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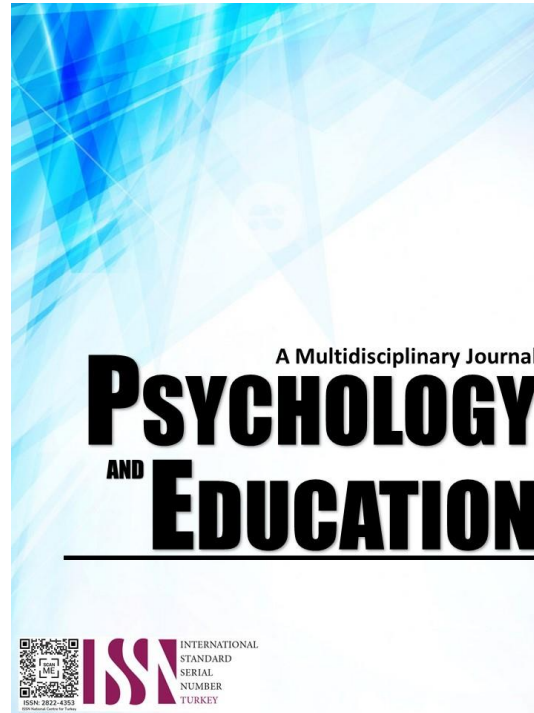
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THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBT INDIVIDUALS WITH FUR BABIES



PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

2023

Volume: 7

Pages: 146-152

Document ID: 2023PEMJ532

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7651584

Manuscript Accepted: 2023-15-2



The Psychological Well-Being and Lived Experiences of LGBT Individuals with Fur Babies

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Abstract

Pets are truly great companions. Some individuals feel that owning a pet can help them prepare for a growing family by giving them a taste of what it would be like to have children. This study also looks into the psychological well-being and life experiences of LGBT fur parents. Employing the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the findings of this study were: (1) With the presence of fur babies, participants had the ease to overcome stressful events, especially the ones that affect their mental health. With these, they have the desire to take care of their fur babies under all circumstances because they see their fur babies as family members. Fur babies are excellent sources of motivation, confidence, and happiness for fur parents. They are treated as family members because they contribute to the mental and emotional aspects of fur parents. Moreover, the majority of respondents valued their pets far more than their actual family members, however, some didn't spend as much time with their relatives and friends. This study comes to the conclusion that a stronger bond with one's dog was also linked to higher anxiety about being unloved and rejected by family members and people surrounding us, which was linked to a heavier impact on one's psychological well-being. In reality, fur parents, especially LGBT parents, offer their fur babies a lot of love and attention compared to other things.

Keywords: *challenges, LGBT, lived experiences, psychological well-being, pets*

Introduction

Pets are indeed man's best friends, therefore it's only fitting that humans honor them for all the happiness and love they have brought us. Fur Parents are those who took care of their "Fur Babies", a person's dog, cat, or other furry pet, especially if it is given the same level of care and love as a child. (Oxford Learners Dictionary), describe fur parents treating their pet dog or cat like a human child before they had children of their own. Some people believe that getting a pet might help you be ready for a growing family by giving you a taste of what having children will entail (Sison, 2020). On the other hand psychological well-being, which can be defined as resilience along with hedonic (pleasure, joy) and eudemonic (meaning, satisfaction) happiness, is a crucial aspect of mental health (coping, emotion regulation, healthy problem solving) .It is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively (Tang et al., 2019). All living things on earth depend on their parents for strength and support. They have a lot of obligations, but they rarely address them. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) refers to a person's sense of self that is based on their interests, associated behaviors, and membership in a group of people who have similar attraction and activities (American Psychological Association, 2019).

According to Kinori (2021), owning a pet has a lot of

positive health effects for LGBT community, pets are much more helpful. The majority of LGBTQ pet owners identify their pets as members of their families and as sources of comfort that help them deal with the stress associated with being LGBTQ, including anxiety, rejection, bias discrimination, from family and peers. It makes sense that a lot of gay people are pet-friendly, commonly prefer to adopt pets from shelters and provide them a loving home. In addition, the same degree of love, attention, patience, and effort is needed to be a fur parent as it is to be someone's parent. The same amount of affection, care, and consideration should be given to pets. Although it's not simpler, it is just as satisfying (Toppr, n.d.). In the spring and summer, pets can be lively friends and excellent heating blankets on chilly winter nights. Pet owners can all agree that having a pet makes life better, even though they may never agree on which animal makes the ideal companion. (Maryville University)

Although studies of Matud et al. (2022), on the variations in psychological well-being between men and women have not produced clear-cut conclusions, research has repeatedly shown gender inequalities in mental health. However, little is known about how a fur parent LGBT characteristics influence their psychological well-being (Tikhomirova et al., 2022). In the history of humanity, this time is exceptional. Major changes in how people live, work, and interact are taking place in many societies, including the country. Low fertility rates provide people more freedom to

Methodology

spend their life as they see fit. These elements may encourage people to pursue higher education and to prioritize fulfilling one's personal goals over those related to their families. The stage is prepared for people to consciously decide to concentrate on pets rather than children.

Additionally, similar correlations are made by other investigations, demonstrating that pet owners without children view their animals as emotional, thinking beings. This method of studying an animal's thoughts contributes to the growth of a parent-like attitude toward companion animals. In other instances, unsure people realize that taking care of pets adequately satisfies their need for nurturing, solidifying their decision to forgo having children (Volsche, 2021). You're not the only one who believes that "my dog is my child." The function of dogs in homes has changed significantly during the past century. Nearly three-quarters of dog owners talk to their dogs, and many of them buy them gifts for Valentine's Day or birthdays. Most dog owners now refer to themselves as "pet parents" rather than "pet owners." Dr. Coren said, "We have a form of empty-nest syndrome." Humans have a need for nurturing and a need to be dependent on someone or something. Due to his social responsiveness—as opposed to a cat's tendency to be a little elusive—a dog tends to fit this very well, benefits of treating your dog like a child while keeping the proper expectations in mind. (Bennett, n.d)

Moreover, this study aims to explore psychological well-being and the lived experiences of LGBT individual's. Thus, this study will also serve as a way to understand the quality of life of fur parents, especially LGBT that contributes to the body of knowledge of psychology.

Research Questions

The study aims to explore the psychological well-being and lived experiences of LGBT fur parents. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBT fur parents?
2. What are the challenges of LGBT fur parents?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of LGBT fur parents?

This study employed Heideggerian phenomenology to explore the participant's lived experiences.

Participants of the Study

In this study, purposive sampling technique utilized wherein participants chose with the intention of elaborating further on their lived experiences as a Fur parent. Additionally, an inclusion criterion was developed to specify this study's limitation.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants should have at least one or more pets.
2. The participants admitted that they belong to LGBT Community.
3. Participants located around Bulacan.
4. There's no specific age, number of family members, and civil status.

Instrument of the Study

This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide whose validity has been ensured by comprehensive content validation by subject matter experts. The three main themes of this study will be condensed into a set of particular interview questions that the researchers would create. The questions mostly focused on the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of LGBT fur parents. It's also crucial to remember that the participants are free to voice any clarifications or issues with these questions.

Data Collection Process

The researchers employed a semi-structured interview with the LGBT fur parents to amplify the study's findings. The study employed a methodical, structured, step-by-step technique to collect coherent data for the study's assessment. Fifteen (15) respondents who matched the study's criteria were chosen, and they were then given a consent form asking for their agreement to take part in the study and permission to record the entire interview. The interview was conducted via face-to-face, Google Meet, and Messenger, and the conversation between the interviewer and interviewee was recorded using a different device. The respondents will feel compassion in order to protect their privacy and for the aim of data collection, which will motivate them to answer questions and be more open with their stories.

Ethical Considerations

The research professor's approval of the data collection method and tool demonstrates that consent was obtained and that strict ethical guidelines were adhered to. Participants who had been identified and qualified to participate based on the defined criteria were requested to give explicit consent via informed consent with the professor's aid.

While the data collection procedure was being employed, the consent form was discussed. The volunteers were informed that they might quit at any time and that the research objectives were spelled out for their voluntary involvement. They were informed of the study's objectives and purpose as well. Participants were given guarantees that all information gathered during the course of the study would only be utilized anonymously and under code names for educational and scientific purposes. Discretion was also covered participants' freely given personal information will be kept private and will not be used in a way that breaches the Data Privacy Act, as mandated by Republic Act 10173.

Data Analysis Procedure

Numerous techniques can be used to collect qualitative data. One of the best ways to prevent content inconsistencies is to record and transcribe interviews. Making sense of the data gathered from experiences and challenges of fur parents. Each participant's exact remarks will be included in the interview transcripts verbatim and will go through a careful review.

The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), founded on the modified Van Kaam strategy made popular by Moustakas, was used in this study. The seven essential steps are horizontalizing, reducing experiences to their invariant components, thematic clustering to create core themes, comparison of various data sources to validate the invariant constituents, crafting of individual textural descriptions, construction of composite structural descriptions, and synthesis of texture and structure into an expression.

Results and Discussion

Based on the data collected, the following themes were identified in this study; namely, (1) Priority, (2) Life Companion. Likewise, the following sub themes were identified from the data-gathering and are based on their perspectives.

Priority

Emphasized protection, and love of fur parents towards their fur babies it also indicates how pet owners give care and see themselves as a fur parent. Participants treat their pet dog or cat like a human child before they have children of their own. Some people believe that getting a pet might help you be ready for a growing family by giving you a taste of what having children will entail. (Sison, 2020).

According to Kinori (2021), having a pet provides many benefits for the LGBT community's health, and animals are much more useful. Most LGBTQ pet owners consider their animals to be members of their families and comforting companions that help them cope with the stress of being LGBTQ, including anxiety, rejection, bias, and discrimination from family and peers. It stands to reason that many LGBT individuals are pet-friendly, frequently favor adopting animals from shelters, and provide them a caring home. Additionally, being a fur parent requires the same amount of love, care, patience, and effort as being someone's parent. Pets should receive the same level of love, care, and consideration. It is equally as fulfilling even though it is more difficult. (Toppr, n.d)

Burning Parent Desire

The participant claimed that their pets were like members of their family, especially in today's society where many individuals are eager to adopt and care for animals. Specifically, participant no. 1 said;

I saw myself as a mother and a father for my cat. And mas gugustuhin ko pa na sila ang maunang mawala kaysa sa ako ang maunang mawala. Dahil mas painful sa kanila yon. (I saw myself as a mother and a father for my cat. And I'd rather they be the first to pass away than me. Because for me it is more painful for them.) (P1)

The parent's desire for their pet means to stop existing and go away, indeed sometimes our fur babies are like our own child. Licsi (2020) suggests that you start making preparations for saying goodbye to your pet now so that you won't have any worries when the time comes. It could be challenging and upsetting to make decisions on the day your companion passes away, so it would be better to do it in advance.

The Care Under all Circumstances

According to the data and responses, fur babies is one of the sources of a fur parent's confidence. When the interviewer asked about how participants balance their life, most participants had the same answer as

participant 4 said

Ay naku, sinasabi ko nga e, mas gusto ko sila ang inuuna mas gusto ko silang alagaan ganon yung everytime na galing ako ng school tas pag uwi uunahin ko talaga silang salubungin kase ang saya lang kase sa part na ang sarap umuwi lagi ng bahay na kahit wala kang dala para sakanila. Kung pwede nga lang dalhin ko yan hanggang sa pinag dudutihan kong hospital eh. (Oh, as I said, I never forget anything, the one good thing about caring for them is that it's always nice to come home, even if you have nothing to give them. So, every time I get home from school, I'll meet them first. If only I could take her to the hospital where I was doing my duty, I would take her every time.) (P4)

This date pertains to parents desire to create relationships where they can receive love, care, and attention from others during these difficult times. Many pet parents offer their furry children unconditional affection as an act of service rather than as payment. Unconditional love is tremendously healing because it helps us to be seen and accepted for who we are, even in the midst of our most stressful circumstances. (Tree House Recovery, 2019)

Protect them at all cost

Every living thing on our planet has the right to a safe, loving home where they can develop to their best ability, as well as access to opportunities that will help them do so.

Nakikita ko ang aking sarili sa pag-aalaga ng alaga ay natuturing ko na rin sila bilang anak na pinoprotektahan. (I see myself taking care of my fur baby and I value them as a child and I will protect them no matter what.) (P2)

This evidence shows by assisting families in meeting everyone's psychological and physical requirements, this can be accomplished, among other things. Additionally, 71% of pet owners indicated they usually put their pet's needs before their own, According to a Chewy survey (2020).

Life Companion

This theme emphasizes the companionship between LGBT fur parents to its fur baby and dealing with mental health problems. Participants show that pets can be our companion with our mental health problems and pets can help us to cope up with our challenges in

life. One factor for the popularity of living with pets is that they are usually portrayed as beneficial to human health and psychological wellbeing (Morgan et al., 2020).

The development of the SGM emerging adult identity and related wellbeing may be influenced by pets, according to our findings. This is because they foster social interactions, feelings of self-worth and purpose, and belongingness. They also offer emotional support and comfort to deal with stress (McDonald et al., 2021).

Source of purpose in life

According to the participants, the challenges they experienced the most are; the expenses and their mental health, besides these challenges, they choose to continue and strive more for their fur babies. Specifically, participant no. 5 said;

“Sa mental health sa totoo lang uhm, dati diko talaga maalala pero yung oras na may problema ako yung partner ko nakipag break sakin partner nagsuicide ako sa totoo lang, pagkatapos pangatlong araw nakaalis na akong ng hospital nairealize ko uhm bawat tao lahat ng taong nakatagpo ko ay iwan ako pero hindi ako iniwan ng mga alaga ko kaya ko nakita yung value nila. (Actually, in terms of mental health, before I truly remembered, but when I was having a problem with my partner, when we split up, I actually committed suicide. In fact, after 3 days out of the hospital, I actually realized that every person I encountered would leave me, but fur babies would never leave me, which is why I see the value.) (P5)

When people spend leisure time with their pets, they can find fulfillment and happy feelings. Because pet owners must take care of their pets every day, these responsibilities may provide them motivation to get out of bed, help them establish routines, and organize their days. Additionally, pets are frequently seen as being able to listen without passing judgement and to show unconditional love, which can aid older people in maintaining or boosting their self-esteem and confidence. (Meier, 2022).

Reliable stress reliever

Participants said taking care of their pets helped them to relieve their stress.

Participant 2 said that,
“Para sa akin, nakakatulong talaga ang pag-aalaga

ng pet dahil ito din yung nakakatanggal ng ating stress o nawawala yung mga problema tuwing kasama ko siya". (For me, having a fur baby helped me to cope up with stress, he helped me to deal with stress by having him.) (P2)

According to Mardon et al. (2021), Animal adoptions have risen as a result of the heightened isolation brought on by pandemic and stay-at-home directives required to stop the virus's spread. Despite the fact that companion animals are useful stress relievers or coping strategies, there are still worries about abandoning. This study emphasizes the connections between people and animals and stresses the value of maintaining good protective habits that are essential to mental health during the epidemic.

My Happy Pill

Taking care of pets is giving the pet owners a quick escape from their problems, by spending time with their pets they feel relieved with stress and from other mental health problems participant 3 mentioned that, *"Oo kasi katulad nga ng sabi ko kanina, na pag may problema talaga ako nadedepress ako sakanya talaga ako pupunta sa aso ko kasi yun nga pagkasama ko sya nakakalimutan ko kahit saglit lang". (Yes, as I indicated before, I become pretty depressed when I have an issue, therefore I turn to my dog because when I'm with him, I forget even for a few moment.) (P3)*

Evidence highlighting the benefits of pet ownership in relation to stress reduction, increased quality of life, and pets as promoters of social and community connection provides indication of the potential value that pets transmit to the experience of mental health. According to Brooks et al. (2018), a concerted effort is needed to identify and mobilize resources to support persons living with a mental health problem because of the rise in the number of people experiencing mental health problems and the recognition of mental illness as the main cause of disability adjusted life years internationally. Recent research has illuminated the value of pets in the social networks of individuals who have been diagnosed with a severe and persistent mental health condition, indicating that pets can be taken into account alongside other human interactions.

Partner in crime

As the study proceeded, the interviewers visited the house of participant 4. They came across the emotional support they gave their fur babies.

Participant 4 remarked that,

"Well, yung sa, kwnto ko nalang yung sa una kong aso si waffle yun, yun yung una kong aso na namatay. bago sya makarating sa grade 12 ako non e uhm, subrang ano subrang laki ng pressure sa bahay ko, yung tipong lahat nagkakagulo yung acads ko pa and nong dumating sya na settled ko lahat bigla. kumbaga nagkakaroon ako ng pahnga nabibigyan ako ng part na magkaroon ako ng breaktime, pero yung breaktime ko ginogulgul ko sakanya". (Dogs or other animals can be a huge help, as I have stated. Because of this, I previously stated that life has a way of making you feel so deeply that, when you consider the aspects of life that aren't your own and you're by yourself, you suddenly believe your pets are present, even though they aren't. If you are the one they will rely on and hope for, they can really stand on their own two feet. They might not offer financial assistance, but they do offer significant emotional and mental support.) (P4)

Having pets is like having a companion in life, they can offer emotional support and help to deal with problems. Hence, this in-depth study of 117 emerging adults from sexual and gender minorities in the U.S. examines the advantages and drawbacks of having pets at home during the transition to adulthood. Our findings imply that dogs may impact the emergence of sexual and gender minority adult identities and associated wellbeing by fostering emotions of community, self-worth, and purpose; encouraging social connections; and offering emotional support and comfort to deal with stress. (McDonald et al., 2021).

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, the following conclusions were derived:

- With the presence of fur babies, participants had the ease to overcome stressful events, especially the ones that affect their mental health. With these, they have the desire to take care of their fur babies under all circumstances because they see their fur babies as family members.
- Fur babies are excellent sources of motivation, confidence, and happiness for fur parents. They are treated as family members because they contribute to the mental and emotional aspects of fur parents.
- The majority of respondents valued their pets far more than their actual family members, however some didn't spend as much time with their relatives and friends. This study comes to the conclusion that a

stronger bond with one's dog was also linked to higher anxiety about being unloved and rejected by family members and people surrounding us, which was linked to a heavier impact on one's psychological well-being. In reality, fur parents, especially LGBT parents, offer their fur babies a lot of love and attention compared to other things.

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