

The Role of Pets in Well-being and the Therapeutic Potential of Logotherapy in Pet Loss Grief: A Literature Review

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Abstract— Pet ownership has been shown to offer significant physical and psychological benefits, including improved mood, reduced stress, and enhanced social interactions. However, the loss of a pet often results in intense grief comparable to human bereavement, which remains underrecognized and undertreated. While various coping strategies exist, formal pet grief therapy is scarce. Logotherapy, a meaning-centered therapeutic approach developed by Viktor Frankl, has demonstrated effectiveness in helping individuals find meaning in suffering and has been successfully applied to diverse populations facing grief, depression, and existential challenges. Despite its potential, logotherapy has not yet been specifically explored as an intervention for pet loss grief. This study aims to investigate the efficacy of group logotherapy in supporting pet owners through bereavement by facilitating meaning-making and promoting psychological well-being. Findings could provide a valuable framework for developing targeted grief therapies for this underserved population.

Keywords— Pet loss, well-being, logotherapy.

INTRODUCTION

The human-animal bond has long been recognized for its positive impact on physical, emotional, and psychological well-being (Brooks et al. 2019, Mandal, 2019 & Thelwell, 2019). Pets often serve as companions that reduce stress, improve mood, and foster a sense of connection, making them vital contributors to overall quality of life. However, the deep emotional attachment formed with pets also means that their loss can trigger intense grief—an experience often overlooked or invalidated by society (Park, Royal & (2023).

The positive impact of owning a pet has been reported such as improving good physical health and psychological well-being through increased social interactions, reduced blood pressure, increased physical activity, relief of academic stress, improvement of their mood and relaxation across time (Allan, 2018; Mandal, 2019; Thelwell, 2019). Owning a pet is beneficial to those with mental health conditions as an emotional support especially in critical times along with their capability to help manage mental health issues and symptoms (Brooks et al. 2019). Studies also involving pets such as the Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) have gained multiple promising reviews of how it can be of beneficial as an alternative interventions and have been proven effective to those struggling with anxiety and stress conditions (Della, 2018 & Hertel & Abel, 2019; Roth, Jackson & Ryan 2021); adolescents with Autism spectrum (London et al, 2020); suicidal interventions (Shoib, et al 2022) those with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Altschuler, 2018) including soldiers with PTSD (Beetz 2021; Nelson 2017); and trauma children survivors (Mims & Waddell, 2016). Thus, the enduring relationship between humans and domestic animals is growing and as of 2021, around 90 million households in Europe owned at least one pet (Statista, 2021). In the

same year, around 90.5 Million US Households owned a pet of different kinds, which accounts for 70% of households (Martyn, 2023). Accordingly, during the pandemic (COVID-19), Southeast Asia has increased up to 89% in terms of pet ownership interest and this includes the country wherein 67% of Filipinos have dogs or around 11-12 million dogs as pets and 43% have cats in their household (Cosgrove, 2023). These data proved that owning pets can be a source of comfort and support and its benefits range to both phys

While research highlights the benefits of pet companionship, fewer studies have explored effective interventions for addressing the emotional toll of pet loss. As pet grief becomes more recognized, there is a growing need for therapeutic approaches that help individuals process their loss and find meaning in their experience. One promising framework is logotherapy, a meaning-centered therapy developed by Viktor Frankl, which encourages individuals to discover purpose in suffering and transform pain into growth (Frankl & Winslade, 2017).

This literature review examines the role of pets in promoting well-being and explores the emerging potential of logotherapy as a therapeutic intervention for those who are grieving the loss of a pet.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a narrative review approach to explore existing literature on the role of pets and its effects on mental health and well-being of pet owners both before and after pet loss. By summarizing and synthesizing relevant research, this method offers a broad and flexible overview of the topic without being limited by the rigid structure of systematic review protocols. (Rammal, 2023). A literature search was conducted using the following search terms ("pet therapy" OR "animal therapy" OR "well-being" OR "pet loss" OR "pet grief" "pet loss" "pet grief") AND (" OR "well-being" OR "psychological health" OR "emotional health") AND ("pet owners" OR " AND ("coping strategies" OR "support systems" OR " pet interventions" OR "resources" AND "logotherapy", "individual logotherapy" and "group logotherapy"). These articles were analyzed and synthesized to present the findings the role of pets in well-being and the therapeutic potential of logotherapy in pet loss grief.

For the inclusion and exclusion criteria, this study includes peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2025 that examine the role of pets in supporting mental health and well-being among pet owners, the experience of grief following pet loss, and the potential application of logotherapy in addressing this form of grief. To ensure the relevance and reliability of the findings, only articles written in English and directly related to these themes were considered.

Articles were excluded if they did not address the specified topics, were not peer-reviewed, were written in languages other than English, or were opinion pieces lacking empirical support..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Positive Impact of Pet Ownership on Physical and Mental Health

Owning a pet has been widely documented to yield multiple health benefits. Research shows that pets contribute to improved physical health by increasing physical activity and reducing blood pressure, alongside psychological benefits such as relief from academic stress, mood improvement, relaxation, and enhanced social interactions

(Mandal, 2019; Thelwell, 2019). Pets are especially beneficial for individuals with mental health conditions, serving as emotional support during critical times and helping to manage symptoms (Brooks et al., 2019).

Beyond individual ownership, Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) programs have been recognized for their effectiveness in reducing anxiety and stress (Della, 2018; Hertel & Abel, 2019; Roth, Jackson & Ryan, 2021). AAT has also been applied successfully in diverse contexts such as supporting adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (London et al., 2020), suicidal interventions (Shoib et al., 2022), and aiding those with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), including soldiers and trauma survivors (Altschuler, 2018; Beetz, 2021; Nelson, 2017; Mims & Waddell, 2016). These findings reflect the enduring and growing bond between humans and pets, with substantial pet ownership reported worldwide—around 90 million households in Europe (Statista, 2021), 90.5 million in the US (Martyn, 2023), and increasing interest in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the Philippines (Cosgrove, 2023).

The Impact of Pet Loss and Grieving

Despite the benefits of pet companionship, the inevitable loss of a pet can cause profound grief akin to losing a human loved one (Park, Royal & Gruen, 2021; Behler, Green, & Joy-Gaba, 2020). The phenomenon of pet bereavement is characterized by intense feelings of loss, loneliness, and disenfranchisement, as society often invalidates the grief experienced by pet owners (Allan, 2023; Park, Royal & Gruen, 2023). Symptoms of pet loss grief closely mirror those classified in the DSM-5 for bereavement in humans (Lee, 2020).

The intense grief experienced by pet owners who are grieving varies its length such that 25 % taking between 3 months to a year, 50% between one year and 19 months, and 25 % between two and six years (Amatenstein, 2021). Also those who experienced pet loss during the previous year were reported to be significantly less happy and less satisfied compared with those who did not obtain a pet and did not experience pet loss (Brkljačić et al 2020). Even after the pet's death, despite their efforts to cope, some still experience continuing bonds with the animal and some suffer long-term grieving (Messam & Hart, 2019).

In the country, there is one study proving that " disenfranchised grief brought by pet loss is indeed a struggle wherein guilt manifested in the participants' shattered sense of commitment which made them feel responsible for their pet's death (Cabredo & Tungol, 2022). Therefore, pet grieving just like human grieving has to be taken seriously and pet loss therapy or pet grief therapy can be an emerging field that can be available in counseling and psychotherapy. These findings emphasize the importance of acknowledging and addressing pet loss grief within therapeutic contexts.

Therapeutic Interventions for Pet Grief and Meaning-Making

Early efforts in pet bereavement therapy include programs that combine psychoeducation, resilience support, and coping skill development, though these have been limited and call for further exploration (Miller et al., 2014). More recent studies emphasize the role of adaptive cognitive emotion regulation in mitigating separation pain and fostering post-traumatic growth (PTG) after pet loss (Park & Jeong, 2022). PTG suggests that individuals may experience positive psychological changes following adversity, including grief (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Pet owners often resort to social support, continuing bonds, memorialization, and spirituality to manage grief, but formal pet grief therapy remains scarce (Park, Royal & Gruen, 2021). This gap indicates a need to develop grief counseling approaches tailored to pet loss.

Moreover, in meaning making, therapy states that what makes a person weak and defeated is not hardships and suffering but the meaninglessness of life wherein once suffering is bravely accepted, life will find meaning. Research on well-being indicates a mediating function of meaning in life between suffering and well-being demonstrating that making sense of past experiences is significantly correlated with high presence of meaning in life (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022). Meaning in life also build greater resilience after exposure to negative events (American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Individuals who have a strong sense of purpose and meaning in life tend to have better mental health, overall well-being, better cognitive functioning and that such is an important asset for well-being since it may protect against depression, lead to experienced less stress, and is associated with greater integration of working and personal lives (Barcaccia, et. al. 2023; Sutin 2023; & Fuller, 2022)

Logotherapy as a Meaning-Centered Approach to Grief

Since pet loss is highly associated with great pain wherein suffering is being alleviated further due to the disfranchise nature of grief, this study is interested in exploring the well-known idea of Frankl (1959) on the meaning of suffering wherein Logotherapy is being utilized as a treatment through finding meaning in suffering after a pet loss. Frankl (1959) contended that even though people cannot choose their circumstances, they can choose the meaning they derive from it. Viktor Frankl's (1959) logotherapy, focused on finding meaning in suffering, offers a promising framework for addressing pet loss grief. Frankl proposed that although individuals cannot always control their circumstances, they can choose the meaning derived from those experiences. Meaning can be found through authentic interaction with the environment and others, creativity and self-expression, or changing one's attitude toward unchangeable circumstances (Burton, 2022).

Research supports that meaning in life mediates well-being and resilience following adversity (Kaftanski & Hanson, 2022; American Psychiatric Association, 2023). Individuals with a strong sense of purpose demonstrate better mental health outcomes, cognitive function, and reduced stress (Barcaccia et al., 2023; Sutin, 2023; Fuller, 2020). Thus, meaning-making may play a critical role in coping with pet loss.

Logotherapy has been applied effectively to reduce depression and improve quality of life in cancer patients, individuals with mental health conditions, and the elderly (Putri & Jannah, 2019; Koulae et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2022; Choi, 2021). Innovative delivery methods, such as mobile-based logotherapy, have also shown efficacy in reducing depression and suicidal ideation (Shaygan, 2023). Group logotherapy has been demonstrated to reduce existential anxiety, loneliness, and improve hope and mental health in diverse populations, including prisoners, mothers of children with disabilities, drug addicts, and university students (Heidary, Heshmati & Hayes, 2023; Ghelbash, 2021; Khaledian & Yarahmadi, 2016; Robatmili, 2015).

Furthermore, meta-analyses confirm the effectiveness of meaning-centered therapy in improving spiritual well-being and reducing psychological stress (Sun et al., 2024; Vos & Vitali, 2018). However, literature on logotherapy specifically targeting pet loss grief remains absent, highlighting a significant gap.

Conclusion and Research Implications

As seen in the previous researches, both individual logotherapy and group logotherapy was applied and proven promising and effective to people battling with life-threatening conditions and in vulnerable groups as well who are facing issues about life's purpose and meaning. However, based on literature and in my knowledge, no logotherapy-based intervention specifically targeting pet owners who are grieving due to a pet loss has yet been studied

Overall, the literature establishes the positive role of pet ownership in physical and psychological well-being and acknowledges the profound grief associated with pet loss, which parallels human bereavement. While traditional pet grief therapy remains underdeveloped, logotherapy's meaning-centered approach offers a viable and promising therapeutic option.

Given the effectiveness of both individual and group logotherapy in various contexts involving grief, depression, and existential crises, future research should explore its application to pet bereavement. Such studies could enhance support for grieving pet owners by facilitating meaning-making and post-traumatic growth, addressing the current gap in therapeutic interventions tailored to pet loss.

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