

Paws & Probabilities: Pets are as much a part of their family as a human member

Research Question:

How do individuals perceive their pets within the context of family dynamics, and what demographic factors influence these perceptions?

Introduction:

For this project, I explore the dynamics of pet ownership within the United States, and focused on how pets are perceived within these family structures. Findings taken from the Pew Research Center's survey, which was conducted in April 2023, I took a look into how American households view their pets, often considering them as family members. My goal is to gather more information on how these perceptions are influenced by demographic factors and to help understand how they show general views about pets in society.

Methods:

For my analysis, I conducted my study solely on Pet Ownership and Family Dynamics survey by the Pew Research Center, a part of the American Trends Panel (ATP). This survey provides data on pet ownership patterns, familial perceptions of pets, and demographic information of U.S. adults. This study utilized a stratified sampling approach to ensure a diverse and representative demographic sample. The key variables I focused on includes pet ownership status (PETFAM1), the level of pets as family members (PETFAM2), owning cats, dogs, or both (PETFAM3), and other various demographic factors like age, gender, and income.

The data for my project comes from ATP Wave 126, which was carried out from April 10 to April 16, 2023. This wave included an oversample of certain demographic groups for more precise estimates. The response rate for this survey was 87%, with a cumulative response rate of 3%, and a break-off rate of 1%. The margin of sampling error for the full sample of 5,073 respondents is ± 1.7 percentage points. To encourage participation, a follow-up strategy was sent out, which included a mail-out with a \$10 pre-incentive, along with an invitation to join the ATP. It's important to note that the participants self-selected into the study by choosing to join the ATP.

Systematic Design:

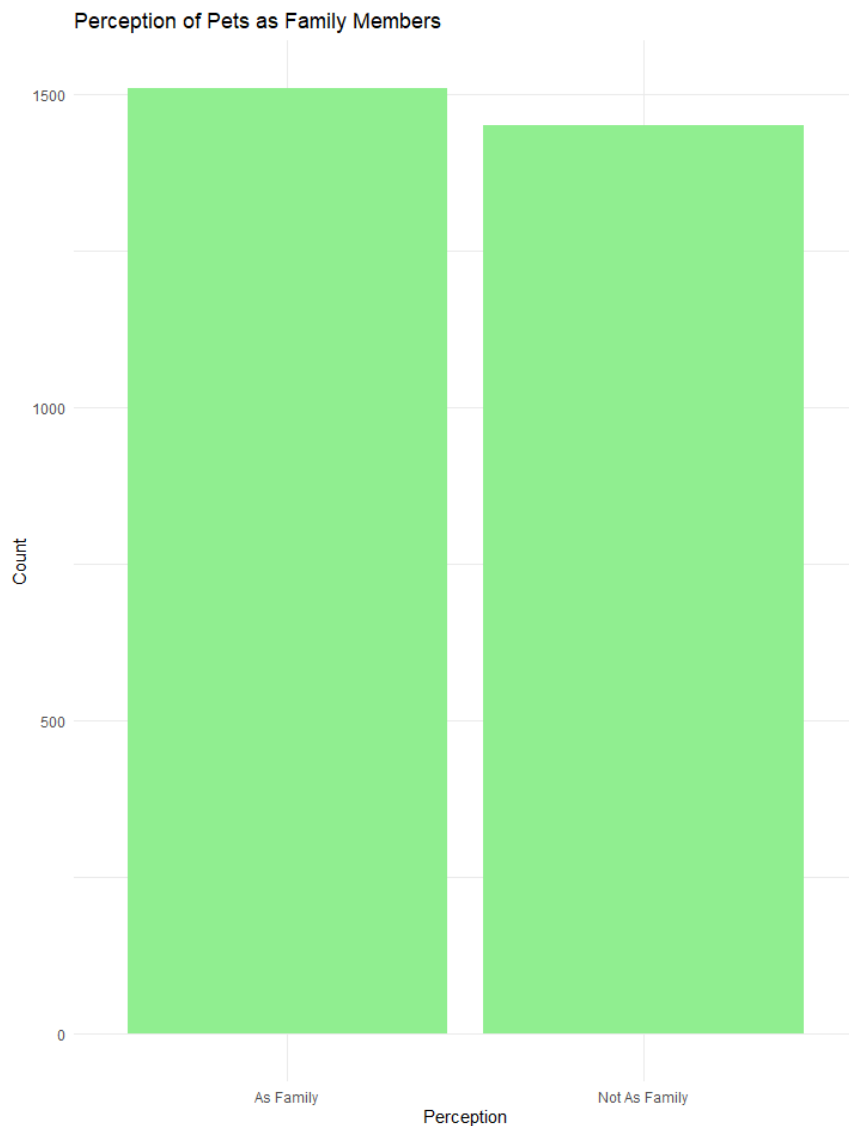
$$\text{Proportion} = \frac{\text{Number of respondents viewing pets as family members}}{\text{Total number of respondents}}$$

$$SE = \sqrt{\frac{p(1-p)}{n}}, \text{ where } p \text{ is the sample proportion and } n \text{ is the sample size.}$$

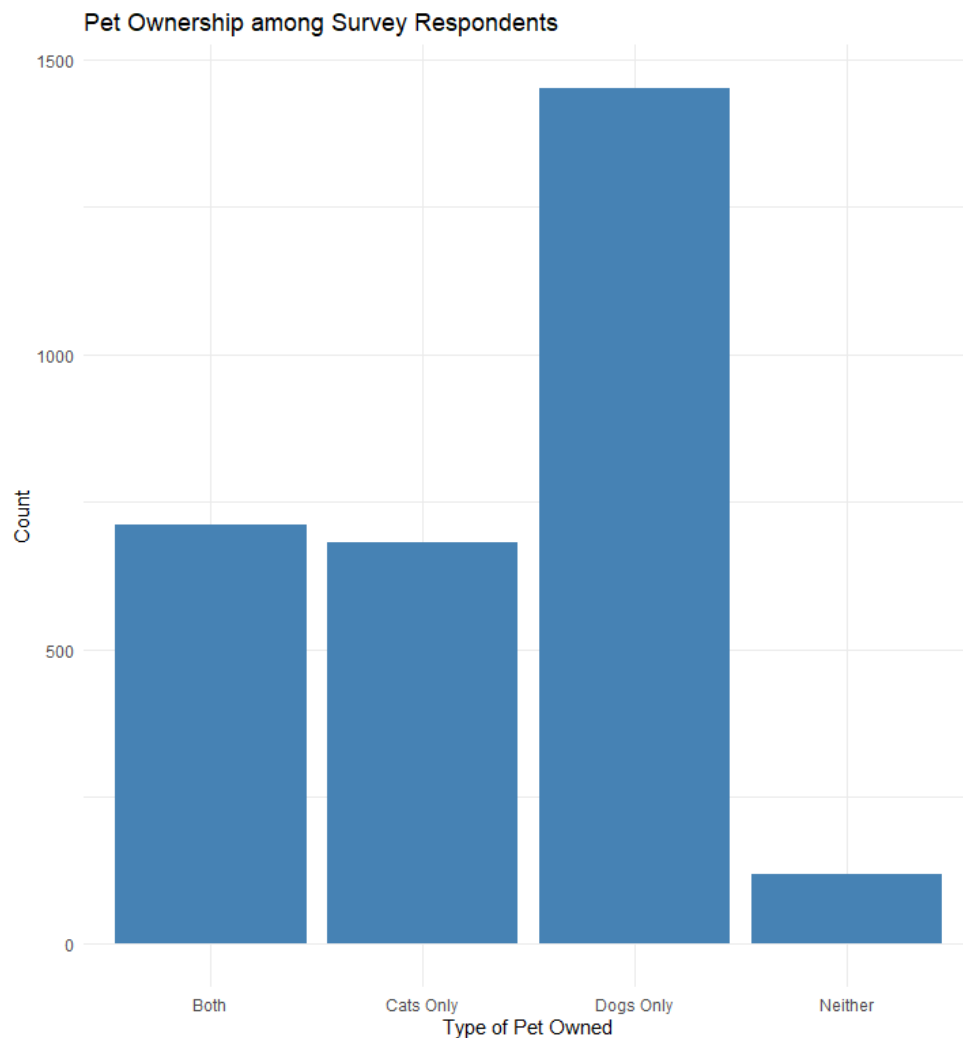
$$CI = p \pm 1.96 \times SE$$

Results:

I solely focused on understanding the proportion of pet owners who consider their pets as family members. After running my calculations in R, I found that 51% of pet owners has this view, which means that about 51% of pet owners view their pets as family members, on par with humans. Diving deep into these observed significant demographic trends - 57% of women, 64% of individuals with lower family incomes, and 61% of urban areas were more likely to view their pets as family members. On the other hand, married individuals and those who have children do not see pets as valuable compare to human family members. This finding aligns with the initial insights from the Pew Research Center's survey.



What was interesting is that I found that dog ownership were much higher than cat ownership, with 49% owning only dogs and 23% owning only cats. Based on my opinion, I think these views affected how people feel about pet care, with many pet owners wanting more focus on pet health as if they were human.



For the precision of this estimate, I calculated the standard error, which turned out to be approximately 0.0092. This low standard error suggests that my estimate is quite precise and reliable. For the 95% confidence interval of this proportion, I want to understand the range within which the true proportion will likely fall under. What I found is that the lower and upper bounds of this interval are approximately 49.19561% and 52.79562%.

Discussion:

In my research, I've noticed a significant trend in the relationships between humans and animals in American homes. It's clear to me that who people are – their demographics – really matters in how they view their pets within the family. For example, pets are highly valued by certain groups, particularly women and people with lower incomes. This could suggest that pets play important social and emotional roles for these individuals. These results are not just numbers to me, but instead they represent a real sentimental indicator towards pet owners. The confidence interval gives me a clearer picture of the range of this sentiment in the broader population. I think it is great to see a significant portion of the population placing their pets on an equal footing with human family members, which speaks volumes about the role pets play in our lives today.

Conclusion:

Through my study, I've been able to highlight the relationship between owning a pet and how they're seen in families across the U.S. What stood out to me is how important pets are in American homes and the varied ways people think about and treat them. My findings here isn't just about understanding social and demographic trends; it also opens up conversations about pet care and family life, which could shape future decisions and policies in this area.

References:

Author: Pew Research Center

Date: July 7, 2023

Title: About half of U.S pet owners say their pets are as much a part of their family as a human member

[Link to Study](#)

Citations: Pew Research Center. (2023, July 7). About half of U.S. pet owners say their pets are as much a part of their family as a human member. Retrieved from <https://pewrsr.ch/3JPtwoR>

Author: Pew Research Center

Date: April 10-16, 2023

Title: PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL WAVE 126

[Link to Survey](#)

Citations: Pew Research Center. (2023, April 10-16). PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S AMERICAN TRENDS PANEL WAVE 126. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/SR_2023.07.07_pets_toplevel.pdf

Author: Pew Research Center

Date: 2023, June 14

Support for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Pew Research Center.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/06/14/support-for-blm-methodology/>