



Profiles of family pet ownership during the COVID-19 pandemic

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The pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) has affected both people and animals globally (Bowen et al., 2020). Research on COVID-19 with both children and adults has indicated negative psychological impacts on mental health outcomes and stress (Odriozola-González et al., 2020; Rothe et al., 2021; Saddik et al., 2021), and significant variation in mental health outcomes by demographic variables (Pierce et al., 2020).

Pets are an underexplored source of emotional support that may foster resilience within families in times of stress (Bowen et al., 2020; Bussolari et al., 2021; Chadwin, 2017). However, research investigating the mental health benefits of pet ownership prior to COVID-19 has produced mixed outcomes (e.g., Powell et al., 2019) and further research is needed to elucidate the potential benefits of companion animals (Gee & Mueller, 2019; Wells, 2019). Human-pet relationships have the potential to be amplified—both positively and negatively—during times of crisis. For example, the effects of unemployment and resource scarcity during the pandemic may intersect significantly with pet ownership. **The perception that companion animals may reduce loneliness may be driving increased pet acquisition, and some initial data have suggested that adoption rates increased during the pandemic** (Morgan et al., 2020). However, relinquishment of pets may be related to economic stress associated with the pandemic, suggesting a need to explore transitions in pet ownership in the context of psychological well-being.

Existing research on pets and COVID-19 suggests that it is imperative to understand sociodemographic profiles of pet ownership during times of increased societal stress, to better

understand how pets contribute to psychological well-being for diverse families. Therefore, this study aims to extend existing work with convenience samples to explore the role of pets during COVID-19 using a nationally-representative sample of United States families to assess if there are systematic sociodemographic differences between families with and without pets during COVID-19, and explore if these differences are related to acquisition of a pet.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

This study used data from the Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) Study®. We analyzed youth data from the ABCD COVID Rapid Response Research Survey, which was administered electronically three times: May 16–22, June 24–27, and August 4–5, 2020. Parent-reported demographic data are from the ABCD Annual Curated Release 3.0, collected between September 1, 2016 and February 15, 2020.

For this analysis, we used a subsample of 8,158 participants who had data for pet ownership in at least one of the three surveys. Youth reported their age (ranging from 10.6 to 14.8 years) and gender. Parents/guardians reported their child's racial/ethnic identities, which were combined into non-mutually exclusive analytic categories of White, Black/African American, Asian, Indigenous, and Hispanic. See Table 1 for demographic data.

Measures

Household Income

Parents/guardians reported their combined family income for the past 12 months on a 10-point scale (1 = Less than \$5,000; 10 = \$200,000+).

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