

Impacts of Pets on Health of Human Beings

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### **Impact of pets on health of human beings**

Majority of people are attached to the companionship of animals. Indeed, times have changed since while the trend used to be mainly common in developed countries, that is no longer the case since the number of people having animals as pets has been on increase in developing countries. In case of Australia, United States, and United Kingdom among other developed nations, it is estimated that over 50% of the households keep pets. On another view, having pets is an expensive undertaking since the lifetime cost of having pets can add up to hundreds of dollar. For example, according to Herzog (2011), the lifetime cost of having a medium sized dog as a pet is \$8,000 while the lifetime costs of having a cat is \$10,000 mainly due to the fact that cats tend to live longer than dogs. However, apart from the high costs that are associated with having pets, there is also the risk of being injured or even been killed by the pets as well as other risks that are associated with having pets. Nevertheless, as already pointed out, the number of people keeping different species of animals as pets is on the increase. In that view, this paper focuses on the topic of pets and seeks to establish whether pets have any impact on health of the pet keepers.

With the number of people with the pets been on the rise, the findings of this paper will be important as the paper will highlights whether having pets has any benefits on the health of pet owners before coming to a conclusion whether it is ideal to have pets or not.

As pointed out by Allen (2003) the main common reason why people keep pets is for companionship as they can play with the pets and at the same time love and take

care of the pets. However, from the findings of numerous studies that have been carried out in the past, it has been found that pets have various benefits on the health of those who keep them.

One of the benefits that pets have as was found out in the studies that were carried out by Allen et al. (2001), El-Alayli et al. (2006) and Heady and Grabka (2011) is that pets have the capability of helping decrease blood pressure among the pet owners. The reason for that as explained the scholars is mainly due to the fact that the pet owners are always involved with the pets and thus have something else to keep them busy when they are not working and that helps decrease the blood pressure thus enhancing the health of those who keep the pets. On the same note, Allen et al. (2002) expounded that pets might help improve the health of the heart health through the reduction of the blood pressure while the same time regulating the heart rate at times when one gets to be in a difficult situations. As highlighted by the schools (Allen et al. 2002), in a study that was carried out in the year 2002, the changes in heart rate and blood pressure among those who had kept dogs or cats as pets were compared to those who had not pets. From the research, it was found that people who had a dog or cat as a pet had low resting heart rates as well as blood pressure levels during the beginning of the study while compared to those who had no dogs or cats as pets. Apart from that, people who either had a dog or a cat were also found to be less likely to have spikes in heart rates and blood pressure while they were undertaking mathematical tasks, while their heart rates as well as the blood pressure also went back to normal with less time. Finally, pet owners also made fewer mistakes in their mathematics tasks as long as their

pets were present in their room. Therefore, it can be pointed out that such findings are a clear indication that having a dog or cat as a pet reduces the risk of heart disease, and at the same time also minimizes stress resulting to improved performance.

On the other hand, Nagengast et al. (1997) carried out a study and found that children who are exposed to pets have low levels of anxiety. Decreased anxiety levels can have major positive impacts in the health of the children since it implies that the children have less risk for contracting cardiovascular diseases, specifically in view of lower systolic blood pressure, plasma cholesterol and plasma triglycerides.

Another health benefit of having a pet as discussed by Davis (2014) is that the pets can act as allergy filters. According to Davis (2014), people used to be of the opinion that families that had pets were putting their children at risk of making them become allergic to pets thus arguing that families with kids had to avoid pets all costs. However, Davies (2014) pointed out that an increased number of studies that have been carried out to investigate that allegation have found that children who grow up in households that have furred animals have minimal chances of allergies and asthma. The reason why that is the case is mainly due to the fact that furred animals tend to be dirty and thus by exposing children to these animals, the children tend to develop strong immune systems.

Another health benefit that pets have on pet keepers as explained by Davies (2014) is that they tend to be good for both mind and soul. According to Davies, pet owners who are diagnosed with AIDS have less chance of suffering from depression while compared to those who have been diagnosed with the same condition but have

no pets. Apart from that pets have also been found to be vital in helping people be at ease due to the fact that they keep people occupied rather than just be idle in their houses. In particular, Davies (2014) has discussed that rather than take drugs such as heroin and cocaine with the intention of raising serotonin and dopamine, one can easily attain that keeping dogs as pet.

As far as the elderly are concerned, Raina , Waltner-Toews, Bonnett , Woodward, and Abernathy (1999) explained that having pets could be a significant source of social support that is vital in improving well-being of the elderly. According to the scholars, one of the research that the carried out found that the elderly people that had a dog or cat as pets were better able to undertake various physical activities that among others comprised of climb up the stairs, kneeling, stooping, bathing and dressing one self, and taking medication. Indeed, it can be noted that there was no major variations as far as the capabilities of dog and cat owners to undertake those tasks were concerned. Moreover, the time that the elderly had owned the cat or dog as a pet was also found to have no influence to the task execution abilities of the elderly. Raina et al (1999) noted that even though companion animals did not seem to have an influence on the psychological wellbeing, the care-taking role that the elderly were embracing by having the pets gave them a sense of responsibility and purpose and that played a vital role in their overall health.

Another common benefit of having pets is that they get the pet owners moving. For instance, it is obvious that dog and cat owners as well as owners of other pets have to occasionally take their pets outside for a walk. While on the outside walk, the owners

engage the pets in various outside activities such as tossing the Frisbee and that has been found to offer the pet owners a natural boost while at the same time permitting them to let off some steam. At the same time, it also makes the pet owners more physically fit while at the same time also strengthening their muscles and bones. As a result, the pet owners have better blood circulation and that reduces the risk of the pet owners having cardiac arrests (Hark, 2013).

In conclusions, it can be explained that even though having pets can be an expensive affair as the pets require a lot of money, pets can have major positive impacts on the health of human beings implying that the decision on whether to keep pets or not should be well evaluated and not overlooked. Nevertheless, caution also needs to be exercised since there has also been an increase into the number of dogs and other pets that have injured their owners or relatives of owners in the last few years. In that view, it is important that whenever a person wants to have a pet, the person is well trained on how to live with the pet before he/she can be permitted to have the pet as that would imply that the person is acquainted on how to keep the pet and ensure that both the pet keeper as well as the pet have a good mutual connection.

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