

Pet Owing, a Tool for Health Promotion?!

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SUMMARY

Studies carried out through time showed that owning a pet has a positive effect on human health, especially on mental health. The animal's companionship moderates the effects of interpersonal stress, subjective health complains and social interaction on anxiety. (Moldt, 1992; Winefield, 1994; Wlsh, 2009). Other studies have shown that pet owning has a protective effect on different physical health problems, especially against cardio-vascular diseases.(Giaquinto, 2009) In the present study, we had in target to make a demographical and nutritional characterization of a pet owner and to find eventual links between pet owning and several chronic conditions. The work was carried out on a sample of urban Romanian adults (n=996), who responded to questionnaires during 2009/2010. A percent of 34.1 of the respondents are pet owners for at least five years. The most frequent pets owned are cats, dogs, birds, rodents (in the respective decreasing order). The pet owning couldn't be significantly linked with any demographical characteristic-age, gender, place of living, socio-economical status. However, pet owners generally report higher incomes than persons without pets. Pet owning had no significant correlation with the frequency of allergies. Inverse correlation coefficients were found between the body mass index (BMI) and the blood pressure (BP) on one hand, and pet owning, on the other hand ($p < .05$). The significance of the correlation persists after correcting for age. People having pets generally have a lower average blood pressure and are slimmer than those without pets, the type of pet being unimportant. Other studies have shown sanogenic effects of pet owning, but generally linked with dog owning, due to the moderate exercise prompted by walking a dog. In the present research, the positive effects are present even for pets that don't necessarily require physical effort from their owner. In conclusion, the study offers some useful data that can be a starting point for further investigation. Pet owning proves concrete positive effects on two objective indicators of human health (BMI, BP) and in depth-mechanism can only be presumed. Pet owning is clearly a useful tool for health promotion and it should be used whenever the situation allows it.

Keywords: pet, hypertension, body mass index, health promotion, cardio-vascular disease.

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