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Stress and Social Adaptation in Cat Owners: The Effect of Pet Attachment

Nur Rahmadani[1*], Adnan Achiruddin Saleh[2]
[1,2]Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare
*Email: nurrahmadani2828@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to determine the effect of pet attachment on stress levels and social adaptation in cat owners. The researcher used a quantitative approach with a multivariate linear regression design. A total of 32 students were selected as participants using a total sampling technique. The instrument used was a Likert model questionnaire of 150 items with Cronbach's Alpha reliability and Pearson Product Moment validity test. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression and multivariate testing (MANOVA) through the SPSS version 25 program. The findings showed that pet attachment significantly affected social adaptation and stress levels in cat owners (F = 97.634 and Sig. = 0.000). The contribution of pet attachment to social adaptation was 19.9% , and to stress was 86.5%. The implications of this study lead to the development of psychological support strategies based on interactions with pets to improve students' emotional and social well-being.

Keywords: pet attachment, social adaptation, stress

INTRODUCTION

College students are an early adult age group vulnerable to stress due to various academic and social demands (Affandi et al., 2023). Stress can come from academic pressure, adjustment, time management, and social relationships (Maszura et al., 2024). In various parts of the world, including Indonesia, the stress level among college students is quite high. Research shows that in Asia, around 39.6%-61.3% of college students experience stress, while in Indonesia, the figure is higher, ranging from 36.7%-71.6% (Suriani et al., 2023). With the high-stress levels in college students, it is important to predict factors that can help them manage stress and improve their psychological well-being (Satra & Muarifah, 2024).

From previous studies, 63% of students admitted to experiencing stress (Haryana et al., 2023). This condition shows that stress is a common problem experienced by most university students. According to Wulandari et al. (2024), students often face many psychological problems related to academic pressure and social adaptation. In addition, students also often experience stress that stems from the burden of professional identities, as in this study; Prospective counsellors must demonstrate emotional stability and the ability to help others, even though they are under pressure, in line with the findings of Zulkarnain et al. (2024), which stated that 55% of Guidance and Counseling students experienced quite high symptoms of anxiety and stress. This condition is due to demands regarding the counsellor's future career and high expectations from society as graduates of Higher Education (Permana et al., 2024).

Becoming a prospective counsellor is difficult; many Guidance and Counseling students experience stress (Angelica & Tambunan, 2021). According to Septyari et al. (2022), as many as 78% of Guidance and Counseling students feel stressed when dealing with clients' mental problems (Dewi & Lubis, 2024). Good social adaptation skills can play an important role in helping students manage and reduce stress levels (Rivaldi, 2024). Ward et al. (2008) stated that difficulties in social adaptation can trigger feelings of lack of self-confidence, alienation, and difficulty in optimizing one's potential. These conditions can ultimately increase high-stress levels in students (Agestia et al., 2024). Recent studies have shown that students with low social adaptation are more susceptible to anxiety and feelings of isolation (Ahmad et al., 2022).

In addition to social adaptation, pet attachment is one coping mechanism that can help individuals reduce stress (Imanina & Suminar, 2022). An American Veterinary Medical Association study shows that around 70% of pet owners, such as cats, are millennials and

students (Agusniar & Adelia, 2024). Cats are known to have a calming effect on their owners through their purrs and physical interactions, such as being stroked, which can reduce stress and improve emotional well-being (Erliza & Atmasari, 2022).

Cats can be life support for humans who have pet attachment (Suryadibrata & Salim, 2019). Pet attachment refers to the ability to benefit from the relationship built with one's pet (Tyrestafani & Soetjiningsih, 2022). This relationship can increase life satisfaction for its owners (Tribudiman et al., 2021; Ivana et al., 2024). Although various studies have shown the benefits of pet ownership on mental health, there is still a gap in research that specifically examines the relationship between pet attachment and stress in college students (Nugraha et al., 2024). Previous studies have focused more on the general population or different age groups, such as school children or medical students (Duma, 2022). Thus, more specific research is needed to understand how pet attachment can affect stress levels and social adaptation in college students.

RESEARCH METHODS

Approaches and Types of Research

This study uses a quantitative approach with a regression research design (Sihotang, 2023). The selection of this design allows researchers to analyze the relationship between independent variables (pet attachment) and dependent variables (stress levels and social adaptation). The quantitative approach collects numerical data that can be analyzed statistically to test the research hypothesis.

Research Subject

The population in this study was 32 students of the Islamic Guidance and Counseling Study Program of the State Islamic Institute

of Parepare who kept cats. The researcher used the total sampling technique to select research subjects. This technique was selected because the research population was relatively small (Suriani et al., 2023); therefore, the total number of samples taken was 32 students.

Research Instruments

Data was collected using stress, social adaptation, and pet attachment questionnaires. The compilation of the stress questionnaire refers to physiological and psychological aspects (Sarafino & Smith, 2016). The stress questionnaire consists of 50 items with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient 0.917. The compilation of the social adaptation questionnaire refers to aspects of academic adjustment, social adjustment, emotional adjustment and attachment to the institution (Baker & Siryk, 1984). The social adaptation questionnaire comprises 50 items with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.914. Compiling the pet attachment questionnaire refers to general attachment, people substitution, and animal rights (Garrity et al., 1989). The pet attachment questionnaire consists of 50 items with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.907.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study is simple linear regression to test the effect of pet attachment on stress and the effect of pet attachment on social adaptation. Then, the effect of pet attachment on stress and social adaptation was tested using multivariate linear regression analysis techniques with SPSS version 25 software.

RESEARCH RESULT

Regression analysis is one of the parametric statistical analysis techniques that require several requirements to be met, such as

normality tests and linearity tests. Here are the results of each assumption test:

Table 1
Normality Test

Variable	Shapiro-Wilk	Sig.	Interpretation
Pet attachment	0.988	0.968	Normal
Stress	0.972	0.555	Normal
Social adaptation	0.951	0.151	Normal

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test showed that the significance value (Sig.) for the pet attachment variable was 0.968, the value for the stress variable was 0.555, and the value for the social adaptation variable was 0.151. The rule used in the Shapiro-Wilk test states that the data is said to be normal if the p-value is> 0.05; thus, the data on the three variables are normally distributed.

Table 2
Linearity Test

Variable	F Linearity	Sig.	Interpretation
Pet attachment with stress	2320.683	0.013	Linear
Pet attachment with social adaptation	365.889	0.033	Linear

From the results of the linearity test between pet attachment with stress, a significance value of 0.013 was obtained, and between pet attachment with social adaptation, 0.033. The rule used in the F Linearity test is that the data is said to be linear if the p-value <0.05; thus, both data show a significant linear relationship.

Table 3
Regression Analysis

Variable	R	R Square	Sig.	Interpretation
Pet attachment with stress	0.930	0.865	0.000	There is a significant relationship
Pet attachment with social adaptation	0.446	0.199	0.011	There is a significant relationship

The simple linear regression analysis results of pet attachment with stress and pet attachment with social adaptation show a

significance value of 0.000 and 0.011. The rule in simple linear regression is that the hypothesis is accepted if the p-value <0.05. Thus, a significant relationship exists between pet attachment and stress and between pet attachment and social adaptation. From the regression test, the coefficient of determination (R Square) of pet attachment with stress was 0.865, meaning that pet attachment contributed 86.5% to the stress level. In comparison, the coefficient of determination (R Square) of pet attachment with social adaptation was 19.9%, meaning that pet attachment contributed 19.9% to social adaptation.

Table 5
Multivariate Regression Analysis

Effect	**F**	**Sig.**	**Interpretation**
Intercept Wilks'Lambda	97.634	0.000	There is a significant relationship

The multivariate linear regression analysis (MANOVA) results obtained the F value at 97.634, and the Wilks' Lambda significance was 0.000. The significance value is <0.05, which means that simultaneously, there is a significant effect of pet attachment on stress and social adaptation. The rule in multivariate linear regression is that the hypothesis is accepted if the p-value is <0.05.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that pet attachment has a more dominant contribution to stress than pet attachment to social adaptation; in this study, emotional bonds with pets, especially cats, tend to function more as a coping strategy (such as providing emotional comfort) than as a means of improving social skills. The command to love and care for cats is contained in the book Fatawa al-Fiqhiyyah al-Kubra, which states that: *"It is advisable to honor cats, and it is obligatory to feed them if they cannot find food for themselves"* (Al-Haitami, 1983); This reflects that Islam regulates not only relationships

between humans, but also relationships with animals. Actions such as ignoring or torturing animals are considered reprehensible and contrary to Islamic values (Musaffa & Hidayati, 2024).

Islam teaches that interacting with living things, including animals, is a form of worship that can provide peace of mind (Qardlawi, 2023). The form of interaction with pets can be done by fulfilling their food needs (Wisnuyana & Yuniati, 2023), as narrated in the book of Sahih Muslim number Hadith 4951, from Abu Hurairah, the Messenger of Allah Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam said: "A woman went to hell because a cat she kept in a cage finally died. She did not feed it and did not let it loose so that it could find food from insects on earth" (An-Nawawi, 2014); The hadith has the meaning that individuals who have pets should pay attention to the needs of their pets (Musaffa & Hidayati, 2024).

According to several studies, pet care routines such as providing physical touch (playing with pets), feeding and bathing pets can create a sense of comfort that helps individuals control their emotions after a day of activities (Haqien & Rahman, 2020; Ansyah & Susanti, 2023). Omega and Herman (2024) added that a positive relationship with pets is a coping emotion that helps individuals control their emotions with many task demands. Thus, pet attachment can function to calm down when individuals are stressed (Adzim et al., 2024).

From a psychological perspective, pet attachment contributes to social adaptability (Anjani et al., 2024). Duma (2022) explains that pet attachment helps individuals improve interpersonal skills through individual participation in animal lover communities. In this case, pets are a link for individuals in social interactions with fellow animal lovers. Pets can increase empathy and a sense of responsibility (Amalia & Mayarni, 2022). Individuals who have pets tend to care about the survival of living things, even though they are not their pets. This

attitude of empathy and responsibility is critical in adjusting individuals to their social environment (Saputra & Dewi, 2023).

This study has several limitations: First, although using linear regression analysis, the study's design is non-experimental, so it cannot ascertain the absolute cause-and-effect relationship between pet attachment with stress and pet attachment with social adaptation. Second, since all respondents originated from a single study program within one institution, the findings may not be generalizable to a broader population. Third, as the study was limited to cat owners, the results may not be generalizable to owners of other pets with differing relational characteristics.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis above, pet attachment significantly affects stress levels and social adaptation of cat-owning students. This implication strengthens previous studies' findings that pet attachment affects stress and social adaptation in students. The suggestion for further research is to expand the number and diversity of samples to obtain a more comprehensive picture. In addition, it is important to compare the effect of pet attachment on stress levels and social adaptation between campuses to gain a deeper understanding of the role of attachment to pets in students' social and psychological contexts in different environments.

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