

Unspoken Therapy: Dogs' Contribution to Their Owners' Well-being, Coping Mechanism, and Newfound Meaning in Life

Daisy T. Kazandjiev¹ and Sharon Rose G. Medez²

^{1,2}*University of Negros Occidental Recoletos
Bacolod City, Philippines*



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52006/main.v8i1.1181>

Article history:

Submitted: January 20, 2025

Revised: February 25, 2025

Accepted: March 19, 2025

Keywords:

Mental health
Well-being
Coping mechanism
Dog-assisted therapy
Phenomenology
Philippines

ABSTRACT. For individuals living alone, the mental and emotional challenges of solitary life can be profound, yet they are often mitigated by the companionship of a dog. This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of solitary adult dog owners. Through unstructured interviews and Lichtman's 3Cs analysis, the research revealed that dogs act as "four-legged therapists," providing crucial support that enables owners to cope with challenges and rediscover life's purpose. These findings underscore the therapeutic value of the human-animal bond and advocate for integrating dog-assisted therapy into academic, medical, and rehabilitation settings. As a preliminary step in addressing gaps in the literature, this study suggests that future research should extend to broader demographics and utilize quantitative methods. Ultimately, this work positions dog-assisted therapy as a credible intervention for enhancing well-being amidst the dynamic struggles of solitary living.

1.0. Introduction

Dogs have long established a noteworthy role in supporting humans in therapeutic ways (Gee et al., 2021) and have proven effective in improving well-being (Mittly et al., 2024). Owners often find companionship in their pets, which serves as a vital coping mechanism during mentally challenging situations (Merkouri et al., 2022). Furthermore, dogs act as a valuable source of motivation and resilience (Martins et al., 2023), providing owners with a renewed purpose in life in response to existential crises (Chen et al., 2020; Bongyoga & Risnawaty, 2021). Despite the positive impact dogs have on humans, ongoing challenges persist in optimizing the application of dog-assisted therapy in various therapeutic settings (Arsovski, 2024).

The need for such therapeutic support is urgent; according to the latest global mental health report, 970 million people are suffering from mental health concerns (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). To address this growing global concern, various interventions have emerged, including dog-assisted therapy (DAT).

Research suggests that DAT effectively helps combat mental health issues and promotes well-being across diverse populations and settings (Pandey et al., 2024). This non-pharmacological intervention is gaining popularity and is increasingly sought after due to its calming and therapeutic benefits (Eckstein et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, this bond is particularly strong. A 2021 Rakuten Insight survey found that the Philippines has the highest percentage of dog ownership in Asia, at 67% (Lagare, 2023), and a study from the same year revealed that Filipinos have the highest interest in owning pets in Southeast Asia (Pena, 2024). More recently, the Philippine Pet Ownership Statistics reported about 12 million dog owners in the country in 2024. This growth is evidenced by data from the Philippine Canine Club Inc. (2021), which noted that registered puppies reached 133,478 in 2021—an increase of more than 40 percent from the previous year. These statistics reveal that Filipinos are emotionally attuned to dogs, demonstrating an unwavering love and appreciation for these animals.

This culture of care is evident locally in Bacolod City. Bacolodnons are renowned for their radiant smiles and loving nature (Villones, 2020), a trait mirrored in the

***Correspondence:** daisykazandjiev1989@gmail.com
Daisy T. Kazandjiev, *University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos, Bacolod City, Philippines*

©Kazandjiev and Medez (2025). **Open Access.** This article published by Philippine Social Science Journal (PSSJ) is licensed under **Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)**. You are free to share (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and adapt (remix, transform, and build upon) the material. Under the following terms, you must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way suggests the licensor endorses you or your use. You may not use the material for commercial purposes. To view the license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

sight of owners strolling with their pets. The city is home to various dog communities championing animal welfare, including the Pawssion Project PH, a well-known non-profit organization founded by a proud Bacolodnon (Olivares, 2024). Furthermore, the City Veterinary Office, in collaboration with various advocates, implemented initiatives such as Alaga.BCD—an online animal welfare desk using the #IsugidKayMayor QR code—to address concerns regarding cruelty, abuse, and the rabies virus (Guadalquiver, 2024). These efforts demonstrate the strong bond between humans and dogs, explaining why dog lovers work hard to provide a safe environment for a healthy coexistence (Gee et al., 2021).

While dog owners' experiences serve as firsthand testimonies of how lives are enriched and transformed by pets (Lea et al., 2024), a significant gap remains in the literature regarding specific demographics. Therefore, this research stands as a foundational step to further investigate the therapeutic benefits of dogs across diverse settings. Specifically, this study aimed to illuminate the authentic experiences of adult dog owners who live alone, highlighting the positive impact pets bring to their solitary lives.

Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study explored the lived experiences of adult pet dog owners in a highly urbanized city in the central Philippines. The research sought to cultivate a richer understanding of the therapeutic benefits of dogs on their owners' mental health and well-being. By capturing these authentic and transformative experiences, the study unveils the beauty of the "unspoken therapy" provided by a four-legged therapist amidst the dynamic struggles of solitary living.

2.0. Methodology

Research Design. This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of adult pet dog owners in a highly urbanized city in Western Visayas, Philippines, aiming to distill individual experiences into a universal essence. Guided by specific philosophical assumptions, the research process was shaped by ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological perspectives. Ontologically, the researcher acknowledged the reality of the therapeutic benefits of dogs, evaluating participants' personalities and environments to foster audience connection. Epistemologically, the researcher acted as an insider, building rapport and observing nonverbal cues to capture authentic stories. Axiologically, the researcher's background as a pet owner and mental health advocate allowed for empathy while ensuring biases were transparently reported. Methodologically, an inductive

approach was used, adhering to Lichtman's coding, categories, and concepts to ensure analytical confidence.

Participants and Sampling Method. The participants consisted of adult pet dog owners selected through purposive and snowball sampling methods. Purposive sampling allowed for the intentional selection of individuals capable of expressing the specific phenomenon, also known as judgment or subjective sampling.

Additionally, snowball sampling utilized referrals from existing participants to identify further subjects. Inclusion criteria required participants to have owned a dog for at least six months and to interact daily with their pet within a home environment.

Data collection. Data were collected using unstructured, in-depth interviews designed to uncover the narratives of living alone with pet dogs. The researcher screened qualified participants and conducted three face-to-face interviews per participant, ranging from 25 to 60 minutes, to capture changes in experiences over time. The process began with establishing rapport and securing informed consent, ensuring participants understood their rights and the potential for emotional recall. During the interviews, the researcher maintained objectivity while using probing questions to gather thick descriptions, observing nonverbal cues, and validating responses through summary and clarification. Post-interview, emotional and spiritual support was provided to participants who experienced emotional breakdowns, followed by debriefing and advice on responsible pet ownership.

Data analysis. Data analysis employed a thematic approach using Lichtman's 3 Cs: coding, categories, and concepts.

The process involved initial code transcription, modification of codes, development and revision of categories, and the identification of key concepts to reveal the essence of the experience. To ensure data quality, the study adhered to strategies for trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was established through member checking and prolonged engagement, while dependability was maintained via field notes and strict adherence to analysis protocols. Transferability was achieved through thick descriptions of the narratives, and confirmability was secured through an external audit of the analysis process.

Ethical considerations. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, adhering to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 and national guidelines. This included ensuring social value, obtaining informed consent, managing participant vulnerability with empathy, and addressing risks through psychosocial support. Privacy was maintained using pseudonyms and data destruction protocols, while justice was upheld through fair

sampling and provision of tokens. Transparency was guaranteed by declaring no conflicts of interest and publishing results. The study was conducted by a qualified researcher with a master's degree in psychology, who is a registered psychometrician, mental health advocate, and experienced dog trainer, ensuring the necessary professional competence and facility adequacy to handle the sensitive nature of the topic.

3.0. Results

The Participants

Anthony is a 37-year-old single man who passionately serves as a Pastor in a religious organization in Bacolod City. Once lost in his younger years, he discovered the transformative love of Jesus while working for a family that became his guiding light. Despite the challenges of poverty, he offered his services to this family, using his earnings to fund his education. His routine included walking the family dogs, which instilled in him a profound love for animals. In young adulthood, he welcomed Lenlen, a mixed-breed dog, and Shawee, a purebred Shih Tzu, into his life. Today, he finds joy in his ministry and the companionship of his dogs, while keeping his heart open to future marriage possibilities.

Josie is a 58-year-old single woman, a devoted mother to a son with special needs, and a passionate entrepreneur. After working abroad as a nurse, she returned to the Philippines to embrace retirement. Her life now revolves around caring for her beloved senior dogs, whom she cherishes as extended children. She finds inspiration in launching her beauty products business while enjoying the unconditional love of her pets. Her senior dogs bring her immense joy, acting as stress relievers and sources of happiness.

Catherine, 56, is a dedicated single woman serving as a finance secretary for a religious organization in Bacolod City. Her unwavering commitment to supporting her family is admirable, even as she navigates the challenges of finding a lifelong companion. Ultimately, she settled on living alone with her dog, Tabby, who provides immense joy and unconditional love. Today, she feels no regrets about her decision to remain single, as long as she has Tabby by her side.

Linda is a 36-year-old real estate broker, a wife, and a dedicated servant of the Lord in Bacolod City. Once hesitant about dogs, she was introduced by a friend to a pit bull named Wins. Despite initial reservations about the breed, his sweet puppy eyes melted her heart. Today, Wins stands by her side as a comforting presence and loyal confidante. In moments of anxiety, he reminds her that she is never alone, and their bond exemplifies the power of genuine companionship and nonjudgmental love.

Charles, 35, embraces his journey as a single man, thriving as a remote Virtual Assistant. Working from home, he balances his professional life with devotion to his dog, Aika. Motivated by a deep love for animals, he selflessly feeds stray cats and dogs, ensuring vulnerable creatures have something to eat. His compassionate actions highlight that genuine care for animals transcends ownership. He enjoys the freedom of singlehood in his own home while finding joy in the vibrant energy Aika brings to his life.

Emman and Lesly, in their six years of marriage, both have faithfully served their church while praying for a child. Though their prayers remain unanswered, they hold steadfast to the promise that their heart's desire will be fulfilled in perfect timing. In the meantime, their dogs, Shadow and Cody, are the cherished recipients of their overflowing love. Lesly and Emman nurture them as if they were their own children; the dogs sleep, cuddle, and dine with the couple. These "furbabies" fulfill their yearning for parenthood, giving them a glimpse of family life and enriching the couple's relationship through the shared bond of caregiving.

Thematic Insights

To mitigate biases and beliefs related to pet dog ownership, the researcher utilized phenomenological bracketing prior to data analysis. This approach enabled her to acknowledge and appreciate the unique perspectives of the participants without allowing her own preconceptions to influence the interpretation. By establishing an atmosphere of openness and receptivity, the researcher encouraged participants to share their stories and express their deepest emotions, yielding rich and varied insights. This intentionality reinforced the validity of the study while facilitating a deeper understanding of the dog-owner relationship and its positive impact on well-being.

Subsequently, the researcher utilized Lichtman's 3Cs framework to systematically analyze the data obtained from the verbatim transcripts of twelve participants. Composite narratives reflecting the essence of the phenomenon were developed. These narratives provided a comprehensive understanding of the "why" and "how" behind the participants' experiences.

Theme 1: Promotes Well-being

This theme highlights the therapeutic benefits of dogs for participants' well-being as they navigate solitary living. Feelings of loneliness, social disconnection, work-related stress, high expectations, and unfulfilled dreams have all taken a toll on the participants' mental health. In these moments, dogs have proven to be invaluable companions who help maintain emotional balance and stability. Their unwavering affection, instinctive ability to read emotions,

entertaining behaviors, and resilience have all significantly contributed to the participants' well-being.

The feeling of being anticipated. Dogs earn the title of "man's best friend" because of the loyalty and devotion that leads them to anticipate their owners' return throughout the day. They often spend their time waiting patiently to catch a scent of their owners or hear their voices, eager for play and cuddle sessions. The feeling of being anticipated, welcomed, and missed gives the participants a unique sense of satisfaction. Despite living alone, these pet dogs make the participants feel genuinely loved and valued. Dogs are excellent examples of how to appreciate the simple things in life; coming home to a wagging tail and a happy, eager greeting is a genuinely heartwarming experience.

What I love most is the feeling of waking up in the morning to find him still beside me, patiently waiting for me to wake up; It feels good when someone looks forward to seeing you.. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2 & August 11, 2024)

As soon as I wake up, I see that she is already staring at me, patiently waiting for me to wake up. She does not want to disturb me, so she waits until I open my eyes. And when I do, she would jump, run, and bark like crazy. Then I find myself smiling. I consider that a good start to the day. It gives me a more positive feeling to start my day right. (Charles, Personal Communication, August 28, 2024)

Arriving home feels different when someone is waiting for you, greeting you, and excited to see you. Their gestures show that they are happy to see you, like wagging their tails. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024)

Vayu waits for me as I open the windows while Jazz is on his cage turning like a mad dog. They are both excited to see me open the door in the morning. It feels good when someone longs to see you and is eager to greet you with a good morning. (Riza, Personal Communication, August 17, 2024)

In the morning when I wake up, all their tails are wagging, showing their excitement to see me. It seems like they want to greet me with a "good morning". (Antonio, Personal Communication, February 10, 2024)

Whenever I arrive home, he greets me with enthusiasm. He is always very excited to see me. Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

What I like most about Aki is when she shows off her belly asking me to scratch it whenever I arrive home. When I say, "Belly scratch", she will run to me and show her belly. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

One of the things I love is that every time I come home, they are so excited to see me. They wait on top of my dining table until I open the door, full of energy and eagerness. It's heartwarming to see how happy they are to welcome me back. (Anthony, Personal Communication February 5, 2024)

There is a satisfying feeling knowing that someone is excited to see you when you arrive home, and when you wake up the next morning, that same someone is eagerly anticipating your presence. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

Whenever I arrive home in the evening, they welcome me like small children running toward you shouting, "Mama is here!" (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Like in my experience, I would go outside to buy something and be gone for an hour but when I return, it seems like we've not seen each other for a day. (Emman, Personal Communication, September 1, 2024)

Acknowledging emotions without judgment. Dogs possess the instinctive ability to read emotions, subtle changes in their owners' behavior, tone of voice, and even scent, which can help them detect when their owners are feeling depressed or anxious, an attribute lacking in humans. Their vigilance and quick response to human emotions and body language enable them to react and respond accordingly. The eye contact, tilting of their heads, and staying focused during interactions convey utmost attentiveness. Dogs' presence during stressful situations opens an avenue for emotional release, where emotions are acknowledged without fear of judgment.

And that is something I appreciate about having dogs because even though you aren't perfect and you are not doing enough for them – they never complain. They are expectant – yes. But complain – no. They still love you the same despite not having enough time for them; I think so, yes, or perhaps because they can't speak, but the way they stare at me and look straight into my eyes, I can read that they're saying, "Hey, it's okay. We understand you." (Josie, Personal Communication, March 3, 2024, August 9, 2024)

I sensed that he understood I was going through a challenging time with anxiety; During moments when I'm crying, Wins remains by my side. He doesn't do anything, of course, since he can't talk, but his presence really helps me. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

Yes, that is it. It seems like they are telling you we are here for you. We will not judge you. They are indeed man's best friend; They recognized that I was heartbroken and sad. They also understood what I needed during that time: silence, space, and companionship. They provided me with all of that. That is why I can confidently say that they truly understand my emotions when I failed the board examination. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024, August 17, 2024)

In those moments, my pets comforted me, especially Aki. She sat beside me, staring at me while I cried. She often licked my hands to soothe me; my dogs made me feel special. To them, I am not less because I am more than enough; I appreciate that Aki understands my situation. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

My dogs, especially Macky, always stay beside me. He usually looks straight at me as if asking, "Hey, what's wrong? What's your problem?" (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024)

However, during these tough times, my two dogs were always by my side. One would sleep on my lap, and the other would rest on my belly. Their presence meant a lot to me and provided great comfort in my life. (Anthony, Personal Communication, February 5, 2024)

Whenever I find myself deep in thought, especially when I'm facing problems, I lie down and Tabby does the same. We lie next to each other. He doesn't do anything; he can't talk. But his presence is incredibly powerful and affects me in a unique way. I've come to realize how wonderful it is to have someone by your side during quiet moments. Tabby's presence truly helps to ease the heaviness and burden I feel. (Catherine, Personal Communication, August 17, 2024)

I was really sorry, but each time I said sorry to her (Aika), she was just like looking at me like she's telling me, "It's okay, I understand you," and that's more painful knowing that she's not mad at me. (Charles, Personal Communication, March 19, 2024)

Constant happiness and entertainment. Dogs are excellent entertainers. Aside from their endearing features, they display humorous behaviors like tail-chasing and "zoomies" that bring joy to their owners. Engaging with a dog acts as a positive distraction, shifting the participant's focus away from stressors and encouraging them to immerse themselves in the present moment. Although this interaction may not directly resolve problems, it offers a vital opportunity to pause, unwind, and recharge.

Actually, she is my entertainer. You know how boring it is to stay at home 24/7, right? But ever since Aika arrived, there hasn't been a boring moment anymore. She often makes silly movements, running around, chasing her tail, and barking. All of this helps me smile. (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024)

My dogs possess positive energy, and they share it with me every time I come home, even when I feel tired. I think that's why I feel rejuvenated when I arrive home; it's their energy that lifts me up. Their gestures, excitement, barking, and playful zoomies all contribute to the positive energy I absorb. (Josie, Personal Communication, August 9, 2024)

My happiness feels different this time, Dais, and I am always excited to go home; the way they welcome me, by licking my hands, and their outburst of excitement as they run here and there – they keep me entertained allowing me to shift my focus away from stress and divert to them. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 25, 2024, August 11, 2024)

I feel happy whenever I see them doing funny things, like when Jazz gets the zoomies or when Vayu is in mating season and attempts to show off. I can't help but burst into laughter! I also find joy in watching Vayu eat with a good appetite; it's amazing how quickly he finishes his food! In these moments, I especially appreciate seeing them healthy and active. (Riza, Personal Communication, August 17, 2024)

Seeing Tabby excited to see me when I arrive home brings me joy. Out of that happiness, I often forget about feeling tired and exhausted. It's like magic! (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

I cherish those moments to see her playing joyfully; In this area of my life, they bring me happiness by fulfilling needs that even my family cannot. During my quiet moments, they were by my side. That's why I appreciate them even more now. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, August 15, 2024)

What I also enjoy is that after he finishes his food, he comes to me for a belly rub, and then he falls asleep. That's how comfortable his life is, haha! Overall, I'm really happy that I have a pet dog now while Jun is at work for months. Wins is my source of happiness during this time. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

I find it funny when Cody finishes his food faster than Shadow because he looks at me as if asking for more. Cody's face is really funny, and Lesly and I always laugh at him. (Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

I'm happy. Somehow, they are fulfilling my desire to have children. I am almost in tears now. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Feeling Protected and Secured. Dogs possess an innate protective instinct that allows them to detect threats in their surroundings, making them valuable partners in ensuring security. Their presence fosters a sense of safety among participants, particularly during the night. When dogs perceive a threat, they communicate warnings through loud barking and signs of restlessness. Knowing that a dog is securing the area allows participants to sleep peacefully, which is essential for maintaining their overall well-being.

I sleep soundly during the night, knowing that Tabby is there watching over me. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024.)

I feel safe knowing that someone is looking out for me. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024)

In the evening, I feel secure knowing that someone is protecting me since I live alone. (Antonio, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

I feel safe and secure knowing that, even though he is just a dog, he can protect me if needed. In the past, whenever I came home late in the evening, I was never afraid as long as Nabe was with me. (Fe, Personal Communication, February 10, 2024)

I feel more secure knowing that he is watching over me; I enjoy the feeling of having him beside me while I sleep because it helps me rest better) (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024, August 15, 2024)

However, when Wins entered my life, he helped me overcome that fear. He gives me the confidence that he will protect me; I am very thankful to Wins because he provides me with a sense of security, especially during the night.

(Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024, March 20, 2024)

I feel safe and secure living alone. I know that Aika will bark if something strange happens. (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024)

They help secure the place; They are very protective and territorial. We feel secure when we sleep at night knowing that they are with us. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

More positive outlook on life. Dogs positively influenced the participants' work habits, which significantly contributed to higher job satisfaction. Participants became more eager to complete their work responsibilities early, motivated by the anticipation of receiving rewarding affection from their pets. Additionally, through the mindfulness embodied by their dogs, participants learned to appreciate the present moment; the realization of their pets' limited lifespans served as a reminder that time is finite. Ultimately, participants learned to transform limitations into strengths and seize the opportunities of the day. These perspectives enabled participants to focus on their capabilities rather than their constraints, allowing them to enjoy what is available rather than dwelling on what is lacking.

She (Aika) changed my life for the good. My singleness feels sufficient. While others long to settle down, actually, I can say "I am good" ... Then I would find myself smiling after waking up. I think that it's a good start of my day when I smile it gives me a much more positive feeling of the day (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024, August 28, 2024)

The truth is, I miss playing with them so much that it compels me to look forward for my fast healing and recovery. I always told myself, "I will get better soon." (Shenny, Personal Communication, April 5, 2024)

However, I have already accepted his fate, understanding that even humans won't stay long on Earth. We all have to say goodbye one day; I became more responsible so I would have more time to spend with them; I believe I have improved significantly in time management, and Polo contributed to my ability to accomplish more tasks. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024)

Losing them (deceased dogs) is very painful. I don't think I'd ever move on from it, but the ones that are left give me hope and optimism to continue with life because I can't leave them

behind. They depend on me. So, after my other dogs died, I shifted my focus to caring and loving the ones I still have today – Franky and Billy... Me too, Dais, but then, that's what life is all about. Nobody stays here forever. All of us need to depart from this world (Josie, Personal Communication, August 9, 2024)

The result has been beneficial for me; I feel more motivated to finish my tasks early, so I don't always have to rush to meet deadlines. (Catherine, Personal Communication, August 17, 2024)

Bringing Wins for a walk outside adds up to my healthy living. As you said, Pitbulls need to stay active. So, I consider that area for my wellness; Besides, they provide reasons to keep living and help prevent me from succumbing to depression, since after all, these are just problems that will eventually pass. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

I remind him always to look at the positive side of things. The most important thing is that Shadow is here with us and we still have the chance to make it up to him; I believe that God allowed dogs into our lives, or perhaps He gave us the capacity to love dogs to prepare us for parenthood. I think God is already working on our hearts to make us good parents. I've realized that I have a lot of love to give to my child because if I can love dogs so much, I can love my own child even more. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 20, 2024, September 1, 2024)

Becoming more resilient The participants have developed resilience through their relationships with their pet dogs. Because these dogs thrive under their care, the participants realize that giving up on life would mean abandoning their pets. When they consider the future of their dogs without them, they often struggle to envision a safe outcome; this contemplation operates as a compelling motivator to continue living for the sake of their animals. Furthermore, because participants view their pets as family, the prospect of the animal becoming ill or passing away fosters a different kind of strength. This reality prepares them emotionally to confront loss with resilience and provides deep insight into the grief associated with losing a loved one..

As I lay in the operating room, I prayed to God for survival and recovery, thinking, "What will happen to Aki if I'm gone? How will they manage?" Aki became my source of strength, motivating me to go through with the operation; All I can say is that I became stronger because of them. If not for them, I would not have gone through with the surgery. They were my source of strength. (Shenny, Personal Communication, April 5, 2024)

It was my most painful experience because he was my favorite. My attachment to him was special compared to my other dogs, especially since he had died. However, I need to overcome everything. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024)

...because their presence reminds me that I still have them. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024)

These are things I never thought possible until I became attached to dogs. This experience taught me to be strong and to cry and grieve, because it's okay, even though they're just dogs. (Anthony, Personal Communication, August 25, 2024)

However, he developed complications, and the infection spread to his brain. The doctor advised me to consider euthanasia. That was the saddest part, but I managed to cope with the emotions. After his death, we placed him in a box, added some flowers, and held a memorial service for him. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024)

I am grateful to God and Tabby because I know that God will use Tabby to make me more courageous and to strengthen my faith in Him. I will cry and grieve for Tabby, yes, but I believe He will provide me with strength. They say that losing a dog prepares you and gives you a glimpse of what it feels like to lose a loved one or family member. Perhaps that's why it won't hurt as much, or it's easier to accept, because you already understand the pain that comes with losing someone you love (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

However, I endured everything because I wanted to get Wins back. It was a truly terrible experience. (Linda, Personal Communication, March 20, 2024)

I recently looked at the situation from a different perspective. What if Aika didn't make it? What if it was too late for me to take her to the vet? These reflections have opened my eyes to a reality I've been trying to avoid: her life is short and limited. Out of fear of losing her, I often overlook this fact, or perhaps I'm in denial because I'm not ready to face it yet. However, what's most important is that this realization has helped me prepare for any challenges I may encounter with Aika in the future. (Charles, Personal Communication, August 28, 2024)

When we lost Shadow, I saw how we worked as a team and have proven that we can overcome problems as long as we're helping each other.

(Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Theme 2: Serves as an effective coping mechanism

This theme highlights how dogs serve as a coping mechanism for participants during mentally challenging situations. In moments of loneliness and disappointment, dogs offer companionship and comfort, allowing participants to openly discuss and express their struggles. This dynamic provides a safe space for emotional release, which is vital for relief and healing. When confronted with stress, dogs serve as a positive distraction, enabling participants to shift their attention away from their problems. Routines involving their dogs divert their attention and foster a sense of connection. Embracing this dynamic allows participants to gradually reframe their perspective, viewing challenges as opportunities for growth and learning. Ultimately, these interactions help participants develop healthier stress responses, equipping them with effective strategies to navigate life's difficulties.

Coping by de-stressing. Dogs help alleviate stress by fostering emotional connectedness and promoting physical activity. Simple routines—such as feeding, walking, grooming, and playing—effectively help participants disconnect from their daily pressures. Connecting emotionally, even in silence, allows participants to slow down, providing room to reflect and recharge. By engaging with their dogs, participants naturally shift their focus away from stressors. Over time, this dynamic leads to the development of positive coping strategies. Consequently, having dogs as companions helps participants manage stress more healthily, allowing them to cope with greater comfort and emotional balance.

My feelings of exhaustion disappear when Tabby seeks attention from me; Tabby is my stress reliever. I always leave home very early in the morning and come back home after it's already dark. I feel so tired and exhausted from work and travel. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

When you come home exhausted from work, someone runs up to you – that's Wins today. The stress and fatigue begin to fade as you focus on him. I also envision this future moment when God blesses us with a baby. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

I can see that his stress and fatigue disappear when he rolls around with the dogs. (Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Yes, especially when you sit down and they approach you – your stress will really be released; I believe it's psychological that he captures my attention, directing my focus towards him instead of my feelings of exhaustion. He keeps me entertained. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024, August 11, 2024)

Whatever stress that I have from that day, like for example, the whole day I am working –when I arrive home, my stress disappears; And for some, it might be therapeutic to have a pet dog and for me also. Of course, with my stress and all that – they really helped me. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024)

Obviously, she cannot help me with my problems but her presence makes me feel better. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

It felt like I was relieved. (Riza, Personal communication, January 16, 2024)

I cannot explain the feeling, but I feel satisfied when she sleeps beside me. I feel more relaxed and get better sleep. (Charles, Personal Communication, August 28, 2024)

Talking out problems to an active listener. The active presence of dogs encourages participants to verbalize their problems. Despite knowing that dogs cannot use spoken language, participants unhesitatingly open up, believing that the animals understand them. Over time, this interaction functions as a coping mechanism by allowing the release of burdens through speech. Upon releasing these burdens, participants experience immediate relief. Such emotional relief is vital to well-being, as it aids in maintaining emotional balance.

Especially when I am alone and have no one to talk to, my dogs have always been there for me. They listen to me as I share my problems. Through them, I can release the negative emotions that I feel. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024)

I talked to him while I was crying, and afterwards, I felt an instant sense of relief. Especially when he licked my hands, it made me feel his concern even more. Isn't it true that when we face problems, just having a listening ear is often enough? Sometimes, all we need is someone to listen to. Even though Wins cannot speak, his presence alone is more than enough for me. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

Yes, I talk to my dogs. Especially when the war between Israel and Hamas escalated, it reminded me to revisit the prophecy about the second coming. Every day, I would tell them, "Jesus Christ is

coming soon. I might be raptured, and if I am gone and Jesus takes me home, please be safe here." I also said to the Lord, "Lord, can I bring them with me instead?" (Anthony, Personal Communication, February 5, August 25, 2024)

I often talk to them, especially when I have problems; I talk to them and share what happened that day. I let them sit beside me. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024)

Sometimes, I talk to him and share my frustrations, whether it's about a family member who upset me, a situation at work, or an unpleasant encounter with a stranger that has put me in a bad mood. He listens, and I can tell he understands by the way he looks at me. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

I always talk to her about anything under the sun; When I got Aika, she really helped me maintain my sanity. While it is not typical to speak to dogs—since they cannot respond—it gives me a sense of fulfillment to share my emotions and thoughts with her. Even though she cannot communicate back, it feels good to express myself and connect in that way. (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024)

There are times when we find ourselves deep in thought about how to manage our budget. We often tell Cody and Shadow, "You should fast for now because we don't have the budget." They stare at us as if they understand what we are saying haha! (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Withhold from problems momentarily. Dogs serve as remarkable companions and sources of entertainment. Participants derive delight from their dogs' naturally playful, quirky, and affectionate nature, which serves as a positive distraction from their distress. This brief respite allows participants to breathe, reflect, and gain perspective. Over time, this interaction evolves into a coping mechanism, alleviating the emotional weight of problems by providing a necessary break through amusement and companionship.

Your focus will shift to them, and gradually, you will begin to forget about your problem. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 2, 2024)

They make me feel so happy and alive. I often experience these moments, too; just seeing them or having them sit beside me diverts my thoughts away from my worries. When they are around, I often forget my problems and no longer feel sad because of their presence. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024)

However, since I have Tabby, I often manage to overlook those feelings. When I am facing problems, I tend not to focus on them because Tabby always captures my attention. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

And you know what? I was verbally telling her (Aika) this, "I will forever blame myself if something happened to you," and she was positively distracting me by licking me, playing with me, and running here and there. She was the one who was affected mainly by my negligence, but she is the one keeping me from focusing on this problem that I created. She is so genuine (Charles, Personal Communication, March 19, 2024)

That is why we are very grateful to Cody and Shadow because we tend to forget our frustration when we shift our focus to them; When I often worry, Cody and Shadow entertain me, and suddenly, I forget my problems. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

With our busy schedules, we do not have time anymore to think about the things we dream of. Actually, I just remember it now. Cody and Shadow distracts me from thinking about it. (Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Dogs provide great support. They can understand you and help you forget your problems. (Antonio, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

Obviously, she cannot help me with my problems but her presence makes me feel better. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024, Lines 65-67)

Reframing perspectives. Dogs play a pivotal role in helping participants approach problems positively by reframing their perspectives. Recognizing the limited lifespan of their companions prompts participants to seek deeper meaning in every situation—including potential divine interventions—thereby gaining insight into the nature of life and fate. By embracing the gifts of the present, participants learn to appreciate simple joys, such as cuddle time, shared meals, and the therapeutic silence of their dogs' companionship. These slower moments allow them to breathe, de-stress, and put "what-ifs" into perspective, helping them better foresee the implications of their decisions. Ultimately, this reframing serves as a positive coping mechanism, enabling participants to find beauty in their circumstances, even in the midst of silence.

I'm acting as if I have children of my own because I was saying, "I need to live for them. (Shenny, Personal Communication, April 5, 2024)

I tend to reflect on my thoughts. In the past, I would postpone tasks to the next day, even when I had enough time to complete them. Now that Polo is with me, I want to finish all my tasks as early as possible so I can come home sooner. (Alit, Personal Communication, February 25, 2024)

I feel the need to do my responsibility to them. I just want to be a responsible and good furparent to them because I know that our time is limited here on earth. My life is uncertain. That is why I am really trying my best to make every day our best days together, even if it means doing the usual routine that we do. (Anthony, Personal Communication, March 5, 2024)

There are still times when I remember them and feel sad. I think the pain lingers, and it feels fresh. However, each time I look at Franky and Billy, I remind myself, "You need to change your thoughts and not delve deeper into your emotions. (Josie, Personal Communication, August 9, 2024)

I don't see him merely as an animal; in my heart, he is my child. I have learned to appreciate everything around me—both human and animal, good and bad. I've come to realize that everything has a reason and a purpose. (Catherine, Personal Communication, August 17, 2024)

Actually, there are a lot of changes in my routine since Wins came because my sleeping habits changed; Wins has also taught me not to be selfish and to recognize that others depend on me too. I really appreciate this experience because he has changed my perspective on life, especially regarding selfishness; Yes, that's correct. I realized I should not take my well-being for granted because there are people who depend on me, and one of them is Wins. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024, March 20, 2024)

On a positive note, I learned something new: even if the environment appears clean, it does not guarantee that dogs are free from bacteria. They can still be exposed to harmful germs. (Charles, Personal Communication, March 19, 2024)

Perhaps it's God's will that we don't have a baby yet, especially since we're currently facing challenges with our budget. Adding Cody and Shadow's food expenses is already a bit difficult; I can only imagine how much more challenging it would be with the costs of milk, diapers, and other necessities. We still have time to save for that; I changed my mind set and let go of the fear that

something bad had happened to Shadow. Instead, I focused on the positive thought that he is okay and that we will find him. (Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024, March 20, 2024)

But that is life. What else can we do if that is their fate? Besides, they really have limited years of life to share with us. (Fe, Personal Communication, August 10, 2024)

Theme 3: Gives Meaning and Purpose in Life

This theme illustrates how dogs have helped participants rediscover their purpose and meaning in life. Through the act of loving and caring for their dogs, participants discovered a new calling to nurture a "furbaby," fulfilling what felt lacking in their lives. As their love for their dogs deepened, it allowed them to develop greater empathy for other animals. This compassion empowered participants to make meaningful contributions that added necessary structure to their days. Even as participants silently confronted existential crises, their dogs offered a way to prepare for future responsibilities, setting the stage for a hopeful future.

Finding fulfillment in nurturing. The participants do not view their responsibilities as additional chores, but rather as meaningful ways to nurture life. They find fulfillment in caring for their dogs because seeing them healthy and happy brings a sense of accomplishment. The health and happiness of the dog are intertwined with that of the owner. Therefore, meeting their dogs' needs is essential—regardless of the costs or energy involved—as it ultimately brings the participants peace of mind and joy.

Because I care for them deeply? They are like my children, and I want them to be happy and healthy. Within the church ministry, I serve as a pastor, but at home, I take on the role of a furparent. I care for my dogs as if they were my own children, and they help me fulfill my sense of "fatherhood." I provide for their needs just as any father would for his family. Their dependence on me brings a sense of fulfillment, as it feels good to know that someone relies on me—my presence is vital to their well-being. (Anthony, Personal Communication, August 25, 2024)

Especially since I do not have a husband or children, my dogs fulfill my desire to care for a baby. When I take care of my dogs, it feels like I am also caring for a human baby. (Alit, Personal Communication, August 11, 2024)

I care for my pets in the same way I would care for an elderly person. While many people neglect their dogs as they age, I become even more

attentive during this time. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2025)

Of course, Dais, when you have a dog, you must take care of them. This includes giving them a bath, feeding them, and cleaning them up. Sometimes, I also take them for walks. You really have to set aside time for this. However, despite the extra tasks, I find joy in doing all these things. I don't dwell on feeling tired or occasionally feeling lazy because I love them. So, out of my love for them, I make sure to care for them. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

Now, I see that life is much better with dogs in it. Feeding and caring for them is satisfying and rewarding, and it gives you a feeling similar to taking care of a child, especially since we do not have a child yet. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

Yes, I am absolutely happy. In fact, one of the happiest moments of my life is when I can enjoy my favorite food and share it with her. I am a food lover, and I love sharing my home-cooked meals with someone I care about. Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024)

While we wait for our real baby to arrive, Cody and Shadow will receive all the love we can give them. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

In the morning, I clean their area by splashing it with water and feed them. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024)

Overcoming existential crisis. Participants constantly grapple with questions about the meaning and purpose of their existence. Dogs emerge as vital responses to these existential crises, solving issues of social disconnectedness and loneliness while serving as surrogates for parenthood. While perhaps not the literal answer to the participants' prayers, dogs are viewed as timely and perfect expedients, acting effectively as blessings in disguise.

Then I asked myself, "Why do I find it hard to look for a job?"; It seems something is missing in me; "How will they manage without me?" This is my purpose in life. (Shenny, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024, August 15, 2024)

Sometimes, I can't help but think about having a family and entertain questions like, "What if this?" and "What if that?" (Alit, Personal Communication, August 11, 2024)

Although yes it's a thing, I still question my position in finding a life partner, but I view this experience from a positive lens na. God is preparing me to have an insight into what it is like to nurture a family. (Anthony, Personal Communication, February 5, 2024)

Sometimes, when I reflect on my life, I find myself asking, "What is my purpose? What is something significant that I need to accomplish to make my life fulfilling, especially since I'm not getting any younger?" During these moments, my senior dogs are always right beside me. In times like these, there is a sense of silence that surrounds us. My dogs truly help me maintain balance in my life and keep my sanity intact. (Josie, Personal Communication, August 9, 2024)

Of course, there are moments when I deeply reflect on the thought, "What if I settled down and got married?" Each time I see intimate couples, I feel a sense of longing, but I don't delve deeper into those emotions. It's too late for that. Besides, I already have a baby, and that's Tabby. I'm content with just the two of us. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024)

I went through a lot and questioned my self-worth. I cannot give Jun a child because of my PCOS, and then the scam issue came; I am grateful to God for sending help through Wins. Wins provided a positive distraction, which helped me avoid dwelling on those thoughts. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

She filled the missing pieces in my life. Sometimes, I think about how I am only 35 and already stuck in a boring work-from-home job. I often question what else I can do to find worth or purpose. Then Aika came along, and now I feel that my primary purpose is to be Aika's parent. (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024)

Yes, I am grateful for Cody and Shadow. They fulfill our desire to have children. We really wanted to have a child, but it's challenging. Our dogs satisfy this longing. (Emman, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

Pursuing meaningful contributions. Inspired by the unconditional love characteristic of dogs, participants have internalized this virtue to foster empathy for abandoned and neglected animals. This compassion drives them to feed community dogs and volunteer at local shelters. Although these efforts often consume significant time and resources, participants derive great delight from them. Pursuing such meaningful contributions extends beyond self-interest, creating a

deep sense of satisfaction and fulfillment that nourishes their souls.

I once had a dream of creating a community for dog owners, including my friends who also own dogs; I planned to organize stray feeding events or hold dog show competitions—something along those lines; deep in my heart, during their final days, I still want to create impactful memories with them. (Josie, Personal Communication, February 8, 2024, August 9, 2024)

I also want to get involved in the future by visiting dog shelters to feed dogs and help those on the streets. (Linda, Personal Communication, February 24, 2024)

I am basically a dog lover. I feed the stray dogs in my subdivision by placing dog bowls outside my house, where I mix leftover food with dog food. Stray dogs come to eat. Before I had Aika, I always kept kibbles in my bag so that whenever I passed by street dogs, I could give them a small snack. I would feed them in small portions. Do you know why I love doing this? Because whenever I return to the same area where these dogs are, they remember me. They come near me with their wagging tails, almost saying, "Oh, here you are again! Do you have something for me?" I donate small amounts through GCash to help rescue hit-and-run dogs that have been abandoned by their owners. (Charles, Personal Communication, February 27, 2024, August 28, 2024)

That's why, whenever I see posts related to lost and found dogs, I feel sorry for them. That's why I share the posts on my Facebook. (Lesly, Personal Communication, March 2, 2024)

I dislike seeing abandoned dogs with skin issues. I feel sorry for them. Sometimes, the neighbors ask me for medicines for their dogs. I usually give them because I feel sorry for them. (Riza, Personal Communication, January 16, 2024)

When I was still in the Army, I trained Jumbo to sense when someone was lying. I taught him to growl in response to the command, "Tell me the truth." Jumbo would growl whenever he detected falsehoods. His most significant contribution came when he was able to locate a dead body from a distance. When we confronted the suspect and asked, "Did you kill someone?" he denied it. However, Jumbo growled at him angrily, prompting the man to admit to the crime. (Antonio, Personal Communication, February 1, 2024)

I feel sorry for the street dogs that do not have owners to care for them and meet their needs. It's

sad to think about, but my resources are limited, and I can't feed them all the time. However, whenever I have extra food for my dog, Polo, I also share it with the dogs outside. Sometimes, if my budget allows, I buy food specifically for the street dogs as well. (Alit, Personal Communication, August 15, 2024)

To help out, I sometimes leave food outside my place, especially when Shawee cannot finish all her meals. It may not be much, but I hope it can help a dog survive for the day. (Charles, Personal Communication, March 5, 2024)

However, I know I am ready to open my heart to a new dog. If God does not allow me to get a dog of a specific breed, I may choose to adopt from a shelter instead. I feel deeply saddened when I see posts from animal welfare groups urgently asking for food for their rescued animals; So, I've decided to share that same kind of love with others. I'm planning to set aside a portion of my December bonus to donate two sacks of dog food to a shelter. (Catherine, Personal Communication, February 21, 2024, August 17, 2024)

Eidetic Insight

Dogs have long been acknowledged as "man's best friend," yet many overlook the profound power of their presence, a force that transcends spoken language. Dogs serve as poignant reminders that simply being present and acknowledging emotions can be as therapeutic as offering advice. While they cannot communicate through human speech, dogs distinguish themselves through an instinctive ability to read emotions. By perceiving subtle changes in behavior, tone of voice, and even scent, they can detect when their owners are experiencing depression or anxiety. This dynamic embodies the metaphor of "unspoken therapy." Words, when spoken without emotional depth, often fall flat. In contrast, a dog's steadfast presence during difficult times communicates time, effort, attention, and genuine love. Ultimately, dogs epitomize the supremacy of presence over spoken words.

4.0. Discussion

The participants' well-being, coping mechanisms, and newfound meaning in life

The objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of adult dog owners living alone and to unveil the therapeutic benefits of their pets on their well-being. A common thread among participants was the profound impact their dogs had on their daily lives, despite facing challenging situations and moments of loneliness that caused significant emotional and psychological distress. The majority of dog owners

reported that the mere presence of their dogs alleviated stress, leaving them feeling recharged and rejuvenated—a finding consistent with the study by Junça-Silva (2022). Furthermore, the affection and entertainment provided by dogs offered a respite that mitigated the effects of a stressful day, paralleling findings by Albulescu et al. (2022). notably, the joy experienced when greeted by an overly enthusiastic and affectionate dog significantly enhanced participants' moods, promoting feelings of positivity and happiness, as detailed in the findings of Robinson and Segal (2024). Participants also reported experiencing happiness simply by engaging with or gazing at their pets, a phenomenon scientifically supported by the research of Paul et al. (2023).

Given their solitary living arrangements, participants found emotional relief in confiding their problems to their dogs. A recurring theme was the participants' amusement at their dogs' ability to detect emotional distress. Owners often noted that their pets were highly observant of facial expressions, particularly during moments of depression or anxiety. This phenomenon is substantiated by the study of Albuquerque and Resende (2023), which highlights dogs' ability to distinguish their owners' emotional expressions. Similarly, the pets' attunement to crying and sadness is explained in detail in research by Meyers-Manor and Botten (2020). Although participants often found it difficult to articulate the relief they felt when confiding in their dogs, it was evident that these interactions reduced stress and promoted relaxation. The calming effects of dogs on human well-being have been effectively documented in a study by Wagner and Cunha (2021). Moreover, participants noted that sleeping next to their pets provided a sense of comfort and security, as illustrated in the study of Rowe et al. (2021), enabling better sleep and a sense of invigoration the following day. The protective instinct of dogs gave participants confidence, ensuring they felt secure even during the quietest hours of the night.

In various studies, participants reported a significantly improved quality of life following the acquisition of dogs and their integration as essential family members, a conclusion supported by Martin et al. (2021). Many participants viewed their dogs as children, compelling them to nurture and care for the animals. A considerable majority derived fulfillment from providing for their dogs' needs, frequently referring to them as "furbabies" or extended children. Participants expressed satisfaction in meeting their pets' needs regardless of cost, often going to great lengths to provide for them. The act of providing for their dogs contributed significantly to their overall happiness, affirming findings presented by White et al. (2021). Moreover, the realization that their dogs relied on them for comfort and

reassurance further enhanced this satisfaction, as dogs tend to follow their owners closely, much like an infant with its parents. This behavior is further elaborated in research by Somppi et al. (2022). In line with findings by Yapo et al. (2023), participants expressed a profound commitment to caring for their pets under all circumstances. For individuals who conceptualized their dogs as children, as highlighted in research by Guo et al. (2021), dog ownership served as a meaningful alternative to parenthood, offering hope, solace, and a profound sense of fulfillment.

Overall, the company of dogs brought notable benefits to the participants' lives, fostering personal growth and development. First, the companionship offered by dogs contributed to a more positive outlook, as demonstrated in the findings of Merkouri et al. (2022). Second, caring for dogs promoted mindfulness, encouraging owners to accept and engage with the present moment. Third, interacting with dogs fostered resilience by encouraging individuals to reframe their perspectives, a phenomenon aligned with the research of Baines and Olivia (2024). Ultimately, the attachment formed with dogs cultivated empathy and solidarity with animals, which in turn positively influenced prosocial behavior, as noted in a study by Okutan (2023).

The Unspoken Therapy

Dog owners were firsthand witnesses to the therapeutic benefits of dogs, as described by Gee et al. (2021). As participants confronted mentally challenging situations, their dogs created a calming and therapeutic atmosphere that enabled them to think more clearly, cope more effectively, and thrive, as corroborated by Eckstein et al. (2020). Consequently, participants cultivated effective coping mechanisms that facilitated a resilient approach to these challenges. Their dogs served as significant sources of unconditional love, support, and resilience, as highlighted in the findings of Merkouri et al. (2022). Collectively, the evidence suggests that dogs significantly enhanced the owners' well-being, as affirmed in the study conducted by Pandey et al. (2024).

Thus, the concept of "unspoken therapy" is predicated on the powerful, therapeutic presence of dogs that words cannot fully capture. Drawing on the narratives of the participants, this study found results consistent with those of Gee et al. (2021), Mittly et al. (2024), and Merkouri et al. (2022), all of which suggest that dogs possess therapeutic benefits, improve quality of life, and increase happiness by offering fulfillment and avenues for meaningful contribution. Dogs are exceptional companions, possessing distinctive attributes that are beautifully encapsulated in their presence.

5.0. Conclusion

The findings indicate that dog ownership contributes to enhanced well-being by serving as an effective coping mechanism and instilling a sense of purpose. Dogs played a crucial role in providing social support, enabling participants to cope with challenges and highlighting the importance of the human-animal bond. The presence of these pets offered a form of non-verbal communication characterized by sustained attention and companionship, which was essential for the participants' emotional stability. These results support the integration of dog-assisted therapy into therapeutic settings—including academic institutions, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers—to promote mental health. Furthermore, this study provides a basis for future quantitative research to validate and expand upon the efficacy of dog-assisted interventions.

6.0. Limitations of the Findings

The study was conducted in a single city, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Furthermore, the research focused exclusively on adult dog owners. This restriction excludes insights from non-dog owners, children, and individuals living in multi-member households. Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the therapeutic benefits of dogs on well-being across diverse populations.

7.0. Practical Value of the Paper

The findings of this study underscore the profound role dogs play in enhancing human well-being. By highlighting the therapeutic benefits experienced by dog owners, this research advocates for the implementation of Dog-Assisted Therapy (DAT) across diverse settings, including academic institutions, healthcare facilities, corporate environments, and rehabilitation centers.

8.0. Directions for Future Research

While this qualitative research serves as a foundational step toward integrating DAT into therapeutic practice, future studies should employ a mixed-methods approach to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Future research should also expand the participant scope to include non-dog owners with an affinity for animals, as well as individuals living in multi-member households. Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to explore digital interventions, such as the therapeutic potential of viewing dog-related media. By broadening the scope and depth of inquiry, subsequent studies can better address current limitations and further validate the efficacy of dog-assisted therapy.

9.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The content and findings of this work were not influenced by any financial or personal relationships.

REFERENCES

- Albulescu, P., Macsinga, I., Rusu, A., Sulea, C., Bodnaru, A., & Tulbure, B. T. (2022). "Give me a break!" A systematic review and meta-analysis on the efficacy of micro-breaks for increasing well-being and performance. *PLoS ONE*, 17(8), e0272460. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272460>
- Albuquerque, N., & Resende, B. (2022). Dogs functionally respond to and use emotional information from human expressions. *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ehs.2022.57>
- Arsovski, D. (2024). The Role of Animal Assisted therapy in the Rehabilitation of Mental Health Disorders: A Systematic literature review. *Perspectives on Integrative Medicine*, 3(3), 142–151. <https://doi.org/10.56986/pim.2024.10.003>
- Baines, L. M., & Oliva, J. L. (2024). Unleashing the personality divide: resilience in dog owners, neuroticism in cat owners. *Anthrozoös*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2024.2378592>
- Bongyoga, V., & Risnawaty, W. (2021). The Description of Family Quality of Life in Parents with Empty-Nest Syndrome. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research/Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210805.144>
- Chen, X., Zhu, H., & Yin, D. (2020). Everyday Life Construction, Outdoor Activity and Health Practice among Urban Empty Nesters and Their Companion Dogs in Guangzhou, China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(11), 4091. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17114091>
- Eckstein, M., Mamaev, I., Ditzen, B., & Sailer, U. (2020). Calming effects of touch in human, animal, and robotic Interaction—Scientific State-of-the-Art and technical advances. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.555058>
- Gee, N. R., K. E. Rodriguez, A. H. Fine, and J. P. Trammell. 2021. Dogs supporting human health and well-being: A biopsychosocial approach. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 8 (March):1–11. doi:10.3389/fvets.2021.630465.
- Generoso, C., Resende, B., Albuquerque, N., Andrade, M. P., & Savalli, C. (2024). Communication as a tool for exhibiting prosocial behavior in dogs. *Animals*, 14(21), 3091. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14213091>
- George, A., Fernando, M., George, A., Baskar, T., & Pandey, D. (2021). Metaverse: the next stage of human culture and the internet. *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6548172>
- Glanville, C., Hemsworth, P., & Coleman, G. (2020). Conceptualising dog owner motivations: The Pet Care Competency model and role of 'duty of care.' *Animal*

- Welfare, 29(3), 271–284.
<https://doi.org/10.7120/09627286.29.3.271>
- GlobalPETS. (2023, December 28). The Philippines: Steadily growing demand in this up- and-coming market - GlobalPETS.
<https://globalpetindustry.com/article/philippines-steadily-growing-demand-and-coming-market/>
- Golbeck, J. (2024). Grief and resilience after the death of a dog. In APA PsycNet (1st ed.).
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2025-35381-011>
- Gordon, S. (2023, December 9). How do emotions affect your health? Health. <https://www.health.com/emotions-8403537>
- Granqvist, P. (2020). Attachment, culture, and gene-culture co-evolution: expanding the evolutionary toolbox of attachment theory. *Attachment & Human Development*, 23(1), 90–113.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2019.1709086>
- Greenly, G. (2018, February 2). How Dogs Can Help with Depression. NAMI. <https://nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/February-2018/How-Dogs-Can-Help-with-Depression>
- Grigg, E. K., Chou, J., Parker, E., Gatesy-Davis, A., Clarkson, S. T., & Hart, L. A. (2021). Stress-Related behaviors in companion dogs exposed to common household noises, and owners' interpretations of their dogs' behaviors. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 8.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.760845>
- Guadalquivir, N. (2024, March 23). Bacolod City launches online Animal Welfare Concerns Desk. Philippine News Agency. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1198154>
- Guo, Z., Ren, X., Zhao, J., Jiao, L., & Xu, Y. (2021). Can pets replace children? The interaction effect of pet attachment and subjective socioeconomic status on fertility intention. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(16), 8610.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18168610>
- Junça-Silva, A. (2022). Unleashing the Furr-Recovery Method: Interacting with Pets in Teleworking Replenishes the Self's Regulatory Resources: Evidence from a Daily-Diary Study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(1), 518.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20010518>
- Lagare, J. B. (2023, February 2). Pet-loving Philippines to consume more dog, cat treats | Inquirer Business. INQUIRER.net. <https://business.inquirer.net/384690/pet-loving-philippines-to-consume-more-dog-cat-treats#ixzz8F3EDXjL1>
- Lea, C., Kirby, Y., & Tilley, J. (2024). Dogs as a gateway to the good life: using thematic analysis to explore the mechanisms underpinning dog ownership and human well-being. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2024.2364330>
- Lichtman, M. (2013). *Qualitative Research in Education: A User's Guide*.
- Martin, F., Bachert, K. E., Snow, L., Tu, H., Belahbib, J., & Lyn, S. A. (2021). Depression, anxiety, and happiness in dog owners and potential dog owners during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. *PLoS ONE*, 16(12), e0260676.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0260676>
- Martins, C. F., Soares, J. P., Cortinhas, A., Silva, L., Cardoso, L., Pires, M. A., & Mota, M. P. (2023). Pet's influence on humans' daily physical activity and mental health: a meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1196199>
- Merkouri, A., Graham, T. M., O'Haire, M. E., Puewal, R., & Westgarth, C. (2022). Dogs and the Good Life: A Cross-Sectional study of the association between the Dog–Owner relationship and owner mental wellbeing. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.903647>
- Meyers-Manor, J. E., & Botten, M. L. (2020). A shoulder to cry on: Heart rate variability and empathetic behavioral responses to crying and laughing in dogs. *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology/Revue Canadienne De Psychologie Expérimentale*, 74(3), 235–243.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/cep0000225>
- Mittly, V., Fáy, V., Dankovics, N., Pál, V., & Purebl, G. (2024). The role of dog therapy in clinical recovery and improving quality of life: a randomized, controlled trial. *BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies*, 24(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12906-024-04538-7>
- Okutan, N. (2023). An Analysis of the Movie “Hachiko: A Dog’s Story” in Terms of Empathy and Solidarity with Animals. *Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar/Psikiyatride Güncel Yaklaşımlar*, 15(4), 705–721.
<https://doi.org/10.18863/pgy.1255168>
- Olivares, R. (2024, October 30). PAWSsion Project celebrates 4th anniversary with fund drives, services for dogs | ABS-CBN Lifestyle. ABS-CBN. <https://www.abs-cbn.com/life/10/13/22/pawssion-project-celebrates-4th-year-with-fund-drives>
- Pandey, R. P., Himanshu, N., Gunjan, N., Mukherjee, R., & Chang, C. (2024). The role of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Enhancing Patients' Well-Being: Systematic study of the qualitative and quantitative evidence. *JMIRx Med*, 5, e51787. <https://doi.org/10.2196/51787>
- Panus, B. (2023). A dog's intuition. In *CABI eBooks* (pp. 97–99). <https://doi.org/10.1079/9781800622616.0022>
- Park, J. H., Moon, J. H., Kim, H. J., Kong, M. H., & Oh, Y. H. (2020). Sedentary Lifestyle: Overview of updated evidence of potential health risks. *Korean Journal of Family Medicine*, 41(6), 365–373.
<https://doi.org/10.4082/kjfm.20.0165>
- Patty, F. (2023, August 26). Introduction: Owning a dog is a rewarding and fulfilling experience, but it's not without its. . . Medium.
<https://medium.com/@faridpatty/introduction-owning-a-dog-is-a-rewarding-and-fulfilling-experience-but-its-not-without-its-462923c74205>
- Paul, E. S., Coombe, E., McGreevy, P. D., Packer, R. M. A., & Neville, V. (2023). Are Brachycephalic Dogs Really Cute? Evidence from Online Descriptions. *Anthrozoös*, 36(4), 533–553.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08927936.2023.2176590>
- Pena, K. D. (2024, June 4). The why behind the rise of pet parenting in Philippines. Asia News Network.
<https://asianews.network/116547-2/>
- Robinson, L., & Segal, J., PhD. (2024, February 5). The Health and Mood-Boosting Benefits of Pets - HelpGuide.org. HelpGuide.org.

- <https://www.helpguide.org/wellness/pets/mood-boosting-power-of-dogs>
- Rowe, H., Jarrin, D. C., Noel, N. A., Ramil, J., & McGrath, J. J. (2021). The curious incident of the dog in the nighttime: The effects of pet-human co-sleeping and bed sharing on sleep dimensions of children and adolescents. *Sleep Health*, 7(3), 324–331.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2021.02.007>
- Hoskins, M. (2022, July 26). What can I catch from my dog: A guide to staying healthy. Healthline.
<https://www.healthline.com/health/humans-catching-from-dogs>
- Somppi, S., Törnqvist, H., Koskela, A., Vehkaoja, A., Tiira, K., Väättäjä, H., Surakka, V., Vainio, O., & Kujala, M. V. (2022). Dog–Owner Relationship, Owner Interpretations and Dog Personality Are Connected with the Emotional Reactivity of Dogs. *Animals*, 12(11), 1338.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12111338>
- Villones, R. (2020). Negros Panaad Festival Dances: A Reflection of Negrenses' Cultural Identity. *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 8(3), 13–24.
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Randyll-Villones/publication/344233326_Negros_Panaad_Festival_Dances_A_Reflection_of_Negrenses'_Cultural_Identity/links/6438d99420f25554da2e61a4/Negros-Panaad-Festival-Dances-A-Reflection-of-Negrenses-Cultural-Identity.pdf
- Wagner, E., & Cunha, M. P. E. (2021). Dogs at the workplace: a multiple case study. *Animals*, 11(1), 89.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani11010089>
- White, M., Khan, N., Deren, J. S., Sim, J. J., & Majka, E. A. (2021). Give a dog a bone: Spending money on pets promotes happiness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 17(4), 589–595.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1897871>
- WHO. (2021). Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021. In World Health Organization. Retrieved March 1, 2025, from
<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240038349>
- Yapo, F. C. D., Baloloy, J. I. R., Plaza, R. a. F. A., Evangelista, C. B. S., Lopez, M. a. G., Osinaga, A. M. E., Torrero, K. a. D., & Tus, J. (2023). The Psychological Well-Being and Lived Experiences of LGBT Individuals with Fur Babies. Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research).
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7651584>

Additional Author's Information:

DAISY T. KAZANDJIEV
daisykazandjiev1989@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9075-7540>

SHARON ROSE G. MEDEZ
s_medez@yahoo.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2823-4768>