

Relationship Between Indicators of a Person's Mental Health and Attitude to Pets

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Introduction. During the last century, there has been an increase in the number of cats and dogs in urban apartments. They begin to be perceived not utilitarian, but as companions and pets. At the same time, there are a growing number of problems associated with deviant relations between a man and an animal: homeless animals on the streets of the city, injuries in owners and strangers, a request for euthanasia of young, healthy but uncontrollable animals.

Related Work. The study of relations between animals and their owners began not long ago. They were stimulated by a change in the attitude of a man to animals that lived next to him. (Hal Herzog, 2009) drew attention to the fact that during the past history of mankind the utilitarian attitude towards domestic animals predominated, whereas in the XX and XXI centuries the attitude changed and the animal became a partner. Based on the theory of family systems, (E.Yu. Fedorovich, A.Ya.Varga, 2010) consider the role of the animal in the human family and come to the conclusion that the concept of transgeneration transmission of ways of supporting the homeostasis of the family system explains why in some families pets are involved in such cases, but not in others. Noteworthy for the explanation is the fact that the number of families, which are breeding pets in recent years is growing rapidly in all industrialized countries. They can “support” the family at all stages of its life cycle, as we wrote in the previous chapter.

A thorough theoretical-methodological and empirical study, conducted by (Nikolskaya,2007), (Nikolskaya,2009) shows that the interspecific groups “man-pet” are formed under certain necessary and sufficient conditions. Relationships in interspecific groups are determined by certain ecopsychological types of interaction, depending on which in such groups mental phenomena of trust, attachment, dominance structure, formation and adoption of norms and rules of behavior of group members in relation to each other, and interspecific communication are formed.

Somewhat different is the concept of (Mychko 2004), which draws attention to the role of the process of socialization of a dog in the formation of relations between a man and an animal.

This study is devoted to identifying the factors that determine the success of human interaction with domestic pets.

We identified the following factors for the success of interaction:

- Individual-typological features of the animal: species, breed, type of higher nervous activity, personal experience of the animal;
- Individual-typological features of the owner: the type of higher nervous activity, motivation, level of tolerance, level of development of emotional intelligence, the leading system of perception;
- The attitude of a person to a domestic animal, which, in turn, is due to the attitude to animals in society, mythological and fantastic ideas about a particular kind of animals, personal experience of communicating with pets;
- Type of upbringing, which is used by the owner while communicating with the animal.

Based on the results of conducted pilot studies on 43 pairs of owners and service dogs (sheep dogs), it was revealed that the greatest success of interaction was observed when a greater strength of higher nervous activity was combined in the owner than in the dog. When combined in the “reverse” direction, the strength of higher nervous activity is greater in sheep-dog than in the owner, deviations occurred in the form of insufficient obedience and controllability of dogs. But the worst combination was the coincidence of the strength of higher nervous activity of the owner and the dog, because in such dyads, status relationships were slowly and unreliably established. The mobility indices of higher nervous activity, on the contrary, in the case of coincidence, contributed to the establishment of relations, and the mismatch of tempo-rhythmic characteristics complicated the process of joint activity. The motivation for keeping the pet also plays a role when combined with the species and breed of the animal: the need for an obedient guard will not be satisfied with the presence of a British cat, and the elderly person who wants to get the animal – companion will have difficulty communicating with the mobile and unpredictable ferret. One of the important components of the optimization of relations is the level of personal tolerance of the owner, his idea of whether the needs and motives of the animal's behavior can not coincide with the human. Insufficient level of tolerance leads to an underestimation of the mental abilities of the animal, or, conversely, anthropomorphism when trying to understand the animal. Emotional intelligence allows you to clearly recognize the emotional state of another person. One can put forward the hypothesis that a developed emotional intellect will contribute to understanding not only human, but also animal emotional manifestations. The predominant type of perception (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) affects the selection of the

animal. The kind of interaction which the owner likes – watch, touch, stroke, talk and listen to purring, depends on this.

The concept of the effectiveness of human-animal interaction requires a separate study. The signs of this, in our opinion, can be, first of all, the security of this interaction both for man and for the animal, emotional satisfaction from communication, conformity of expectations and the result obtained. With further research, the content of this concept is specified more precisely.

Results and Discussion. An empirical study of this problem is planned. Several groups of subjects took part in it: adults who did not have animals now, but who had them earlier – 50 respondents; owners of cats and dogs – 88 respondents; breeders, experts (cynologists and veterinarians) – 20 respondents. With the help of in-depth interviews, we were able to identify the level of safety and satisfaction of the owners by the relationships with their pets, the state of health and the normative behavior of the animals. At this stage of the empirical study, standardization and approbation of author techniques and modifications of standard tests take place.

To study the typology of animals, questionnaires for owners and expert assessments were used. Attitude to the animal was studied using the author's technique "Types of relations" and the types of upbringing were studied by modifying the Eidemiller technique [6]. At a later stage, a comparative study of the effect of the identified factors on relationships with tamed animals (ferrets, rats) will be conducted.

The functions of the family are historical and connected with the socio-economic conditions in society, so over time, both the nature of the functions and their hierarchy change. It is logical to assume that the more someone is involved in performing these functions of the system, the more likely it is part of the system. Let us analyze how cats and dogs fit into the functions of the family.

Reproductive. The satisfaction of the need for offspring can sometimes be transferred to the animal. Some owners call a dog "My little son", "baby", dress it up in clothes, etc. This behavior is more typical for young families who "train" before they have a descendant and for elderly couples who are at the "empty nest" stage. This helps to harmonize relations in the family or to clarify the prospects for the development of a young couple.

Educational. In this function, cats and dogs are very active. Socialization of an animal is the responsibility of its owners. Cats and dogs have their own sensitive periods of development, during which they are most sensitive to educational influences. Education takes place both in the family and on the site, under the guidance of trainers and dog handlers. A well-bred dog is safe for owners, other people and animals, a well-bred cat successfully fits into the home's space and relationships with people. In this case, the opposite happens – a dog has a socializing effect on other members of the family. The household function of the family includes caring for the life and health of pets. The responsible owner selects correct feed, makes vaccinations, if necessary takes the animal to the veterinarian, monitors its safety, etc. Care of the animal includes a rather large number of household activities – day-care service or cleaning the tray, feeding, grooming, cleaning, etc. Dogs and cats also take part in household functions (especially in rural houses) – they guard the house and yard, cats catch mice and rats. In many places, dogs help hunters and shepherds, since it was introduced from time immemorial. In an urban home, the animal acts more as an object of care than an assistant in domestic affairs.

Spiritual communication – communication with an animal can positively influence the spiritual development of a person, it causes a sense of responsibility for the life of another one, develops manifestations of empathy and kindness. Participation in the interspecies community evokes a sense of unity with other living beings in the world. For many owners, the experience of harmony and unity with the animal becomes truly a practice of spiritual experience.

Social-status function is aimed at reproducing the social structure; it does not always concerns animals. As a result of our study, we found out that 68% of persons had animals in the parent family and they have them now. 12% of persons had animals, and as a result, they decided not to bring animals any more (poorly disciplined animal, cruel treatment, a vivid impression of the animal's death), and 20% of persons did not have animals in the parent family, but after separation they themselves got cats and dogs. The tendency to reproduce the interspecific group that was in the parent family still prevails.

Economic function is receiving material assets by one family member from others. In this function, animals are both consumers of material goods, and their producers. For many breeders of thoroughbred cats and dogs, selling kittens and puppies is the main source of income.

The sphere of primary social control extends to people and animals; one of the most important tasks is socialization of the animal and the control of its behavior. If the animal is not included in this function, it becomes uncontrollable and dangerous for other animals and humans.

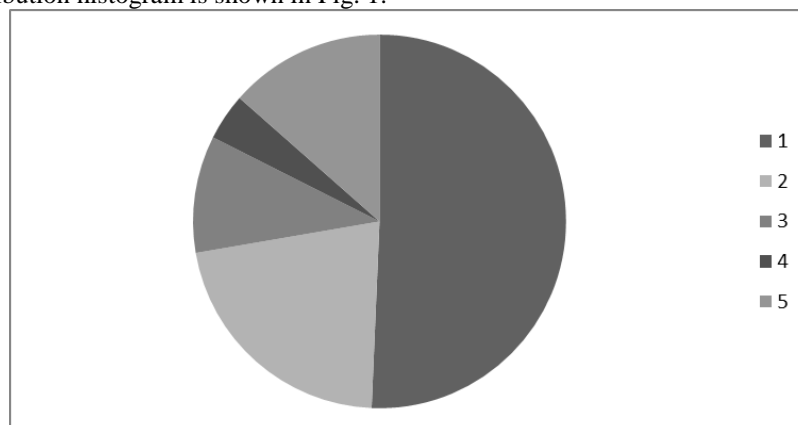
Leisure is the most important function, for which an animal is usually brought. They play with it, walk around, do agility, and so on. The presence of a cat or a dog structures the rest of the owner, makes it healthier and more active.

Emotional (receiving mental protection and support) is exactly what a person gets while being on friendly terms with his pet. Cats and dogs can regret and console a man. They help to relax and laugh. Special relationships connect children and their pets.

The sexual function of animals in modern urban conditions is either regulated by the masters (in pedigreed animals), or animals are generally deprived of it in the process of sterilization. Normally, animals do not affect the sexual function of the owners.

Thus, it can be concluded that in the modern world (especially in urban conditions) dogs and cats take an active part in the life of the family, they are involved in most of the functions of the family and bring in it many new and interesting things. An additional function is communicative – communication of family members with each other and with surrounding people. People develop receptivity to non-verbal communication of animals, pets learn to understand people, react not only to special commands, but also to the context of interaction between people. An additional result is the formation of groups of “dog owners” who regularly communicate during the walking of dogs. Discussion of tricks, state of health, and behavior of pets is one of the typical topics for communication and rapprochement of people, both in real life and on the Internet.

One of the tasks of our study was to analyze the place of animals in the family system, depending on the stages of development of the family. 148 respondents were examined with the help of the “family atom” technique and the narrative method: the analysis of the story “We and our pet”. The respondents were persons with higher education; their age was from 23 to 60 years, there were 130 women and 18 men. The owners were not breeders, they did not breed animals purposefully, most owners described their relationship with animals as good, problem-free, no one turned to specialists to correct the behavior of the animal. They had cats, dogs, parrots and rats. 75 families had cats, 24 of them had two or three cats. In 32 families there lived dogs, 7 families had 2 dogs. 15 respondents had rodents: 10 families had decorative rats (both in one and in pairs), 5 families had hamsters. 6 owners had large parrots, which were perceived as family members. In a rather large number of families, as many as twenty, animals of different types lived: cats and dogs, a cat and a rat, a dog and a parrot, etc. The owners did not consider such combinations problematic; they and all their animals lived together quite happily. The distribution histogram is shown in Fig. 1.



1 – cats, 2 – dogs, 3 – hamsters or rats, 4 – parrots, 5 – two or more different animals.

Fig.1. The histogram of the distribution of the number of pets in respondents

We analyzed the process of interaction between people and their pets, depending on the stages of family development. Subjects assessed their stay at one or another stage.

On the basis of the theoretical research, four groups of factors of the success of the relationship in the system of “owner-household pet” were revealed. It is possible to put forward a hypothesis that relations are influenced by individual and typological features of animals and owners, the attitude of the owner to the animal, the type of education of the pet. Further empirical studies of each of these factors are planned, development and testing of diagnostic tools is underway.

As a result of the analysis of scientific and applied publications and interviewing owners, breeders and veterinarians, another questionnaire was developed. It is not intended to study the level of responsibility of the owner, but to understand the type of attitude towards pets in general, among different respondents, regardless of whether they have a pet or not.

An empirical study of the system of interaction between people and their pets was conducted. 125 respondents belonging to several groups were examined: people do not keep any animals at home (32 subjects), owners of cats (50 subjects), owners of dogs (18 subjects), 18 respondents had both cats and dogs, there were also 7 owners, who had parrots. In our study, a tendency was found to display early childhood experiences with animals in adulthood. Those people who had animals in their childhood mostly brought them in adulthood, and preferred animals of the same biological species. Owners of animals were met among those people who did not have children’s experience with animals. Only three persons were in deviant relationships with their animals, all of them had no experience of dealing with animal in childhood. Normative relations were distributed in the following way: friendly relations prevailed (67%), parental-children (23%), only 8% were in “working”

utilitarian relations and 2% could not formulate their type of relationship. It was interesting that the owners of both cats and dogs or two or more dogs of different breeds described that they had different types of relationships depending on the species and breed of the animal. The age of the subjects was from 18 to 49 years, women predominated (73% of the subjects). According to the results of the empirical study, the polarization of the attitude towards animals was revealed depending on the age of the subjects: in respondents older than 40 years, a negative attitude toward domestic pets and violation of emotional boundaries is significantly more likely than among the young people.

The pragmatic attitude towards animals was significantly more frequent among the inhabitants of villages and small towns than among the inhabitants of Kiev.

Types of deviant relations were defined on the basis of expert assessments and content analysis of expert texts: veterinarians, cynologists, and felinologists. Criteria for violation of relationships are, first of all, a danger to humans or animals, as well as the high level of discomfort and stress that arises in these relationships. In the frequency analysis of complaints of deviant relations on the part of animal owners, veterinarians, cynologists and felinologists, the following picture of the distribution of deviant relationships was distinguished. In total, 1536 statements were analyzed in social networks of the corresponding direction.

When the criterion χ^2 was used, the reliability of the disagreements in the positions of the studied groups to the behavior disorders at the level of 0.05 was revealed. In the group of veterinarians, the greatest activity was observed in reactions to deviant attitudes – 484 utterances.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of complaints about violations of relations

Violations	Veterinarians	Owners	Cynologists	Felinologists
Doghunting	4	15	3	0
Cruel treatment	45	12	27	7
Failure to provide assistance	116	64	32	13
Failure to consider needs	214	21	62	123
Irresponsibility	94	43	103	106
Dangerous behavior	5	22	112	3
Unpleasant behavior	6	148	41	95

Professional activity increases attention to untimely appeal for veterinary care and neglect of animal needs – feeding inappropriate food, poor conditions of keeping. In the group of owners of animals (both cats and dogs), complaints of unpleasant behavior of animals and search for advice on this matter prevail, the group of rat owners pays more attention to the irresponsibility of the owners and the failure to provide rats with the appropriate veterinary care. The group of cynologists actively discusses current trends in the training of dogs; they are concerned with the combination of irresponsibility of animal owners who do not pay enough attention to the education of pets and aggressive manifestations of deviant behavior of dogs, methods of correction. The opposite picture in the group of felinologists – they are concerned about the neglect of the needs of cats, the irresponsibility of the owners, and accordingly the unpleasant behavior of animals.

Cognitive factors of deviant relations include low awareness of the owners about the psychophysiology of animals, inadequate knowledge of the first signs of diseases, the rules of care, the rules for building adequate relationships.

The wrong motivation for getting a pet belongs to the group of motivational factors: “it was presented as a gift”, “it was brought for a child – let it play”, “this is a fighting breed – everyone should respect me”, “it is fashionable to go to clubs with a dog.”. Emotional factors are both the owner’s own emotional instability and a low level of recognition of the animal’s emotional states. Behavioral disorders are often the result of all the previous factors, but can arise independently of them, when the owner does not consciously fix the inadequate behavior of the animal due to lack of experience and attention.

In accordance with the proposed theoretical model, there is a need to develop a new psychodiagnostic toolkit.

4. Limitations of the study. A separate study requires the concept of the effectiveness of human-animal interaction. The signs of this, in our opinion, can be, first of all, the security of this interaction both for a man and for an animal, emotional satisfaction from communication, conformity of expectations and the result obtained. With further research, the content of this concept was specified more precisely. An empirical study of this problem has been carried out. Several groups of subjects took part in it: adults who do not have animals now, but who had them earlier – 50 respondents; owners of cats and dogs – 88 respondents; breeders, experts (cynologists and veterinarians) – 20 respondents – at the stage of development and standardization of methods. With the help of in-depth interviews, we were able to identify the level of safety and satisfaction of the owners with the relationships with their pets, the state of health and the normative behavior of the animals. At this stage

of the empirical study, standardization and approbation of author techniques and modifications of standard tests take place.

Significant Mann-Whitney correlation at 0.05 between the “Responsible attitude to the animal” indicators and the quality of emotion recognition and a reliable level of correlation between the indicator of the level of empathy and the recognition of emotions was noted in the respondents. At the same time, there was no reliable relationship between empathy and a responsible attitude towards the animal.

Conclusions (and Future Work) We can conclude that the content of pets is not compensatory (at least among a socially adapted group of respondents). But subjects who had pets had a more positive attitude to themselves and the environment and a lower level of psychoemotional anxiety. Perhaps in the presence of a pet, a more positive attitude to oneself and to others arises, which contributes both to the successful search for social support and to communication with pets. Interaction in the interspecies community is successful and contributes to overcoming the psychological strain provided that the emotional states of animals are adequately perceived.

The prospect of further research is the elucidation of cultural factors and personal characteristics of the owners, influencing the type of relationship to the animal.

Abstract. Dogs and cats living in the town house become part of the family system, and not just of the interspecies community. They take an active part in the functions of the family, sometimes compensating, and sometimes exacerbating the emotional state of family members. Animals fit into the family system in various ways, depending on the stages of family development. In our study it was found that the most diverse animals with which functional and weakly functional families interacted influenced family life positively or neutrally. In dysfunctional families with a high level of anxiety and low differentiation, triangulation and transfer of problem feelings to the animal is triggered. In this case, the animal becomes neurotic, its behavior becomes worth, and the family starts to be even more dysfunctional. There was a need to find out which type of attitude to the animal helped, and which one prevented good interaction with it.

As a result of our research, questionnaires have been developed that study the level of responsible attitude to the animal, the type of relationship, the specificity of the owner’s motivation. It has been found that the responsible attitude to the animal is associated with a high level of empathy, social support, and adequate motivation of the owner. The appearance of a pet plays a different role depending on the stages of family development and can serve as an indicator of crisis and conflict relations.

Keywords: mental health, social support, pets, questionnaires, typology, family system.

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