Perceived Attitudes of Pet Owners About Their Pets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

This longitudinal study aims to:

1. Investigate perceived attitudes toward, attachment to, and relationship with pets held by participants at two points during the COVID-19 pandemic

2. Examine how these measures change as COVID-19 vaccination rates increase and social distancing restrictions are eased, allowing people to spend more time away from home.

METHODOLOGY

Timeline

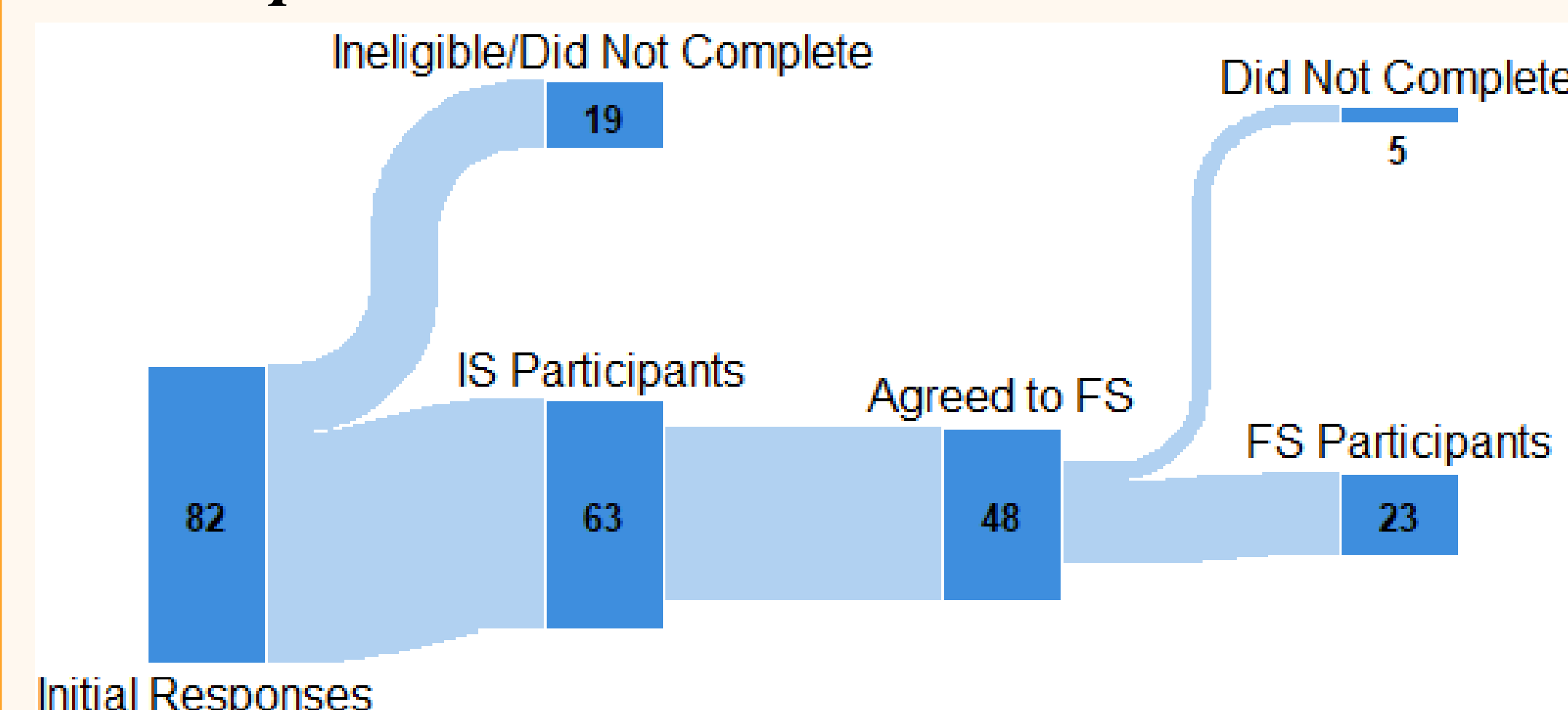The initial survey (**IS**) was first distributed on **March 2, 2021** — 6 Months → The follow-up survey (**FS**) was first distributed on **September 2, 2021**

Participants

63 IS participants and 23 FS participants were included in the final analyses

Participant Flow

Procedure

- Measures were distributed via online survey, and participants were asked to complete quantitative measures and answer open-ended questions about their attitudes and attachment toward their pets

Measures

Attitudes Toward Pets
- How people feel or think about either their pets specifically or pets generally
- Modified Pet Attitude Scale (PAS-M; Munsell et al. (2004)

Attachment to Pets
- The emotional bond between a person and their specific pet or pets
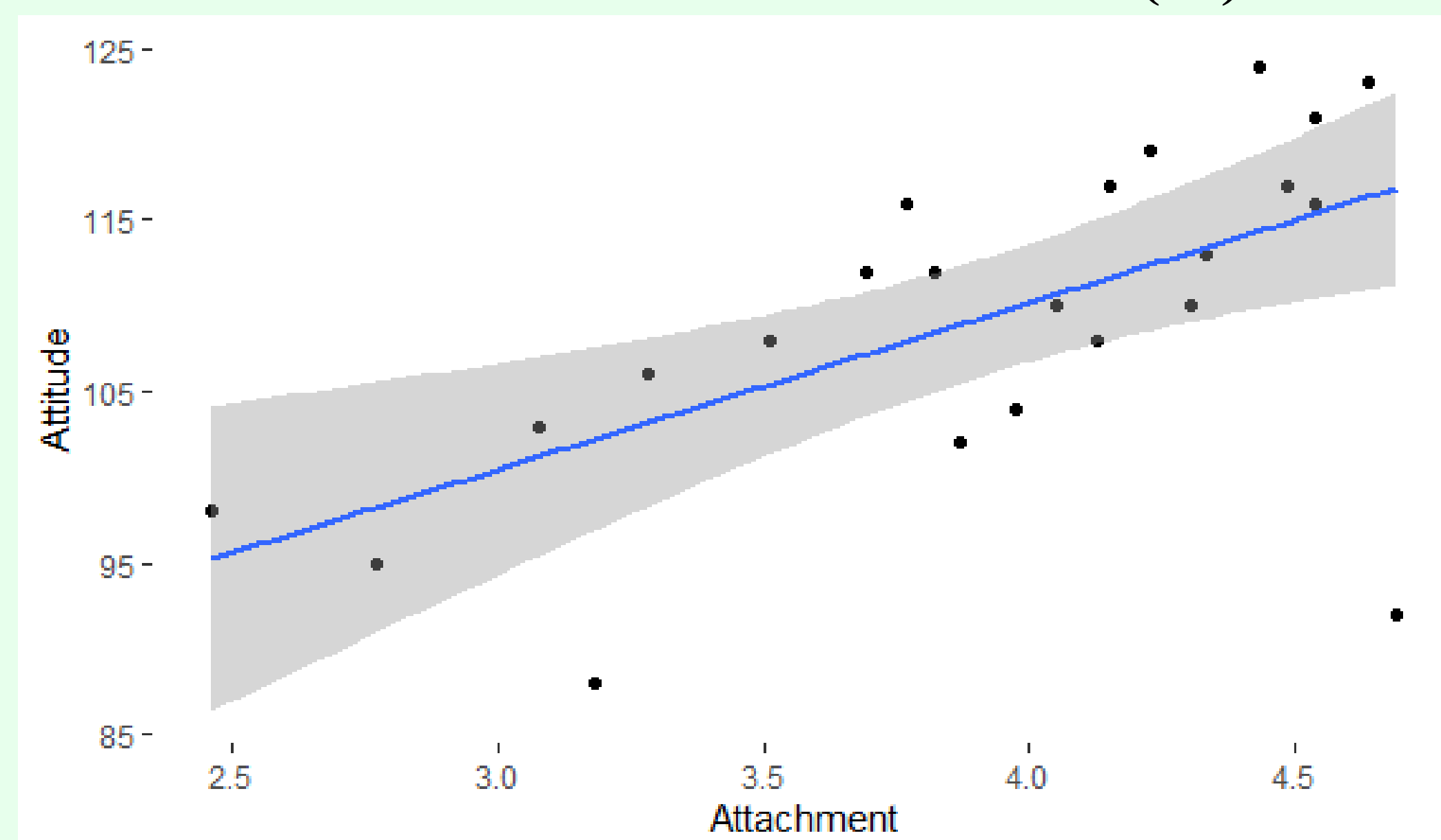- Pet Attachment and Life Impact Scale (PALS; Cromer & Barlow, 2013)

COVID-19
- Pets and COVID-19 (PAC-19) Scale, which was created for this study
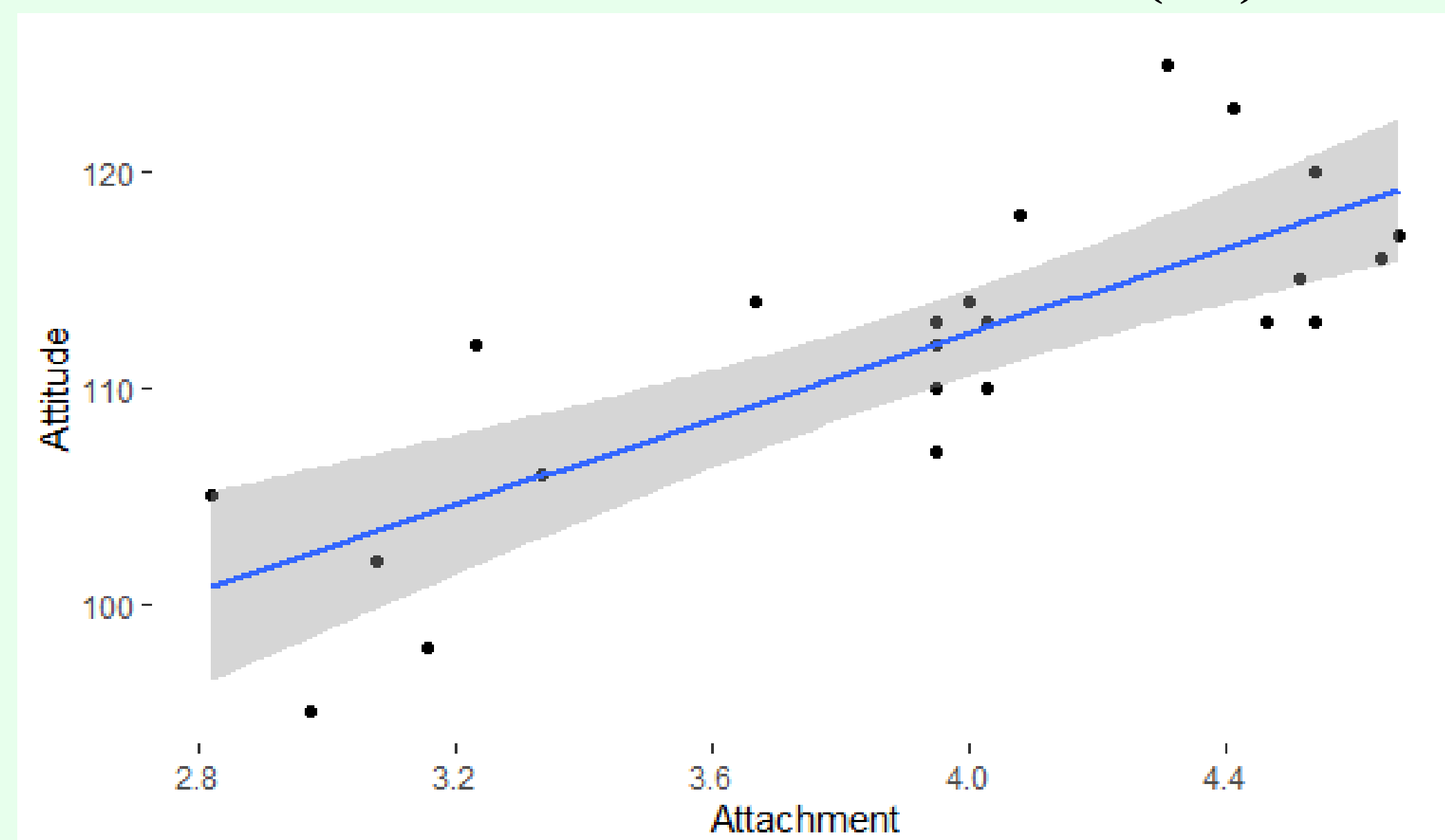
MAIN RESULTS/FINDINGS

- No significant differences between responses to the IS and FS in any of the domains explored

- Significant positive Spearman's rank correlation between the attitudes toward and attachment to pets in paired participants at both IS (s = 790.67, p = .002, ρ = .61) and FS (s = 414.06, p = .00, ρ = .79)

Correlation Between PAS-M and PALS (IS)
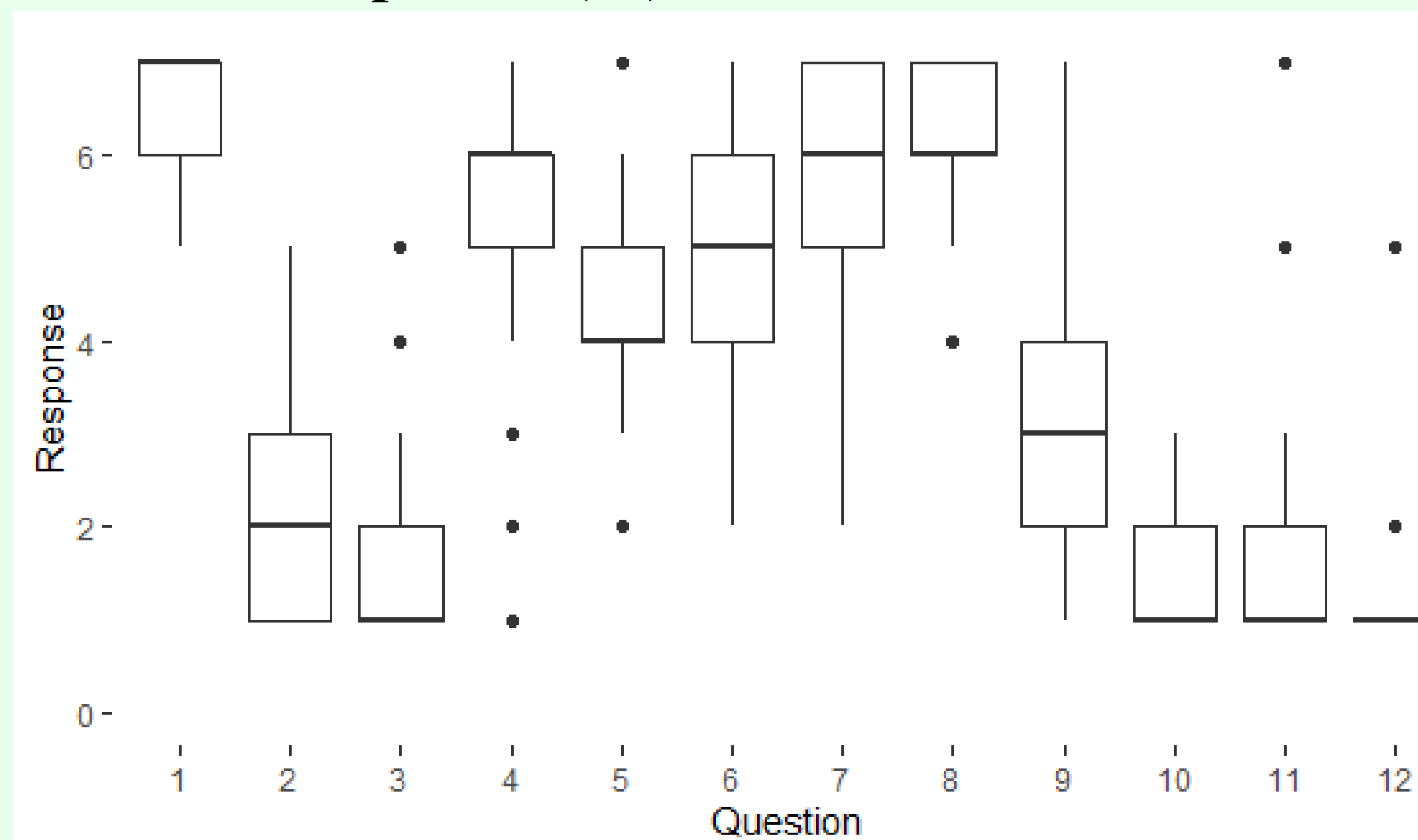

Correlation Between PAS-M and PALS (FS)

Qualitative Results

- Many participants reported a positive relationship with their pets and appreciated the increased amount of time they could spend with them during the pandemic

- Some participants noted an increase in negative behaviors—such as separation anxiety—in their pets

PAC-19 Responses (IS)

PAC-19 Scale Items
1. I have been able to spend more time with my pet because of the COVID-19 pandemic
2. I worry that my pet could become infected with COVID-19
3. I worry that my pet could infect me with COVID-19
4. I have been turning to my pet for social support and companionship since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
5. I feel more certain of the future because I have my pet with me
6. I feel that my days have more structure because of my pet
7. I feel less lonely because of my pet
8. Playing with my pet is comforting
9. I have bought more toys than usual for my pet during the COVID-19 pandemic
10. I have found it difficult to afford caring for my pet as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
11. I have found it difficult to provide my pet with an adequate amount of exercise as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
12. I feel that having a pet has increased my risk of being infected with COVID-19

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

- The PAC-19 scale could serve as a foundation for future research conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic or future similar pandemics that may occur

- Future studies could work to validate the PAC-19 scale and investigate the specific factors of the scale

- Future research should be conducted with a more representative sample to capture the full experience of U.S. residents

- Overall, this study shows that participants held generally positive attitudes toward pets, which was maintained over time; and additionally, that participants reported generally positive relationships with their pets during the COVID-19 pandemic

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