person experiential training with the practitioner's animal partner and a supervised clinical practicum. Competencies were measured using a researcher-developed survey containing three subscales (i.e., AAC Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes) and a total competency score. Participants rated their perceived competence on a 1 to 5 scale. Paired samples t-tests were used to examine pre–post changes across all measures.

Main Results: Analyses revealed significant increases in participants' scores on all three subscales, as well as in total competency scores. These findings indicated that the structured training program substantially enhanced practitioners' AAC knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: This study demonstrates that targeted, experiential AAC training can meaningfully strengthen practitioner competencies, supporting the integration of AAC into mental health practice. As AAC continues to expand, intentional training programs grounded in competency development will be essential. Future research should identify which training components, such as experiential practice, supervised clinical work, or animal-partner skill development, most strongly contribute to gains in AAC competence.

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34 Tugger, Fetcher, or Chewer? Tailoring toys to dog play preferences to increase engagement

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Abstract

Object play is an enrichment opportunity for dogs and can involve engagement in various playstyles like tugging, fetching, thrashing, and asocial manipulation. A dog's playstyle can vary by breed, age, personality, and individual toy characteristics, as certain toy types may be better suited for some playstyles over others. To understand the relationship between play interactions and toy types, we conducted two experiments. Experiment 1 evaluated whether dogs (N=61) showed more play with specific owner engagement styles. Experiment 2 examined whether toy type and scent affect dogs' engagement (N=14). In Experiment 1, owners conducted four-minute daily sessions involving fetch, tug, thrash, and asocial manipulation across four days using rope, ball, stick, and plush toys. Duration was recorded, and a preferred interaction style was inferred when dogs engaged significantly longer in one condition. In Experiment 2, dogs were divided into two groups: having a preferred condition (n = 3; Treatment) and without (n = 11; Control). Owners conducted identical play sessions using toys that varied by play interaction match and scent, based on Experiment 1 results; control dogs received randomly assigned toys that differed by scent. Play duration differed among individual dogs ($p < 0.0001$) and varied by the interaction between toy type and play interaction ($p < 0.001$). Rope elicited the shortest asocial (14.5 ± 2.7 s) and the longest tug play (33.4 ± 2.7 s). Males played longer than females ($p = 0.04$); age ($p = 0.29$) and breed ($p = 0.75$) did not affect play duration. Treatment dogs spent more time with their playstyle-matched toy ($p = 0.008$; vs. unmatched), while no differences in toy engagement were found for the control group. Findings suggest that play is highly individual, and matching toys to a dog's playstyle can be an effective enrichment strategy to enhance engagement and welfare.

35 Development of a customised canine ethogram for use during canine assisted education activities in four different languages.

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Abstract

Introduction. Continuous assessment of the emotional state of dogs during canine assisted education is crucial to optimise dog welfare, student and staff safety, and the educational aims of the sessions. This project aims to develop a customised canine ethogram for use in schools. It will enable school staff, who are not behavioural experts and are often managing busy sessions, to monitor behavioural indicators of dogs' emotional states and adjust the ongoing session when needed.

Methodology. Nine behaviours were selected for the ethogram based on a literature review of behavioural indicators of canine emotional state, and the need for ease of use by school staff. During a session with seven researchers, technical terminology from the literature was simplified into more accessible phrasing. Next, feedback from experts in the field was requested and the English written ethogram was translated into Dutch, German and Welsh, with back translation to English to check for consistency. Inter- and intra-observer reliability testing was undertaken in the four languages.

Main Results. Feedback from experts in the field was positive with suggestions for phrasing and for applications after validation. Back translations to English showed the versions in all four languages were consistent and could be used for reliability testing. Reliability testing allowed to validate the ethogram in all four languages.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. The initial phases of this project demonstrated that robust methods from applied ethology can be feasibly used in this context, despite the challenges of working across four languages. The validation of this ethogram enables a pilot study in real school settings, after which a final version will be available to school staff and for further applied research on canine assisted education.

36 Public Attitude toward Zoonosis Policy Incorporating Animal Welfare

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Abstract

Introduction: COVID-19 heightened the entangled risks and vulnerabilities linking human and non-human animals in zoonotic diseases and renewed calls to incorporate ethics into public health policy (Anthony et.al, 2024). This study investigates how the Korean public weighs interspecies conflicts during the zoonotic pandemic, with the informing zoonosis preparedness strategy that consider animal welfare.

Methodology: We translated and adapted a prior US survey (Anthony and Cerqueira, 2025) into Korean and administrated it to the 1,000 participants through an online panel. This survey assessed attitudes towards human–animal conflict during the pandemic and support for pandemic policies incorporating animal welfare. Multiple regression analysis tested whether demographics and perception on animal and zoonotic risk predicted support for pandemic policies incorporating animal welfare.

Main results/findings: Participants perceived the COVID-19 risk through animals and livestock products compromised animal interests during the pandemic crisis, but weighed animal welfare if the alternatives existed. In multiple linear regression predicting support for pandemic policies incorporating animal welfare ($R^2 = 0.219$, $F = 17.803$, $p < 0.001$), is positively associated with pro-animal attitude (AAS-5, $\beta = 0.322$, $p < 0.001$) and pet ownership ($\beta = 0.122$, $p < 0.001$). Perceived family COVID risk ($\beta =$

0.090, $p < 0.001$), age ($\beta = 0.075$, $p < 0.001$), and progressive political orientation ($\beta = 0.074$, $p < 0.05$) show smaller positive associations.

Conclusions and implications for the field: Public support for pandemic policies incorporating animal welfare is associated with lived individual experience with animals and perceived zoonotic risks. Therefore, a preparedness strategy should pair scientific evidence with explicit ethical commitments.

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37 Reducing excessive arousal in shelter dogs: Exploring the influence of enrichment and pharmaceutical interventions

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Abstract

Shelter dogs may develop excessive arousal, impacting adoptability and human safety. Despite recommendations to reduce arousal include pharmaceuticals and enrichment, empirical evidence is limited; we evaluated the effects of these interventions on shelter dog arousal. Adult dogs (N=50; 1-6 years) at a municipal shelter in Texas (USA) were eligible if they displayed excessive arousal behavior (i.e., at least three instances of jumping, vocalizing, mouthing, pacing, and/or circling during one-minute in-kennel and on walk observations). Dogs were randomly assigned to one of five groups: 1) control (5-min walk, 2x/day), 2) enrichment-only (15-min walks 2x/day, 15-min human-animal interaction (HAI)), 3) play enrichment (15-min play 2x/day, 15-min HAI), 4) pharmaceutical-only (20 mg/kg gabapentin, 6mg/kg trazodone, 5-min walk 2x/day), 5) pharmaceutical and enrichment (20 mg/kg gabapentin, 6mg/kg trazodone, 15-min walk 2x/day, 15-min HAI). Testing included one control week (day 1-7) and one week of treatment (day 8-14), with behavioral assessments on days 1, 3, 7, 10, and 14. Arousal behaviors were video scored for 1-min during pre- and post- enrichment and a walk. Likert-scale arousal and transition (kennel exit) scores were used to assess treatment effects within and across groups via mixed-effects regression and negative binomial models. Across groups, treatment week (Day 10, $p < 0.001$; Day 14, $p = 0.003$) arousal scores were lower compared to Day 1 (control). Arousal scores were lower during walks than pre-enrichment for both pharmaceutical-only ($p < 0.001$) and pharmaceutical and enrichment groups ($p < 0.001$). Locomotion was lower post-enrichment ($p = 0.012$, vs. pre-enrichment). Dogs in the enrichment-only group had higher odds of vocalizing than those in the pharmaceutical and enrichment group (95% CI: 1.93, 27.69; OR: 7.3; $p = 0.003$). Walks (95% CI: 0.001, 0.007; OR: 0.002; $p < 0.001$) and post-enrichment (95% CI: 0.03, 0.09; OR: 0.05; $p < 0.001$) had lower odds of vocalization than pre-enrichment. Results suggest that enrichment (e.g., human-animal interaction), and/or pharmaceuticals help reduce arousal, which may improve adoptability and staff management.

38 Continuing Bonds after Pet Loss: Imagining Deceased Companion Animals through the Japanese Pearl (Shinju) Funeral

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Abstract

Research on the psychological processes of pet loss has primarily focused on grief reactions and coping, while relatively little attention has been paid to how bereaved owners imagine their deceased companion animals (pets) and reconfigure continuing bonds with them. This study examines how owners imagine their deceased pets as distinct forms of post-mortem presence and how continuing bonds are reconfigured, with a specific focus on the Japanese Pearl (Shinju) Funeral as a practice embedded in Japanese *katami* (keepsake) culture. The Funeral is a ceremony in which a pet's remains are used as a nucleus to cultivate a pearl over approximately one year. Data were drawn from a longitudinal semi-structured interview study on pet loss (dogs or cats) in Japan. The present analysis focuses on transcripts from ten bereaved owners at a single time point. Narrative segments concerning post-mortem images and ongoing relationships with the deceased pets were analyzed using a qualitative categorical approach, in which subthemes were identified and integrated into higher-order themes. Three interrelated modes of post-mortem presence were identified: (1) **Internalized Presence**, in which the pet was experienced as an inner or sensed presence; (2) **Externalized Presence**, in which the pet was imagined as continuing to exist in symbolically meaningful physical places or in transcendent spaces such as the "Rainbow Bridge"; and (3) **materialized continuing bonds**, in which the ongoing relationship was anchored in pearls created from the pet's remains and the pearls were often treated as embodying aspects of the deceased pet. These modes were not mutually exclusive but coexisted within individuals and varied in strength. Materialized continuing bonds were enacted not only through the pearls themselves but also through temporal and relational practices surrounding their cultivation, including retrieving the pearls, monitoring weather conditions at the cultivation site, talking to the deceased pet, and narrativizing the pearl's color or shape as meaningful signs.

39 Adding Four Paws to Grammar Learning: Contributions of Animal-Assisted Intervention for Middle School Students in Enrolled in Inclusive Special Education Program.

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Abstract

Introduction-Animal-assisted interventions (AAI) in educational settings have markedly increased, particularly for students with neurodevelopmental disorders and special educational needs. While existing research reports various benefits, several gaps remain: effects beyond intervention sessions are rarely examined, outcomes on academic learning are underexplored, and the role of the animal's degree of involvement remains uninvestigated. The present study aimed to address these limitations.

Methodology-Fifteen middle school students ($M=13,2\pm1,3$), all enrolled in a specialized inclusive education unit for students with neurodevelopmental disorders and/or special educational needs, participated in this study. Students were divided into three groups of five, attending three 1-hour sessions focusing on grammar learning each under different conditions: without dog; dog present but not actively involved; dog actively engaged in learning activities. During each session, students completed measures of affective/emotional state (Self-Assessment Manikin) and self-esteem (Brief Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale). Then, at the end of the subsequent regular classroom lesson, students again completed these scales and performed grammar exercises targeting the content covered during the session, while their classroom behaviors were assessed through tools addressed to teachers and educational assistants. Non-parametric analyses were conducted.

Findings-During the sessions, students' self-esteem scores were higher when the dog was present (actively or not) compared to sessions without dog (all $p<.05$). In regular classroom lessons, educational assistants reported reduced calmness and mutism following sessions with active dog involvement compared to sessions without dog (all $p\leq.05$); a pattern corroborated in student's reports. Grammar performances were higher following sessions with active dog involvement than after sessions without dog ($p=.05$).

Conclusions-AAI appears beneficial for students with special educational needs, supporting not only their self-esteem and arousal state during and after, but also their integration of academic learning. Importantly, the degree of the animal's involvement emerges as central for optimizing the benefits of AAI in educational contexts.

40 Developing spiritual care responses in an Animal Rescue service

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Abstract

Introduction – Animal rescue services are dominated by caring, passionate animal loving persons who face both the joys and the tragedies of human-animal relationships. Stress, burnout, and trauma of workers in the animal care and animal rescue sectors are well documented. Hence there is a need to develop responses that recognise, respond to and support animal rescue staff and volunteers. Spiritual care focuses on engaging with the foundational values, meanings, emotions and drivers of individuals in order to help people find comfort, strength and resilience.

Methods – Using an applied collaborative auto-ethnographic iterative approach, an animal rescue service in Australia have been exploring how spiritual care models and approaches may be of use in supporting their staff. This has involved multiple meetings, liaising with in-house stakeholders, reflective considerations and small actions.

Findings – To date actions have included a memorial tree for animals who have "not made it" (needed to be euthanised or passed in care) through the service, considerations as to extending deceased animal care responses, and a Blue Christmas memorial event and tree. Personal reflections and feedback from participants has led to various inclusions that were not initially considered such as modifying original "big" plans to smaller gentle actions and recognising more extended losses in peoples lives

that ripple into animal care as well. Feedback from participants of events has also been positive and is seen as part of a larger agenda of creating a caring people (as well as animals) culture.

Conclusions/Implications – Developing grass roots responses that work within the everyday lives of a multi-species organisation is vital to the wellbeing of both people and vulnerable animals in the field of animal rescue and care.

41 When possession matters: Longitudinal analysis of dog behaviours around resources

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Abstract

Identifying behaviours dogs display around resources is needed to better understand the development of threatening and/or aggressive behaviour (T±Ab) in different contexts. Guarding behaviours impact dog and owner welfare. Dog behaviours around five resources across three timepoints were examined, and how T±Ab around stolen non-food items changed with age in a UK/ROI longitudinal study of dogs.

Participants selected, from a pre-defined list, their dog's behavioural responses within the last month if approached while in possession of a given resource and/or removal off/from the resource was attempted. Resources included dog toys, stolen food, stolen non-food items, the dog's bed, and other resting places. Surveys were completed when dogs were 9-months (n=4021), 15-months (n=2756) and 2.5-years (n=1662). T±Ab was defined as growling, snapping and/or biting. A GLMM assessed the effect of age on the probability of reported T±Ab around stolen non-food items, including fixed effects for urgency of removal, within-, and between-individual change.

Across timepoints, dogs were frequently and consistently reported to have accessed four resources (toys [>96.0%], stolen food [41.9–56.3%], the dog's bed [45.6–50.4%], and other resting places [58.4–67.8%]), whereas stolen non-food items showed greater variation, decreasing from 74.0% to 37.8%. Desirable behaviours, such as tail-wagging, predominated in some contexts, while 'moving away with item' and 'ate item' were common around stolen non-food items and stolen food. T±Ab was most reported around stolen non-food items (4.5% [n=133/2941], 5.5% [n=88/1596], 7.1% [n=47/658] across consecutive timepoints). T±Ab increased with age (OR=1.06/month, 95%CI [1.02-1.11], p=0.008) and during urgent removal contexts (OR=2.18, 95%CI [1.08-4.41], p=0.03), with substantial between-dog variation.

Dogs typically responded in affiliative or cooperative ways; T±Ab was rare. T±Ab increased with age and markedly during urgent removal contexts around stolen non-food items, highlighting the importance of owner education about safe item removal/exchange and reinforcing appropriate behaviours.

42 Support-seeking and rehoming pathways differ by surrender circumstances among companion animal guardians

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Abstract

Introduction: Companion animals housed in shelter facilities are at increased risk of poor welfare, highlighting the need for strategies that reduce intake. Guardians faced with the decision to surrender their animal may pursue various pathways, such as seeking support to retain their animals, independently rehoming their pets (self-rehoming), or relinquishing them to an animal shelter. Limited research examines how the circumstances surrounding surrender (e.g., reasons for surrender, length of guardianship) influence whether guardians pursue support and which surrender pathways they select.

Methodology: This mixed-methods study surveyed U.S. and Canadian adults who rehomed a companion animal within the past five years (n = 452) about the circumstances of their most recent surrender, desired or accessed pet retention supports, and the rehoming methods used.

Main results/findings: Latent class analysis identified three groups of pet guardians with similar surrender circumstances: Behavioural Incompatibilities (9.5%), New Acquisitions (42.9%), and Owner Hardships (47.6%). Class membership was associated with whether assistance was sought to retain the animal ($p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.23$) and with the rehoming pathways used (e.g., shelter relinquishment vs. self-rehoming; $p = 0.002$, Cramer's $V = 0.16$). Respondents in the Behavioural Incompatibilities class were most likely to attempt shelter relinquishment but ultimately self-rehome and least likely to seek pet retention support. Respondents in the New Acquisitions class were most likely to relinquish to a shelter and to seek pet retention support. Respondents in the Owner Hardships class were most likely to successfully self-rehome. Qualitative analysis revealed that respondents sought various supports including behavioural assistance, temporary care, and veterinary services; however, few sought help from animal shelters.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: This research shows that circumstances driving animal surrender are not homogeneous, which is important to consider when developing strategies to reduce relinquishment to animal shelters.

43 Are prison-animal based programs, a gender-focused correctional intervention ? : A result of sociological inquiry

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Abstract

From a gender perspective, the prison animal based programs (PAPs) have been little explored (Weseley, 2019). While there is literature on masculinities in prison contexts (Sloan, 2016) which I will not revisit here, to my knowledge there are very few studies that combine human-animal studies and prison.

This presentation will be based on an ethnographical research conducted in seven French prisons with various programs (canine, equine, and rodent-based activities), through observations (from December 2018 to March 2020) and interviews (51 conducted with prisoners, mediation professionals, and prison staff). It shows that the « humanization » sought by the prison institution is delegated to external actors, both

human and non-human. This process involves a threefold task: that of mediators caught between the logic of care and punishment, that of animals whose care work oscillates between cooperation and instrumentalization, and that of prisoners who are required to work on their emotions.

One of the major results of this research is to redefine PAPs as a "gender-focused correctional intervention" (Karp, 2010) and to analyze not only its implementation, but also its reception by prisoners. These programs thus appear as spaces where incarcerated masculinities can be reformed and hybridized with one another. How PAPs can participate to « humanize » prison and what does it mean ? "Humanizing" in this case, refers to an ideal of masculinity co-constructed by the prison as an institution and by professionals who are bringing animals into the walls. This presentation will make it clear that PAPs are corrective interventions on gender, embedded in relationships of domination based on gender, class, age, race, and species. White, middle-class female "therapists" shape "good masculinity" in men who are often racialized and from working-class backgrounds. The care work at the heart of these systems is overwhelmingly carried out by women and animals, whose division of emotional work teaches us a lot about how they are viewed.

44 “From Cute to Crucial: Exploring Children’s Compassion toward Marine Species”

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Abstract

Marine species are often overlooked in animal welfare debates and elicit little empathic responses (Miralles et al., 2019). Existing research has predominantly focused on familiar vertebrates and charismatic species when addressing conservation issues (Bègue-Shankland, 2022). Given the ecological importance of marine ecosystems, fostering awareness and understanding of ocean biodiversity among younger generations is essential. Importantly, effective conservation education requires a prior understanding of children’s interests in marine species. Additionally, compassion -the act of alleviating other’s suffering (Decety & Holvoet, 2021) - has received little attention despite its potential as a driving force for conservation. This study examines how children (6–12 years) express compassion toward marine biodiversity, with a particular focus on the roles of species charisma, phylogenetic distance, and developmental factors.

Building on the protocol by Miralles et al. (2019), our research used a serious game to apprehend children’s compassion toward marine life. In total, thirty species from ten different clades have been evaluated. The children were shown ten pairs of species belonging to different clades. Each time, they had to choose which one they would save if they were in danger. Generalized mixed-effects logistic regressions models were used to assess how different variables modulate children’s choices. The results revealed that children were significantly ($p < .001$) more likely to save phylogenetically closer species, mostly charismatic mammals. However, this general tendency was modulated by several factors. Specifically, younger children’s choices appeared to be less influenced by anthropomorphic considerations, suggesting developmental changes in the evolution of compassion toward marine species across childhood.

These findings raise important questions for conservation education. Developmentally informed educational strategies may help foster more inclusive forms of compassion not only for attractive species but also for less appealing, yet ecologically indispensable, taxa.

45 Human Microbiome Composition and Human-Animal Interactions: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Introduction:

Human microbiomes are known to impact human psychological and physiological wellbeing. Interacting with animals, who possess their own unique microbiomes, may influence the composition of human microbiomes. To better understand these influences, this scoping review explored the effects of intentional, non-occupational human-animal interactions (HAI) on human microbiomes. Aims were to characterize relevant literature, summarize the studied HAIs and microbiomes, and summarize the reported microbiome outcomes resulting from HAI.

Methodology:

A pre-registered scoping review was conducted following PRISMA guidelines. Two groups of keywords (HAI, microbiome) were used to search six major databases (PubMed, CINAHL, PsycINFO, Web of Science, CAB Abstracts, ProQuest) from inception to February 21, 2025. Resulting articles were screened, and information was extracted, according to the established protocol.

Results:

Of the 2,946 articles identified, 30 articles met eligibility criteria. Four types of HAI were present: cohabitation (n=27), farm care (n=1), humane education (n=1), and a visitation program (n=1). Studied microbiomes included fecal (n=23), oral (n=5), nasal (n=3), and skin (n=3). Included species were dogs (n=14), cats (n=10), “pocket pets” (n=2), fish (n=1), horses (n=1), birds (n=1), pigs (n=1), and “other” (n=2). Five articles did not report the species of animal studied. Animal demographics were sparsely reported, including age range (n=4), breed (n=3), and time spent with the animal(s) (n=8). Twenty-three studies found statistically significant differences in microbiomes, four found no significant differences, and three reported ambiguous results.

Principal conclusions and implications:

This review demonstrates the potential for HAI to influence the human microbiome. Microbiome changes may be an underexplored way that HAIs influence human wellbeing. However, more thorough documentation of HAIs and participating animals is needed. Incorporating well-designed evaluation of the microbiome into HAI studies may serve as a novel approach to developing a more robust understanding of the biopsychosocial impacts of human-animal interactions.

46 Animal-Assisted Interventions and Mental Health Stigma Reduction: Creating Openness to Treatment

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Abstract

Introduction: Mental health treatment stigma is a pervasive issue that consistently negatively impacts society. However, when offered the option for their mental health treatment, adults are more willing to engage in an Animal-Assisted Intervention (AAI), stating that it reduces their feelings of stigma. This project sought to understand a deeper understanding of why that might be.

Methodology: Twenty young adult participants were recruited. The intervention included a recorded AAI or a non-AAI therapy session, followed by an online interview. Thematic analysis was used to determine patterns within the data.

Main Results: Two themes and 6 subthemes were identified. The first main theme was the Benefit of Interaction with Animals. Subthemes included: *Companion Animals are Sought in Times of Stress*, *A Non-Judgmental Presence*, *Loving Animals*, and *AAIs Create Openness to Treatment*. The other theme, Resistance to AAIs, had 2 subthemes – *Species Matters*, and *No Strong Connections to Animals*. For many participants animals provided comfort, a judgement-free presence, and they enjoyed being around animals. These themes pointed to how participants felt that AAIs would make it easier for them to engage in a therapy-based session compared to treatment as usual. Resistance to AAI was mainly due to the belief that only canines could be therapy animals –but many were more open to the idea of an AAI with other species options. For those without a strong connection to animals, they felt unsure whether the presence of an animal would be impactful.

Principal Conclusions: When offered the option to engage in an AAI, participants stated the animal will provide a general sense of comfort, a lack of judgment, and may reflect a prior positive relationship to an animal that they have engaged with. Unsure and negative feelings towards AAI reflect attitudes towards specific species or lack of prior experience with animals.

47 More than just a dog? A mixed-methods single-case investigation of the perceived role of a therapy dog in child and adolescent psychotherapy from three perspectives, embedded in a randomized controlled trial

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Abstract

Background

Therapy motivation and therapeutic alliance are key predictors of treatment success. Therapy dogs are assumed to enhance both motivation and relational processes, which has led to their increasing integration into child and adolescent psychotherapy. Although positive effects of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) have been reported, little is known about the underlying mechanisms through which therapy dogs exert their effects and how their involvement needs to be structured to be effective.

Methods

This study applies an embedded mixed methods design within an ongoing randomized controlled trial (RCT), combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the impact of a dog's presence in psychotherapy for children and adolescents aged 9 to 17 years. Quantitative RCT outcome data on motivation, therapeutic alliance and treatment satisfaction are analysed using mixed-methods single-case approaches, comparing conditions with and without a therapy dog. These data are complemented by semi-structured interviews with children and adolescents (aged 9–17 years), their parents, and psychotherapists working with a therapy dog. Qualitative data are analysed using thematic analysis to explore subjective experiences, perceived mechanisms, and the role of the dog within the therapeutic process.

Results

Initial qualitative findings from single-case analyses indicate that the presence of a therapy dog can facilitate relationship building, increase openness towards therapy, and support engagement. However, perceived effects vary depending on how the dog is integrated into the session (e.g. active versus passive involvement).

Discussion

These preliminary results suggest that therapy dogs may positively influence motivation and therapeutic alliance, but that their effectiveness depends on intentional and context-sensitive integration into the therapeutic process. Mixed-methods single-case analyses embedded in RCTs offer a promising approach to elucidate mechanisms of action in dog-assisted psychotherapy. Further data collection and analyses are ongoing.

48 Building Posthumous Bridges: Exploring the Limits of Post-Mortem Recognition at Pet Cemeteries

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Abstract

Introduction

Pet cemeteries are social spaces in which human–animal relationships continue after death, making visible which animals are recognised as true companions and which remain excluded. Within anthrozoology and animal studies, research has consistently shown that pet cemeteries are structured around dogs and cats, while other species appear infrequently or only exceptionally.

Methodology

This paper examines how, and to what extent, post-mortem recognition extends beyond dogs and cats, and where its limits remain. The study is based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in 2025 at the new premises of *Psi Los*, the oldest Polish pet cemetery established in 1991. Data were collected through systematic photographic documentation of graves, inscriptions, and memorial objects. Graves were coded by species, with attention to animals other than cats and dogs.

Main results/findings

Of more than 9,000 graves in the ten-year-old second section of the cemetery, 32 graves explicitly commemorating non-traditional companion animals were identified. These included rabbits, rats, guinea pigs, ferrets, hamsters, parakeets, parrots, pigeons, gerbils, an African hedgehog, a canary, and one non-specified bird. No graves were

found for fish, amphibians, reptiles, or invertebrates. “Family graves,” in which multiple individuals – sometimes from different species – are buried together, indicate attempts to extend relational recognition across species boundaries. Two collective memorials dedicated to homeless or stray animals were also present. In contrast, no graves or memorials referenced livestock, wild animals, or other typically marginalised animal categories, and no spatially distinct sections for different species were observed.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

The findings demonstrate that “posthumous bridges” are being built slowly and selectively – at least at the oldest and largest pet cemetery in Poland. While some non-traditional companions are increasingly recognised as grievable, clear limits persist regarding which animals are afforded post-mortem visibility.

49 A fashion for cuteness: The shifting popularities of small and flat-muzzled dogs in the 20th and 21st Centuries

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Abstract

Introduction: It is well known that dog breeds vary in popularity across time. But recent and dramatic increases in the ownership of certain breeds of dog, such as the Chihuahua, Pug and French bulldog, have led researchers to speculate that the ‘cute’ appearance of these animals is a key driver of their popularity, and that a long-term trend towards greater ownership of ‘cute dogs’ is in progress. Here, we investigated whether the current popularity of brachycephalic dogs and small dogs can be best characterised as a transient fashion, or as part of a long-term shift in pet-keeping preferences for cute-looking dogs with neotenous morphologies.

Methodology: Annual breed registration data were obtained from Kennel Clubs in the UK, Australia and Japan. We classified breeds according to how relatively-short their muzzles were (using published measurements of Cranio-facial Ratio and Cephalic Index) and how tall they were (Kennel Club estimated breed height at withers). The changing popularity of small and short-muzzled breeds was then mapped across time (1908-2022).

Results: Short-muzzled breeds were found to have risen and fallen in popularity on several occasions across the past century, as had some very small and toy breeds. We found no evidence of sustained increases in the relative popularity of extremely brachycephalic and/or toy breeds over the period considered, and nor of a sustained shortening of the average muzzle length or average height of dogs registered over the past century.

Conclusion: We conclude that there has been no long-term trend towards greater ownership of ‘cute dogs’ across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. However, there is an indication that fashions in dog breeds are changing more rapidly than they did in the past. Social media may be playing a key contemporary role in influencing people's interest in companion animals, and in ‘cute’ breeds in particular.

50 A critical review of ethical framings in welfare research on dogs and horses in animal-assisted services

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Abstract

Introduction:

The welfare of dogs and horses involved in animal-assisted services (AAS) has received increasing scholarly attention, reflecting a broader recognition of AAS' ethical complexity. However, how welfare assessments are framed ethically varies substantially, with important implications for the study results: for example, when AAS are framed through a companion animal welfare lens, they may be interpreted as having the potential to benefit the animals, whereas laboratory-animal framings (e.g., the 3Rs) may present animal use as a necessity for human benefit, with welfare assessed primarily in terms of harm minimisation. This critical review therefore maps and analyses ethical frames in AAS welfare research from an animal ethics perspective to clarify ethical assumptions and support more consistent research, standards, and policy.

Methodology:

Peer-reviewed papers (2000–2025) were reviewed to identify how welfare research regarding AAS was framed, focusing on normative frameworks (e.g. One Health) and their implications for interpretation and conclusions. Included papers comprised direct welfare measures in dogs and/or horses, indirect welfare assessments, and conceptual welfare analyses.

Main findings:

The review has three key findings. First, the ethical frameworks applied in AAS welfare assessments are highly diverse and often remain insufficiently explained. Second, this diversity and vagueness limit comparability across studies and can shape welfare conclusions. For example, they may shape how stress assessments are interpreted. Third, despite this broad spectrum of frameworks, there is substantial agreement across studies that AAS welfare studies should primarily address effects on animals within the handler–client–animal triad rather than adopting a decontextualized focus on the animal.

Implications:

Greater transparency about ethical framing is needed to improve comparability and communication of welfare findings; future research should further develop AAS welfare assessments that center animals' experiences within the relational handler–client–animal triad.

51 The Dog Mentor in Education: Dog professionals' pre-training expectations and post implementation perceived benefits and challenges

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Abstract

Introduction: Dogs are a popular addition to the school environment with much of the research suggesting many benefits such as improved academic attainment, reduction of stress and anxiety. The Dog Mentor is an organisation that supports schools to have flexibility when working with the dogs, while upholding clear high standards of animal welfare. The perspectives of dog professionals on The Dog Mentor program are shared here before the training and once they have evidenced incorporating the work with the dogs within their schools and therefore achieving the gold award.

Method: Dog professionals (n=45) whose schools signed up to complete The Dog Mentor training completed the initial questionnaire before the training. Some dog professionals (and schools) have since compiled additional evidence of the impact of The Dog Mentor teams within their schools and have therefore completed the questionnaire to achieve the 'Gold' award. These schools have completed the follow up questionnaire. Both questionnaires were analysed qualitatively, using content analysis.

Results: Before the training, benefits of The Dog Mentor in school were indicated as most important part of the training (62%) followed by animal welfare considerations (38%). At the gold award completion, the most common perceived benefit was child wellbeing (60%), with some dogs meeting specific need requirements (18%) including supporting regulation and attendance. Dog professionals shared learnings, reflections and challenges from the dogs and pupils.

Conclusions: A range of perceived benefits will be presented and discussed, together with challenges relating to integrating a dog within the classroom. Specific recommendations will be made to guide future research.

52 Care and Conflict at Cats Corner: A Multispecies Ethnography of a Cat Colony on the Costa del Sol, Spain

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Abstract

Introduction

A colony of cats (*Felis catus*) inhabiting a popular beach-style holiday destination on the Costa del Sol, Spain, serves as a case study to elucidate prominent features of a transspecies community situated within a touristic landscape. Focusing on relations between residents, visitors, and cats, this multispecies ethnographic study examined how feeding, petting, photographing, and caring for unowned cats can lead to conflict and concern for the cats' wellbeing.

Methodology

Fieldwork undertaken between May 2024 and December 2025 included observational notes, photos, and video footage documenting the daily lives of the cats. A thematic analysis was applied to observations, six unstructured interviews with colony caretakers and residents, and responses to a qualitative survey completed by 101 tourists in 2025. Thematic analysis borrows from phenomenological inquiry, allowing meaning to be derived from the diverse and rich datasets that arise from multispecies ethnography by focusing on patterns within predefined themes. Namely, 1) Feline agency, 2) practices of feeding and care, and 3) cat-tourist interactions. Through an iterative process, codes were developed for behavioural patterns, interactions, and perceptions of cats.

Main results/findings

Tourists of all ages, genders, and various nationalities openly expressed joy at seeing the cats, stopping to look, take photos, and sometimes pet the cats. Residents and visitors largely ignored the prominent signs explaining these cats are fed by licensed feeders and that unauthorised feeding can incur a fine. Reasons given for feeding the cats were not limited to concerns they might go hungry and included motivations to initiate positive interactions with the cats.

Conclusions

Food and feeding are expressions of love and acts of care, but overfeeding and poor diets can lead to poor health outcomes. Furthermore, littering (empty containers) and disagreements over the right to feed is a source of conflict that potentially threatens multispecies community relations.

53 ImPERUving Patient Engagement- How Partnering with a Facility Dog Can Positively Impact Patient Performance in Inpatient Rehabilitation.

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Abstract

Introduction: Facility dog partnership can offer a novel way to mitigate commonly cited barriers to participation in inpatient rehabilitation (e.g., pain, fatigue). The aim of this study was to investigate how working with a facility dog influences patient performance in physical therapy. We evaluated whether a facility dog increased task persistence and decreased perceived and physiological effort during rehabilitation.

Methodology: In a randomized controlled crossover trial, 69 inpatients (39 females and 30 males) worked with a facility dog on the first or second trial of the same task during a physical therapy session. Linear mixed-effects models, accounting for repeated measures within participants and other study design parameters, were used to assess associations between the presence of a facility dog and task persistence, self-rated pain and exertion, and physiological measures including heart rate and blood pressure.

Main Results: Participants spent 2.6 more minutes (95% CI: 1.78, 3.41; $P = <0.001$)

engaged in goal-directed rehabilitation tasks when interacting with the facility dog, handler, and physical therapist, compared with sessions without the facility dog.

Compared to dog owners, participants without a dog persisted significantly longer on tasks with the facility dog (2.00 mins; 95% CI: -3.61, -0.39; $P = 0.015$). Pain and heart rate varied by task order and facility dog presence: both were lower during the first task with the dog but significantly higher during the second, suggesting a shared physiological response to cumulative effort or arousal.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: Collaborating with a facility dog in inpatient rehabilitation may boost participation and task persistence. Benefits may stem from cognitive distraction, social support mechanisms, biophilic responses, and the bond with a well-trained canine, offering a promising way to reduce rehabilitation barriers. Future research should assess generalizability across rehabilitation

populations and task types and further clarify the mechanisms through which facility dogs enhance patient engagement.

54 Understanding autistic people's responses to unfamiliar dogs in public spaces

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Abstract

Background. While the benefits of animal-assisted interventions involving trained dogs are well documented in autism research, everyday encounters with unfamiliar/untrained dogs in urban environments remain unexplored. Yet these unscripted interactions occur in sensory complex and unpredictable public spaces which differ markedly from therapeutic or familiar contexts. Examining such encounters provides a more naturalistic insight into autistic people's daily lived experiences with dogs.

Method. This study investigated everyday encounters with dogs in urban spaces through 19 interviews with autistic adults, 8 interviews with parents, 7 group interviews involving 34 professionals, and an online survey completed by autistic adults ($n=289$). Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to highlight both experiential diversity and response patterns.

Results. Encounters with dogs in urban environments were rarely neutral and showed strong variability across individuals and contexts. Autistic adults reported experiences ranging from enjoyment and social facilitation to discomfort related to interpersonal distance, social anxiety, or dog ownership. Professionals described reactions ranging from panic to indifference, sometimes generating stress and requiring anticipatory strategies. Parents emphasized on inconsistent danger perception, and on dogs' potential to support autonomy and socialization. When encountering an unfamiliar dog, 39.1% of autistic adults reported positive emotions, 31.8% negative emotions, and 29.1% no specific emotion ($p=0.01$). More than half (51.2%) reported never wanting to touch an unfamiliar dog, whereas responses from the other half varied according to the dog's characteristics (28.0%) or the owner's behavior (26.3%) ($p<0.001$). Responses were also influenced by contextual factors such as leash use, assistance-dog status, familiarity, and urban spatial features.

Conclusion. Everyday encounters with dogs represent a complex and highly individualized dimension of autistic people's interactions with their environment. These findings emphasize the need to consider the specific dynamics of interspecies encounters and to promote public awareness and urban policy initiatives that could improve urban mobility experiences and human-dog interactions in public spaces for autistic individuals.

55 Building tomorrow's forest landscapes: how draft horses-horse drivers relationships link to a resilient environment

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Abstract

This contribution's goal is to expose how horse logging in Belgium and Luxemburg leads to interspecific relationships that are co-constructed by both the draft horses and horse drivers, and how these relationships are essential to the conservation and building of tomorrow's forest landscapes.

The theoretical framework of this research is that of anthropology and its qualitative methods (participant observation, methodological empathy, semi-structured interviews, life stories, collection of contextual and specific data) (Beaud and Weber 2010; Laplantine 2015; Laurent 2020; Lejeune 2019; Lizet and de Ravignan 2023; Mucchielli 2009; Olivier de Sardan 2008; Paillé and Mucchielli 2012). More specifically, this work is situated at the crossroads of sensitive anthropology and the anthropology of nature. Cross-observations among the remaining horse loggers in Belgium and Luxembourg reveal a complex know-how in the use of the body and senses: both human and animal. The link between humans and animals is the "cordeau" (single hand driving rope). This is a practical, technical know-how that demands a heightened sensitivity in humans, both in the precision of their movements and in the understanding of the animal's sensory perception. The continued use of these techniques is threatened by the efficiency of machinery, even though horse logging is widely considered more relevant in regards of soil conservation. Consequently, we observe creativity based on knowledge sharing among associations and collective initiatives of professional and amateur horse loggers, which bring new kinds of challenges to used-to-be loner workers: social behavior adaptation, conversational aptitudes, debate and negotiation. From an anthropological point of view, this research demonstrates how complex the interspecific relationship in the frame of working with animals is. And how necessary it is to focus, today, on this relationship's complexity and our need for resilient environments.

56 Linking Videorecorded Interaction Behavior Between Therapy Dogs and University Students' to Salivary Cortisol Reactivity and Recovery During Test Anxiety Simulation in Randomized Controlled Trial

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Abstract

While studies have demonstrated stress-buffering effects of animals on humans' salivary cortisol reactivity to laboratory stressors, these paradigms lack generalizability to common stressors encountered by college students. Moreover, prior research studies have not examined the specific effects of key components of human animal interaction (e.g., duration, intensity and frequency of physical contact, touch and petting) on salivary cortisol *reactivity and recovery* from a stressor, which has implications for physiological dysregulation. In the final session of a four-week workshop series geared toward reducing Test Anxiety (TA), students were guided through a stress-induction and release exercise while randomly assigned to receive a) TA-related content without dog exposure (n = 70), b) combination of TA-related content and interaction with therapy dogs (HAI-E; n = 89), or c) interaction with dogs without TA-related content (HAI-O; n = 78). Four salivary samples were collected from which AUC cortisol parameters were

calculated. Interactions between each dog and student were videorecorded and coded by a team of independent coders for frequency, duration, intensity and type of physical contact (e.g., petting, touch, sitting) ($\alpha = .94$).

Regression analyses suggested that greater duration of petting during TA induction showed greater buffering of cortisol output ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$), while duration of physical contact between dog and students during TA induction only showed marginally buffered cortisol output ($\beta = -0.04$, $p = 0.08$). Greater petting duration during TA induction *and* release showed enhanced recovery in terms of cortisol output ($\beta = -0.28$, $p = 0.03$), while duration of physical contact alone only did not. These findings provide support for the buffering and recovery effects of petting dogs in the context of TA induction based on precise behavioral observations of interaction behavior, a novel approach. Effects are not matched by mere proximity or passive physical contact.

57 From Clinical Care to Connection: Social Benefits of Dog-Assisted Interventions in Adults with Epilepsy

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Abstract

Introduction. To date, no study has investigated if people with epilepsy benefit from dog-assisted interventions (DAI). Yet, this hypothesis is well supported: epilepsy is a neurological condition associated with psychosocial and emotional challenges that may be alleviated by the presence of a service dog, and numerous populations have been shown to benefit from DAI. This study aimed to characterise social and human–animal interactions during DAI sessions for adults with epilepsy. We hypothesised that interaction patterns similar to those described in other clinical populations would emerge, with the dog acting as a social catalyst facilitating social interactions over time. We further expected participants to progressively initiate more spontaneous social behaviours across sessions, notably towards human partners.

Methodology. Ten adults with epilepsy (five women, five men; mean age = 24.4 ± 3.0 yo) participated in this study. They were divided into three groups, each attending ten 1-hour DAI sessions. Participants' behaviours were collected using standardised ethological methods. Quality of life and anxiety were assessed before and after the 10-weeks-DAI sessions using standardized questionnaires. Non-parametric statistical analyses were conducted.

Findings. Human–human interactions were leading vocally, whereas human–dog interactions involved more physical and visual behaviours (all $p < 0.05$). The dog consistently attracted participants' attention ($F = 40.9$, $p < 0.001$) and constituted the main target of physical contact ($F = 18.1$, $p < 0.001$). Some visual and physical human–human interactions ($p < 0.05$) increased across sessions, while interactions with the dog were high and remained stable over time ($p > 0.05$), supporting a social-catalyst effect. In contrast, no significant change was observed in quality of life or anxiety scores over the sessions (all $p < 0.05$).

Conclusions. DAI appears to be a promising non-pharmacological approach to support social engagement in adults with epilepsy. The dog is not only a primary social target, but also facilitates human-human interactions over time. These findings support the integration of DAI within multidisciplinary care pathways for epilepsy.

58 Building Resilience through Animal-Assisted Pedagogy: Development, Implementation, and First Evaluation of a Dog-Assisted Resilience Training for Children

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Abstract

Introduction:

Social-emotional competence is crucial for children's positive development. Research in canine-assisted education (CAE) suggests that CAE can enhance children's cognitive-emotional development (e.g. Meints et al., 2017). Based on this, it is hypothesised that CAE may have a resilience-promoting effect. This assumption provided the foundation for developing and implementing a canine-assisted training programme for social learning, followed by an exploratory interview study investigating children's perceptions of their participation in the training.

Methodology:

The theoretical framework of the training is based on the established model of social-cognitive information processing (e.g. Urban et al., 2020). To explore children's perceptions of the training's impact, the programme was conducted with two groups: one in the presence of a dog (N = 10) and a control group in which the dog was replaced by a hand puppet (N = 11).

Main findings:

The children who participated in the canine-assisted training attributed great significance to the dog's presence for the training's success and their sense of well-being. In contrast, the hand puppet used in the control group was rarely mentioned. Notably, children in the canine-assisted group described caregiving for the animal as particularly meaningful.

Conclusions:

The findings suggest that caring for an animal may promote self-care, thereby supporting the development of resilience. These insights highlight the potential of canine-assisted interventions in fostering social learning and resilience in children and underscore the need for further research in this field.

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59 Why are dog breeders resistant to do what will improve the health of the dogs they breed? – A qualitative study to identify the obstacles and how to get around them

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Abstract

Introduction: Modern dog breeds originate from Victorian Britain where breeding in closed populations created uniform groups of dogs. Knowledge about breeding related health disorders emerged in the 1960s and hip dysplasia was the first of many for which a screening program was established. However, with few exceptions, only limited improvements have been made. Compared to production animal breeding, dog breeding is undertaken by a diverse group with few professional players. So, improving the health of dogs relies largely on the decisions of these individuals. The present qualitative study investigates motivational factors, resistance and general attitudes to breeding regulation using a screening program for disc calcifications in Danish Dachshunds as an example.

Methodology: A total of 17 interviews were carried out with key stakeholders from the Danish Dachshund breeding community. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed in NVIVO using an abductive approach.

Main results/findings: Three overarching themes emerged: the disease itself, the screening method, and the expected outcome of the breeding program. Providing data documenting the severity as well as the prevalence of the health problem in question was central to establishing a general understanding of the need for intervention. Equally important was ensuring transparency and impartiality of the screening process. Mistrust was a common cause of resistance, and the breeders expressed a need to understand why their dog was either approved or disqualified. Finally, participants highlighted a need for a way to monitor progress and work towards a clearly defined goal.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: The study identifies factors to consider for stakeholders engaged in dog breeding. It is recommended that systems to provide reliable data on disease prevalences are developed nationally as well as internationally. In addition, transparency of the screening and methods to evaluate the effect must be part of the planning process.

60 SAFEpet@home: Adaptation of the Dutch PET@home Toolkit for the UK home care context

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Abstract

Introduction: Pets play an important role in the lives of people receiving home care, contributing to wellbeing, quality of life, and emotional support. At the same time, living with a companion-animal in a home care context presents challenges, such as reliance on informal caregivers, concerns about animal welfare, and uncertainty among professional caregivers about how to address pet-related issues. In the Netherlands, the PET@home Toolkit was developed to support stakeholders with these challenges. The aim of this project was to translate and adapt the Dutch PET@home Toolkit for use in the United Kingdom.

Methodology: A qualitative adaptation process was conducted between September 2024 and June 2025. Following an initial translation using ChatGPT, the toolkit materials were reviewed through two online focus groups and two individual interviews with UK-based experts (N = 12), including veterinarians and professionals experienced in home care and companion animals. Adaptation involved an iterative process, followed by member checking. The study was preregistered and received ethical approval.

Findings: The adaptation resulted in the SAFEpet@home Toolkit. Key changes included: (1) a stronger emphasis on the role of veterinary practices; (2) increased diversity in both clients and animal species; (3) replacement of the Five Freedoms framework with the Five Domains model of animal welfare. The adapted toolkit includes an information booklet, care plan checklists, communication and animal welfare leaflets, conversation cards, and an implementation guide.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: The SAFEpet@home Toolkit aligns with the UK's emphasis on person-centred care and supports home care professionals in acknowledging and addressing the role of pets in clients' lives. By supporting proactive conversations, the toolkit has the potential to enhance wellbeing, reduce avoidable risks, and support sustainable home care for clients living with companion animals.

61 Exploration of the facilitators and challenges encountered in the process of integrating dogs into schools

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Abstract

Introduction: By ensuring the general well-being of students and meeting the needs of students with special needs, dogs have gradually carved out a place for themselves in schools. The effects of their presence on students' cognitive, social, physiological, and emotional spheres are widely documented in scientific literature. However, few studies have specifically examined the processes involved in integrating them into schools. Additionally there has been little research conducted on the measures implemented to ensure the well-being of both students and dogs in schools. Therefore, this study focuses on the facilitators and challenges encountered in the process of integrating dogs into schools with an emphasis on the well-being of both dogs and students.

Method: Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually. A thematic analysis identified four themes and one sub-theme: 1) the process is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty; 1.1) animal-assisted therapy is still little-known intervention; 2) dogs are

more than just therapeutic objects; 3) the addition of responsibilities; 4) the importance of social support.

Results: Obstacles were identified at various levels (governmental, organizational, community, and personal), complicating the process of integrating dogs into schools and limiting access to this type of intervention for students who could benefit from it. The results collected consider the perspectives of various stakeholders involved, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and concerns encountered during the process of integration. This study also examined the measures put in place to ensure the well-being of students and dogs in schools, an innovative aspect of research on human-animal interactions.

Conclusion: Overall, this research fills a gap in the literature, as few studies have focused specifically on the process of integrating dogs into schools, none in Quebec, Canada. It also presents interesting solutions and ideas for making dog-assisted interventions more accessible in Quebec schools.

62 Customizing an On-Campus Canine-Assisted Intervention for Autistic University Students: Perceptions and Recommendations

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Abstract

Introduction. Autistic university students face increased mental health challenges compared to their neurotypical peers and report that university well-being supports are lacking. One approach to supporting the well-being of autistic students is found through offering on-campus Canine-Assisted Interventions (CAIs). However, research on CAIs for autistic populations focuses largely on children and has yet to explore how CAIs can be tailored to support the sensory and social needs of autistic people. This research explored how a CAI could be adapted for autistic university students.

Methodology. Grounded in both anthrozoological and autism research, a CAI that considered sensory stimuli and varying levels of social comfort was developed and implemented. Ten autistic university students ($M_{age} = 21.59$ years, 30.8% female, 15.4% male, 30.8% non-binary, 23.1% preferred to self-describe) who attended this CAI participated in a semi-structured case-study interview regarding their perceptions of the session. Interviews were transcribed and Thematic Analysis conducted to reveal salient themes.

Main findings. Participants overwhelmingly reported enjoying and benefitting from the low-stimuli CAI session, with 100% of participants stating that they would recommend this program to other autistic students. Participants identified the aspects that enhanced (e.g., calm demeanor, physical contact, reciprocity) or detracted from (e.g., smell, challenges reading the dog's cues, lack of interaction) their experience. Participants notably appreciated low-level lighting, reduced noise, and decreased physical or perceived presence of people and dogs. Finally, many participants reported being able to *unmask* aspects of themselves (i.e., allowed them to be “themselves”), while still masking or self-regulating other aspects based on perceived societal expectations.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field. Findings hold potential to inform researchers and practitioners, both within and outside the field of human-animal

interactions, and this research illustrates how CAIs may be modified to support diverse learners.

63 An overview of Animal-Assisted Services with cats in Italy: a survey for cat handlers

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Abstract

Animal-Assisted Services (AAS) with cats have been scarcely investigated. This study provides an overview of cat assisted services in Italy. In January 2026, an online survey was sent to 408 Italian formally trained, certified cat handlers registered in DigitalPet platform; 33.6% responded (N=137). The survey collected data on handlers, cats, AAS sessions, potential issues and benefits associated with AAS for cats and users.

Respondents were mainly middle age (47.0 ± 10.7 years old) women (96.4%) with diverse occupations. Notably, 59.1% had never participated in AAS involving cats although their training as cat handlers, reporting that they had never had the opportunity (61.7%) or did not have a suitable cat (29.6%).

Among those who had participated in AAS (N=56; 40.9%), 27.8% did it as cat handler and 13.1% in other roles. The majority (78.6%) of AAS were activities, mainly with children (60.7%), people with disabilities (53.6%), and older adults (39.3%), performed in various settings such as schools (42.9%), elderly homes (33.9%), but also the cat (19.6%) and the user (12.5%) home. The frequency was 4 times per month (30.4%) or less (48.2%), with a duration of less than 60 minutes (73.9%) per session. The main obstacles encountered in AAS involving cats were inappropriate space and concerns on cat welfare (both 45.5%), and difficulties in matching cats with specific users (18.2%). In an open question asking the benefits of cat-AAS, the most commonly reported were the enhancement of calm (41.1%) and respect (7.1%).

Despite being certified, the majority of interviewed handlers had never participated in AAS with cats. Among those who had, a low monthly frequency and potential issues, above all related to cat welfare, were reported. Cat involvement in AAS seem to be quite uncommon, although potentially beneficial for humans; further research is required to facilitate their application while protecting cat welfare.

64 They Shoot Horses, Don't They? – A comparison of attitudes among horse-owners in Austria, Denmark, and Germany to euthanasia of privately owned horses

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Abstract

Introduction: Scandinavian countries are much more accepting of killing companion animals for reasons other than serious illness than German speaking countries, while slaughter of farm animals is equally accepted in both areas. Horses are situated somewhere in the middle. This presentation, therefore, aims to compare attitudes concerning when it is acceptable for horse-owners to euthanize horses in Austria and Germany versus Denmark.

Methodology: Participants for the study were recruited by NORSTAT and partner companies, to gain a broad sample of Austrian, German and Danish horse owners. The final sample consisted of 1,435 horse owners, including 369 (25.7%) from Austria, 763 (53.2%) from Germany, and 303 (21.1%) from Denmark. The statistical differences between attitudes among the horse owners in the countries are reported.

Main results/findings: About a third of the Austrian and German respondents said that they were fundamentally against humane killing of horses while this was only the case for a little more than 10 % of the Danish owners ($P < 0.001$). When asked whether horse euthanasia should only be used when all available medical options for the horse have been exhausted a majority of over 70% of Austrian and German owners agreed, while less than half as many of the Danish horse owners did ($P < 0.001$). When asked whether it is acceptable to delay the euthanasia of seriously ill horses, Austrian and German horse owners were significantly more accepting than the Danish ones.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: There are significant differences in national attitudes regarding horse euthanasia, with a more “utilitarian” attitude in Denmark. These findings have implications for the horse sector and the veterinary sector in the countries.

65 Decoding the Depths: How does AI help determine whether sperm whale vocalisations exhibit patterns of meaning comparable to human language?

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Abstract

Sperm whales (*physeter macrocephalus*) are an endangered species with a highly complex vocalization system. This review summarises widespread research on how artificial intelligence (AI) can be utilized to examine whether their vocalizations exhibit patterns of meaning compatible with human language. Sperm whales produce highly structured and varying click sequences, which suggest a sentient linguistic understanding, but technological and methodological limitations have hindered our efforts to examine these communications at scale. AI, particularly natural language processing within machine learning, enables researchers to identify acoustic patterns, classify call types, and map the complex contextual features of whale communication within their society. This paper evaluates current approaches, namely key researchers and initiatives such as Project CETI, that apply techniques such as tagging, aerial drones, and tethered buoy arrays to further this research. This review also addresses the critical challenges within the field, namely, limited available datasets, inadequate contextual understanding, and anthropocentric bias. Through the evaluation of both the progress and constraints of AI-led bioacoustics, this paper highlights the potential for interspecies communication and the potential drawbacks it may have, such as specialized fishing and further disruption of sperm whale communities. Ultimately, the

goal is to not only discover the linguistic potential of sperm whale vocalizations and initiate interspecies communication but also to consider how that breakthrough might fundamentally affect the way humans think about the intelligence, cognition, and exploitation of animals.

66 The Impact of a Dog's Passive Presence on Anxiety Perception in University Students in Chile

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Abstract

Introduction: Anxiety in university students is a growing mental health concern that affects the well-being and academic performance. This study aimed to evaluate the impact of the passive presence of a trained dog in the classroom on the perception of anxiety in university students in Chile. The hypothesis was that the presence of a dog would significantly reduce perceived anxiety compared to a control condition (no dog present).

Methodology: A quasi-experimental, repeated-measures pre-post design was employed. Participants (N=127) were undergraduate students from Veterinary Medicine and Law Studies, divided into experimental (dog present) and control groups (no dog). Anxiety was measured using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) at the beginning and end of a class session. In the experimental condition, a trained dog was passively present without human (student) interaction. Data were analyzed using t-tests.

Main results/findings: A statistically significant decrease in state anxiety was observed in the group exposed to the dog compared to the control group ($p < 0.001$). A significant reduction in trait anxiety was also found in the experimental group ($p < 0.001$). The effect was consistent across both academic disciplines (Veterinary Medicine and Law), with no significant difference in efficacy between them.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: The passive, non-interactive presence of a dog in a classroom may be an effective strategy for the immediate reduction of both state and trait anxiety in university students, regardless of their field of study. This finding supports the implementation of low-cost, low-disruption animal-assisted Interventions in higher education to foster healthier learning environments. Future research should incorporate longitudinal designs and physiological measures to assess the duration and mechanisms of this effect.

67 Human-wolf co-existence: Livestock protection measures in wolf territories

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Abstract

Introduction

According to zoo management guidelines (R. Laidlaw, 2000), wolf enclosures require electrified fencing at least 2.5m high with a 0.7–1m inward-sloping overhang of 35–45° and anti-digging barriers extending 1m below ground. In response to a 65% rise in Europe's free-roaming wolf population over the past decade, this study reviews existing livestock enclosure guidelines designed to separate and protect farm animals living in wolf territory.

Material and Method

In October–December 2025, the search string “livestock protection measures wolf”, was used on Google Scholar (cut-off: 100 publications).

Results

Google identified 87 relevant publications. Most sources (77%) recommend fencing to prevent wolf contact. Recommended fence heights vary, with 18% suggesting 90–120 cm, 9% 130–150 cm, and 8% over 150 cm. 61% publications suggest electric fences, with 7% suggesting 2,000–5,000V, and 2% advise above 5,000V.

To prevent digging, measures include burying the lowest wire (5%) or placing it max. 20 cm (6%), or 30 cm (1%) above ground. Passage through fences may be reduced using wire mesh (12%), 3–6 wires (8%), or more than six wires (2%). Night livestock shelters are mentioned in 46% of publications.

Scare deterrents include fladry or coloured flags (18%), lights (18%), sound (19%) and scent deterrents (eg ammonia, cinnamon, human hair, etc.) (10%). Livestock guardian dogs (71%) are widely reported, followed by donkeys (8%) and llamas (6%).

Discussion

Recommendations for protecting livestock from free-roaming wolves vary widely, and their effectiveness may depend on local wolf pack experience and problem-solving skills, such as the ability to jump over or crawl under fences, or dig beneath them. Further research is needed to clarify how the effectiveness of specific protection measures relate to region-specific wolf predation strategies, which may be shaped by genetic factors, social learning within packs, and ecosystem characteristics.

68 Ethical approach to the use of invertebrates in environmental monitoring. Could it contribute to reshaping human perception and relationships with them?

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Abstract

Small animals, such as invertebrates, are often overlooked. Human attitudes toward them can vary widely, ranging from curiosity to indifference, fear, or aversion, often influenced by perceptions of their appearance. Despite this, they play crucial roles in ecosystems, and some species can serve as effective bioindicators of environmental quality, providing valuable information for habitat monitoring and conservation planning. The topic of sentience in invertebrates is increasingly debated, and in some species it has been demonstrated, representing a new frontier for animal ethics. These insights could help shift human attitudes toward these animals and the way they are perceived.

Their use in biomonitoring should focus on the respect they deserve and on placing them in the spotlight of an ethical rethinking of practices. The most widely used biomonitoring techniques involve the collection and sacrifice of thousands of invertebrate specimens. We present a non-lethal, observation-based method: the Soil and Freshwater Biodiversity Indices of the Biodiversity Friend® certification standard. Based on observation and release, the protocol ensures accurate ecosystem assessment while respecting animal welfare. It also reduces costs and labor, making it suitable for diverse field conditions, including areas with limited technical or economic support.

69 Human Perception of Canine Emotional States During Petting: Effects of Expertise and Short-Term Body-Language Training

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Abstract

For many people, petting a dog can be a comforting and pleasant experience. People like to pet dogs because they are warm, soft, and generally evoke positive emotions. Many owners also use petting as a way to express love and affection toward their dog. However, an important question arises: does the dog experience this interaction in the same way? Are people aware of the possible discrepancy between what humans intend and how dogs actually feel during petting?

In this study, 15 short video clips of dogs being petted by their owners were shown to participants (n = 37). They were asked to rate the dogs' feelings ("pleasantness score"), that is, how pleasant they thought the dogs were feeling during the petting session, on a scale from 0 (the dog doesn't like the petting at all) to 5 (the dog found the petting very enjoyable). Three experts in dog behaviour also scored the dogs. This study investigated whether there was a difference in scoring between laypeople and professionals, and whether a short information session about dog stress signals influenced these scores. After watching the videos for the first time and rating the dogs, participants received a short information session on stress signals in dogs. Afterwards, they rated the dogs again.

There was a significant difference between the scores given by laypeople and professionals, both before and after the information session. On average, laypeople gave the dogs higher scores than professionals, indicating that they assumed the dogs enjoyed being petted more than professionals estimated. However, after the information session, laypeople gave significantly lower scores on average, although these scores were still higher than those given by the professionals.

This illustrates that humans overestimate canine enjoyment and that continued education is needed to enhance recognition of subtle stress indicators.

DigitalPoster Artificial Intelligence Applications to Aid Qualitative Research in Animal-Assisted TherapiesWith Farm Animals

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Abstract

Introduction: Artificial intelligence is increasingly used to support qualitative research, including coding, pattern recognition, and thematic identification. However, its use in human animal interaction research raises important methodological and ethical questions, particularly regarding contextual interpretation, privacy, and the risk of overreliance on automated analysis. This presentation describes an AI assisted qualitative methodology developed for an animal assisted therapy with farm animals intervention involving domesticated ducks and individuals with traumatic brain injury.

Methodology: This methodological study used qualitative thematic content analysis of 10 semistructured exit interviews collected after a 12 week duck assisted intervention. Human researchers and the AI based software Insight7 independently reviewed deidentified interview transcripts. The researchers then compared human generated themes with AI generated insights to evaluate convergence, divergence, and the role of human oversight in refining qualitative interpretation.

Main results/findings: Human and AI generated findings showed broad agreement across the final thematic structure. Four major themes summarized participant experiences: emotional wellbeing, attachment, care, and nature and environment. AI supported the organization of transcripts and helped identify recurring linguistic patterns. However, AI also demonstrated contextual limitations. For example, it misclassified routine duck care activities, such as breaking ice for water access and repairing an enclosure, as challenges rather than meaningful caregiving. AI also labeled coping related experiences as broad therapeutic effects, which human researchers found less precise. These discrepancies prompted reflexive review and strengthened confidence in the final interpretation.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: AI can support qualitative analysis in anthrozoology by improving organization, transparency, and early pattern identification. However, AI cannot replace the contextual judgment, ethical responsibility, and interpretive depth of human researchers. In human animal interaction research, AI should be used as a supportive analytic tool rather than an independent authority. Future work should refine AI tools while preserving human oversight as central to rigorous and ethical qualitative inquiry.

DigitalPoster Shifting Meanings of Dōbutsu Aigo in Japanese Media Discourse ~A Diachronic Analysis of National Newspaper Coverage~

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Abstract

Introduction. This study aims to examine how the term Dōbutsu Aigo has been used in Japanese media discourse and how its meanings have shifted over time. The term Dōbutsu Aigo is widely used in Japan, encompassing meanings that partially overlap with the concept of animal welfare. Although Dōbutsu Aigo has been employed as a polysemous concept encompassing values such as protection, welfare, emotion, ethics, and management, its actual patterns of use in mass media have not been sufficiently examined systematically.

Methodology. Using the Yomiuri Shimbun database, this study analyzed articles published between 1999 and 2024, corresponding to the period following the revision of the Act on Welfare and Management of Animals. Articles containing either the term “Dōbutsu Aigo” or both “Dōbutsu” and “Aigo” were extracted and divided into three periods: the late 1990s–2000s, the 2010s, and the 2020s. Based on co-occurrence analysis, articles referring to “dogs” and “cats” were selected for analysis. A period-based categorical analysis was conducted, followed by hierarchical cluster analysis for each category. Subsequently, representative articles were examined qualitatively.

Main Results. 1,620 articles were extracted. In the 1990s–2000s, media discourse surrounding Dōbutsu Aigo was characterized primarily by ethical and empathetic narratives articulated by citizens, volunteers, and veterinarians. During the 2010s, attempts at institutionalization through public–private collaboration became increasingly prominent. In the 2020s, the term was more frequently used in connection with the operation of social institutions, exemplified by themes such as disaster-related evacuation with pets and the advance allocation of owner responsibility.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field. The findings suggest that the meaning of Dōbutsu Aigo has been reorganized in response to emerging social issues. Future research should extend this analysis through cross-newspaper comparisons and international perspectives to further clarify the role of the term in structuring social institutions, emotions, and responsibilities.

DigitalPoster Human Gaze and Pointing Cue Interpretation by Indian Free-Ranging Dogs

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Abstract

Urban environments create frequent opportunities for interactions between humans and animals, resulting in both coexistence and conflict. Certain species possess advanced socio-cognitive abilities that enable them to interpret human communicative gestures and use these cues adaptively. In this study, we investigated whether Indian free-ranging dogs (FRDs) can utilize human social-referential cues, specifically pointing and gazing, to locate hidden food. We also compared the effectiveness of unimodal cues with multimodal cues in guiding their responses.

A total of 352 adult FRDs participated in an object-choice task involving six experimental conditions: a control condition without cues, a negative control with one baited bowl but no cue, combined pointing-and-gazing cues, pointing-only cues, gazing-only cues, and a conflicting-cues condition in which pointing and gazing indicated opposite bowls. The results revealed that dogs successfully identified the correct target only when both pointing and gazing cues were presented together ($\chi^2 = 11.520$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). Performance in the unimodal and conflicting-cue conditions remained at chance level, suggesting that clear and redundant multimodal signals are crucial for successful communication.

The study further demonstrated that a dog's demeanor significantly influenced its willingness to participate in the task. Affiliative dogs approached more readily, exhibited

shorter approach latencies, and were more likely to succeed compared to anxious or neutral individuals. However, although demeanor affected motivation and speed of approach, it did not significantly influence the accuracy of choosing the correct bowl. This distinction indicates that personality traits shape engagement behavior, whereas the cognitive ability to interpret human cues operates independently. Overall, these findings reinforce the idea that Indian FRDs are capable of understanding human social signals, with successful interpretation depending strongly on the clarity and redundancy of multimodal communication. The study highlights the complex relationship between temperament, cognition, and signal characteristics in dog–human interactions.

DigitalPoster Pain Management in Pet Guinea Pigs (*Cavia porcellus*): a Review

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Abstract

Introduction

Guinea pigs (*Cavia porcellus*) are popular pets worldwide. Appropriate veterinary care and knowledge are important factors in human-animal interaction and welfare. This study examined pain assessment and pain management of guinea pigs through systematic review. Data was collected on analgesia, doses and efficacy. The study considered impacts on welfare and identified areas for further research.

Methodology

The systematic review of peer-reviewed literature from 2000 onwards was completed through database searches from ScienceDirect, PubMed and CAB abstracts along with relevant information from books and ebooks. Terms used were guinea pigs, cavies, *Cavia porcellus*, pain, surgery, surgical procedures, grimace, dental, bloat, analgesia, non-steroidal anti-inflammatories and opiates.

Main results/findings

There were few studies in the areas of pain assessment and pain management in guinea pigs identified, demonstrating a lack of definitive recommendations for efficacy and dosing of analgesics to avoid subtherapeutic dosing and poor welfare. Grimace scales and in-clinic pain assessment scales are validated for use in other species but not currently for guinea pigs.

Doses of analgesic drugs had been extrapolated from other species or from anecdotal evidence in the absence of validated values. The specified dose for the only UK licenced analgesic drug for guinea pigs (meloxicam) is significantly lower than recorded in the reviewed literature with potential negative impact on their welfare. Pharmacokinetic (PK) and pharmacodynamic (PD) data are limited for analgesia in guinea pigs, this review collates studies of PK and PD data for meloxicam in rabbits and guinea pigs highlighting potential for current subtherapeutic dosing in guinea pigs.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

To improve welfare, further research into PK and PD properties of analgesic drugs specific to this species are required. Further research into the development and

validation of pain assessment methods is also indicated to promote improved clinical knowledge and better welfare.

DigitalPoster Not Just Pets: Attachment in the Human-Pet Rat Relationship

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Abstract

The human-pet rat relationship remains underexplored compared to that of more common companion animals, particularly regarding implications for rat welfare. This study investigated owner attachment to pet rats, perceived impacts of ownership, and associations between attachment and potentially welfare-relevant care behaviours. An online questionnaire collected data from 252 rat owners, including attachment scores (using 21/23 questions from the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale; excluding the two negatively framed questions), perceived impacts of ownership, and owner care practices including how frequently owners interacted with their rats and the length of time rats were allowed access outside their cages. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests, while the free-text responses were analysed using reflective thematic analysis.

Attachment scores were generally high (median=53.00, max range: 0-63). Most owners (n=231) reported interacting with their rats multiple times daily; these owners had significantly higher attachment scores ($U=1216.50$, $Z=-3.79$, $p<0.001$, $r=0.24$) than those interacting once daily (n=21). Owners who allowed their rats outside the cage less than daily (n=68), once daily (n=86), or multiple times daily or with constant access (n=91) differed significantly in attachment scores (Kruskal-Wallis $H(2)=8.519$, $p=0.014$; owners who selected 'other' (n=7) excluded from analysis). Post-hoc Mann-Whitney U tests with Bonferroni correction ($p<0.017$) indicated that owners providing once-daily access outside the cage had significantly higher attachment scores than those providing less than daily access ($p=0.004$), with no other comparisons reaching significance. Reflective thematic analysis also indicated that owners reported rat ownership improved their quality of life.

Overall, the human-pet rat relationship appeared beneficial for owners and higher owner attachment was associated with some care behaviours likely to enhance rat welfare. However, participation bias likely means this sample over-represented highly attached owners, suggesting rat welfare in the broader population may warrant further investigation.

DigitalPoster Scent marks as social signals: olfactory communication and territoriality in free-ranging dogs

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Abstract

Introduction. Free-ranging dogs live closely with humans in urban and peri-urban landscapes, where they negotiate territories, resources, mates, and group membership. Although scent marking is a major form of canid communication, its role in the social and territorial dynamics of free-ranging dogs remains poorly understood. We tested whether dogs distinguish scent marks according to sex and group identity, and whether these cues trigger territorial and overmarking responses.

Methodology. We conducted field-based scent-presentation experiments with free-ranging dog groups across 25 locations in Nadia and Purba Bardhaman districts, West Bengal, India, from March 2022 to November 2023. Scent marks from male and female dogs were collected on cotton cloth and presented either within the donor's own group territory or to neighbouring groups. Presentations were made at resource areas, resting sites, and territorial boundaries; controls used water-treated cloth. Each three-minute trial was video-recorded, and responses were scored using an ethogram including investigation, vigilance, aggressive barking, scent marking, overmarking, and ground scratching.

Main Results. We conducted 302 trials, of which 192 elicited responses. Dogs investigated scent marks for longer than controls, and investigation time was higher for neighbouring-group than own-group scent marks. Dogs overmarked 37 times, mostly on scent samples rather than controls. Males overmarked male scent marks more frequently than females and responded more often to neighbouring-group than same-group scent marks. Territorial response scores were higher for scent marks than controls, and males showed stronger territorial responses than females. Behavioural clustering revealed distinct response profiles based on scent-donor sex and group identity.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. Scent marks function as important social signals in free-ranging dogs, mediating territorial defence and intrasexual competition. These findings show how human-associated animals use olfactory information to maintain social organization in shared human–animal spaces, with implications for understanding dog behaviour, coexistence, and welfare.

DigitalPoster Older people living in Long-Term Care Facilities: character strengths and human-dog bond

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Abstract

Introduction: Studies on human–animal interactions among older adults have suggested psychosocial benefits, particularly reduced loneliness and improved well-being. However, findings remain heterogeneous, with most studies focusing on animal-assisted interventions, while quantitative investigations involving institutionalized older adults living with their dogs remain scarce, especially in underrepresented countries. Additionally, character strengths (positive psychological traits associated with human thriving) are a promising tool to evaluate human well-being in Long-Term Care Facilities (LTCFs).

Objective: To characterize older adults who live with their dogs in LTCFs, especially character strengths and the human-animal bond.

Methodology: Participants were residents in two LTCFs in São Paulo state, Brazil, aged ≥ 60 years, living with their dogs, and cognitively capable. They completed sociodemographic and dog characteristics questions, the Character Strengths Scale, the Dog Owner Relationship Scale (DORS - interactions, emotional closeness, and perceived costs), and the 10-TaGA-LTCF (adapted from the 10-minute Targeted Geriatric Assessment for LTCF settings).

Main Results: Thirty residents participated (mean age: 72.5 years) with 73% women and median time in education of 16 years. Long-term coexistence with their dogs was observed (mean=6.3 years); most dogs were small-sized and adopted/rescued (76.7% each). The main character strengths were Love (93.3%), Perspective (90%), and Gratitude (86.7%). Most participants (93.3%) presented low geriatric vulnerability, and the median of dog-owner interaction scores (DORS; 0-1) was 0.5.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: Findings suggest that older people living with their dogs in LTCFs showed high levels of many character strengths, low geriatric vulnerability, and moderate DORS scores. It also proposes that character strengths may function as important psychological tools to evaluate the human-animal bond. Although further research comparing different groups of older people living in LTCFs is needed, these findings support the development of more humanized and person-centered institutional care models, capable of recognizing the psychosocial benefits of safe coexistence between residents and their companion animals.

DigitalPoster Scale and Spectrum? Does Being Autistic Impact Preferences Between Mammals and Reptiles?

Mr Cai Brown¹, Dr Romina Vivaldi¹, Dr Nikki Street², Dr Gemma Hurst¹

¹*University of Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, United Kingdom.* ²*Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom*

Abstract

Introduction:

Although most animal-assisted interventions involve mammals (e.g. rabbits) numerous providers working with autistic individuals employ reptiles (e.g. snakes). Despite claims that certain behavioural and sensory aspects of reptiles are especially appealing to autistic clients, little research documents autistic people's animal preferences, nor how these compare to those of non-autistic individuals. This study thus aims to ascertain and compare the popularity of reptiles and mammals for interaction activities amongst autistic and non-autistic populations.

Methodology:

Autistic (n=65) and non-autistic (n=102) participants watched seven identically framed 35-second videos in randomised order. These showed 4 reptiles and 3 mammals being handled and stroked at timed intervals. After each video participants were asked "Do you enjoy watching this animal?" and "Would you like to physically interact with this animal?" via Likert scales (-3 to 3).

Main results/findings:

ANOVA analyses showed a significant main effect of animal type (mammal or reptile) upon participants' enjoyment of watching the animals [$F(1, 165)=19.050$, $p<.001$,

$\eta^2=.020$] and desire to interact with them [$F(1, 165)=31.572, p<.001, \eta^2=.037$], with mammals being more popular than reptiles in both scenarios. There was no significant main effect of participant neurotype (autistic or non-autistic) upon participants' enjoyment of watching [$F(1, 165)=.001, p=.978, \eta^2<.001$] or desire to interact with [$F(1, 165)=.357, p=.551, \eta^2=.001$] mammals or reptiles. There was likewise no significant interaction between animal type and participant neurotype upon enjoyment of watching [$F(1, 165)=.183, p=.669, \eta^2<.001$] or interest in interaction [$F(1, 165)=.612, p=.435, \eta^2<.001$] with mammals or reptiles.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

This study suggests that both autistic and non-autistic populations typically prefer the idea of watching and interacting with small mammals as opposed to reptiles.

Nevertheless, the effect sizes reported are quite modest. These findings can be applied to species selection for animal therapy.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Everyday Human–Animal Interaction, Affect, and Mental Health

9:00 - 10:00am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

Sponsored by:



9:00 - 9:20am

200 Biophilia and digital disconnection: Daily animal contact – but not nature contact – aids daily work recovery and positive affect in dog/cat caregivers

Dr. Joni Delanoeije^{1,2}, Dr. Alice Verlinden¹

¹Work and Organisation Studies, KU Leuven, Leuven, Vlaams-Brabant, Belgium.

²Research Foundation Flanders (FWO), Brussels, Brussels, Belgium

Abstract

Introduction. Employees are increasingly digitally connected to their work beyond working hours. Being “always-on” hinders psychological recovery and emotional well-being. Digital disconnection (DD; the deliberate limitation of work-related ICT use after hours) may counter these harms. Yet, its effects remain inconsistent, with limited insight into the boundary conditions shaping its effectiveness. Interestingly, the biophilia hypothesis highlights the potential of nature contact—spending time outdoors or interacting with animals—to support recovery and emotional well-being. Although both DD and biophilia may help restoring mental resources, their interplay has not been examined. This is surprising given emerging evidence that nature contact could help reducing screen-time. We integrate both perspectives, examining how daily DD, outdoor contact, and animal contact jointly relate to next-day recovery and positive affect (PA).

Methodology. We conducted a daily diary study over 10 workdays, with 86 employees with a cat/dog completing app-based morning and evening surveys ($N_{\text{day-observations}} = 629$). Evening measures captured DD (5-item;EDDS) and after-work outdoor (1-item)

and animal (1-item) contact. Morning measures assessed next-day recovery (3-item) and PA (5-item; PANAS). Data were analyzed using multilevel linear-mixed modeling, assessing main effects of DD, outdoor contact, and animal contact, and moderating effects of DD*outdoor and DD*animal.

Results. For recovery, DD ($\beta=0.012$, $p<.05$) and animal contact ($\beta=0.04$, $p<.05$)—but not outdoor contact—predicted recovery. Moreover, the DD*animal interaction ($\beta=-0.03$, $p=.11$) suggested that animal contact buffers against recovery-drops due to low DD. The DD*outdoor interaction was not significant. For PA, animal ($\beta=0.02$, $p<.05$) and outdoor ($\beta=0.03$, $p=.056$) contact (marginally)—but not DD—predicted PA.

Conclusions/Implications. This study offers novel evidence that animal contact, but not outdoor contact, increases employees' daily recovery and PA, complementing benefits of DD and compensating when employees disconnect less. These findings suggest that daily animal interactions may support restorative and affective processes, also when daily DD is compromised.

9:20 - 9:40am

244 Using ecological momentary assessment to evaluate the impact of pet presence on human thought patterns and affect

Dr. Nicole M Lorig¹, Dara Jonkoski¹, Dr. Eric Andrews^{1,2}, Dr. Jessica R Andrews-Hanna¹, Dr. Matthew D Grilli¹, Huashi Li¹, Dr. Edward J Bedrick¹, Dr. Evan MacLean¹, Dr. Emily Bray¹, Dr. Kerri Rodriguez¹

¹The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA. ²Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Research has increasingly explored how daily pet interactions may influence momentary indicators of wellbeing. Ecological momentary assessment (EMA) methods offer a unique way to examine this question. Our objective was to use EMA to assess the influence of pet presence on pet owners' in-the-moment thought patterns and affect, as well as the potential moderating role of pet owners' mental health.

Methodology: Using the Mind Window smartphone app, a convenience sample of N=1,350 dog- and/or cat-owning adults ($M_{age}=43.0$) answered up to 6 EMA prompts per day across 14 days. Prompts included questions on the content of current thoughts (0=very negative to 1=very positive), momentary affect (0=unpleasant to 1=pleasant), and whether a pet was present. Participants also completed single-timepoint questionnaires of trait mental health including depression, anxiety, loneliness, and social support, which were averaged to create a composite score. Data were analyzed using hierarchical linear models with pet presence and covariates as fixed effects. Random intercepts were included for individuals and for days nested within individuals to account for repeated EMA observations.

Results: Results indicated a small effect of pet presence on thought content ($p<0.001$) with thoughts being rated as slightly more negative ($M=0.639$) when a pet was present compared to absent ($M=0.647$). There was no main effect of pet presence on momentary affect ($p=0.33$). However, mental health significantly moderated the relationship between pet presence and affect ($p<0.001$) such that the positive effect of pet presence on momentary affect was stronger among those with poorer mental health.

Conclusions/Implications: Although the effect of pet presence on thought patterns was statistically detectable, it was small in magnitude and unlikely to be practically significant. Moderation findings further highlight the complexity of human-pet relationships and provide insight into for whom pet presence may have the most impact.

9:40 - 10:00am

128 Pets as Reasons for Living: A New Measure to Inform Suicide Research and Practice

Dr Shelby E McDonald¹, Dr Camie A Tomlinson², Dr Stacey L Freedenthal³, Dr. Nicole Nicotera³, Dr. Lori R Kogan¹, Jada K Ford¹

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Abstract

Introduction: Suicide is a global public health crisis and a leading cause of preventable death. Companion animals have been identified as a potential suicide-protective factor and reason for living; however, this pet-related protective construct has not been assessed using a validated, pet-specific measure. To address this gap, we developed and psychometrically evaluated the Pet-Specific Reasons for Living Scale (Pet-RFL) in response to calls for improved measurement of protective human–animal relationships.

Methodology: The sample included 962 U.S. pet owners recruited through Prolific using nationally representative sampling. The 16-item Pet-RFL was developed based on the original Reasons for Living (RFL) Inventory. Confirmatory factor analyses tested competing factor structures and measurement invariance across sociodemographic groups (race/ethnicity, gender identity, relationship status, parenting status, age, pet type). Convergent validity was assessed via associations with the RFL scale and measures of suicidal ideation severity and intensity.

Main results/findings: A four-factor model fit best compared to single-factor ($\Delta\chi^2(6)=203.19$, $p<.001$) and higher-order models ($\Delta\chi^2(2)=13.28$, $p=.001$). The factors—Responsibility, Pet Dependence and Risk, Emotional Attachment, and Anticipated Emotional Harm—were largely invariant across sociodemographic groups, except for age, indicating minimal measurement bias. All Pet-RFL factors were positively associated with the RFL total score ($\beta_s = .13-.28$, $ps < .001$), supporting convergent validity. Emotional Attachment was the only factor associated with suicidality; higher attachment predicted lower severity ($B=-3.93$, $p<.05$) and intensity ($B=-4.45$, $p<.05$) of suicidal ideation.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Findings provide initial support for the Pet-RFL as a multidimensional measure of pet-related reasons for living with evidence of convergent and criterion-related validity. Emotional Attachment may function as a suicide-protective factor, while other dimensions capture distinct, psychometrically valid aspects of pet-related meaning relevant to broader suicide-related processes.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Human-Wildlife Interactions: Sharing Space & Policy

9:00 - 10:00am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

137 Who is Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf? Measuring a Cultural Stereotype

Maël Theubet¹, Valentine Voigt², Emily Heer², Clément Chalut², Charlotte Vadori², Beatriz Izquierdo González², Ariadna Mon Gomis², Prof. Christine Mohr¹, Alexandre Roulin¹

¹University of Lausanne, Lausanne, Switzerland. ²EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland

Abstract

Introduction

Over the past decades, the expansion of grey wolves in Europe has led to increased conflicts with humans and public debates about wolf management. Discussions surrounding wolves are often tainted by negative cultural representations, which may perpetuate stereotypes that in turn influence conservation policies. Yet this stereotype has not been examined using implicit behavioural measures, which can capture automatic biases operating outside conscious awareness.

Methodology

We performed a Go/No-Go Association Task to measure the association of 16 positive and negative trait adjectives with six species in positive or negative contexts. Participants also provided explicit wolf ratings. A total of 102 participants completed a laboratory experiment. Generalized linear mixed models were used to examine how species, context valence, and demographic moderators (age, gender, diet, nature-relatedness, and pet ownership) predicted reaction times.

Results

Participants responded slower to wolves in positive contexts ($\beta = 0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .007$), but faster for cats and turtles ($\beta = -0.08$, $SE = 0.03$ and $\beta = -0.07$, $SE = 0.03$, both $p < .01$). Explicit ratings confirmed stronger negative wolf associations ($OR = 1.17$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .011$). Exploratory moderation analyses ($\chi^2(8) = 127.0$, $p < .001$) showed nature-relatedness and vegetarian diet attenuated the explicit stereotype ($\beta = 0.59$, $SE = 0.12$ and $\beta = 1.15$, $SE = 0.17$, both $p < .001$). Critically, moderation diverged across measures: high-nature-relatedness individuals rejected the stereotype explicitly but showed no corresponding facilitation for wolf-positive trials at the implicit level ($\beta = 0.12$, $SE = 0.05$, $p = .010$), suggesting automatic bias persists despite conscious rejection.

Conclusions

Our findings demonstrate a measurable wolf stereotype and reveal that conscious rejection does not eliminate implicit bias. This dissociation suggests interventions targeting only explicit attitudes may be insufficient; effective strategies must address automatic associations to support wolf conservation.

9:20 - 9:40am

89 Competing policy frames in urban raccoon management in Germany: A qualitative analysis across authorities and interest groups

Dr. Birkan Taş

Pompeu Fabra University- Centre for Animal Ethics, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract

Introduction

Urban raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) populations in Germany have become a contested issue at the intersection of wildlife management, animal welfare, and urban governance. Although raccoons are legally classified as an invasive species, policymakers and civil society actors promote divergent interpretations of the human–raccoon relationship. These perspectives shape which management strategies are considered legitimate, feasible, or ethically acceptable. This study examines how raccoon management is framed by public authorities and interest groups, and how these frames influence urban wildlife governance.

Methodology

A qualitative frame analysis was conducted on 30 publicly available documents published between 2021 and 2026, including policy reports, parliamentary documents, official websites, and position papers. The corpus covered state and municipal authorities (e.g. Berlin Senate Department; City of Kassel), as well as conservation, hunting, animal welfare, and raccoon-focused activist organisations. Data were coded inductively and deductively following established frame analysis approaches, focusing on problem definitions, moral evaluations, and proposed solutions.

Main results/findings

Five dominant frames were identified: (1) invasive species threat, (2) urban pest and infrastructure risk, (3) manageable neighbour, (4) animal welfare subject, and (5) technical management problem. Authorities primarily combined frames (2) and (5), emphasising administrative responsibility, risk mitigation, and citizen compliance while avoiding overtly lethal rhetoric. Conservation and animal welfare organisations favoured frames (3) and (4), stressing coexistence and ethical obligations. Hunting organisations and some political actors mobilised frame (1) to legitimise decisive population control, including lethal measures. Non-lethal initiatives, such as the Kassel BiPoMa sterilisation project, functioned as boundary objects bridging otherwise conflicting frames.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

The findings indicate that raccoon management debates in Germany are driven less by empirical disagreement than by competing normative frames. For anthrozoology and policy studies, this highlights the importance of frame-sensitive governance when addressing urban human–animal interactions.

9:40 - 10:00am

28 Co-Thriving Begins With Us: Bears, Wolves, and Multispecies Ethics Across the Rural–Urban Divide

Mrs Claire L Musser

Falmouth University, Falmouth, United Kingdom

Abstract

Human–wildlife research and conservation practice increasingly invoke “coexistence,” yet this concept often remains rooted in managerial logics of tolerance, separation, and human control. Such framings obscure power asymmetries and marginalize animals’ roles in shaping shared landscapes. This presentation introduces **co-thriving** as a conceptual and practice-based alternative, developed through multispecies visual ethnography and fieldwork with carnivores. Drawing on encounters with urban American

black bears and rural grey wolves, I ask how animals might be engaged not only as ecological subjects, but as epistemic agents whose actions, presences, and refusals shape ethical futures.

Aims:

- Develop co-thriving as a relational framework that moves beyond coexistence;
- Examine how animal-led visual ethnography operationalizes multispecies ethics in practice;
- Assess how relational, non-lethal approaches reshape human–wildlife relationships across urban and rural landscapes.

This practice-based study integrates multispecies ethnography, visual methods, and fieldwork. Case studies examined are:

- *Bears in Hot Tubs*, a documentary using remote cameras as tools of ethical witnessing with urban black bears in Los Angeles;
- *Co-Thriving on the Range*, an ongoing collaboration with range riders and ranchers in Washington documenting non-lethal wolf–livestock relationships.

Methods include animal-led camera placement, visual and audio field journals, and reflexive analysis informed by compassionate conservation, egomorphism, and response-ability.

Across sites, animals shaped research trajectories, narrative structure, and ethical decision-making through presence, absence, and behavior, demonstrating how animal agency can function as a methodology rather than a representational claim. Urban participants reported shifts from fear-based responses to responsibility-driven practices, while in rural contexts, sustained non-lethal presence correlated with increased tolerance for wolves and an appreciation for their presence.

The findings support co-thriving as a novel, transferable framework for multispecies ethics that foregrounds relational responsibility over control. Treating animals as participants rather than management problems offers significant implications for conservation practice, wildlife media, and human–animal studies, particularly in bridging rural–urban divides and advancing ethically grounded conservation futures.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Ownership Trends & Family Transitions

9:00 - 10:00am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Presentation type Themed Oral Presentations

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

149 Shifting patterns in dog acquisition in the United Kingdom: Time-series modelling of pre- and post-pandemic trends based on responses from a national survey of dog owners

Dr Bethan N Greenwood, Dr Ben Cooper, Prof Robert M Christley

Dogs Trust, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

Early life experiences, including those associated with acquisition, have important consequences for dogs' short and longer-term welfare. The major social disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to have altered the UK dog population, yet

population-level evidence quantifying the changes remains limited. The UK National Dog Survey provides a uniquely large dataset, enabling retrospective analysis of acquisition trends over time. We modelled changes in dog acquisition routes over time, using owner-reported acquisition year, to identify pandemic-related deviations relative to pre-pandemic predictions.

Using data from the 2025 UK National Dog Survey, which collected retrospective information on the year and source of acquisition for 336,644 dogs, we fitted Poisson regression time-series models to acquisition source counts for key routes (licensed breeders, other breeders, non-breeding sellers, rehoming organisations, informal rehoming from previous owners, and strays). Pre-2020 trends including seasonality were used to generate baseline predictions. Observed acquisitions were compared with modelled expectations to quantify deviations during and after the pandemic.

We discovered positive deviations from predicted acquisition counts for both licensed and non-licensed breeders during 2020–2022, consistent with elevated demand for dogs during lockdowns. Deviations were 1.2-fold greater for non-licensed breeders, suggesting demand exceeded supply from established sources. In contrast, acquisitions from UK rehoming organisations were lower than predicted, likely reflecting restricted access. Post-pandemic, breeder acquisitions have largely returned to expected levels, whereas informal rehoming from previous owners was 28% higher than expected.

Our findings demonstrate that the pandemic was associated with both short-term disruption and longer-lasting changes in how dogs are acquired in the UK. The disproportionate increase in non-licensed breeder routes, alongside sustained pressures on rehoming organisations, has implications for dog welfare and downstream demand for behavioural and rehoming support. Retrospective time-series modelling of large survey datasets offers a valuable approach for understanding population-level human-dog dynamics following major societal change.

9:20 - 9:40am

84 Pet ownership and longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms of older adults over an 18-year period

Adriana Rostekova^{1,2,3}, Dr Charikleia Lampraki^{1,2,3}, Professor Andreas Ihle^{1,2,3}

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Abstract

Pet ownership and longitudinal changes in depressive symptoms of older adults over an 18-year period

Introduction. Evidence on companion animals and late-life depression is mixed and may be confounded by self-selection into ownership. We tested whether pet ownership predicts baseline depressive symptoms and their change over 18 years, and whether these associations vary by species and owners' perceived benefits and burdens.

Methodology. We analysed eight waves of the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) data from 11 countries. Participants were aged 50 and over at baseline (N=17,758). Depressive symptoms were repeatedly assessed using the European Depression Scale (EURO-D). Linear mixed-effects models (random intercepts and time slopes) estimated the change in the reported number of depressive symptoms per wave, adjusting for age, sex, education, physical activity, chronic conditions, living alone, and lifetime depression history.

Main results. Pet owners reported higher baseline symptoms than non-owners ($\beta=0.10$, 95%CI [0.05, 0.15], $p<.001$). Symptoms increased over time overall ($\beta=0.10$, 95%CI [0.09, 0.11], $p<.001$), but increases were slower among owners ($\beta=-0.03$, 95%CI [-0.04, -0.01], $p<.001$), implying convergence approximately 10 years after baseline.

Dog ownership showed the same pattern at baseline ($\beta=0.14$, 95%CI [0.06, 0.21], $p<.001$) and over time ($\beta=-0.03$, 95%CI [-0.06, -0.01], $p=.019$). Cat, bird and fish ownership showed no evidence of baseline or slope differences versus non-owners. In a subsample of Swiss pet owners (waves 7-9; N=183-188), perceived benefits/burdens did not improve model fit or predict symptom level and change.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Pet ownership appears to be linked with baseline vulnerability, yet is associated with attenuated long-term worsening of depressive symptoms, largely driven by dog ownership. Findings highlight the value of extended follow-up and species-specific exposure definitions, and motivate policy and practice supports (e.g., pet-friendly housing, practical assistance) that make dog ownership feasible for older adults while minimising caregiving strain.

9:40 - 10:00am

116 Perceived Dog Behavior Changes During Owner Pregnancy and the Human–Dog Relationship

Catherine Reeve¹, Olivia Milne², Sarah Wilson³, Sophie Jacques²

¹Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. ²Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. ³Queen's University Belfast, Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction: Dogs share a unique bond with humans, and anecdotal evidence suggests that some dogs exhibit behavioral changes when their owners become pregnant. This study examined the prevalence of perceived behavioral changes in dogs during owner pregnancy and explored behavioral and demographic predictors of these reports.

Methods: One hundred and thirty dog-owning participants completed an online questionnaire assessing demographics, pregnancy-related factors, dogs' behaviors before and during pregnancy, and the owner–dog relationship. Sign tests compared reported behaviors before versus during pregnancy, and logistic regression examined predictors of whether owners reported a behavioral change.

Results: Most owners (65.4%) reported that their dogs' behavior changed during pregnancy, with significant increases in attention-seeking and guarding behaviors ($p = .001$). Although the overall logistic regression model was not significant ($p = .168$), higher pre-pregnancy guarding toward unfamiliar people increased the odds of owners reporting behavioral change during pregnancy (OR = 1.67, 95% CI [1.12, 2.51], $p = .012$), whereas higher pre-pregnancy fear/anxiety toward other dogs decreased these

odds (OR = 0.64, 95% CI [0.48, 0.87], $p = .004$). Qualitative analyses highlighted themes related to perceived behavioral shifts, emotional closeness, and owner concerns during pregnancy.

Principal Conclusions: Dogs' pre-pregnancy behavioral profiles, particularly guarding tendencies and dog-reactivity, may help identify dogs more likely to exhibit noticeable behavioral changes during owner pregnancy, with implications for anticipatory guidance, support, and behavior management during major family transitions.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Safety, Risk & Aggression Prevention

9:00 - 10:00am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

95 Regulation over recognition; executive function as the hidden driver of child dog risk

Anna Baatz

University of Salford, Salford, United Kingdom

Abstract

The missing piece in child dog interaction (CDI) research may not be what children know about dogs, but how well they can regulate their own behaviour. Child dog bites and compromised quality of life for family dogs living with children are frequently positioned as a supervision or knowledge problem (Arhant et al 2017; Hall et al 2018). Prevention efforts predominantly focus on children's ability to recognise canine stress signals (Aldridge & Rose 2019; Meints et al 2018) and general messaging around what they should and shouldn't do around a dog (Shen et al 2017; Baatz et al 2020).

However, evidence from both applied and experimental contexts outlined in this presentation suggests that supervision and dog body language recognition alone is likely insufficient at preventing unsafe interactions or compromised canine welfare.

Drawing on findings from a multi-study doctoral programme, this paper reports that children with greater difficulties in executive functioning, were significantly more likely to be associated with fearful or aggressive behaviour directed towards them by the family dog, and less likely to physiologically react to a virtual dog snapping at them.

These findings crack an important cognitive code in CDI research: children who struggle most to regulate their own behaviour may be both less responsive to canine warning signals and more likely to place dogs under chronic interactional pressure as they are simply incapable of enacting behavioural adjustment.

This work builds bridges between developmental psychology, bite prevention and ethology, suggesting that improving CDI outcomes requires developmentally informed interventions that support children's self-regulation, not solely their knowledge of dog behaviour. The findings have implications for both successful dog rehoming and One Health oriented prevention strategies that seek to protect both child safety and dog quality of life within the family home.

9:20 - 9:40am

141 Utilizing Structured Professional Judgement: New ways to understand the human-animal aspects of human directed aggression by dogs.

Professor Emeritus Todd E Hogue, Dr Helen Howell, Ann Baslington-Davies, Professor Daniel S Mills

University of Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction: The human-animal (dog) relationship should be a critical factor in understanding the risk of human directed aggression from dogs (HDDA). However, most of the assessments of HDDA focus almost solely on the behaviour and risk presented by the dog while the consequences of dog bites impact on the humans, dogs and their interaction at both an individual and societal level. The need for successful risk assessment and risk management strategies for HDDA are central to maintaining healthy human-animal relationships.

An evidence base for factors influencing the expression of HDDA was developed to inform a risk assessment model. Structured professional judgement (SPJ) systems are common practice for human violence risk assessment (e.g., HCR-20 etc.). This paper illustrates the value of developing a SPJ methodology for assessing HDDA usable across different contexts, including rehoming, behavioural assessment and criminal proceedings. Such an evidence-based approach to assessing HDDA aims to better understand and improve human animal interactions and safety.

Aims and objectives: This project discusses how we are developing an SPJ system to better understand HDDA. We use as an example work done to assist RSPCA welfare officers in making risk judgements of HDDA which impacts on animal welfare and human safety.

Methodology:

1. A prototypical Dog Bite Risk SPJ tool was reviewed to identify useful triage items.
2. RSPCA based experts undertook a workshop to clarify risk factors for their context.

Results: We illustrate how an evidence based SPJ tool can be developed for HDDA and use pilot work with the RSPCA and examples from expert witness assessments using an SPJ structure to illustrate how this is done.

Conclusions: It is possible to adapt models of risk assessment from forensic psychology to develop evidence-based assessments to better understand and assess HDDA thereby positively impact on the impact of dog bite risk.

9:40 - 10:00am

121 Virtual Reality Bites: How Intervention Type and Learner Imagination Influences Dog Safety Intervention Efficacy.

Dr Marie-Claire Pagano¹, Mr Camran Qadeer², Ms Christy Georgiou², Mr Craig Rothwell², Dr Simon Champion², Prof Carri Westgarth¹

¹*Department of Livestock and One Health, Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences, University of Liverpool, Neston, United Kingdom.* ²*Virtual Engineering Centre, Institute of Digital Engineering & Autonomous Systems, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom*

Abstract

Dog bites are complex socio-cultural issues that require multiple interventions, one of which is through education. Virtual Reality (VR) can simulate other perspectives making it useful for learning about animal behaviour, while also assessing behavioural change safely. Here we present a randomised controlled study to test the effectiveness of two virtual reality interventions designed to promote safe interactions with dogs.

Participants were randomly assigned to a control VR scenario or one of two interventions, either being a dog during an unwanted interaction with a human avatar (perspective taking) or observing an unwanted interaction between a human avatar and dog while learning about dog behaviour (tutorial). Participants completed pre and post intervention surveys and carried out a final task to approach a virtual Labrador showing signs of aggression and stop at a comfortable distance. Generalised Linear Mixed Model (GLMM) selection using AICc assessed whether participant empathic traits and/or intervention experienced impacted approach to dog. Wilcoxon signed-rank tests assessed pre-post changes in attitudes towards dogs and perceived risk of being bitten.

Forty-seven (27 female, 20 male) participated. The tutorial group increased their confidence in recognising behaviours of aggression in dogs ($V = 33.5$, $p = 0.03$) and knowing how to avoid bites ($V = 0$, $p = 0.01$). There was some evidence that those experiencing the tutorial intervention stayed further away from the dog compared to the control group ($\Delta AICc = 2.04$; $p = 0.02$) and those scoring high in fantasy score (imagination) approached the dog closely ($\Delta AICc = 1.98$; $p = 0.03$).

Interventions in VR that explain and demonstrate dog behaviour may improve knowledge around dog safety. Our findings weakly suggest a behaviour change post tutorial. Whether this translates as reduced bite risk is unknown and larger sample sizes are required to further explore the impact of VR interventions on behaviour change around real dogs.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Dog Behavior, Monitoring & Welfare

9:00 - 10:00am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Presentation type Themed Oral Presentations

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

221 The Sound of Fun in Dogs: Acoustic and Facial Markers of Play-pant and Behavioural Responses to Play-pant Playback in Young Dogs

Ines Waldecker¹, Laura V. Cuaya¹, Raúl Hernández-Pérez¹, Paula Pérez-Fraga², Sasha Winkler³, Ludwig Huber⁴, Claus Lamm¹

¹*Social, Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience Unit, Department of Cognition, Emotion, and Methods in Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.* ²*BARKS Lab, Department of Ethology, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.* ³*Department of Evolutionary Anthropology, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.* ⁴*Messerli Research Institute, Department of Interdisciplinary Life Sciences, University of Veterinary Medicine Vienna, Veterinärplatz 1, 1210, Vienna, Austria*

Abstract

Introduction. Dogs produce a pant-like vocalization in social play (play-pant) that may function as a play signal, unlike exercise panting used for thermoregulation. We tested whether play-pant is acoustically distinct, co-occurs with mouth-stretch, and elicits differential playback responses.

Methodology. Eighteen adult dog–caregiver dyads completed paired play and exercise sessions (≥ 3 min); 10 audible pant bouts per session were selected per dog (two dogs did not pant post exercise). Seventeen young dogs (6–24 months) completed 1–3 playback sessions (2 min silence, 10 s playback, 15 s silence, 10 s playback, 2 min silence) with one stimulus type per session (play-pant, growl, or exercise-pant).

Main results. Play-pant differed from exercise-pant acoustically (lower spectral spread; higher peak frequency and duration; all $p < 0.01$, corrected); mean FFT peak frequency was 1500 Hz versus 562 Hz. Using two PCA components, pant type (play vs exercise) was classified with 89% accuracy ($p < 0.01$). Mouth-stretch co-occurred more during 4-s segments containing play-pant than during matched 4-s play segments without play-pant (paired t-test, $t(17) = 5.54$, $p < 0.001$). During playback, both play-pant and growling increased speaker-oriented behaviour relative to exercise-pant (45 s post-playback onset). A Gaussian GEE (cluster: dog; exchangeable correlation; robust SEs) showed an overall condition effect (Wald $\chi^2(2) = 13.005$, $p = 0.001$); planned contrasts differed for growl vs exercise-pant ($p = 0.02$) and play-pant vs exercise-pant ($p = 0.04$), but not growl vs play-pant ($p = 0.18$).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field. Together, play-pant's distinct acoustic profile, its co-occurrence with mouth-stretch, and the increased speaker-oriented behaviour it elicits in playback provide candidate indicators of positive affect, with potential to strengthen welfare assessment in homes, shelters, and clinical settings, and to motivate studies validating play-pant across contexts and testing links with dog–human attachment, social buffering, and positive welfare indicators.

9:20 - 9:40am

171 Seeing the unseen: Automated CCTV-based monitoring to support dog welfare in rehoming centres

Dani A Sorbie¹, Dr Sara Owczarczak-Garstecka², Dr Alyx Elder¹, Dr Charlotte Brassey¹, Dr Connah Kendrick¹

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Abstract

Introduction: Thousands of dogs are relinquished to animal shelters annually. In kennel environments, dogs experience stressors, including noise, confinement, and frequent exposure to unfamiliar humans and conspecifics. Welfare monitoring in kennels relies heavily on staff observation, yet time and resource constraints limit consistent monitoring. Automated CCTV-based detection enables continuous, non-invasive monitoring of kennel-housed dogs, helping staff detect potential welfare concerns and tailor care to individual dogs. This study evaluates the performance of object detection models for identifying dogs, humans, and kennel resources in CCTV footage from a UK rehoming centre.

Methodology: Five deep-learning object detection models from the YOLO ('You Only Look Once') family (v5s–11s) were fine-tuned by training them on annotated CCTV

footage to improve detection performance in kennel environments. The final dataset, comprising footage from 196 dogs, produced 2,487 labelled frames across seven classes: dogs, humans, kennel bars, beds, crates, doors, and bowls. Models were trained using transfer learning and evaluated on an independent test set using mean average precision ($mAP@0.5$; $mAP@[0.5:0.95]$), precision, recall, and F1 score.

Results: All YOLO models improved following fine-tuning on the annotated data. YOLOv9s achieved the highest $mAP@0.5$ (0.90), while YOLOv8n and YOLOv10s performed lowest (0.78). Detection was most accurate for larger, structurally consistent features (kennel bars, beds, and doors), whereas smaller, frequently occluded objects (bowls) remained challenging. Dog detection was moderately affected by occlusion and variable postures but remained robust enough to support calculation of activity and spatial metrics.

Implications: CCTV-based object detection provides a foundation for monitoring dog activity and resource use in kennel environments. Accurate detection enables assessment of activity levels and spatial use, supporting staff to interpret individual dogs' movement and resource use. This supports consistent, evidence-based decisions, particularly when monitoring dogs of concern or evaluating changes over time, and can complement existing welfare assessments by strengthening staff capacity for timely, individualised responses, potentially improving welfare outcomes.

9:40 - 10:00am

201 Behavioural Responses to Unfamiliar Human Interaction in Dogs Involved and Non-involved in Animal-Assisted Services (AAS)

PhD student Giulia Russo¹, Dr. Carmen Borrelli¹, Dr. Giacomo Riggio², Prof. Roberta Moruzzo¹, Prof. Chiara Mariti¹

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Abstract

This study aimed to evaluate whether dogs involved and not involved in AAS (Animal-Assisted Services) respond differently to interspecific social stimuli.

Fourteen AAS-certified dogs (CD: 6.5 ± 2.8 years old; 6 females; all medium/large-size) and 14 dogs not involved in AAS (NCD: 5.0 ± 2.9 years old; 8 females; all medium/large-size) underwent with their caregivers the SuiTe, a pre-screening aptitude test for AAS-dogs. A score-based evaluation ranging -5 to +5 for both valence and arousal was used to assess dog responses to social stimuli: attraction, handling, brushing, and playing with the caregiver and with a female and a male stranger. Mann-Whitney U-test was used for between-group analysis (CD vs. NCD; $p < 0.05$).

Grouping all valence scores together, higher (i.e. more positive) scores were found in CD than in NCD (2.60 vs. 0.68 ; $U=8552$, $p < 0.001$, $r=0.383$). When considering responses to the caregivers, each valence score was higher in CD than NCD: attraction ($U=55.5$, $p=0.035$, $r=0.434$), handling ($U=52.0$, $p=0.032$, $r=0.469$), playing ($U=43.5$, $p=0.012$, $r=0.522$), and brushing ($U=37.5$, $p=0.004$, $r=0.617$). In contrast, during interaction with strangers valence scores were higher in CD than NCD for brushing, for both the female ($U=45.0$, $p=0.015$, $r=0.541$) and male ($U=50.5$, $p=0.045$, $r=0.445$) stranger; and were higher in CD for the response to handling only by the female

stranger ($U=40.5$, $p=0.008$, $r=0.587$). The total score for arousal was instead lower in CD than in NCD (0.48 vs. 1.15; $U=10828$, $p<0.001$, $r=-0.219$)

The more positive response to caregivers in AAS might be related to a better aptitude, that make them prone for this work, as well as the result of a better relationship, even due to the collaboration CD had with their handlers. Although pro-sociality to strangers are AAS-specific stimuli, only the more intense ones (brushing and handling) revealed differences between groups, highlighting the relevance of their assessment for AAS suitability.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Relationship Dynamics in Animal Assisted Services

10:10 - 11:10am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

37 Do you have it handled? Uncovering the perceptions of therapy dog handlers as pseudo-therapists in a post-secondary canine-assisted intervention

Mikaela L. Dahlman^{1,2}, Freya L.L. Green², Dr. John-Tyler Binfet²

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Abstract

Research attests to the beneficial effects of canine-assisted interventions (CAIs) for supporting post-secondary student well-being. Among other outcomes, CAIs have been shown to improve student self-esteem, connectedness to campus, and decrease stress, homesickness, and loneliness. Of the three agents – therapy dog, handler, and visiting client, the role of the handler remains empirically understudied. Handlers implement a variety of skills and form close connections with students; however, there is a paucity of research elucidating these skills within the context of CAIs. To address this gap, this qualitative study explored therapy dog handlers' perceptions of their roles and responsibilities, and whether they use skills mirroring professional counselling skills. Thirteen therapy dog handlers ($Mage = 53.58$, $SD = 12.31$) from a large post-secondary therapy dog program in Western Canada participated in semi-structured interviews focused on topics such as *motivations for volunteering*, *a self-description of their role*, *the skills they use when interacting with students*, and *situations for which they may have felt unprepared*. Conventional content analysis was used to analyze the transcribed interviews, and both inter-coder agreement and member checking were conducted to support the dependability/reliability of findings. Insights gleaned from handlers revealed that they often *feel* as though they are pseudo-therapists and utilize many of the same skills as counsellors, whilst recognizing that they are not professional counsellors, nor are they meant to be. Further, findings clarify the varied skills handlers employ to support human well-being outcomes and how therapy dog programs can optimally support handler preparation. Our findings respond to the need to more fully understand a key agent within the therapy dog-handler-client triad, and stand to inform not only the broader field of human-animal interactions, but therapy dog handlers

themselves, therapy dog program personnel, practitioners, students, and those who attend canine-assisted interventions.

10:30 - 10:50am

2 In-Sync, Innovative, and Welfare-Centered: Human–Canine Dynamics in AACR

Dr. Batya G. Jaffe

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Abstract

Animal-Assisted Crisis Response (AACR) teams provide immediate emotional stabilization and support at trauma scenes, yet the mechanisms that make this intervention effective remain underexplored. This study examines AACR through the lens of the human–canine partnership, focusing on how dyadic communication, co-regulation, and welfare-centered practices shape outcomes for trauma survivors, bystanders, and first responders. Using a qualitative design, 21 trained crisis responders were interviewed about their experiences with AACR at crisis scenes, the nature of their working relationships, and the strategies they used to interpret and respond to canine cues under crisis conditions. Findings revealed that AACR effectiveness is grounded in a collaborative process in which handlers and dogs continuously monitor and influence one another's emotional states. The study further showed that AACR dogs often identified individuals in acute distress, while handlers provided contextual judgment and boundary setting, creating a synergistic dynamic that augmented traditional crisis response practices. These results highlight that AACR is most effective when viewed not simply as the presence of a dog but as the coordinated work of a well-trained dyad whose communication and welfare practices directly shape therapeutic impact. The findings support the need for specialized training that prioritizes handler–dog attunement, welfare-centered protocols, and an understanding of canine communication to sustain team well-being and enhance the reliability of AACR in crisis settings.

10:50 - 11:10am

251 Beyond the Binary: Deconstructing Hierarchy in Human-Animal Therapeutic Contexts

Briana Riley, Jessica Gullion, Rory Gullion

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Abstract

Introduction: Most literature on human-animal therapeutic interaction emphasizes health benefits to humans and is increasingly considering therapy animal welfare. While dialogue on positive welfare and animal happiness is emerging, there remains an inequality in benefit of the therapeutic context between human and animal and a limited body of research to ameliorate it. This paper:

- Examines human-animal ontological inequality in therapeutic contexts, offering a critique of human-animal therapy hierarchies
- Contextualizes how therapy animal welfare is conceptualized and studied
- Offers a reframing of multispecies therapeutic practices

Method: This is a narrative review and conceptual paper on the relational and ontological position of animals to humans in therapeutic contexts related to therapeutic benefit, informed by One Welfare, Post-Humanist, and Interspecies Relational frameworks, building on interdisciplinary ideas of human exceptionalism, anthropocentrism, welfare, ethics, and animal consent.

Findings: This paper extends research beyond only interdependent welfare, which still privileges human interests in therapy contexts, and advocates dynamic multispecies research and practice which views the animal and human of equal ontological consideration. We challenge the assumptions that use of animals for therapeutic benefit to humans is acceptable exclusively on the condition of welfare assurances and that suitability for and tolerance of therapy work is sufficient justification for animal use. We conclude a non-hierarchical approach to therapeutic engagement should inform how therapy contexts involving animals are constructed and how mutual benefit is ascertained.

Implications: Beyond welfare, this research proposes ontological equality as the lens through which to situate therapy animal involvement, by applying a holistic multispecies understanding of benefit, health, and advantage. This research has implications for constructing therapy animal programs, best practices for animal participation in therapy activities, and contributes to ethical conversations and standards around animal involvement in therapy contexts.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Animal Care: Perspectives & Distress

10:10 - 11:10am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

168 Animal Patient Welfare and Technician's Well-being: Veterinary Technicians' Experiences of Moral Distress

Ms. Aiman Khattak¹, Dr. Philip Smith², Dr. Tipsarp Kittisiam³, Dr. Andria Jones³, Dr. April McGrath⁴, Dr. Kathryn L. Proudfoot¹, Dr. Caroline Ritter¹

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⁴*Department of Psychology, Mount Royal University, Calgary, Alberta, Canada*

Abstract

Introduction. Veterinary technicians play a vital role in patient care within veterinary practice. Moral distress can occur when technicians recognize the morally appropriate course of action but feel unable to act in an animal's best interest due to external factors. This study aimed to explore how veterinary technicians experience moral distress when caring for patients and to identify factors that help mitigate this distress in clinical settings.

Methodology. Twenty-three veterinary technicians working in small animal practice across Canada participated in this phenomenological qualitative study. Data were

collected through virtual, individual semi-structured interviews. Transcripts were analyzed inductively using NVivo 15 software, following a template analysis approach to develop a structured coding framework.

Main Results. Participants expressed strong commitment to patient advocacy and concern for animal welfare. Moral distress most often arose when technicians felt unable to carry out what they believed was morally appropriate care due to limited autonomy within clinical hierarchies or restrictive protocols. Participants described instances where their professional judgment was overridden by veterinarians or client decisions (e.g. a technician's concerns were ignored when a veterinarian continued performing ineffective pain mitigation on a patient, despite the technician being competent to assist). Such experiences intensified moral distress and negatively affected participants' wellbeing. Emotional intelligence skills, particularly emotional awareness, regulation, and effective communication helped technicians navigate these challenges. Further, autonomy and inclusion in clinical decision-making enabled participants to provide higher-quality care, build more meaningful relationships with animal patients, and better support their own wellbeing.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field. Findings highlight the importance of recognizing technicians as moral agents suggesting that inclusive decision-making and stronger inter-professional collaboration can reduce moral distress and support better animal care. This research demonstrates how responsibility and power shape everyday human-animal relationships and helps inform future research on supporting moral decision-making in veterinary teams.

10:30 - 10:50am

214 Investigating the emotional toll of animal care in UK laboratory research settings

Miss Kleita Sergiou, Dr Beth Clark, Prof Lucy Asher

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Abstract

Laboratory animal professionals face considerable stress due to the nature of their work. A key concern is compassion fatigue, with a lack of UK-specific data on its prevalence and contributing factors. This study aimed to deepen understanding of how work practices, workplace stressors, and establishment support systems relate to compassion fatigue among UK laboratory animal professionals.

An online survey (n=269) was conducted with UK-based laboratory animal workers. The survey included the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) to measure components of compassion fatigue: burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and compassion satisfaction.

Emotional struggles related to animal work had been previously expressed by 47% participants. Most participants (70%) reported knowing where to seek support. However, only 36% were satisfied with the support available. Suggested improvements included more leadership training (47%), development of compassion fatigue programmes (47%), awareness seminars (36%), and clearer routes for accessing help (34%).

Laboratory animal professionals reported lower mental wellbeing (M=44.5, SD = 8.6), compared to UK population norms (M=51, SD=8.7). Most participants reported

moderate burnout (78%), low or moderate secondary traumatic stress (low: 54%, moderate: 46%, high: 2%) and high compassion satisfaction (high: 25%). Linear regression analyses indicated that higher mental wellbeing significantly predicted lower burnout ($\beta = -0.50$, $SE = 0.03$, $p < .001$), lower secondary traumatic stress ($\beta = -0.28$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$), and higher compassion satisfaction ($\beta = 0.33$, $SE = 0.04$, $p < .001$).

Findings highlight the emotional complexity of laboratory animal care work and the need for targeted support. While many professionals draw meaning from their roles, high rates of emotional strain and limited satisfaction with available support suggest current systems may be insufficient. Parallel research has been conducted with participants who work with animals in livestock farming.

10:50 - 11:10am

36 Veterinarians' perspectives on dog handling decisions during routine examinations

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Abstract

Introduction: Many dogs experience fear during veterinary visits, which compromises dog welfare and increases safety risks. Despite growing interest in stress-reducing practices, limited research has examined how veterinarians make handling decisions. This qualitative study aimed to explore how veterinarians conduct dog examinations, the factors that shape their handling decisions, and their perceived benefits and challenges of stress-reducing practices.

Methodology: Semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted with 17 veterinarians practicing in Canada and the United States between November 2024 and February 2025. Transcripts were analyzed using inductive content analysis within an interpretivist framework to capture veterinarians' experiences and reasoning.

Main results: Four major categories emerged: (1) approaches to dog handling, (2) factors affecting handling, (3) veterinarian professional well-being (i.e., compassion fatigue and satisfaction), and (4) perceptions of stress-reducing practices. All participants described using stress-reducing practices (e.g., treat provision), and reported benefits such as reduced dog fear, improved cooperation, and decreased injury risk. However, some felt that stress-reducing practices were not effective or practical for every dog or context. Handling choices were influenced by previous experiences and training, clinic factors (e.g., appointment structure), patient factors (e.g., dog behavior), and owner presence and expectations. Many participants discussed facing constraints to stress-reducing practices, such as high caseloads, time pressure, and limited support staff. Nearly all participants experienced compassion fatigue at some point in their career, particularly during early years in practice and/or in emergency roles. Some felt their patient interactions were unaffected from compassion fatigue due to effective coping strategies (e.g., compartmentalization), while others described having less patience and decreased use of stress-reducing practices. Positive interactions with clients and patients, and successful clinical outcomes contributed to compassion satisfaction, resiliency, and professional purpose.

Principal conclusions: These findings suggest that clinic-level support and attention to practitioner well-being, are important for sustaining stress-reducing practices to support dog welfare.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Attachment, Compatibility & Owner Mental Health

10:10 - 11:10am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

151 Dog Quality of Life and Caregiver Wellbeing: The Mediating Role of Caregiver Burden

Dr. Nikki E Bennett¹, Dr. Margaret Gober², Dr. John T Martin¹, Dr. Mary Beth Spitznagel¹

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Abstract

Introduction: Providing long-term care for a companion animal with a medical or behavioral condition can be associated with psychological distress. Prior research demonstrates that pet owners experiencing caregiver burden (CB) report elevated depressive symptoms, though the role of the animal's wellbeing in this relationship has not been investigated. This study examined whether perceived dog quality-of-life (QoL) is related to caregiver depressive symptoms, and whether CB demonstrates a cross-sectional mediation of that relationship. We hypothesized that poorer dog QoL would be associated with greater depressive symptoms, mediated by CB.

Methods: Data were extracted from online assessments administered to veterinary clients during development of the Canine CB Assessment Tool (Spitznagel et al., 2025). Dog QoL was assessed using the Canine Health QoL Scale (CHQLS), caregiver depressive symptoms using the Center for Epidemiology Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), and CB using the Zarit Burden Interview (ZBI). A cross-sectional mediation analysis using PROCESS in SPSS was conducted with CHQLS as the independent variable, CES-D as the dependent variable, and ZBI as the mediator.

Results: 669 participants reported caring for a dog with a medical or behavioral condition. Analysis demonstrated significant relationships between all variables ($p < .001$). Lower dog QoL was associated with higher CB ($b = -.339$, $p < .001$), and higher CB was associated with higher depressive symptoms ($b = .466$, $p < .001$). The relationship between dog QoL and depressive symptoms remained significant after accounting for CB ($b = -.135$, $p = .0007$, BootCI[-.212, -.057]), with a significant indirect effect of CB ($b = -.158$, BootCI[-.201, -.116]).

Conclusions: Distress linked to perception of a pet's QoL may be shaped by CB in the context of pet illness. Although longitudinal research is needed to address causality, this work highlights the importance of considering both animal and caregiver wellbeing when examining outcomes in human-animal relationships.

Reference: Spitznagel et al. (2025). Development and psychometric validation of a CCBAT. doi:10.1079/hai.2025.0052

10:30 - 10:50am

125 Caregiver Anxiety and Reported Dog Anxiety in the Context of Trauma History and Acquisition Factors

Dr. Lexis H Ly¹, Amelia Malone², Jada Ford², Dr. Shelby E McDonald²

¹*University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.* ²*Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, Canada*

Abstract

Introduction: Prior research in human–animal interaction has documented associations between human anxiety and anxiety-related behavior in pet dogs. However, this literature has rarely accounted for dogs' prior adverse experiences or related contextual human factors that may influence this association. This study examined the association between caregiver anxiety and caregiver-reported anxiety-related behaviors in dogs, while accounting for trauma history, anxiety medication use, and dog acquisition source.

Methodology: An online survey was administered to a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults who were the primary, day-to-day caregivers of at least one dog (n = 659), recruited via Prolific. Caregiver anxiety was assessed using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder–7 (GAD-7). Caregiver-reported anxiety-related behaviors in dogs were measured using selected items from the Canine Behavioral Assessment and Research Questionnaire (C-BARQ). Respondents reported dog trauma history (e.g., abuse, neglect), caregiver trauma history (e.g., serious accident, abuse), caregiver and/or canine anxiety medication use, and dog acquisition source. Moderation models were estimated to test whether these factors altered the association between caregiver anxiety and anxiety-related behaviors in dogs.

Main results/findings: Higher caregiver anxiety was significantly associated with higher anxiety-related behaviors in dogs ($b = 0.147$, $SE = 0.070$, $p = .04$). This association remained significant after accounting for dog trauma history, caregiver trauma history, anxiety medication use, and dog acquisition source. None of the tested moderators significantly altered the strength of the association, although dog trauma history was independently associated with higher anxiety-related behaviors in dogs.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Findings indicate that caregiver anxiety is positively associated with anxiety-related behaviors in dogs, independent of dogs' prior adverse experiences and related caregiver factors. Results underscore the importance of incorporating caregiver mental health into research and practice focused on canine behavior and welfare. Trauma-informed, caregiver-inclusive approaches may strengthen both empirical models and applied interventions within human–animal relationships.

10:50 - 11:10am

7 Exploring the connection between pet attachment and owner mental health: The roles of owner-pet compatibility, perceived pet welfare, and behavioural issues

Dr Roxanne D Hawkins¹, Dr Annalyse Ellis¹, Dr Charlotte Robinson²

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Abstract

Despite increasing interest in how human–pet relationships shape mental health, existing work frequently overlooks crucial dynamics including species differences, attachment patterns, and animal welfare and behavioural issues. This study

investigated whether the relationship between owner-pet attachment and owner mental health could be better understood through the lens of owner-perceived pet compatibility, perceived pet welfare, and pet behavioural issues. This study surveyed young adults (ages 18–26) who owned dogs and/or cats from the United Kingdom (N = 600) who self-identified as experiencing difficulties with anxiety and/or low mood. Our findings revealed that dog owners exhibited more secure pet attachments than cat owners. Anxious attachment was associated with poorer mental health among dog owners, while avoidant attachment was associated with better mental health in both dog and cat owners. Insecure attachment related to poorer perceived pet quality of life, increased reports of pet behavioural problems, and poorer owner-pet compatibility, regardless of pet species. Additionally, poorer welfare and more behavioural problems were associated with poorer mental health for dog owners; these findings were not replicated for cat owners. Notably, a dog's mental state (such as appearing depressed), as well as fear and anxiety, mediated the relationship between owner-pet attachment and owner mental health. Owner-dog compatibility, particularly in the affection domain, positively mediated the relationship between anxious attachment and poorer mental health, while negatively mediating the relationship between avoidant attachment and better mental health. These findings suggest that a simplistic view of pet ownership fails to capture the complexity of the factors that shape the mental health of pet owners and underscores the need to consider important owner-pet factors to fully understand how the human-pet relationship can impact the well-being of both people and their pets.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Violence, Safeguarding & Workforce Well-being

10:10 - 11:10am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

253 The impact of cruelty cases on animal protection officers' and animal shelter workers' mental well-being

Meghan Lok, Alexandra Protopopova

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Abstract

Introduction. In Canada, animal protection officers (APOs) and animal shelter workers (ASWs) are routinely exposed to animal cruelty, placing both groups at risk of poor mental health. These cases typically involve two stages: APOs conduct an investigation and seize animals, after which ASWs manage animal intake and provide care. Existing literature has investigated the emotional impact of animal euthanasia on ASWs, identifying common coping strategies and preferred forms of support, such as counselling. However, research examining the impact of animal cruelty cases, as well as research on APOs in general, is limited. As a result, it remains unclear whether dealing with animal cruelty warrants similar types or levels of support. This qualitative study aimed to explore how involvement in animal cruelty cases impacts the mental well-being of APOs and ASWs differently and the distinct support they need.

Methodology. Taking a phenomenological research approach, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with 7 APOs and 6 ASWs from British Columbia, Canada. Participants described the stressors and emotional impact experienced during their most impactful cruelty case. The resulting transcripts were anonymized, and role-specific and shared stressors were identified through inductive thematic analysis using NVivo.

Main Results. APO-specific stressors included concerns for coworker well-being and exposure to physical danger, whereas ASWs described challenges related to caring for difficult animals and prolonged court processes. Both groups identified witnessing animal cruelty and experiencing verbal abuse as significant stressors. Although participants from both roles expressed a desire for greater mental health support, APOs emphasized internal organizational changes, while ASWs highlighted the need for external, systemic improvements.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. These findings highlight the shared and distinct challenges faced by APOs and ASWs and suggest avenues for change to support worker well-being, ultimately improving animal welfare, reducing employee turnover, and benefiting the broader community.

10:30 - 10:50am

241 Responding to Animal Abuse in Childhood: Professional Perspectives Across Disciplines

Dr. Katharine Wenocur, Dr. Kirby Wycoff, Sarah Jayne Oltz, Ryan Gilchrist

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Abstract

Introduction: Intentional harm of animals in childhood has long been considered an indicator of psychological distress that is correlated with perpetration of and victimization by violence. Few studies address common practices within and between the professional disciplines that come into contact with these cases (Oellig, Lindsj, & Röcklinsberg, 2024). This study sought to identify best practices and gaps in intervention from a professional perspective.

Methodology: This qualitative descriptive study used focus groups to examine professionals' (N=24) experiences working with childhood animal abuse and included mental health professionals, child protective service workers, animal control officers, veterinarians, and legal professionals/prosecutors. Questions focused on specific responses to cases, general discussion of best practices, and ideas for future interventions. Focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes.

Results: Several interrelated themes emerged regarding professional responses, including perceived drivers of animal harm (e.g., parental influence, trauma exposure and lack of early intervention), systemic challenges (e.g., lack of resources, interagency communication barriers, parental reluctance to seek help and professional role ambiguity) and critical knowledge gaps (e.g., links to other problem behaviors, jurisdictional responsibility). Recommended best practices (e.g., community outreach, safety planning, timely referrals and addressing compassion fatigue) were also explored.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: These findings suggest that collaborative safety planning with mental health professionals, community outreach with animal welfare professions and increased cross-disciplinary communication are necessary. This study identified a need for greater understanding of behavioral red flags associated with animal abuse, attention to professional compassion fatigue and noted that these findings can inform future research and evidence-based practice.

Reference:

Oellig, L., Lindsj, J., & Röcklinsberg, H. (2024). Exploring Swedish veterinarians' awareness of non-accidental-injuries, animal abuse and the Link to domestic violence, and their role in addressing this societal issue. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2024.1439106>

10:50 - 11:10am

48 When Violence Extends to Animals: Childhood Exposure to Harm Toward Pets, Mental Health, and Suicide Risk

Dr. Camie Tomlinson¹, Amelia Malone², Jada Ford², Hannah Van Buiten³, Dr. Stacey Freedenthal⁴, Dr. Charlotte Bright², Dr. Nicole Nicotera⁴, Dr. Lori R Kogan², Dr. Shelby E McDonald²

¹University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, USA. ²Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA. ³Independent Researcher, Kailua, HI, USA. ⁴University of Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and exposure to domestic violence, are well-established predictors of adult mental health problems and suicidality. These experiences often co-occur with exposure to harm toward pets, yet such exposure is not typically included in ACE frameworks. Exposure to harm toward pets may amplify the psychological impact of other adverse experiences. This study examined whether patterns of childhood adversity—defined as reporting ACEs with and without exposure to harm toward pets—are associated with adult mental health and suicidality.

Methodology: Participants were 1,072 U.S. adults recruited through Prolific using nationally representative sampling. Childhood adversity was assessed using ACE domains measured with the WHO Adverse Childhood Experiences–International Questionnaire. Childhood exposure to harm toward pets was assessed using behaviorally specific items asking whether participants witnessed or heard about intentional harm to a pet. Latent class analysis identified distinct patterns of childhood adversity. Associations with adult psychological distress and suicidality were examined using the Bolck–Croon–Hagenaars method, adjusting for sociodemographic characteristics and perceived social support.

Main results/findings: Three latent classes of childhood adversity were identified: Low Adversity (29.6%), Exposure to Interpersonal Violence Only (34.8%), and Exposure to Interpersonal Violence and Animal Cruelty (35.6%). Compared with both other classes, adults in the Exposure to Interpersonal Violence and Animal Cruelty class reported higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress ($ds = 0.61-1.13$; $ps < .01$), greater intensity of suicidal ideation ($ds = 0.25-0.28$, $ps < .05$), and greater likelihood of a lifetime suicide attempt ($ds = 0.30-0.32$, $ps < .05$).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Among individuals exposed to interpersonal violence in childhood, co-occurring exposure to harm toward animals differentiates a subgroup with substantially elevated mental health burden and suicide risk, whereas interpersonal violence alone does not.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Policy, Ethics, and Social Contexts of Human–Animal Relationships

10:10 - 11:10am Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

26 A community-engaged case study on the landscape of pet-inclusive housing in one Florida county: Implications for human-animal bond-informed policy and programs

Dr. Jennifer W. Applebaum¹, Lauren Loney², Kaylinn M Escobar¹, Selena M Gutierrez¹, Hannah P Fetko¹, Madeline J Dahlman¹, Angelica M Bathory-Frota¹, Cailey J Katz¹, Jordana M Sklon¹, Carlos Cordero¹, Soumya Joseph¹, Scarlet R Mendez¹

¹University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, USA. ²Shared Home Project, Washington, DC, USA

Abstract

Introduction: This project aimed to conduct a comprehensive community-engaged case study of pet-inclusive housing in Alachua County, FL. This assessment addresses the challenges and opportunities associated with pet owners' access to pet-inclusive, affordable rental housing, with the aim of developing actionable recommendations and materials for various stakeholders.

Methodology: We used a three-arm approach: 1. Analysis of federal, state, municipal, and organizational policy on pets in rental housing; 2. Assessment of programs offering pet-inclusive housing support in other U.S. communities; and 3. Focus groups and in-depth interviews with landlords ($n=8$), government officials ($n=6$), animal welfare stakeholders ($n=5$), renters with pets ($n=15$), and representatives from tenants' rights organizations ($n=7$). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: The policy analysis revealed Alachua County has limited capacity to address systemic issues due to statewide landlord-tenant law preemption; however, there are potential opportunities. For example, local governments retain authority to enact ordinances under Human Rights or Discrimination codes, which could guarantee local protections for Emotional Support Animals (ESAs) as federal protections erode. The program assessment indicated that few programs in other communities addressed pet-inclusive housing needs, underscoring a critical programmatic gap. Data from stakeholder groups revealed consistent themes of limited availability, affordability, and accessibility of pet-inclusive housing, alongside widespread concerns about accommodations for ESAs. Stakeholders emphasized financial barriers, regulation enforcement gaps, and the importance of the human-animal bond.

Conclusions: This study highlights the need for policy reform and cross-sector collaboration to meet the needs of community members who rent with pets. Community-

specific issues, coupled with the broader nationwide housing crisis, are likely contributing to worsening outcomes for pet-owning renters and their animals. The results were presented to local advocates to inform policy reform and establish new supportive programs. Future collaborative efforts will focus on multilevel interventions to meet the housing needs of local pet owners.

10:30 - 10:50am

138 From Puppies to Commodities: Discourse, Domination, and the Legal Positioning of Dogs

Laura Goditiabo

Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium

Abstract

1. Introduction

Dogs occupy a paradoxical position within contemporary human-animal relations. Dogs are widely regarded as sentient companions humans share intimate bonds with and are emotionally embedded within families. Yet they are simultaneously commodified into products, traded to make profits from their bodies and lives. This ambivalence is particularly visible in commercial breeding establishments (CBEs), commonly referred to as puppy mills or puppy farms. This type of institution interacts with other institutions like the legal system that regulates and controls CBEs. In Belgium, several CBEs have been brought before court following infractions of existing regulations. These cases are an illustration of the legal struggle surrounding, among other issues, the welfare of dogs in commercial breeding. In this study the “commodity stories” in the legal discourse within cases involving Belgian CBEs will be explored.

2. Methods

This case study uses Critical Discourse Analysis on legal documents of Belgian court cases involving CBEs. It reveals recurring discursive strategies of the parties in the cases to examine how dogs are discursively positioned within legal discourse.

3. Main findings

The analysis identifies discursive strategies that position dogs as objects. These strategies reinforce the dogs’ construction as lively commodities through legal discourse. The domination of dogs inherent in their commercial breeding and trade is silenced and concealed.

4. Conclusions

This study advances understandings of human–animal relations by demonstrating that species domination is a deeply embedded social process reproduced through discourse and institutions. By bridging insights from socio-legal and human-animal studies, we demonstrate how power over and commodification of animals is enacted through courtroom discourse. Through examining the parties’ discursive strategies, the study reveals how discourse shapes the way dogs are perceived and positioned within the legal context.

10:50 - 11:10am

4 From Crisis to Care: How Social Determinants of Health Shape Companion-Animal Guardianship Outcomes – A Qualitative Study.

Miss Sonya E McDowall^{1,2}, Associate Professor Susan J Hazel², Associate Professor Anne Hamilton-Bruce², Dr Tiffani J Howell¹, Associate Professor Rwth Stuckey¹
¹La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia. ²The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Abstract

Introduction

Companion animals are often vital sources of emotional and psychological stability, particularly for individuals facing systemic disadvantage. Yet, the ability to maintain these bonds is frequently challenged by socioeconomic and health-related crises. Understanding how people navigate these pressures, and the role of charitable interventions, is essential to inform inclusive health and welfare policy.

Methods

Guided by the Social Determinants of Health (SDH) framework, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Australian participants who had accessed support from human and animal charitable services. A thematic analysis approach was used to identify patterns and relationships within participant narratives, focusing on how structural conditions shaped their capacity to care for companion animals.

Results

Eleven interrelated themes were identified, highlighting how financial insecurity, housing instability, limited access to health care, and trauma intersect to influence animal care capacity. Participants described their companion animals as emotional “lifelines” during periods of grief, mental illness, and chronic hardship. However, maintaining these relationships often carried a cumulative emotional toll due to systemic neglect and inadequate safety nets. Charitable supports that recognised the significance of the human–animal relationship were described not only as practical lifelines but as sources of dignity, validation, and emotional stability.

Conclusions

Findings underscore the urgent need for health and social policy frameworks that integrate companion animals into conceptions of human wellbeing. Embedding consideration of animals within human health discourse through an SDH lens enables a more relational understanding of resilience and recovery, one that recognises animals not as peripheral, but as integral to household stability and social inclusion.

Keynote Talk: Isabelle Fromantin & Caroline Gilbert - The Story of a Shelter Dog Who Became a Care Companion

11:30am - 12:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Isabelle Fromantin is the head of the Wounds and Wound Healing research unit at the Institut Curie. She was the first nurse in France to earn a doctorate in science and engineering, and she has been developing innovative approaches to patient care since the start of her career. She and her team are the subject of the recently published book, *Snoopy, un chien qui fait du bien* (A support dog called Snoopy).

Caroline Gilbert is veterinarian and professor of ethology whose research focuses on animals' physiological and behavioral adaptations to various environmental conditions and constraints. She has studied how dogs and cats adapt to human interactions, with a focus on individual coping strategies linked to animals' personalities.

Isabelle Fromantin and Caroline Gilbert have worked together for over 10 years, first on the KDOG project (sniffer dogs against cancer) and more recently on the M-KDOG study dealing with the adoption of a service dog in the Curie hospital and medical research unit. M-KDOG is also known as the 'Snoopy project', named for the English setter that Fromantin brought into her team in 2022 to help improve the well-being of patients and hospital personnel.

Isabelle Fromantin and Caroline Gilbert will share the story of this trailblazing initiative anchored in the reality of the medical environment. They will highlight both the uniqueness of the project and the example it can provide for others. Caroline Gilbert's assessment of the animal welfare component of this program and her study of the various human-animal interactions involved will complete the picture.

Birds of a Feather Topic-Themed Social Lunch: Conversations That Connect

12:30 - 2:00pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

One of the best parts of ISAZ is the opportunity to connect with colleagues who share your interests, spark new ideas, and build collaborations that extend far beyond the conference. Our **Birds of a Feather Topic-Themed Social Lunch** is designed to do exactly that. All attendees are encouraged to participate!

During this interactive social lunch, attendees will gather at themed tables centered around a wide range of topics in human-animal interaction research, practice, education, and policy. Whether you're passionate about canines, felines, wildlife, qualitative methods, One Health, community-engaged research, publishing, global perspectives, or simply looking to meet new colleagues, there is a table for you. Choose a topic that interests you, grab your lunch, and join a small group of fellow attendees for lively conversation, networking, and idea-sharing. Special color-coded balloons and themed table areas will make it easy to find your group and create a festive atmosphere throughout the lunch space.

No presentations. No slides. Just great conversations with people who share your curiosity and enthusiasm.

Come ready to exchange ideas, make new connections, and discover unexpected collaborations—because some of the most valuable conference experiences happen around the lunch table.

It's raining cats and dogs

Blue table cards > Canine tables

Orange table cards > Feline tables

Other magnificent & abstract animals

Green table cards > Exotic companion animals tables

Red table cards > Wildlife tables

Black table cards > Equids

Blue table cards > Imaginary animals & representations

Fushia table cards > Other magnificent & abstract animals

Teaching, methods, and publishing

Deep purple table cards > Teaching in HAIs

Green table cards > Community engaged research

Red table cards > Qualitative research methods
Black table cards > Measuring animal emotions
Blue table cards > Publishing
Brown table cards > Other teaching, methods, and publishing

Health, One health/One welfare, and global affairs

Fushia table cards > One Health/One welfare
Brown table cards > Companions and their human families
Blue table cards > Animals in care & education settings
Red table cards > Global perspectives on HAIs
Green table cards > World Cup 2026 & Le Tour de France
Black table cards > Other health, welfare, and global affairs

Sponsored by:



Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Animal Assisted Services and Therapeutic Relationships

2:00 - 2:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature lightning oral presentations each 5-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:10pm

10 Service Dog Training as a Peer-Directed Intervention for Veterans With PTSD

Dr. Cheryl Krause-Parello¹, Dr. Erika Friedmann², Deborah Taber², Dr. Haidong Zhu³, Alejandra Quintero¹, Rick Yount⁴

¹Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA. ²University of Maryland, Baltimore, MD, USA. ³Georgia Prevention Institute, Augusta, GA, USA. ⁴Warrior Canine Connection, Boyds, MD, USA

Abstract

Women veterans remain significantly underrepresented in military research, despite their distinct service experiences and post-deployment challenges. Limited social support and greater reintegration demands may exacerbate mental health concerns, including PTSD. Human–animal interaction and volunteerism may offer alternative pathways for social connection and purpose. This randomized controlled trial examined whether participation in an 8-week Service Dog Training Program (SDTP) improved biological and psychological stress indicators among women veterans with PTSD, compared to an active comparison intervention (CI).

Twenty-eight female military veterans with PTSD (age 32–72 years) were randomized to the SDTP (n = 13) or CI (n = 15). The SDTP followed standardized Warrior Canine Connection training modules, while the CI consisted of weekly online dog-training instruction. Both interventions met weekly for one hour over eight weeks. Telomere length and heart rate variability (HRV), along with PTSD symptoms, perceived stress,

and anxiety, were assessed at baseline, mid-intervention, and post-intervention. Combat exposure was examined as a moderator.

Results showed a significant interaction between intervention group and combat exposure on telomere length. Telomere length decreased in the CI group, especially among women with combat exposure, whereas it increased in the SDTP group regardless of exposure. HRV changed differentially by intervention group, decreasing in the SDTP and remaining stable in the CI. Psychological outcomes improved over time across all participants. PTSD symptoms, perceived stress, and anxiety each decreased significantly from baseline to week 8, but reductions did not differ between intervention groups, and combat exposure did not moderate these changes.

This study is among the first to examine cellular aging in women veterans with PTSD and to evaluate service-dog training as a volunteer-based intervention. Findings indicate that while both programs reduced psychological stress, SDTP may confer unique biological benefits. Further research is needed to inform clinical care and policy for women veterans.

2:10 - 2:20pm

20 Farm Animals in Animal-Assisted Interventions: Expanding Evidence, Ethics, and Therapeutic Potential

Dr. Katherine Compitus

NYU Silver School of Social Work, New York, NY, USA

Abstract

While companion animals and equines dominate research and practice within human–animal interaction and Animal-Assisted Interventions (AAI), farm animals remain significantly underrepresented despite indications of meaningful therapeutic potential. This lightning talk explores the rationale, theoretical grounding, emerging clinical observations, and proposed methodological pathways for integrating farm animals such as cattle, goats, alpacas, and poultry into AAI. Within a Veterinary Social Work and trauma-informed framework, this work considers how multisensory presence, co-regulation, caregiving tasks, and experiences of attunement may support emotional regulation, agency, and relational healing in humans navigating trauma, anxiety, grief, and identity disruption.

A mixed-methods design is proposed, including qualitative participant narratives and clinician observations alongside behavioral indicators of calm and, when feasible, physiological measures such as heart rate variability. Anticipated challenges include ethical considerations of animal consent and welfare, biosecurity, liability structures, practitioner competency, and the need to avoid anthropomorphic or romanticized assumptions.

Rather than presenting conclusive data, this session invites dialogue on conceptual clarity, methodological rigor, and international applicability. Key considerations include: What species-specific therapeutic affordances might farm animals offer distinct from other AAI partners? How can we design interventions that are ethically reciprocal, scientifically robust, culturally sensitive, and welfare-centered? What might farm-based settings contribute to global AAI practice, particularly in settings where companion animals are less central?

This presentation seeks to engage ISAZ scholars in shaping a more inclusive and ethically grounded research agenda that recognizes farm animals as meaningful participants in human–animal interaction science.

2:20 - 2:30pm

19 The third function of the animal in the psychotherapeutic setting of zoopsychotherapy: towards a delta function of the animal within the patient-animal-clinician relationship?

Marion Ours

Epic 485, Lyon, France

Abstract

In the complex interplay of human-animal relationships, animals are increasingly being invited into psychotherapy sessions, with some psychotherapists offering the presence of one or more pets during consultations. To date, few studies have specifically focused on understanding the role of animals in therapy sessions, generally concentrating instead on the patient-clinician relationship.

The research I propose to present today is based on the zoopsychotherapy approach I use in my private practice as a psychotherapist. Zoopsychotherapy is a clinical and psychotherapeutic method that aims to articulate three distinct subjectivities: that of the patient, that of the therapist, and that of the animal. This approach differs from traditional animal-assisted therapy, as the animal is not considered a mediator but rather an integral part of the psychotherapeutic space. Furthermore, the research's central hypothesis is to investigate a third-party function, termed the Delta function, that the animal might occupy during therapy sessions, in reference to the Alpha function defined by Wilfred Bion, particularly within the context of the mother-infant relationship. The animal would assume a Delta function in that it acts as an activator of the patient's unconscious deposits, on the one hand, and as an activator of the psychotherapist's processing and understanding of the patient's psychological issues, on the other.

The research methodology is based on data collected from six patients, both girls and boys, aged 4 to 9 years. These children receive psychotherapy at the therapist's office, where, in addition to the therapist, a group of rats, a lop-eared rabbit, a beagle dog, and two guinea pigs are also present. The methodology is structured around the analysis of session notes, collected via voice notes after the consultation and then transcribed into written session narratives. The data collection is based on the analysis of an average of fifteen to twenty sessions for each patient.

Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Frameworks for Conceptualizing Animal Care

2:00 - 2:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature lightning oral presentations each 5-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:10pm

215 Measuring and Improving Human – Animal Interactions: Developing a Compassionate Handling Mentoring Framework for Working Equids

Dr Jen Wathan, Dr Sophie Hill, Kimberly Wells

Brooke, Action for Working Horses and Donkeys, London, United Kingdom

Abstract

There are an estimated 116 million working equids (horses, donkeys, and their hybrids) worldwide, the majority of whom interact with people daily. These interactions profoundly influence their welfare, behaviour, and lived experience. Brooke, an international equine welfare organisation, frequently observes challenges in the quality of animal handling, including aversive techniques, unclear cues, and limited understanding of animal emotions and behaviour. Although handling is one of the most influential components of human–animal interaction, it remains difficult to assess reliably in field conditions. Existing guidance often prioritises human orientated goals (e.g. the completion of a task) over the qualities that differentiate compassionate handling from harmful or stressful approaches, leaving a gap between behavioural science and practical application.

This lightning talk introduces the Compassionate Handling Mentoring Framework (CHMF), a structured, field-ready tool designed to translate scientific evidence into accessible best practice. The framework aims to make good handling achievable, measurable, and ethically grounded across diverse working contexts. It addresses two key questions: (1) What competencies underpin effective and compassionate human–animal communication in working equid environments? and (2) How can human–animal interactions be practically evaluated to ensure they are compassionate, measurable, and context-appropriate?

The CHMF builds on Brooke's existing mentoring model, combining a review of the literature with iterative co-design involving global teams. This process has identified core competencies for compassionate interaction, developed practical work-based assessments (mentoring rubrics), and piloted the framework in real-world settings. Observations, reflective dialogue, and adaptive mentoring have informed ongoing refinement.

Discussion will explore opportunities to reframe handling as a positive experience for animals, effective mentoring strategies for shifting mindsets, approaches for building capacity in recognising emotional cues, and methods for validating the CHMF across diverse contexts.

2:10 - 2:20pm

17 Conceptualizing *Pet Parenting*: Toward a Multidisciplinary Theoretical Model

MA Wiktoria Moczarska

Institute of Philosophy, University of Silesia in Katowice, Katowice, Poland

Abstract

The term *pet parenting* has become increasingly common in academic discussions of human–animal relationships, yet its conceptual status has remained unclear. Although Volsche (2021) proposed one of the most explicit definitions of pet parenting, the term has often been adopted without specifying its theoretical scope or boundaries. This raised the question of whether pet parenting designates a distinct type of relationship or merely re-labels existing concepts such as pet guardianship or human–animal bond. In this presentation, I propose a theoretical model of pet parenting grounded in an integration of anthrozoology, evolutionary biology, moral and social psychology. I argue that pet parenting emerges from the activation of evolutionarily shaped mechanisms,

including sensitivity to baby schema cues, anthropomorphism, altruistic motivation, and care-based moral intuitions. Crucially, I suggest that these mechanisms are not sufficient on their own to define pet parenting. The central claim of the model is that pet parenting is best understood as a psychologically distinct phenomenon defined by the subjective identification with a parental role toward one's dog. Rather than caregiving behaviors alone, it is this parental self-concept—analogue to an adoption-like relationship—that differentiates pet parenting from broader forms of pet caregiving or human–dog bonding. The model further highlights the role of individual differences and socio-cultural context in modulating how parental mechanisms are expressed and stabilized in human–dog relationships.

The proposed framework raises key unresolved questions concerning the empirical boundaries of pet parenting, the interpretation of parental language as a psychological criterion rather than a cultural metaphor, and the cross-cultural variability of the construct. I conclude by outlining implications for future empirical research, including the development of theory-driven measurement tools and cross-cultural validation strategies.

The presentation invites discussion on whether pet parenting should be conceptualized as a distinct relational construct and on how such a construct can be rigorously operationalized within human–animal research.

2:20 - 2:30pm

66 Raising the BARS in Animal Welfare: A Multimodal Framework for Assessing Stress and Engagement in Service Dogs

Don M. Cherry

University of Missouri, Columbia, MO, USA

Abstract

Service dogs provide essential support for individuals with disabilities, yet little is known about how they experience the training that prepares them for this work. Protocols, curricula, and placement decisions rely largely on performance and trainer judgment, with limited use of objective welfare indicators to guide these crucial processes.

Current literature often focuses on single biological or behavioral measures that cannot reliably distinguish among stress, neutrality, and positive engagement, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the true welfare state.

As a result, service dog programs lack objective, evidence-based tools for assessing and maximizing animal welfare.

This presentation introduces an Ethical Listening framework that integrates behavioral, physiological, biological, and socioemotional indicators to assess welfare during standardized service-dog training. Rather than treating each measure as an independent proxy for emotional valence and affective state, the framework emphasizes convergence and divergence across systems to interpret arousal, affect, and engagement more accurately.

Behavioral expression is assessed through facial/postural coding and ethogram-ranked behaviors; physiological regulation via measures of autonomic activity; biological state via endocrine indicators; and socioemotional context via trainer observations and task demands.

The discussion will explore how multimodal welfare profiles can enhance ethical training and placement decisions, reduce reliance on performance metrics, and increase the relevance of welfare research across laboratory and field settings.

Attendees will be encouraged to consider adapting Ethical Listening principles to other working and companion-animal contexts and to contribute to the development of evidence-based welfare tools.

Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Cat–Human Relationships, Agency, and Meaning

2:00 - 2:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature lightning oral presentations each 5-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:10pm

222 Navigating Agency Dynamics: Facilitating Feline Environmental Choice and its Impact on Guardian Well-being.

Miss Myer M Baugh

University of Salford, Salford, United Kingdom

Abstract

The human-feline partnership is a dynamic relationship characterised by co-habitation and the mediation of shared domestic space. A significant focus of contemporary animal welfare is environmental agency - an animal's ability to exercise choice and control. For the domestic feline, this involves the guardian facilitating opportunities for agency, such as social interaction, enrichment, and behavioural autonomy. While the indoor-outdoor debate frequently dominates feline welfare discourse, this research focuses on the guardian's lived experience of navigating the ethical and practical responsibilities of providing such agency within their specific environment.

Despite the popularity of anthrozoology, research regarding human-animal interactions often yields mixed results for human well-being. Within this field, feline-specific studies remain scarce, highlighting the need for deeper investigation into the nuances of the human-feline bond. This research helps build bridges by adopting a One Health perspective, recognising that the well-being of humans, animals, and their shared environments are inextricably linked. By exploring how guardians make sense of their responsibility to facilitate feline agency, this study investigates the potential reciprocal well-being inherent in the bond.

Utilising Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), this study centres the guardian's perspective to uncover the meaning of the lived experience. Through semi-structured interviews, I will explore the emotional navigation required to support feline choice, arguing that qualitative insights are vital for cracking codes and understanding complexities that quantitative measures may overlook.

As a work in progress, this presentation outlines the theoretical framework and preliminary insights. It argues that understanding the human side of the agency dynamic is essential for advancing welfare science and building sustainable partnerships. By understanding the human experience of facilitating feline freedom, we can develop practices that ensure both species flourish together in an interconnected partnership.

2:10 - 2:20pm

100 Feral felines, friend or foe? How word choice influences perceptions of unowned domestic cats

Ms Emma L McVicker¹, Dr Sarah L Crowley¹, Dr Jennifer L McDonald², Professor David J Hodgson¹

¹*University of Exeter, Exeter, United Kingdom.* ²*Cats Protection, Haywards Heath, United Kingdom*

Abstract

The domestic cat is a popular companion animal globally with approximately 11 million owned as pets in the UK alone. Cats may be perceived as self-sufficient and able to return to a wild state. Worldwide, large populations of unowned cats evoke positive and negative perceptions and often require management. Different terminologies are applied to unowned individuals, based on characteristics, socialisation, or intended management outcomes. Here we review 11 common adjectives used to describe unowned cats, and motivations for their use. A systematic review of scientific literature was carried out using an adapted PRISMA protocol and 610 primary scientific papers were included. Definitions were collated and thematic analysis was carried out in NVivo, with network synthesis and statistical analysis incorporating metadata in R. We find clear clustering of adjectival connotations among sources within networks. Further, thematic analysis finds clear differentiation between adjective usage, with some terms, such as feral, applying negative connotation towards cats, alienating them from the landscape, with implications for more stringent control measures; with others, like stray, positioning unowned cats as companion animals out of place, requiring human intervention and care. An overarching aim of our work was to establish standardised definitions for commonly used adjectives, free from connotation or bias. However, we propose that wording is frequently deliberate and intended to inculcate bias in recipients. This opens up avenues for research into the causes and consequences of deliberate and accidental usage of biased terminology.

2:20 - 2:30pm

97 The value of mixed methods for exploring owner-pet relationships and mental wellbeing in the context of UK cat owners

Alex Elford¹, Prof Carri Westgarth¹, Dr Tamzin Furtado¹, Dr Vanessa Ashall²

¹*University of Liverpool, Liverpool, United Kingdom.* ²*Waltham Petcare Science Institute, Mars Petcare, Melton Mowbray, United Kingdom*

Abstract

Studies on owner-pet relationships and owner mental wellbeing continue to produce mixed findings, which are often deemed inconclusive, but indicate that these domains relate in varied and complex ways. Utilising mixed methods of both quantitative and qualitative data can illuminate complicated areas, and highlight the value of considering cross-paradigm insights in combination, rather than in opposition. How may mixed methods be purposefully enacted to help untangle the relationship between pets and mental wellbeing?

This mixed methods project will investigate owner-pet relationships and mental wellbeing within UK cat owners. In-depth interviews and a wide-reaching online survey

(combining validated scales and open-text response), and subsequent thematic and statistical analysis will be employed in a more integrated convergent design. This method allows an iterative and interactive process of instrument refinement and data collation to capture the specificities of owner-cat relationships and related wellbeing. The project will investigate associations as well as attending to relationship perceptions of owners, and contexts these dyads are situated in and informed by. Cross-paradigm meta-inferences are expected to facilitate a nuanced understanding of this multidimensional area.

In-depth mixed methods reporting is lacking in Human Animal Interactions research, providing little guidance around how studies yielding meta-inferences can be practically enacted and communicated. The extent of mixing methods and data is expected to be complicated, and dissemination of pooled findings may also be challenging due to paradigm-specific publication conventions and word count limitations.

We would like to discuss the value and practicalities of utilising mixed methods for HAI research. In what ways is this limited by positivist bias in the area? How can qualitative insights be best communicated to highlight their inherent value? How do ethics and publication procedures hinder essential components of mixed methods investigations, and how can they be overcome?

Lightning Oral Presentation Session: Public Attitudes, Perceptions, and Social Contexts of Human–Animal Relations

2:00 - 2:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature lightning oral presentations each 5-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:10pm

106 Attitudes Towards Animals in Saskatchewan, Canada

Rylie Dancey¹, Christie Tetrault¹, [Amanda Plante](#)¹, Colleen Dell¹, Abu-Hena Mostofa Kamal¹, Victor Eyo Assi², Lisa F. Carver³, Sara Packull-McCormick⁴, Elizabeth Mumford⁵, Katherine Paphitis⁶, Chris Przybyszewski⁷, Wendy Rib⁸, Susana Rodriguez⁹, Cheryl Stroud¹⁰, Dennis Turner¹¹

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⁴*University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada.* ⁵*University of Surrey, Guildford, United Kingdom.* ⁶*Public Health Ontario, Toronto, ON, Canada.* ⁷*US Biologic, Inc., Memphis, TN, USA.* ⁸*St. Petersburg College, St. Petersburg, FL, USA.* ⁹*National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Baltimore, MD, USA.* ¹⁰*One Health Commission, Apex, NC, USA.* ¹¹*Institute for Applied Ethology and Animal Psychology (I.E.A.P./I.E.T.), Horgen/ZH, Switzerland*

Abstract

Theoretical Framework:

Zooeyia—the positive effects of animals on human health—is often overlooked in One Health, which emphasizes interconnections among human, animal, and environmental health. The ©Attitudes Toward Animals (ATA) questionnaire examines views on (1)

nature conservation, (2) raising animals for products, (3) animal cognition and emotion, and (4) benefits companion animals provide to humans. This aligns with the Tripartite Model of Attitudes, which frames attitudes toward animals as affective, cognitive and behavioral.

Research Focus:

Our study examines whether individual differences predict attitudes toward wild and companion animals in Saskatchewan, a province with a strong agricultural base and distinctive relationships with farm and domestic animals. We examine how factors, such as age, gender, urban/rural upbringing, and political alignment, relate to the ©ATA dimensions.

Methodology:

This is the first Canadian application of the ©ATA. We will take the initial step in validating the English ©ATA by conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). We will use regression analyses to examine how demographic and individual characteristics predict the ©ATA factors identified in the EFA. With ethics approval, data are being collected through a provincial survey panel and university faculty and students via ©SurveyMonkey.

Issues & Responses:

Our design includes several innovative elements: (1) additional demographic questions, such as meat consumption, political affiliation, and urban/rural identity; (2) a diverse recruitment strategy; (3) short-answer items for qualitative insights; and (4) an EFA to validate the ©ATA scale in English.

Discussion:

As members of the international One Health Commission Working Group on the Human-Animal Bond, we will highlight the rationale and process of applying the ©ATA. The questionnaire, with added short-answer questions, provides opportunities to explore quantitative and qualitative responses regarding attitudes towards animals. Understanding a fuller scope of attitudes towards animals will advance understanding at the human-animal-environment interface, including implications for animal welfare.

2:10 - 2:20pm

226 Preserving the Human–Animal Bond: Overcoming Institutional Barriers in Social Support

Anne TROTZIER

LIANES, Strasbourg, France

Abstract

For many people living in vulnerable situations, a companion animal can be a major source of stability: a reassuring presence, a daily anchor, a reason to keep going, and sometimes the only consistent emotional bond. In social support pathways, preserving the human–animal bond can strengthen trust, encourage engagement with services, and help maintain continuity of care and support. Yet even today, many social care, housing, health, and long-term care settings (including nursing homes) refuse to admit animals, or allow them only in rare exceptional cases. These restrictions—often linked to concerns about hygiene, allergies, safety, liability, internal organization, or lack of staff training—create a practical barrier to access. They can lead to forced separations,

increased distress, and greater risks of service disengagement, interrupted pathways, and animal abandonment.

Building on field experience from LIANES (Strasbourg, France), an organization working to reduce social exclusion through animal-assisted approaches and support for people living with their animals, this Lightning talk proposes an approach centred on cooperation between partners to turn an institutional barrier into a lever for inclusion.

Problem statement / questions. How can animal inclusion be made compatible with institutional constraints while ensuring everyone's safety and safeguarding animal welfare? Which partnerships (social workers, care teams, veterinarians, animal welfare actors, and public authorities) enable realistic and sustainable implementation?

Proposed methodology. (1) stakeholder mapping and co-design workshops; (2) development of a practical **Animal-Inclusion Protocol** (assessment, consent, hygiene measures, behaviour management, and emergency procedures); (3) a pilot plan with mixed-method evaluation focused on acceptability, feasibility, perceived safety, continuity of support, and perceived effects on the human–animal bond.

Points for discussion. Minimum standards for animal inclusion, ethical tensions (animal welfare vs access to care), and how anthrozoology can connect practice, evidence, and public policy through partnerships.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Service & Assistance Dogs: Veterans and Youth

2:40 - 4:10pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:40 - 3:00pm

255 Adolescent-Dog Attachment and Psychosocial Well-Being Among Military-Connected Youth: A Preliminary Analysis

Dr. Laurie Martinez, Dr Cheryl Krause-Parello

Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL, USA

Abstract

Introduction:

Military-connected adolescents experience elevated stress exposure related to frequent family relocations and parental deployment, placing them at heightened risk for emotional distress. Companion dogs may serve as sources of emotional support; however, empirical evidence examining adolescent-dog attachment and psychosocial outcomes among military-connected adolescents remains limited. This study examined associations among dog attachment, resilience, stress, depressive symptoms, and mental well-being.

Methodology:

A cross-sectional analysis was conducted among military-connected adolescents (N = 70) who owned a dog. Participants completed standardized measures of resilience (Brief Resilience Scale), depressive symptoms (CES-D), perceived stress (PSS), mental well-being (WEMWBS), and dog attachment (Short Attachment to Pets Scale). Descriptive statistics summarize psychosocial functioning. Pearson correlations examined relationships among attachment and psychosocial outcomes.

Main results/findings:

Participants demonstrated moderate resilience ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.44$), elevated depressive symptoms ($M = 19.6$, $SD = 6.98$), moderate perceived stress ($M = 17.83$, $SD = 3.73$), and variable well-being ($M = 51.33$, $SD = 13.41$). Dog attachment levels were moderate to high ($M = 14.29$, $SD = 4.87$). Strong associations emerged among psychosocial variables, including stress and depressive symptoms ($r = 0.53$, $p < .001$), stress and well-being ($r = -0.54$, $p < .001$), and depressive symptoms and well-being ($r = -0.42$, $p < .001$). In contrast, dog attachment demonstrated small, non-significant associations with resilience ($r = -0.08$, $p > .30$), stress ($r = -0.01$, $p > .30$), depressive symptoms ($r = -0.02$, $p > .30$), and well-being ($r = 0.12$, $p > .30$).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

Military-connected adolescents exhibited substantial emotional burden alongside strong interrelations among stress, depression, and well-being. Although dog attachment was high, its direct association with psychosocial outcomes was minimal in this preliminary sample, suggesting the presence of potential indirect or contextual mechanisms. Future longitudinal and mechanistic studies should examine moderating and mediating pathways through which companion dogs may influence youth adjustment in high-stress military environments.

3:00 - 3:20pm

41 Investigating the Influence of Animal-Assisted Services and Service Dogs on Moral Injury in Military Veterans: A Scoping Review

Matthew P. Knight¹, Dr. Zenithson Ng², Jeanine Williamson³

¹*Center for Veterinary Social Work, University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, Knoxville, TN, USA.* ²*Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, Knoxville, TN, USA.* ³*University of Tennessee Libraries, Knoxville, TN, USA*

Abstract

Background: Moral injury (MI) has become widely recognized as a distinct and potentially clinical consequence of military-related trauma, characterized by perpetual guilt, shame, social withdrawal, and disruptions in moral identity. Although MI and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) frequently co-occur, traditional PTSD treatments were designed to address fear-based trauma and often fail to alleviate MI-related distress. Animal-assisted services (AAS) and psychiatric service dogs (PSD) have gained prominence as complementary approaches for veterans with PTSD, yet their relevance to MI has not been systematically examined.

Methods: A scoping review was conducted using Arksey and O'Malley's five-stage framework and reported in accordance with PRISMA-ScR guidelines. Searches were performed on August 7, 2025, across nine databases without publication-year limits. Eligible studies included peer-reviewed research involving military veterans or service members with PTSD who participated in AAS, PSD, or structured animal-related programs. Studies were included if they assessed MI directly or measured outcomes conceptually aligned with MI (e.g., guilt, shame, self-compassion, social functioning).

Results: A total of 18 studies met the inclusion criteria from an eligible pool of 266 publications. Only one study (Steele et al., 2018) directly assessed MI using a validated instrument. However, across AAS and PSD partnerships, consistent improvements

were observed in MI-relevant domains, particularly moral thinking and social functioning. These improvements were characterized by reductions in self-condemnation and guilt-based appraisals, as well as decreased social isolation and greater relational engagement.

Conclusion: The optimal treatment for veteran MI remains undetermined. Existing evidence suggests that AAS or PSD may influence core mechanisms implicated in MI. Conceptually, the human–animal bond may serve as a corrective experience that restores moral and social agency. Therefore, animal-related programs may serve as complementary approaches capable of addressing both PTSD-related symptoms and the enduring shame- and trust-based sequelae of morally injurious experiences.

3:20 - 3:40pm

103 Psychiatric Assistance Dogs Support Wellbeing in Civilian Youth: Evidence from Three Complementary Studies

Prof. dr. Steffie Van Der Steen

University of Groningen, Groningen, Netherlands

Abstract

Introduction

Psychiatric assistance dogs are increasingly partnered with adolescents and young adults with chronic mental health conditions to support social participation and emotional regulation. This partnership has the potential to improve quality of life for a population often underserved by conventional treatments. Despite growing demand, civilian access remains limited due to high training costs and inconsistent funding, as most research has focused on veterans.

Methodology

This study strengthens the evidence base for psychiatric assistance dogs among civilian youth by presenting three complementary studies evaluating their impact on quality of life and psychological, physical, and social wellbeing in adolescents and young adults (16–30 years) in the Netherlands. A mixed-methods design combined: 1) a cross-sectional questionnaire (Kidscreen-10; $n = 141$), 2) a six-month longitudinal study of 9 participants newly partnered with their dog (12 measurement points), and 3) in-depth qualitative interviews ($n = 13$).

Main results/findings

Across studies, converging evidence revealed consistent improvements in daily functioning and wellbeing. In the cross-sectional questionnaire, participants partnered with a dog for more than two years reported higher quality of life and psychosocial wellbeing than those in shorter partnerships ($t(139) = -3.39$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[-0.53, -0.14]$, $d = 0.57$). In the longitudinal study, quality of life improved significantly over six months (Friedman $\chi^2(11) = 21.64$, $p = .03$, Kendall's $W = .22$). Qualitative interviews contextualized these results, describing an initial adjustment period followed by gains in psychological and social wellbeing, including increased hope, independence, social participation, and strong bonds of companionship and trust.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

Together, these findings provide the first robust civilian-focused evidence that psychiatric assistance dogs can meaningfully enhance psychosocial wellbeing and overall quality of life in youth with chronic mental health conditions.

3:40 - 4:00pm

96 Investigating the molecular physiology elicited in military veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder paired with psychiatric service dogs

Jaci Gandenberger, Marisa Motiff, Kevin N Morris

University of Denver, Denver, CO, USA

Abstract

Introduction

Growing evidence shows that pairing veterans with psychiatric service dogs results in significant improvements in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. However, very little is known about the physiological responses elicited by service dogs that result in symptom reduction. In addition, little research has been conducted on how this type of service affects the health and well-being of the dogs.

Methodology

Fifty veterans with PTSD and their service dogs are being tracked across one year. Data collected prior to pairing and one, six, and twelve months post-pairing include measures of PTSD severity (PCL-5) and post-traumatic growth (PTGI) for the humans and basic health measures (veterinary reports) and behavior for the dogs (CBARQ). Over 11,000 proteins are being assayed (SomaScan) in human and canine plasma samples obtained concurrent with the clinical and behavioral data. Changes in protein expression that correlate with those in the human clinical and canine health and behavioral data identify potential molecular pathways affected by the pairings.

Main results

Linear mixed model regression analysis of data in a pilot study of the first ten veterans and their dogs through the first six months of the study indicate that the average PTSD symptoms are decreasing (slope=-1.8; $p=0.003$), the average post-traumatic growth is increasing (slope=1.1; $p=0.048$), and the average dog behavioral measures are increasing (slope=0.72; $p=0.048$). Individuals exhibit different clinical and behavioral trajectories and variations in protein patterns.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

Analysis of the average and individual trends and variability in the clinical, behavioral, and protein data in the pilot study are beginning to identify the molecular biology underlying the effects of service dogs on PTSD. Findings of this proteomics-based research will provide biomarker panels for tracking clinical outcomes, optimizing this intervention for PTSD, and ensuring optimal health and well-being trajectories for the service dogs.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companionship: Human Aging, Health, & HIV

2:40 - 4:10pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:40 - 3:00pm

42 Companionship Across Generations and Species: A Qualitative Study on the Companion Animal - Older Adult Reciprocal Relationship

Izza Babar

University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada

Abstract

This research study focuses on the multifaceted, reciprocal relationships between companion animals and older adults, exploring how these bonds contribute to emotional stability and well-being in later life. Companion animals, often perceived merely as pets, are integral to the lives of approximately 40% of Canadians aged 65 and older, serving as sources of companionship and emotional support. However, traditional research tends to adopt a human-centric lens, overlooking the agency and experiences of nonhuman animals. This study aims to bridge the fields of critical aging studies and critical animal studies, highlighting the intersectionality of aging and human-animal relationships.

The primary objective of this study is to understand these relationships as reciprocal rather than one-sided, enriching our comprehension of both human and animal welfare. By examining older adults' experiences with their companion animals, the research emphasizes the mutual emotional labour involved in caregiving and companionship. Key research questions include how older adults derive meaning from these relationships and how they navigate the interplay of their needs with those of their animal companions.

The study employs qualitative methods, including photo elicitation (inspired loosely by Photovoice) and narrative analysis, to capture the nuanced dynamics of these interspecies bonds. Preliminary insights suggest that recognizing companion animals as active participants challenges conventional perceptions of care and nurtures a more reciprocal and compassionate understanding of human-animal relationships. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to public health and aging policies by advocating for a more holistic understanding of well-being that extends beyond just older adults to also encapsulate their nonhuman companions.

3:00 - 3:20pm

154 "I do it all with love." The Human-Companion Animal Bond as a Source of Strength and Stress Among Older People with HIV

Jacqueline Nicole Jones, Kaylinn M Escobar, Hannah Patricia Fetko, Angelica Bathory-Frota, Dr. Preeti Manavalan, Dr. Deepthi Satheesa Varma, Dr. Jennifer W Applebaum
University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Pets are thought to provide mental and physical health benefits to older people living with HIV (PWH); however, pet caregiving is resource-intensive and may present challenges for older PWH who face physical, psychosocial, and financial limitations. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of pet ownership and its impact on health and well-being among older PWH.

Methodology: In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 cat and/or dog-owning older PWH (75% dog owners, 17% cat owners, 8% both; age range 50-64; 60% women; 33% Black, 50% White, 8% Native American, 8% Latinx; 50% with \$10-

50k/yr income; 50% high school educated). A deductive thematic analysis, guided by the a priori themes of pet ownership, health, living alone, housing, and financial circumstances, was employed. Through a systematic consensus coding process, two independent coders reached agreement in identifying salient subthemes and codes which were categorized under the broader themes to depict the participants' experiences of pet ownership and its impact on their health and well-being.

Main Results: Participants primarily characterized pet ownership as a devotion to pet caregiving despite challenges. Participant reported benefits of pet ownership were emotional support, companionship, motivation for positive health behaviors, and adherence to HIV treatment. However, financial circumstances and unexpected health emergencies introduced precarity into pet ownership, as participants reported constraints on economic subsistence imposed by fixed incomes and variable health status. Secure, pet-inclusive housing was a salient concern. All participants expressed a strong commitment to their pet(s)' welfare despite the additional challenges.

Principle Conclusions: While the participants' pets provided love, companionship, and a motivation to maintain their health, the participants faced many notable challenges that threatened the stability of the human-animal bond. Social and public health programs designed to support this vulnerable population should address the additional needs created by pet ownership to maintain their health-promoting human-animal bonds.

3:20 - 3:40pm

49 Unmet pet caregiving needs are associated with depression and anxiety symptoms among people with HIV

Selena M. Gutierrez¹, Jacqueline N. Jones¹, Dr. Emily Cherenack², Dr. Shelby E. McDonald³, Kaylinn Escobar¹, Dr. Preeti Manavalan¹, Dr. Humberto E. Fabelo⁴, Dr. Maya Widmeyer⁵, Dr. Steven Safren⁶, Dr. Robert L. Cook¹, Dr. Jennifer W. Applebaum¹

¹University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida, USA. ²Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA. ³Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado, USA. ⁴Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia, USA. ⁵Unconditional Love, Inc., Melbourne, Florida, USA. ⁶University of Miami, Miami, Florida, USA

Abstract

Introduction: People with HIV (PWH) experience disproportionately high rates of depression and anxiety due to stigma, social isolation, financial instability, and barriers to healthcare access. Pet ownership, common among PWH, may provide emotional support that bolsters mental health. However, the human-animal bond can also be threatened by socioeconomic factors that may limit one's ability to meet pets' needs, thereby worsening mental health. In this study, we aimed to assess associations between symptoms of depression and anxiety and (1) comfort from pets, and (2) unmet pet needs.

Methodology: Data were drawn from a survey study of 210 pet-owning PWH in Florida, USA (*M*_{age}=49; 66% White, 28% Black, 6% other races; 21% Latinx; 56% men, 42% women, 2% other genders; 47% income <\$20k). We used linear regression to assess associations between (1) comfort from companion animals and (2) unmet pet needs (i.e., difficulty affording pet food, medications, supplies, and veterinary care), and mental

health symptoms (depression [PHQ-8] and anxiety [GAD-7]), adjusted for sociodemographic covariates.

Results: Participants reported high levels of comfort from companion animals; however, comfort from pets was not significantly associated with depression or anxiety (depression: $B=-0.08$, $p=.118$; anxiety: $B=-0.06$, $p=.194$). In contrast, unmet pet needs were consistently associated with poorer mental health. Difficulty affording pet food, medications, or supplies was significantly associated with higher depression scores ($B=2.44$, $p=.012$) and marginally significantly associated with higher anxiety scores ($B=1.70$, $p=.075$). Difficulty affording veterinary care showed the strongest associations with both depression ($B=2.96$, $p<.001$) and anxiety ($B=3.28$, $p<.001$).

Conclusions: While pets may provide PWH with emotional comfort, unmet pet needs driven by socioeconomic barriers are associated with poorer mental health in this sample. These findings underscore the relevance of unmet pet needs for mental health among PWH, with implications for HIV care, social services, and future research.

3:40 - 4:00pm

15 A Systematic Review of Pet Attachment and Health Outcomes in Older Adults

Erika Friedmann¹, Nancy R. Gee², Mona R. A. Eltantawy³, Sarah Cole⁴

¹University of Maryland School of Nursing, Baltimore, MD, USA. ²Virginia Commonwealth University Department of Psychiatry, Richmond, VA, USA. ³Damietta University Faculty of Medicine, New Damietta, Damietta Prefecture, Egypt. ⁴Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine, Richmond, VA, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Research suggests that older adults might obtain health benefits from pet ownership, however results are mixed. Pet attachment is suggested as both a mechanism for the relationship and reason for differences in the association of pet ownership with health outcomes.

Purpose: This systematic review examines evidence for the relationship of pet attachment to health outcomes among older adults.

Methods: This Open Science Foundation-registered review began with multiple literature data base and journal searches that resulted in 20,795 candidate articles. After examination of titles and abstracts 58 articles were identified that included peer reviewed original research, published between 1965 and June 2025 in English, included older adults (age $\geq$ 50 years) and examined the relationship of pet attachment to health outcomes.

Main Results: Articles examined health outcomes: psychological ($n=53$), social ($n=27$), physical ($n=27$). Pet attachment was assessed with 19 tools; most frequently the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale and the Pet Attachment Questionnaire. The studies were not consistently of high quality according to OCEBM criteria. Most studies were cross-sectional. Grief over the loss of a pet was consistently related to pet attachment. No other psychological, social, or physical health outcome was consistently related to pet attachment. The findings do not support a clear relationship of pet attachment to health outcomes in older adults. They suggest that the relationship of pet attachment to health outcomes, especially positive psychological outcomes, is not the same for older adults as younger individuals.

Implications: Further research is necessary to more precisely examine the relationship of pet attachment to health outcomes in older adults. Longitudinal examination of the relationship of pet attachment to changes in health outcomes may be particularly interesting in older adults who may keep pets to help with their own health issues, for example depression or loneliness.

Symposium: At a loss for evidence: Designing ethical investigations to understand social animals' experience of death and grief

2:40 - 4:10pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

The symposium features a 5-minute introduction, four 15-minute themed oral presentations, a 10-minute discussant presentation, followed by a 15-minute Q&A session.

129 At a loss for evidence: Designing ethical investigations to understand social animals' experience of death and grief

Dr. Courtney L. Sexton

Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA

Abstract

For humans, social bonds are central to wellbeing. When strong bonds are broken through death or separation, grief and distress often follow, with adverse effects, particularly on cognitive and mental health. Increasingly, research shows that inter- and intra-species social bonds are similarly important for other social animals, producing comparable benefits and costs when lost. Understanding when, where, and how animals are affected by companion loss has important implications for animal welfare and human-animal relations. This symposium highlights current comparative thanatological research across species, emphasizing innovative study design and methods used to generate quantitative data, and considers what these findings reveal about animals' lived experiences. Presentation #1 examines factors influencing behavioral changes in surviving horses, including the nature of the relationship, whether the survivor witnessed the death, and whether it could spend time with the body. The study draws on a retrospective survey of 325 surviving horses and ponies. Presentation #2 presents a noninvasive, multidimensional approach to evaluating behavioral, physiological, and spatial responses of wild chimpanzees to loss, integrating 60 years of longitudinal data from Gombe National Park, Tanzania, with real-time in situ physiological monitoring. Presentation #3 introduces the Companionship, Loss & Outcomes Survey (C-LOS), a novel tool assessing the impacts of loss on physical and cognitive health in household dogs, and describes its use within the Dog Aging Project, a cohort of over 50,000 dogs across diverse U.S. home environments. Presentation #4 shifts the focus to humans, exploring beliefs and experiences related to animal grief. Across online studies, participants express strong belief in animals' capacity to grieve, identifying species thought to grieve, observed post-loss behaviors, and implications for animals' understanding of death. Together, these talks and discussion led by Michał Pręgowski, whose expertise in animals and society and grief provides an integrative lens, center a critical anthrozoological topic with translational relevance that remains under-researched and under-described in the literature.

Presenters:

Dr. Claire Ricci-Bonot, *INRAE, CNRS, Université de Tours, Centre Val de Loire UMR Physiologie de la Reproduction et des Comportements, Nouzilly 37380, France*

Abigail McClain, MPhil, *The George Washington University, Washington, DC, United States*

Dr. Courtney Sexton, *Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Blacksburg, Virginia, United States*

Prof. Leanne Proops, *University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, United Kingdom*

Discussant:

Dr. Michał Pręgowski

Presenter 1 Title & Abstract

Title: Behavioural reactions of horses (*Equus caballus*) following the death of their companion

Dr. Claire Ricci-Bonot, *INRAE, CNRS, Université de Tours, Centre Val de Loire UMR Physiologie de la Reproduction et des Comportements, Nouzilly 37380, France*

Introduction: Although it might be expected that horses would show behaviour changes associated with a dying/dead conspecific, there is remarkably little literature on this subject. We therefore sought to explore behavioural changes in horses who had experienced the loss of a companion equid.

Methodology: We used an online questionnaire designed to collect data on the housing and management of the equids, the passing of the deceased equid, and the type and duration of immediate and sustained behavioural changes in the surviving horse.

Main results/findings: Horse owners frequently reported behavioural changes within 24 hours of the companion's death, including changes in arousal (88.96%), alertness to stimuli (72.92%), behaviour directed towards other equids (77.67%) and people (77.64%), and vocalisation (68.63%). Multiple logistic regression modelling found that horses who had shared a parental-dependant or friendly relationship, rather than simply tolerated each other, were more likely to change their behaviour towards humans and their excitement to interact with others or around feed time. Horses who had witnessed the death of their companion showed changes in time spent feeding ($p=0.030$) and sleeping ($p=0.028$) within 24 hours. These horses were also more likely to show changes in vigilance ($p=0.016$) and/or excitement towards others and/or around feeding time ($p=0.004$). Spending time with the dead body did not impact behaviours in the first 24 hours. However, within 6 months, horses unable to spend time with the body were more likely to show changes in vigilance ($p=0.033$) and/or arousal ($p=0.038$).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Our results indicate that horses may express grief-related behaviours that have welfare significance and might benefit from better management.

Presenter 2 Title & Abstract

Title: Integrating datasets to evaluate compensatory socialization following social loss in wild chimpanzees

Abigail McClain, MPhil, *The George Washington University, Washington, DC, United States*

Introduction: In humans, the death of close social partners can have acute consequences and promote feelings of dread, grief, and anxiety. While humans often demonstrate a compensatory behavioral response after loss, few studies investigate such a conserved mechanism in wild primates. This research utilizes a natural removal framework in wild eastern chimpanzees alongside onsite endocrine analyses to evaluate if and how social resilience and adaptive recovery manifest across behavioral, spatial, and physiological domains.

Methodology: We integrate 60 years of longitudinal data from Gombe National Park, Tanzania, with current in situ monitoring. Spatial responses were modeled using 40 years of geospatial data to assess range shifts via 50% utilization distributions following 29 death events. Social responses were evaluated by calculating dyadic association indices (DAI) before and after 58 deaths. Urinary cortisol (CT) was analyzed in situ using a portable plate reader.

Main results/findings: Females who lose a strong-bond partner shift away from the range formerly occupied by the deceased, while those with weak ties may shift into vacated areas if they provide a net gain in mean habitat quality. Behavioral changes post-death suggest differential responses to the loss of a strong partner and in situ data collection and analyses will help assess if individuals demonstrate rapid changes in CT mediated by the presence, absence, or death of a preferred partner.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: This work provides a framework for quantifying behavioral and biological "costs" of loss in long-lived social mammals. Our approach demonstrates how spatial, social, and physiological systems may interact to regulate both individual behavior and community relationships. These findings offer insights into the evolutionary roots of social compensation and enrich our understanding of how extant wild apes manage complex social landscapes.

Presenter 3 Title & Abstract

Title: Development of the C-LOS, a novel survey instrument to assess the impact of companionship loss on health outcomes in household-living dogs

Dr. Courtney Sexton, *Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine, Blacksburg, Virginia, United States*

Introduction: While dogs and humans have been cohabitating for millennia, dogs are increasingly regarded by many individuals as important members of the family. Emerging research aims to evaluate these evolving relationships and the impacts of animal companionship on peoples' health and quality of life. There is little understanding, however, of how relationships formed in human households affect dogs' development, health and welfare.

Methodology: We recruited 15 dog owners from the longitudinal Dog Aging Project (DAP) who had previously volunteered information about their dogs' response to the loss of household companions to participate in ½ hour-long qualitative interviews. We developed and followed a semi-structured interview guide to gather data from these respondents, which were then coded and analyzed using Atlas.ti. Patterns, themes, and categories of risk and response that emerged during interview analysis informed the construction of the novel Companionship-Loss and Outcomes Survey (C-LOS).

Main results/findings: The resulting instrument (C-LOS) presents three survey streams (Loss, Gain, and Multiple Incidents) comprising five main questionnaire sections – Household Composition, Characterization of Companionship Change,

Observed Behaviors and Health Conditions, Human Disposition, and Supportive Interventions – and is designed to investigate the short- and long-term effects of permanent change in familial social structures on dogs' physical, cognitive, and behavioral health.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: In our initial deployment of the C-LOS within the DAP, we aim to quantify the exhibition and associated effects of grief and grief-like behaviors in dogs, with important implications for recognizing companionship as a social determinant of health in non-human animals and advancing our understanding of the human-dog bond and its impact on both species' fitness and evolution.

Presenter 4 Title & Abstract

Title: Human perspectives on animal grief and loss.

Prof. Leanne Proops, *University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, United Kingdom*

Introduction: There is currently no scientific consensus as to which species have the capacity to understand death and to grieve. Attributing mental and emotional states, such as grief and death awareness, to other species influences our attitudes towards their treatment and welfare. Previous research shows that these attributions are subject to certain biases related to the features of the person and the species in question.

Methodology: In a series of two online questionnaires we asked UK residents whether they thought animal species grieved and possessed a concept of death. We predicted that attribution of death awareness and grief would be affected by a participants' gender and dietary habits as well as the species' genetic closeness to humans and its function. Participants also answered open questions regarding their experience of animal loss and views on the topic.

Main results/findings: Over 95% of participants believed that some animals discriminate between life and death and experience grief, with greater understanding attributed to phylogenetically closer species and to pets and wild animals rather than food animals or pests. Women consistently attributed higher levels of understanding than men —especially to more phylogenetically distant species. Non-meat eaters attributed higher levels of understanding than meat eaters – especially to food animals. Behavioural and emotional changes were seen as the strongest evidence of death awareness.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: This study provides an in-depth exploration of people's opinions regarding animals' capacities to understand death. A belief that a species possesses even a rudimentary understanding of death may be a justification for including them within our sphere of moral concern. These results show that beliefs about animal grief and death awareness are widespread in the UK but are systematically shaped by species' social roles and human identity factors.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Cats: Cohabitation & Health

2:40 - 4:10pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:40 - 3:00pm

185 Friend or foe: A qualitative study of owners' perceptions and handling of conflicts among cohabiting companion cats

Dr. Ayoe Hoff¹, DVM Sabine Toft Thorslund², Professor Peter Sandøe^{1,2}

¹*Department of Food and Resource Economics, Rolighedsvej 23, 1958 Frederiksberg C, Denmark.* ²*Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences, Grønnegårdsvej 8, 1870 Frederiksberg C, Denmark*

Abstract

Introduction: The domestic cat (*Felis silvestris catus*) descends from the solitary African wildcat (*Felis silvestris lybica*) but has acquired some conspecific social tolerance during domestication. Nevertheless, conflicts are frequently reported by caretakers of cohabiting companion cats in domestic homes. However, such reports mainly stem from questionnaire studies or behavioural / veterinary clinic journals. Conversely, cat caretakers' own perceptions of behaviours indicative of, reasons for, and ways to handle inter-cat conflicts are understudied. The aim of this study was therefore to map caretakers' (i) description of types of and reasons for conflict among their cats, and (ii) strategies for handling such conflicts.

Methodology: Qualitative semi-structured interviews were performed with 15 Danish cat caretakers, recruited using convenience sampling. Questions comprised (i) cat background information, (ii) respondents' perceptions of type of and reasons for conflicts between their cats, and (iii) respondents' handling of such conflicts. The interviews were transcribed and thematically coded.

Main results/findings: The respondents owned in all 36 cats. The respondents' most frequent explanations for inter-cat conflicts in their homes were 'escalating play', 'hierarchical / territorial', and 'social distancing'. Observed behaviours ranged from direct agonistic (hissing, chasing, fighting) to more subtle (staring, blocking, displacing). Respondents mostly addressed direct agonistic interactions. Common interventions were interruption, distraction or separation. In contrast, typical conflict mitigation strategies included joint feeding or play, adding resources (e.g. litter boxes), or introducing enrichment.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Respondents in our study were most prone to intervene in direct agonistic interactions. However, more subtle conflict behaviours may be equally stressful for the involved cats. Thus, when advising cat caretakers on how to handle inter-cat conflicts, cat professionals should emphasize the wide variety of inter-cat conflict indicators, and that every type of conflict may lead to reduced welfare for the involved cats and therefore should be addressed.

3:00 - 3:20pm

247 Associations of Resource Quality and Accessibility with Community Cat Health Across Colonies

Nattawipa Ampaiwan, Jacquelyn Jacobs

Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA

Abstract

Free-roaming, or "community cats (CC)", rely on resources found in surrounding environments, which may include existing outdoor items or those provided by human caretakers. Quality and accessibility of these resources and management of colonies vary between communities, and the impact of these factors on cat health is unknown.

This study aimed to evaluate the relationship of resource and management-based factors with individual CC health outcomes. Caretakers managing CC colonies in the United States were asked to report resource availability and quality, and to evaluate individual cat health using five validated visual indicators: body condition, coat condition, nasal and ocular discharge, ear crusting, and injury status. A total of 137 participants contributed data on 712 cats with an average of 5.3 ± 2.7 cats per respondent (range: 1–15). Associations between resources (e.g., food, water, shelter) and health outcomes were analyzed using multiple linear mixed-effects models which accounted for clustering of CC within colonies. Results indicated that higher total health scores were associated with more consistent and cleaner water resources ($\beta = 0.21 \pm 0.11$, $p = 0.050$). Poorer body condition scores were associated with cats with unknown sterilization dates ($\beta = -1.34 \pm 0.58$, $p = 0.020$) and those sterilized more than 4 years ago ($\beta = -0.85 \pm 0.40$, $p = 0.033$), which may reflect increased cat age. Coat conditions varied across colony sizes; cats living in colonies of 10 - 15 and colonies of 1 - 5 had higher coat condition scores ($\beta = 2.29 \pm 0.95$, $p = 0.001$; $\beta = 1.07 \pm 0.57$, $p = 0.060$) than those living with 6-9 other cats. Overall, these findings suggest that water quality and availability, and date of sterilization are important predictors of CC health, emphasizing the need of consistent access to clean water in colony management.

3:20 - 3:40pm

102 Assessing Reliability of In-home Caregiver-collected Cat Health Measurements

Grace Boone¹, Dr. Daniel SJ Pang², Dr. Ilana Halperin¹, Dr. Carly Moody¹

¹University of California, Davis, Davis, California, USA. ²University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Abstract

Introduction: Veterinary telehealth tools may reduce barriers to care and enable caregivers to become more active participants in their cat's healthcare. However, concerns exist regarding the reliability of at-home health measurements. We assessed reliability of caregiver- versus investigator-collected cat health measurements, and surveyed participants to examine attitudes towards using telehealth and ease of collecting cat health data at home.

Methodology: A research assistant first instructed cat caregivers (N=26) via video-call to conduct basic components of a physical exam (e.g., checking ears for discharge). Next, the trained investigator entered the home and repeated the exam. Caregivers completed a pre- and post-participation questionnaire assessing their experiences with veterinary telehealth and opinions regarding examining their cat at home. Reliability between caregiver- and investigator-collected measurements were assessed using Prevalence and Bias Adjusted Kappa (PABAK), ICC, and Kendall's coefficient W. Differences in pre- versus post-questionnaire responses were assessed with Wilcoxon Signed-rank tests.

Main results/findings: Caregivers reliability collected some cat health metrics including weight (ICC=0.8, $p < 0.001$), respiratory rate (ICC=0.96, $p < 0.001$), and body condition score (W=0.76, $p = 0.05$). However, after participation, caregivers reported increased difficulty handling their cat (W=88, $p = 0.023$), and assessing their cat's feet (W=52, $p = 0.013$) and skin (W=57, $p = 0.029$). Nevertheless, most participants indicated

they were ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ satisfied with the telehealth appointment (84.6%), and interested in examining their cat at home during a future telehealth appointment (73.1%).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Caregivers can reliably collect some cat health metrics at home and are interested in using telehealth tools that support participation in their cat’s healthcare and expand access to care. Reported challenges highlight the need for standardized protocols and strategies to improve feasibility, as well as identify caregiver–cat dyads that may be best suited for assessing their cat’s health at home, recognizing this approach may not be feasible for all.

3:40 - 4:00pm

193 Intertwined Lives: The Pet-Effect Paradox in the Management of Feline Diabetes Mellitus – an Explorative Pilot-Study

Dr. Christine Smetacek¹, Dr. Antonia Rippe², Katharina Soukup¹, Alexandra Haslinger¹, Dr. Philip Watson³, Steve Williams³, Univ.Prof.Dr. Birgit Ursula Stetina¹

¹*Sigmund Freud University, Vienna, Austria.* ²*Tierarzt am Spittelberg, Vienna, Austria.*

³*Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica GmbH, Ingelheim, Germany*

Abstract

Introduction: The “Pet Effect” (Allen, 2003) highlights health benefits of pet ownership, but the “Pet-Effect Paradox” (Herzog, 2021) emphasizes burdens when caring for chronically ill animals. Feline diabetes mellitus (FDM), which requires daily treatment, provides a unique context for exploring the interlinked quality of life (QoL) of cats and their owners.

Methodology: In a mixed-methods pilot study, we examined how managing FDM affected the quality of life (QoL) of cats and owners. Owners completed repeated online surveys over 16 weeks (baseline–TP10), using standardized measures like WHOQOL-BREF, Self-Compassion Scale, and Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale. Qualitative interviews, guided by grounded theory, complemented the study. Quantitative analysis involved generalized linear models, difference testing, and effect sizes; qualitative data were analyzed through case models, word clouds, and code-relations.

Results: Quantitatively, owners reported significant improvements in physical QoL ($t(7)=-2.19, p=.064, d=0.78$), whereas social and spiritual domains showed declines, reflecting the dual nature of caregiving. Owners’ assessments of their cats, however, indicated broad improvements in physical ($t(7)=-4.55, p=.003, d=-1.61$), psychological ($t(6)=-3.11, p=.021, d=-1.18$), and social domains ($t(6)=-3.65, p=.011, d=-1.38$), with significant effects for psychological well-being, social interaction, mobility, and living conditions.

Qualitative analysis showed four thematic clusters: (1) **medical management**; (2) **emotional burden**; (3) **positive relational change**; and (4) **veterinarian/information support**. Case models demonstrated more stable adaptation among new medication users, whereas insulin treatment was associated with fluctuating burden and reduced independence.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Overall, results demonstrate the intertwined nature of cat and owner QoL: improvements in cats’ well-being translated into relief and optimism for owners, while setbacks amplified strain. These findings highlight the need for veterinary and psychosocial support to address both

medical and emotional dimensions of chronic pet care, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the human–animal bond.

Workshop: Employing diverse and innovative research methods in Human-Animal Interaction research

2:40 - 4:10pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

184 Employing diverse and innovative research methods in Human-Animal Interaction research.

Miss Nicola Elliott, Dr Vanessa Ashall

Waltham Petcare Science Institute, Leicester, United Kingdom

Abstract

There is increasing awareness of the need to expand beyond traditional research methods in the growing field of Human Animal Interaction (HAI) research. Contemporary approaches aim to engage more fully with the complex and dynamic nature of our relationships with animals, and the impacts we can have on one another. This workshop will give attendees the opportunity to learn about the use of innovative and diverse research methods in Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) research, through practical tasks, short presentations and discussion with experienced researchers. Several hands-on ‘research stations’ will allow participants to compare the strengths and limitations of specific techniques and explore practical solutions for generating and integrating multiple data streams. There will also be the opportunity for discussion with researchers currently employing these methods in cutting edge HAI research projects. Our workshop includes active project-based examples of innovative data capture technologies, in depth interviewing techniques, longitudinal data collection methods and novel analytic processes.

The workshop will demonstrate how multiple research teams across the Pets And Wellbeing Study (PAWS) programme are implementing and combining different methods to address complex questions in Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) research.

INTRODUCTION (20 MINS)

Five short presentations from each workshop presenter on their HAI research method.

RESEARCH STATIONS (40 MINS)

Interactive stations designed by each presenter, allowing participants to explore different HAI research methods through hands-on activities or focus in depth on one approach.

1. Using Wearable Physiology Sensors for Studying Human–Animal Interaction in Real-World Contexts.

Megan Mueller

Participants will get hands-on exposure to use of the Empatica EmbracePlus wristband as an example of a wearable sensor for assessing physiological parameters in humans.

2. An introduction or refresher of qualitative interviewing methodology

Alex Elford and Carri Westgarth

Participants will interact with sorting games and analysis taster-tasks to convey considerations when employing qualitative interviewing, how it feels to do it, and how the journey of analysis begins.

3. Introduction to Ecological Momentary Assessment (EMA) and its applicability in HAI research

Lauren Powell

Participants will be introduced to EMA methodologies and consider their potential use in HAI research. They will learn about EMA sampling frameworks and gain hands-on experience working with a common EMA software platform.

4. Using Naturalistic Experience Sampling in HAI Research – A Case Study of Assessing How People Talk to Their Pets

Kerri Rodriguez and Emily Bray

Participants will be introduced to The Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR), a naturalistic experience sampling method that intermittently records snippets of ambient sounds throughout participants' daily lives.

5. Evolving a methodology for using Instagram posts and reels to capture the discourse on topics in Human Animal Interactions

Madhavi Rangaswamy and Rijita Mukherjee

Participants will be introduced to developing and applying a protocol to analyse Human–Animal Interaction discourse on social media, including framing research questions, selecting hashtags, curating datasets, and designing coding and analysis procedures

AUDIENCE/PANEL DISCUSSION (20 MINS)

Presenters will discuss participants' research questions and share their experiences using different HAI methods

Learning Outcomes & Associated Activities

The workshop begins with introductory presentations suitable for novice and experienced researchers. The research stations can be adapted to suit varying participant objectives, and the panel discussion will be shaped by participants personal research challenges.

Learning outcomes include:

- Exposure to a variety of different HAI research methods (presentations and research stations)
- Hands on practical experience of selected data collection and analytic methods (research stations)
- Application of different methods through specific case examples (presentations and research stations)
- Discussion of strengths/limitations of different techniques (research stations and panel discussion)
- Experience of participation in HAI data collection (research stations)
- Reflection on suitability of different research methods for attendees own research questions (research stations and panel discussion)
- Barriers and solutions to implementing different research methods (panel discussion).
- Ethics, data security and participant protection in HAI research (panel discussion)

Attendees do not need to have any prior knowledge of HAI research methods, activities can be adapted for individual participant needs.

ISAZ Annual General Meeting

4:30 - 5:30pm Thursday, 2nd July, 2026

The ISAZ AGM provides an opportunity for ISAZ members to hear updates from the ISAZ Board of Directors about the society's activities. The AGM will also include an announcement of the ISAZ 2027 location and date! All members are encouraged to attend, and non-members are welcome.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Companion Animals and Student Well-being

9:00 - 10:00am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

71 Exploring the impact of therapy dog interactions on stress and well-being in university students

Krischanda Bemister, Shania Hossain, Margaret Rainbow, Dr. Kristin Vickers, Dr.

Margaret Moulson

Toronto Metropolitan University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Introduction. University students experience high academic, social, and financial stress that contributes to psychological distress. Traditional mental health supports often fall short, increasing interest in complementary approaches such as animal-assisted interventions (AAIs), which can reduce stress and improve mood. However, research largely focuses on quantitative outcomes, leaving broader experiential impacts unclear. This study examines whether brief, naturalistic therapy dog interactions improve students' mood and stress and explores mechanisms supporting emotional well-being.

Method. University students ($n = 114$) attended a single therapy dog session at Toronto Metropolitan University, delivered in partnership with St. John's Ambulance Therapy Dogs, during the first four weeks of the Fall 2025 semester. Pre- and post-session questionnaires measured momentary affect, perceived stress, and baseline animal attitudes. Open-ended responses were thematically analyzed in NVivo15 to contextualize quantitative analyses conducted in R.

Main Results. After a single therapy dog session, positive affect increased ($M = 4.45 \rightarrow 5.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.13$), while negative affect ($M = 4.55 \rightarrow 3.38$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.28$) and perceived stress ($M = 5.62 \rightarrow 3.51$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.45$) decreased, with large effect sizes. Multiple regression indicated that baseline animal attitudes, pet ownership, mental health, and prior AAI experience did not predict changes in affect or stress. Qualitative and ethnographic analyses identified four key mechanisms through which therapy dog interactions supported student well-being: physical/emotional comfort, companionship and connection, accessible stress relief, and learning/program appreciation. Overall, the therapy dog interactions provided immediate emotional benefits and social connection, supporting student well-being during a time of academic stress.

Implications for Practice. Brief therapy dog programs offer accessible support for student well-being and stress reduction, regardless of prior experience or pet

ownership. Such programs may complement existing mental health services, particularly during periods of academic stress.

9:20 - 9:40am

209 From Paws to Pulse: Psychological and Physiological Indicators of Mental Health in Graduate Students Participating in a Canine-Assisted Intervention Drop-In Clinic

Dr. Christine Kivlen, Alexandra E. Soltesz, Dr. Gino Panza

Wayne State University, Detroit, Mi, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Anxiety is a significant problem among graduate students requiring novel interventions to prevent sequential health impairments like autonomic imbalances, and reductions in life satisfaction. Canine-assisted interventions (CAI) have demonstrated improvements in anxiety, but real-world application of CAI for college campuses is lacking. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of a “drop-in” CAI clinic on graduate student mental health and autonomic function.

Methodology: The CAI clinic was open 1-2 days per week throughout the semester. Anxiety (Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale [GAD7] and State-Trait Anxiety Inventory [STAI]), satisfaction with life (Satisfaction with Life Scale [SWLS]), and autonomic activity (heart rate variability [HRV]) were measured before the first and last day of attending the CAI clinic. Attendance to the CAI clinic was self-selected (#days and duration). Students unable to attend the clinic served as controls.

Main Results/Findings: Baseline anxiety was significantly lower in control participants (n=18), compared to those attending CAI (n=23, $p < 0.01$), but neither group changed over time for either the GAD7 or STAI ($p > 0.67$). Similarly, the total SWLS was lower in the controls compared to CAI ($p < 0.001$), but neither group changed over time ($p \geq 0.61$). However, SWLS item 1 showed a significant increase ($30 \pm 13\%$) after attending CAI compared to controls ($-9 \pm 4\%$, $p < 0.01$). Finally, no differences in baseline sympathetic or parasympathetic activity were observed by group or time throughout the semester ($p \geq 0.13$, for all measures).

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field: This study demonstrates the feasibility of measuring psychological and physiological data in a “drop-in” style CAI intervention. While the findings remain ambiguous, there is a clear improvement with life satisfaction with CAI. These findings inform the design of future CAI research by emphasizing the need to examine dose, timing, and contextual factors when assessing physiological change in naturalistic campus settings.

9:40 - 10:00am

73 Benefit or Burden? Perceived Stress and Pet Ownership in U.S. College Students: A Pilot Study

Ella R. MacKenzie^{1,2}, Dr. Emma K. Grigg¹

¹University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA. ²Arizona College of Veterinary Medicine, Oro Valley, AZ, USA

Abstract

Introduction: The transition from high school (secondary school) to college is a major life change and can be difficult for many students. This pilot study explored the impact of

pet ownership on the perceived stress levels and overall college experiences of undergraduate students at a large urban university in the USA, by comparing the experiences of students living with pets to those of students living without a pet.

Methods: Sixty full-time undergraduate students at the University of Arizona (Tucson, AZ, USA) completed a cross-sectional anonymous online survey measuring stress, lifestyle factors, and, for pet owners, aspects of their relationship with their companion animal. As classes are held on weekdays (M-F), respondents were asked to rate their perceived stress for both weekdays and weekends (Sa/Su). T-tests and Fisher's exact tests were used to analyze group differences.

Main Results: Results indicated no significant difference in self-reported stress levels between pet owners (n=28) and non-owners (n=24) overall. However, pet-owning students with jobs experienced higher weekday (but not weekend) stress levels compared to pet-owning students without jobs ($t=2.184$, $p=0.042$). Students who had received complaints about their pet reported significantly higher stress levels than those who had not (weekdays: $t=2.928$, $p=0.014$; weekend: $t=2.552$, $p=0.031$). Students living with an animal (n=39) were more likely to have sought help for mental health concerns than those living without an animal (n=22; $p=0.0015$).

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field: These findings suggest that pet ownership alone does not inherently increase or decrease stress. Rather, contextual factors such as academic workload and social pressures likely shape whether students benefit from pet companionship, and may play a role in which students choose to live with pets during their college years. This highlights the need for greater access to evidence-based resources and guidance for college students considering pet ownership.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Equine-Assisted Services: Practice & Perception

9:00 - 10:00am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

69 How do Horses Perceive Equine-Assisted Services: A case study of behavioural responses during horse-human interactions in the preparatory phase

Dr Céline Rochais, Ms Amélia Beylie, Dr Séverine Henry, Dr Marine Grandgeorge

Centre for the Study of Ethology and Cognition, Rennes University, Rennes, France

Abstract

Introduction:

Equine-assisted services (EAS) have expanded rapidly, yet research has mainly focused on human outcomes, with limited attention to horses' perspectives. Previous studies report inconsistent findings regarding stress indicators and horses' abilities to cope with atypical human behaviours. This study investigated how horses perceive EAS, focusing on interactions during the preparatory phase preceding ridden work.

Methodology:

A case study was conducted on five horses from the same riding school, observed across five EAS sessions. The preparatory phase took place at a tying rail in the

presence of a ridding teacher, three educators, and five children's beneficiaries. It comprised seven stages: grooming, hoof picking, saddling, girthing, re-girthing, bridling, and mounting. Horse behaviours were recorded using all-occurrence sampling, and ear and neck positions via scan sampling every 10 seconds. Data were analysed using R, and differences between stages were tested using non-parametric analyses (significance threshold $p < 0.05$).

Main results:

The preparatory phase lasted on average 30 min. Grooming ($671.0 \pm 115.2s$) and saddling ($590.6 \pm 132.9s$) were the longest stages, whereas girthing ($197.0 \pm 41.2s$) and re-girthing ($49.4 \pm 13.5s$) were the shortest. Horses displayed multiple indicators of negative emotional states, including vacuum chewing (2.4 ± 1.1 occ./10 min.), rapid head movements (1.1 ± 0.3 occ./10 min.), predominantly backward ear positions ($52.4 \pm 3.5\%$), and high neck posture ($57.2 \pm 3.6\%$). Discomfort indicators varied significantly across stages: bridling was associated with more avoidance behaviours, girthing with increased threats and tail swishing, and re-girthing and mounting with higher agitation (Friedman tests, $0.0001 < p < 0.05$).

Conclusions:

The preparatory phase preceding mounted EAS sessions was associated with behavioural indicators of discomfort in horses, particularly during later stages. These findings support revising in-hand practices from the horse's perspective, promoting systematic behavioural monitoring, and reconsidering selection criteria for horses involved in EAS.

9:20 - 9:40am

143 EYLE Project Study - Enhancing Leadership Skills in an Equine Assisted Program: A Pragmatic Pre-Post-Trial to Evaluate a Practice Project

Junia Colruyt¹, Prof. Dr. Karin Hediger^{2,1}

¹*Open Universiteit Nederland, Heerlen, Netherlands.* ²*Universität Luzern, Lucern, Switzerland*

Abstract

Background: Communication, coping, emotional intelligence and resilience are crucial during childhood and adolescence. Although Equine-Assisted Services (EAS) show promising psychosocial effects, evidence in healthy populations remains limited. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the Equestrian Young Leaders Program (EYLE) on social competences and leadership skills compared to a control group from riding schools without the program.

Methods: A controlled trial with three measurement points (baseline, mid-intervention, post-intervention) was conducted in Norway, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Participants aged 6–25 years were recruited from riding schools offering EYLE and compared to a control group. Social competences (primary outcome) and leadership skills were assessed using validated questionnaires (Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), Devereux Student Strength Assessment (DESSA)). Program satisfaction was assessed and qualitative interviews were conducted. Data were analysed using mixed-effects models.

Results: A total of 127 participants ($M=14.1$ years, $SD=3.17$; $R=7-23$ years) were included (intervention: $n=101$; control: $n=26$). No significant changes in social

competences were found over time ($b=0.78$, $p=.314$), nor were group differences ($b=0.17$, $p=.696$) or time x intervention interactions ($b=-0.61$, $p=.454$) significant. No significant effects were observed for leadership skills over time ($b=0.13$, $p=.939$) or for time x intervention interaction ($b=-0.40$, $p=.827$). A significant baseline difference indicated higher leadership skills at baseline in the intervention group ($b=1.90$, $p=0.044$). Higher attendance was significantly associated with higher leadership skills ($b=3.31$, $p=.002$).

Discussion: The EYLE program showed no significant effects on social competences or leadership skills. However, higher attendance was associated with higher leadership skills, suggesting that program intensity may be relevant. Findings should be interpreted cautiously due to baseline differences and the small, unbalanced sample. Future studies should use larger samples and further examine the effects of EAS compared to conventional riding activities in healthy youth.

9:40 - 10:00am

232 Moving Toward a Culture of Curiosity: Negotiating “Horse-First” Values, Discipline-Oriented Goals and Economic Realities in Ontario Riding Lesson Facilities

Dr. Megan Ross^{1,2}, Caleigh Copelin^{1,2}, Dustin Neal¹, Dr. Tamzin Furtado³, Dr. Katrina Merkies^{1,2}

¹University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, Canada. ²Campell Centre for the Study of Animal Welfare, Guelph, ON, Canada. ³University of Liverpool, Liverpool, England, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction: Equestrian lesson programs provide foundational horse education for beginner riders. Lesson horses may experience poorer well-being than privately-owned horses, yet minimal research has explored the perspectives of coaches and riders who may directly influence lesson horse well-being. This study aimed to explore (1) coaches' and riders' values within their horseback riding programs and (2) how coach and rider values relate to their education and consideration of horse-centered experiences.

Methodology: Forty-eight riders and six coaches from six hunter-jumper facilities in southwestern Ontario participated in this study. A phenomenological approach guided data collection and analysis. Virtual semi-structured interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, through which codes were developed and grouped into broader themes.

Results: Three key themes were developed. First, coaches and riders expressed that the broader industry discourages rider curiosity and the development of horse care skills. Second, participating coaches believed they were challenging industry norms by prioritizing a “horse-first” approach, emphasizing hands-on horse care, creating inclusive lesson communities and encouraging rider curiosity. Riders reflected reciprocity in these values, expressing community and hands-on horse care as key to their educational experience within lesson programs. Third, both groups acknowledge tensions between their values, discipline-oriented norms and the financial burden of operating lesson programs. Coaches sought alternative strategies to support rider participation (e.g., creating jobs, accepting reduced income). Discipline-oriented norms

that prioritize competitive success with limited focus on horse-centered experiences challenged coaches' and riders' "horse-first" values.

Conclusion: The results reflect participating coaches' and riders' orientation toward cultural shifts that promote horse and rider well-being, yet lesson program tensions were situated within contradictions between coach-rider values, discipline-oriented norms and the financial sustainability of running a lesson program. Participatory research may facilitate collaborative solutions that align horse ownership costs and discipline-orientated goals, with rider and coach values.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Trust & Perceptions

9:00 - 10:00am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

157 My Dog Makes Me Human: Companion Animals Act as Symbolic Cues in the Perception of Marginalized Individuals (Study 1)

Dr Cluny S South, Ms Esther E Arguello

Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey, BC, Canada

Abstract

Introduction. Refugees are among society's most marginalized populations. They are often perceived as low in warmth and competence and treated as less than fully human. These perceptions reduce public support and undermine policy and community-based efforts aimed at social inclusion. This research sets out to examine whether companion animals can serve as symbolic cues that improve perceptions of marginalized individuals, reduce dehumanization, and promote concrete pro-social behaviors.

Methodology. A sample of 375 participants were presented with one of three colour photo vignettes depicting a female refugee alone, or with a companion animal (either an attractive small dog, or a larger more aggressive breed of dog). Participants were then asked to rate the female refugee on a 12-item warmth and competence scale, and a 10-item dehumanization scale. Participants were asked four questions regarding volunteer and donation support, before classification questions were collected and participants debriefed.

Main Results. Analysis demonstrates a significant main effect of presence of companion animal in the photo vignettes for both warmth and dehumanization, with independent t-tests showing warmth ratings for the female refugee as higher when a companion animal was present (without animal $M=19.33$, $SD=4.69$; with animal $M=20.27$, $SD=4.63$, $t(368) = 1.83$, $p=.034$) and dehumanization ratings as lower when a companion animal was present (without animal $M=24.06$, $SD=8.40$; with animal $M=21.60$, $SD=9.07$, $t(372) = -2.60$, $p=.005$). Mechanisms and further details behind the results will be discussed.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. These findings suggest that companion animals may act as symbolic cues, improving perceptions of marginalized individuals. These results shed further light on our understanding of human-animal interactions, as well as the mechanisms and properties of dehumanization and prejudice expressed towards marginalized individuals. These findings can potentially be of use in policy and

community-based efforts as well as informational campaigns for marginalized populations.

9:20 - 9:40am

62 People are judged more negatively if they appear in a video interacting with an obese as opposed to a normal weight dog

Anna Kis, Lilién Bogdán, Orsolya Ignéczi, Sára Horváth, Anna Gergely

HUN-REN Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology, Budapest, Hungary

Abstract

Introduction

Human observers are known to generally attribute poorer abilities to overweight individuals due to their body condition. These stereotypes may partially have a basis in their real world experience, as obesity is indeed associated with reduced performance in several areas (e.g., cognitive inhibition). Interestingly, experimental participants also tend to rate individuals more negatively for simply sitting near an overweight (versus normal-weight) person, regardless of the target individual's own body condition. We investigated whether a similar effect can be observed in the case of dog owners who appear on a social media-like video together with an overweight versus normal-weight dog – that is, whether people are judged more negatively when they are seen with an overweight dog.

Methodology

In our stimulus materials, each of four female experimenters (two of them overweight and two normal-weight) played the role of an owner of both a normal-weight and an overweight dog across standard task situations (basic obedience commands and a hide-and-seek task). The human participants (N=144) in the study were asked to evaluate the individual people appearing in the videos using a shortened human personality questionnaire (the Ten-Item Personality Inventory). Statistical analyses were carried out using General Linear Models to test the effect of dog body condition on human personality ratings.

Results

Our results show that participants indeed attributed more negative personality traits to the same “owner” when they were seen with an overweight dog in the video, but this was also modulated by the human's own body condition. People were rated less friendly ($F=16.991$, $p<0.001$), less conscientious ($F=37.377$, $p<0.001$) and more neurotic ($F=15.455$, $p<0.001$) compared to those appearing with normal weight dogs. Ratings of extraversion ($F=0.108$, $p=0.743$) and openness ($F=0.907$, $p=0.343$), however, did not differ.

Conclusions

These findings support the proximity hypothesis and prove that the negative preconceptions also extend to dog-owner relationships.

9:40 - 10:00am

32 “She's loved me at all sizes”: The role of the human-animal bond in eating disorder experiences and treatment

Annalyse Ellis, Dr Marie-Christine Opitz, Dr Steve Loughnan, Dr Roxanne D. Hawkins

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

Abstract

The mental well-being benefits and challenges of pet ownership have been explored in many populations, including clinical populations such as individuals with depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Critically, there are currently no published studies focusing specifically on pet ownership for individuals with eating disorders. The present work aimed to explore pet ownership experiences of adults experiencing eating disorders. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 cat- and dog-owning British adults (eight cat owners, six dog owners, three participants with both cats and dogs) with diagnosed or suspected eating disorders. Reflexive thematic analysis was utilized to identify two overarching themes and seven subthemes relating to the role of the human-pet bond in eating disorder symptoms and treatment. Data-driven themes include recovery experiences, the dual role of pets in eating behaviours, exercise experiences, pets' influence on cognitions, body image perceptions, and self-identity, as well as pets' roles in recovery motivations. Furthermore, pets were found to impact treatment experiences, represented by themes that discuss pets as catalysts for change and partners during treatment, while also creating challenges around separation during treatment. The present study found that pets can be largely beneficial for individuals with eating disorders, especially for those in later stages of recovery; however, pets can also create challenges, especially for individuals in earlier stages of recovery. The present work also provides a foundation for future work related to pet ownership for individuals with eating disorders, such as further exploration on incorporating pets into eating disorder treatment, how to utilize the human-pet relationship to support symptom reduction, and how to mitigate challenges posed by pets related to treatment, with the results having key relevance for the development of clinical interventions for this population.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Care, Connection, and Companionship Beyond Traditional Pets

9:00 - 10:00am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

9:00 - 9:20am

54 “They bond much better with you when they’re alone” - Application of the Integrated Behavioural Model to understand companionship provision for rabbits

Natalie Powdrill-Wells^{1,2}, Wanda McCormick¹, Chris Pawson¹, Alison P. Wills¹

¹Hartpury University, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, United Kingdom. ²Woodgreen Pets Charity, Godmanchester, Cambridgeshire, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction

Rabbits are social animals and naturally live in large social groups. In contrast, many domestic rabbits live alone, which can result in chronic stress and removes opportunities for natural social behaviours. This elicitation study deploys the Integrated Behavioural Model to explore the social housing decisions of rabbit owners.

Methodology

Using semi-structured interviews, 21 UK rabbit owners were questioned about their feelings regarding rabbit social housing. Directed content analysis was used to examine the behavioural, normative and control beliefs of participants and their rabbit companionship knowledge.

Main results

Housing rabbits socially was generally considered to improve rabbit quality of life, provide constant companionship and reduce owner's guilt when leaving their rabbit(s) alone. However, significant concerns exist about the bonding process, risks of fighting, and a potential detrimental impact on the owner-rabbit relationship. Exploration of normative beliefs revealed that veterinary professionals, animal welfare charities and other owners encountered through social media may contribute to social housing decisions. Potential barriers to social housing included physical space, time, cost and the bonding process. Conversely, access to professional rabbit bonding services was identified as an important facilitator to enable social housing.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

The seemingly simple message of ensuring all rabbits live with a companion rabbit is underpinned by a complex reality. The bonding process presents a significant barrier, with many rabbit owners having significant concerns regarding their rabbit's experience. Differing views exist on the suitability of human companionship for rabbits, particularly those housed indoors. Many owners of single rabbits worry that their bond with their rabbit will be detrimentally impacted by the addition of a conspecific companion. This study advocates for the provision of expert rabbit bonding services to facilitate improved rabbit welfare. Future research should explore the welfare implications of human versus conspecific companionship for rabbits.

9:20 - 9:40am

230 "The same heartbreaks, the same deep love..." Finding belonging and connection in the chicken rescue community.

Dr. Ashley J. McFalls, Olivia A. Tassou

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Abstract

Introduction: Sense of belonging is an evolutionary deep drive as group affiliation was crucial to the survival of our ancestors. Consequently, it is positively linked to resilience and mental health. There are myriad factors that contribute to sense of belonging with shared experiences, goals and values being primary drivers. People who rescue chickens have an unusually high exposure to largely hidden, anthropogenic animal suffering (e.g., factory farming, neglect cases). Thus, the experiences and consequent perspective shifts and ethos tend to engender a sense of disconnection from the culture at large, and sometimes friends and family.

Methodology: We assessed sense of belonging in the chicken rescue/sanctuary community using a questionnaire with subscales that included the contribution of family, friends, cultural practices, food choices, and the rescue community. Thematic analysis was applied to open-ended questions regarding factors influencing sense of belonging. Main results/findings: Friendships with those involved in rescue significantly increased overall sense of belonging, while living in a culture whose practices and values do not align with their own decreased belonging ($F(5,396) = 51.7$, $p < 0.001$, $f = 7.2$).

Respondents overwhelmingly noted that finding people who share the same ethos and love for chickens is a source of deep connection and resilience. Conversely, differing standards of care and value placed on chickens (compared to other farmed animals) decreases sense of belonging in the larger rescue/sanctuary community. Other themes included increased sense of connection with other animals and the natural world.

Participants also noted that while being on social media connects them to other like-minded people, as an outlet for advocacy, it can add additional emotional labor onto already difficult work.

Principle conclusions and implications for the field: While chicken rescuers feel largely disconnected from the culture, connection with this small community of like-minded people provides a buffer against loneliness and a source of resolve to continue their work.

9:40 - 10:00am

35 Effects of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Familiar and Unfamiliar Environments on the Behavior of Chickens

Karin Hediger^{1,2,3}, Nadia Clavien⁴

¹University of Lucerne, Lucerne, Switzerland. ²Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands.

³University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. ⁴University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Abstract

Introduction: Chickens are increasingly involved in animal-assisted therapy, yet little is known about how their participation affects behavior. This pilot study aimed to investigate whether environmental familiarity influences hens' behavior during therapy and to examine individual differences in responses.

Methodology: Five hens of varying ages, breeds, and therapy experience were observed in a randomized, controlled design with repeated measures across three conditions: (I) therapy in a familiar environment, (II) therapy in an unfamiliar environment, and (III) a control condition in a familiar environment without human contact. Sessions were video-recorded, and behavior was coded using an ethogram in *Observer XT 17*. Multilevel modeling assessed the effects of condition on behavior, and ANOVAs with post hoc tests evaluated individual differences.

Main results: Hens displayed higher locomotor activity ($p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.98$; CI= 0.54 to 1.42) and more feeding-related interactions ($p = 0.043$; $\beta = 0.53$; CI= 0.02 to 1.04) during therapy in a familiar environment compared with therapy in an unfamiliar environment and the control condition. Preening ($p = 0.008$; $\beta = 1.37$; CI= 0.40 to 2.34), head flicking ($p = 0.004$; $\beta = 0.88$; CI= 0.30 to 1.45), and ground scratching ($p = 0.001$; $\beta = 1.12$; CI= 0.46 to 1.77) were observed more frequently in the control condition than during therapy in the unfamiliar environment. Differences were also observed between individual hens.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Environmental familiarity and individual differences significantly influence the behavior and welfare of chickens involved in therapy. These findings suggest that optimizing environmental conditions and considering individual characteristics are important for animal welfare in animal-assisted interventions. Future research should further investigate these factors to guide best practices and improve ethical standards for including animals in therapy programs.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Canine-Assisted Services Efficacy & Design

10:10 - 11:10am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

50 The Presence of a Dog Increases Perceived Trustworthiness of Therapists

Hanzhang Xie^{1,2}, Prof. Laura T. Germine³, Prof. Daniel G. Dillon², Liz Grinspoon⁴, Lisa M. Kluehn², Prof. Karin Hediger^{1,5}, Roger Strong², Andrea M. Cataldo²

¹University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. ²McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA. ³Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, USA. ⁴Tufts University, Boston, USA. ⁵University of Lucerne, Lucerne, Switzerland

Abstract

Background: Trust in a therapist is central to therapeutic relationships, and dogs may shape these trust judgments. Earlier work used ratings to test whether dogs influence perceived trustworthiness, but scales are associated with limitations around bias and social desirability. A two-alternative forced-choice (2AFC) task forces participants to choose between two options, which avoids scale biases and reduces social desirability confounds. Therefore, this follow-up study tested whether dogs increase perceived trustworthiness of therapists using a 2AFC design. Images of therapists paired with plants and lamps, which are common in therapy settings, served as controls. Participants viewed image pairs differing in the object (dog, plant, lamp) paired with the therapist and chose which therapist seemed more trustworthy.

Method: 2127 participants were recruited online via TestMyBrain.org. They completed five rounds of 12 trials (60 total) in 2AFC tasks using pictures of people paired with a dog, plant, or lamp. We assessed trustworthiness (primary outcome), therapist preference, friendliness, sympathy, and competence (secondary outcomes). Choices were analyzed using GLMMs and signal detection analyses (2AFC d').

Results: In 60% of trials with dog- vs. plant-paired faces, a dog-paired face was chosen as more trustworthy ($p < .0001$; $d' = 0.25$), and in 61% with dog- vs. lamp-paired faces, a dog-paired face was chosen ($p < .0001$; $d' = 0.29$). For secondary outcomes, d' values revealed participants could distinguish dog-paired individuals from plant- or lamp-paired faces. Dog-paired faces were also chosen more often as therapists, as friendlier, and as more sympathetic (than therapists paired with lamps or plants). No clear preference emerged for competence: dog-paired faces were chosen in 51% of trials against plants and 50% against lamps. Exploratory analyses suggest education and attitudes toward dogs and therapists mediate these effects.

Conclusions: Dogs increased perceived trustworthiness, therapist appeal, friendliness, and sympathy, but had no effect on competence. Their presence enhances trust and positive impressions relevant for therapist–patient rapport.

10:30 - 10:50am

239 Cognitive and well-being improvements after dog-assisted interventions with younger and older adults: a randomised controlled trial measuring effects of in-person, online, robotic, virtual reality, and video interventions.

Mr Luke T Argyle, Professor Kerstin Meints

University of Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction:

While dog-assisted interventions (DAIs) can provide beneficial effects for human well-being, their effects on cognitive functioning are less understood. Furthermore, alongside DAIs with real dogs, alternative technologies may provide similar benefits, but remain underexplored. Our large longitudinal randomised-controlled trial measured effects of multiple DAI types (real dog and technology-based DAIs) on cognitive and psychological well-being measures with younger and older adults.

Methodology:

Younger ($Mage=25$) and older adults ($Mage=70$), $N=153$) were randomised into six 10-minute interventions: in-person and online real dog, robotic dog, virtual reality (VR) dog, dog video, neutral control. Cognitive and well-being assessments were obtained pre and post-interventions, and one-month later. Dog and human welfare were safeguarded throughout.

Main Results:

Working memory was significantly improved after interventions in younger adults' following the in-person ($t(13)=-2.47$, $p=.028$, $d=-.66$) and VR dog ($t(10)=-5.24$, $p<.001$, $d=-1.58$) interventions; older adults showed strongest memory improvements with the robotic dog ($t(9)=-3.28$, $p=.010$, $d=-1.04$). The in-person DAI best improved younger adult's accuracy and processing speed of global Navon targets, $t(12)=7.23$, $p=.001$, $d=2.01$, while the robotic dog facilitated such improvements for older adults, $t(6)=4.05$, $p=.007$, $d=1.53$. The online DAI improved younger adults' detection of local targets, $t(7)=3.27$, $p=.014$, $d=-1.16$. Interestingly, the in-person and online DAIs ($p=.048$; $p=.025$) shifted older adults' attention toward neutral faces via a dot-probe paradigm, indicating a potential anxiolytic effect. Improvements to psychological well-being measures were also observed for both age groups and will be reported (p between $<.001$ and $.049$).

Conclusions and Implications:

This study is the first to highlight benefits of different DAI types on cognitive functioning and psychological well-being in younger and older adults using both conventional and technology-based approaches. This evidence can also enhance accessibility of services for individuals unable to engage with real animals due to allergies, location, or other restrictions.

10:50 - 11:10am

22 Integrating Facility Dogs Into Physical Therapy: Development of a Structured Intervention Manual to Enhance Engagement in Inpatient Rehabilitation

Dr. Julie Robertson, Dr. Heather Tropiano

Adventist Healthcare Rehabilitation, Silver Spring, Maryland, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Patient engagement is a critical predictor of functional recovery in inpatient rehabilitation, yet many individuals struggle with motivation in physical therapy.

Animal-assisted interventions (AAI), particularly the use of facility dogs trained in task-specific behaviors, have shown promise for increasing engagement during therapy sessions. However, the field lacks standardized, replicable protocols that align canine

behaviors with therapeutic, patient-centered goals. This project aimed to develop a structured intervention manual to guide the intentional integration of facility dogs into physical therapy practice on an inpatient rehabilitation unit.

Methodology: To create the intervention manual, a structured development process was conducted using empirical literature on rehabilitation engagement, AAI, and physical therapy best practice. Task-trained facility dog skills were systematically mapped across physical therapy domains including balance, ambulation, endurance, and cognitive-motor performance. Each activity was detailed to specify therapeutic intent, canine skill requirements, safety considerations, and strategies to adapt across all diagnoses and functional levels. Iterative feedback from physical therapists and facility-dog handlers informed refinement of the manual.

Main Results/Findings: The project produced a comprehensive intervention manual detailing over 50 facility dog-assisted therapeutic activities. Key outputs include: (1) a structured framework linking canine skills to specific physical therapy goals; (2) standardized protocols supporting treatment fidelity and safety; and (3) progression guidelines enabling therapists to scale activities by complexity and intensity. The manual and resulting framework directly address previously identified gaps in consistency, replicability, and goal alignment in AAI-supported physical therapy.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field: This work demonstrates that facility dog partnerships in physical therapy can be formalized into a structured, clinically feasible, and goal-directed framework. The manual provides a transferable tool for enhancing engagement in inpatient rehabilitation, supports the development of institutional AAI guidelines, and establishes a foundation for future empirical evaluation of facility dog-assisted interventions.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Methods, Sampling & Disciplinary Breadth

10:10 - 11:10am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

110 Who volunteers for owner-pet surveys? Sampling bias and its consequences for findings in companion animal research

Laura Gillet^{1,2}, Professor Eniko Kubinyi^{1,2}

¹*Department of Ethology, ELTE Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary.* ²*MTA-ELTE Lendület "Momentum" Companion Animal Research Group, Budapest, Hungary*

Abstract

Introduction: While many owner-pet studies rely on convenience sampling methods, little is known about how sampling bias impacts findings. Data-driven, direct comparisons between different sample types would help define the sociodemographic profile of respondents voluntarily engaging in pet ownership surveys, and clarify whether they hold more positive attitudes towards their pets compared to the general population of pet owners.

Methodology: We compared pet-owner data collected from convenience samples (i.e., recruitment on social media) to data collected from representative samples of pet

owners (i.e., recruitment through research survey companies) in Hungary (N = 2076) and in France (N = 660), using the same questionnaires across sample types.

Main results: Convenience samples' respondents belonged to a specific subgroup of pet owners (e.g., childless women aged 25-45, with high education levels and financial status) (all $p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$). We also found that convenience samples invested more time in pet activities and showed greater intimacy with their pets than representative samples. Notably, 52% of owners from the HU representative sample declared going on a walk with their dog weekly or less/never, vs. 10% of the convenience sample ($p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$; $V = 0.49$). 51% of the FR convenience sample totally agreed that pets should have the same rights and privileges as family members, against 33% of the representative sample ($p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$, $V = 0.17$). Both convenience samples also declared more pleasure in petting and caring for their pet ($p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$) and more hugging and kissing behaviours ($p_{\text{adj}} < 0.01$).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Our findings confirm that convenience sampling methods engage a specific profile of pet owners. Specifically, these owners seem to be more dedicated to their pets and to share a stronger emotional bond with them, limiting generalizability to the general population. Our study also highlights the importance of considering the cultural context in which companion animal research takes place.

10:30 - 10:50am

234 How Multidisciplinary is HAI's Influence?

Prof Jane Yacilla¹, Dr Kelly Weigand², Dr John-Tyler Binfet³

¹*Purdue University, W Lafayette, IN, USA.* ²*Auburn University, Auburn, AL, USA.*

³*University of British Columbia, Kelowna, BC, Canada*

Abstract

Introduction

The field of human-animal interaction (HAI) research is multidisciplinary (i.e., created independently by researchers from disparate disciplines) or even interdisciplinary (i.e., created collaboratively by teams representing multiple disciplines). The objective of this study is to examine how multidisciplinary the *influence* of HAI is based on analysis of journal articles that cite a representative body of HAI research literature, namely articles published in the journal *Anthrozoös* from 1992 through 2025.

Methodology

Data were derived from articles that were published in journals indexed in *Web of Science Core Collection (WOSCC)* and that cited *Anthrozoös* articles. *WOSCC* was chosen because it is a multidisciplinary database that assigns one or more of 250 established subject categories to each indexed journal. *WOSCC* analysis revealed that 1114 *Anthrozoös* articles were cited 27,044 times in articles published across 12,118 distinct journals that collectively spanned 220 *WOSCC* subject designations. To provide a more granular evaluation of the multidisciplinary nature of citation patterns, we will further analyze the journals in which *Anthrozoös*'s most highly cited articles are published, the journals that cite *Anthrozoös* most heavily, and the subject designations of each.

Main results

The top two WOSCC subject categories for journals citing *Anthrozoös* were either animal-oriented (including veterinary medicine) (59.3%) or from the social sciences (54.9%). The following broad disciplines were represented: biological/life/geological sciences (34.7%), psychological/psychiatric disciplines (26.0%), human health sciences (16.9%), physical sciences (16.6%), humanities (9.77%), engineering/technology/computational sciences (6.96%), education (3.9%), and agriculture (.95%). (Totals exceed 100% due to journals having more than one subject category assigned to them).

Conclusions

This study establishes that the influence of HAI articles extends well beyond the disciplines covered by the main HAI journals and demonstrates how *Anthrozoös* articles reach and inform scholars in diversified fields beyond HAI.

10:50 - 11:10am

167 I'm all ears: Development of the AURAL-Pet coding system to explore daily human-pet interactions

Dara S Jonkoski, Nicole Lorig, Molly C Delzio, Amanda M Bernal, Matthias R Mehl, Kerri Rodriguez, Emily Bray

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Abstract

Introduction: Studies exploring the impact of pet ownership on human mental health and wellbeing have shown mixed results. One potential explanation for these contradictory findings is that individual pet owners interact with their pets differently, producing varied outcomes. Ecological Momentary Assessment methods that capture people's daily interactions with their pets are needed to provide additional context for these differences. The Electronically Activated Recorder (EAR) is one such method that intermittently records snippets of ambient sounds throughout participants' daily lives. In the current study, we sought to develop a coding system to quantify daily interactions between people and pets as captured by the EAR.

Methodology: Informed by literature concerning human-pet interaction, an acoustic observational coding system was developed by listening to a subset of four archival EAR datasets that contained potential pet-talk, amounting to 47.7 hours of audio data. We identified participants (N = 240) who interacted with a cat and/or dog in at least two sound files, then had two coders apply the coding system to all relevant sound files (N = 5072). To calculate inter-rater reliability, we used intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC (1,k)).

Main results/findings: The final coding system, Audio-based Understanding of Relational Animal-directed Language (AURAL-Pet), consists of 23 binary variables that capture nuances of the quality (e.g., valence, perceived owner parental role) and frequency of daily human-pet interactions. We found that 7 of our variables had excellent agreement ($ICC > 0.90$), 12 had good agreement ($0.75 < ICC < 0.90$), and 4 had moderate agreement ($0.50 < ICC < 0.75$).

Principal Conclusions and implications for the field: AURAL-Pet is a reliable observational coding system that provides a novel way for researchers to further explore the nuances of daily human-pet interactions, and could help to explain individual variation in how pet ownership is associated with mental health outcomes.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Cultures & Histories of Human–Animal Relations

10:10 - 11:10am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

213 Investigating Human-Animal Interactions in Latin America and the Caribbean: Descriptive Findings from a Systematic Review

PhD Sergio Almeida¹, Francisca Cuevas²

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Abstract

Introduction. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) combines a large population, high biodiversity, and extensive livestock production, which entails numerous human-animal interactions (HAI). However, little is known about how they are studied in the region. This systematic review aims to fill this gap.

Method. A PRISMA-inspired systematic review was conducted on articles published between 2015-2025 by researchers affiliated with LAC institutions. Searches were carried out in four HAI-focused journals, using country names from the region in the affiliation field. Descriptive analyses were performed by year, country, collaboration, species, topic, and methodology. To avoid overestimation due to variables with multiple values, each article contributed a total weight of 1. Growth was estimated using the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR).

Results. Identified articles (N=88) were produced in 11 countries, with the highest output in Chile (26.7%), Brazil and Mexico (20.3% each). The regional CAGR was 27.1%, raising from 1 article in 2015 to 11 in 2025, with a notable peak of 21 in 2021. National teams (45.5%) predominated, followed by extra-regional collaborations (38.6%) –mainly with Spain, US, and UK. Studies primarily involved early adult populations (27.3%); focused on dogs (31%), wildlife in zoos/natural parks (17.6%), and cats (12.2%); and addressed beliefs/attitudes (32.4%), animal well-being (25.9%), and human well-being (23.7%). Descriptive-correlational designs (59.7%), quantitative methodologies (62.5%), and social/cognitive psychology approaches (47.7%) predominated.

Discussion. Although HAI research in LAC shows sustained growth, output remains limited. Strengthening intra-regional collaboration and expanding research with underrepresented populations –children, adolescents, older adults– is needed. In view of the region's high biodiversity, attention to wildlife interactions is remarkable. Nevertheless, LAC is a major global livestock producer (≈15%, FAO), with associated socioenvironmental conflicts; therefore, research on HAI related to livestock production and meat consumption should be expanded. A limitation of this review is its focus on specialized journals; future reviews should broaden the search to major databases.

10:30 - 10:50am

160 The emergence of the *civis canem*: street dogs and people's relations in the public space of two cities in southern Chile.

Sebastian Pelayo Benavides

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Villarrica, La Araucanía, Chile

Abstract

This study presents a three-year ethnographic investigation conducted in two cities in southern Chile, examining relationships between street dogs and people in public spaces. Two central research questions guided the inquiry: How are street dogs configured and understood as "subjects" and social agents through their relationships with humans and mutual influences in public spaces? How can we interpret street dogs' position and experiences while recognizing them as agents?

Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were employed to construct an "anthrozoography" (Madden, 2014), totalling 1,041 hours of observation across specific areas and mobile contexts. Grounded Theory informed data analysis through the construction of codes, categories, and schemas. The analytical framework integrated "anthropo-interpretivism" (Taylor, 2011) and "critical cynomorphism" (Merritt, 2021), incorporating structuralist anthropology elements concerning categories and boundaries to connect observations with broader social understandings. Hartigan's (2020) application of Goffman's (1959) work shaped key aspects of the etho-ethnographic analysis, complemented by Ingold's (2000) ecological anthropology and Motamedi's (2024) critical perspective on scientific and cultural framings of dogs.

The analysis generated 23 codes describing interactions and behaviors between street dogs and people sharing public spaces, organized into three main categories:

Problematic behaviors, Co-existence behaviors, and Co-habitation behaviors. Principal findings reveal a mutual process of 'interspecies courtesy,' whereby street dogs and humans engage in shared learning. These 'civic' behaviors facilitated moments of interaction while largely maintaining mutual detachment, enabling shared use of public spaces. Consequently, a form of distanced domesticity (Oehler, 2020) emerged, oriented toward the *civitas* rather than the *domus*. While acknowledging problems affecting both canine and human wellbeing due to dogs' unsupervised status, the study suggests that more nuanced approaches to individual differences and contextual particularities, in public policies, could foster more targeted, localized solutions.

10:50 - 11:10am

53 From Bison to Frogs: A New Perspective on Prehistoric Human-Animal Relationships from Japanese Jōmon Pottery

Prof. Miki Kakinuma¹, Dr. Asami Tsuchida²

¹*Nippon Veterinary and Life Science University, Suginami, Tokyo, Japan.* ²*Asian Society of Animal Assisted Education and Therapy, Tokyo, Japan*

Abstract

Studies of prehistoric human-animal relationships often highlight Paleolithic cave paintings of large mammals in Europe. This study, however, shifts the focus to a different, yet equally significant, form of animal representation: motifs on pottery from the Japanese archipelago. While relationships are commonly reconstructed from subsistence remains, this research analyzes animal motifs on Middle Jōmon period pottery (ca. 5000–4000 BP) as crucial evidence for early human-animal interactions. From a "material mind" perspective—where material culture reflects cognitive

processes—this research aims to reconstruct the Jōmon people's perception of animals, including small creatures like frogs, by examining the material traces they left behind. The analysis targets 120 vessels and sherds from the Chūbu region bearing animal motifs assembled by Imafuku(2019). For each specimen, animal type and vessel form were recorded ; snake motifs (n = 76), frogs (n = 27) and wild boar (n = 17). This prevalence of amphibians and reptiles alongside mammals contrasts with many other prehistoric assemblages globally. Significant associations were found between animal type and vessel form: snakes appeared mainly on deep bowls, frogs on perforated vessels, and wild boar on loop-handled pottery ($p < .001$).

These patterned associations suggest that a diverse range of animals were differentiated not only practically but also symbolically. The focus on creatures like frogs—harmless and familiar—alongside threatening snakes and vital food sources like boar, points to a unique worldview. The materialization of these figures on pottery allows us to explore this distinct cognitive landscape. By highlighting a tradition that diverges from the well-known focus on large mammals, this study offers a new perspective on the complexity and diversity of prehistoric human-animal relationships. Imafuku, T. (2019). Animal patterns and Human body expression on Katusaka style Jomon pottery (in Japanese), Bulletin of Archaeological Museum and Archaeological Center of Yamanashi, 35, 1-25.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Rethinking Human-Animal Relations in Therapy, Education, and Sexuality

10:10 - 11:10am Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

10:10 - 10:30am

161 Motivation in Animal-Assisted Youth Trauma Therapy: A Mixed-Methods Study.

MSc Wanda Arnskötter¹, MSc Junia Colruyt², Prof. Karin Hediger³

¹University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland. ²Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands.

³University of Lucerne, Lucerne, Switzerland

Abstract

Introduction: Despite the growing need for trauma-centered treatment among youth, many fail to initiate therapy or drop out early, prolonging trauma-related symptoms. This underscores the need for innovative approaches to enhance engagement and retention. Animals may help overcome these barriers by fostering motivation and reducing avoidance of challenging trauma work.

Methodology: This mixed-methods study presents preliminary findings from an ongoing project comparing a 10-week animal-assisted trauma-focused group program (AAT, n = 15) to the same therapy without animals (control, n = 6) in youth (N = 21; 12 male, 9 female; M age = 11.38, SD = 2.65). Motivation was measured pre-session using a visual analog scale and reassessed post-treatment through interviews. Due to ordinal, non-normal data, medians (IQR) were reported, and Mann–Whitney/Wilcoxon rank-sum tests with FDR correction compared groups at each timepoint. Global differences were

tested using mean motivation over time and the t10–t1 change score. Interviews were analyzed using exploratory, inductive qualitative content analysis.

Main results: Descriptively, motivation was slightly higher in the AAT group (Mdn = 5.00 [IQR 2.00]) than in the control group (Mdn = 4.50 [IQR 2.00]). However, no timepoint-specific group differences remained significant after FDR correction (all $p_{FDR} > .05$). Global tests were also non-significant for mean motivation ($p = .161$) and change scores ($p = .198$). Qualitative analysis revealed that motivation was shaped by emotional safety, group belonging, and engaging therapy content, with animals potentially enhancing these dimensions.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: These preliminary findings suggest that animal-assisted therapy may slightly increase motivation, though no significant statistical advantage was observed. The study demonstrates feasibility and highlights potential mechanisms, such as emotional safety, connection and enjoyment, which animals may enhance. Further data collection and larger randomized trials should validate these initial trends and examine moderators, mechanisms, and engagement outcomes.

10:30 - 10:50am

189 Beyond Single Dimensions: A Cluster-Analytic Examination of Sexual Self-Concept in Zoosexuality

Univ.Prof.Dr Birgit Ursula Stetina, Armin Klaps

Sigmund Freud University, Vienna, Austria

Abstract

Background: Research into the sexual self-concept of people with zoophile interests has shown that this hidden population differs from validation samples using the Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire (MSSCQ), though effect sizes show that the differences are small (Stetina et al., 2024, ISAZ). The instrument captures a broad range of cognitive, affective, motivational, and self-regulatory aspects of sexuality. The research aimed to examine how these dimensions combine to form distinct profiles of sexual self-concept across this heterogeneous population.

Methods: Data from a large online sample ($N=8,313$) of volunteers with self-reported zoophile sexual interests were analyzed. Demographic data, the MMSQ, and other clinical instruments were used. After removing missing values across all 20 MSSCQ subscales, the final sample comprised 2,135 participants. Descriptive analysis was followed by exploratory hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method with squared Euclidean distances. A three-cluster solution was chosen based on dendrogram and agglomeration coefficients ($>10,000$), indicating that heterogeneous clusters were forced to merge at the highest hierarchy levels. One-way ANOVAs examined between-cluster differences.

Results: Cluster analysis identified three distinct profiles. The “high sexual agency”-Cluster reported low sexual distress, high self-efficacy, internal control, and satisfaction. Most participants report a partnership with an animal as their family status (68,1%, $\chi^2(14, N=2131)=135,45, p<.001$), and most live alone with a non-human animal (59,5%, $\chi^2(20, N=2130)=89,32, p<.001$). The “distress”-Cluster showed high sexual anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and efficacy, with stronger external control beliefs. The “regulation”-Cluster is marked by high sexual motivation, preoccupation, moderate

distress, and high sexual monitoring. ANOVAs showed significant differences across all 20 subscales.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that understanding the zoophile sexual self-concept may require examining its heterogeneity beyond single-dimensional approaches. Three qualitatively distinct profiles indicate subgroups that differ in distress, perceived agency, and self-regulatory processes, and could provide a useful framework for future research.

10:50 - 11:10am

238 Multispecies Interventions in Dog-Assisted Music Pedagogy: Effects on Students' Engagement in Musical Learning and Co-Regulation in Group Instrumental Lessons

Sophie Szczepanek

Hochschule für Musik, Nürnberg, Bavaria, Germany

Abstract

Drawing on Actor-Network Theory and Haraway's more than human perspectives, dog-assisted interventions are conceptualized as relational networks beyond anthropocentric pedagogies.

The study employed video-based multispecies interaction analysis to examine dynamics between students, a certified pedagogy-assistance dog (PAD), the dog's human team partner/music educator, and musical materials in instrumental lessons. Interactional and digital (in Watzlawick's sense) communication events were identified. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis, and an ANT-based mapping was used to visualize how agency was distributed among human and non-human actants.

The analysis revealed two recurring patterns. First, the PAD appeared to stabilize the learning situation: his presence, proximity, and bodily orientation reduced students' frustration, supported smoother transitions between tasks, and enabled sustained concentration during instrumental activities. Second, his presence seemed to foster students' initiative and communicative engagement.

Students frequently explained their musical actions to him, oriented their playing toward him as a relational point of reference, thereby altering the interactional dynamics of the lesson.

The findings suggest that dog-assisted interventions positively influence both specific music-pedagogical processes and co-regulation in instrumental lessons. Students showed increased willingness to repeat musical passages with focused attention, improve sound quality, intonation, or rhythmic stability, perform previously practiced pieces, and make independent musical decisions. They also verbalized their musical actions more frequently, which appeared to strengthen their self-efficacy, use of musical terminology, and reflective engagement.

Overall, the results indicate that musical learning in dog-assisted settings can be understood as a co-constructed multispecies process whose potential for a more-than-human music pedagogy warrants further investigation.

Keynote Talk: Luc Mounier - Scientific outreach to improve animal welfare

11:30am - 12:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

In recent years, increased comprehension of animal behaviour, consciousness, and pain, as well as NGO-driven campaigns, have given rise to greater public concern for animal welfare and new expectations of policy makers. This has led to new European and national regulations, as well as concrete improvements in livestock farming and food industry practices.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to stop here. It is essential to raise awareness among a wider range of stakeholders by disseminating information that covers all the elements of the “One Welfare” concept. This means not only animal welfare and livestock farming, but also farmers’ duties and challenges, as well as the need to protect the environment.

Clear, trustworthy information is critical to everyone: farmers, industry, policymakers, and private citizens, who also need to develop a more-informed understanding of agriculture and its challenges.

Professor **Luc Mounier** has focused on animal behavior and welfare for over 20 years, conducting research on animal behavior and welfare in the context of breeding practices.

He is the head of France’s only Animal Welfare Unit (Chaire bien-être animal), which was created in 2018 through an agreement between the French Ministry of Agriculture and the National Veterinary School of Lyon. The Unit’s core mission is to provide a wide variety of audiences with reliable, easily-accessible science-based information on animal welfare from the “One Welfare” perspective.

Mentor-Mentee Meet-Up

12:30 - 1:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

C-D, Level S1

Presentation type Event

An event linking experienced mentors in the field to those who are new to the field.

Participants apply to participate in advance, ISAZ membership required.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Adolescents, Anxiety & Animal-Assisted Therapy

2:00 - 3:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:20pm

228 Depression and Mindfulness Trajectories in Adolescents Receiving Animal-Assisted Therapy: A Latent Transition Analysis

Sonja Kälin¹, Mascha Molog², Patricia Pendry³, Roeslan Leontjevas², Marion Seidel⁴, Christopher Kutschke⁴, Karin Hediger^{1,2,5}

¹University of Lucerne, Lucerne, Switzerland. ²Open University, Heerlen, Netherlands.

³Washington State University, Washington, USA. ⁴Schön Klinik, Bad Arolsen, Germany.

⁵University of Basel, Basel, Switzerland

Abstract

Introduction: Animal-assisted therapy (AAT) has shown promising effectiveness in adolescent mental health care; however, little is known about heterogeneity in treatment response. This study aimed to identify subgroups of adolescents participating in an animal-assisted intervention and to examine stability and change in these subgroups from pre- to post-intervention.

Methodology: Participants were 105 adolescents (12–17 years) in inpatient psychosomatic treatment in Germany with ICD-10 diagnoses of depressive, anxiety, obsessive–compulsive, or eating disorders. All received standard multimodal treatment and a manualized AAT program (six weekly 150-minute sessions involving dogs and horses). Depressive symptoms were assessed using the Beck Depression Inventory–Fast Screen (BDI-FS) and mindfulness using the Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FFI) before (T1) and after (T2) the intervention. Latent profile analyses were conducted separately at T1 (N = 100) and T2 (N = 105) using robust maximum likelihood in Mplus. Model selection was based on information criteria, the Lo–Mendell–Rubin test, and entropy. Latent transition analysis examined change and stability.

Main results: Three profiles emerged at both time points: high depression/low mindfulness (T1: 40%; T2: 42%), moderate (T1: 46%; T2: 31%), and low depression/high mindfulness (T1: 14%; T2: 27%). The high depression/low mindfulness group demonstrated high stability, with a transition probability of .915, and only limited movement to the low depression/high mindfulness profile (.070) or the moderate profile (.014). The moderate group showed partial stability (.758) and a meaningful probability of improvement to the low depression/high mindfulness profile (.203). Adolescents in the low depression/high mindfulness group remained fully stable across time (probability = 1.00).

Principal conclusions and implications: AAT was associated with heterogeneous trajectories. Adolescents with moderate initial burden frequently improved, whereas those with pronounced depressive symptoms showed little change, indicating a need for intensified or prolonged interventions. Early identification of profile membership may support personalized treatment planning.

2:20 - 2:40pm

115 Understanding Adolescent–Dog Relationships and Social Anxiety:

Idiographic Mixed Methods Case Studies

Dr. Megan K Mueller¹, Dr. Jasmine Mote², Dr. Eric C Anderson^{3,4}, Dr. Brianna Paquette¹, Siyu Zhang⁴, Angelique Zhong¹, Jordanne Brown⁵, Dr. Linda Charmaraman⁶

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Abstract

Introduction: Social anxiety is particularly prevalent among adolescents, and can significantly impact functioning across home and school settings. However, there is limited research examining how adolescents with social anxiety can cope adaptively

with stressors, and how close relationships with dogs may provide regulation and support.

Methods: The objective of this study is to use an idiographic, mixed methods approach to explore adolescent–dog relationships in real-life contexts for youth with social anxiety. We present four illustrative cases of adolescents with high social anxiety representing a range of levels of pet-dog relationship quality, integrating data sources: (1) continuous electrodermal activity using ambulatory psychophysiological sensors to measure arousal, (2) ecological momentary assessment of real-time of emotions and behavior, (3) quantitative survey data from adolescents and parents, and (4) in-depth qualitative interviews (conducted separately with parents and youth). This multimodal approach enables us to examine dynamic, context-sensitive interactions with dogs and their potential role in regulating arousal and supporting emotional coping.

Results: Findings indicate individual variability in how/when adolescents seek proximity to their dogs, and in the coherence between physiological arousal, loneliness, and positive/negative affect. This variability was often linked to the strength of the teenager's relationship with their dog. Qualitative interviews contextualized these patterns, showing the unique ways dogs may contribute to comfort, distraction, emotion regulation, or friction. There were differential patterns in the quality of teenager-dog relationships and how this relationship may be linked to anxiety reduction, with some youth reporting a pathway between their dog relationship and outcomes and others showing no clear associations.

Conclusions: This study demonstrates the value of mixed methods data for exploring experiences of adolescent anxiety. Our findings suggest that dogs may support adaptive coping for some adolescents, but that others may not be engaging with their dogs in ways that link to coping.

2:40 - 3:00pm

119 Adolescent-Dog Relationship Quality and Coping with Peer Stress

Nicole Mason¹, Dr. Erin K. King¹, Evan C. Mingo¹, Ramina Bebezova¹, Dr. Kristina Callina², Dr. Megan K. Mueller¹

¹Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, North Grafton, Massachusetts, USA. ²Lynch Research Associates, Natick, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

Introduction: Social anxiety is a prevalent mental health concern for adolescents. Therefore, there is a need to identify adaptive coping strategies for adolescents to effectively manage peer stress. Relationships with pet dogs may support adolescent resilience to peer stress, but the qualities of the youth-dog relationship that are related to effective coping have not yet been explored.

Methodology: Using structural equation modeling with survey data collected from 514 parent-adolescent dyads, we examined how adolescent-dog relationship qualities (i.e., Companionship, Nurturance, Affection, Emotional Support, Friction, and Pets as Substitutes measured by the Pet Dog Relationship Inventory from Kerns et al., 2022) predicted adaptive and non-adaptive dimensions of coping with peer stress (Responses to Stress Questionnaire–Peer Stress Questionnaire; Connor-Smith et al., 2000). Gender was included as a covariate.

Results: Companionship was positively associated with emotional regulation ($B=0.17$; $p=.01$), positive thinking ($B=0.29$; $p<.001$), and was negatively linked to rumination ($B=-0.29$; $p<.001$) and avoidance coping ($B=-0.15$; $p=.01$). Nurturance was also positively linked to positive thinking ($B=0.27$; $p<.001$) and inversely related to rumination ($B=-0.22$; $p=.01$) and avoidance coping ($B=-0.15$; $p=.02$). Surprisingly, Emotional Support was positively associated with rumination ($B=0.20$; $p=.02$) and negatively associated with positive thinking ($B=-0.27$; $p<.001$). Friction with pet was positively related to rumination ($B=0.12$; $p=.01$) and avoidance coping ($B=0.13$; $p<.001$) and negatively linked to emotional regulation ($B=-0.19$; $p<.001$). Pets as Substitutes was positively associated with avoidance coping ($B=0.17$; $p<.001$) and negatively related to both emotional regulation ($B=-0.16$; $p<.001$) and positive thinking ($B=-0.16$; $p=.01$). Affection did not significantly predict any coping outcomes.

Conclusions and Implications: These results suggest that relationship quality is an important factor in understanding how pet dogs can support adolescent coping with peer stress. Future research should examine the contextual factors that shape these beneficial adolescent-dog relationships.

Symposium: How People Understand Animal Emotion States Across Anthrozoological Contexts: Perception, Beliefs, and Consequences for Human–Animal Relations

2:00 - 3:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

The symposium features a 5-minute introduction, four 15-minute themed oral presentations, a 10-minute discussant presentation, followed by a 15-minute Q&A session.

72 How People Understand Animal Emotion States Across Anthrozoological Contexts: Perception, Beliefs, and Consequences for Human–Animal Relations

Dr. Michael A. Kisley

University of Colorado Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, CO, USA

Abstract

Humans routinely infer non-human animals' emotional states, yet these inferences vary across individuals, developmental stages, and sociocultural contexts. This variability is central to anthrozoology because it shapes how people interpret animal behaviour, relate to animals, and evaluate practices that affect welfare and safety. This symposium integrates complementary work on animal emotion understanding across several contexts. Presentation #1 (Guo et al.) tests human recognition of dog emotions when emotional information is conveyed through auditory, visual, audio-visual, and contextualized cues, showing that modality, age, and culture jointly shape accuracy. Presentation #2 (Williams et al.) presents tools for measuring children's understanding of animal emotions as a multi-component construct, distinguishing emotion recognition, beliefs about animal minds, and cognitive, affective, and behavioural empathy, and demonstrates their use in two animal welfare education evaluation studies. Presentation #3 (Kisley et al.) introduces the Beliefs about Animal Emotions Scale (BAES) and shows that beliefs about animal emotional complexity and authenticity, as well as beliefs about the moral relevance of animal emotions, predict attitudes and animal-impacting behaviours in experimentally modelled human–animal contexts. Presentation #4 (von

Steimker & Köhl) compares citizens and dairy farmers in judgments of calf rearing systems and finds that perceived need fulfillment explains acceptance more strongly than perceived emotional capacities. Taken together, these talks specify *what* people use to infer animal emotion states (modality- and context-dependent cues), *how* such understanding develops and can be measured (distinct components of recognition, mind-beliefs, and empathy), and *why* it matters (links to animal-impacting attitudes and choices). This integrated account helps to identify targets for education, communication, and intervention across anthrozoological contexts. As discussant, Dr Liz Paul (University of Bristol) will integrate the four talks, drawing on her expertise in animal affective-state measurement and in psychological determinants of human attitudes and decisions as they relate to animals.

Presenters:

Dr. Kun Guo, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK*

Dr. Joanne M. Williams, *University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK*

Dr. Michael A. Kisley, *University of Colorado - Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA*

Dr. Flora von Steimker, *Georg August University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany*

Discussant:

Dr. Elizabeth S. Paul, Associate Professor at Bristol Veterinary School, *University of Bristol, Bristol, UK*

Presenter 1 Title & Abstract

Effects of Expression Modality and Culture on Human Recognition of Dog Emotions

Dr. Kun Guo, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK*

The increasing global prominence of human–dog interactions highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of how humans appraise dogs' affective states using verbal and non-verbal emotional cues. However, existing research has largely focused on Western adults and has primarily examined recognition of dog facial and bodily expressions. The present study investigated how different emotional cues (auditory, visual, audio-visual, and contextual) affect accuracy in categorizing dog emotional expressions across Eastern and Western cultures, and in both children and adults. Methodology: In this online study, participants viewed naturalistic stimuli depicting a common set of primary and secondary dog emotions (anger, distress, fear, frustration, happiness, neutral, pain, and positive anticipation). These emotions were presented across auditory, visual, audio-visual, and contextualized audio-visual channels. Emotion recognition performance was assessed in 69 children aged 6–11 years, 235 Chinese-speaking adults, and 159 English-speaking adults.

Main results/findings: Overall, visual cues supported higher recognition accuracy than auditory cues, and multimodal integration outperformed unimodal presentations.

Contextual information significantly enhanced recognition accuracy across most emotions ($F(3,1146) = 559.57, p < .001$), with the largest gains observed for fear and positive anticipation ($F(21,8022) = 75.31, p < .001$). Cultural background interacted significantly with emotion category and expression modality ($\chi^2(21) = 85.02, p < .001$). Western participants showed higher accuracy for frustration, neutral, and pain expressions, particularly in audio-visual and contextualized conditions, whereas Eastern

participants were more accurate in recognizing anger and positive anticipation (all p s < .01). Children were less accurate than adults overall ($\chi^2(3) = 53.27$, $p < .001$), especially for fear and pain.

Principal conclusions and implications: It seems that dog expression modality, human cultural background, and age significantly shape emotion recognition, with effects further modulated by emotion category. Such differences in perception have important implications for human interpretation of dog behaviour, canine welfare, and human safety.

Presenter 2 Title & Abstract

Children's understanding of animal emotions: How do we measure it?

Dr. Joanne M. Williams, *University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK*

Introduction: Children's understanding of animal emotions is complex involving: emotion recognition across different species, beliefs about animals' cognitive and emotion capacities; and empathy (cognitive, affective and behavioural) towards animals. The aims of this research are to design new research tools to measure these constructs and to implement them in intervention evaluation research.

Methods: Two animal welfare education evaluation studies will be presented to illustrate the measures. Participants: Study 1 included 24 intervention group children (11 girls and 13 boys, mean age = 7.9 years) and 24 matched controls (11 girls and 13 boys, mean age = 7.9 years). Study 2 included 120 children aged 8–9 years (intervention group: $M=8.29$; control group: $M=8.29$). Measures: 1) Animal Emotion Recognition (animal images representing different emotions requiring children to judge emotional states); 2) Children's Belief in Animal Minds (5 questions asking: is animal clever, can they feel pain, happiness, sadness, and fear?); 3) Child Emotion Recognition and Empathy Scale presents pictures of child-animal interactions and measures cognitive, affective and behavioural empathy towards animals.

Results: Study 1: There were no intervention group changes in animal emotion recognition, but significant increases in Child-BAM ($t=-2.5$, $df=15$, $p=0.024$), and empathy: cognitive ($t=-4.5$, $df=15$, $p<0.001$), affective ($t=-3.6$, $df=15$, $p=0.003$, and behavioural ($t=-2.2$, $df=15$, $p=0.044$). Study 2: there was a significant increase in emotion recognition for the intervention group ($F(1,118) = 13.72$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$), but no change in Child-BAM.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field: Children's understanding of animal emotions is not a unitary construct. These new measures can be used as evaluation tools in animal welfare education and animal-assisted interventions, and to predict children's behaviour towards animals. They are acceptable to children, age-appropriate in language and task demands, culturally sensitive, and can be administered in individual interviews or as self-complete questionnaires.

Presenter 3 Title & Abstract

Beliefs About Animal Emotions as Predictors of Human-Animal Attitudes and Behaviors

Dr. Michael A. Kisley, *University of Colorado - Colorado Springs, Colorado Springs, Colorado, USA*

Introduction: Beliefs about the emotional capacity and experience of non-human animals vary between individuals, but the relevance of such variation is poorly

understood. Across multiple studies, we examined whether beliefs about animal emotions predict attitudes and behaviors toward animals across different anthrozoological contexts.

Methodology: In a series of online studies, participants completed the Beliefs about Animal Emotions Scale (Kisley, 2025) which consists of 3 sub-scales. Experimental manipulations were employed to model specific human-animal contexts, and additional measures of attitudes and behaviors towards animals were collected.

Main results/findings: In one study ($N = 251$), controlling for gender and education, beliefs about the complexity and authenticity of animal emotions predicted the number of animal product dietary avoidances ($\beta = .41$) and endorsed pro-welfare behaviors (e.g., avoidance of animal-based competitions; $\beta = 0.36$), both $ps < .001$. In a second study ($N = 194$), beliefs about the moral relevance of animal emotions significantly predicted the likelihood that participants would take specific actions with a cat exhibiting challenging behaviors at home, including relinquishing the cat to a shelter ($\beta = -.24$), rehoming ($\beta = -.24$), and spanking ($\beta = -.23$), all $ps < .001$. In a third study ($N = 220$), beliefs about the moral relevance of animal emotions significantly predicted people's anxious ($\beta = .19$, $p = .032$) and avoidant ($\beta = -.37$) attachment orientations toward their pets, the strength of the human–pet attachment bond ($\beta = .43$), and perceptions of pets as close friends ($\beta = .29$) and as important family members ($\beta = .29$), all $ps < .001$.

Principal conclusions and implications: These findings highlight the potential importance of human beliefs about animal emotions for human-animal relationships. Intervention studies are underway to determine whether changing one's beliefs about animal emotions may change people's attitudes and behaviors toward animals.

Presenter 4 Title & Abstract

Emotion Perception versus Need Fulfillment: Explaining Acceptance of Calf Rearing Systems among Citizens and Dairy Farmers

Dr. Flora von Steimker, *Georg August University of Göttingen, Göttingen, Germany*
Public criticism of farm animal welfare increasingly targets early cow–calf separation and subsequent individual housing of calves, particularly due to presumed negative emotional consequences for calves. We compared citizens' and dairy farmers' acceptance of calf rearing systems and tested whether perceived calf emotions and need fulfillment predict social acceptance.

Methodology. An online survey was conducted among a representative sample of German citizens ($n=996$) and dairy farmers ($n=117$). Respondents evaluated four systems (individual housing, early group housing, foster cow system, dam rearing) with respect to emotional capacity, perceived emotional experiences and fulfillment of needs, and acceptance. Group differences were examined descriptively and via t-tests and Fisher's exact tests. Linear regression models identified predictors of social acceptance.

Main results/findings. Farmers attributed a broader range of emotional and cognitive capacities to cows than citizens but assigned comparatively low importance to mother–calf bonding for calf welfare, prioritizing functional needs such as nutrition. Citizens ranked mother–calf bonding as most important, showed high acceptance of cow–calf contact systems, and expressed moderate acceptance of group housing. Regression analyses showed that social acceptance was primarily explained by perceived fulfillment

of needs; perceived emotional capacities and empathic orientations were negligible predictors. While farmers rejected cow–calf contact systems, individual housing was no longer the preferred option. Early group housing emerged as the most accepted system among farmers, potentially reflecting a tension between acknowledging negative calf experiences in individual housing and practical constraints of cow–calf contact systems.

Principal conclusions and implications. Despite broad attribution of emotional capacities, the study shows that emotion perception plays only a limited role in livestock system acceptance and identifies early group housing as a first feasible compromise for stepwise, sustainable improvements in calf rearing relevant to advisory services and policy in Germany.

Thematic Oral Presentation Session: Humane Education & Youth Perspectives

2:00 - 3:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Session to feature oral presentations each 15-minutes in length followed by 5-minutes of Q&As.

2:00 - 2:20pm

181 Evaluating a School-Based Humane Education Curriculum in China: Impacts on Children's Human–Animal Relations, Socio-Emotional Learning, and Ecological Competencies

Dr. Xuan Gu^{1,2}, Dr. Bo Wang³, Kaisheng Xie⁴, Yuzhu Fu¹, Dr. Sarah Bexell^{5,6}

¹Department of Social Work, Shandong University, Jinan, China. ²Centre for Animal Protection Studies, Shandong University, Jinan, China. ³School of Education, Shandong Women's University, Jinan, China. ⁴School of Psychology, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, China. ⁵Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, Denver, USA. ⁶Institute for Human-Animal Connection, University of Denver, Denver, USA

Abstract

Introduction

Humane education is increasingly recognized as a promising approach for fostering positive human–animal relations alongside broader socio-emotional and ecological competencies. This study examined the effectiveness and implementation of a school-based humane education curriculum in Chinese elementary schools, with particular attention to children's learning about animals, empathy, and pro-environmental behavior.

Methodology

A mixed-methods quasi-experimental design was employed. The 12-lesson curriculum integrated human–animal–environment relationships and was delivered by in-service teachers. Quantitative data were collected from 245 students in the intervention group and 133 students in a control group using pre- and post-intervention surveys assessing animal and environmental knowledge, connectedness with animals and nature, environmental attitudes, empathy, perceived social support, and well-being. Data were analyzed using repeated-measures analyses of variance. Qualitative data were

obtained from open-ended questionnaires completed by 16 teachers and were analyzed thematically to examine implementation experiences and observed student outcomes.

Main results/findings

Compared to the control group, students receiving the humane education curriculum showed significantly greater gains across all measured domains, including animal and environmental knowledge, empathy, connectedness with animals and nature, and well-being (all $p < .05$). Teachers reported observable increases in students' prosocial behaviors toward peers and animals, heightened concern for animal welfare, and greater engagement in everyday pro-environmental practices such as waste reduction and responsible pet-related behaviors.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field

The findings demonstrate that humane education can effectively promote positive human–animal relations while simultaneously supporting children's socio-emotional and ecological development. This study provides evidence that teacher-led humane education is feasible and impactful in under-resourced educational contexts. For anthrozoology, the results highlight humane education as a scalable intervention for cultivating empathy toward animals and fostering responsible human-animal interactions, with implications for education policy and teacher training.

2:20 - 2:40pm

229 Rethinking care for underserved communities in educational programs: A short overview of a qualitative analysis of veterinary student reflective journal entries from a shelter medicine rotation

Sohaila Jafarian¹, Lauren Powell², Chelsea Reinhard², Brittany Watson²

¹Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO, USA. ²University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, USA

Abstract

Introduction. Community-based learning opportunities are often utilized as a way to address challenges for pet owners accessing veterinary care. It is important to understand more about students' learning experiences through veterinary engagement opportunities and how interactions with clients and animals can ethically be approached. The goal of this presentation is to provide an anthrozoological discussion of a qualitative analysis of veterinary student journals from our recent publication in JAVMA (Jafarian et al., 2026).

Methodology. Utilizing a retrospective qualitative study design, student journal entries from a shelter medicine rotation at the University of Pennsylvania between January 2015 and July 2019 were analyzed with collaborative qualitative content analysis using Nvivo 12 (Lumivero). The analysis involved organization and planning, open and axial coding, development of a preliminary codebook, testing of the codebook, final coding process, and reviewing the codebook and finalizing themes.

Main Results. Eight major themes emerged from 53 veterinary students including student perspectives of owners, pets, neighborhoods, community outreach, and self; the learning process; the role of pets as social catalysts; and trust. In particular, we found the strength of the human-animal bond often prompted reflection and helped students to build empathy for owners in underserved communities.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for Field. These findings suggest that incorporating sustained, diverse, and ethically grounded community engagement may empower future professionals to navigate complex social contexts and more effectively serve all types of populations of humans and animals. This study could also serve as a model for future research to evaluate learning experiences for students working with human-animal dyads.

References: Jafarian S, Powell L, Reinhard CL, Watson B. Shelter medicine rotations help students rethink care for underserved communities: a qualitative analysis of veterinary student reflective journals. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2026 Jan 9:1-9.

2:40 - 3:00pm

18 Understanding Children's Knowledge, Experiences and Attitudes Toward Pets: Findings from the UK's First Nationally Representative Children and Pets Survey 2025

Anna Baggott¹, Caroline Francoli², Kerry Taylor³, Chris Bennett⁴, Anna Cowling⁴, Shelley Brown⁵, Charlotte Huggins⁶, Philip Marsh⁶, Siobhan McHaffie⁷

¹PDSA, Telford, Shropshire, United Kingdom. ²RSPCA, London, United Kingdom. ³Blue Cross, Burford, Oxfordshire, United Kingdom. ⁴Woodgreen, Cambridge, United Kingdom. ⁵Cats Protection, Chelwood Gate, Haywards Heath, United Kingdom. ⁶Dogs Trust, London, United Kingdom. ⁷USPCA, Belfast, United Kingdom

Abstract

Introduction:

Despite the important role pets play in childhood development, little nationally representative evidence exists on how children understand, interact with, and care for animals. The Children and Pets Survey 2025 addressed this gap by examining children's pet ownership, welfare knowledge, emotional perceptions, learning preferences, and safety experiences, generating evidence to inform animal welfare education and responsible interspecies relationships.

Methodology:

The Pet Education Partnership, a coalition of animal welfare organisations developing evidence-based pet education resources, commissioned YouGov to conduct a cross-sectional, nationally representative survey of 1,024 children aged 7–11 years in the United Kingdom. Sampling was balanced by age, gender, geographic location and household characteristics. The questionnaire assessed pet ownership, emotional attachment, welfare knowledge, preferred learning sources and experiences of pet interaction, including supervision and safety. Descriptive statistics and subgroup comparisons identified key patterns and demographic differences.

Main Results/Findings:

Sixty-five percent of children reported living with at least one pet, indicating widespread human–animal interaction. Children generally expressed strong emotional bonds with animals but showed variable welfare knowledge, particularly regarding less expressive species. Many preferred learning about pets through videos and animal experts rather than classroom teaching. While most attributed feelings to dogs and cats, perceptions of sentience in other species were less consistent. Safety concerns were evident: one in five children reported having been bitten by a pet, and unsupervised interactions were common. (View the full report here: [Children and Pets Survey 2025](#))

Principal Conclusions & Implications:

Although children form meaningful emotional connections with pets, notable gaps in welfare knowledge and safety understanding remain. These findings highlight the need for targeted, child-centred pet education aligned with children's preferred learning modalities. Evidence-informed educational strategies may support safer, more compassionate human–animal relationships and inform policy, practice, and future anthrozoology research.

3:00 - 3:20pm

65 A paw between pages: Building bridges to reading through canine-assisted interventions in classrooms

Louanic ROUSSEAU

Université de Limoges, Limoges, France

Abstract

Introduction.

Reading is a foundational skill for academic success. Yet in France, substantial inequalities in reading abilities are observed at entry into middle school. These disparities are both a consequence and a driver of broader educational and social inequalities. Canine-assisted interventions have been suggested as a means to enhance engagement, reduce anxiety, and support learners facing academic vulnerability. This study examines how the presence of a dog can act as a bridge between students and reading in French middle school classrooms, aligning with the ISAZ theme of “building bridges.”

Methodology.

Forty-five sixth-grade students (first year of middle school, aged 11 to 12) from three educational contexts in France participated in an eight-week reading program : a city-center middle school, a program for students with learning disabilities, and a school serving students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Students were assigned to one of three conditions: canine-assisted reading sessions reading, reading with the teacher only, or no structured reading sessions. Reading fluency and comprehension were assessed using standardized measures. Engagement and pleasure in reading were assessed through observations, student self-reports, and parent questionnaires. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed.

Main Results.

Students in the canine-assisted reading condition showed significantly higher engagement, improved fluency, and better reading comprehension compared to the other groups. Positive effects were observed across all classroom contexts. Observational data indicated that the presence of a dog enhanced students' motivation to attend class, sustained attention, pleasure in reading, confidence, and the quality of parent-child interactions.

Principal Conclusions and Implications for the Field.

Canine-assisted interventions function as a meaningful bridge between students and reading by linking emotional security with cognitive engagement. These findings highlight the potential of human–animal interactions to reduce learning barriers and enhance educational accessibility in diverse classroom settings.

Symposium: Regulating the Human–Dog Interface: Law, Behaviour, and Public Safety

2:00 - 3:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

The symposium features a 5-minute introduction, four 15-minute themed oral presentations, a 10-minute discussant presentation, followed by a 15-minute Q&A session.

178 Regulating the Human–Dog Interface: Law, Behaviour, and Public Safety

Dr Sarah Singh

University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom

Abstract

Dog bites are a significant public health concern, as reflected in significant recent media coverage, and the recent extension of breed specific legislation in the UK. To date, however, there has been little engagement between anthrozoology, which explores the relationships between humans and animals (in this case, dogs), and law which seeks to regulate these relationships. The papers in this symposium seek to address this gap, bringing the two into conversation to enrich both disciplines and better ensure public safety around dogs, both in the home and in public spaces.

Presentation one will explore how dog-related laws, including those seeking to ensure safety, are perceived. It notes that cultural shifts in human dog relationships have led to corresponding changes in social attitudes which has implications for legal compliance and ultimately, public safety.

The second presentation addresses the legislation in detail, exploring how the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 has acquired different meanings over time, impacting enforcement and demonstrating that anthrozoological evidence can inform more effective law-making.

Presentation three emphasises the need for evidence-based responses, specifically as regards the risk posed to children in the home by pet dogs. Here we introduce a co-designed tool for frontline professionals to use to improve child safety.

Finally, presentation four shows that responses not only need to be evidence-based but must also be attuned to particular local knowledge and challenges. This presentation highlights the need for a multidisciplinary approach across stakeholders if safety around dogs is to be managed effectively.

The discussant, a leading psychologist who studies dog bite prevention, is ideally placed to draw the aforementioned themes together. They will speak to cultural shifts in our relationships with dogs and how they affect attitudes and compliance with laws and other types of intervention intended to ensure public safety, particularly that of children.

Presenters:

Sarah A. Weir, *University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland, United Kingdom*

Prof Marie Fox, *University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom*

Dr Helen Howell, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom*

Prof Carri Westgarth, *University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom*

Discussant:

Prof Kerstin Meints, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom*

Presenter 1 Title & Abstract

Regulating the Dangerous Dog: A Nationally Representative Study of UK Public Knowledge and Attitudes to Dog Law

Sarah A. Weir, *University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland, United Kingdom*

Introduction:

Law is a common tool used by governments to manage dangerous dogs. However, dog's societal role has changed, increasingly regarded as family in private spaces while framed as dangerous in public. These tensions result in dogs leading separate public and private lives, which may lead people to minimise the risks posed by dogs within the home compared to in public. This study aimed to explore whether different approaches to legislating dangerous dogs align with changing ideas of dogs.

Methodology:

Using the UK as a case study, we present findings from a nationally representative questionnaire examining people's knowledge and opinions of current and potential laws, and the relationship between legal knowledge and attitudes. Data were collected from 1,758 participants, regarding laws that aim to directly or indirectly manage dogs' risk. Following exploratory model-building, knowledge was analysed using multinomial regression and opinions using ordinal regression.

Main results/findings:

Participants' knowledge of laws governing the public dog was more accurate (average 61%) than knowledge of laws governing the private dog (average 35%). However, opinions did not differ between public and private law. There was widespread support for laws that aimed to protect people and livestock but only when in public spaces and when no physical harm came to dogs. Participants supported banning aversive training methods, but support was limited for improving welfare standards that may reduce aggression. Age and dog ownership were the main factors influencing knowledge and opinions, suggesting generational shifts in engagement with law. Strong associations were found between legal knowledge and public opinion.

Principal conclusions and Implications for the field:

Findings suggest that changes in dogs' social role may require new approaches that balance dog welfare with human and livestock safety. Aligning law with public attitudes may improve legal awareness and compliance.

Presenter 2 Title & Abstract

Putting the Dangerous Dogs Act into Context

Prof Marie Fox, *University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom*

Introduction:

This presentation is based on a study of 'dangerous dogs' legislation across the UK for a forthcoming monograph (Fox & Singh, *The Dangerous Dogs Act in Context*, Cambridge UP). It is the first in depth legal examination of the actors and other factors that shape a statute and its interpretation.

Methodology:

It uses doctrinal, comparative and socio-legal methods to explore the social, economic, political, cultural and historical contexts within which the Act applies, and traces how it acquires meanings over time. Our analysis is informed by an empirical study funded by Research England and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration fund (2022-25). This included 26 interviews with dog rehoming

organisations across the devolved nations, and two focus groups held in collaboration with the Kennel Club.

Main results/findings:

Our findings underline the deleterious impact of this legislation on an overburdened animal rescue sector and have informed our legal critique of the legislation. This argues that the original 1991 legislation was a knee-jerk and ill-considered response to media hysteria and a subsequent 'moral panic'. We draw on evidence that the legislation has failed to achieve its objectives of reducing dog attacks and eliminating particular dog types. Meanwhile, the economic costs of this law (e.g. policing) are disproportionate, there is a significant adverse welfare impact on seized dogs, and rehoming organisations are left to deal with abandoned dogs who typically must be euthanised since they cannot lawfully be rehomed. Our research underlines how these issues have been compounded by the more recent legislative amendments to ban XL Bully types.

Principal conclusions and Implications for the field:

While we believe that our empirical findings are generalisable, they also suggest the need for further empirical and comparative research that explores the impact on other actors (e.g. owners, the police) and approaches in other jurisdictions.

Presenter 3 Title & Abstract

An evidence-based, structured professional judgement approach to dog bite risk safeguarding at a community level.

Dr Helen Howell, *University of Lincoln, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom*

Introduction:

Dog bites to children remain a significant societal concern. UK legislation places statutory duties on local authorities, partner agencies, and organisations to safeguard the welfare of children. The risk of dog bites within the home therefore constitutes a safeguarding issue with currently no evidence-based or standardised approach available for identifying safeguarding concerns related to dog bite risk. This study aimed to develop an evidence-based dog-bite risk triage tool, for use by frontline professionals entering family homes.

Methodology:

A systematic review of the published literature and a qualitative study of professional perspectives identified risk factors for human-directed aggression in dogs. This evidence base informed the development of structured professional judgement guidance (SPJ) for assessing dog bite risk. A draft dog bite risk triage tool was developed for frontline RSPCA officers conducting home visits, with a one-day workshop of potential end users used to evaluate the tool's feasibility and comprehensibility.

Main results/findings:

RSPCA staff members (n = 11) provided feedback on individual risk items and on the SPJ tool. All participants agreed that the tool would be useful in professional practice for identifying and referring dog bite risk safeguarding concerns. A reflexive analysis of feedback led to iterative refinements of the draft instrument and the development of the Dog Bite Risk Triage tool (DBR-T).

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

A brief structured professional judgement tool was developed to support professionals in identifying and referring safeguarding concerns related to dog bite risk. The DBR-T

offers an evidence-based SPJ structure to aid stakeholders, including health and social care professionals and police officers with safeguarding responsibilities, to identify potential dog bite risks at a community level. Early identification of bite risk creates opportunities for timely intervention, with the overarching aim of preventing dog bite incidents.

Presenter 4 Title & Abstract

From theory to practice through multi-stakeholder collaboration - The work of the Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership

Prof Carri Westgarth, *University of Liverpool, Liverpool, Merseyside, United Kingdom*

Introduction:

Merseyside is known for the highest rates of dog bites in England including high profile fatalities. In 2015, the Communication Workers Union (CWU) and Royal Mail approached the University of Liverpool for help to strengthen dog bite prevention among staff in the region. It became clear that a multi-disciplinary approach was needed to tackle dog bites effectively, taking into consideration other perspectives and actions from key stakeholders including enforcement of law.

Methodology:

In 2016 the Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership (MDSP) was established, led by the University of Liverpool, including key community organisations such as animal welfare charities, medical establishments, local authorities such as councils and police, as well as animal behaviour and veterinary professionals. The group meets bi-monthly to discuss current needs and implement ways to reduce dog bites. This includes analysing data and improving education and awareness of safe behaviour around dogs for professionals, dog owners and the general public.

Main results/findings:

Multiple interventions have been established through the partnership in response to research findings. These include: the AVOID strategy for improving safety of delivery workers and other visitors around dogs; ATLAS reporting system for escalation of near-miss incidents for intervention by authorities; Responsible Dog Ownership 'out-of-court' disposal course for low-level offences delivered by the Blue Cross charity; and a new child safeguarding around dogs policy across Cheshire and Merseyside NHS.

Principal conclusions and implications for the field:

The Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership is a unique example of cross-partnership working for collaborative goals to improve safety around dogs. The website www.merseydogsafes.co.uk is a hub of resources and guidance about dog safety available for the public and professionals. The partnership continues to grow, including international membership, and has inspired the establishment of a Welsh Dog Safety Partnership in order to tackle their localised challenges.

Workshop: Your Research, Your Voice: Podcast-Ready Communication Skills for Scientists

2:00 - 3:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

79 Your Research, Your Voice: Podcast-Ready Communication Skills for Scientists

Marika S Bell

The Deal with Animals, Greater London, Surrey, United Kingdom

Abstract

Effective science communication is essential for bridging the gap between experts and the general public. Podcasting, with its accessibility and wide reach, offers an unparalleled platform to enhance these skills. By improving science communication through podcasting, either as a creator or a guest, professionals can break down complex ideas into engaging and understandable content, making science more relatable and impactful.

One key benefit of science podcasting is its ability to reach diverse audiences. Unlike academic papers or conferences, podcasts can connect with people from various backgrounds who may not have a strong science foundation. This creates an opportunity to demystify scientific concepts, foster public interest, and promote critical thinking. Podcasts also allow experts to share the human stories behind scientific discoveries, which fosters a deeper connection with listeners and inspires trust in the scientific process.

Podcasting hones important communication skills such as storytelling, simplifying jargon, and engaging in dialogue. These skills are crucial for scientists who want to collaborate across disciplines or engage with policymakers, educators, and the public. By developing a podcast, or simply learning how to be a good guest, scientists can learn to craft narratives that resonate and motivate action.

This workshop will focus on enhancing science communication through podcasting; Geared towards researchers who may be interested in starting their own podcast or those who want to learn how to be a guest on podcasts so they can better share their research.

Learn what software you need, how to create an in-home podcast studio, practice interview and guesting skills, and build a content plan.

Learning Outcomes & Associated Activities

- **Distill complex research into clear, concise language.** *Activity:* Participants write a one-sentence explanation of their research for a general audience and refine it through peer feedback.*How this meets the aim:* Strengthens clarity, reduces jargon, and builds confidence in communicating scientific ideas to non-specialists.
- **Develop skills for participating in and conducting short, structured interviews.** *Activity:* Paired mini-interviews where participants alternate between interviewer and guest roles.*How this meets the aim:* Builds practical communication skills directly transferable to podcasts, media interviews, interdisciplinary collaboration, and public engagement.
- **Clarify the purpose and intended audience of their outreach or potential podcast.** *Activity:* Guided reflection and small-group discussion on communication goals, audience needs, and the broader relevance of their research.*How this meets the aim:* Helps participants articulate why their work matters beyond academia and identify who they want to reach.
- **Identify key messages and develop a personal narrative that connects to their research.** *Activity:* Participants identify three audience takeaways and craft a short personal story that anchors their research in lived experience.*How this meets the aim:*

ets the aim: Enhances authenticity, relatability, and memorability — essential qualities for effective science communication.

- **Gain foundational knowledge of podcast tools and content planning.** *Activity:* Brief demonstration of beginner-friendly recording software, simple home-studio setup, and a short exercise mapping out early episode ideas. *How this meets the aim:* Provides practical tools that empower participants to apply their communication skills through podcasting or other public-facing formats.
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Early Career Award Winner Talk: Lauren Powell - Reframing sociodemographic variation in human–animal relationships

4:00 - 5:00pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Dr. Lauren Powell is an Assistant Professor in Animal Welfare & Behavior and the Director of the Powell laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine. Her research applies a One Health framework to understand how human-animal interactions impact both animal and human wellbeing to help improve the lives of companion animals and the people who care for them. She received a Bachelor of Animal and Veterinary Bioscience (First Class Honors) and a PhD in Public Health from the University of Sydney.

Awards & Closing Ceremony

5:00 - 5:30pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

Come join us as we announce our Student Travel Award, DEIB Award, *Anthrozoös* Most Popular Award, PJ Hart Student Scholar Award, Caregiver Award, and Student Conference Presentation Award winners!

Country Banquet (COMPLETE registration package ticket required)

7:00 - 10:00pm Friday, 3rd July, 2026

The banquet features a gourmet buffet in a private garden setting specially set up for the event. The banquet is located at the restored Rouvary building and biodiversity gardens that lead to the Adrienne & Pierre Sommer Educational Farm within La Villette Park. Pre-registration is required.