



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**PAWS AND POSSIBILITIES: Exploring the impact of pet
ownership on the person's quality of life.**

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Bachelor in Psychology (Honours)

2024

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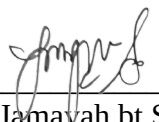
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This project is submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor in Psychology with Honours

Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
(2024

The project entitled **PAWS AND POSSIBILITIES: Exploring the impact of pet ownership on the person's quality of life** was prepared by **SAIDATUL HUSNA BINTI MUHAMAD TAUFIK (78507)** and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor in Psychology with Honours

Received for examination by:



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Date:

10 July 2024

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Jamayah bt Saili for her invaluable guidance throughout the course of this research. Her insightful feedback and encouragement have been significant in the completion of this study.

I extend my sincere thanks to the participants of this study, whose willingness to share their experiences and perspectives made this research possible. Without their openness and cooperation, this research would not have come to fruition.

A special thanks to my friends and fellow researchers, Effinie, Crystal, Natasha, Putera, Farah, Sarah, Firdaus, Aida, Mieja and Alim for their continuous encouragement and for providing a stimulating and fun environment when I am at my wit's end. Their camaraderie and support have been a source of strength and motivation.

Finally, I am profoundly grateful to my family especially my mother, Dr Thaharah whose love and encouragement have been unwavering. Their encouragement fuelled my every step on this journey. I dedicate this work to them, with heartfelt thanks.

Thank you all for your contributions, support, and encouragement.

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	1
LIST OF TABLES	i
LIST OF FIGURES	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ABSTRAK.....	iv
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Introduction	1
1.1 Background of Study.....	1
1.2 Problem Statement	2
1.3 Research Objectives	4
1.3.1 General Objective	4
1.3.2 Specific Objectives	4
1.4 Research Questions	4
1.5 Definition of Terms.....	4
1.6 Research framework.....	6
1.7 Significance of study	6
1.8 Limitation of study	7
1.9 Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.0 Introduction	8
2.1 History of Pet Ownership.....	8
2.1.1 Definition of “animal domestication”.....	8
2.2 Pet ownership	10
2.3 Effects and Benefits of having pets.....	11
2.3.1 Emotional Health Companionship; reduced feelings of loneliness.....	11
2.3.2 Physical health.....	13
2.4 Case study – Prison cats	16
2.5 Routine and responsibility of pet owners	18
2.6 Quality of Life	20
2.6.1 Theoretical Context	24
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	29
3.0 Introduction	29
3.1 Design of study.....	29

3.2 Participants	30
3.3 Data Collection.....	31
3.5 Ethics of study	32
3.6 Data Analysis Procedure	33
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	36
4.0 Introduction	36
4.1 Demographic Information	36
4.2 Results and Findings	37
4.2.1 Theme 1: Dynamic Interaction of Pets and Their Owners	38
4.2.2 Theme 2: Effect of pet ownership	44
4.2.3 Theme 3: Pets as emotional support system.	50
4.3 Chapter Summary.....	55
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION.....	56
5.0 Introduction	56
5.1 Discussion	56
5.1.1 Dynamic interaction of pets and their owners	56
5.1.2 Effects	58
5.1.3 Pets as emotional support system	61
5.2 Related Theory/ Model Discussion	63
5.2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy	64
5.3 Summary of the study	66
5.4 Implications	67
5.5 Recommendations	68
REFERENCES	69
APPENDIX A.....	77
APPENDIX B	79
APPENDIX C	81

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 <i>Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in Selecting Participants</i>	30
Table 2 <i>Demographic Information of Participants</i>	36
Table 3 <i>Structure Overview of Three Main Themes and Subthemes</i>	38

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 <i>Research framework</i>	6
Figure 2 <i>Conceptual framework of 3B's Quality of Life</i>	22
Figure 3 <i>Maslow's revisited hierarchy of needs</i>	25
Figure 4 <i>Steps in Conducting Thematic Analysis</i>	33
Figure 5 <i>Dynamic interaction of pets and their owners</i>	39
Figure 6 <i>Effects of pet ownership</i>	44
Figure 7 <i>Pets as support system</i>	51

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the Quality of Life for pet owners in Malaysia, the effects of pet ownership and how their pets act as an emotional support system. This research was conducted qualitatively with the involvement of 8 pet owners through face-to-face interview. Informed consent was provided, and pseudonyms were used in this research to protect participants' privacy. Data collected were analysed using thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun (2006). Current research analysed pet owners' quality of life through their experiences and anecdotes with the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (revisited ver.) by Ventegodt, Merrick and Anderson. In addition, the research revealed that dynamic interaction of pets and their owners consist of minimal recognition (basic acknowledgement), verbal interaction and physical touch. Participants in this research experienced various effects where positives outweighed the dull effects, including sense of responsibility, source of motivation, develop care and empathy, time spent wisely and gaining self-confidence. Notably that pets' co-existence and companionship is significant to their owners and they manage as their support system by exuding calming effect and act as a stress reliever. Any dull effects mostly had to with grooming and pet care. This study says pets are great for reducing stress and improving quality of life, especially for those needing companionship, like people in hospice or isolation.

Keywords: Pet owners, Quality of Life, effects, emotional support system

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penyelidikan ini adalah untuk meneroka Kualiti Hidup bagi pemilik haiwan peliharaan di Malaysia, kesan pemilikan haiwan peliharaan dan bagaimana haiwan peliharaan mereka bertindak sebagai sistem sokongan emosi. Penyelidikan ini dijalankan secara kualitatif dengan melibatkan 8 pemilik haiwan peliharaan melalui temu bual bersemuka. Persetujuan dimaklumkan diberikan, dan nama samaran digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini untuk melindungi privasi peserta. Data yang dikumpul dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik oleh Clarke dan Braun (2006). Penyelidikan semasa menganalisis kualiti hidup pemilik haiwan peliharaan melalui pengalaman dan anekdot mereka dengan aplikasi Hierarki Keperluan Maslow (versi dikemas kini) oleh Ventegodt, Merrick dan Anderson. Selain itu, penyelidikan mendapati bahawa interaksi dinamik antara haiwan peliharaan dan pemilik mereka terdiri daripada pengiktirafan minimum (pengakuan asas), interaksi lisan dan sentuhan fizikal. Peserta dalam penyelidikan ini mengalami pelbagai kesan di mana kesan positif melebihi kesan negatif, termasuk rasa tanggungjawab, sumber motivasi, mengembangkan sifat mengambil berat dan empati, menghabiskan masa dengan bijak dan mendapatkan keyakinan diri. Keberadaan dan persahabatan haiwan peliharaan sangat penting bagi pemilik mereka dan mereka bertindak sebagai sistem sokongan dengan memberikan kesan menenangkan dan sebagai pengurang tekanan. Sebarang kesan negatif kebanyakannya berkaitan dengan penjagaan haiwan peliharaan. Kajian ini menyatakan bahawa haiwan peliharaan sangat baik untuk mengurangkan tekanan dan meningkatkan kualiti hidup, terutama bagi mereka yang memerlukan persahabatan, seperti orang dalam penjagaan hospis atau pengasingan.

Kata kunci: Pemilik haiwan, kualiti hidup, kesan, system sokongan

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter will discuss in detail about the research foundation. This chapter contains background of the study, statement of problems, research objective, research questions, the definition of terms used in this study, research frameworks, significance of the study and the limitations.

1.1 Background of Study

The history of pet ownership has roots in the millennia-old bond, that exists between humans and animals. Tens of thousands of years ago, people began to develop mutually beneficial relationships with some species of animals, which marked the beginning of the domestication of animals. According to Baltic and Boskovic (2015), during the era of evolution, hunters would consume meat from animals as they provide great benefits. Hence other than companionship, owning animals provided economic stability for the household. In the current times, based on research done by Graham et al. (2019) in Canada, results highlight how dogs can offer security at a time in life when millennials frequently suffer instability. Millennials referring to mid-to-late twenties. Focusing on Malaysian context, specifically in Putrajaya, a screening of pet ownership data was collected by Debra et al. (2019) the results indicated that almost half (47%) of the households kept animals as their pets. The majority of pets identified were cats (72%), while the next popular pet was fish (14%). The choice of a pet often depends on individual preferences and living conditions,

There is a growing body of research that suggests pet ownership can have an impact on the quality of life, be it negative or positive. Pets can promote physical exercise, lower stress levels, and offer companionship, when adverse effects are identified, they

frequently have to do with zoonotic illnesses rather than interactions between humans and animals (Behraves, 2017). Additionally, they can lessen social isolation and loneliness. Stress reduction is among the most well-known advantages of pet keeping. According to Grimm, spending time with dogs can cause the release of oxytocin, a hormone that improves mood and promotes calmness (Grimm, 2015). Additionally, having a pet may provide a person a sense of accountability and purpose, which is beneficial for those who are feeling lost or alone.

A person's social life can be improved, and social support can be obtained from pets. Reported by (Wood et al., 2017), found that people who own pets report greater social relationships in their community than people who don't. They were consistently more likely to mention social advantages including neighbour trust, friendliness, and helpfulness. This study supports the idea that having a pet is a beneficial aspect of living in a neighbourhood and community. For example, when walking their dogs, dog owners frequently run into other dog owners. Especially for young children, the responsibilities of pet ownership can aid in the teaching of critical life skills like dedication, empathy, and time management. The impact of owning a pet on quality of life can differ greatly based on the person, the kind of pet, and the environment. The effects of pet ownership on a person's life might vary depending on their lifestyle, health, and level of commitment to their animal.

1.2 Problem Statement

Regarding previous studies, there is quite a lack of research in this topic, but the ones that do conduct this study the results are inconsistent. Hence, the impact of pet ownership cannot be recognized. There is substantial individual variability in the perceived impact of pet ownership. Some individuals may derive immense psychological benefits, while others may experience stress or challenges associated

with their pets. Thus, affecting the consistency of the results. A study done by Miyake et al. (2023) claimed that the incidence ratio of depressive symptoms was 1.17 times greater in single people without pets than in people living with others. While a study from Scoresby et al. (2021) reveals mixed or minimal benefits, out of the 13 studies, four (31%) showed inconsistent results, indicating that there was a time when human-animal bonding was linked to improved mental health and a time when it was not. While others find massively favourable effects on people's psychological quality of life. Understanding this variability and its sources is vital, hence a thorough investigation of the contributing variables to these disparities is necessary in light of this contradiction.

When observing the studies done based on the impact of pet ownership on the quality of life, not a lot of them were conducted in the context of Asian culture, especially in Malaysia. The research gaps in a prior study done by Kim et al. (2020) claimed that there was lack of research on pet ownership and attitudes in the context of Korean culture. Most previous studies on pet ownership have been conducted in Western countries, and there is a need for research that takes into account cultural differences and values. For instance, the study conducted by Denis-Robichaud et al. (2022) also placed their attention on Canadian participants during the pandemic in 2021, which is mainly in North America. This can be seen a more inclusive perspective is needed to broaden the outlook on this issue through Asian cultural context.

Moving on, further research is needed to look into the fundamental mechanisms required to create a productive and constructive human-animal bond, especially in regard to the type, frequency, and length of human interaction necessary. More specifically, not enough is known about the significance of giving animals a sense of agency over their interactions with people (Rault et al., 2020). Sense of agency refers to the notion that animals believe they have some degree of control or influence over

how they interact with humans when it comes to animals and human interactions. Thus, this study aims to bring light to the impact of pet ownerships on a person's quality of life.

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 General Objective

This research aims to explore the impacts of pet ownerships on the person's quality of life.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

1. To explore the dynamic of human-animal interaction.
2. To explore the positive effects of having pets.
3. To examine the role of pets as an emotional support to owners.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is the dynamic of the human-animal interaction.
2. What are the positive effects of having pets.
3. How do pets play a role as an emotional support to owners.

1.5 Definition of Terms

1.5.1 Quality of life

Conceptual definition:

According to Teoli and Bhardwaj (2022), Quality of life (QoL) is a concept which aims to capture the well-being, whether of a population or individual, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence at a specific point in time.

Operational definition:

In this research, the Quality of life of pet owners are more focused. Thus, including one's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being; relationships; level of education; workplace; money; feeling of safety and security; freedom; and sense of social belonging.

1.5.2 Pet ownership

Conceptual definition:

According to Collins English Dictionary (2023), pet ownership is the noun for people who own pets.

Operational definition:

To apply it in this research, pet ownership can mean having pets as a companion animal kept for personal use and not intended for sale or study.

1.5.3 Support system

Conceptual definition:

According to Collins English Dictionary (2023). Support system is people who provide support.

Operational definition:

In relevance with this research, pets are usually assumed a support system for certain people.

1.6 Research framework

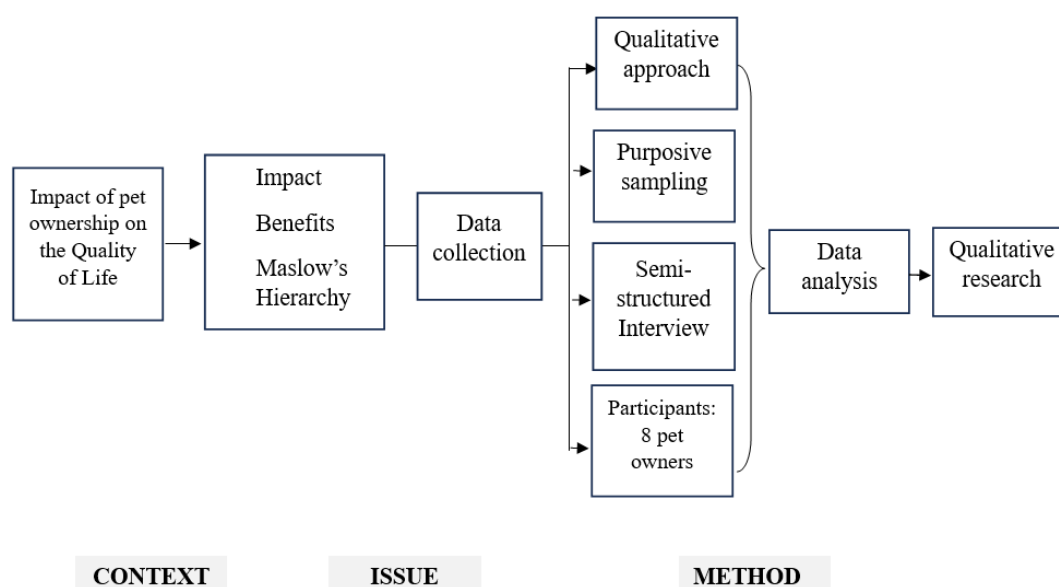


Figure 1 Research framework

1.7 Significance of study

This study seeks to explore the impact of pet ownership in Malaysia. This is due to the limited academic research done in the Malaysian scope, there are a few studies but most of them are surface level. What more when Malaysia offers a wide and rich cultural heritage, encompassing a range of customs and beliefs around animals and pets. Studies can shed light on how these cultural aspects affect people's psychological health and pet ownership. If the public gets to know more about the positive or negative outcomes from having a pet, it might help them gain social support or companionship, including the elderly and those with disabilities, by supporting the development of pet therapy and animal-assisted interventions in healthcare, education, and social services in Malaysia. Other than helping our welfare, raising awareness on this matter may discover the best pet ownership practises in Malaysia, which may vary from those in other nations owing to cultural and environmental circumstances, and therefore contribute to the welfare of pets and animals in Malaysia.

1.8 Limitation of study

The main goal of this research study is to comprehend and investigate the impact of pet ownership on the quality of life. It is important to recognise and keep in mind, though, that this research still has some restrictions. There were limited works of literature on the issue that is focused on cultural Asian context, there were only a few found from Korea and Japan. A lot of the research has been done in western countries. Hence, a more narrowed review in the context of Malaysia culture is needed, as we are also diverse in our ethnicities. Because this study used interviews, biases like the researcher's opinions or the tendency of interviewees to answer in ways they believe are socially acceptable could affect the investigation and data analysis. Next most of the previous research had been done in a quantitative method, where not a lot of detailed explanations behind participants choice of answers can be found.

1.9 Summary

This chapter reviewed the background of the study, providing an overview of the current situation. It outlined the problem statement, research objectives, and research questions. The research framework offered an informative outline of the research process. Finally, the chapter thoroughly examined the significance of the study, its limitations, and the definition of key terms.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research paper's literature review section is to critically evaluate and summarise the body of past academic research on quality of life and pet ownership. The concepts obtained from this literature had been used in generating the conceptual framework and the objectives for this research. This review will offer a thorough overview of the present knowledge landscape by looking at a variety of reliable sources, including academic journals, books, and pertinent research projects.

2.1 History of Pet Ownership

It is commonly known that animals have benefited us since the ancient times, Animal domestication has a millennium-long history and was essential to the evolution of human societies from wars, transportation, economy, food consumption and daily life errands. This process, which was characterised by selective breeding and the establishment of mutually beneficial connections, profoundly altered social structures, economics, and ways of life, influencing the development of agricultural civilizations around the world and the path of human history.

2.1.1 Definition of “animal domestication”

According to Zeder (2006) the definition of animal domestication has a variety of dimensions, from the first perspective, the word "mastery" emphasises how deliberate and purposeful this human involvement is, suggesting that people have a significant influence on how the domestication process is shaped by their proactive planning and foresight. Main point is that humans intentionally influence the lives of plants and animals. This means actively influencing their life cycles, accepting accountability for their welfare, and pursuing certain objectives to satisfy their desires.

While on the second perspective, as stated by Zeder, other researchers reside to objecting the concept of “anthropocentric” which values humankind as the central and most important beings. Certain scholars disagree with the anthropocentric view of domestication, emphasizing that domesticated animals and plants gain advantages from the process. They highlight that domesticates, in turn, enjoy enhanced reproductive fitness and expanded habitats. Researchers adopting an evolutionary biology standpoint argue that the interaction between humans and domesticates is comparable to other mutually beneficial relationships observed in nature. In essence, this perspective suggests that the relationship between humans and domesticated species is akin to the mutually advantageous associations found among different species in the natural world.

The last perspective by Zeder carries a bit more pivotal notion, that the domesticated species take on a more leading role. It presents the idea that domesticates, and humans could have become associated in a relationship that, from an evolutionary perspective, may have actually reduced human fitness or well-being. Essentially it presents an alternative perspective where domesticates also actively participate in the domestication process, modifying the dynamics of the relationship for their own evolutionary success, hence challenging the conventional narrative.

Despite the different definitions brought to light by Zeder (2006) in her later years, Zeder claimed that documenting domestication requires a thorough comprehension of phenotypic, genetic, plastic, and cultural responses. Significantly, the process of domestication is characterised as fluid and nonlinear, devoid of a generally accepted boundary that distinguishes between the wild and the domestic. This complexity suggests that there may be unanticipated detours, reversals, or pauses in the domestication process, underscoring the necessity for a flexible and nuanced viewpoint when examining this complicated phenomenon (Zeder, 2012).

Upon recent studies, Russell (2022) drew attention to whether or not particular wild animals were adopted for herding in central Anatolia, Turkey. It depended on human interactions with them, as did the expansion of herding to other parts of the region. Certain wild animals were thought to have unique spiritual or symbolic meaning in different parts of the world. Even between places, there were regional differences that represented the distinct customs and beliefs of every group. It is interesting that throughout this period, domesticated animals received little attention in terms of symbolic significance. Rather, there appeared to be a greater emphasis on ritualistic interactions with wild animals. This change in focus could have been a reaction to the new agricultural and herding methods, forging a more unique identity.

2.2 Pet ownership

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a pet is defined as an animal (typically one which is domestic or tame) kept for pleasure of companionship” (“Pet, N.² & Adj.,” 2023).

Before owning pets, as mentioned before animals were first domesticated for their usefulness and protection. Animal roles altered as society developed and people's habits shifted. Some animals that were once mostly productive partners started to serve more companionable roles.

Referring to (Frantz et al., 2020), which began with wolves and humans more than 15,000 years ago, signalled a significant turning point in human history where animal domestication shifted to pet ownership. Two methods are used by scientists to investigate this process: first, they use genetic data from both present and ancient animals, and second, they examine the archaeological record, which has information on changes in age profiles, cultural artefacts, and bone morphology. Newly developed

techniques have allowed us to gather genetic data from ancient animals, which has challenged the notion that domestication always included isolated confinement of animals from the wild.

2.3 Effects and Benefits of having pets.

Numerous advantages can be derived from owning a pet, such as enhanced mental and physical well-being, heightened social engagement, and a feeling of purpose and connection (Arkow, 2019). Because they provide company and a sense of routine, pets can also aid in the management of loneliness and melancholy. Furthermore, since many people must walk or play with their pets on a daily basis, pets can promote physical exercise. Claimed by Gujarathi and Chatterjee (2021), due to the patience and love required to care for a pet, pets can also teach children empathy and responsibility. Lastly, having a pet can just make our life happier and more unconditionally loving, which is especially helpful during stressful times.

2.3.1 Emotional Health Companionship; reduced feelings of loneliness

It is an intrinsic part of humans that we seek companionship, building and forming emotional bonds that brings satisfaction to our emotional well-being. Whether through friendship, family connections or romantic partners, they can lead a fulfilling life. Certain pets can provide a sense of comfort and easiness during interaction.

Hence when talking about pets as our companions, Watt and Pachana (2007) highlighted the connection between owning pets and receiving social support is especially significant for older individuals who remain unmarried, have experienced divorce, or have been widowed. This group tends to form strong emotional bonds with their pets and is more likely to anthropomorphize them (to attribute human-like

qualities). A study from Aumer et al. (2022) declared that their participants felt the same way about their human-pet and human-human interactions. However, when it came to negative reactions, people are more likely to respond negatively to other humans than to their pets. Positive attitudes towards pets typically elicit more positive responses from others and reduce negative ones. People's preferences can also be influenced by favourable emotions towards pets. Jiao Lü et al. (2023) studied that when an individual's pet attachment level is higher than 0.444, it indicates that they have a strong emotional bond with their pet, which lessens the detrimental effects of loneliness on their healthy lifestyle choices. This threshold effect is valid for elderly people with varying degrees of social interaction. Therefore, even in the absence of strong social ties, pets not only offer companionship but also help foster healthy habits.

From a different light, we can see that pets somehow fill a void humans lack for in partners or friends. The most prominent times when this can be seen was during the tragic COVID-19 pandemic, a study by Kretzler et al. (2022) claimed that the sense of loneliness can be correlated with owning a pet. Results has shown after the COVID-19 pandemic began, it did help reduce loneliness among older adults, even though this link was not consistently significant before the pandemic. As for kids and younger children, loneliness was reduced even before the pandemic occurred. Another very recent perspective from Brooks and Greenberg (2023) scope review said that previous studies were inconsistent between positive, negative, and null findings on the wellbeing of animal caregivers and their fellow animal companion during COVID-19, but it is evident that pet owners believe their animals have given them love, friendship, and emotional support throughout the pandemic.

2.3.2 Physical health

From a common point of view, having a pet improves physical health by promoting consistent exercise. Regular exercise is encouraged for pet owners by the everyday tasks involved in providing for their pets, such as walking, playing, and catering to their requirements (Christian et al., 2016). Hence, improved muscular strength, cardiovascular health, and general fitness are all benefits of this increased activity.

Although contradicting to this statement, research conducted by Mueller et al. (2021) found that the overall health and body weight does not seem to be greatly impacted by keeping a pet, but owning a dog is associated with higher levels of physical activity. In general, having a pet increases the likelihood of suffering anxiety, particularly for people who do not own dogs or cats. However, owners of dogs and cats are more prone to suffer from depression. Concluded, having a pet has a variety of health effects, some of which are specific to the type of pet and the owner.

Regarding unhealthy habits, a Central European cohort chosen at random, Maugeri et al. (2019) sought to investigate the association between cardiovascular health and pet ownership, specifically with regard to dog ownership. The results show that people who owned pets especially dogs were more likely to report eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly. Furthermore, when compared to individuals who did not own dogs, their blood glucose levels were also more likely to be within the optimal range. Nonetheless, dog owners in particular were more likely to report smoking, which is seen as a bad habit for cardiovascular health. Pet owners had a higher total cardiovascular health score than non-owners, despite the fact that pet owners smoke more frequently. Friedmann et al. (2022) also provided long-term evidence over an average of 7.5 years suggesting that pet ownership can help reduce the physical function

deterioration that frequently occurs with ageing. Compared to elderly persons without pets, those who owned dogs or cats demonstrated less decline in their physical function. The Health ABC Physical Function Battery was one of the measurements utilised in the study to gauge participants' physical health. Recent research indicates that our relationships with our pets may also cause the release of Oxytocin, and that this hormone may be responsible for some of the health advantages associated with owning and interacting with pets (Wells, 2019).

This can be deducted that animal interactions do weigh heavily on the benefits but there are also downsides to it which could be due to situational circumstances.

2.3.3 Mental Health

Pet ownership has various benefits for mental health. Dogs and cats are the most common examples of pets that provide company. By generating bonding chemicals as mentioned in physical health before, interacting with pets like caressing them can reduce stress and anxiety levels. Frequent physical activity, such as playing with a pet or walking a dog, is believed to improve mental health.

According to Martin et al. (2021), a significant proportion of individuals stated that from the COVID-19 pandemic it had a detrimental influence on their lifestyle and mental health. Compared to potential dog owners, dog owners generally revealed lower depression levels and a more positive attitude towards pets. Although the two groups' scores for happiness and anxiety were not affected significantly, the study indicates that having a dog may have some favourable effects on mental health, particularly in terms of reduced depression and a more positive outlook on dogs. But dog owners cannot really represent the whole pet owner's community. Hence from the standpoint of the cat owner's community, a study done by Currin-McCulloch et al. (2021) how people

were affected by keeping cats during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many felt closer to their cats and found comfort in their company when they spent more time with them. Although with extra time spent together, some people experienced relationship problems, yet most people thought these were manageable. Concerns included accessing necessary cat care supplies and worries about the health of cats and owners. Despite these worries, cats provided emotional support just like how dogs can. Overall, the study demonstrated that, in spite of difficulties, owning cats improved people's mental health during the pandemic. There is also another finding in Malaysian context by Grajfoner et al. (2021) that claimed in extremely stressful situations where human contact may not be attainable, pets might improve certain facets of mental health and wellness.

With stands on a very positive outlook for pet ownership, there have also been studies that results to inconsistent findings or very too little of no impact on the mental health for individuals. For instance, Lima et al. (2022) found there was an intricate link between anxiety levels, the kind of living space, and having a dog during the lockdown. When living with a dog, people in rural and semi-urban settings reported less anxiety, but people in urban areas reported more anxiety. Regular dog walking has been associated with somewhat decreased levels of depression in dog owners. On the other hand, feelings of attachment and the perceived costs of dog ownership were linked to higher levels of anxiety and despair. While Shoesmith et al. (2023) after conducting a regression analysis, he claimed there was no obvious connection between the participants' mental health or overall well-being and having a pet or how strongly they felt they bonded with them. This shows that the participants from the UK population's psychological well-being, sadness, anxiety, or loneliness ratings were not statistically significantly affected by having a pet. Another study done for Canadians by Denis-

Robichaud et al. (2022) revealed the COVID-19 pandemic and pet ownership did not have a direct impact on mental health or wellbeing. But there were other variables involved. At first, the data seemed to point to a negative relationship between pet ownership and reduced mental health, stress, anxiety, and loneliness as well as a decreased quality of life. However, these correlations were misleading as they were impacted by a number of additional variables. Put another way, these early connections were the result of multiple factors combining rather than a clear impact of pet ownership on mental health.

2.4 Case study – Prison cats

When "an inmate at the Lima State Hospital in Ohio adopted an injured sparrow," the first animal-assisted rehabilitation programme was unintentionally launched in 1975 Britton and Button cited by McCormack (2016). The officials chose to approve animal therapy programmes after observing a significant behavioural shift in every inmate. The programs started with a focus on just dog, but have now included cats and specific cases, horses.

In 2015, there has been a more increasing step into the cat-therapy from organisations such as Alley Cat Allies where they implemented it into the Bayside State Prison and Southern State Correctional Facility, they make sure to neuter the cats beforehand to avoid overflowing clutter of cats (*Prison Cats*, n.d.). In the same year Pendleton Correctional Facility also commenced the same type of program but called Felines and Offenders Rehabilitation with Affection, Reformation and Dedication (FORWARD). The cats at Pendleton provide prisoners with unfiltered, unbiased affection in exchange of healthcare and a place to call home until being adopted (Erb, 2020).

As for the Bayside State Prison, just like everyone who enters and exits prisons, they needed the right authorization to allow their workers to enter and set up traps. This includes screenings, ID badges, background checks, and instruction on prison rules. To ensure that only permitted supplies enter prison premises, they also collaborated with the management of the prison. Everyone is kept safer when these security procedures are followed. The Bayside State prison Cat Wellness Programme was established by Alley Cat Allies to offer community cats regular, systematic care because it might be difficult for cats held on prison property to make trips to veterinary visits. Each cat has a microchip, yearly checkup with the doctor, and medical history.

The primary goal from programs of Alley Cat Allies and FORWARD was to reduce recidivism which is the relapse of criminal behaviour (National Institute of Justice, 2014). According to Monica Solinas-Saunders, an associate professor at Indiana University whose work focuses on offender rehabilitation and incarceration, these kinds of programmes have significantly reduced recidivism rates and improved the soft skills personal qualities that enable people to get by in their environment of incarcerated individuals. Research on pet programmes in prisons has also revealed enhanced employability and work ethic, along with enhanced emotional intelligence and coping skills. These qualities are crucial for effective re-entry into society and an overall decrease in recidivism. Many of the inmates claimed they found a purpose to get up in the morning, as interacting with the cats is what they look forward to all day. Having companionship in such confined walls helps keep them sane especially when pets like this cannot comprehend the gravity of an individual's crime or the ink on their skin. Providing the unconditional love and a sense of belongingness, quoted by Anthony LaRussa, an inmate from Pendleton facility,

“I feel that we’ve taken enough from the society, so when we’re able to come to a program like this, we’re able to give back, and not just for us, but for the animals too.”

There was also a study conducted by Topbas, Z. S., & Simsek, N. (2022) where they reviewed past studies on animal-assisted prisons. It was observed that the implementation of animal-assisted interventions in correctional facilities had a positive impact on the psychosocial well-being of inmates, assisting them in developing new abilities in self-awareness, managing negative thoughts and stress, expressing themselves, controlling anger and other negative emotions, and handling maladaptive prisoner behaviours like aggression and self-harm. An inmate from Allendale Prison stated,

“I’m helping her get over her abuse and she’s helping me get over mine”.

This shows how rehabilitation with animals have mostly had a positive impact as negative occurrences have yet to happen. In a way, this could be a vision for prisons in Malaysia to improve the public perception of Malaysian prison system.

2.5 Routine and responsibility of pet owners

As many humans tend to our own needs, pets also need catering to. Keep an eye on your pet's general well-being and behaviour and arrange for routine veterinary examinations. Training sessions and interactive toys can provide mental stimulation that helps create a happy and well-mannered pet. Medication administration, encouraging socialisation, and thorough cleaning of toys and bedding are among the weekly or monthly responsibilities. There could also be specialized requests for different type of animals such as chinchillas needing a dust bath or pet frogs that eat live mealworms. They can vary accordingly. Stated by Overgaauw et al. (2020)

responsible pet-ownership, including normal hygienic practices, responsible breeding, feeding, housing, and mental and physical challenges, can help establish routine and responsibility in the human-animal bond.

Due to the sense of security and predictability they offer, pets thrive on set routines and timetables. By creating a predictable, regulated atmosphere, these routines help pets feel less stressed and more stable. According to Pickup et al. (2017) dog activity levels vary by breed, and some may not get the necessary amount of exercise, which could have an adverse effect on the welfare of the dog and the physical activity levels of its owners. Hence following a plan also helps with training, rewarding good behaviour and enhancing the link between the owner and pet. Learn et al. (2020) says that there is a correlation between the degree of training and the thoroughness of housetraining; large dogs are more likely to be house-trained than tiny dogs. In the end, a consistent schedule improves the well-being for pets by making sure they get the care, attention, and stimulation required for a happy and healthy life. Because stated by Naughton et al. (2021) numerous cat and dog owners in Northern Ireland lack awareness of their pets' nutritional needs and fail to provide adequate physical activity, which is essential for the health and welfare of their animals.

But medically, a lot of attention is needed when the lives of humans and animals intertwine, what more when living in the same household. Our biology is different than theirs. Maintaining proper grooming is a crucial element of basic hygiene care for the majority of companion animals. McDonald et al. (2022) suggested demonstrations on nail-trimming substantially boost pet owners' confidence in managing this aspect of care, ultimately enhancing the health and welfare of their pets. That neglecting routine grooming can pose notable risks to the health and well-being of animals. Also, neutering common neighbourhood pets like dogs and animals is a responsibility that

must be taken for the community, but Hart et al. (2020) argued dogs after neutering generally do not raise the risk of joint diseases or cancers; however, small-dog breeds may be more susceptible to cancer. Neutering age requirements differ depending on the breed and sex.

Hence recognizing the shared evolutionary ties between humans and animals, and acknowledging the uniqueness of each species, including humans, can foster empathy. This emotional connection may, in turn, facilitate better care and conservation efforts for animals. Understanding that all species have distinct qualities encourages a more compassionate approach to their well-being and preservation. Mentioned by Arruda et al. (2022) owners of dogs and cats in Rio de Janeiro exhibit comparable socioeconomic characteristics and pet care practices, including sanitation routines. Increased pet caretaking responsibilities during COVID-19 have been linked to more stress-relieving time spent with pets and enhanced family relationships for both pet and dog owners (Charmaraman et al., 2022).

The scope of pet routines is generally studied more on dog and cats other than different animals even in recent studies.

2.6 Quality of Life

From a general and common perception, the term "quality of life" (QoL) describes a person's general state of happiness and contentment. It includes everything that affects a person's overall happiness and life satisfaction, such as their physical health, mental and emotional well-being, social relationships, financial security, and personal fulfilment (Irtelli & Durbano, 2020). Because it is subjective, each person's definition of quality of life will differ according to their circumstances, values, and aspirations. It is often used as a broad measure to assess and understand the overall life

satisfaction and happiness of individuals or communities. The environment, social interactions, personal fulfilment, health, and economic standing are all factors that affect one's quality of life.

While the definition of QoL is often interchanged with psychological well-being (PWB), according to Machado and Bandeira (2012), PWB is a concept with characteristics like self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, life purpose, and personal progress that is founded on psychology theory regarding positive or optimal functioning. As for QoL, officially stated by World Health Organization (2012), “individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns.”

Referring to Owczarek (2010) after World War II, the term QOL was first used in the US. It was formerly restricted to having or not having conventional consumer goods, and it represented "the good life." Affluence was equated with having a car, a home of one's own, and other possessions. That category was "have"-only. The idea progressively expanded and took on new dimensions, including the implementation of changing one's surroundings and fulfilling one's goals in order to handle it more effectively. Stated differently, the idea of QOL shifted over time from "have" to "be". But now in the current times, QoL has been characterized by R. K. and Kumari (2020)

into a structured concept called the category of 3B's which can be seen in the figure below (Figure 2.)

Domains	Sub domains	Meaning	Aspects
BEING	Physical being	Basic things of "Who one is"	Physical health Personal hygiene Nutrition, Exercise Grooming, Clothing Exercising
	Psychological being	Person's psychological health and adjustment	Cognition Feelings Evaluations Concerning the self and self-control
	Spiritual being	Reflects personal standards	Personal values Standards of conduct Spiritual belief
BELONGING	Physical belonging	Connecting the persons with his/her physical environment	Home Workplace Neighborhood Schools and community
	Social belonging	Mingling with social environment	Sense of acceptance with other family friends, coworkers, neighborhood and community
	Community belonging	Access of obtainable resources to community members	Adequate income, health and social services Employment Educational and Recreational programs Community activities
BECOMING	Practical becoming	Day-to-day actions	Domestic activities Paid work Volunteer activities Health needs
	Leisure becoming	Promote relaxation and stress reduction	Games Neighborhood walk Family visit, Tourism
	Growth becoming	Promoting knowledge and skills	Accomplishing/achieving goal and need

Figure 2 Conceptual framework of 3B's Quality of Life

Every person should have the opportunity to maintain bodily, psychological, social, and spiritual health in order to raise their standards of living and quality of life. A person's quality of life must be balanced because it is a multifaceted and subjective assessment of health. If we were to apply the categories towards this study, 'belonging' would very much correlate with pet ownership, in the sense that physical belonging could be the presence and company of their pets, social belonging could be the social interaction from pet owner to another and lastly community belonging could be from

online communities that have similar pets or business and services that cater the pet needs. A different brief conception of QoL from Teoli and Bhardwaj (2022), where they divide QoL into four major domains; economics, culture, politics, and ecology. But not much could be analysed since the access to this book reached limitations.

Although regarding direct correlation between pet ownership and quality of life, a study has been conducted by Scoresby et al. (2021) where they analysed previous research that explored the connection between mental health and pet ownership. While prior reviews had mixed results, Scoresby utilized the same methodology, compared to Islam and Towell (2013), they included a broader range of studies (54 in total) compared to their 11 Brooks et al. (2018) that focused on individuals with diagnosed mental health conditions, finding 17 studies, Hence, Scoresby's study encompassed a larger and more diverse body of research.

Results aligned with earlier reviews, indicating varied outcomes—positive, negative, mixed, or negligible. Unlike previous studies, Scoresby distinguished between those comparing pet owners to non-pet owners and those examining the level of attachment to a pet as a predictor of mental health. Despite this, there was no consistent evidence supporting the idea that pet ownership positively contributes to quality of life.

Islam and Towell argued for a standardized definition of pet ownership across studies, including factors like length of ownership, time spent with the animal, and the perceived quality of interaction. However, even within these categories, outcomes varied, indicating a lack of consensus. This lack of agreement is not unexpected, as positive aspects of pet ownership are often emphasized in popular media, while

negative findings may go unpublished, contributing to the overall inconclusiveness in the literature.

2.6.1 Theoretical Context

Based on Hierarchy of Needs Theory from Abraham Maslow in 1962, it has been revisited by Ventegodt, Merrick and Anderson in 2003. Maslow developed a developmental theory that emphasises meeting basic human needs in order to achieve pleasure and self-realization. He described his method as an existential psychology that emphasises personal development and self-actualization.

By accepting more accountability for our lives, we can make better use of our good traits, which boosts our happiness, power, freedom, and well-being. Maslow's theory of self-actualization may have a big impact on contemporary medicine. Numerous chronic illnesses continue to exist, in spite of sophisticated biological therapies, suggesting that real improvement may stem from embracing and living the noble path of personal development. Hence, he mapped a solution for this conflict of personal development to achieve maximum quality of life. Maslow structured a sequential set of needs, with each succeeding need becoming apparent as you fulfil the preceding one. This created a kind of ascending progression, often visualized as a pyramid in his well-known hierarchy of needs. (See Figure 3.)

The pyramid consists of 8 level of needs, having to pass each and leading up to the final stage where one surpasses self-actualization and achieves transcendence. According to the Cambridge dictionary, transcendence means “to experience that goes past normal limits, or the ability to achieve this”.

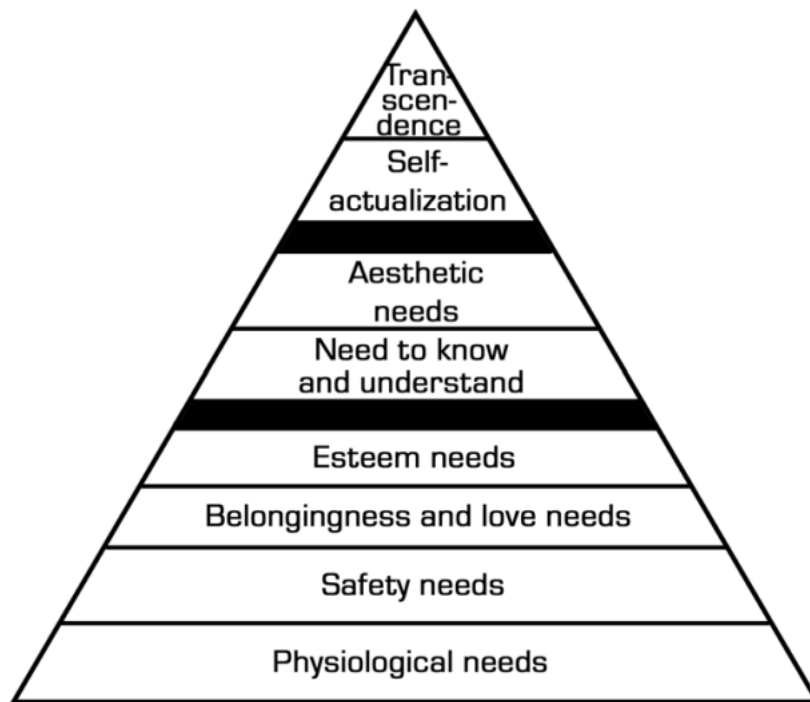


Figure 3 Maslow's revisited hierarchy of needs

The hierarchy of needs (revisited)

The lower level of hierarchy starts with more basic needs:

- The physiological needs, for example: air, food, and water.
- The safety needs, for examples: security and finance.
- Social and belonging needs, for example: family, friendship, and intimacy.
- Esteem needs, for example: self-confidence and respect from others.

The following levels lean to more advanced needs:

- Cognitive needs, for example: pursuit of knowledge and understanding.
- Creativity and aesthetic needs, for example: pursuit of beauty and creativity.

The final level pursues much more metaphysical needs:

- The need for self-actualization, for example: achieving individual potential.
- Transcendence, for example: to become a useful and integrated component of the global society.

Physiological needs

Essential for human survival and well-being are basic necessities. These consist of necessities such as food, drink, shelter, air, and sleep. Both breathing and staying hydrated are necessary for many body processes. The body gets the nutrition and energy it needs from a balanced diet. Shelter offers safety and a secure area to rest. Sleep is essential for healing the body, preserving memories, and reviving the energy system. Although Rao et al. (2022) suggested that wireless internet has evolved into a basic necessity, much like clothing, food, and shelter. Higher-level objectives and motives are not given top priority until these fundamental wants are satisfied, in accordance with Maslow's hierarchy of requirements. In essence, attending to these fundamental requirements serves as the foundation for addressing more intricate psychological and social demands.

Safety needs

After their physiological demands are fairly satisfied, people look for reassurance in a variety of ways to lessen risks and uncertainties. This encompasses the need for a stable and secure environment as well as the need for physical safety, such as protection from harm and danger. Gaining psychological security is critical to a

person's wellbeing because it enables them to protect themselves against risks that could jeopardise their emotional and mental stability Victoriia Overchuk et al. (2022). Essentially, meeting safety requirements lays the groundwork for people to boldly pursue higher-level needs like self-actualization, social connectedness, and self-esteem.

Belongingness and self-esteem needs

Belongingness needs are about wanting connections and acceptance from others, like family and friends. We naturally look for meaningful partnerships as soon as we feel protected, and our basic requirements are satisfied. The next stage, esteem needs, is being positive about us and getting approval from others. This involves being respectful of or appreciative of others and feeling confident in our talents. Satisfying these requirements contributes to the development of self-worth and a positive self-image. As we meet these wants for esteem and belonging, we go closer to reaching our full potential and growing as individuals. They serve as stepping stones on the path to become our best selves.

Cognitive needs and aesthetic needs

According to Maslow's hierarchy of requirements, cognitive needs are related to people's demands for information, comprehension, and mental stimulation. Our innate need to understand, investigate, and make sense of the world around us arises when our basic needs are satisfied. On the other side, creative aesthetic demands entail appreciating creativity, beauty, and the arts. This involves the need for encounters that bring excitement, inspiration, and wonder. Our curiosity and desire for information are satisfied when our cognitive requirements are met, and our lives are enhanced by the addition of beauty and inspiration when our creative aesthetic needs are met.

Self-actualization and transcendence

At the summit of Maslow's hierarchy of wants, self-actualization signifies the ultimate state of human growth. It represents reaching one's greatest potential, pursuing personal development, and realising one's unique gifts and capabilities. Posited by Tekke (2019) going beyond Maslow's self-actualization is the idea of self-transcendence, promotes independence, self-actualization, identity attainment, and healthy social connections. Self-transcendence emphasises a wider, more communal aspect of human fulfilment through deeds of kindness, compassion, and a sense of connectedness to something more than oneself.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods applied when conducting the research. This chapter is divided into the first few sections which were design of study, participants, and sampling procedure. The next section is data collection. As for the last section, ethics of study and data analysis procedure.

3.1 Design of study

The method used is qualitative study. This type of study has been chosen as the research design because it emphasizes the subjective nature of human experiences, thoughts, and behaviours. Focuses on understanding the context and perspectives of the participants. This design aligns with the objective of this research, where not only to explore the impact of pet ownership on the person's quality of life, but also to explore the dynamic of human-animal interaction, positive effects of owning pets and how pets play a role in emotional support to their owners. According to Rahman (2016) Qualitative research in psychiatry, usually focuses on "thick" descriptions of participants' thoughts, feelings, and experiences and deciphers the meanings behind their behaviours. Hence, it offers valuable insights into client experiences and physician relationships, enhancing service delivery and enhancing mental health policy implementation (Başer & Akdemir, 2019). Especially since this research centralizes on the quality life among pet ownerships. Hence qualitative study helps enable the researcher to explore research objectives in a scientific way. The reason I chose qualitative approach for my study is so that I could gain contextual understanding and allows me to explore the social, cultural and personal context that influences between individuals and their pets.

3.2 Participants

There were three main inclusion criteria that must be taken into consideration when selecting the participants as listen in the following Table 1. However, the involvement of participants is totally voluntary, and no incentives will be offered.

Table 1

Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria in Selecting Participants

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Pet owners	Non-pet owners
Malaysian citizen	Non-Malaysian citizen
Age 18 and above	Age below 18

This research primarily focuses on individuals who own pets and live in Malaysia, as the researcher is focusing more on Malaysian context. Participants aged 18 and above are listed as the inclusion criteria because they are generally considered capable of understanding the research and its implications. For participants below 18 years old, additional ethical considerations must come into play referring to the institutional review boards (IRBs) or ethics committees.

Purposive sampling would be applied in this research. A purposive sample is a non-probability sample but can be known as judgemental, selective, or subjective sampling (Crossman, 2020). Researcher deliberately choose participants according to predetermined traits or standards that support their research objectives. Purposive sampling is centred on choosing participants who are especially relevant to the study, as opposed to random sampling, which provides an equal chance for every member of the population to be included. The criteria listed above is going to be used to choose

participants, and those who meet the researcher's requirements for the participant's profile will be chosen.

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 In-depth Interviews

The first instrument that will be applied in this research is semi-structured interview protocol. The researcher will use a set of predetermined open-ended questions but has the flexibility to explore topics in more depth based on the participant's responses. It will be utilized to collect the required information based on the research objectives from the participants. In order to align with the researcher's objectives and study questions, interview techniques would be revised. Together with the researcher's supervisor, the interview protocol would be reviewed to make sure all of its contents align with the study's objectives. The researcher would use the interview protocol's questions as a guide to make sure the interview session was within the parameters of the study. Thus, the researcher still has the freedom and flexibility to paraphrase the questions to the participants understanding. Each session will take approximately about one hour the shortest or two hours the longest. The interview protocol will include four essential parts that starts off with the introduction of participants, followed by clarification of the bond with their pets, the benefits of having them around, and how they act as an emotional support system to them.

Other than semi-structured interview protocol, the researcher will be using the Microsoft Teams app to set up meetings that does not allow face-to-face get-together. The researcher would be using the built-in recording feature in the process of data collection. This is to guarantee that throughout the interview, no relevant facts or data will be overlooked. Even several days after the interview, the researcher is still able to

listen back to the discussion. As a result, it serves as a useful tool that facilitates the transcript process and lowers the possibility of making important mistakes.

3.3.2 Recruitment Process

Data collection will start with reaching out through online Malaysian social pet groups or acquaintances that meets the inclusion criteria and move forward with getting their consent to take part in the study. The researcher would arrange their time and availability, depending on whether the participants preferred in-person or online interviews. To make sure the participants understand their engagement, the researcher will give them a brief explanation of the specifics and objective of the study before the interview began. When the participants are ready, the interview may start, and it may last between one and two hours for each. The researcher will be using a semi-structured interview technique as a guide during the interview, and the Microsoft Teams app's record feature allowed for obtaining of audio recordings.

3.5 Ethics of study

3.5.1 Participant Information Sheet

The participant will be given a different form, known as the participant information sheet. This form would include the researcher's details, a clear statement of the study's goal, and an estimated interview duration. This will help the participants to comprehend better the research they will be collaborating on

3.5.3 Informed Consent Form

This form will be used to request participants for their agreement to participate in the research. The form made it very apparent that the researcher will be maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participant's identity and data. The participants'

information will only be used for academic purposes. Participation was totally voluntary, and participants are able to withdraw at any stage.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

A qualitative research technique called thematic analysis is used to find, examine, and present patterns or themes in a dataset, which could include textual data, interview transcripts, or other qualitative data. It involves methodically arranging and analysing the information to find frequent themes or meaningful patterns. According to Lochmiller (2021), an innovative approach for conducting qualitative research is thematic analysis, which makes use of structured qualitative data from in-depth interviews to find patterns and produce themes created by the researcher.

Based on Braun & Clarke (2006), the framework for thematic analysis consists of a six-phase guide, shown in Figure 4:



Figure 4 Steps in Conducting Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Step 1: Familiarize with the data.

Rereading the transcripts will be the first thing to do. Before moving on, the researcher then has a thorough understanding of the data gathered by going over all of the transcripts again. At this point, the researcher will take notes and record initial observations. The researcher has to translate some of the data into English for the write-up because the interviews may be done casually with preference to the Malay or English language from the participants.

Step 2: Generate initial code.

The data then will be organised in a coherent and systematic manner. A large amount of data would be coded into small chunks of meaning. Every piece of data that was pertinent to the study issue is then coded. The data will be tabulated by the researcher into two distinct columns: emergent theme titles on the right column and free textual analysis on the left.

Step 3: Search for themes.

A theme is a pattern that highlights an important or intriguing aspect of the study questions and/or data. The importance of a theme defines it. As a result, the researcher will look over the codes, and the data that has similarities will be combined to form a theme. The codes will then be arranged into more general themes that provide detailed explanations for these research topics at the conclusion of this process.

Step 4: Review themes.

The initial themes that were determined in Step 3 will be examined, altered, and expanded upon by the researcher. After reading the information related to each theme, the researcher would evaluate the data's credibility. A number of factors would be taken

into account, including the themes' relevance to the study and their ability to function within the framework of the complete data set.

Step 5: Define themes.

The final improvement of the theme, it is critical that the researcher must have a firm understanding of your themes' distinctions by the end of this stage. One test for this is to see whether the researcher can describe the scope and content of each theme in an a few of sentences. If the researcher is unable to accomplish this, that theme may require further refinement (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.25).

Step 6: Write-up

The last step is the write-up of the report. It will start when the researcher has a set of defined themes. The objective of the thematic analysis write-up was to narrate the intricate narrative of the data in a manner that persuades the reader about the quality and validity of the analysis. The write-up needs to be more than just deliver data. The researcher can incorporate extracts into a compelling narrative that vividly portrays the data story. The narrative should not just describe the data but also go beyond, making a persuasive argument related to the research question.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter covers the research participants' demographic data as well as the conclusions drawn from semi-structured interviews. To preserve participant anonymity, the names that are displayed are pseudonyms that do not accurately represent the individuals' true identities.

4.1 Demographic Information

Table 2

Demographic Information of Participants

Participant name	Age	Current status	Residential location	Type of pets	How long they've owned the pets
Nami	22	Undergraduate	Terengganu	Turtles and cats	8 years
Mr. A	40	Retired	Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan	Cats	9 years
Amy	22	Undergraduate	Selangor	Guinea pigs	4 years
Gigi	22	Intern	Sabah	Bearded dragons, Axolotls, Tortoise, Arowana fish	3-5 years

Syabeel	23	Undergraduate	Kelantan	Goats and cats	7 years
Iman	22	Undergraduate	Kelantan	Fish	6 months
Dilan	18	Part time jobs	Kajang, Selangor	Snake and Blue-tongued skink	2 years
Ariz	22	Undergraduate	Selangor	Sugar glider and hedgehog	2 years

As shown in Table 2 above a total of 8 pet owners took part in this research as participants. All participants are from different parts of Malaysia, there is Iman which is currently studying in Russia but his pets were in Malaysia and also with him in Russia. The ages of all participants mostly were around the more or less the same age, the oldest was Mr. A or youngest being Dilan. Every participant has different experiences of owning pets and most of them since they were young, their childhood pets were mostly cats. Referring to their current status, almost all of them are undergraduates except Mr. A and Dilan in-between jobs. The pets they owned varies greatly from furry friends to exotic animals, the most common of cats up to different breeds of Chelonia (turtles and tortoises) and Squamata (lizards and snakes).

4.2 Results and Findings

Three main themes emerged from the data, which are the dynamic of pets and their owners, the positive/ negative effects of having pets, and how they are as an emotional support system to their owners.

Table 3

Structure Overview of Three Main Themes and Subthemes

	Main Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1	Dynamic interaction of pets and their owners	Minimal recognition
		Verbal interaction
		Physical touch
Theme 2	Effects	Positive
		Dull
Theme 3	Pets as emotional support system	Co-exist/ companionship
		Calming effect

A total of three master themes and seven sub themes emerged from the analysis of data. Table 3 demonstrated structural overview of the three main themes and the subthemes for this research.

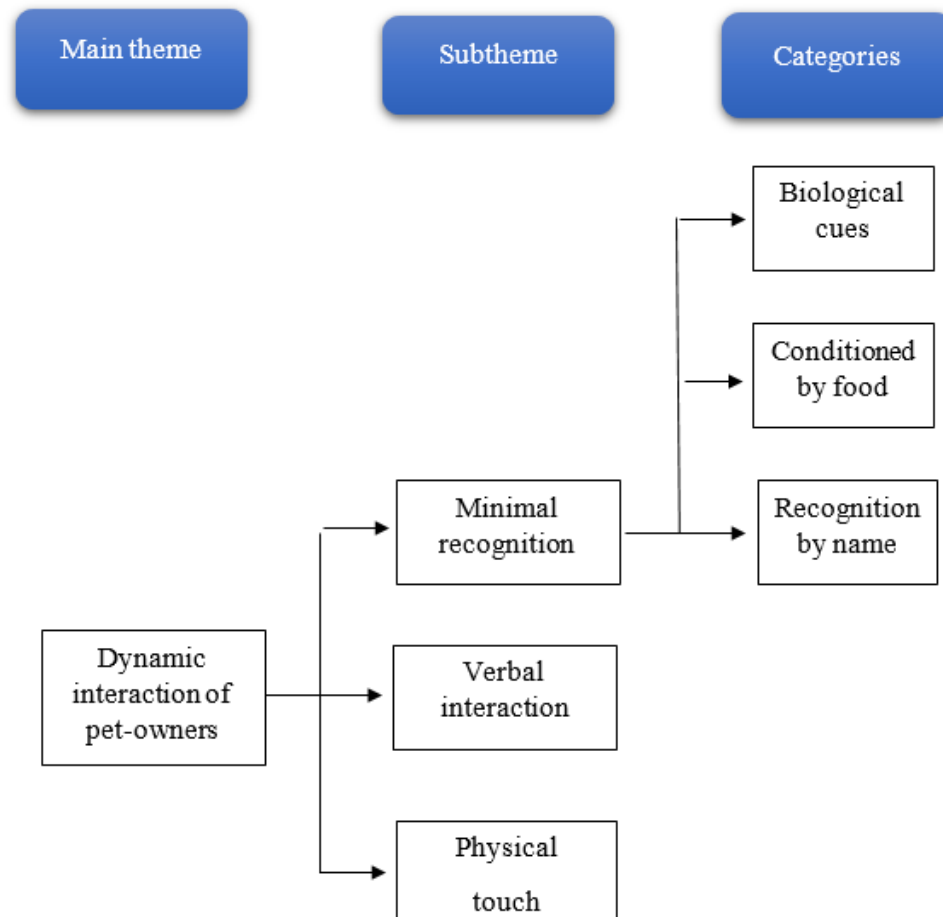
The first theme discusses the dynamic interaction of pets and their owners which extracted into subthemes of how pets recognize their owners, verbal interaction with one another and engagement of physical touch with their pets. Next is the effects of owning pets whether positive outcomes outweigh dull outcomes. Lastly, how their pets act as their emotional support system further divided in to two subthemes companionship and calming effect.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Dynamic Interaction of Pets and Their Owners

Analysis of data revealed that dynamic interaction between the pets and their owner minimal recognition, verbal interaction and physical touch. Minimal recognition

is then divided into three categories biological cues, conditioned by food and by name calling. The dynamic interaction of pets and their owners are summarized in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Dynamic interaction of pets and their owners.



i. Minimal recognition

Throughout the interview, the researcher recognized that dynamics of the owners vary from the most basic routine interaction up to hands-on engagement with their pets. This research provides an in-depth understanding on exploring the intricate connections between human and animal.

a. Biological cues

The analysis of face-to face interviews found that most of the participants understood their pet's well-being through biological cues expressed from their pets.

Especially when it came to exotic pets, that exhibit the least the expressions. Dilan and Didi mentioned that their pets are barely vocal but they often communicate through other means such as body language, scent marking, or visual displays.

“Didi doesn’t really talk but Mel, if we open Mel’s (snake) cage and she makes a hissing sound that could only mean 3 things, first is she is uncomfortable, second if we are touching her that means she doesn’t want to be touched. The other is she must be hungry” (Dilan)

“So, there are main cues when they’re hungry, when the environment is not right and also when they’re not happy..... I can see when my axolotls are unhealthy their gills like frills are shorter than before, it sort of grows down” (Gigi)

Dilan and Gigi interpreted their pets needs through observation since their pets do not communicate like most mammals do. Dilan and Gigi demonstrate a keen understanding of their pets' needs by closely observing their behaviour, body language, and physical cues. For example, Dilan recognizes that his snake, Mel, communicates discomfort or hunger through specific hissing sounds, while Gigi monitors the health of her axolotls by observing changes in their gills. The excerpt underscores the responsibility of pet owners for providing a suitable environment and care for their exotic pets, who may be fully reliant on them due to being outside their natural habitat. Other than exotic pets, Ariz who owns a hedgehog (mammal) also understand his pets through cues like these.

“Like cats they like to pee right? They’re marking their territory lah. But it’s only a little bit, you barely can see it. Sometimes the fluffy carpets, Bob (hedgehog) likes to produce foamy saliva there, later when we touch the carpet its wet but there’s no smell” (Ariz)

Ariz’s pet Bob also does territorial markings like cats when it comes to expressive cues.

b. Recognition conditioned with food

As the pets fully rely on the owners to provide them their food and nutrients, some pet-owner dynamics only raise to the level of recognizing their owners at most when holding their food. Which they are conditioned to familiarize the faces with food that makes them happy. For example,

“They won’t come if I’m not holding their food. If I’m holding it, yes, only then they come to me.” (Ariz)

“So yeah, whenever he goes out to feed them and they hear the crackle of like the food container, they would be like screaming like squeaking all the time, you know, and then climbing over the edge to like you know, urge him to go faster and stuff.... They definitely understand when I give them food” (Amy)

“But every time I come near to the tank, they always macam come near me. Like they approach me. I don't know lah if they're like “oh she's gonna feed me” But I feel like my pet recognizes me macam tu lah. I think mostly my axolotls, but for my bearded dragons tu. I think they have more of primal instincts. They only like food.” (Gigi)

Ariz, Amy and Gigi’s pets associate their owners with food, when the sound of the container or seeing the food, itself makes them stimulated to squeak or come towards them.

c. Recognition by name

This level of dynamic is a step further than before because it shows emotional development has occurred for the connection of pet-owners. Unlike humans, animals don’t learn as quick as us, but the participants who owns cats or mammals have a higher tendency to recognize and respond to their names compared to pet owners of reptiles.

“When I call specifically one (cats), the one with the name that I called will answer me. So, I know that they know their names.... they have a specific sound when I call them with their names. So that’s how why they know their names because of that specific sound for each of them” (Mr. A)

“So Didi (Blue-tongued skink) and Mel (Snake) don’t hear like how we normally hear, if we call them out, they can’t hear us. They listen through vibrations, if Mel

she can listen to sounds of footsteps or animals running but if we clap hands, she can't hear us" (Dilan)

Somehow through the one-on-one interviews, participants who practice name-calling have a higher tendency to be emotionally connected with their pets, there are even owners who do not even name their pets, for example instead Iman calls his pets "fish" or Syabeel call his pets "goat". They do not find the practicality of naming their pets but instead are more attached through innate interest of animals through personal or functional interest.

ii. Verbal Interaction

Another category of engagement that shapes the dynamic of pet-owner relationship is vocal interaction. Through talking, chatting, and verbal sounds towards the pets, it evokes emotional connection with one another. Most of the participants acknowledge verbal interaction or mimicking their pets' sounds, but only a few says that their pets understand them, others would be just playful banter when talking with their pets. For example, Nami claims she rants to her turtles despite them not understanding her.

"Not as much as the cats but I have done it during PKP times as well, that time there was only the turtles. They were stacked on top of each other and I was fuming, usually I rant to them only when I'm really mad because even the turtles are like really wild, so it would look like they're agreeing with me" (Nami)

"So sometimes I would you know like to entertain them. I would make that sound (squeaks) too. At first it sounds awkward as hell but when you get used to it, it's actually pretty cute" (Amy)

"I do chat with them (sugarglider and hedgehog) but they don't respond. I think they don't understand me, just chatting for fun" (Ariz)

Nami, Ariz and Amy show that they talk or mimic to entertain their pets but emotional reciprocity is undetermined since animals do not hold cognitive abilities in understanding emotions but they do associate sounds and vowels to situations.

“When they have a long call that means something is not right, I mean a lot of times with the vowels, something like that” (Mr.A)

iii. Physical touch

Physical contact and affection are a form of higher level of interaction, this is when an animal trusts the owners enough to indicate their comfort or preferences. As commonly known, mammals like cats and dogs are very expressive in physical touch while exotic animals are the least.

“For me I really like them leaning against me. I like when cats are affectionate to me because I become ‘geram’, even if the goats lean on me affectionately. That’s why I love them” (Syabeel)

Despite Syabeel not even naming his pet goats but the physical affection truly bonds him and his pets. Another example is Amy when asked what was the most meaningful experience of her and her guinea pigs...

“When I managed to pick them up for the first time, you know because before that Zhong Li would run away... they would immediately think you’re a predator wanting to eat them.... So, like, you have to condition them telling them that it’s okay to be in my hands... So once they start to open up to you, you just feel like oh, you’ve accomplished something” (Amy)

“Just make sure that every morning I’ll cuddle just to make sure that we are attached with them, just to make sure that the bonding is there.” (Mr.A)

Amy chose out of all her experience with her Guinea pigs, the first form of physical touch that occurred was the dearest to her heart making her feel like she had developed an emotional connection. As for Mr. A, he described the interdependence he felt from his cuddling his cats in his daily routine.

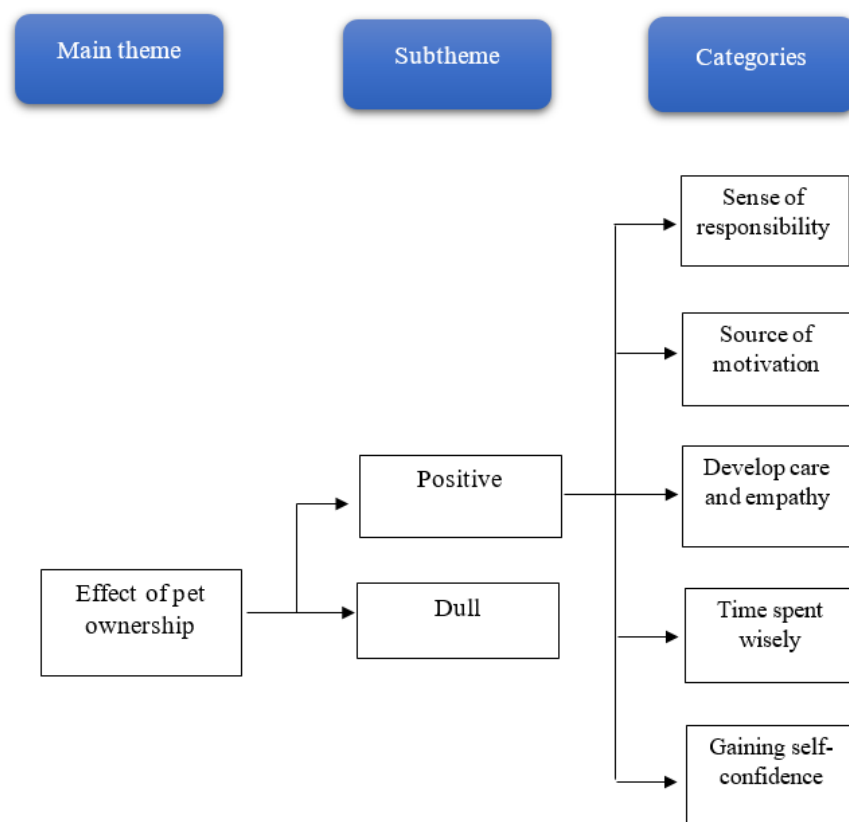
“I used to have one big fish and I could pet him because he was big. It’s like this big, 40cm. It’s Toman in Malay. Ikan Toman. So, the first-time pet him was, it was nice because you don’t usually pet fish. Yeah, I guess it’s meaningful in a way.” (Iman)

Another clear example is Iman when asked the most meaningful experience too, he mentioned touching his pet fish Toman who used to be in his care compared to the ones now since they're small. Hence in a way, further engagement such as this advances the dynamic of pet-owners.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Effect of pet ownership

According to the analysis, effects of pet ownership were divided into two subthemes, positive and dull. Positive were then further extracted into five categories sense of responsibility, source of motivation and develop care and empathy, time spent wisely and gaining self-confidence. Effects of pet ownership were summarized in figure 6.

Figure 6. Effects of pet ownership



i. Positive effects

Across the participants, almost all positive claims outweighed any negative claims. The following categories were the most dominant among any other advantages brought up by the participants.

a. Sense of Responsibility

Many of the participants posit that after having owned pets for a while their sense of responsibility increases. Considering that their age is around 18-22 years old, a common student's age. As young adults they are emerging from under their parents' care into the real world, hence commitments and responsibilities are becoming familiar.

"Since I was small, I think it developed me to be more confident and responsible lah. Another reason maybe because I am the oldest so I have to take care of my younger siblings and at the same time taking care of pets. Even though at times I don't even know how to take care of them. But we try because it is our responsibility for the animal..." (Ariz)

Owning pets since Ariz was young has exposed himself to holding a minor responsibility so that he can train himself for bigger obligations in the upcoming future, as of now a medical student adding on to being responsible as the eldest son.

"And I know cats are really cute and so on but then we are the ones that had to do the litter, give it food and vacuuming. It's not our sister.... because my mother did say that having cats is your own responsibility. But it's kind of weird she said it to us not our sister" (Nami)

Another relatable example as Nami is the eldest child, she had to shoulder the responsibilities of her younger sister's cats even though it was not her who wanted the cats.

"But owning pets ni, we have to wake up in the morning and give them food and all, cats we shower them, in the evening too. So, our time is used wisely, and we manage our time well, morning evening and if the goat has a kid, then afternoon too." (Syabeel)

“We learn to be a more responsible person.... But at times I have to do it even though I feel lazy but we’re the ones who want to keep them” (Dilan)

Syabeel mentions that having a structural routine helps him manage his time well, working around the needs of his goats and cats while Dilan notes that he becomes more responsible when it comes to having to clean his snake’s and skink’s cages, he instils discipline within himself despite feeling lazy. Overall, owning pets helps these young adults develop responsibility and discipline through the chores of routines for pet handling.

b. Source of Motivation

A few of the participants mentioned how their pets were their source of motivation when it comes to getting things done. First example is Nami;

“I really miss them because yeah, right now they are like one of the main reason why I’m still doing this actually (degree).”

“Like they like to rub their body on our hands. It’s one of the things I look forward to each day and each time I bagi dia makan.”

She confirms that her pets are what fires her passion when it comes to her degree, as she is majoring in Aquatic Resource Science and Management and one of the daily routines of cuddles and belly rubs remains one of her biggest motivations when getting through the day. Another participant, Gigi;

“On bad days, like you’re tired from work and you will get a little demotivated to do all of those things But I would say that it keeps you from going to a dark place. How would I say, macam you imagine you macam dah jadi mak orang. You have that responsibility. So, whether you like it or not, you have to do it macam tu. It gives you a sort of motivation”

“Enhance my daily life? I would say it gives you motivation to actually wake up when you are lazy. I do it for them and I do it for myself too. Two-way street lah. In my opinion having a pet train your accountability....”

Gigi associates her source of motivation as being responsible and taking accountability when having pets under her care. They also are one of the factors that gets her up in the morning, which must have to do with their feeding and grooming sessions.

c. Develop care and empathy

Another relatable virtue that has been picked up by most participants is that they developed extra care and empathy regarding animals and the people around them. Possibly by caring for another being, heightens their motherly senses.

“Another thing is they make us feel love, because they’re a living being” (Dilan)

“Sometimes we see them milking their babies and it’s like “aww don’t be mad” because we interrupt them when they’re feeding but we’re just trying to help them and seeing that bond kind of melts my heart” (Nami)

Nami highlights how she felt touched seeing the mother cat milking her babies, despite them not liking the idea of being interrupted. The cat evokes an emotional sense of security towards Nami; hence she empathizes by trying to help the milking process.

“I kind of understand you know, the relationship that other pet owners have with their pets, but I get why they would want to have pets in their lives. It feels nice.” (Amy)

“Positive changes that make me look on the positive things rather than all the negative things, one thing I really find out that I cannot look anymore if any cat being chased around or being treated badly. It makes me feel so bad and sometimes I cry for that” (Mr. A)

“We become more empathetic with animals, I feel pity for my cats when they fall sick, kesian lah. They meow pun like “eh I thought I gave you food just now and already meow for more?” so I end up giving more. We end up spoiling them” (Syabeel)

Here Mr. A empathizes with cats that do not have the same luck like the ones under his care, he feels for them as for Syabeel, he sympathizes when his cats fall ill especially

when they ‘meow’ for more food, he gives in most of the time which shows his perspective of care.

d. Time spent wisely

Other than that, some mentioned that when caring for their pets they do not waste their time spent on unnecessary activities.

“If I had no pets? It’d be boring. There’s nothing to do. I bet everybody would just be in the house, my father too. My mom can’t stand when my father is mindlessly doing nothing. My father needs to do work, get him busy because he has illnesses, obesity. He also used to have diabetes, heart problems, high blood pressure, the big 3. So he can’t rest a lot, have to get him moving. If he stayed in, he would just sleep, if not we would ask him to mow the lawn, feed the goats, or plant in the gardens. So, it’s worth it lah, having pets is like your time is not wasted just like that” (Syabeel)

To Syabeel, having his goats with him help his family stay healthy by spending time wisely in caring for their needs. Especially his father being unwell, looking after the goats are a major distraction for his father from succumbing to slumber, and gets him moving.

“For example, I can spend time with my pets instead of just studying.....because at home we’re not really with our friends, we can’t be playing on our phone all the time. Another alternative is to play with our pets” (Ariz)

Since Ariz is a medical student, his work is very fast-paced and hospital stays are a norm. Having an escape from the chaotic study life, when at home he chooses to spend time with his hedgehog and sugar glider rather than being on his phone.

e. Gaining self-confidence

Lastly, an unexpected claim from the participants, they say that they also gain confidence after owning pets:

“I think it developed me to be more confident and responsible lah.... From the confident angle, we are the ones who keep in charge of the animal’s daily life, their food” (Ariz)

Ariz’s confidence heightens having his pets rely on him especially for their source food, it gives him a reassuring sense that he can be depended on in a way.

“After owning them I always bring them to the park or any events. So, they would give me confidence when talking to other people. Then after that I find my self-esteem is better when talking with people....I also feel more confident because I keep animals that not a lot of people keep” (Dilan)

As for Dilan, having Mel and Didi, his exotic animals force him to move out of his comfort zone and engage with people at animal events which makes him more confident in socializing, especially when the topic is his expertise. Having different animals than the common ones also is a great ice breaker in conversations and he takes pride in having an animal that he can showcase, more or less his trophy animal.

ii. Dull effects

Amongst the silver linings with pets there are a few dull effects that the participants have come across. One of the most mentioned is when it comes to grooming or cleaning up the pets’ mess;

“The hardest routine is to bathe them back then, because they don’t like to be bathed. But I try my best you know, Zhong Li (guinea pig) is like the most cooperative. Even though of course he keeps scratching your hand and stuff it doesn’t hurt.... or if heightening my stress levels maybe whenever I always think about how I need to trim their nails.... whenever I try to do it, I’m afraid of like clipping their blood vessels.” (Amy)

One of the downsides mentioned by Amy when keeping guinea pigs is that they are easily anxious and frail. Guinea pigs can easily die from a heart attack she said, hence she’s in a bit of a conflict when thinking of her guinea pigs’ hygiene and well-being. But she did later confirm that it is just regular pet stress.

“Just regular pet stress, you know just like ‘oh no I’m gonna have to bathe him’ ‘oh I’m gonna have to clip their nails’. It’s just normal stress, not too much that it affects my daily routine.” (Amy)

Another pet stress from Dilan;

“When I lift them up and they poop, woooooh really ticks you off. Ha if they poop, it’s just like that, no timing. That’s Didi, it likes to excrete when its scared, like when I lift her up, afraid of heights. If Mel, no she waits til she’s in the cage” (Dilan)

When asked what about them calm or otherwise, there were a few times when Dilan mentioned that Didi (blue-tongued skink) likes to create a lot of mess which makes him annoyed. Especially if he just came back from his part time job.

As for Ariz, he feels that keeping his pets does not really enhance his daily life;

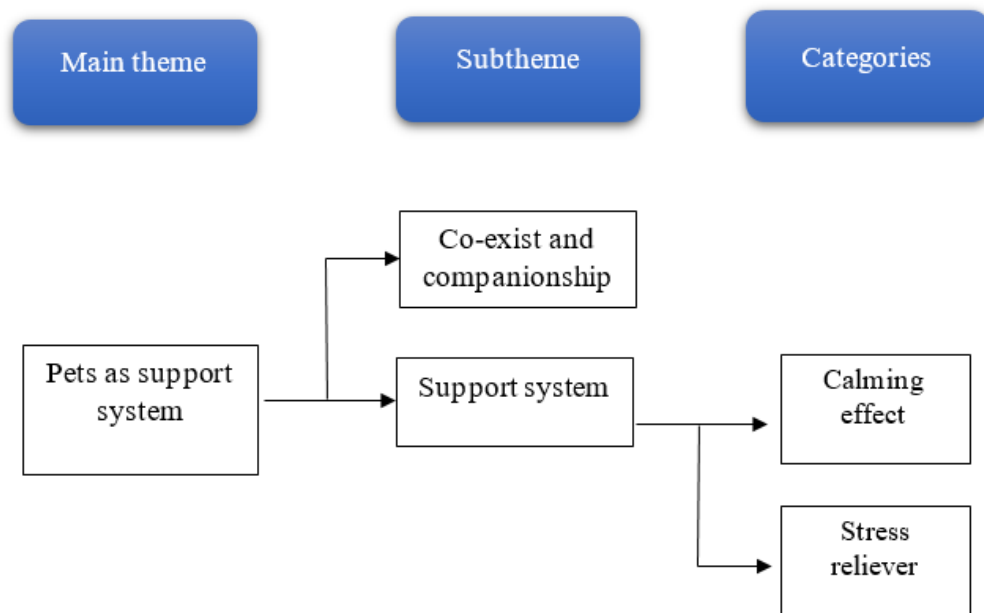
“They don’t really enhance my life. It’s only if you’re interested in that thing, only then we want. They don’t have a negative effect; they don’t have a positive effect. Feels like normal. They don’t burden me or convenient me. Because keeping a pet is another commitment. But they’re definitely not a burden to me” (Ariz)

Here Ariz states that keeping his pets does not really impact him majorly but reassures that they are not a burden to him. In a way despite pets being another commitment, having interest in them helps make the commitment feel lighter.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Pets as emotional support system.

This research identified two ways pets can act as an owner’s emotional support system which first is offering companionship & co-existence and also how they act as a support system. How they act as a support system can be further explained under the categories of calming effect and stress reliever.

Figure 7. Pets as support system



i. Co-existing and companionship

A majority of the participants felt companionship with their pets, although some of them had a less attached connection, by co-existing. Just with the presence of their pets with them is enough to make them feel less alone.

“I think maybe they’re always there for me, even though they have their own families.” (Nami)

“Yes, they actually do help me with companionship. I don’t feel that lonely when I come back because I know they will be around the house because ten of them, they’ll be scattered around the house.” (Mr. A)

Mr. A seems to be expressing that having his cats comfortably laying around the house unguarded provides him with a sense of comfort and companionship. Despite coming back to an empty house, knowing that his companions are there waiting for him makes him feel less lonely.

“For those who are always isolated in their room, if they have a pet in their room and they at least have that type of companionship, they would not feel

lonely. I think it's nice. It's good for people to at least be in touch with the world through their pets." (Amy)

Amy being the youngest in her family and the only daughter agrees that having a pet helps her stay in touch out of her solitude and confinement of her own room. When caring for her pets, they involve moving around and engaging with another being which can also evoke a sense of comfort in their company.

"I feel like my pets understands me. Yeah, like they are very very good companions and once you take care of them.... it gives a very big sentimental value to you...." (Gigi)

Despite Gigi keeping exotic animals that are known to be still and unaffectionate animals, Gigi claims they mean a lot to her, they become family once they are under her care.

"It was nice because the fish are in your house, so you don't have to go out, of course. And they're constant, a constant in your life. And when you're bored or whatever, you can just observe them." (Iman)

Iman highlights the convenience of having fish as indoor pets, as they provide a source of interest and observation within the home without the need to venture outside. The fish serve as a consistent element in life, offering a stable presence that can be relied upon for entertainment and distraction during moments of boredom.

"They don't really comfort me that much, but they are there when I need them. That means them being there is enough for me, we look at them and feel calm." (Ariz)

Ariz's perspective suggests a similar sentiment of co-existence. While his hedgehog and sugar glider may not actively provide comfort in the traditional sense, their mere presence serves as a source of serenity. Simply observing them brings about a sense of

calm, implying that their role is more about enhancing the atmosphere of the home rather than actively engaging with their owner.

ii. Support system

All the participants agreed their pets provided support in some way whether it be through health benefits, structural routines or the pets as their coping mechanism.

“I wouldn’t trade a pet for having an easy life.... in my opinion it’s more of- they are your support begitu” (Gigi)

“If we love them less, they will die. If we love them too much, they’ll still die. It’s the same, so we should love them as we do” (Syabeel)

Gigi suggests that having a pet is worth her struggles and sacrifices, because in return they provide her support that cannot be replaced or replicated by anything else. Syabeel's quote touches on the bittersweet reality of loving a pet. Regardless of how much love and care we give them; they will eventually pass away. This sentiment acknowledges the natural cycle of life and death.

As their support system, the most prominent themes are how the pets give off a calming effect and reduces their stress from mundane lives.

a. Calming effect

When asking the participants, the most calming gestures their pets did, most of them had variations of calming gestures.

“If at night as I said, just now Asmara (cat) will be on top of my bed now on my pillow and he’ll start purring and the whole pillow will start to vibrate, it helps me to sleep with that calming” (Mr. A)

As mentioned before how physical touch is very important, Mr. A finds his cats sleeping with him and their purring gestures to be relaxing, as if a mother is singing their child to sleep. Mr. A feels safe and comforted by Asmara hence he sleeps better.

“Watching them chase each other around, and we’re just at the back. Them chasing each other around feels relaxing a bit, you don’t think about your worries. I like watching them play, just like that” (Syabeel)

“Keeping fish can relax you when I’m looking at them and just watching them live their life is calming of course and I myself am interested in fish, so it’s something I do in my free time as a hobby” (Iman)

Syabeel and Iman both find serenity when watching their pets in their natural behavior, for Iman just watching his fish go about their days by swimming around and Syabeel when his goats play around, their playful interactions put his mind off his worries. Both find that simply observing them is already calming.

“It’s nice watching them eat, because when they eat it’s so satisfying” (Dilan)

As for Dilan he finds feeding time to be calming for him, this is more to satisfaction in providing for his pets. His pets which are skinks and snakes, commonly known predators so when they eat, they eat with gusto. This provides him a sense of relief.

b. Stress reliever

As for stress relieving, majority of the owners did agree to the fact that their pets relieved their pressure in different ways.

“When I stress myself out, I would really just go to the cat and then try to ‘belai-belai’ and so on” (Nami)

“And when I feel like I’m stressed, I’ll just hold them, pet them, having them in my arms and it makes me feel less stressed. And I feel so comforting when I have them, like when you hug your own teddy bear when you’re small” (Mr. A)

“They actually relieve our stress, especially if it’s cats. Ha when we see cats and we pet them slow slow. It’s not so stressful, like the problem goes away just like that.” (Syabeel)

Nami and Syabeel describes seeking out their cats specifically when feeling stressed, using the act of "belai-belai" (petting or stroking) as a way to alleviate stress. This physical interaction with her cat seems to be a coping mechanism for managing

stress. As for Mr. A, he associates caressing his cats with his childhood memory which highlights the sense of security and emotional reassurance that comes from physical contact with a pet.

“It’s nice knowing like different pets and different personalities that you may deal with is like dealing with a human being but in the form of animal. But seeing their personality out there it gives you some colour” (Gigi)

From here Gigi says that interacting with her pets are interesting just like with human interaction, but with pets’ disparate personality, it can make life a little less boring.

“I think they relieve kan stress because when studying its stressful so an alternative is for us to watch them and focus on them. When they’re there, we spend time with them, problems at the hospital or friends or anything because being at the hospital is stressful.” (Ariz)

As for Ariz, being at the hospital and coming back to an empty home since his parents work late, he doesn’t find an outlet for his worries. Even if his pets cannot reciprocate emotionally to him, again just by observing them sets a better tone for his space of mind. He focuses on the here and now instead of stressing himself.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of eight pet owners through semi-structures interview and the findings reflected in the research objectives. This chapter also reported the demographic information of participants in detail. Further discussion will be in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATION, RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings according to research objectives and themes respectively.

5.1 Discussion

The current study explored the quality of life of pet owner in Malaysia after owning pets. In this section, the dynamic interaction of pets and their owners, effects and how the pets act as an emotional support system will be discussed from previous research findings.

5.1.1 Dynamic interaction of pets and their owners

From previous studies, most interactions of humans and animals were for animal domestication where one of the researchers Zeder studied animal domestication for years from 2006 up to 2012. Animal domestication can be viewed from several perspectives. One interpretation sees it as a deliberate, human-controlled process in which people modify plants' and animals' life to suit their own interests. Zeder also points out that, like other mutually beneficial interactions in nature, domestication is beneficial to both humans and domesticates (Zeder, 2006).

Due to human involvement over many generations, a thorough understanding of the biological signs of pets has resulted from animal domestication. This long history means that modern pets often exhibit behaviours and physical traits that are direct results of domestication. Only the participants with cats as their pets, adopted them as strays. Other than that, the rest of them were bought from a shop. One of Zeder's

perspective in 2006 where domesticates (at this time would be considered as pets) may have evolved traits that make humans more likely to care for and breed them, thus ensuring their own survival and reproductive success. This previous study is found partially consistent with the current study because the pets often learn to associate their owners with food and other necessities, leading to behaviours like coming when called or reacting to the sound of their food container. Zeder's statement is partially consistent because it was further mentioned that the active relationship of animals in the dynamic becomes detrimental to human's fitness or well-being. On the contrary, this interaction displays a mutual adaptation; where the pets ensure they get fed, while for the owners they find these behaviours rewarding and reinforcing. Even if intimacy or emotional connection is not yet reached at least this most basic level of attachment that must be retained since owners fulfil their physiological needs and also safety needs according to Maslow's Hierarchy (revisited).

In other words, all of the participants recognize their pet's well-being through biological cues, especially for Dilan and Gigi since their pets are exotic animals and often do not communicate vocally. Physically they notice when their pets produce markings as a sign of territory. Other than physical cues, they understand when their pets make certain sounds which indicate discomfort or preferred isolation. Or physical observations on the colour and markings on their pets' body to indicate level of health. These examples show that pet owners rely on subtle and body language to understand and care for their pets. This also emphasizes familiarity between one another up to the point they can distinguish behavioural meaning and shows that effective pet care involves more than just providing food and shelter; it requires keen observation and responsiveness to subtle signals. The pets in return rely on their owners to recognize

these cues, demonstrating a reciprocal relationship where both pets and owners adapt and respond to each other's behaviour and needs.

A different approach that was not mentioned by past studies is that current pet owners implement verbal interactions when it comes to enhancing their relationships with pets. Talking, chatting and mimicking pets create an emotional connection even if the cognitive understanding of the pets is limited. Most of the participants instigated this verbal play despite fully acknowledging there is no reciprocal understanding. This emotional expression can be therapeutic for the owner and contributes to the sense of companionship. Pets, in turn respond to the tone and rhythm of their owner's voice, which can be soothing and familiar, enhancing the bond. Another unmentioned approach, negative in past studies were how physical touch became such a significance for the pet owners in the current studies. All of the participants highlighted that physical contact with their pets are one of their best interests when interacting with their pets because physical affection is a clear indicator that the animal trusts the owner and feels comfortable around them.

5.1.2 Effects

The effects of pet ownership will be discussed in this section. According to the research findings, pet owners saw more positive effects than negative effects which will further be elaborated.

The majority of the participants in this research were found to have gained a sense of responsibility when having their pets care routine involved in their schedule, considering that most of the participants are going through young adulthood. It is crucial as individuals to start experience independence and the need to manage their own commitments and responsibilities. Taking care of pets introduces them to the kind

of commitment they would face in the future. This is consistent with the findings that Overgaauw et al. (2020) claimed routine and responsibility can be established in the human-animal bond through responsible pet ownership, which includes standard hygiene procedures, appropriate breeding, feeding, housing, and providing mental and physical challenges. This regular care routine helps them structure their day and make better use of their time which is highlighted by the participants, instead of being attached to their phones and stuck inside their rooms. Having to accommodate their pets needs at certain times of day gives them a proper excuse to move around and socially interact which aligns with claims from Charmaraman et al. (2022) that increased responsibilities in pet care during COVID-19 have been linked to more stress-relieving time spent with pets and enhanced family relationships for both pet and dog owners.

Another positive impact that all of the participants mentioned was how their pets became their source of motivation. Moving forward in daily lives with commitments and responsibilities which can hold a person back, the participants draw significant motivation from their pets as a consistent source of joy and comfort. They anticipate daily interactions like cuddles and belly rubs which provides them with a tangible reward and helps them push through with their challenging times such as studies or work-life balance. The routine tasks as stated before structures their day and provides a fixed purpose to get up in the morning. This current finding aligns with the case study on Prison cats by McCormack (2016) when animal therapy programmes were implemented into prison walls. Many of the inmates claimed they found a purpose to get up in the morning as interacting with the cats is what they look forward to all day. The companionship provided by innocent minded small creatures gives them a sense of drive that they have a meaningful role in the well-being of another living being.

According to Topbas, and Simsek (2022) who studied animal-assisted prison interventions, they noted that the animals helped handle negative emotions like aggression and self-harm in the inmates. Which can bring people down when they lack motivation.

Other than that, developing care and empathy was brought up by the participants when majority of the participants shared experience on their compassion and empathy towards their pets. The participants expressed a deep understanding on the needs and emotions of the animals, for example when they recognize the bond between a mother cat and her kittens. They imagine themselves when they put themselves in the shoes (or paws) of the strays which lead to the desire for care and support. The participants mentioned that they do become more sensitive to the well-being of animals in general and advocate on their welfare. Hence this further aligns with the study by Aumer et al. (2022) when his participants tend to respond more negatively when it came to humans than their pets. They show a softer and less judgmental side when interacting with animals. Watt and Pachana (2007) also noted that for older individuals who remain unmarried, have experience divorce or have been widowed. This group tends to form strong emotional bonds with their pets and anthropomorphize them (attribute human-like qualities) which can be mirrored in the current study for participants who are older than 30 years old, also claims to care deeply for their pets and emphasizes that their pets seem to display similar behaviour to them. This heightened sense of empathy extends not only to animals but also to fellow humans, as participants develop a greater capacity for understanding and compassion towards others.

Another impact on owning pets in this study is that the participants claimed that they gained self-confidence when caring for the pets. Taking care of pets requires a significant level of responsibility, from ensuring their pets wellbeing. The responsibility

can lead to a sense of confidence as individuals realize they are capable for caring for another living being and are being relied upon, it is also the fact that their decisions are in the hands of the owners which provides self-security. The participants noted that joining animal events force them into social settings where they develop social skills and connections, ultimately boosting their self-esteem. Considering that the participants who highlighted these were men, it does show consistency with Schulz et al. (2020). where he states self-esteem between men pet owners and women pet owners differ, as for men they gain higher self-esteem but women show lower self-esteem.

5.1.3 Pets as emotional support system

As lonely as an individual gets, to crave companionship is undeniable. Pets provide a constant source of affection without judgement or conditions and their constant availability makes their owners rarely feel completely alone. Many of the participants shared experiences where they appreciate their pet's presence and company even if it is just by co-existing in the same room.

It is noticeable that there is a difference in response between pet owners that owns interactive animals such as cats or goats, compared to conserved and 'still animals' such as reptiles and fish. The owners with interactive animals note that they despite their pets having their own lives wandering about, they always return back to their owners which provides a sense of comfort. As for the exotic pets, the owners expressed despite their pets being unaffectionate they still hold a significant sentimental value and are considered as their own family. It was emphasized that the importance of owning a pet is significant for those who are often isolated in their room, it connects them to the world beyond their solitary confinement. This is parallel to Kretzler et al. (2022) study that shows the sense of loneliness was reduced for pet owners after the COVID-19 pandemic began where solitude was compulsory to survive at the moment.

But a few did also mention that when they are staying in campus and engaged in social activities with friends, the participants experienced a diminished sense of connection with their pets. This likely due to the presence of alternative source of companionship and distraction. Although, the appreciation of their pet's resurfaces when they return home. This reflects minor inconsistency in current findings just as Brooks and Greenberg (2023) claimed in their scope review previous studies were inconsistent between positive, negative and null findings on wellbeing of pet owners and their animal companion during COVID-19. But evidently, the owners do believe their pets provided love, comfort and emotional friendship through the pandemic.

In addition, many of the participants also reported that their pets exhibit a sense of calm in them from physical engagement, feeding time and even distant observation. The owners stated that sleeping and cuddling with their pets helped calm them. To exemplify, the participants' cats let out purring vibrations which can mimic the rhythm of a human heartbeat fostering a sense of relaxation. This can be corroborated by Nagasawa et al. (2023) their study suggests that interaction with cats triggers a complex interplay in the owner's body where there is an increase of cortisol (hormone for alertness), this leads to an increase of oxytocin afterwards (hormone of love) which promotes feelings of bonding and relaxation.

As for feeding time, the participants claimed that watching their pets eat with gusto to be satisfying and calming. This satisfaction can stem from providing his pets and observing their natural predatory behaviour as it brings them a sense of relief. Most of the participants that mentioned this were exotic pet owners. Then for increasing calmness by distant observation, the owners in this study enjoy watching their animals play and interact in their natural behaviour. The playful interactions act as a positive distraction from fast-paced demands of everyday life and bring out a temporary relief.

This finding can be mirrored from Zhou et al. (2020), where the researcher studies the effects of watching pet videos and livestreams, it promotes telepresence and the flow experience (viewers are absorbed and enjoy the activity) has a positive effect on the subjective well-being, hence increasing the satisfaction with their lives.

Finally, another finding on how pets can act as the support system is that they reduce stress. Many of the participants shared anecdotes about their pets' role in alleviating stress. There is a difference between calm and reduced stress where reduced stress focuses on lowering stress levels over the long term as for calmed, it is immediate short-term relief. The owners claimed that the pets' distinct personalities make life less monotonous as it adds colours, similar to interacting with different human beings. It was also mentioned when the owners do feel stressed, they prefer holding their animals in their arms because they feel comforted, it stimulates the childhood memory when caressing a teddy bear which highlights the sense of security and emotional reassurance. This can be corroborated by Sharma (2013) because cuddling with pets stimulates touch receptors beneath the skin, it can help lower stress and enhance contentment. Despite the favourable outcome of this research, according to Currin McCulloch et al. (2021) his study noted that many became closer with their pets even though some experienced minor relationships problems but were still manageable. Parallel to this study there were also minor stressors that were brought up by the participants regarding messy clean ups and elaborate grooming that causes conflict in their bond but they found it manageable, their interest in their pets outweigh their languor.

5.2 Related Theory/ Model Discussion

The findings were found to contribute personal development of the pet owners and Maslow's revisited hierarchy of needs (2003) has applicability towards understanding the Quality of Life of pet owners. As discussed in the previous chapter,

Maslow's revisited hierarchy can be divided into three levels and each levels contain categories, the lowest level; physiological needs, safety needs, social & belonging needs and esteem needs, the middle level; cognitive needs and creativity & aesthetic needs, the highest level; self-actualization and transcendence. While the highest level of self-actualization and transcendence is known to be difficult to achieve but it may contribute to the prior levels as motivators.

5.2.1 Maslow's Hierarchy

1. Physiological needs

According to Maslow's revisited hierarchy, physiological needs encompass air, food and water. The most basic necessities, because the bond between a pet and their owner is a reciprocal relationship. The owners provide their pets with food and water for nutrition and shelter that offers safety under their own roof for a secure area where their animals could sleep. The owners are also responsible for maintaining their pet's health through regular veterinary check-ups, vaccination and treatments. As for the pets they need regular exercise and play which encourages owners to engage in physical play hence a contribution to their physiological well-being.

2. Safety needs

As for the safety needs of the owners and their pets, it can vary from physical security to emotional security. Physical security would be an extension from the safety of their owner's shelter or how certain animals that can provide physical protection and intimidation or alert neighbours if there were to be intruders. According to Applebaum et al. (2021) pets are also perceived as reliable towards humans hence from emotional security, pets offer a structured routine for their owners since their feeding times are fixed and at certain times of the day, they would

need different types of play or physical activities. Their companionship can also provide emotional stability and contribute to a sense of security.

3. Social belongingness and love

This level is characterized by the need for interpersonal relationships, affection, companionship and a sense of belonging. The construct of companionship can also extend to this level, where it corresponds between the owners and their pets, both indulge in each other's company and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. They rely on each other for love and affection, where the pets accept their owners without judgement and offers them unconditional love hence providing a sense of comfort. From social interactions, there are pet communities that have been established to exchange necessary information regarding their pets, this fosters the sense of belongingness and shared purposes.

4. Self-esteem

Self-esteem plays as one of the biggest building blocks for personal development. This involves the belief that one is valuable and deserving of respect and happiness. Although owning a pet does not ensure self-efficacy but it does act as a stepping stone. Thus, according to this research findings, one of the themes that emerged is gaining self-confidence. Owning pets can be excellent ice-breaker conversations or pet events do force an individual to engage socially which can help and individual obtain self-assurance. Other than that, from the study also seeing a pet grow and thrive under their care sets a rewarding profound sense of satisfaction.

5. Cognitive needs and aesthetic needs

A more advanced level and that is separate than the original version of Maslow's hierarchy (1954) beyond the basics would be cognitive and aesthetic needs. By

offering opportunities for learning, mental stimulation, creativity and the appreciation of nature and beauty and animals. Owners would need to acquire proper knowledge on their pet care, from there the pets and owners would learn to adapt to each other to comprehend and biological cues exhibited by the pets or playful banter from the owner which satisfies the need for information and comprehension, despite animals being underperceived as emotionally intelligent. According to Van Kleef (2022) compared to humans, animals tend to express their emotions more directly and with less external influence, which makes it simpler to assess their internal emotions and general well-being. From the aesthetic lens, where the need for the pursuit of beauty is active, appreciating the graceful movements of animals helps satisfy this need. To exemplify in this research, the theme of distant observation brings out a sense of calm in the participants. This complex bond not only improves the lives of pet owners by offering potential for creative expression and mental stimulation, but it also develops an increased appreciation for the wonder and beauty of the natural world.

5.3 Summary of the study

We share this earth with a stunning diversity of life, one thing that we can share globally in Malaysia is that pets are cherished just as much, they play a significant role in enhancing lives of individuals and continue to do so. This qualitative research was carried out to comprehend the impact of pet ownership and how it improves the Quality of Lives for individuals in Malaysia. There were three research objectives as the framework; to explore the dynamic of human-animal interaction, to explore the effects of having pets, and to examine the role of pets as an emotional support to owners.

In **Chapter 1**, includes a discussion of the topic's background research and the significance of this study. Following that, the study objectives and questions were then

established in conjunction with the development of a conceptual framework. As for **Chapter 2**, thorough research was done on history of pet ownership, the effects and benefits of having pets ranging from emotional and mental health, physical health and routine & responsibility of pet owners and the application of Maslow's Hierarchy revisited version, journal articles that were necessary and a case study: Prison cats were also added to complete this study's literature review. Moving on, in **Chapter 3** the research methodology involved conducting a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews. Eight participants meeting the inclusion criteria were interviewed, in addition to one pilot study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. Consequently, **Chapter 4** discusses the findings of the research through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, **Chapter 5**, indulges in further discussion from the findings as well as recommendations and implications.

5.4 Implications

This study found that the positive effects of pet ownership outweighed the dull effects, and pets act as a stress reliever with calming effect as the support system of their owners. The findings of this research contributed to the existing body of knowledge by implementing pet ownership to improve an individual's quality of life which can be based on Maslow's Hierarchy revisited version, where there is an extension of aesthetic and cognitive needs compared to the original version. The impact of this study is also specified, in the levels of belongingness and companionship provided by the pets. It also delivers a contributing angle in the Malaysian perspective as majority of the collected literature were not specific to the Malaysian context. The results have several applications. For instance, the findings can be applied to aid future therapeutical interventions or to improve psychological well-being of individuals that need

motivators such as people in hospice care, individuals in isolation or anybody that would prefer a non-judgemental companion.

5.5 Recommendations

On upcoming analysis, future researchers can reduce the scope of their research by focusing on the types of animals whether its exotic animals, domesticated animals or even farm animals so the dynamic of pet-owner interaction can be compared accurately. In addition to this, it would help researchers comprehend better which types of pets are better as companions or just as co-existing company. Other than specifying the types of animals, narrowing the timeline for pet ownership could also draw more accurate data, focusing more on present pets instead of past pets to minimize potential bias due to underlying subjective memories of longing their past pets. The next recommendation is to polish the guided questionnaire, by asking more relevant and unbiased questions which may be limit unfairness and ambiguity in the responses to draw precise and insightful conclusions.

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APPENDIX A

Interview protocol

Part A: Demographic Information

- 1) Name:
- 2) Age:
- 3) Level of education
- 4) Occupation:
- 5) Where do you stay:
- 6) What kind of pet/pets do you have?

Part B: Dynamic of human-pet interaction.

- 1) How long have you had them for?
- 2) How would you describe your pet's personality? Are there any unique/specific behaviours?
- 3) Can you walk me through a daily routine of you and your pet/pets?
- 4) How do you and your pet communicate with each other?
- 5) Are there specific sounds or cues your pet uses to express itself?

Part C: Pros or Cons of having pets.

- 6) Do you think the routine of your pet care has positively or negatively impacted your daily life?
- 7) From what aspects do your pet enhance your daily life or otherwise? Ex: companionship or financial burden

- 8) Are there specific activities or behaviours of your pet that you find particularly calming?
- 9) Have you noticed any positive changes in your overall outlook on life since having a pet?

Part D: How pets may act as an emotional support system.

- 10) Do you typically find that engaging with your pets serves as a coping mechanism during times of stress or otherwise?
- 11) In what ways has your pet become a source of comfort and companionship for you?
- 12) Can you share specific instances where your pet has helped provide emotional support or heightened your stress levels?
- 13) Are there any daily rituals or habits with your pet that have become emotionally significant for you?
- 14) What experience has been the most meaningful to you when you had them?
Are they in terms of positive or negative?
- 15) In what ways do you anticipate your pet offering ongoing emotional support in the future?

APPENDIX B

Participant Information Sheet



Dear Participant,

Please take some time to read through the following information.

Research Title

PAWS AND POSSIBILITIES: Exploring the impact of pet ownership on the person's quality of life.

Research Purpose

I am from the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS). I am interested in exploring the impact of pet ownership on the person's quality of life.

Therefore, I would like to invite you to take part in this study and share your experiences that you think is relevant regarding this matter.

Your Role

If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be involved in an interview session that may take 1 to 2 hours of your time. However, the time allocated for the interview depends on you and we can set the time and place according to your liking.

Participation Agreement

Your participation is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw yourself from the study anytime you want. I will be recording the interview session and once it has been transcribed, the information will be destroyed. I will not disclose your name or any other private information that can reveal your identity in any records and information that we will use in this study.

Confidentiality

All your information is guaranteed confidentiality, and I am the only one to know about your participation in the study. I will be using your information for the study's findings, report, and presentation. However, I will make sure that the information used will not reveal your name and it stays confidential. This includes extracts written in the article and during the presentation.

If at any point you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask the researcher, Saidatul Husna Binti Muhamad Taufik or contact us at +601120947132 or email me at 78507@siswa.unimas.my . You can also contact the supervisor of this study, Dr Jamayah Saili at 584507 or email her at sjamayah@unimas.my.

I highly welcome your cooperation and participation in this study and appreciate your sharing of experiences. Thank you.

Informed consent form



PAWS AND POSSIBILITIES: Exploring the impact of pet ownership on the person's quality of life.

Please ensure that you have consented to the followings before being interviewed:

- I understand the purpose and procedures of the study
- I was given the participant information sheet beforehand
- I understand that my participation is voluntary
- I understand that my name, address, and other private information will not be used
- I understand that my answers and reactions will be kept confidential
- I agree and consented to be a part of this study
- I agree and consented for my interview session to be recorded for the use of this study

Signature : _____

Date : _____

APPENDIX C

Sample Transcripts

Interview transcript no.1: Nami

Researcher: So how do you and your pets communicate with each other? Is there an example you can give?

Nami: Macam mana tu kalau communicate? Oh ha okay kalau beri makan, usually kita letak makanan dalam bekas so it makes sounds. So usually we just shake the container lah to panggil makan maka and panggil jugak lah through the names as well. And then for the turtles, I can't really call the names because they don't really understand that. But usually both of the turtles and cats tu kalau kocak botol memang diaorang akan bergerak lah untuk datang ke sini then usually if we're going for like a long-term holiday for like maybe at a week, kalau the turtles tu usually kita akan tinggal kat rumah je. Tapi kita akan sediakan makanan yang banyak terus macam sayur yang boleh je letak dalam tu. Usually it can last je that long.

Researcher: Oh, I see. Usually, the turtles tu they don't eat pellets? They eat sayur?

Nami: We gave them both. Maybe kalau kitaorang ada sayur lebih dah nak buruk, kita akan bagi je lah. Instead of pellets, sebab kalau bagi pellets air dia akan cepat lagi kotor.

Researcher: Oh ye ke? Sebab tak elok eh dia punya taik?

Nami: I'm not sure, maybe sebab diaorang tak makan sangat and even pellet tu sendiri yang mengotorkan air or maybe because the digestion system yang tak elok.

Researcher: Oh okay so kalau the cats maybe Tam ke or lain, kalau diaorang nak keluar dia ada cara dia cakap ke yang you dah biasa?

Nami: Usually kalau Tam tu, kalau nak masuk bilik atau keluar bilik dia akan mengmeow dekat pintu lah and kadang-kadang dia nak tidur sekali, dia akan cuba pusing-pusing atas katil.

Researcher: Aww dia ajak tidur ke tu?

Nami: Haah tapi tak selalu dia jarang tidur dengan orang but usually memang katil orang adalah kegemaran dia lah untuk lepak especially I don't know why, my katil my father even my father sendiri membebel "aku nak tidur kau ada dekat sini" hahaha.

Interview transcript no.2: Mr. A

Researcher: All right, So do you typically find that engaging with your pets serve as a coping mechanism during times of stress or do you find them more stressful?

Mr. A: Yes. It's really helped me with my stress, especially with them because they have different different personalities. So it makes me like if I feel in this way, I go and get the one that can handle me in in my mood that day, means if I feel like in a way then I'll find another one, you know, because every each of them have their own personalities. I have different type of stress, so their different personalities can help me with my different type of stress. That means ada 10, if I feel like this way I'll go to Kakngah, if I feel like this way I'll go to Asmara. If I feel like at this moment, I'll go to CheMot.

Researcher: So let me see, do you have a favorite cat out of all the cats that you have?

Mr. A: Nope. I hopefully I can treat them equally because I don't like to have one specific. But maybe Kaklong is the the most attached to me lah because she just listens to me when I'm around. And when I'm not around she'll be the one who will be looking for me, who is running to me, jumping on my lap, waiting for me to pet her, to take her. The oldest in the family that is Kaklong atau Wan Umbut.

Researcher: Does she do that to anybody else? The attachment tu?

Mr. A: Nope, it's only me.

Researcher: So in what way has your pet become a source of comfort or companionship to you? If you think this is repetitive, do you think you can explain a bit more?

Mr. A: I'll give example, like right now Kakngah put her back in my face. That kind of behaviour shows that your cat really trusts you. In short its very comforting.

Researcher: Can you share specific instances where your pet has helped provide emotional support or heightened your stress level?

Mr. A: So far I've no stress level that is constantly making me unstable. I think sebab they're very trained cats, not to say specifically trained, but as I said just now, they will follow their owner's behaviour. So when especially like me, I think I'm quite strict and I think I'm quite disciplined myself. So most of them are like that-

Interview transcript no.3: Ms. Amy

Researcher: So are there any daily rituals or habits with your pets that have become emotionally significant for you?

Ms. Amy: Oh yeah. Whenever I keep talking to them in their language from across the room and then they would communicate back.

Researcher: Do you think they actually understand you? Could they just like the tone of you doing that?

Ms. Amy: I feel like they understand whenever I give them food. But I think they know whenever I wanted to pick them up.

Researcher: So they know when you want to pick them up.

Ms. Amy: Yeah, I would come near their cage and then they would come near me. And then I would, like, show my palm to them. And then they would smell it. And then they lick it. And that's it.

Researcher: What experience has been the most meaningful to you when you had them? Are they positive or negative? Like, what's the best memory that you could think of?

Ms. Amy: When I manage to pick them up for the first time, you know because before that Zhong Li would run away. But after I managed to like calm them down- what do you call it? Like, you have to condition them when you want to pick them up. So at first when you want to scoop them, they would immediately think that you're a predator wanting to eat them. Like the bird that caught them with their claws. So like, you have to condition them telling them that it's okay to be in my arms, you know, it's okay to be in my hands. So you have to, like, keep them there while you're trapping them in your in your fingers, you know, So like to make them understand that it's okay to be here, you know? So like, I did that a couple of times, maybe three times a day back then. And then by the third day, you know, by the third time they already got used to it. And then when I could safely scoop them up and they would not make a fuss. Because they're usually so scared. So once they start to open up to you, you just feel like, oh, you accomplished something. I did it. You know, it's nice.

Interview transcript no.4: Ms. Gigi

Researcher: All right. Since this is not burden and it has impacted you positively from what way did having pets enhance your daily life?

Ms. Gigi: Enhance my daily life? I would say it gives you motivation to actually wake up when you macam malas. I do it for them and I do it for myself too. Two-way street lah. It's something that can, in my opinion having a pet train your accountability because you have a responsibility. So you take in account of the consequences if you don't, if you don't take care of that living being.

Researcher: Yeah. Yeah, that's true. Well, do you feel like when you're away from them, do you rasa kosong macam their companionship affects you?

Ms. Gigi: Of course, you miss them lah. I have a lot of pets, which I sometimes I wonder, oh, are they really taking care of my axolotl? Are they really taking care of my pets, which macam risau lah.

Researcher: Are there like other specific activities or behaviours or we have pets that you find particularly calming?

Ms. Gigi: Calming? Not like calming but there is like an emotional value when it comes to the pets not really calming but it's nice knowing like different pets and different personalities that you may deal with is like dealing with a human being but in the form of an animal. But seeing their personality out there it gives you, it gives you some colour. Oh, basically yes hahah. Yes, to the question tadi. I like when I come to the aquarium, they datang macam "how are you?" hahaha

Researcher: Are you are there any other examples that you rasa macam tu lagi?

Ms. Gigi: I like it when I feed my tortoise also he reacts differently to different types of food, so I like preferences macam tu. It's like sometimes with reptiles kan they're so small and they look so garang, so actually like people who don't own reptiles don't see how reptiles also have personalities Macam you give different things, they react differently. So I like my bearded dragons, my axolotl and my tortoise. They have different personalities.

Interview transcript no.5: Mr. Syabeel

Mr. Syabeel: Macam takde haiwan peliharaan eh? Macam bosan je, takde aktiviti nak buat. Mesti semua terperap dalam rumah je, ayah aku terperap. Mak aku tak boleh tengok ayah aku terperap ni. Kena buat jugak kerja ayah aku ni, sebab dia ada penyakit, penyakit obesiti gemuk en. Dulu dia ada kencing manis, sakit jantung, darah tinggi, tiga serangkai semua tu adda. So takleh bagi dia banyak rehat, kena bagi dia bergerak. Kalau dia rehat mesti dia tidur, kalau dia duk rumah mesti dia tidur je. Kalau tak kena bagi dia kerja, macam petang tu potong rumput ke, bagi makan kambing ke, tanam pokok apa semua. So berbaloi lah perlihara haiwan macam aktiviti tu kira masa tak terbuang.

Researcher: Ohh sebab tu lah mak kau kasi kau bela kambing ni?

Mr. Syabeel: Haa sebab tu lah dia kasi, taknak bagi dia duk saje. Nak bagi dia aktiviti, kalau tak dia memang tidur je manjang, kalau duk atas katil tu hmm memang tutup mata.

Researcher: Tapi kau memang minat haiwan pun kan?

Mr. Syabeel: Haa, aku memang hobi jenis minat haiwan so aku okay je pelihara haiwan.

Researcher: Okay ada tak benda yang kambing-kambing atau kucing kau buat, buat rasa kau tenang?

Mr. Syabeel: Tengok diaorang duk main kejar-kejar lah sama diaorang, macam kita duk dekat belakang saje-saje, tengok ah dia main kejar-kejar, kita macam relax sikit tak berfikir masalah-masalah, tengok dia main suka. Macam tu je.

Researcher: Bila dia happy-happy lompat macam tu, kau rasa seronok ah?

Mr. Syabeel: Haaa, macam tu lah.

Researcher: Ada tak benda yang kau perasan sejak kau bela haiwan kucing kambing macam ni, ada tak rasa macam pandangan hidup kau meningkat?

Mr. Syabeel: Kalau yang tu ada lah rasa macam, kita sebelum pelihara haiwan ni, ada masa kalau pagi kita tidur je, petang pun takde buat apa-apa pun memang aku tidur je, macam main phone dekat bilik. Tapi kalau pelihara haiwan ni, pagi kita kena bangun bagi makan apa semua, kucing mandi kan, petang pun macam tu lah.

Interview transcript no.6: Mr. Iman

Researcher: Right. So do you typically find that engaging with their fishes serves as a coping mechanism during times of stress, especially since that we had COVID- in the past. Of course, you kept fishes during those times too, right?

Mr. Iman: Yeah. So we were very much locked down in the house it was nice because the fish are in your house, so you don't have to go out, of course. And they're constant, a constant in your life. And when you're bored or whatever, you can just observe them. Something like that,

Researcher: Okay, all right. So in what ways has your pet become a source of comfort and companionship for you?

Mr. Iman: Well, they are my companions in a way, because they are with me all the time. As long as I'm home. And like any other animals, I think it's just the same.

Researcher: So have you ever, like, talked to the fish like rant to them? You know, some people actually talk to the animals, right?

Mr. Iman: Yes, sometimes. Not often. But I have talked to fish. I don't think they're listening. I'm basically talking to myself.

Researcher: Alright, so can you share specific instances where your pet has helped provide emotional support or negatively heightened stress? Have they ever?

Mr. Iman: Well, a few times when I was sad, I did kind of like went to the fish and sit around them just looking at them living happy lives, it can make you feel better. Just by looking at them.

Researcher: So are there any daily rituals or habits with your pets that have become emotionally significant for you?

Mr. Iman: No, I don't think so. I think I feed them? But feeding isn't very emotional? not really, really. But so far that's like all you have, like the emotional connection is that when you feed them and they rely on you. Yeah, basically.

Researcher: Okay, so what experience has been the most meaningful to you when you had them? Are they in terms of, are they in positive or negative terms? Like, what memory?

Interview transcript no.7: Dilan

Dilan: Macam kita nak interaksi dengan dia? Buat bunyi. Mel takde telinga, Didi ada telinga tapi tembus. So diaorang ni tak dengar macam kita, macam panggil “woi” dia pandang. Tak, diaorang dengar lalu getaran, kalau Mel ni dengar bunyi tapak kaki atau haiwan lari-lari dengar, tapi kalau kita tepuk-tepuk tangan ke dia tak dengar.

Researcher: Oh kiranya dia kena deka tatas surface yang dia duduk eh?

Dilan: Haa betul, baru dapat rasa getaran jiwa. Kalau camtu, kena ketuk-ketuk dekat cage dia lah baru dia pandang ah. Yang dia ingat makanan je.

Researcher: Pernah tak bawak dia keluar untuk main je?

Dilan: Pernah, pernah jugak bawak dia keluar untuk pergi event untuk bagi orang pegang-pegang dekat dia. Bawak dia event haiwan lah, haiwan exotic. Kadang-kadang bawak dia gi taman, ada budak-budak nak pegang dia, dia okay je. Kadang-kadang ada bagi dia lepas dalam bilik, tapi kena tengok lah sebab nanti dia hilang.

Researcher: Ohh I see, so yang pastinya cara korang communicate ni dengan ketuk-ketuk dekat tingkap tu je lah? Takde lah bercakap?

Dilan: Ha ketuk-ketuk je. Ada lah bercakap, tapi dia taknak dengar hahaha. Dia tak paham, tapi dia seolah memahami. Sebab kita borak tu dia dengar je lah, tak faham pun rasanya benda yang kita cakap.

Researcher: So ada tak isyarat atau bahasa khusus yang digunakan oleh Didi and Mel?

Dilan: Okay kalau Mel, contoh dia kalau kita nak bukak sangkar dia. Dia aka nada bunyi ular yang macam “sssss”. Bunyi tu dia ada 3 sebab, first dia tak selesa, kedua kalau kita sentuh dia berbunyi maknanya dia tak suka kita sentuh dia time tu. Satu lagi, dia lapar.

Researcher: So kalau dia buat bunyi macam tu, bagi makan dulu ke?

Dilan: Ha tak, kita akan biar dia dulu 2 minit, lepas 2 minit patutnya okay dah lah tu. Dia complicate sikit macam perempuan kan hahaha. Dia ada mood dia. Kita kena paham dia. Kalau Didi, dia takde bunyi lah, dia bisu. Dia diam je. Kalau bunyi hembus nafas ada kut.

Interview transcript no.8: Mr. Ariz

Researcher: Alright, so have you noticed any positive outlook of life since having pets? Since dari kecik lagi.

Mr. Ariz: Dari kecik eh, I think it developed me to be more confident and responsible lah. Salah satu nya sebab anak sulung kan, so kena jaga adik-adik sambil tu kita jaga jugak haiwan. Kadang kita tak tau pun macam mana nak jaga. Tapi kita cuba sebab kita rasa tu tanggungjawab kita untuk animal tu. Daripada segi confidence tu sebab kita yang take charge untuk animal tu punya daily life dia, makanan dia. Sebab asalnya nak jaga binatang ni, utamanya ayah dengan mak tak berapa suka sebab bulu-bulu also nak kena jaga lagi. Bersih kan sangkar, sebab start dari kecik form 1 kan, duduk asrama je. So sape yang kena jaga, tapi form 1 boleh overcome jugak lah. Parents pun nampak okay je.

Researcher: Sangkar diaorang dekat mana?

Mr. Ariz: Dekat ruang tamu tu so semua boleh nampak.

Researcher: Tak ambik banyak space eh?

Mr. Ariz: Tak tak sangkar diaorang kecik je, lagipun diaorang suka tidur so malam-malam memang kitaorang lepas kan je.

Researcher: Oh ha sebab diaorang nocturnal, pernah tak macam kacau your jadual. You macam baru balik penat nak tidur, tapi diaorang nak active-active camtu?

Mr. Ariz: Oh takde kalau kita penat ke apa, kita tidur takpun bair dia dalam sangkar. Ataupun lepaskan je. Sebab Tim tu boleh panjat-panjat kan, dia boleh balik sendiri sangkar dia.

Researcher: Do you typically find that engaging with your pets serve as a coping mechanism during times of stress? Ke diaorang lagi menambahkan stress?

Mr. Ariz: Rasanya diaorang lagi relieve kan stress sebab dalam belajar ni, dia sebenarnya belajar stress so salah satu cara dia bila kita tengok diaorang kita tak fikir masalah kita, kita tengok dia kita fokus dekat dia je. Bila ada dia, kita banyak spend time dengan dia, masalah dekat hospital ke kawan-kawan ke pape sebab kat hospital ni agak stress sikit. Kurang relax, parents pun selalu kerja, kita-kita je, diaorang pun selalu balik malam. Nak borak dengan sape? Macam tu ah.