

Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy on the Influence of Owner-Pet Relationship and Social Support on Pet-Owner Wellness

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***Abstract** – Most people have deemed the importance of prioritizing one's well-being, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study is to determine the mediating role of self-efficacy on the influences between owner-pet relationship and social support on pet-owner wellness. The survey was participated by Filipino pet owners aged 18 to 65 who had owned a pet cat or dog for at least six months. They were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods. The participants completed an online survey through Google forms; and data were analyzed with Jamovi and R Core Team. The result shows very good relationship of owner-pet relationship, high social support from family, friends, and significant others. Self-efficacy and pet-owner wellness are also high. The path from the variables, social support and owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness is significantly correlated ($p = <.001$). Self-efficacy partially mediated the influences between owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness, and between social support and pet-owner wellness.*

Keywords: owner-pet relationship, social support, pet-owner wellness, self-efficacy, pet owners

I. INTRODUCTION

Many people decide to adopt pets for meaningful reasons, as they see animals as an important addition to their lives. Families also shared that pets hold lasting value for them, especially during moments of hardship or loss, when their presence becomes most significant (Chandler et al., 2015). In response to the global threat posed by the coronavirus, social distancing measures such as the work-from-home setup were implemented across the world (Dhama et al., 2020). As a result, people began spending significantly more time at home. This shift contributed to a notable rise in pet ownership (Park, 2021). With families and individuals confined indoors, the interest in adopting or fostering pets—especially dogs—grew worldwide, from Canada to India. In fact, foster pet placements in U.S. households increased by 8% between March and September 2020 (May, 2021).

In April 2020, Dr. Jon Bowen and his colleagues, a behavior consultant at the Royal Veterinary College in London, asked 1,297 dog and cat owners in Spain questions about their feelings toward their pets and their animals' recent behavior. Most owners responded that their pets have provided "substantial support" during the pandemic, yet 62% of respondents said they thought their pet's quality of life had decreased. In addition, about 41% also reported observing behavioral changes in their animals during the pandemic, particularly dogs that had experienced behavioral problems in the past.

It appears that limited research has been conducted on the connection between the owner-pet relationship, social support, and the well-being of pet owners across various ages. Moreover, in previous studies, self-efficacy has not been explored as a variable that mediates the three. At present, no study is being conducted in the said area. Thus, the main purpose of this research is to fill this gap in the literature and to add more discoveries that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic setting.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cherry (2020) noted that self-efficacy is a person's belief in their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Psychologist Albert Bandura described these beliefs as determinants of how people think, behave, and feel. It can play a role not only on how a pet owner may feel about himself but also how he will successfully achieve an improved owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness.

Individuals may have a variety of self-efficacy ideas about themselves at any given moment since self-efficacy can be either general or task-specific. The views that a person holds about their own levels of self-efficacy can affect how they think, feel, and motivate themselves (Wilde & Hsu, 2019). This is also supported by Bandura (1977) when he postulated the idea that people who have high levels of self-efficacy also tends to have a strong sense of self-confidence and view obstacles as tasks to be completed rather than dangers to be avoided.

A high level of self-efficacy is advantageous. People who feel quite good about themselves. According to Cherry (2020), people who feel quite good about themselves are individuals who also deepen their interest in the activities they take part in, become more firmly committed to their hobbies and activities, quickly bounce back from failures and disappointments, and consider difficult challenges as chores that must be completed.

Schunk and Dibenedetto (2020) noted that in comparison with individuals who feel less efficacious, those with higher self-efficacy choose to engage in activities, expend greater effort, persist longer and especially during difficulties, and achieve at higher levels. Similarly, Forsythe (2019) described its importance because of its power in one's own beliefs. Individuals

with high levels of self-efficacy could be better able to and more successful at using the resources acquired through playing one role for the advantage of playing the other. Higher self-efficacy people are more likely to learn new things and develop new perspectives, values, skills, and confidence (Carlson et al., 2007).

Self-efficacy influences how people behave in a particular situation. There is only limited research that have explored both self-efficacy and pet-owner wellness. However, in one previous study, the relationship between pet ownership and self-efficacy was investigated (Quan & Jin, 2005 as cited in Khashbat, 2017) and it was revealed that there was no major difference between those who own dogs and those who do not. Nonetheless, pet owners showed higher levels of self-efficacy than non-pet owners.

Research shows that individuals who have established a relationship with their pets seem to have a little bit greater self-esteem and self-efficacy on average than persons without pets (Cheong et al., 2005). This is also in line with the study of Grajfoner et al. (2021) in which the study's findings confirmed that pet owners reported considerably higher levels of coping self-efficacy. However, these findings contradict the study of Berge (2019) in which the results reveal that there is no significant difference between pet owners and non-pet owners in terms of their general self-efficacy scores using an online survey with manipulation.

Self-efficacy is directly influenced by perceived social support. This is in line with the study of Hosseingholizadeh et al. (2019) in which evidence was found that self-efficacy and social support were important factors of wellness and social participation among elderlies. Additionally, another local study has shown that there is a weak but positive association between self-efficacy and perceived social support, suggesting that self-efficacy increases in some way when perceived social support increases (Cadava et al., 2017).

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a quantitative research employing descriptive-correlational design. The descriptive method was utilized to determine the levels of owner-pet relationship, social support, pet-owner wellness, and self-efficacy. The study also used mediation analysis in which self-efficacy was measured as a mediator variable between owner-pet relationship, and pet-owner wellness, and between social support and pet-owner wellness. The participants of the study were Filipino pet owners living in the Philippines. The present study utilized the purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling technique. The study has the following set of criteria: (a) a Filipino citizen; (b) currently residing in the Philippines; (c) ages 18 to 65 years old; and (d) should be owning a pet cat or dog for at least six months. The study was able to gather a total sample of 500 respondents. The samples selected fulfilled the set criteria.

The conduct of the study was approved by the Ethics Review Board (ERB). The research instrument was then sent to the target participants. Consequently, the study secured informed consent from the participants before they answered the online questionnaires. The researcher managed the Google Forms setting, allowing only one response per user. The responses were collected and submitted to the statistician for analysis. The overall data analysis was obtained through Jamovi. Statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation were used to measure the descriptive results of the study, meanwhile Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized in the mediation analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 4 displays the model diagram of the mediating role of self-efficacy.

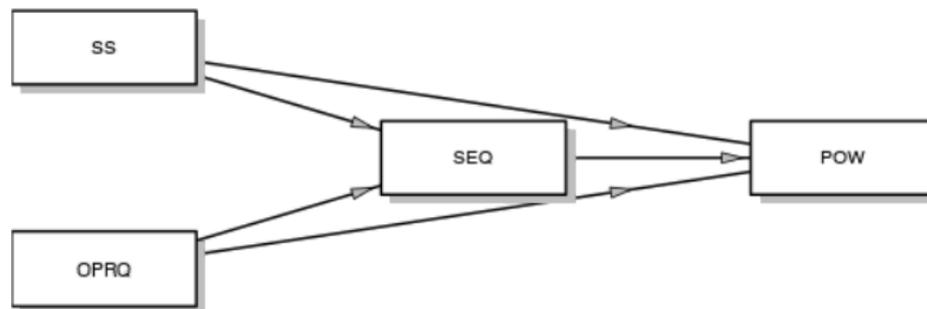


Figure 1. Model diagram of mediation analysis

Mediation analysis was performed to mediate the influences between owner-pet relationship, social support and pet-owner wellness. As seen in the model, the indirect path from social support to pet-owner wellness is significant. This means that if there is an increase of 1 unit in social support, pet-owner wellness also increases by 0.607. The path from owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness is significant as well. This means that if there is an increase of 1 unit in owner-pet relationship, pet-owner wellness also increases by 0.0856. The increase of these paths works through the mediating role of self-efficacy.

The component path from social support to self-efficacy is also significant. This indicates that if there is an increase of 1 unit in social support, the level of self-efficacy also increases by 0.113. The same is true with the path from self-efficacy to pet-owner wellness. If there is an increase of 1 unit in self-efficacy, the level of pet-owner wellness increases by 0.5454. The last component path from owner-pet relationship to self-efficacy is also significant. This means if there is an increase of 1 unit in the owner-pet relationship, the level self-efficacy increases by 0.1569.

The direct path from social support to pet-owner wellness is significant which implies that as social support increases by at least 1 unit, the level of pet-owner wellness increases by 0.2022. The direct path from owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness is also significant which means that if owner-pet relationship increases by at least 1 unit, pet-owner wellness also increases by 0.1000. This is the effect of exposure on the outcome without self-efficacy being the mediator.

In total the path from social support to pet-owner wellness, there is an increase of 0.2629 in pet-owner wellness if social support increases by at least 1 unit. This path means a significant effect. Lastly, the total path from owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness is significant as well. Pet-owner wellness increases by 0.1855 if owner-pet relationship also increases by 1 unit. Again, this path is significant.

Table 1 shows the indirect, component, direct, and total effects of the mediation analysis. The mediation results reject the null hypothesis which states that "Self-efficacy does not mediate the influences between owner-pet relationship, social support and pet-owner wellness." The results reveal that there is a significant relationship between social support and self-efficacy ($p = <.001$), self-efficacy and pet-owner wellness ($p = <.001$), and owner-pet relationship and self-efficacy ($p = <.001$). It is observed that owner-pet relationship and social support are correlated with self-efficacy, and that self-efficacy is also correlated with pet-owner wellness. In total, the path from the variables, social support and owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness is significantly correlated ($p = <.001$).

Table 1. Indirect and Total Effects Mediation of Social Support to Pet-Owner Wellness; and Owner-Pet Relationship to Pet-Owner Wellness

Type	Effect	Estimate	p	Verbal Interpretation
Indirect	SS → SE → POW	0.0607	<.001	Significant
	OPR → SE → POW	0.0856	<.001	Significant
Component	SS → SE	0.1113	<.001	Significant
	SE → POW	0.5454	<.001	Significant

Direct	OPR → SE	0.1569	<.001	Significant
	SS → POW	0.2022	<.001	Significant
	OPR → POW	0.1000	0.014	Significant
Total	SS → POW	0.2629	<.001	Significant
	OPR → POW	0.1855	<.001	Significant

SS = Social Support, *SE* = Self-Efficacy, *POW* = Pet-Owner Wellness, *OPR* = Owner-Pet Relationship

*Significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

The results indicate that self-efficacy is serving a partial mediating role between owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness and between social support and pet-owner wellness. Although the indirect paths of owner-pet relationship and social support to pet-owner wellness are significant, the direct path still remains significant. This means that the other variables can still have a significant relationship with each other even without the function of self-efficacy as a mediating variable. The evidence is found in the direct type of mediation of social support to pet-owner wellness; and owner-pet relationship to pet-owner wellness which are both significantly correlated ($p = <.001$).

In other words, social support, owner-pet relationship, and pet-owner wellness are significantly associated with each other even if self-efficacy does not mediate them. It also means that there could be other variables that can mediate the three. This suggests that if a pet-owner receives social support from his family, friends, and significant others, he can function well in the seven areas of pet-owner wellness even without being self-efficacious. The same is true with the relationship of owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness.

In the perspective of having self-efficacy as a mediating variable, the findings imply that high levels of owner-pet relationship and social support lead to high levels of self-efficacy of the pet owner, and that this high self-efficacy later translates into high levels of pet-owner wellness. This means that pet owners who have established a very good relationship with their pets and have a high social support from their family, friends, significant others tend to be confident in approaching their tasks, challenges and situations, and feel they are able to accomplish things.

The high level of self-efficacy from the path of owner-pet relationship and social support leads pet owners to have a positive outlook in life; to be emotionally stable; create happy memories together with the family; do duties and responsibilities diligently; create opportunities to relate with others, feel a greater sense of purpose in life; laugh in simple things in life; and improve their physical performance.

To give light to these findings, prior studies found that self-efficacy served as a partial mediator to variables related to a person's wellness. In Bender and Ingram's (2018) report, self-efficacy mediated the relationship between the variable's attachment and resilience. Another evidence was found in the study of Czynowska and Gurba (2022) where self-efficacy played a significant mediating role ($p = <.001$) between meaning in life and wellbeing. In the body of research, this present study is among the new investigations that examined the relationship of owner-pet relationship and pet-owner wellness, and social support and pet-owner wellness as mediated by self-efficacy. Hence, this calls for a good basis of research in this area.

V. CONCLUSION

This study provides a unique insight into pet owners' perspectives, highlighting how the bond between owners and their pets, along with social support and self-efficacy, contribute positively to their overall wellness. The high level of pet-owner wellness observed can be attributed to several factors: the strong and healthy connection they share with their pets, the meaningful support they receive from family, friends, and significant others, and their confidence in their ability to accomplish tasks successfully. The results further indicate that both the owner-pet relationship and social support play an important role in promoting physical and mental well-being, particularly during times of social isolation brought about by the global pandemic.

Despite the challenges brought about by the global pandemic, pet owners have continued to share their lives with their animal companions. This reflects the enduring human desire to connect with and care for animals, a commitment that remains strong even in difficult times. The study also affirms that pet owners value and appreciate the natural world, embracing their role as stewards of nature.

Moreover, pet owners experienced an acceptable level of wellness not only due to the social support they received but also through the strong bonds they had formed with their pets. The findings also demonstrated that self-efficacy enhanced the positive impact of both the owner-pet relationship and social support on their overall well-being.

The study's results provided further support for the theory applied. The Self-Efficacy Theory is validated by the finding that pet owners demonstrated a high sense of self-efficacy, enabling them to quickly develop solutions when faced with challenges. Lastly, the COVID-19 pandemic may have influenced the respondents' attitudes and behaviors, particularly in relation to their physical wellness. Due to social restrictions, people were discouraged from leaving their homes, making it difficult to spend time outdoors or enjoy fresh air. As a result, physical exercise was confined within the household, limiting opportunities for outdoor activities.

The largely positive results found in the study call for the need to conduct more research with larger sample sizes and the inclusion of participants from various settings such as community schools, industrial organizations, and treatment facilities. Researchers of the same field are encouraged to explore the present study's research questions employing a comparative study between pet owners and non-pet owners. First, it is notable to conduct this investigation among children with disabilities, grieving individuals, and pet owners who are clinically diagnosed with a mental disorder. Second, the type of pet should not only be limited to cats and dogs. House-pet animals such as rabbit, fish, bird, chicken, and hamster are advised to be included in the study as well. Lastly, longitudinal studies are pushed to obtain a deeper understanding of this inquiry.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Princess Marian G. Macasa is the principal author of this study, primarily responsible for the conceptualization of the research, conducting the investigation, gathering the necessary data, and preparing the written manuscript. Her work ensured that the study was carried out systematically and comprehensively. On the other hand, Dr. Myrtle C. Orbon-Grijalvo served as the research adviser, offering guidance, supervision, and valuable academic insights throughout the process. Her mentorship contributed significantly to the refinement of the study and the completion of the final manuscript.

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