

Exploring the Connection between Physical and Mental Health in Women and Dog Ownership Explorando la Conexión entre la Salud Física y Mental en Mujeres y la Tenencia de un Perro

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Abstract. The connection between pet ownership and human well-being, especially the role of dogs, has been an area of increased focus for researchers. This qualitative study investigates the intricate relationship between physical and mental health in women who have dogs. Through semi-structured interviews with 20 women and open-ended questions designed specifically for the topic, this study provided a platform for participants to share their experiences and thoughts, leading to a deeper understanding of the issue. The research strongly indicates that having a dog has a beneficial effect on mental health. Participants reported feeling less stress and anxiety, an uplift in spirits, and increased motivation. They also noted enhanced social bonds and emotional support from their canine companions. Conversely, the study also calls attention to specific challenges linked with dog ownership. The financial burden, time investment, and care responsibilities could increase stress for some. Health conditions or allergies could intensify discomfort for dog owners, and the emotional impact of a pet's illness or loss could lead to profound grief. The study underscores the importance of acknowledging individual factors that influence the impact of dog ownership on mental health. By recognizing the benefits and the challenges of having a dog, individuals can make more informed choices about pet ownership and better prepare for any associated difficulties. Further research is necessary to deepen our understanding of the dynamics between human and canine well-being and devise strategies to enhance the mental health benefits for dogs and their owners. Supporting the human-canine relationship could significantly improve mental well-being and overall quality of life.

Key Words: Dog ownership; Women; Well-being; Emotional Support; Mental Health

Resumen. La conexión entre la tenencia de mascotas y el bienestar humano, especialmente el papel de los perros, ha sido un área de enfoque creciente para los investigadores. Este estudio cualitativo investiga la relación intrincada entre la salud física y mental en mujeres que tienen perros. A través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con 20 mujeres y preguntas abiertas diseñadas específicamente para el tema, este estudio proporcionó una plataforma para que las participantes compartieran sus experiencias y pensamientos, lo que llevó a una comprensión más profunda del problema. La investigación indica fuertemente que tener un perro tiene un efecto beneficioso sobre la salud mental. Las participantes informaron sentir menos estrés y ansiedad, un aumento en el ánimo y una mayor motivación. También notaron vínculos sociales mejorados y apoyo emocional de sus compañeros caninos. Por otro lado, el estudio también llama la atención sobre desafíos específicos vinculados con la tenencia de perros. La carga financiera, la inversión de tiempo y las responsabilidades de cuidado podrían aumentar el estrés para algunos. Las condiciones de salud o alergias podrían intensificar la incomodidad para los dueños de perros, y el impacto emocional de una enfermedad o pérdida de una mascota podría llevar a un dolor profundo. El estudio subraya la importancia de reconocer los factores individuales que influyen en el impacto de la tenencia de perros en la salud mental. Al reconocer tanto los beneficios como los desafíos de tener un perro, las personas pueden tomar decisiones más informadas sobre la tenencia de mascotas y prepararse mejor para cualquier dificultad asociada. Se necesitan más investigaciones para profundizar nuestro entendimiento de la dinámica entre el bienestar humano y canino y para desarrollar estrategias que mejoren los beneficios de la salud mental tanto para los perros como para sus dueños. Apoyar la relación humano-canina podría mejorar significativamente el bienestar mental y la calidad de vida en general.

Palabras clave: Tenencia de perro; Mujeres; Bienestar; Apoyo Emocional; Salud Mental

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Introduction

The relationship between pet ownership, particularly dog ownership, and human well-being has received increasing attention in recent years as researchers delve into the multifaceted connections between engaging with dogs and various physical and mental health aspects across diverse populations. The significance of human-animal interactions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, has become increasingly evident, with studies conducted during lockdown phases highlighting the pivotal role of companion animals, including dogs, in mitigating loneliness and promoting mental well-being (Ratschen et al., 2020; Shoesmith et al., 2021). Given that women often take on primary caregiving roles in households, it is crucial to understand their experiences concerning dog

ownership.

Dog ownership has been extensively studied in physical health, particularly cardiovascular health. Research indicates that the presence of pets positively impacts cardiovascular reactivity, underscoring the potential role of dogs in enhancing overall physical well-being (Allen et al., 1997). Moreover, engaging in activities associated with dog ownership, such as regular walks, has been linked to improved physical fitness, as evidenced by studies examining this relationship (Slater et al., 1995; Westgarth et al., 2017).

In addition to physical health benefits, owning a dog has been associated with various mental health benefits. Studies have explored the association between pet ownership and indicators of psychological well-being and mood, particularly in older adults (Bennett et al., 2019). Throughout the COVID-

19 pandemic, the presence of companion dogs has been linked to reduced feelings of loneliness and enhanced mental health, emphasizing the crucial role of dogs as sources of emotional support during challenging times (Ratschen et al., 2020). The biopsychosocial approach proposed by Gee et al. (2021) further underscores the holistic impact of dogs on human health, considering biological, psychological, and social dimensions. Given the significant role of women in caregiving, understanding how dog ownership intersects with their physical and mental health is paramount. Exploring typologies of older adult companion animal owners, including gender-specific patterns, can provide valuable insights into women's unique experiences (Carr et al., 2019).

Therefore, this article aims to delve into the complex interaction between physical and mental health in women who own dogs, considering the broader context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the existing literature on the topic. It addresses the gaps and specific aspects of dog ownership that contribute to women's well-being, employing a qualitative approach that captures women's lived experiences and perceptions. Through this exploration, we strive to provide valuable insights that can inform both research and practice in human-animal interactions and women's health.

Method

In conducting this research, we embraced the utilization of the semi-structured interview technique, a qualitative research approach expounded by Creswell and Poth (2017). Our choice of this methodology was driven by the study's overarching aim—to present a nuanced and comprehensive outlook on a specific subject, allowing for the thorough evaluation of a defined problem from various perspectives (Patton, 2014). Through the semi-structured interview technique, researchers and participants engaged in profound discussions and interpretations of the chosen topic, fostering a more expansive exploration of the research problem within the article.

Approval was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Istanbul Aydın University, Social and Human Sciences (No: 2023/08), before commencing the research. The educators were informed about the study and its purpose during the data collection phase.

Data Collection Tools

We employed a semi-structured interview during data collection (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This method allowed participants to interpret a specific topic and articulate their experiences and ideas. The interviews were skillfully conducted using open-ended questions tailored to the research topic, with additional queries introduced dynamically based on the participant's responses (Galletta, 2013). The interview sessions, lasting an average of 30 to 45 minutes each, were meticulously recorded using audio recording devices

(Roulston, 2010). Subsequently, these audio recordings underwent transcription, transforming spoken words into written text (Oliver et al., 2005). While quoting participants' views, a systematic coding system ("W1, W2, W3," etc.) was adopted to anonymize and attribute statements to specific participants. This approach ensured clarity and confidentiality when presenting participants' perspectives.

Data Analysis

The acquired data underwent meticulous qualitative data analysis procedures, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Each interview was subjected to a comprehensive assessment, with distinct segments systematically coded in line with established methods (Saldaña, 2015). These codes were subsequently organized into cohesive themes, and their relevance to the overarching research problem and objectives was thoroughly explored, drawing from the insights of Flick (2018). The researchers dedicated considerable effort to grasping participants' nuanced expressions and perspectives within their respective contexts, aligning with the approach advocated by Creswell (2013).

This study demonstrates a rigorous adherence to ethical and scientific research principles, aligning with the guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association (2023). Throughout the interview and data collection processes, the researchers ensured the informed knowledge and consent of all participants, a practice aligned with the recommendations of Hennink et al. (2020). Before participation, participants were transparently briefed on the research objectives, procedures, and data collection and analysis methods, fostering a foundation of ethical engagement (Ellis, 2007).

In qualitative research, it is recommended to ensure validity and reliability by spending extended periods in the research setting, presenting data and analyses for review by the participants, having interpretations confirmed by expert individuals, reporting data in detail, and explaining how the researchers arrived at their conclusions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The validity and reliability of this study were designed according to the criteria above, and the resulting themes and sub-themes were determined to see if they accurately represented the analyzed data. Three experts in qualitative research separately analyzed the data to establish these themes and sub-themes. To ensure data reliability, the formula $(\text{Consensus} / (\text{Consensus} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100)$ was used (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The expert consensus calculated for the data was found to be 94%.

Study Grup

The study employed a convenience sampling strategy, enlisting the participation of 20 women (Etikan et al., 2016). This approach allowed for a substantial sample's rapid and cost-effective gathering (Marshall, 1996). However, the absence of random selection in this strategy raises concerns

about the generalizability of the findings to the broader population (Bhattacharjee, 2012). The selection of participants was meticulously conducted to align with the research's subject and objectives. Individuals with diverse demographic and occupational backgrounds were purposefully chosen to enrich the study with varied perspectives and robust data (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

Ensuring the protection of participants' personal information and maintaining confidentiality were paramount in this research. Data collection and analysis strictly adhered to the non-disclosure of participants' details was adhered to, with their involvement entirely voluntary. This ethical approach is designed to cultivate trust among participants, encouraging their active involvement in the research process (Resnik, 2015).

Table 1.
Distribution of Participants by Age

Age	N	%
31-40	7	35
41-50	9	45
51+	4	20
Total	20	100

Table 1 shows the age distribution of the study participants. Of the 20 participants, 35% are between 31 and 40 years old, comprising seven individuals. The largest age group, accounting for 45% of the participants, includes nine individuals between 41 and 50. The remaining 20% of the sample, which includes four individuals, are aged 51 years and older. This breakdown provides a clear view of the age range within the study population.

Table 2.
Participants' Educational Levels

Education Level	N	%
Master's	7	35
University	10	50
Secondary	3	15

Table 3.
Participants' Living Situations

Living Situation	N	%
Living alone	9	45
Living with a partner or spouse	10	50
Living with partner, spouse, and child(ren)	1	5
Living with roommates	1	5
Living with partner and part-time with stepson	1	5

Table 2 shows the educational distribution among the study's participants. A notable 35% possess Master's degrees, demonstrating a substantial representation of advanced academic achievement within the group. The majority, 50%, have obtained university degrees at the bachelor's level, suggesting a robust educational background across much of the sample. Additionally, 15% of participants have achieved up to secondary education, marking a smaller but significant segment of the study population.

Table 3 that 45% of participants live alone, amounting to

nine individuals. The largest segment, constituting 50% of the participants, live with a partner or spouse. Additionally, smaller proportions of the participants have other living arrangements: 5% (one participant) live with a partner, spouse, and children, another 5% (one participant) live with roommates, and the remaining 5% (one participant) live with a partner and part-time with a stepson. This distribution highlights the diverse living situations within the study group.

Table 4.
Frequency of Participants' Personal Dog Walking

Participant Frequency Status	Participant Number
Once	W11
Twice	W2, W3, W7, W8, W12, W13, W14, W17, W18, W20
Three times	W5, W9, W15, W16, W1
Four times	W10

Table 4 shows the frequency of participants' dog-walking habits. Participants are categorized based on how often they walk their dogs. For example, one participant walks his or her dog once, several participants walk their dogs twice, another group walks three times, and one participant walks their dog four times.

Results

Table 5.
The Impact of Owning a Dog on Participants' Physical Activity Levels

Physical Activity Level	Participants No
Much less	W8, W18
Slightly less	W2, W14
Same amount	W5, W11, W19
Slightly more	W1, W4, W6, W9, W13, W20
Much more	W3, W7, W10, W12, W15, W16, W17

Table 6.
How participants generally feel when they spend time with dogs

Emotion	Participants
Calm	W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W7, W8, W15
Happy	W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W8, W9, W10, W12, W13, W14, W16, W17, W18, W20
Peaceful	W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W7, W8, W15
Loved	W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W8, W10, W11, W12, W13, W14, W15, W16, W17, W18, W19, W20
Energetic	W3, W5, W6, W8, W9, W14, W18

Table 5 provides insights into the influence of dog ownership on the physical activity levels of participating individuals. A noticeable pattern emerges as we examine the data. Participants W8 and W18 reported engaging in "Much less" physical activity, signifying a significant reduction after acquiring a dog. In contrast, participants W2 and W14 experienced a slight decline, falling into the "Slightly less" category. On the other hand, participants W5, W11, and W19 maintained their physical activity at a consistent level, categorized as "Same amount." Meanwhile, participants W1, W4, W6, W9, W13, and W20 fell into the "Slightly more" category, indicating a modest increase in physical activity since owning

a dog. The most notable trend is observed in participants categorized under "Much more." W3, W7, W10, W12, W15, W16, and W17 reported a substantial increase in their physical activity levels after acquiring a dog.

Table 6 shows the emotional impact reported by participants when spending time with their dogs. The emotions in-

clude calmness, happiness, peacefulness, love, and energy infusion. Participants expressed many positive emotions, with many indicating happiness and love when interacting with their canine companions. The diverse emotional responses highlight the multifaceted nature of the human-dog bond, emphasizing the positive influence of such interactions on individuals' emotional well-being.

Table 7.
Positive or negative impact of owning a dog on physical activities

Increasing Physical Activity	Energy and Motivation	Strengthening Social Relations	Mental Health and Coping with Stress	Non-Routine Activities	Healthy Lifestyle and Weight Control	Connection with Nature	The Beginning and End of the Day
Dog ownership increases physical activity levels through regular walks and games.	The dog's energy motivates its daily activities and increases its energy levels.	Dog owners increase social interactions as they have opportunities to meet other dog owners.	Dog ownership positively impacts mental health and strengthens stress-coping skills.	Participants become more active with their dogs, which helps them escape their daily routine.	By contributing to adopting a healthy lifestyle, regular exercise, and activities help control weight.	Time spent in nature allows participants to become more connected to their environment.	It positively affects the beginning of the day, encouraging morning exercises and helping to complete the day energetically.
W1, W2, W4, W6, W8, W11, W13, W17	W1, W2, W5, W8, W12	W10, W14, W19	W6, W14, W18	W15, W16	W4, W9, W11	W3, W5, W8, W14	W3, W8, W11, W17

Table 7 shows findings regarding the positive and negative impacts of owning a dog on various aspects of individuals' lives, specifically focusing on physical activities. Each column represents a different aspect of physical activity, such as increasing physical activity, energy and motivation, strengthening social relations, mental health and coping with stress, non-routine activities, healthy lifestyle and weight control, connection with nature, and the beginning and end of the day. Participants' responses are categorized according to whether they perceive dog ownership as having a positive or negative impact on each aspect. For example, participants report that owning a dog increases physical activity levels through regular walks and games, positively impacting their healthy lifestyle and weight control. Similarly, they note that the energy and motivation provided by their dogs contribute to their daily activities and energy levels.

Furthermore, dog ownership strengthens social relations, as owners can meet other dog owners, enhancing mental health and coping with stress. Each participant's response is indicated by their corresponding identifier (W1, W2, etc.), offering a diverse range of perspectives on the influence of dog ownership on physical activities. The table provides a comprehensive overview of how owning a dog can impact individuals' engagement in physical activities, highlighting this relationship's positive and negative aspects.

The following statements from individual participants shed light on the positive impact of owning a dog on physical activities.

W1. "Yes, being with my dog is a great source of physical activity. We go for regular walks daily, which positively affects my overall health. Her energy gets me going, which increases my daily exercise amount."

W2: "Playing with my dog and spending time outside is a pleasure. This keeps me motivated, especially when I come home tired from work. I feel an increase in my physical activities, positively impacting my overall health."

W3. "I go for regular morning walks, thanks to my dog. This helps me start the day with more energy and positivity. However, sometimes it can be difficult to go out due to weather conditions."

P 4. "My time with my dog makes me feel young and energetic. Playing and running with it increases my daily exercise, which helps me manage my weight."

P 5. "Frankly, I would rather stay home without my dog. However, his presence encourages me to go out every day. In this way, I connect with nature and escape my daily stress."

W6. "Running and playing in the park with my dog revitalizes me physically and mentally. The time I spend with him positively impacts my mental health."

W7. "Yes, spending time with my dog encourages me to exercise regularly. However, due to my workload, I sometimes can skip these activities."

P 8. "If I did not have a dog, I would probably spend most of my time outdoors sitting. However, her energy gets me going and encourages me to go on nature walks a few times a week."

P 9. "Thanks to my dog, I started exercising regularly. This has helped me manage my weight and adopt a healthier lifestyle."

W10. "My time with my dog positively impacts my physical activities and social relationships. It is a great experience meeting other dog owners at the park with him."

P 11. "Regular running with my dog increases my cardiovascular endurance. This improves my overall health and helps me feel more energetic throughout the day."

P 12. "The time I spend with my dog frees me from my daily

routine. Her energy encourages me to get outside daily, positively impacting my health."

W13. "Exercises with my dog are no longer boring. The time I spend with him makes working out fun."

W14. "Going for regular walks with my dog has become a mindfulness activity. Connecting with nature and enjoying moments filled with its energy helps me cope with stress."

P 15. "If I did not have a dog, I would probably spend most of the day sitting at a desk. However, thanks to him, I have become more active, positively impacting my overall health."

W16. "Regular walks with my dog work like an immune system booster for me. Time spent outdoors helps me connect with my body and stay healthy."

W17. "Thanks to my dog, I started doing regular morning exercises. This helps me be more energetic for the rest of the day and cope better with work-related stress."

W18. "The time I spend with my dog is a kind of therapy. Being outside with him positively impacts my mental health and helps me escape the day's stress."

W19. "Yes, physical activities with my dog are like meditation for me. Being in nature with him calms me and improves my overall mood."

W20. "Regular walks with my dog are a source of social interaction for me. Meeting and chatting with other dog owners make exercise, which can be boring for me, more enjoyable."

Table 7 shows a comprehensive overview of the positive impact of dog ownership on various facets of individuals' lives. The table categorizes the benefits into different aspects, such as increasing physical activity, boosting energy and motivation, strengthening social relations, improving mental health, engaging in non-routine activities, promoting a healthy lifestyle, and enhancing the beginning and end of the day. The participant statements further elucidate these aspects, with each individual sharing unique experiences. Common themes emerge, emphasizing how owning a dog stimulates regular physical activity through activities like walks and play, provides motivation and energy, fosters social interactions with other dog owners, positively influences mental health and stress coping, breaks routine, contributes to a healthy lifestyle, and establishes a connection with nature. The participants consistently highlight the transformative impact of canine companionship on their overall well-being, portraying dogs not just as pets but as sources of motivation, joy, and therapeutic support in their daily lives.

Table 8.

Positive or negative social effects of owning a dog

New Friends and Social Environment	Neighbourhood Relationships	Family and Friend Relationships	Parenting and Relationships with Children	Participation in Social Events	Encouraging Activities Outside the Home
Dog ownership allows you to make new friendships and expand your social circle at parks, dog training classes or events with other dog owners.	Dog ownership strengthens neighbourly relations by providing the opportunity to meet and chat with neighbours more often.	Dog ownership positively impacts these relationships by providing more interaction between family members and friends.	Dog ownership strengthens parenting and relationships with children by providing the opportunity to meet and interact with other families with their children.	Dog ownership positively impacts social life by increasing participation in dog parks, training classes and other social events.	Dog ownership encourages owners to get out of the house, allowing them to interact more with the outside world.
W1, W2, W3, W4, W5, W6, W8, W11, W15, W16, W17, W19	W3, W7, W12, W14, W17	W4, W8, W9, W12, W13	W8, W11, W12	W1, W6, W10, W14, W16, W18, W20	W14, W15

Table 8 outlines various positive and negative social effects of owning a dog, as reported by participants in the study. These effects are categorized into six key areas: new friends and social environment, neighbourhood relationships, family and friend relationships, parenting and relationships with children, participation in social events, and encouraging activities outside the home. Participants indicate that dog ownership facilitates the formation of new friendships and the expansion of social circles, mainly through interactions at parks, dog training classes, and other dog-related events. Additionally, owning a dog strengthens neighbour relations by increasing opportunities for casual interactions with neighbours. Within the family and friend relationships domain, dog ownership is associated with increased interaction among family members and friends, contributing to a more cohesive social network. Furthermore, participants highlight the positive impact of dog ownership on parenting and relationships with children, noting that owning a dog provides opportunities for families to

engage with other families and children in social settings. Participation in social events related to dog ownership, such as visits to dog parks and training classes, is also emphasized as a beneficial aspect of dog ownership, fostering increased social engagement.

Additionally, owning a dog encourages owners to engage in activities outside the home, facilitating more significant interaction with the outside world. This aspect of dog ownership is perceived as promoting physical activity and providing opportunities for social interaction beyond the confines of the home environment.

The following statements from individual participants shed light on the **Positive or negative social effects of owning a dog**.

W1. "Yes, my dog makes a positive social impact in my life. Thanks to him, we meet other dog owners in the park, allowing me to make new friendships."

W2. "My dog has increased my social interactions. Meeting other

dog owners, especially at the park, provides a great way for me to form new social circles."

W3. "Yes, spending time with my dog has caused me to interact more with my neighbours. Walking with him, I can meet and chat with the neighbourhood's residents."

W4. "Social events with my dog cause me to be around my family and friends more often. Her energy encourages other people in the house to participate in activities".

W5. "Meeting other dog owners at the park with my dog has become a social outlet for me. This helps me increase social connections, especially after busy work days".

W6. "Yes, attending social events with my dog encourages me to get out of the house and meet different people. This allows me to expand my social circle".

W7. "My dog makes me meet and chat with my neighbours more often. Events with other dog owners in the neighbourhood provide a social platform for me."

W8. "The dog parks I attend with my dog allow me to meet people from different age groups. This adds new perspectives to my life and strengthens my social connections".

W9. "Thanks to my dog, we have created a social circle where we meet regularly with other dog owners. This helps me feel more connected to him and people."

W10. "Yes, the dog parks I attend with my dog strengthen my social bonds by introducing me to other dog owners around me".

W11. "The time I spend with my dog allows me to participate more in neighbourhood activities. This positively impacts other areas of my life by increasing my social connections".

W12. "My dog allows me to have the opportunity to meet other

families with their children. For me, this allows for strong social bonds with both my dog and other parents".

W13. "Yes, thanks to my dog, we can communicate with other dog owners and find a common topic at our social events".

W14. "My dog encourages me to go outside instead of spending more time at home, which increases my social interactions."

W15. "The dog parks I attend with my dog introduce me to other dog owners, strengthening my social bonds and allowing me to make new friendships".

W16. "Yes, the dog training classes and events I attend with my dog provide a social platform for me and offer the chance to meet new people."

W17. "The time I spend with my dog causes me to interact more with my neighbours and strengthens my social bonds. "

W18. "Thanks to my dog, we regularly organize social events where we meet other dog owners in my neighbourhood. This helps me form strong bonds with both my dog and other people. "

W19. "Yes, the time I spend with my dog creates opportunities to meet people around me and increases my social interactions".

W20. "Thanks to my dog, we started attending events organized among pet owners."

The participant sentences further reinforce these positive impacts, illustrating real-life experiences where dogs contribute to expanding social circles, facilitating interactions with neighbours, and promoting engagement in various social activities. The recurring themes include the role of dogs in creating opportunities for socializing, both informally in parks and through organized events, as well as the positive influence on family dynamics.

Table 9. Positive or adverse effects of owning a dog on mental health

Stress and Anxiety Reduction	Morale and Motivation Increase	Strengthening Social Connections	Mental Relaxation	Developing a Sense of Responsibility	Emotional Support
Participants report that interactions with their dogs reduce their stress and anxiety levels.	Dog ownership contributes to participants' morale and a more motivated approach to daily activities.	Dog ownership strengthens the participants' social bonds and enables them to communicate with other people.	Participants state that spending time with their dogs positively affects their mental health and provides inner peace.	Participants emphasize that dog ownership increases their sense of responsibility and brings order to their daily routines.	Participants report that their dogs' love and loyalty provide emotional support.
W1, W4, W5, W7, W9, W12, W13, W14, W16, W17, W19	W1, W2, W8, W10, W11, W15	W3, W6, W9, W10, W14	W4, W8, W13, W15, W16, W18	W2, W7, W12	W1, W3, W5, W6, W9, W11, W14, W15, W17, W19, W20

Table 9 provides stress and anxiety reduction, increased morale and motivation, strengthened social connections, mental relaxation, Developed sense of responsibility, and emotional support. The data consistently reveal that interactions with dogs significantly diminish stress and anxiety, underscoring the therapeutic benefits of canine companionship. Additionally, owning a dog enhances morale and motivates individuals towards daily activities, beneficially influencing their psychological well-being and productivity. Dog ownership also strengthens social connections, as it enhances communication and helps forge bonds among people. Moreover,

spending time with dogs provides mental relaxation, fostering a tranquil environment for owners.

Moreover, participants highlight the development of a sense of responsibility associated with dog ownership, emphasizing how caring for a pet contributes to orderliness in daily routines and fosters personal growth. Lastly, participants emphasize the emotional support dogs provide, emphasizing their love, loyalty, and companionship as significant sources of comfort and reassurance in challenging times. Overall, the table provides valuable insights into the multifaceted role of dog ownership in promoting mental health and well-being,

highlighting both the therapeutic benefits and the responsibilities associated with canine companionship.

The following statements from individual participants shed light on the **Positive or adverse effects of owning a dog on mental health**.

W1. "Yes, I feel a significant positive impact on my mental health thanks to my dog. His love and loyalty support me in dealing with stressful situations. Even on tough days, being around him comforts me."

W2. "The time I spend with my dog positively impacts my mental health. Playing with him and giving him attention reduces my daily stress. At the same time, the sense of responsibility develops."

W3. "My dog is like a therapist to me. His love motivates me and makes it easier to cope with the challenges I face during the day. Additionally, my interactions with my dog strengthen my social bonds."

W4. "It has a positive impact on my mental health. My dog is a stress reliever and anxiety reducer. Spending time with him helps me feel calmer and more balanced for the rest of the day."

W5. "Yes, the time I spend with my dog is like therapy. His sincerity and love lift my mood and help me cope with difficult moments."

W6. "My dog is a soul friend to me. My interactions with him improve my mental health. Being around him comforts me, especially when I feel lonely."

W7. "My dog is a stress reliever for me. His affection and games help me get through the stress of the day. At the same time, it disciplines me by helping me gain a sense of responsibility."

W8. "It has a positive impact on my mental health. Time spent with my dog helps me escape the day's stress and gain a positive perspective. Her energy infectiously creates happiness."

W9. "My connection with my dog is a source of mental support for me. His love and attention help me lift my spirits, especially in difficult moments. It also satisfies my need to get outside and move."

W10. "The time I spend with my dog positively impacts my mental health. My interactions with him encourage me to focus on living in the present. Also, his love motivates me".

W11. "Yes, my relationship with my dog is a source of spiritual healing for me. His love and loyalty always make me feel good and help me become stronger against life's challenges."

W12. "The time I spend with my dog positively impacts my mental health. Playing games and spending time with him distracts me

from daily stress and worries. At the same time, his presence has made me more responsible."

W13. "It positively affects my mental health. Spending time with my dog relaxes me and helps me get through the negative thoughts during the day. Her love is a true source of support."

W14. "My dog is a stress reliever for me. My interactions with him strengthen my mental health and help me escape from the hectic pace of the day."

W15. "It has a significant impact on my mental health. My dog is a source of joy, and my time with him makes me feel mentally rested."

W16. "Yes, my time with my dog positively impacts my mental health. Interactions with him distract me from troubles and allow me to focus on the positive aspects of the day."

W17. "It positively affects my mental health. Being with my dog relieves stress during the day and relaxes me. His presence makes me happier and calmer."

W18. "The time I spend with my dog positively impacts my mental health. His love encourages me to overcome any challenge and reduces the complexity of daily life."

W19. "My dog is a stress reliever. My interactions with him strengthen my mental health and help me cope with negative thoughts."

W20. "The time I spend with my dog has a significant positive impact on my mental health. Playing with and being around him relaxes me and helps me find inner peace."

Table 9 provides a detailed exploration of dog ownership's diverse benefits to mental health, emphasizing areas such as stress and anxiety reduction, morale and motivation enhancement, and strengthening of social bonds. It also highlights how dogs contribute to mental rest, a developed sense of responsibility, and robust emotional support. Participants (W1 to W20) consistently reflect positive experiences with their dogs, noting significant improvements in their mental well-being. These accounts showcase dogs' essential roles, from providing companionship and reducing anxiety to boosting owners' morale and fostering responsibilities. Their testimonials vividly describe the comfort, loyalty, and love dogs offer, underscoring the profound, multifaceted impact these animals have on their owners' mental health and daily lives.

Table 10.
Factors that can cause stress in dog ownership

Veterinary Expenses and Health Concerns	Holiday and Travel Plans	Loneliness and Behavior Problems at Home	Social Interaction and Outdoor Encounters	Training and Adaptation	Daily Care and Cleaning	Housing and Rental Problems	Balance of Work and Dog Care
Participants may experience stress about veterinary expenses and their dog's health concerns that may	Dog owners may experience stress due to the uncertainty of leaving or taking their dogs with them during	Participants may experience stress due to separation anxiety or behavioural problems when their dog is	Participants may experience stress due to difficulties attending social events with their	Participants may experience stress due to difficulties training their dogs and dealing	Participants may experience stress due to the daily care of their dog, shed-	Participants may experience stress due to finding housing where they live with their dogs, lease agreements, and	Participants may experience stress due to the challenges of balancing their work lives with dog care.

arise due to unexpected health issues or emergencies.	vacation or travel plans.	left home alone.	dogs or encountering other dog owners outside.	with specific behavioural issues.	ding, and cleaning-related tasks.	landlords' pet admission policies.	
W2, W3, W14, W18	W1, W12	W4, W13, W15, W16	W8, W10, W17	W5, W6, W11	W7, W9, W19	W8, W9, W18	W4, W11, W16, W19

Table 10 delineates the various stress areas associated with dog ownership, as reported by participants. These areas are categorized into distinct domains, including veterinary expenses and health concerns, holiday and travel plans, loneliness and behaviour problems at home, social interaction and outdoor encounters, training and adaptation, daily care and cleaning, housing and rental problems, and the balance of work and dog care. Each domain represents a specific aspect of dog ownership that may lead to stress for individuals. For instance, participants express stress related to veterinary expenses and health concerns stemming from unexpected health issues or emergencies that may arise with their dogs. Similarly, stress arises concerning holiday and travel plans as dog owners grapple with the uncertainty of whether to leave their dogs behind or include them in their travel arrangements. Moreover, loneliness and behaviour problems at home present another source of stress, mainly when dogs exhibit separation anxiety or undesirable behaviours in their absence.

Furthermore, participants report stress related to social interaction and outdoor encounters as they navigate difficulties attending social events with their dogs or interacting with other dog owners outside. Training and adaptation of dogs also pose challenges, leading to stress for participants who struggle with training their dogs or managing specific behavioural issues. Daily care and cleaning tasks associated with dog ownership contribute to stress, particularly concerning shedding and cleaning-related chores. Housing and rental problems present additional stressors, as participants encounter challenges finding suitable housing that accommodates their dogs and navigating lease agreements and landlords' pet admission policies. Finally, participants express stress regarding the balance of work and dog care, highlighting the difficulties of managing their professional responsibilities alongside caring for their dogs. Table 10 provides a comprehensive overview of the multifaceted stressors associated with dog ownership, highlighting individuals' diverse challenges in managing various aspects of their lives while caring for their canine companions.

The following statements from individual participants shed light on **Factors that can cause stress in dog ownership.**

W1. "Yes, sometimes leaving the dog while on vacation can be stressful. It can be difficult to find a reliable caregiver to ensure their good care."

W2. "Veterinary expenses can create pressure at times. Unexpected health issues or emergencies can cause costs to increase, which can cause stress."

W3. "When my dog gets sick or there is an emergency, I worry

about being unable to be with the vet immediately. Getting appropriate help quickly can be stressful."

W4. "On days when I have to spend long hours at home with my dog, meeting his needs and draining his energy can be stressful. Balancing work life and dog care can be difficult."

W5. "The training process is time-consuming and requires patience, especially when I adopt a puppy. Difficulties experienced in this process can create stress."

W6. "Finding solutions to my dog's behavioural problems, especially regarding aggressive behaviour or toilet training, can stress me out. Providing appropriate training can take time and effort."

W7. "Sometimes grooming and cleaning my dog regularly creates extra work, especially during shedding periods, which can be stressful."

W8. "Taking the dog with me to social events, especially in restaurants or hotels, can bring some difficulties. This may require additional thought when planning."

W9. "Finding and renting a house in the city where I live with my dog can create an additional difficulty due to the pet acceptance policies of the landlords, and this can be stressful."

W10. "Some dog owners may be anxious about encountering other dogs in the park or walking areas. This may require caution in social interactions."

W11. "Remembering and organizing daily dog care tasks can create stress, especially when I have a busy work schedule."

W12. "When making some holiday or travel plans, uncertainty about whether I can be with the dog can affect holiday plans, which can be stressful."

W13. "Keeping order in the house where I live with my dog can sometimes be stressful, especially if things get chewed up or messed up."

W14. "Concerns about my dog's health can make me stressed, especially as he ages. Preparing for vet checkups and health issues can be important but sometimes challenging."

W15. "The anxiety or separation anxiety my dog experiences when left alone at home can also affect me, and this creates stress."

W16. "When my dog's energy level is sometimes not the same as mine, it can be difficult to provide appropriate exercise, which can create stress."

W17. "Some dogs may be incompatible with other animals or people. This can cause anxiety about encountering other dog owners outside."

W18. "Finding quality food and ingredients that suit my dog's needs can sometimes require extra time and research, which can create stress."

W19. "Dog care can sometimes feel like a second job in the busyness of daily life, and this can create stress."

W20. "Encountering some restrictions in the house where I live

with my dog due to the rules of the landlords can create stress, especially when I think about moving house.”

Table 11.
Negative Impacts on Quality of Life Associated with Not Owning a Dog

Decrease in Physical Activity	Social Isolation and Decrease in Interaction	Loss of Connection with Nature	Mental Health and Difficulty Coping with Stress	The monotony of Daily Routine
Participants indicate that if they did not have a dog, they would likely be less physically active and decrease their daily exercise.	Participants think that without a dog, their social interactions will decrease, and they will be less connected to their environment.	Participants state that if they did not have a dog, they would interact less with nature and may decrease their outdoor activities.	Participants state that dog ownership positively impacts their mental health and helps them cope with stress.	Participants felt that their daily life routines might be monotonous and repetitive if they did not have a dog.
W2, W4, W7, W9, W13	W8, W10, W15, W18	W3, W14, W16	W6, W11, W17	W5, W12, W16
The feeling of Inner Emptiness	Decrease in Energy and Joy	Decreased Diversity of Life	Decrease in Outside Activities	Loss of Social Interaction and Connection
Participants state that they may experience an inner feeling of emptiness if they do not have a dog.	Participants state that their daily energy levels and joy may decrease if they do not have a dog.	Participants felt their daily lives might be less diverse and exciting if they did not have a dog.	Participants state that if they do not have a dog, their outdoor activities may decrease, and their connection with nature may weaken.	Participants state that their social ties with other dog owners and communities may weaken if they do not have a dog.
W15, W19	W1, W11, W13	W6, W9, W16	W1, W3, W14	W8, W10, W15

Table 11 presents findings from a study examining the perceived impact of not having a dog on individuals' quality of life across various domains. The study employs a qualitative approach, with participants expressing their beliefs and experiences regarding potential changes in physical activity, social interaction, connection with nature, mental health, and daily routine monotony in the absence of a dog. Participants consistently suggest that the absence of a dog may lead to decreased physical activity and exercise, as well as reduced social interaction and connection to the environment. They also anticipate interacting less with nature and experiencing a potential decline in outdoor activities without a dog. Furthermore, participants attribute positive effects on mental health and stress coping to dog ownership, highlighting its potential absence as detrimental to their well-being. Additionally, participants expressed concerns about inner emptiness, decreased energy and joy, diminished diversity in daily life, and weakened social ties with other dog owners and communities if they were without a dog.

The following statements from individual participants shed light on the **Negative Impacts on Quality of Life Associated with Not Owning a Dog.**

W1. *"If I did not have a dog, I would probably have a more sedentary lifestyle. Her energy and needs encourage me to get outside regularly, which improves my quality of life."*

W2. *"If I did not have a dog, I would spend my day less actively. His presence encourages me to get outside daily, positively impacting my physical health."*

W3. *"If I did not have a dog, perhaps I would miss my opportunities to connect with nature. My walks with him encourage me to interact more with my environment."*

W4. *"If I did not have a dog, I would spend more time at home. His presence forces me to get outside, positively impacting my social*

interactions and overall life energy."

W5. *"If I did not have a dog, I would probably move less during the day. The time I spend with him encourages me to exercise regularly, which helps me maintain my physical health."*

W6. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe my daily routine would be more monotonous. My time with him encourages me to go out, making my day more diverse and enjoyable."*

W7. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would have a harder time dealing with stress. His presence guides me to moments of play and love, which helps me lower my stress levels."*

W8. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would have a more isolated lifestyle. Thanks to him, I can meet other dog owners, expanding my social circle."*

W9. *"If I did not have a dog, I would probably spend less time outside during the day. Her energy encourages me to explore the outside world, which improves my quality of life."*

W10. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would be less in touch with nature. Our walks with him encourage me to interact more with my environment, an important quality of life element."*

W11. *"If I did not have a dog, I might smile less during the day. His love and games help me spend my day more positively and joyfully."*

W12. *"If I did not have my dog, I would probably feel more of an inner emptiness. Her presence adds welcome vibrancy to my home and encourages me to live more meaningfully."*

W13. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would be less physically active. Her energy encourages me to exercise regularly, which improves my quality of life."*

W14. *"If I did not have a dog, I would probably miss opportunities to connect with nature. His presence directs me to outdoor activities, positively affecting my quality of life."*

W15. *"If I did not have a dog, I might be more withdrawn over time. His presence encourages me to go out and creates opportunities*

to meet new people."

W16. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would have a more monotonous daily routine. His energy directs me to different daily activities, improving my quality of life."*

W17. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would have a more work-oriented lifestyle. His presence directs me to activities outside of work, which helps me maintain balance."*

W18. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would have a harder time dealing with stress. His love supports me in difficult moments and improves my quality of life."*

W19. *"If I did not have a dog, I might feel more inner emptiness. His love is enough to make me happy daily and positively affect my quality of life."*

W20. *"If I did not have a dog, maybe I would be less spontaneous. His presence encourages me to enjoy the moment, which improves my quality of life."*

Discussion

Dog ownership has been consistently associated with increased physical activity levels among owners. Regular walks and games with dogs motivate owners to engage in physical activities, contributing to a healthier lifestyle and weight control (Potter et al., 2019; Toohey & Rock, 2011; Müllersdorf et al., 2010). Given the global rise in physical inactivity linked to chronic health issues, dog walking has been highlighted as a potential strategy to enhance physical activity levels, a finding supported by Li et al. (2024), who investigated the exercise intensity of on-leash dog walking to see if it meets health-enhancement thresholds. This aligns with the findings of the BuddyStudy pilot trial, which demonstrated that dog acquisition led to significant increases in physical activity and psychosocial well-being among participants (Potter et al., 2019). Also, Christian et al. (2022) found that active engagement with dogs, such as playing and walking, is significantly associated with increased physical activity, more outdoor play, and less screen time among preschoolers (Christian, H., Wenden, E. J., Ng, M., & Maitland, C., 2022).

Additionally, the comprehensive review by Westgarth et al. (2014) highlighted various correlates of dog walking, emphasizing its potential to increase physical activity levels among owners. Furthermore, the statements from individual participants corroborate these findings, emphasizing the role of dogs in providing energy, motivation, and companionship during physical activities (Powell et al., 2020; Arhant-Sudhir et al., 2011). Participants consistently reported that owning a dog positively influenced their daily routines, encouraging them to engage in non-routine outdoor exercises and nature walks (Curl et al., 2017; Giraudet et al., 2022). Additionally, the social benefits of dog ownership were observed, as participants noted enhanced opportunities for interaction and socializing with other dog owners during physical activities with their dogs (Corrigan et al., 2018). Despite the overwhelming

evidence supporting the positive impact of dog ownership on physical activities, some participants also acknowledged potential challenges, such as weather conditions and workload, which may hinder their ability to engage in regular physical activities with their dogs. Supporting literature suggest a predominantly positive impact of owning a dog on physical activities. Dog ownership motivates owners to engage in regular physical activities, contributes to a healthier lifestyle, fosters social interactions, and enhances overall well-being. However, it is essential to recognize and address potential barriers limiting individuals' ability to realize these benefits fully.

Dogs play a significant role in facilitating social interactions and fostering connections within communities. Research by McConnell et al. (2011) emphasizes the benefits of pet ownership, including the formation of new friendships and the expansion of social circles, aligning with the experiences reported by participants who noted that dog ownership allows them to make new friends and engage in social activities with other dog owners. Moreover, the positive impact of dogs on neighbourhood relationships is supported by studies such as Beals (2009), which found that pet ownership strengthens neighbourly relations by providing opportunities for casual interactions. This is echoed in participants' experiences, where they mention that owning a dog encourages them to interact more with their neighbours, leading to stronger social bonds. Family dynamics and relationships are also positively influenced by dog ownership. Ramírez and Hernández (2014) highlighted the role of pets in strengthening family ties, which resonates with participants' accounts of how owning a dog enhances relationships with family members and children. Dogs facilitate bonding experiences within families as they create opportunities for shared activities and interactions with other families, contributing to a sense of unity and connection.

Additionally, participation in social events related to dog ownership, such as visits to dog parks and training classes, serves as a platform for increased social engagement. Hull et al. (2022) found that involvement in such activities promotes adolescent social interaction, consistent with participants' reports of attending social events with their dogs and expanding their social circles. Furthermore, the encouragement provided by dogs to engage in activities outside the home contributes to overall social well-being. Clark Cline (2010) highlighted the role of pets in reducing feelings of isolation and enhancing social connectedness, which aligns with participants' experiences of increased social interactions resulting from spending time with their dogs in outdoor settings. The positive social effects of owning a dog are supported by empirical research and underscored by participants' firsthand experiences. Dogs catalyze social interaction and community engagement, strengthening interpersonal relationships across various domains and contributing to individuals' overall social well-being.

Interactions with dogs have been shown to reduce individual stress and anxiety levels (Cui et al., 2021; Lass-Henne-mann et al., 2020). Dogs provide emotional support and companionship, which can significantly improve mood and well-being, especially during challenging times (Hawkins et al., 2021; Beals, 2009). Participants in the study reported feeling a sense of comfort, joy, and relaxation when spending time with their dogs, indicating the therapeutic benefits of canine companionship (McConnell et al., 2011; Smith, 2012). Moreover, owning a dog has increased morale, motivation, and a positive outlook (Cui et al., 2021; Hawkins et al., 2021). Participants felt more energized and motivated in their daily activities, attributing this boost to their interactions with their dogs. The sense of responsibility with pet ownership also contributes to a sense of purpose and fulfilment, which can positively impact mental well-being (Tóth et al., 2023).

Additionally, dogs play a crucial role in strengthening social connections and facilitating social interactions (Cui et al., 2021; Grajfoner et al., 2021). Participants in the study reported that owning a dog provided opportunities to meet new people and engage in social activities, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness and isolation. The emotional bond between dogs and their owners fosters a sense of belonging and support, contributing to overall mental well-being (Tóth et al., 2023).

While most of the data and academic sources emphasize the positive effects of owning a dog on mental health, it is also essential to acknowledge potential adverse effects. For some individuals, the responsibilities associated with pet ownership, such as financial costs and time commitment, can lead to stress and overwhelming feelings (Hawkins et al., 2021; Grajfoner et al., 2021). Additionally, individuals with certain mental health conditions, such as allergies or phobias, may experience increased anxiety or discomfort in the presence of dogs (Tóth et al., 2023). Furthermore, the loss of a pet or witnessing a decline in their health can have a significant impact on owners' mental well-being, leading to grief and emotional distress (McConnell et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2021). While the bond between dogs and their owners is often a source of comfort, the loss of that bond can be deeply felt and may contribute to feelings of sadness and depression. The data and academic sources provide compelling evidence for the positive effects of dog ownership on mental health. Interactions with dogs have been shown to reduce stress, increase morale and motivation, strengthen social connections, and provide emotional support. However, it is essential to acknowledge that pet ownership also comes with responsibilities and potential challenges that may affect mental well-being. By understanding the positive and adverse effects of owning a dog on mental health, individuals can make informed decisions about pet ownership and ensure their well-being and that of their furry companions.

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of

dog ownership on mental health. For instance, Bergen-Cico et al. (2018) found that dog ownership and training reduced post-traumatic stress symptoms and increased self-compassion among veterans, indicating the potential therapeutic benefits of canine companionship for individuals experiencing trauma-related stress. Similarly, Rathish et al. (2022) explored the experiences of dog owners from a rural district of Sri Lanka. They found that being with their dogs provided a source of comfort and support during times of stress, suggesting a protective effect on mental well-being. Moreover, longitudinal studies have provided evidence of the positive impact of dog ownership on mental health over time. Tzivian et al. (2015) compared the stress and quality of life outcomes between individuals keeping a living dog versus those who lost a dog by euthanasia. They found that dog owners reported higher levels of social support and lower stress levels than individuals who had lost a dog, highlighting the ongoing benefits of canine companionship for mental well-being. Despite the positive aspects, owning a dog can also pose challenges that impact mental health. As highlighted, one area of concern is the stress associated with veterinary expenses and health concerns. Participants reported experiencing stress related to unexpected health issues or emergencies with their dogs, which can have financial and emotional implications, potentially contributing to mental distress (González-Ramírez et al., 2018).

Additionally, the responsibility of daily care and cleaning tasks associated with dog ownership can become overwhelming for some individuals, leading to stress and burnout (Antonacopoulos & Pychyl, 2008). Furthermore, housing and rental problems related to pet admission policies can create additional stressors, particularly for individuals who find suitable accommodation that accommodates their dogs (Cui et al., 2021). Empirical research and participant experiences show that owning a dog can positively and negatively affect mental health. While canine companionship has been associated with therapeutic benefits and improved well-being, it also entails challenges and stressors that may negatively impact mental health. Therefore, it is essential to consider the individual circumstances and factors influencing the relationship between dog ownership and mental health, highlighting the need for tailored interventions and support services to promote positive outcomes for owners and their dogs.

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of owning a dog on mental health. For example, Oyama et al. (2017) developed and validated a dog owner-specific quality-of-life questionnaire, which revealed that dog ownership was associated with increased overall quality of life for owners. Similarly, Hall et al. (2017) conducted a pilot study examining the impact of owning a service dog on quality of life for individuals with physical and hearing disabilities, finding that service dog ownership significantly improved mental well-be-

ing. Furthermore, McIver et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study investigating the impact of owning a guide dog on owners' quality of life, reporting sustained improvements in mental health over time. While most research suggests positive outcomes, some studies have also identified potential adverse effects of dog ownership on mental health. Tzivian et al. (2015) explored associations between stress and quality of life among individuals who owned a living dog versus those who experienced the loss of a dog through euthanasia, finding that stress levels were higher among individuals who lost a dog.

Additionally, Linek and Favrot (2010) examined the impact of canine atopic dermatitis on the health-related quality of life of affected dogs and their owners, reporting adverse effects on owners' mental well-being due to the burden of caring for a dog with a chronic condition. The literature suggests that owning a dog can have positive and adverse effects on mental health, depending on various factors such as the individual's circumstances, the type of dog owned, and the relationship quality. While many studies highlight the potential benefits of dog ownership for mental well-being, it is essential to recognize and address any challenges or negative consequences that may arise. Further research is needed to understand the complex interplay between dog ownership and mental health, ultimately informing strategies to promote positive outcomes for owners and their canine companions.

Conclusion

Evidence strongly indicates that dog ownership can significantly enhance mental well-being for many individuals, including women, by reducing stress and anxiety, boosting morale and motivation, and strengthening social connections. Women, in particular, may find the companionship and emotional support from dogs especially comforting, leading to increased joy and a sense of fulfillment. However, it is essential to recognize that dog ownership also entails challenges and potential stressors that can affect mental health. Pet care responsibilities, including financial costs and time commitments, can be overwhelming and stressful, particularly for women who may juggle multiple roles. Additionally, women with specific mental health conditions or allergies might experience increased discomfort or anxiety around dogs. Furthermore, the emotional toll from the loss of a pet or dealing with a pet's health issues can lead to significant grief and sadness, impacting women's mental well-being profoundly.

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