

## **“The Hand of Friendship in the Sunless Hour - a Study to Explore Happiness Measure, Perceived Loneliness, Life Satisfaction and Meaning in Life of Retired People with Pet Dogs and Without Pet Dogs”**

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### **Abstract :**

The purpose of the study was to compare psychological variables namely Happiness, Meaning in life, Loneliness and satisfaction with life between two groups of retired-with dogs and without dogs. The study was carried out among retired people aged 60-70 years in Kolkata. The method of sampling was purposive. The sample size was 50 individuals in each group, the total sample size being 100. For the purpose of conducting the study, the standardized tools used were namely, The Comfort from Companion Animal Scale (CCAS) by R Lee. Zasloff (1996), Life event scale by Holmes and Rahe (1967) and The Happiness measures by Fordyce (1988), Meaning in life Scale by Steger, M.F., Frazier, p., Oishi, s., & Kaler, M. (2006), Loneliness scale by Russell et al. (1980). The satisfaction with life scale by Ed Diener (1984) and Attachment Scale by Collins (1996). Initial screening of the sample was done through the General Information schedule, General Health Questionnaire and the Comfort from Companion Animal Scale. Using t test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation, retired pet owners and non-pet owners were found to differ significantly with respect to Happiness, Satisfaction, Loneliness, Attachment and Meaning in Life. A positive correlation was also found to exist between Comfort from Companion Animal and Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Loneliness and Attachment.

**Key words :** Pet Happiness, Meaning in life, Loneliness, Satisfaction of life

### **Introduction-**

THERE IS NO PSYCHIATRIST IN THE WORLD LIKE A PUPPY LICKING YOUR FACE. –BEN WILLIAMS

To some people, a pet is ‘just’ an animal. However, to a pet lover a pet is a friend, true partner, and loyal companion. Human relationships with companion animals are not new. Even before human beings settled into agricultural communities, they kept wild and tamed animals as companions (Savishinsky, 1983). Dogs are considered mankind’s longest-standing animal companions. In more recent times, dogs have become emotional companions and human substitutes for people living in solitude, and they have given new meaning to people’s lives. Scientists have found that the connections between humans and their dogs have the same biochemical basis as the mother-child bond and it is strengthened by the same thing: a loving gaze. Pet owners often describe their pets as important and cherished family members who offer comfort in times of stress. For some older adults, companion animals are a vital part of their daily existence.

The perceived mutual affection between companion animals and their human counterparts is supported by the loving and pleasant feelings often experienced during interactions (Archer, 1997). These feelings have spurred a unique field of research called human-animal interactions. An emerging literature in the area has revealed that interacting with companion animals can remarkably enhance human health and well-being. The study of human-animal interaction is a new field in research beginning around the 1980’s (Odendaal, 2000). Positive psychology may offer some meditational explanations for the association between emotional attachment to a pet dog and health outcomes. An alternative to the need satisfaction view places more weight on the role of being a pet owner and the activities that follow this role. (Stenseng, 2008; Stenseng, Rise & Kraft, 2011.

During the last decades, animal assistance in therapy, education, and care has greatly increased. Today, the value of animal-assisted interventions [AAI, including animal-assisted therapy (AAT) and activities] is widely acknowledged.

Times of India published an article in 2017 that described that pets can enhance mood, help to control blood pressure, are a source of exercise, an antidote for loneliness, stress reduction, better social skills, and safety. The Indian

Constitution has long advocated coexistence between all creatures under Article 51(g), which gives every citizen the right to decide how they choose to live, which includes the choice to live with or without a companion animal.

Studies have linked companion animal guardianship (pet ownership) with increased survival after heart attack (Friedmann, 1995; Friedmann, Katcher, Lynch, & Thomas, 1980; Friedmann, Thomas, & Eddy, 2000) and decreased risk of cardiovascular disease (Anderson, Reid, & Jennings, 1992). Other studies (Poresky & Hendrix, 1990; Zasloff & Kidd, 1994) have shown pet ownership to have psychological and social benefits.

The study conducted by Naomi White, Daniel Mills and Sophie Hall (2017) found that attachment styles have been shown to affect quality of life. Growing interest in the value of companion animals highlights that owning a dog can also affect quality of life, yet little research has explored the role of the attachment bond in affecting the relationship between dog ownership and quality of life.

Lawrence Robinson and Jeanne Segal (2019) studied the effect on human and animal interaction. They also explained that dogs are able to understand many the tone of voice, body language, and gesture and like any good human friend, a loyal dog will look into your eyes to gauge emotional state and try to understand what you're thinking and feeling. They also found that pet ownership is less likely to suffer from depression than those without pets. They experience less blood pressure in the stressful situation than those without a pet.

The end of the human life cycle is old age. Elderly people constitute a segment of the population at heightened risk for a variety of physical and emotional problems. To many elderly people, their animal friend means joy and quality of life (Otterstedt and Rosenberger 2009)

They often have limited regenerative abilities and are more susceptible to disease, syndrome and sickness than adults. The elders also face other social issues such as retirement, loneliness, loss of spouse etc. Not everyone feels ready to retire at the same time. Losing of job may carry a feeling of financial insecurity, losses of friendship with colleagues and loss of self-esteem. At this time they may feel depressed because they are unable to cope with the change of their life. Their physical strength is also decreased at this age. Even, they have to leave their authorization of their family which is also stressful. A feeling of uselessness can be an immediate consequence following retirement. Gubrium, J. F. and Lynott, R. J. (1983) opine that pets instantly confer roles (e.g. cat lover or dog owner) on those who appreciate animals. These roles are identities shared with others and they echo across past, present and future involvement with animals.

Pets help the elderly hold onto the world of reality, of care, of human toil and sacrifice, and of intense emotional relationships. Their self-concept as worthwhile individuals is restored and even enhanced when they find that the pet they have been caring for loves them in return. They help the elderly cope with the loss of a loved one or a change in their circumstance. The friendship of their pet acts as a stress buffer in these situations. People look to them for solace.

Many elderly people simply are not able to establish new social contacts and the subsequent strong bonds when trying to compensate for the loss of their partners or the transition to retirement (Ludwig 2001). However, they long for an intimate and loving companionship. A pet can be such a companion. In most cases, pets can satisfy both the longing for company and the desire for affection. Older adults owning a pet are more likely to engage in physical activity than non-dog or non-pet owners. (Thorpe et al. 2006).

There are so many beneficial effects of pet ownership. First, the socializing effects of animals, which may be important to elderly people who have lost friends and family members, especially if they lack children or employment to draw them into community activities. Second, the way in which pets may confer a role or identity on an individual. This may be important for someone whose life has revolved around professional, spousal and parental roles which may be lost as the person ages. Third, pets have an effect on stress reduction. These may assume special importance when key losses (such as death of a spouse) arise that hamper a person's well-being. Fourth, animals play a role of motivating people. This may help older people in providing nurturance to others and in participating in activities. Having a pet is positively correlated with feelings of importance, social competence, and self-esteem. In addition, significant differences have been found between pet owners and non-owners; there are higher feelings of self-concept, self-esteem, and autonomy in preadolescent and early adolescent pet owners ( Davis and Juhasz 1985; Davis 1987; Van Houtte and Jarvis 1995).

The present study aimed to identify the effect of pets on psychological variables namely life satisfaction, happiness, loneliness, meaning in life, attachment. A comparison has been drawn between these psychological factors in two groups of retired people (60-70)-group 1 consisting of people who are essentially pet lovers and also pet owners and group 2 consisted of retired people who are neither pet lovers nor do they have any pet at home.

### **Objectives**

1. To investigate subjective happiness among two groups of retired people –one who have pets and the other who are not pet owners.
2. To investigate meaning in life among two groups of retired people-one who have pets and other who are not pet owners.
3. To investigate perceived loneliness among two groups of retired people-one who have pets and other who are not pet owners.
4. To investigate life satisfaction among two groups of retired people-one who have pets and the other who are not pet owners.

### **Methodology**

**GENERAL HYPOTHESES**-Considering the objectives of the study stated and review of literature, the following null hypotheses have been precisely formulated and have been examined in this study-

**H01**- There is no significant difference between subjective happiness among two groups of retired people-one with a pet dog and the other without a pet dog.

**H02**- There is no significant difference between meaning in life among two groups of retired people- one with a pet dog and the other without a pet dog.

**H03**- There is no significant difference in perceived loneliness among two groups of retired people- one with a pet dog and the other without a pet dog.

**H04**- There is no significant difference between life satisfaction among two groups of retired people- one with a pet dog and the other without a pet dog.

**H05**-There is no correlation between the Comfort from Companion Animal and the subjective happiness in retired pet owners (dogs).

**H06**-There is no correlation between the Comfort from Companion Animal and the meaning in life in retired pet owners (dogs).

**H07**-There is no correlation between the Comfortable from Companion Animal Scale and the loneliness in retired pet owners.

**H08**- There is no correlation between the Comfortable from Companion Animal Scale and the life satisfaction in retired pet owners.

**Sample**- The method of sampling used for the present research was purposive. Two groups of retired people were considered in the present study-one group being dog lovers and having a pet(at least one dog) and the other who neither had any pet at home nor were dog lovers .

The group consisted of people belonging to the age group of 60 to 70 years.

The sample got selected from different parks, pet shops across Kolkata, from personal contacts, friends and online.

**SAMPLE CHARECTERISTICS** –Both male and female respondents were considered. Both the groups were matched with respect to the age, socio economic status, physical and mental health, family income, number of family members, number of children etc.

**Inclusion criteria**- The inclusion criteria of the sample were as follows.

**Age group**-60 to 70 years

**Sex**- both male and female respondents were taken into account.

**Occupation of the group**-Both the groups consisted of retired people.

**Family status**- having spouse and at least two children

\*group 1 (pet owners)- having at least one dog for minimum two years

\*Group 2-never had any pets.

**Socio economic status**-middle and higher socio economic groups were considered.

**Sample size**- Each group consisted of 50 individuals and therefore the total sample was 100.

Group 1-consisted of respondents who were dog owners and had at least one pet at home for a period of minimum two years

Group 2- did not consist of respondents who were dog lovers nor had any pet at home ever.

**Tools used**- The following tools were used for the collection of data in the present study.

General information schedule

The Comfort from Companion Animal Scale (CCAS) by R Lee.Zasloff (1996)

Life event scale by Holmes and Rahe (1967).

The Happiness measures by Fordyce (1988)

Meaning in life Scale by Steger, M.F., Frazier, p., Oishi, s., & kaler, M. (2006)

Loneliness scale by Russell et al, (1980).

The satisfaction with life scale by Ed Diener (1984)

**Description of the tools used-**

**1. General information schedule**-This information schedule was administered to the respondents, both male and female participants in the present study to avail information regarding their age, sex, educational qualification, occupation, socio economic status, salary, family structure, whether they have any pets, whether they are dog lovers, whether they feel comfortable with dogs or not, how much they spend their time with their dogs, whether their pets may help to reduce their stress, depression, loneliness or not and whether they consider their pets to be their friend or not etc.

**2. THE COMFORT FROM COMPANION ANIMAL SCALE (CASS)**- this 13 items scale was developed to measure the perceived level of emotional comfort owners received from pets. Responses are based on Likert scale from (1)strongly disagree to (4)strongly agree. This was administered as a screening tool. Pilot testing of the construct validity of this instrument (Zasloff and Kidd, 1993) was conducted by correlating scores with those on the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) (Johnson et al., 1992). A coefficient of -0.68 ( $P < 0.05$ ) was obtained (the scales are inversely related). Pilot reliability testing produced a Cronbach alpha of 0.85 ( $P < 0.01$ ).

**3. Life event scale**- This scale consists of 51 events of life which can break the daily track of life such as Death of a spouse, major injury etc. Each event was considered only when it has taken place in the last 12 months. A score of <149, indicates lower illness A score of 150-200 indicates mild illness ; 200-299 is moderate and >300 indicates major illness and mental health problems. This was administered as a screening tool.

**4. GENERAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE**-The GHQ-28 was developed by Goldberg in 1978. This was used as a screening tool. It is a 28 item measure of emotional distress in medical setting. Through factor analysis, the GHQ-28 has been divided into 4 sub scales. These are-somatic symptoms (item 1-7), anxiety insomnia (item 8-14), social dysfunction (item 15-20) and severe depression (item 22-28). A total score of 23/24 is the threshold for the presence of distress. Test-retest reliability has been reported to be high (.78 to 0.9) (Robinson and Price 1982) and reliability is high. (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  0.9-0.95).

**5. The Happiness measure scale**- This scale is developed by Fordyce in 1988. It used to measure emotional well-being that provides an indication of a person's perceived happiness. This consists of two dimensions on happiness.



The items measure happiness on a 'happiness/unhappiness scale'. This descriptors range from (0) 'extremely unhappy', to 5 'neutral', to 10 'extremely happy' and measure perceived quality of general happiness.

**6. Meaning in life Questionnaire-**The meaning in life questionnaire assesses two dimensions of meaning in life using 10 items rated on a seven point scale from 'absolutely true to 'absolutely untrue'. The search for meaning subscale measures how engaged and motivated respondent are in efforts to find meaning and deepen their understanding of meaning in their lives. The MLQ has good internal consistency, with coefficient alphas ranging in the low to high .80s for the Presence subscale and mid .80s to low .90s for the Search subscale.

**7. Loneliness scale-** It assesses two dimension of loneliness. The first portion has 20 statements and the response are scored by never(1), Rarely(2), Sometimes(3),and Often(4).It measure how often a person feels the way described in each of the statements. The second portion of the scale has three questions and the responses are scored by 'hardly Ever' (1), 'some of the time'(2),and 'Often'(3).These question are about different aspects of a person's life. The alpha coefficient of reliability is .72.

**8. Satisfaction with life scale-** The satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al;1984) is a five item measure that assesses an individual's global judgement of life satisfaction as a whole. It is a seven point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'neither agree nor disagree'(4), to 'strongly agree' (7). There are five statements. The response are added to calculate the total score which range from 5 to 35. The SWLS has moderate to strong correlations ( $r = .40$  to  $.70$ ) with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .79 to .87

**Method of Data collection-**People from different areas fulfilling the inclusion criteria were contacted personally and the questionnaires were administered on them. The sample was selected from personal contacts, friends and pet shops and online. The general Information Schedule, General Health Questionnaire and Life Event Scales were administered on the respondents for the purpose of screening -to ensure that the sample were mentally and physically stable .Elaborate discussion was conducted with the respondents of Group 1 i.e. dog lovers regarding pets and related issues. The discussion helped to identify the variables to be considered in the present study. Literature review was also done to identify the variables .The respondents of Group 1 were then administered the Comfort from Companion Animal scale(CCAS) to determine their attitude towards their pets. Initially, 80 people belonging to Group 1 were contacted. Based on the scores of Comfort from Companion Animal scale (CCAS), people having positive attitude towards their dogs as revealed by the high scores were only taken into consideration resulting in the sample size being 50 in Group 1 .Therefore, 50 respondents who were not dog lovers or did not have any pets were matched with the criteria of group 1 and were considered as Group 2 for the present study. Every questionnaire was administered to them one by one with an interval of 10 minutes in between.

**Statistics Used-** Means and standard deviations for the different groups with respect to each of the variables were calculated. Then ,t-test were used to test the significance the difference between means and after that Pearson Product Moment correlation was computed to find the correlation if any, between Comfort from Companion animal and each of the variables considered in the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION-**

The data obtained from the subjects were systematically arranged and properly tabulated with respect to each of the variables considered in the present study. The data were analysed statistically and suitable statistical techniques were used in line with the hypotheses as stated earlier. At first, means and standard deviations for the different groups with respect to each of the variables were calculated. Then, t statistic for independent samples of equal size was used to test the significance of the difference between the means. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was also used to test the significant correlation if any, between comfort from companion animal and each of the variables in case of group 1 namely retired pet (dog) owners. For the present analysis of data the application of these inferential statistical tests were to test the null hypotheses as stated earlier and interpret the results in accordance with the main objectives of the study. The results obtained from the present analysis of data are presented in the following tables. The geometric representations of the results are given.

TABLE 1

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS (SD) OF THE RETIRED GROUP 1(WITH DOG) AND GROUP2(WITHOUT DOG) WITH RESPECT TO THE VARIABLES CONSIDERED IN THE STUDY

VARIABLES	GROUPS	MEAN	SD
LIFE SATISFACTION	WITH DOG	26.42	3.41
	WITHOUT DOG	20.88	4.35
HAPPINESS	WITH DOG	7.54	1.68
	WITHOUT DOG	5.98	1.15
MEANING IN LIFE	WITH DOG	38.1	5.62
	WITHOUT DOG	30.14	4.97
LONELINESS	WITH DOG	49.76	7.42
	WITHOUT DOG	50.82	16.76

TABLE-2

t ratios for the significance of the difference between the means of Group 1 (with dog) and Group 2 (without dog) of retired people across different variables considered in the study.

LIFE SATISFACTION	WITH DOG	2.13*
	WITHOUT DOG	
HAPPINESS	WITH DOG	4.38**
	WITHOUT DOG	
MEANING IN LIFE	WITH DOG	2.88**
	WITHOUT DOG	
LONELINESS	WITH DOG	2.68**
	WITHOUT DOG	

\*p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01      df=90

It is revealed from the t values of Table 2 that there exists significant difference at 0.01 level between two groups of retired people i.e .with pet dog and without a pet dog with respect to the variables viz. happiness and meaning in

life. On the other hand, significant difference at 0.05 level has been found between retired people with dog and without dog with respect to Life Satisfaction. Significant difference between the two groups with respect to loneliness has also been found.

TABLE- 3

PEARSON PRODUCT MOMENT CORRELATION FOR THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN THE VARIABLES CONSIDERED IN THE STUDY

Variables	Correlation value
Life satisfaction and comfort from companion animal	0.546**
Happiness and comfort from companion animal	.581**
Meaning in life and comfort from companion animal	.109
Loneliness and comfort from companion animal	.413**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$        $df = 45$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$        $df = 45$

The result of the correlations show that there is a significant correlation between comfort from companion animal with life satisfaction, happiness and loneliness at 0.01 level and there is no significant correlation between meaning in life and comfort from companion animal.

On the basis of the present results the following statements can be made:-

- i) Significant difference has been found between the two groups of retired people-with dog and without dog with respect to the variables viz. life satisfaction, happiness, loneliness and meaning in life.
- ii) Significant correlation has been found between comfort from companion animals and life satisfaction; comfort from companion animals and happiness; comfort from companion animals and loneliness ; comfort from companion animals and meaning in life in case of group 1 i.e. retired people-with dog.

#### **Statement of Result:-**

The null hypotheses as stated earlier have been tested using suitable statistical techniques. The obtained t ratios have shown that all the null hypotheses except H03, are rejected at 0.01 level. Now, the individual variables may be taken up and be interpreted in the light of the obtained results.

Therefore, it may be stated that Ho1, Ho2, Ho3 , Ho4, Ho5, Ho6, Ho7 and HO8 have been rejected at 0.01 level.

Life Satisfaction is the way a person evaluates his or her life and how he or she feels about where it is going in future. There are two emotions that may influence how people perceive their lives-Hope and Optimism. Both these cognitive processes usually orient towards the reaching of goals. It is found in the present study that retired people having pets are relatively more satisfied with their lives than non-pet owners. It is proposed that overall life satisfaction comes from within an individual based on the individual's personal values and what he or she holds important. For some, it is money, for others it is love and still others may find satisfaction out of their family. The above finding may be attributed to the fact that as the retired people get older, their importance in their family decreases day by day as they become incapable to be the same active person both physically and mentally as they used to be earlier. However, pets can provide love to their owners unconditionally. As retirees make a transition from regular work to retirement, they must make many choices. Some choose to find another job, while others increase their participation in established leisure pursuits. Still others embark on long postponed travels. Some flounder about for a time not knowing what to do with themselves. Pets can give an elderly person a great sense of self and help increase self-esteem since pets need and rely on their owners for virtually every aspect of their caretaking. Seniors also benefit from the unconditional

love and affection their pets give them. The present study gets its support from the finding that pet ownership is associated with better health and life satisfaction (Lago, Delaney, Miller and Grill, 1989). National Institute of Health Technological Assessment Workshop, recommended that all studies of human health consider the presence of a pet in the home as a meaningful variable (Beck and Meyers, 1996). Pet ownership has been linked to physical, social, and psychological health especially in elderly. Dog owners walk for recreation more often and longer than non-owners (Serpell, 1991). Dogs can also serve as “social lubricants”. A study conducted by Patricia A. Norris, Kimberly J. Shinen, Garry Chick, Alan M. Beck (1999) show that the life satisfaction scores decline as the years of retirement increase for pet owners and non-owners. They reported various ways that pets could be beneficial to improving the health and well-being of the elderly people (Friedmann, 1995; Siegel, 1990; Serpell, 1991; Kidd & Kidd, 1994; Beck & Meyers, 1996; Brodie & Biley, 1999). Cheung Ming, Alfred Chan Kam Wing, Kevin Cheung Lam fatlo (2007), found that even respondents who lived alone could keep in contact with friends and get involved in community functions and activities through their dogs.

The mean score with respect to the variable Meaning in Life is found to be greater (38.1) for retired pet owners as compared to the non-pet owners (30.14), signifying a higher meaning in life in case of the retired pet owners. A significant difference has also been found to exist between the pet lovers and non-lovers which is revealed by the t value (2.88).

Retired people are usually withdrawn from their occupation, business, or office because they have to finish their active working life. At their age, when they are at the end of their life, they may not find a new way to construct their meaning in life. In this context, it can be said that, retired people may be neglected by their family and their importance in the family is also decreased. Meaning in life means everything in our life that has significance and meaning and a proper growth of human spirit. So retirement comes with two of the biggest hurdles for the elderly; social isolation and inactivity. A crisis is experienced by some people as they realize that they have reached an ending point in their lifespan and experience conflicts or dissatisfaction within themselves because of unrealized goals, self-perceptions or physical changes as a result of aging or health issues. The above finding may be attributed to the fact that, retired people having pets relatively have more strong meaning in life than non-pet owners. The general care associated with a pet can help seniors live more energetic lives. As any pet owner knows, animals need attention and keep us active — whether we want to be or not. Pets help seniors establish routines and get them to do things they might not normally do, such as getting outside and walking their dog or changing their cat’s litter box, feeding, grooming or playing with their pet.

Based on Friedman and Thomas’s definition, dog ownership was defined as “claiming a pet as one’s own.” Research evidence laid down by Lawrence A. Kurdek (2009) reveals the fact that owner’s turn to their pet dogs in times of emotional distress. Dogs have become emotional companions and human substitutes for people living in solitude, and they have given new meaning to elderly people’s lives.

The mean score with respect to the variable happiness is found to be greater (7.54) for retired Pet owners as compared to the non-pet owners (5.98). So, it can be interpreted that life satisfaction is high in case of the retired pet owners. A significant difference has also been found to exist between the pet lovers and non-lovers which is revealed by the t value (4.38). Happiness is a mental or emotional state of well-being defined by positive or pleasant emotions ranging from contentment to intense joy. A variety of biological, psychological, religious, and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources. The research finding indicates that retired people having pets are relatively happier with their lives than non-pet owners. Old age in general is very depressive and boring stage with lots of losses, weakness, loneliness that leads a drastic change in a life. This change is difficult to cope with it and also stressful. Maximum people during this stage remain unhappy for physical, mental, emotional changes. But research suggests that retired pet owners are happier than retired non-pet owners. Animals satisfy the need for a living and loving connection, take the place of family and kids and fulfil a bunch of other emotional needs. Pets can be relied upon for an enthusiastic ‘welcome home’ greeting when owners return. Elderly pet owners, especially benefit from knowing that a non-judgemental companion shares the joys and sorrows of each day. Research conducted by Erika Friedmann (1995) suggests that Pets may confer a role or identity on an individual. This may be important for someone whose life has revolved around professional, spousal and parental roles which may be lost as the person ages. A study conducted by Ory, M. G. and Goldberg, E. L. (1983), suggest that elderly women aged 65-75 years who had a better relationship with their pets were more likely to be closely attached to their spouses and to be happy. Pet ownership and attachment is a factor that operate directly to enhance health and emotional well-being and/or indirectly by buffering the impact of stressful events on health and emotional well-being (Garrity and Marx 1989; Gunter, 1999). The pet can facilitate improvement in self-worth, interpersonal competence, life satisfaction, happiness, and marital health (Sussman, 1985).



The mean score with respect to the variable loneliness is found to be greater (49.76) for retired non pet owners as compared to the pet owners (50.82). So, it can be interpreted that loneliness is high in case of retired non pet owners. But a significant difference has also been found to exist between the pet owners and non-owners which is revealed by the t value (2.68). Loneliness is defined as an individual's subjective experience of a lack of satisfying human relationships, and thus loneliness is a negative feeling causing distress to an individual. The expressions "loneliness" and "suffering from loneliness" are used interchangeably because both meet the definition. Generally lonely people often experience a subjective sense of inner emptiness or hollowness, with feelings of separation or isolation from the world. At the old age, loneliness is a very common thing as they become weak in both terms of physically and mentally. By tradition, they leave their job which leads a separation from friends, their authorization of their family is gradually decrease and some life event such as loss of spouse, friends may also take place. On the other hand, new generation becomes unacceptable by them so that gradually the world starts to get unknown for them and they become isolated. The present study reveals that, loneliness is low for retired pet owners which indicate that, pet have an effect on loneliness. Pets may help them realize they are not alone. Dog owners often talk about their pets like they're part of the family. More than any other animal, dogs have evolved to become acutely attuned to humans and our behaviour and emotions. While dogs are able to understand many of the words we use, they're even better at interpreting our tone of voice, body language, and gestures. And like any good human friend, a loyal dog will look into your eyes to gauge your emotional state and try to understand what you're thinking and feeling (Jitka Pikhartova Ann Bowling and Christina Victor 2014). According to a study in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, caring for a cat or dog helps elderly people overcome depression or loneliness. Whether that be from the loss of a loved one, not having family or friends nearby to interact with, or not being able to get out much, having a fluffy friend gives older citizens a sense of purpose since they have to take care of their pet and think about things other than their own problems. If people come home to an empty house, pets will offer a greeting. Pets, especially dogs provide security as they protect both an owner and property. Pets provide a relationship replacement.

However, the present study revealed that Comfort from Companion Animal is associated with happiness, loneliness, life satisfaction, and also meaning in life thereby indicating that comfort one has with his or her pet, contributes positively in life, especially at old age. The more a person is comfortable with his or her pet, more is his or her life satisfaction, perceived happiness and attachment -lower is his or her loneliness in life. Therefore the result reveals that, there exists a correlation with the degree of comfort from the companionship with animals and the others variables that have been considered in the study thereby justifying the selection of the variables as parameters of psychological health related with having pets.

**Summary and conclusion** - The present study unravelled the fact that pet (dog) has been found to have significant contribution in enhancing meaning in life, life satisfaction, happiness, loneliness, attachment of retired pet owners and retired non-pet owners. The older people who are dog owners are commonly happy, satisfied with their life, loneliness is low among them and also the attachment level is greater than non-pet owners. From the psychological point of view, retired people may suffer from various problematic situations. They start to feel isolated, their life become aimless, meaningless; attachment with external environment is also decreased due to their physical inability. Pet ownership is thought to make a positive contribution to health, health behaviours and the general well-being of older people. More specifically pet ownership is often proposed as a solution to the problem of loneliness in later life. So that, ultimately, they may be engaged with dogs to find out their meaning in life, their happiness, and satisfaction as well as decreased loneliness and so on.

Therefore, it may be said that, aged people in our society might be benefited from the dog by combating with their loneliness because dog give a great deal in the form of affectionate attachments. They are a vital part of the daily existence of retired people who can get a hope in their life. It would be beneficial to develop a precious human animal bond. When pets-especially dogs can give us an unconditional love and can contribute to our mental health to such an extent, it remains for us human beings to reciprocate this emotion by providing shelter, love and affection to these homeless creatures. In the later life when multiple loss-inducing events and negative life events surround the aged people, it is the pets who provide the most desired aspect of life- identity. The dog is the only thing on earth that loves owner more than the owner loves himself.

**“DOGS HAVE A WAY OF FINDING THOSE WHO NEED THEM AND FILLING AN EMPTINESS WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW WE HAD”**

IMPLICATION-

1. The study has attempted to explore the significance of psychological or mental health of the retired people when literature review reveals that most of the other studies are concerned with the other dimensions of pet

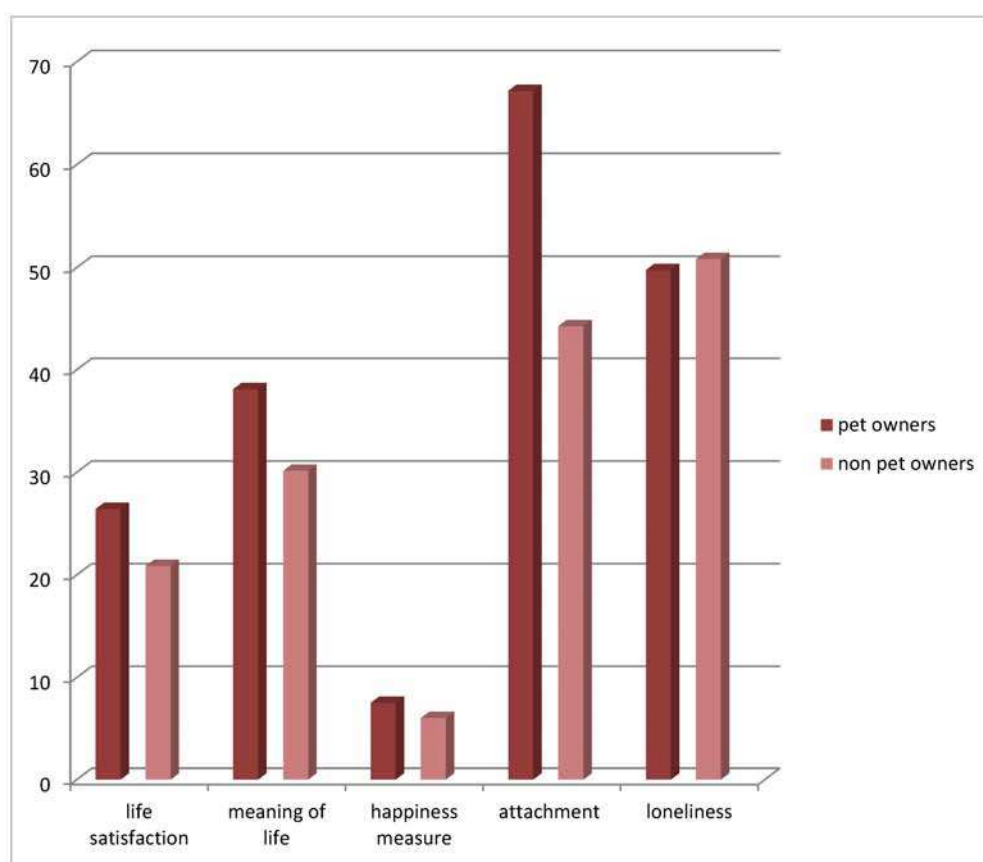
effect especially physiological health of the retired people. Physical health alone is not sufficient for them to march towards overcoming of obstacles unless and until they are benefited from the pet both physically and mentally.

2. The study has attempted to explore the fact that all pet owners are not necessarily pet lovers on the other hand, all pet lovers' not pet owners. This is very effective impact of the pet effect. Whereas, literature review reveals that most of the other studies are concerned with the pet effect on pet owners.
3. The study has attempted to explore the effect of various variables namely, loneliness, happiness, meaning in life, life satisfaction, and attachment on pet owners when literature review reveals that most of the other studies are concerned with fewer aspect of them. This study also reveals the relationship between the comfort from companion animal with the pet owners.
4. The study has suggested a way by which aged people in our society might be benefited by combating with their loneliness.
5. The study might be helpful in motivating people to adopt destitute and helpless dogs not for their sake alone them but also by considering the psychological effects that they have on humans.

“DOGS LOVE THEIR FRIENDS AND BITE THEIR ENEMIES, QUITE UNLIKE PEOPLE ,WHO ARE INCAPABLE OF PURE LOVE AND ALWAYS HAVE TO MIX LOVE AND HATE.”- SIGMUND FREUD

#### GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

A Comparison between two groups of retired people: with pets and without pets with respect to Mean values of different psychological variables considered in the study



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