

## ANALYSIS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN UNDANA PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS WHO HAVE A PET

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**Abstract.** This study aims to analyse the psychological well-being of psychology students of Nusa Cendana University who have a pet. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through direct interviews with nine participants who own dogs and cats, as well as through literature review of previous research. The results of the analysis showed that the participants' psychological well-being fulfilled almost all indicators of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff, including positive relationships with others, mastery of the environment, personal growth and self-acceptance. These findings indicate that university students who own pets experience improved psychological well-being.

**Keywords:** Psychological well-being, pet

### INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being is one of the fundamental aspects of an individual's life, which has a profound effect on quality of life and mental health. Among university students, especially psychology students, academic and social challenges are often a significant source of stress. The pressure to achieve high academic performance, meet parental expectations, and adapt to new social environments can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems. Therefore, it is important to explore factors that can support college students' psychological well-being, one of which is pet ownership. Pets, such as dogs and cats, have long been recognized as loyal friends who can provide emotional support for their owners. Various studies have shown that interactions with pets can provide significant psychological benefits. According to Kwan et al. (2021), individuals who have pets tend to have lower levels of anxiety and depression compared to those who do not have pets. This is due to pets' ability to provide a sense of comfort, reduce feelings of loneliness, and increase social connectedness. Pets are often a source of unconditional affection, which can help individuals feel more accepted and valued. In addition, pets can also serve as an effective stress management tool. Research by Gage and Anderson (1985) suggests that interaction with pets is considered an important practice in stress management, especially for individuals experiencing high levels of stress. Pets can provide hugs, attention and a calming presence, all of which contribute to stress reduction. In the context of university students, where academic pressures can be heightened, pets can be an invaluable source of emotional support. Pet ownership can also improve social skills and interpersonal relationships. Pets are often a bridge to interacting with others, whether through activities such as dog walking or participating in an animal-loving community. These interactions can help college students build stronger social networks, which in turn can support their psychological well-being. According to research by Siegel (1990), pet owners show higher levels of social contact and experience fewer feelings of loneliness compared to those without pets. However, while many studies point to the psychological benefits of pet ownership, there is still a lack of research specifically exploring this impact on university students, especially in Indonesia. Nusa Cendana University (Undana) as one of the higher education institutions in Indonesia has a diverse student population, and it is important to understand how pet

ownership may affect their psychological well-being. In this context, this study aims to analyze the role of pets in improving the psychological well-being of Undana psychology students. Through a qualitative approach, this study will explore the experiences of students who own pets and how their interactions with these animals affect their psychological state. Thus, it is hoped that this study can provide deeper insights into the psychological benefits of pet ownership as well as provide recommendations for students and the general public regarding the importance of pets in everyday life. Furthermore, the results of this study are also expected to contribute to the existing literature on psychological well-being and pet ownership, and serve as a reference for other researchers interested in similar topics. By raising public awareness about the importance of pets as part of social support, it is hoped that it can help individuals, especially university students, in facing life's challenges and improve their overall quality of life.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in the Psychology study program building at Nusa Cendana University. This research was conducted for 2 days, on November 4 and 5, 2024. The subjects of this study were students of the Psychology Department of Nusa Cendana University who have pets. Namely 5 people who keep dogs, and 4 people who keep cats. This type of research is qualitative research conducted by interviewing pet owners. There are 2 data collection techniques, namely: Direct interview Interviewing research subjects directly with descriptive questions. Literature Study Collecting data from previous research and other supporting literature.

## RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Based on the results of the approach through direct interviews to 10 subjects with 5 of them keeping cats and 5 of them keeping dogs, it shows that almost most subjects show good psychological well-being. Although some subjects admitted that often these pets also had a negative impact, the impact given was only momentary and could be understood by some of these subjects. "for the mood, it is definitely a bit disturbed, but not to the point of affecting college activities. just like a little emotion. but after that, I immediately understand" (verbatim), "Really his voice is shrill in the ear, so I get emotional. Like I wanted to hit him. His voice is really shrill which makes my ears hurt. But never mind, the dog understands" (verbatim). This negative impact is like the stress caused by the pet's mischief. "But sometimes I can't wait if he's really naughty. Sometimes if people hit him, he gets more and more when it makes us as the master stressed" (verbatim).

In the interviews conducted, it was also found that a strong emotional connection with pets can increase great empathy "The negative moment was when he was sick, it was stressful because I was afraid he would die and had to take him to the veterinary hospital to be examined, it made me think a little because I was afraid he would die but thank God he is healthy" (verbatim), "Yes, it is very influential especially when the cat is sick sometimes it sometimes hurts until someone dies, right? A lot of cats were sick until they died, and I cried too, so it's not only the happiness that affects me, but also the sadness that also affects me" (verbatim). This is also supported by research conducted by Lukito (2021) which found that the higher the attachment to pets, the higher the level of individual empathy, which shows that there is a positive relationship between the two.

Several previous studies have shown that the level of pet attachment affects the psychological well-being of individual pet owners, one of which is research conducted by Peacock et al. (2012) who said that with pet attachment the owner feels connected to their pet, feels positive emotions, which makes the owner have a high level of psychological well-being.

## **Indicators of Psychological Well Being**

### **a. Self-acceptance**

Self-acceptance is a dimension that is the main characteristic of mental health and also the main characteristic in the process of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and individual maturity. Based on the interview results, pets contribute to psychological well-being in the aspect of self-acceptance. With pets, it can reduce stress so that it can increase self-confidence, which then supports self-acceptance. Elmaya Sari Palungan (2021) stated that keeping pets can serve as a way to cope with stress. In addition, research conducted by Allen (2001) shows that the presence of pets provides social support that is important for reducing physiological responses to the onset of stress.

### **b. Positive relationships with others**

A study by Ayuningtyas et al (2023) showed that pet attachment contributed to increased social support, which in turn improved the psychological well-being of pet owners. This research may indicate that a strong attachment to a pet can create a sense of emotional support similar to social interactions with humans, helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and increase happiness. In addition, research by Krause-Parello (2012) also confirmed that pets can serve as a source of social support, especially for individuals who feel isolated.

### **c. Independence**

Research by Van Houten and Jarvis showed that adolescents with pets tend to have higher independence, self-esteem, and self-concept than adolescents without pets. Interaction with pets has a significant influence on individual independence from the interviewed subjects, including:

#### **1. Creating a daily routine**

In interviews with several subjects, almost all subjects have daily routines with their pets including feeding, walking, sunbathing, and playing, which can then help owners develop discipline and order in their lives. "for the cat, maybe we play at night, because after finishing college, the assignments are done. then for the dog, because maybe it's still new, so it's just a morning sunbathing, every Saturday morning I don't go to college, just like that or in the afternoon after college I sunbathe" (verbatim), "For my dog, the ritual that we often do is bathing him, like taking him to the sea, then walking in the sea, then bathing in the sea together" (verbatim), "If it's just me playing with them like taking a walk, feeding or giving treats. Then I often play with dong pu toys like that" (verbatim).

According to Dr. Dyah Novita Anggraini, daily care of pets can reduce anxiety and provide structure that is beneficial to mental health, especially for those with mental disorders such as depression. Thus, pets not only provide emotional support but also encourage independence through a regular routine.

#### **2. Increases responsibility**

Increasing responsibility through pet care is an important aspect of developing individual independence. Owning a pet requires the owner to fulfill the pet's basic needs, such as feeding, cleaning, and providing attention “emm definitely a positive feeling, because it makes me more like emm trained to take care” (verbatim). Research by Van Houten and Jarvis shows that children who care for pets develop a heightened sense of responsibility, which contributes to their increased independence and self-confidence. In addition, pet care also helps individuals to learn time management and organization. According to Graham et al. (2019), this responsibility encourages individuals to make better decisions and understand the consequences of their actions. Pets are not only companions, but also an effective educational tool in building their owners' independence and responsibility.

**d. Environmental mastery**

Keeping a pet can help individuals develop skills in managing their environment, such as creating a safe and comfortable space or environment for the animal. Research by Wells (2004) shows that pet owners tend to be more involved in outdoor activities and have more structured routines, which increases their sense of control over their environment. In the interviews with the subjects, it was seen that they often play and walk outside with their pets. “If it's a dog, it's because it's probably still new so it's just morning sunbathing” (verbatim), ‘I play with them like taking them for a walk’ (verbatim), ‘the ritual that we often do is bathing them, like taking them to the sea, then walking in the sea, then bathing in the sea together’ (verbatim).

In addition, pets can be a motivation to keep the home clean and safe, and create social interactions with others. According to research by Zasloff and Kidd (1994), pet owners often participate in communities related to animal care, which reinforces a sense of ownership and mastery of the environment.

**e. Life purpose**

Having a pet often provides purpose and meaning in life, especially for those who feel lonely or isolated from their social environment. Research by Krause-Parello (2012), states that pets can serve as a source of motivation to lead a more active and healthy lifestyle, which in turn can help individuals achieve their life goals. Pets can also serve as a reminder to take care of oneself and create a positive daily routine, thus increasing the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction in an individual's life.

**f. Personal growth**

Keeping pets can increase a sense of responsibility, empathy and self-confidence. Research conducted by Hasibuan et al (2022) showed that there is a positive relationship between attachment to pets and students' self-esteem, reflecting positive personal growth.

In addition, a study by Black (2019) revealed that adolescents who own pets tend to experience reduced loneliness and improved social skills, which support their personal development. Pets also provide emotional support that helps individuals overcome life's challenges, thus promoting personal growth.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that pet ownership has a positive effect on the psychological well-being of Undana psychology students. Indicators of psychological well-being proposed by Ryff, such as self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, and mastery of the environment, are almost all fulfilled. Pets contribute to reducing stress and increasing self-confidence, thus supporting self-acceptance. In addition, closeness with pets creates a sense of emotional support similar to social interaction, reducing feelings of loneliness and increasing happiness. Pet care also helps develop skills in organizing the environment and creating a more structured routine, increasing a sense of control over the environment. This research shows that pet ownership can increase the independence and responsibility of the owner. Therefore, the importance of pet ownership as a way to improve psychological well-being, especially for university students, is highly recommended, as the emotional support it provides can help them deal with life's challenges and improve their overall quality of life

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