The Effect of Pet Attachment, Self-Compassion, and Social Constraint on Pet Bereavement

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Abstract

Pets play a significant role in their owners' lives. Psychological studies have found that pet loss is one of the contributing factors to depression. The grieving response experienced by pet owners following the loss of their pets is referred to as pet bereavement. This study aims to examine the influence of pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint on pet bereavement. This research employs a quantitative approach with a sample of 250 individuals who have experienced pet loss and reside in Indonesia. The sampling technique used is non-probability sampling. The Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ) developed by Hunt & Padilla (2006) was used to measure pet bereavement, the Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale (LAPS) developed by Johnson et al. (1992) was used to assess pet attachment. Self-compassion was measured using the Self-Compassion Scale (SCS) developed by Neff (2003), and social constraint was assessed using the Social Constraint Scale developed by Lepore et al. (1996). Data analysis was conducted using multiple regression analysis. The regression test results showed an R-squared value of .727, indicating that pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint significantly influence pet bereavement, accounting for 72.7% of the variance. The significance test results revealed that three variables had a significant impact on pet bereavement: general attachment ($p < .05$), people substituting ($p < .05$), and gender ($p < .05$). Based on these findings, it is recommended that pet owners develop a healthy attachment to their pets and engage with animal lover communities to receive social support during times of loss.

Keywords: pet loss, pet bereavement, pet attachment, self-compassion, social constraint

Abstrak

Hewan peliharaan memiliki peran penting dalam hidup pemiliknya, oleh karena itu studi psikologis menemukan fakta bahwa kematian hewan peliharaan terbukti menjadi salah satu faktor penyebab depresi. Respon berkabung yang dialami oleh pemilik hewan peliharaan setelah mengalami pet loss adalah pet bereavement. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan pengaruh dari variabel pet attachment, self-compassion, *dan* social constraint. *Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan subjek berjumlah 250 orang yang memiliki kriteria pernah mengalami pet loss dan berdomisili di Indonesia. Teknik sampling yang digunakan adalah teknik* non-probability sampling. *Alat ukur pet bereavement menggunakan* Pet Bereavement Questionnaire *(PBQ) yang dikembangkan oleh Hunt & Padilla (2006), alat ukur pet attachment menggunakan* Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale *(LAPS) yang dikembangkan oleh Johnson et al. (1992), alat ukur self-compassion menggunakan* Self-Compassion Scale *(SCS) yang dikembangkan oleh Neff (2003), dan alat ukur* social constraint *menggunakan* Social Constraint Scale *yang dikembangkan oleh Lepore et al, (1996). Analisis data dalam penelitian ini menggunakan teknik analisis regresi berganda. Hasil uji analisis regresi menunjukan nilai R square .727 yang artinya terdapat pengaruh signifikan dari* pet attachment, self-compassion, *dan* social constraint *terhadap* pet bereavement *sebesar 72,7%. Hasil uji signifikansi menunjukan bajwa terdapat tiga variabel yang terbukti*

mempengaruhi pet bereavement *secara signifikan yaitu* general attachment *(p< .05),* people substituting *(p< .05), dan jenis kelamin (p< .05). Penulis menyarankan agar pemilik hewan peliharaan untuk dapat menjalin kelekatan yang sehat dengan hewan peliharaannya dan bergabung dengan komunitas pecinta hewan.*

Kata kunci: pet loss, pet bereavement, pet attachment, self-compassion, social constraint

Introduction

Pet animals, especially cats and dogs, hold a special place in the hearts of Indonesian society. This was evidenced by a survey conducted by Rakuten Insight in 2018, which ranked Indonesia as the 4th country in Asia with the highest number of dog and cat owners. Similar to other living creatures, pets will inevitably experience death. Kubler-Ross (1998) revealed that the grief response that arises in individuals after the death of a pet is similar to the grief response that occurs in individuals who have lost a human loved one. This is because pet cats and dogs are often seen as companions, children, and family members (Neidhart & Boyd, 2002). As a result, the death of a pet often brings deep sorrow and grief to its owner. The phenomenon of grief due to the death of a pet can be seen on the website page alodokter.com, where an individual recounts the trauma they experienced, including symptoms of numbness, difficulty sleeping, and feelings of wanting to disappear after the death of their pet cat. In addition, based on observations made by the author on a post from the Twitter account @kochengfess on December 8th 2022, about experiences of pet death which managed to gather more than 1000 replies containing experiences from followers of that account, one follower with the username @purpleeeyeoreee stated that the death of their pet led to them experiencing depression and seeking treatment from a psychiatrist. According to Hunt & Padilla (2006), feelings of anxiety and depression experienced after the death of a pet can occur in owners because they tend to blame themselves and feel guilty towards their pets.

Deceased pets undoubtedly leave memories and habits that are very meaningful to their owners. Individuals who lose a pet will long for the closeness with their pet and the feeling of being needed (Carmack, 1985). At such times, pet owners experience pet bereavement, or mourning experienced by owners after the death of their pet (Hunt & Padilla, 2006). Individuals experiencing pet bereavement after the death of a pet cat or dog are at risk of experiencing higher rates of death-related depression compared to owners of other types of pets (Planchon & Templer in Planchon et al., 2002). This is because pets like dogs and cats have the potential to provide a sense of security, emotional bonding, and enhance their owner's well-being (Sable, 1995). Individuals experiencing the death of a pet may undergo bereavement due to the significant role of the pet in their lives. However, when pet bereavement remains unresolved, several pathological conditions such as anxiety and depression may occur. In line with this, Hunt & Padilla (2006) revealed in their research that the death of a pet is one of the triggers for stress and a factor leading to depression.

Many factors can influence pet bereavement, such as attachment factors. Bowlby (1982) conceptualized attachment as an innate behavior aimed at maintaining closeness between an individual and an attachment figure. Just like humans, pets also have the potential to create attachment bonds that can provide well-being and provide a sense of security (Sable, 1995). The emotional attachment between a pet and its owner is referred to pet attachment (Johnson et al., 1992). Pet attachment occurs when humans find comfort spending time with their pets (Hunt & Padilla, 2006). This means that not all pets have the potential to create deep attachments with their owners. For example, pets like cats and dogs that can be kept indoors tend to have higher frequencies of interaction with their owners compared to other pets. In line with this, Triebenbacher (1998) revealed that cats and dogs are interactive animals, capable of forming greater attachments compared to other animals such as birds, reptiles, and horses. Pet owners develop pet attachment, forming commitments and responsibilities towards their pets, which can lead to

grief and mourning after the death of their pet. Brown & Symons (2016) found in their research that there is a positive correlation between attachment and grief in individuals experiencing pet bereavement.

Individuals who experience pet bereavement tend to go through difficult times after the death of their pet. They often get stuck in negative thoughts, sometimes blaming themselves and feeling like they have failed to be a good owner. These negative feelings and thoughts can potentially hinder the owner's recovery process from the pet bereavement experienced after the death of their pet. Therefore, self-compassion, or a form of caring and attention towards oneself (Neff, 2003; Rahardjo et al., 2021), is considered to influence the pet bereavement experienced by owners after the death of their pet. Self-compassion is described as an effort to comfort and regulate oneself regarding all things related to trauma and loss. Self-compassion greatly helps individuals dealing with difficult-to-control problems and suffering (Neff, 2003). Through self-compassion, individuals become more aware and understand the sadness they are experiencing, gradually feeling deserving of kindness, especially from themselves. Bluth et al. (2018) revealed that individuals with high self-compassion have less potential to feel depressed and anxious.

Losing a loved one, including a pet, can certainly trigger stress. However, there are other factors that could potentially worsen the impact of losing a pet, such as social environmental factors. Individuals grieving after losing a beloved often seek support from their social environment to cope with sadness and mourning, enabling them to adapt and move on with life. Unfortunately, some individuals experiencing pet bereavement often do not receive much sympathy; in fact, some feel mocked or belittled for grieving the loss of a pet (Hunt & Padilla, 2006). This condition is known as social constraint, where individuals receive little support, assistance, and sympathy from those around them when discussing their sadness and trauma (Lepore et al., 1996). This is because the sadness from the death of a pet is often considered less significant in garnering sympathy. Unvalidated feelings of sadness and grief can potentially disrupt an individual's psychosocial function, especially when they realize they have no one to help them through their grief and mourning. As a result, social constraint can lead to depression and anxiety (Juth et al., 2015). Previous research has found significant correlations between these three factors and loss and grief.

Loss and separation, especially due to death, inevitably impact individuals who experience them. It's not just about "just an animal"; losing anything beloved is always heavy and painful. While research on grief has extensively focused on human death, studies on grief resulting from the death of pets have been limited, particularly in Indonesia. However, several studies have shown that the grief and sadness experienced by individuals after the death of a pet are similar to the grief experienced when losing a human loved one. Therefore, the author is interested in researching the grief experienced by owners after the death of their pet cats and dogs. Additionally, this study aims to examine the influence of pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint on pet bereavement. Based on the aforementioned introduction, the research hypotheses are as follows:

H_0 : There is no significant influence of Pet Attachment, Self-Compassion, and Social Constraint on Pet Bereavement

H_1 : There is a significant influence of Pet Attachment, Self-Compassion, and Social Constraint on Pet Bereavement

H_2 : There is a significant influence of Pet Attachment on Pet Bereavement

H_3 : There is a significant influence of Self-Compassion on Pet Bereavement

H_4 : There is a significant influence of Social Constraint on Pet Bereavement

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Methods

Participants and Research Design

This study used quantitative method with multiple regression analysis to examine the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. The population in this study consists of individuals who have experienced the loss of a pet cat or dog due to death within the last year and lived in Indonesia. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling. Data collection for this study was conducted online using a Google Form distributed through social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. The distributed Google Form includes informed consent, respondent's personal information, and four questionnaires. The sample size used in this study is 250 respondents, consisting of 41 males and 209 females. The characteristics of the research respondents based on age range from 13 to 56 years, dominated by people who residing in the Greater Jakarta area (JABODETABEK), and dominated by cat owners, totaling 232 respondents.

Measurement

This study utilizes four research scales in data collection, consisting of the Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ) with 17 items developed by Hunt & Padilla (2006), the Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale (LAPS) with 23 items developed by Johnson et al. (1992), the Self-Compassion Scale with 26 items developed by Neff (2003) and adapted by Sugianto et al. (2020), and the Social Constraint Scale (SCS) with 10 items developed by Lepore et al. (1996). All measurement tools in this study employ Likert scales with four response alternatives

Validity Test

This study conducted validity testing using the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) method with LISREL software. All research instruments were subjected to validity testing with CFA to ensure that the instruments used accurately measure the constructs under investigation. The results of the CFA validity testing can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Test

Instrumen	Dimensi	Chi square	Df	P-value	RMSEA
Pet Bereavement	Pet Bereavement	73.20	56	.06118	.035
Pet Attachment	General Attachment	48.01	35	.07041	.039
	People Substituting	8.09	5	.15154	.050
	Animal Rights/Welfare	.58	3	.90038	.000
Self-Compassion	Self-Kindness	23.50	17	.13353	.039
	Common Humanity	6.92	8	.54499	.000
	Mindfulness	10.35	11	.49887	.000
Social Constraint	Important Other	6.38	5	.27097	.033
	Other People	2.71	3	.43802	.000

Table 1. Indicates that the CFA results for all research variables show a well-fitted model because all variables have a P-value greater than .05 and RMSEA less than .05.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this study is multiple linear regression analysis with the assistance of SPSS software to determine the magnitude of the influence of all and each independent variable (IV) consisting of Pet Attachment (IV1), Self-Compassion (IV2), and Social Constraint (IV3) on the dependent variable (DV), which is Pet Bereavement. Meanwhile, the research hypotheses and the significance of the IVs' influence on the DV are tested using the F-test (Sig. <.05). Furthermore, t-tests are used to examine the significant contribution of each IV to the DV (Sig. <.05).

Results and Discussion

Results

After all items of the instrument were tested using the CFA technique, the items that were proven valid were used to test the research hypotheses using multiple regression analysis, yielding the following results:

Table 2. Model Summary Multiple Regression

R	R-Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.853[a]	.727	.716	5.08097

As predicted by the research, **Table 2.** shows that pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint have a significant influence on pet bereavement. Regression analysis conducted by the author indicates an R-Square value of .719, meaning that the proportion of variance in pet bereavement as the dependent variable has been significantly explained by pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint as independent variables at 71.9%. The remaining 28.1% is explained by the influence of other variables outside of this study.

Tabel 3. Anova

Model	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16444.938	10	1644.494	63.700	.000[b]
Residual	6170.095	239	25.816		
Total	22615.033	249			

Based on the information from **Table 3.** the F-test conducted to determine the magnitude of the influence of all independent variables on the dependent variable shows a value of 63,700 with a significance value of .000 (sig < .05). Thus, it can be said that the null hypothesis (H0) stating that there is no significant influence of pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint on pet bereavement is rejected.

Tabel 4. Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.991	4.613		1.082	.280
General Attachment	.565	.064	.573	8.879	.000*
People Substituting	.235	.055	.227	4.253	.000*
Animal Right/ Welfare	.061	.068	.059	.896	.371
Self-Kindness	-.045	.052	-.042	-.859	.391
Common Humanity	.005	.044	.005	.114	.910
Mindfulness	-.028	.057	-.025	-.496	.620
Important Other	.017	.068	.015	.244	.807
Other People	.006	.068	.006	.095	.924
Gender	2.563	.947	.101	2.707	.007*
Age	-.172	.637	-.010	-.271	.787

Furthermore, based on the results of regression coefficients depicted in **Table 4**, it was found that three out of the 10 independent variables in this study have a significant influence on pet bereavement. These are the variables of general attachment with a regression coefficient value of .565 with a significance of .000 (Sig. <.05), people substituting with a regression coefficient value of .235 with a significance of .000 (Sig. <.05), and gender with a regression coefficient value of 2.563 with a significance of .007 (Sig. <.05). Meanwhile, the remaining seven independent variables were found to have no significant influence on pet bereavement.

Tabel 5. Proporsi Varian

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error of The Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	.822[a]	.676	.675	5.43523	.676	517.528	1	248	.000*
2	.843[b]	.711	.708	5.14748	.035	29.501	1	247	.000*
3	.844[c]	.712	.709	5.14283	.002	1.448	1	246	.230
4	.847[d]	.718	.713	5.10143	.006	5.009	1	245	.026*
5	.847[e]	.718	.712	5.11181	.000	.006	1	244	.938
6	.848[f]	.719	.712	5.11637	.001	.566	1	243	.453
7	.848[g]	.719	.711	5.12683	.000	.009	1	242	.924
8	.848[h]	.719	.709	5.13721	.000	.023	1	241	.879
9	.853[i]	.727	.717	5.07115	.008	7.319	1	240	.007*
10	.165[j]	.027	.023	9.41801	.027	6.964	1	248	.009*

To examine the proportion of variance from each independent variable to the dependent variable, the author checked the results of multiple regression analysis as shown in **Table 5.** It indicates that 72.7% of the influence from all independent variables on the dependent variable comes from the contribution of general attachment at 67.6%, people substituting at 3.5%, animal rights/welfare at 0.2%, self-kindness at 0.6%, mindfulness at 0.1%, gender at 0.8%, and age at 2.7%..

Discussion

Referring to the data analysis results in this study, the level of pet bereavement perceived by the Indonesian community falls within the category of high scores. This means that losing a pet due to death indeed leaves significant sadness and grief for its owners. This aligns with the research by Hunt & Padilla (2006), which reveals that the death of a pet brings grief and sadness that may risk triggering stress and depression for its owners (Hunt & Padilla, 2006). This is because individuals who lose a pet due to death are potentially experiencing complicated, traumatic grief that may not diminish over time (Park et al., 2021).

The results of this study indicate that the general attachment variable from pet attachment has a significant effect (p < .05) on pet bereavement experienced by individuals after the death of their pets. As presented in Table 4, the direction of this effect is positive, meaning that the stronger the bond between the pet owner and their pet, the greater the likelihood of experiencing a profound grief reaction when faced with the pet's death. This finding aligns with Brown & Symons (2016), who found a positive correlation between attachment and grief in individuals experiencing pet bereavement. In Indonesia, pets are often considered part of the family, and this cultural context may explain the high scores for both general attachment and pet bereavement in this study. As Field et al. (2009) state, the deeper the emotional connection between an individual and their pet, the greater the psychological impact felt when the loss occurs.

Furthermore, the people substituting variable in this study was found to have a significant effect on pet bereavement, although its score was relatively low. This dimension explains how pets may substitute the position of other individuals in the owner's life. In other words, this finding indicates that for most respondents, pets do not fully replace the role of humans in their social life. This is consistent with the analysis of the pet attachment scale, where it was found that when the role of pets was compared with that of other individuals, the majority of respondents disagreed with the statement, for example, in item one of the pet attachment scale which reads, "My pet means more to me than my friends." This condition suggests that while pets can provide comfort and emotional support to their owners, they are not always seen as capable of replacing the role of other humans. This finding aligns with research by Zilcha-Mano et al. (2012), which discovered that although the bond between pets and their owners can fulfill an individual's social needs, attachment to pets does not always replace interpersonal relationships with humans.

On the other hand, the final dimension of pet attachment, namely animal rights/welfare, was found to have no significant effect on pet bereavement. This finding suggests that while awareness regarding the rights and welfare of pets is gradually developing in Indonesia, especially among pet owner communities, understanding of this dimension remains limited. Therefore, in the context of pet bereavement, most pet owners tend to focus more on emotional closeness than on the rights of their pets. This is consistent with research by Archer (1997) and McCarthy & Sable (2010), which revealed that emotional closeness, life experiences, and socio-cultural factors play a more significant role than understanding animal rights and welfare in the context of pet loss. Thus, although the pet attachment variable generally has a significant effect on pet bereavement, the animal rights/welfare dimension has not yet become a primary factor influencing pet bereavement for most respondents.

Another variable in this study, self-compassion, was found to have no significant effect on pet bereavement. Self-compassion is related to an open attitude and self-kindness. In the context of pet bereavement, individuals with good self-compassion are assumed to experience less anxiety and sadness after the death of their pet, as suggested by research from Neff (2003) and Bussolari et al. (2018), which found that self-compassion negatively correlates with sadness, emotional and social disturbances, and anxiety. The discrepancy between these findings and the results of this study may be attributed to the socio-cultural differences in Indonesia. In societies outside of Indonesia, where individualism is more common, the process of accepting and validating emotions may be easier, allowing self-compassion to help individuals cope with grief. On the other hand, as Neff et al. (2007) explained in their research, collectivistic cultures tend to emphasize relationships with others. This suggests that many Indonesians may feel that self-compassion alone is not enough; they require the support of others to accept and validate the feelings of loss and grief they experience.

Furthermore, the final variable in this study, social constraint, was found to have no significant effect on pet bereavement. Social constraint refers to a situation where individuals do not have others to talk to about the sadness or trauma they are experiencing. Lepore et al. (1996) state that discussing thoughts and feelings about grief can facilitate individuals in making cognitive adjustments to reduce trauma. The results of this study indicate that the level of social constraint experienced by pet owners after the death of their pet is relatively low. This finding can be explained by the fact that Indonesian society has a high level of social concern and a collectivist cultural value that forms the basis for social interactions. In other words, the majority of respondents tend to rely on social support when facing grief and loss. However, the grief arising from the death of a pet has not yet been fully validated as a significant event that requires a special response or treatment, as with the grief caused by the death of a human. As a result, although individuals have the freedom to express their sadness, they may not receive adequate emotional support from their surroundings, leading them to continue experiencing deep grief after the death of their pet.

As a complement, the author attempted to include several demographic factors such as gender and age to examine their influence on pet bereavement. The findings of this study are consistent with research by Archer (1996), which revealed that women tend to be more expressive in expressing their emotions, including in the context of mourning. The results of this study indicate that the demographic factor of gender has a significant effect on pet bereavement in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the demographic factor of age in this study was found to have no significant effect on pet bereavement. This finding contrasts with research by Zasloff & Kidd (1994), which found that older individuals tend to have a longer attachment to their pets, making the grief they experience more intense compared to younger individuals. This may be due to emotional and social factors having a greater influence than age. As Archer & Winchester (1994) stated, the intensity of grief after the death of a pet is more related to the emotional bond than to demographic factors such as age.

The researcher acknowledges that this study has limitations and shortcomings that may have affected the completeness of the findings. First, the sampling method was conducted online through the distribution of a Google Form questionnaire, which may have led to a potential self-selection bias. This means that only individuals with internet access, an understanding of the importance of the study, and a willingness to complete the questionnaire participated, thus the sample may not fully represent the

population. Second, the data in this study were collected through an online self-report questionnaire, meaning there is a possibility that respondents' answers were subjectively influenced, such as by a desire to present a certain image of themselves (social desirability bias). Third, the social and cultural factors were not considered in the adaptation and modification of the measurement tools, resulting in item statements in the instruments being less suited to the social and cultural conditions of the respondents. Finally, this study employed a quantitative method, which may not fully capture the depth of the grief experienced by respondents after the death of their pets.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis and hypothesis testing conducted, the author concludes that there is a significant influence of pet attachment, self-compassion, and social constraint on pet bereavement, accounting for 72.7% of the variance, with a significance value of .000 ($< .05$). More specifically, based on the results of the regression coefficient test performed on each independent variable, three variables were found to have a significant effect on pet bereavement: general attachment with a contribution of 67.7% ($p < .05$), people substituting with a contribution of 3.5% ($p < .05$), and gender with a contribution of 0.7% ($p < .05$). In other words, the research hypothesis that can be accepted is that an increase in pet bereavement is influenced by the variables of general attachment and people substituting within the pet attachment variable. These findings also demonstrate that the phenomenon of pet bereavement exists in Indonesia, confirming that the death of a pet causes significant sadness and grief for its owner.

Suggestions

The results of this study show that the dimensions of general attachment and people substituting within the pet attachment variable significantly contribute to pet bereavement. This proves that the bond between a pet and its owner plays a critical role in the grief experienced by the owner after the pet's death. Therefore, the author recommends that pet owners establish a healthy attachment with their pets. A healthy attachment means that the owner can care for and love the pet sincerely and wholeheartedly, while still acknowledging that there are certain roles of humans that cannot be replaced by pets. Ultimately, pets cannot replace the role of humans, and individuals will always need the presence and support of other people in their lives. The researcher also suggests that pet owners build relationships with individuals who share similar interests, such as pet lovers. Through such communities, it is hoped that pet owners can receive support when experiencing pet bereavement, facilitating a smoother grieving process.

The author recommends that future researchers consider the socio-cultural factors when modifying measurement tools, as this can lead to differences in perspectives on how individuals view pets. The author also suggests that future research on pet bereavement should use a mixed-methods approach, which could provide a clearer picture of the grief experienced by pet owners. For example, interviews with respondents could be conducted as supplementary data. To obtain results that truly represent the population, future researchers could collect data through surveys and direct interviews, ensuring that pet owners who experience pet bereavement but are not digitally active can still participate. Lastly, future studies could consider incorporating demographic factors such as the duration of pet ownership, pet care experience, the cause of the pet's death, and the number of pets owned, to gain a more diverse understanding of how pet owners experience grief.

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