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Identifying optimal support for people and pets in Scotland

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**JANUARY
2022**



**IDENTIFYING
OPTIMAL
SUPPORT FOR
PEOPLE AND
PETS IN
SCOTLAND**

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SCOTTISH SPCA
Scotland's Animal Welfare Charity



Pets change lives
We change theirs

**THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH**



BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Scottish SPCA and Blue Cross approached us at the beginning of the year to commission a piece of collaborative research. The aim was to establish an evidence-base for the future development of animal welfare services offered to pet owners in Scotland. The charities were keen to identify where and how they could have the greatest impact in order to:

- Ensure services/support are available, and tailored, to everyone who needs them.
- Ensure any services/support are accessed, through targeted promotion and embedded services (that link with other providers) that address the barriers that prevent people from seeking support.
- Intervene early to prevent the downward spiral that leads to negative welfare and wellbeing for pets and owners (where initial difficulties experienced with pets become worse over time).
- Enhance both pet and human welfare and wellbeing through positive reciprocal relationships/interactions.
- Prevent the relinquishment of pets.
- Avoid duplication of effort and create synergies between the services offered by both charities.

THE TEAM

The University of Edinburgh

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Professor Jo Williams (Applied Developmental Psychology)

Blue Cross

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METHODOLOGY SNAPSHOT

As data and research relating to the challenges that pet owners experience in Scotland are limited, we decided to take a broad approach to investigating the issues. An on-line survey was developed in collaboration with the Scottish SPCA and Blue Cross that targeted adult pet owners (past and present) living in Scotland. We worked alongside the Communications Teams in the charities to promote the survey using both broad-brush and targeted techniques. The data were exported into SPSS for analysis.

WHY IS SUPPORT NECESSARY FOR PET OWNERS?

Our previous research has revealed that pet ownership in the UK is common. Around 70% of families with children report owning a pet (Marsa-Sambola *et al.*, 2016). However, pet care is highly gendered (Muldoon *et al.*, 2015), and at least amongst young people, there is limited understanding of pets' welfare needs (Muldoon *et al.*, 2016). This poses a risk for animal welfare and also potentially for human health. Currently, little is known about the people/families affected most by the challenges of caring for their pet/s, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, when purchasing pets has been at an all-time high. Equally, there is little knowledge of the specific issues (direct and indirect) that are most problematic for pet owners, how these are dealt with, and how they affect the owner, as well as the animal/s in their care. It is important to identify the extent to which people are aware of and access support/services and their perceptions and experiences of the support that is available. In particular, there are many potential barriers that prevent those experiencing difficulties from seeking support. This, in turn, is likely to increase the possibility of pets being relinquished. It is anticipated that certain areas or groups of people/families living in Scotland will experience greater challenges caring for their pet/s than others, though there is no data as yet to indicate which areas or groups are most vulnerable.

Our recent research with 25 animal welfare charities in the UK and overseas (Muldoon & Williams, 2021a; 2021b) has highlighted the need to form a strong research-led evidence base to support charities as they develop their policies and practices. Their core aims are to enhance animal welfare and human wellbeing through provision of support for positive reciprocal human-animal relationships, especially in times of national crisis. Therefore, this project was designed to provide the evidence required to identify support needs, as well as barriers to seeking support when difficulties are experienced with pets, during the Covid-19 period and beyond.

2 / RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The study was exploratory in nature, designed to provide insights to guide the development of new services/approaches that Blue Cross and the Scottish SPCA will coordinate and deliver in Scotland. An online survey was created and promoted widely on social media by the University of Edinburgh and through collaborating partners' networks.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

01 IN SCOTLAND, WHO IS EXPERIENCING THE GREATEST CHALLENGES CARING FOR THEIR PET/S?

- Are there specific geographical areas where a greater proportion of people are experiencing problems and needing support?
- Are there specific groups of people/families living in Scotland that are facing greater challenges?

02 HOW ARE PETS SOURCED AND WHAT DO PETS MEAN TO THE OWNERS?

- Where are pets presenting challenges for their owners sourced?
- What kind of support/advice is provided when purchasing a pet (focus on dogs and cats)?
- How do owners feel about the pets they are experiencing challenges with and the impact they have on their lives?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

03 **WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH CARING FOR PETS?**

- What type of challenges are owners experiencing with their pets?
- Why are challenges being experienced? What circumstances led to them?
- What impact do these problems have on the owners?
- Are there specific types of pet animal that pose greater challenges?
- Has the coronavirus pandemic intensified the challenges of pet ownership?

04 **TO WHAT EXTENT ARE PET OWNERSHIP SERVICES OR SUPPORT ACCESSED?**

- To what extent have pet owners accessed support services that are available to them through the Scottish SPCA, Blue Cross and other charities?
- For those who have sought support, what type, and how was their experience?
- Are some people reluctant to access support? If so, why?
- What kind of support or services are likely to be most successful?

05 **WHAT FACTORS ARE INVOLVED IN THE RELINQUISHMENT OF A PET?**

- What are the main reasons for relinquishment?
- Was support sought/accessed prior to considering relinquishment?
- To what extent is relinquishment distressing?
- What support/service might prevent relinquishment?

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES & REQUIRED SUPPORT

SAMPLE & SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

Due to limited data relating to the challenges that people experience with their pets, we chose to adopt a broad-brush exploratory approach using an online survey targeting current and past pet owners (age 18+) living in Scotland, especially:

- those currently experiencing challenges with pet/s or struggling to provide the best care,
- people who may be thinking about relinquishing a pet,
- those who felt they had to give up a pet due to the challenges experienced, and
- marginalised (hard-to-reach) groups (those mostly likely to be experiencing problems).

In order to identify demographic patterns, in particular, differences in the extent of pet ownership challenges and commitment to pets according to the local authority area in which the participant lives, we calculated the required sample size using G*power (Faul et al., 2009). The a priori power analyses for a series of planned analyses (using a medium effect size ($f = .25$), with Type I and II error probability levels set at $\alpha = .05$ and $1 - \beta = .95$) required a sample size of 608. To allow for incomplete survey submissions, we aimed for 1000 participants.

PROCEDURE

The team had several meetings to discuss the name, content, and style of the survey and a draft version was developed, alongside adverts using a set of images chosen to give the project a distinct identity. These were submitted for ethical approval, which was granted by the Clinical and Health Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Edinburgh (ethics number CLPS005s).

Qualtrics was used to design and implement the online survey '**Supporting People & Pets in Scotland**', as it is accessible via multiple types of device and allows participants to return to complete if they are unable to finish in one sitting.

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Once the survey had been created in Qualtrics, the team reviewed the survey for ease of use and time taken to complete. It was subsequently amended, reduced in length, and then piloted. It was estimated that the final version would take between 15 and 30 minutes to complete, depending on the extent to which participants wanted to share their experiences. The survey was promoted on the social media channels of all organisations involved (see Survey promotion) and was live for 5 weeks from Tuesday 18th May to Tuesday 22nd June 2021.

SURVEY STRUCTURE

The survey comprised the following sections, and used items with Likert scale response formats, or selection/prioritisation options, with some open-ended questions to capture qualitative data. The survey was anonymous. We did not collect any data that would identify participants.

Introduction & consent

A welcome page, providing a link to [detailed information](#) and the dedicated [project page](#) on the CAAR (Children, Adolescents and Animals Research) website (University of Edinburgh). Participants were asked to demonstrate that they understood the purposes of the survey and how their data would be used, and provide their consent to take part.

Section 1: Information about you (demographics)

Included the following sub-sections:

- where you live/your current living arrangements (1.1)
- your characteristics, identity and relationships (1.2)
- your current employment/benefits status (1.3)
- your health and any medical conditions (1.4)

Section 2: Your current pet/s

Included questions relating to:

- the number/type of pets currently owned
- the number/type of pets giving cause for concern
- what the pet/s mean to you

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...continued

Section 3: Challenges relating to your current pet/s

Included the following sub-sections with questions relating to a specific pet that is causing concern/presenting challenges:

- Information about the pet giving most cause for concern – type of pet, how sourced, attachment (3.1)
- Specific challenges you are experiencing – animal, owner, pet-environment fit & support-related (3.2)
- The impact of the challenges – focus on quality of life of owner/animal & balancing demands (3.3)
- Access to support and services – awareness and previous access/perceptions of support (3.4)

Section 4: Access to support and services

Included questions relating to awareness of existing support/services and perceptions of those accessed.

Section 5: Pet animals you had to rehome/give up

Included the following sub-sections relating to a specific pet that the participant had to give up:

- Information about the pet you had to give up – type of pet, age, how long had the pet (4.1)
- Reasons for giving up your pet – specific challenges and impact on quality of life (4.2)
- Access to support and services – awareness/previous access/perceptions of support received and what would have helped (4.3)
- The impact of giving up your pet (4.4)

Debrief:

An opportunity was provided for participants to leave feedback or share other information. They were reminded of the study aims/how data would be handled, and contact details were provided for the main researcher and organisations available to offer support. A link was also provided for an anonymous prize draw to win a £50 Amazon voucher.

METHODS

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MEASURES (1)

SECTION 1: INFORMATION ABOUT YOU

The survey began by asking participants to provide information relating to the following demographics.

Living arrangements

Participants were asked to indicate where they currently lived by selecting one of the 32 local authority areas in Scotland and, optionally, providing a postcode. The following measures were drawn from the Scottish Census (2021), with minor adaptations to wording – type of housing, home ownership/rental, number of people living in the household, household composition (e.g., single person, couple household with children), and access to a vehicle for private use. If participants reported a household with children, they were asked to provide the age and sex of each child.

Personal characteristics, identity and relationships

We used the Scottish Census measures of age, sex, trans status, sexual orientation, and religion, and the current Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey measures of current relationship status (e.g., single, married, divorced, etc.), and ethnicity.

Employment/benefits status

Questions were developed to assess employment status, whether participants were in receipt of any means tested benefits, had used a food bank in the past 12 months, and whether they were registered disabled.

Health/medical conditions

The ONS measure of perceived general health was used, alongside Scottish Census measures to ascertain the presence of any developmental or health-related/medical conditions that had lasted or were expected to last, at least 12 months. These included: deafness or partial hearing loss; blindness or partial sight; full or partial loss of voice/difficulty speaking; a learning disability or difficulty; a developmental disorder; physical disability; mental health condition or another long term illness, disease or condition not listed). Participants were also asked to disclose the extent to which day-to-day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability (including problems relating to old age).

METHODS

...continued

MEASURES (2)

SECTION 2: YOUR CURRENT PET/S

Participants were asked if they currently had a pet and if so, the type and number they had. They were also asked to indicate which pets were presenting challenges for them. Motivation for getting their pet/s was assessed with a 7-item measure and the option to add their own reason (e.g., companionship for a child, wanting an animal to care for/love, helping others out when they could no longer look after their pet/s). We also asked if anything had made it difficult to meet the costs of looking after their pet/s. 7 options were presented (e.g., delayed benefits payment, increased cost of living, reduction in income), along with the option to add other issues or select 'none of the above'.

SECTION 3: CHALLENGES RELATING TO YOUR CURRENT PET/S

This section asked participants about the pet that was giving them most cause for concern or presenting them with the most significant challenges, and subsequently, about the specific types of challenge they were experiencing, the impact of the challenges and the support and services they had accessed.

Information about the pet giving most cause for concern

Participants were asked to indicate the type of pet, their age, how long they had owned the pet, what breed (for dogs, cats, rabbits and horses), where they sourced the pet, and whether they were given any advice on seven different aspects of caring for the pet (e.g., providing for basic needs – food, shelter, exercise, past experience of the pet, their health background, how they should be handled, etc.). A 9-item measure of attachment to the pet was developed, using 6 items (slightly modified) from the General Attachment sub-scale of the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS) (Johnson *et al.*, 1992). Items included 'I play with my pet quite often', 'My pet makes me happy' (original wording: 'makes me feel happy'), 'My pet is a great companion' (original wording: 'I consider my pet to be a great companion'), 'My pet is my best friend' (original wording: 'I consider my pet to be a friend'), 'I feel my pet understands me' (original wording: 'My pet understands me'), 'My pet seems to know when I'm feeling bad' (original wording: 'my pet knows when I'm feeling bad').

METHODS

...continued

MEASURES (3)

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

3 items inspired by the People-Substituting Sub-scale of the LAPS were used to assess how the support received from the pet/s compares with support from other relationships ('They are a member of the family', 'I would be lonely without my pet' and 'My pet means everything to me as I have no one else in my life'). This measure used the following response categories: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. Participants were also asked the extent to which they were the main carer for this pet and whether the pet had been insured, registered with a vet, been neutered (where applicable) or received individual/specialist behavioural support.

Specific challenges you are experiencing

A detailed 22-item measure was developed to assess the whole range of 'pet ownership challenges', with the same response categories as the attachment scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree). This measure has 4 broad dimensions of challenges that are related to (1) the animal (10 items), (2) the owner (7 items), (3) the fit between the animal and the environment (3 items), and (4) support (2 items).

(1) Animal-related (9 questions)

a. Behaviour (x5 questions)

My pet is a nuisance to others (e.g., makes a lot of noise, chases other animals, annoys neighbours); My pet is aggressive towards, or is a threat to, other animals or people; They are destructive and damage things in the house/garden/enclosure; They have toileting issues; They need a lot of exercise or time/space outside their enclosure or sleeping accommodation.

b. Welfare (x3 questions)

They have health issues; My pet does not seem happy; My pet shows other signs of distress.

c. Care/training (x2 questions)

My pet is difficult to look after/train; My pet is hard to live with (e.g., they need a lot of attention).

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...continued

MEASURES (4)

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

(2) Owner-related (7 questions)

a. Financial (x2 questions)

I cannot afford the costs associated with feeding, vet bills or specialist equipment; Looking after my pet has cost me far more than I expected.

b. Personal (x3 questions)

I am not well enough or able to give my pet the care or attention they need; I do not understand my pet's behaviour or communication; I am anxious about what might happen to my pet (illness, injury, escape, stolen).

c. Social (x2 questions)

It is difficult to look after my pet at the moment due to other family commitments; Having my pet prevents me from seeing my friends or having visitors.

(3) Animal-environment fit (3 questions)

Changes in my living arrangements mean it is difficult for me to look after my pet; Personal/family challenges mean that my pet is not right for me/us anymore; Changes in my pet (in their behaviour/health) mean it is more difficult to look after them.

(4) Support-related (2 questions)

I can't leave my pet in the care of other people that live with me; I do not have enough support to help me look after my pet.

The impact of the challenges

A 9-item measure was developed to assess the impact of the challenges, with the same four response categories as the other scales. Participants were asked the extent to which they agreed that the challenges were having the following impact on their quality of life through:

(a) emotional strain ('make life stressful and tiring', 'make me feel angry/resentful towards my pet', 'make me feel anxious', 'upset my family'); *(b) constraints on life* ('are creating financial pressure', 'cause problems with neighbours', 'prevent me from doing the things I want to do', 'prevent me from seeing other people or inviting others to my home'; or *(c) concern for the animal's welfare/wellbeing* 'make me feel guilty/sorry for my pet'.

METHODS

...continued

MEASURES (5)

SECTION 3 CONTINUED

Participants were asked the extent to which they felt responsible for the challenges they were experiencing with their pet (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree) and whether caring for this pet had added stress to the current coronavirus situation. This question was adapted from an item in Applebaum *et al.* (2020). They were asked if they had ever considered giving up this pet and to select the main reasons for doing so from a list of 14 items (e.g., they needed extensive veterinary care, they had problems that come with being old, I/my family moved to new housing, etc.) The items were adapted from the Commitment to Pets Scale (Rauktis *et al.*, 2021), with four additional items created for this study.

SECTION 4: ACCESS TO SUPPORT AND SERVICES

Participants were asked if they had ever sought support to help them care for their pet/s, and if so, where from (Scottish SPCA, Blue Cross, another animal welfare charity or a veterinary practice). They were asked to select the type of services or support, from a list of 9, that they had accessed, and whether their experience of those they had accessed was positive, negative or neutral. For those who had not accessed support/services, they were asked to select the reasons for not doing so from a list of 13 (e.g., there were no support services to help me, I thought my pet might be taken away from me, I was too embarrassed or thought I might be judged).

SECTION 5: PET ANIMALS YOU HAD TO REHOME/GIVE UP

Participants were asked if they had given up a pet animal in the past (either through rehoming, leaving them, or having them put to sleep by a vet), and were asked to provide more information about one particular animal (the age of the pet when they were given up, the length of time they had the pet, and the main reasons for giving them up. Participants were asked to select the main reasons that applied to them from a list of 13, or had the option to provide another reason. Examples included: 'my animal was too aggressive or destructive', my animal had a lot of health issues', 'I couldn't cope with my animal's behaviour or health issues', and 'trying to look after my animal was stopping me enjoying life'.

METHODS

...continued

MEASURES (6) & SURVEY PROMOTION

SECTION 5 CONTINUED

Participants were asked if they had ever accessed support to help them manage the challenges of looking after this pet, and if so, where from and what they thought of the services they had accessed. If they had not accessed support, they were asked the reasons why. Additionally, they were asked what kind of support might have been helpful and perhaps prevented them from giving up their pet. 7 options were provided, (e.g., financial assistance to pay for food and general upkeep, support to understand and train the pet, temporary foster care for the pet, etc.) alongside an option to add their own suggestion.

One question asked when the participant had given up the pet and if 2020 or 2021 was selected, if the coronavirus situation had played a role. They were asked how they felt about giving up their pet ('relieved', 'sad/distressed', 'disappointed', 'guilty/ashamed', 'other feelings') They were asked where they had taken their pet and if they had sought any support since giving them up and whether or not this was helpful. Finally, participants were asked to provide information on the number of other pets they had given up and if there was anything further they wanted to share with us.

SURVEY PROMOTION

A range of promotional flyers was created for use on social media channels. These reflected a diverse range of people/ families and different types of pet. Care was taken to ensure they fitted a Scottish context and wording was brief to ensure clarity and impact.

The majority of posts to promote the survey were on the Children, Adolescents and Animals Research group page (CAAR) Facebook and Twitter pages and these were shared/ re-tweeted by the Blue Cross and Scottish SPCA media teams. Survey data were continually monitored and paid/targeted advertising used to reach any groups where we had few responses (males and larger family groups in particular).



3 / THE SAMPLE

The sample included people living in all the local authorities in Scotland, though the numbers were low in some areas. Females and people classifying themselves as 'White' and heterosexual were over-represented in the sample. Large families, male participants, and marginalised groups were under-represented.



REGIONS IN SCOTLAND

A total of 1361 people participated in our online survey, representing all 32 local authority areas in Scotland. The numbers ranged from 2 in the Shetland Islands to 131 (10% of the sample) from Fife. Following Fife, the majority of the participants came from the following regions: Glasgow (n=95), Edinburgh (n=94), South Lanarkshire (n=85), Highland (n=78), North Lanarkshire (n=69), Dundee (n=65), Angus (n=60), Perth and Kinross (n=58), and Aberdeenshire (n=50).

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

70% of the sample (n=944) reported living in a house or bungalow, and 28% a flat, apartment or maisonette. The remainder (<2%) were living in either a hostel, shelter, women's refuge, or caravan, or they were homeless. 64% of the sample owned their own home, while 33% were renting (with or without benefits). Of those who were renting (n=441), 47% were in private rental accommodation. 47% of all households in the sample comprised two people, 23% one person, and 16% three people. The majority of households were couples without children (n=520, 38%), single people (n=311, 23%) and couples with children (n=306, 23%). 7% (n=90) of the sample were lone parents. 54% of those with children had one child and 34% two children. 84% (n=1136) had access to a car or van.



PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, IDENTITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

15% (n=207) of the participants in the study were age 30 or younger, 17% (n=227) aged 31 to 40, 19% (n=255) aged 41 to 50, 24% (n=324) aged 51 to 60, 18% (n=206) aged 61 to 70, and 7% (n=92) aged 71 to 89. 87% (n=1186) of the sample were female, and 2% (n=24) considered themselves to be trans or have a trans history. 86% were heterosexual/straight. 44% (n=598) of participants were married, 18% single, 18% co-habiting, and 10% divorced. 95% (n=1263) classified themselves as White, and 57% did not see themselves belonging to any religion. 22% of the sample identified as Church of Scotland, and 8% Roman Catholic.

EMPLOYMENT/BENEFITS STATUS

41% (n=554) of participants were working full time, and 20% (n=276) part-time. 21% (n=285) were retired, and 18% (n=246) were not currently in paid employment. 21% (n=290) were in receipt of means-tested benefits, and 7% (n=100) had used a food bank in the past year.

HEALTH/MEDICAL CONDITIONS

64% (n=872) of the sample reported 'very good' or 'good' health, 25% (n=338) 'fair', and 11% (n=147) poor or very poor. 13% of participants (n=171) were registered disabled. 58% (n=786) reported that their day-to-day activities were not limited due to a health problem, disability or problems relating to old age. 30% (n=411) said their activities were 'limited a little' and 12% (n=16) 'limited a lot'. 46% (n=624) reported that they had not experienced any of the health conditions listed in the previous 12 months (see Methods Section). 25% (n=338) had a mental health condition, 12% (n=159) a physical disability, and 10% (n=133) reported being deaf or having partial hearing loss. Fewer than 3% reported other health conditions on the list. However, 27% (n=362) reported that they had a long-term illness, disease or condition that was not on the list.



4 / KEY FINDINGS

- RQ1** People experiencing the greatest challenges
- RQ2** The sourcing and significance of pet animals
- RQ3** Challenges of pet ownership and different types of pet
- RQ4** Access to, and utility of, support
- RQ5** Factors involved in relinquishing pets



RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE (1)

ARE THERE SPECIFIC AREAS IN SCOTLAND WHERE A GREATER PROPORTION OF PEOPLE ARE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES?

A total of 519 people from 30 local authority areas in Scotland completed the questions relating to pet ownership challenges. However, the numbers from many areas were low. Accordingly, to examine whether there were any geographical differences in the pet ownership challenges experienced, a minimum of 15 cases was used as the cut-off for inclusion in the analyses. This resulted in examination of differences between 14 local authority areas (Table 1.1). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference overall in the mean score for the pet ownership challenges scale*, $F(13, 363) = 2.178, p = .01$. However, post-hoc tests showed that only one local authority (Aberdeen City) was significantly higher than the lowest scoring (North Lanarkshire).

Table 1.1 Mean score on the full pet ownership challenges scale

Local authority area	n	mean	standard deviation
Aberdeen City	18	48.9	15.6
Aberdeenshire	20	44.0	7.3
Angus	27	43.6	13.0
Dundee City	28	44.9	11.9
East Ayrshire	15	39.4	7.8
Edinburgh (City of)	41	42.0	9.2
Falkirk	16	38.3	7.9
Fife	49	41.6	10.6
Glasgow City	36	42.4	8.8
Highland	30	39.3	8.3
North Ayrshire	18	39.1	6.9
North Lanarkshire	29	37.9	8.0
South Lanarkshire	35	39.3	6.9
West Lothian	15	40.1	8.8
Total	377	41.5	9.9

* The 22 items measuring 'pet ownership challenges', and the 9 items assessing 'impact of the challenges' (see p.20) functioned well as scales (Cronbach's alpha = .892 and .858 respectively).

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCE (2)

To investigate further, analysis was carried out on the four challenges sub-scales: animal-related, owner-related, those relating to animal-environment fit, and support-related (see pages 12-13). One-way ANOVA revealed only a significant difference for the animal-environment fit sub-scale (questions concerning changes in circumstances making it more difficult to look after the pet or the pet no longer being a good fit for the family), $F(13, 363) = 3.145, p < .001$ (Table 1.2). Those in Aberdeen City scored significantly higher ($p < .05$) than those in four other local authorities (North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, South Lanarkshire and West Lothian). However, it should be noted that the mean scores are fairly low. The maximum total score for this sub-scale was 12.

Table 1.2 Mean score on the challenges sub-scale relating to animal-environment fit

Local authority area	n	mean	standard deviation
Aberdeen City	18	6.7	2.5
Aberdeenshire	20	5.9	1.6
Angus	27	5.7	2.4
Dundee City	28	5.6	2.0
East Ayrshire	15	5.1	1.8
Edinburgh (City of)	41	5.2	1.9
Falkirk	16	4.9	1.4
Fife	49	5.1	2.0
Glasgow City	36	5.0	1.4
Highland	30	5.1	1.7
North Ayrshire	18	4.6	1.5
North Lanarkshire	29	4.4	1.3
South Lanarkshire	35	4.2	1.3
West Lothian	15	4.3	1.3
Total	377	5.1	1.8

There were no differences between these 14 local authorities in terms of the perceived impact of the challenges experienced with pets* $F(13, 355) = 1.029, p = .423$. Taken together, these findings suggest that there is likely to be more variation within local authority areas than between them, and area deprivation level may be a better indicator than local authority (see next section).

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (1)

ARE THERE SPECIFIC GROUPS OF PEOPLE/FAMILIES LIVING IN SCOTLAND THAT ARE FACING GREATER CHALLENGES?

One-way ANOVAs and t-tests were used to examine differences between the following groups on the four sub-scales relating to pet ownership challenges:

- (1) Sex
- (2) Financial measures (employment status, means tested benefits, and use of a food bank)
- (3) Family circumstances (relationship status, number of people living in household, type of household, type of rental property, and number of children)
- (4) Perceived health and activity limitations
- (5) Religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation

SEX

Male participants scored higher than females on all four sub-scales (Table 1.3 and Table 8.2 in the Appendix), though the sample size was small compared with females.

Table 1.3 Female/male differences in mean scores for the challenges sub-scales

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	Sex	N	Mean	S.D.	T-test results
Animal-related challenges	Female	466	18.7	4.7	$t(1,529) = -3.136, p < .01$
	Male	65	20.7	5.7	
Owner-related challenges	Female	466	13.7	3.3	$t(1,529) = -3.086, p < .01$
	Male	65	15.1	4.0	
Challenges relating to animal-environment fit	Female	453	4.9	1.8	$t(1,516) = -4.593, p < .001$
	Male	65	6.0	1.9	
Support-related challenges	Female	453	3.4	1.4	$t(1,516) = -2.913, p < .01$
	Male	65	3.9	1.4	

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (2)

FINANCIAL MEASURES

Regarding employment status, significant differences were found for three of the four sub-scales (not support-related challenges) (Table 1.4). Full-time workers had higher scores than those of retired people for three sub-scales. Retired people also scored lower than those not currently working on owner-related challenges, and lower than full and part-time workers in relation to animal-environment fit challenges.

Table 1.4 Employment status differences in the challenges sub-scales

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	Employment status	N	Mean	S.D.	Anova results
Animal-related challenges	Full-time	232	19.4	5.1	$F(3,528) = 3.107, p < .05$
	Part-time	111	19.1	4.9	
	Not employed	112	19.0	4.6	
	Retired	77	17.5	4.3	
Owner-related challenges	Full-time	232	14.0	3.4	$F(3,528) = 4.202, p < .01$
	Part-time	111	13.9	3.4	
	Not employed	112	14.3	3.5	
	Retired	77	12.6	3.3	
Challenges relating to animal-environment fit	Full-time	230	5.2	1.9	$F(3,515) = 4.018, p < .01$
	Part-time	108	5.2	1.9	
	Not employed	107	5.0	1.8	
	Retired	74	4.4	1.5	

Participants who were in receipt of means-tested benefits scored significantly higher on all four sub-scales relating to different challenges (Table 1.5). Participants who had used a food bank in the past year also scored significantly higher on all four sub-scales relating to different challenges (Table 1.6).

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (3)

Table 1.5 Differences in mean scores for the challenges sub-scales according to benefits status

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	Means-tested benefits?	N	Mean	S.D.	T-test results
Animal-related challenges	Yes	144	20.2	5.7	$t(1,512) = 3.584, p < .001$
	No	370	18.5	4.4	
Owner-related challenges	Yes	144	15.0	3.4	$t(1,512) = 4.681, p < .001$
	No	370	13.4	3.3	
Challenges relating to animal-environment fit	Yes	139	5.5	2.1	$t(1,500) = 3.724, p < .001$
	No	363	4.8	1.7	
Support-related challenges	Yes	139	3.7	1.5	$t(1,500) = 2.296, p < .005$
	No	363	3.3	1.4	

Table 1.6 Differences in mean scores for the challenges sub-scales according to use of food banks

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	Use of a food bank?	N	Mean	S.D.	T-test results
Animal-related challenges	Yes	60	22.4	5.6	$t(1,522) = 6.126, p < .001$
	No	464	18.5	4.5	
Owner-related challenges	Yes	60	16.0	3.6	$t(1,522) = 5.585, p < .001$
	No	464	13.5	3.2	
Challenges relating to animal-environment fit	Yes	59	6.4	2.2	$t(1,509) = 6.447, p < .001$
	No	452	4.8	1.7	
Support-related challenges	Yes	59	4.3	1.4	$t(1,509) = 4.890, p < .001$
	No	452	3.3	1.4	

FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES

There were significant differences for three of the sub-scales (not owner-related challenges) depending on the number of people living in the household (Table 1.7). Animal-related & animal-environment fit challenges were higher in households with three people compared with two. Support-related challenges were more likely in lone person households or when there were three people compared with two (i.e., with a child or other dependant).

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (4)

Table 1.7 Differences in the challenges sub-scales according to number of people in household

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	n people in household	N	Mean	S.D.	Anova results
Animal-related challenges	1	120	18.6	5.2	$F(5,525) = 2.532, p < .05$
	2	242	18.5	4.3	
	3	92	20.3	5.2	
	4	51	19.6	3.7	
	5	18	19.2	6.6	
	6 or more	8	20.8	9.2	
Animal-environment fit challenges	1	119	5.2	1.9	$F(5,512) = 3.839, p < .005$
	2	233	4.7	1.7	
	3	90	5.6	1.9	
	4	50	5.3	1.7	
	5	18	4.4	2.3	
	6 or more	8	5.1	3.0	
Support-related challenges	1	119	3.9	1.5	$F(5,512) = 5.028, p < .001$
	2	233	3.1	1.3	
	3	90	3.7	1.4	
	4	50	3.4	1.0	
	5	18	3.6	1.8	
	6 or more	8	3.1	1.6	

There were also differences for all four sub-scales between types of household (Table 1.8). Lone parent households with children scored higher for animal-related challenges than households without children (single person, couples without children and 'other' without children). Lone parent households also had higher scores for owner-related challenges than single person households, couples without children and couples with children. For animal-environment fit challenges, lone parent households scored higher on pet challenges than couples without children and others without children. Finally, for support-related challenges, single person and lone parent households have higher scores than couples without children. Details of the specific challenges experienced by lone parent households can be found in Table 8.3 in the Appendix.

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (5)

Table 1.8 Differences in the challenges sub-scales according to type of household

Pet ownership challenges sub-scales	Type of household	N	Mean	S.D.	Anova results
Animal-related challenges	Single person	121	18.6	5.4	$F(5,526) = 5.603, p < .001$
	Lone parent	50	21.9	6.8	
	Couple (no children)	184	18.2	4.1	
	Couple (with children)	126	19.7	4.3	
	Other (no children)	43	18.2	4.1	
	Other (with children)	8	18.9	3.0	
Owner-related challenges	Single person	121	14.0	4.0	$F(5,526) = 4.918, p < .001$
	Lone parent	50	15.7	4.0	
	Couple (no children)	184	13.2	3.1	
	Couple (with children)	126	13.9	3.0	
	Other (no children)	43	14.1	2.4	
	Other (with children)	8	14.6	3.7	
Animal-environment fit challenges	Single person	120	5.3	2.0	$F(5,513) = 5.327, p < .001$
	Lone parent	46	6.0	2.5	
	Couple (no children)	178	4.7	1.5	
	Couple (with children)	124	5.2	1.7	
	Other (no children)	43	4.5	1.5	
	Other (with children)	8	4.4	1.9	
Support-related challenges	Single person	119	3.9	1.5	$F(5,513) = 6.855, p < .001$
	Lone parent	233	3.9	1.7	
	Couple (no children)	90	3.0	1.2	
	Couple (with children)	50	3.5	1.3	
	Other (no children)	18	3.3	1.5	
	Other (with children)	8	3.3	1.6	

For those who were in rental accommodation, animal-environment fit challenges were higher for those in private rental (mean=5.2, s.d.=1.8) compared with local authority rental (mean=4.4, s.d.=1.5), $F(1, 170) = 3.090, p = .005$. There were no differences in any of the challenges sub-scales as a result of the number of children in the household or relationship status (e.g., single, married, divorced).

RQ1 / PEOPLE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

OTHER DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES (6)

PERCEIVED HEALTH AND ACTIVITY LIMITATIONS

There were no significant differences in the four sub-scales with respect to self-perceived health (very good/good, fair, poor/very poor). While there were also no differences in three sub-scales between participants who felt their day-to-day activities were/were not limited due to a health condition, disability or aging, those saying they felt limited 'a little' scored higher (mean=14.3, s.d.=3.5) than those who reported no limitations (mean=13.3, s.d.=3.2) on the owner-related challenges sub-scale $F(2, 526) = 5.743, p = .005$. There was no significant difference in perceived challenges between those with and without health conditions (i.e., deafness/partial hearing loss, physical disability, mental health condition, or other long-term illness/condition).

RELIGION, ETHNICITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

As the vast majority of our sample were of White ethnicity and heterosexual, the numbers did not permit statistical analysis. There were no differences in any of the challenges sub-scales between the five religious groups included in the statistical analysis (No religion, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Other Christian and Pagan).



RQ2 / THE SOURCING & SIGNIFICANCE OF PETS



RQ2 / THE SOURCING & SIGNIFICANCE OF PETS

SOURCING PETS

WHERE DO PEOPLE GET THEIR PETS FROM?

Participants were asked about a pet that was giving them most concern or presenting them with challenges. They were asked where they had got them from originally. A total of 568 people responded to this question. The majority got their pets from someone they knew (24%, n=135), or from a UK-based rehoming/rescue centre or animal welfare charity (22%, n=126). Table 2.1 shows the distribution of sources for dogs and cats specifically. These animals are the focus, as the number of people describing challenges with other animal types was very low (17 or fewer).

Table 2.1 The sourcing of dogs and cats (top 3 highlighted)

Source	Dogs (n = 378) n (%)	Cats (n = 146) n (%)
Someone I knew - a friend, family member or neighbour	80 (22.0%)	39 (27.3%)
This was a puppy from our own dog's litter	9 (2.5%)	-
From an accidental litter	11 (3.0%)	9 (6.3%)
A Kennel Club assured breeder	49 (13.5%)	-
A Scottish SPCA assured breeder	2 (0.5%)	-
A commercial licensed breeder	22 (6.0%)	4 (2.8%)
An unlicensed hobby breeder	26 (7.1%)	5 (3.5%)
A UK-based rehoming/rescue centre/animal welfare charity	68 (18.7%)	49 (39.3%)
A pet shop/garden centre	1 (0.3%)	3 (2.1%)
Through a private seller via an advert on social media	16 (4.4%)	10 (7.0%)
Via a classified website that sells pets (e.g., Gumtree, Pets4Homes)	36 (9.9%)	5 (3.5%)
An overseas rescue/rehoming charity	31 (8.5%)	1 (0.7%)
A puppy farm	1 (0.3%)	-

RQ2 / THE SOURCING & SIGNIFICANCE OF PETS

SOURCING PETS

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT/ADVICE IS PROVIDED WHEN PURCHASING A PET?

Table 2.2 shows the support/advice given to owners when they purchased their dog or cat. Just over a fifth of those purchasing dogs and over a third of those purchasing cats received no support/advice from the person/organisation providing the pet. A similar proportion received advice on costs/insurance for dogs, but very few purchasing cats were provided with this information (9%). People/organisations selling pets tended to provide more information on basic needs and health background. Just over half of owners received advice on providing for the dog's basic needs, just over a third on characteristics/health conditions and the dog's health background and just under a third on past experiences. People purchasing cats received less support/advice than those purchasing dogs.

Table 2.2 Support/advice provided by the person/organisation providing the pet when purchasing dogs and cats (top 3 highlighted for each type of pet)

Type of support/advice given	Dogs (n = 364) n (%)	Cats (n = 143) n (%)
Providing for basic needs (food, shelter, exercise, routine care)	205 (54.2%)	55 (37.7%)
Characteristics of the animal and health conditions to look out for	148 (39.2%)	37 (25.3%)
Past experiences (history of aggression, lived with animals/children)	118 (31.2%)	39 (26.7%)
The health background of the animal	147 (38.9%)	43 (29.5%)
The way they should be handled (what they like/dislike)	106 (28.0%)	22 (15.1%)
Availability of support to help manage the pet's behaviour	101 (26.7%)	4 (2.7%)
Costs associated with caring for the pet/recommended insurance	84 (22.3%)	13 (8.9%)
I was given no advice by the person/organisation I got the pet from	85 (22.5%)	56 (38.4%)

RQ2 / THE SOURCING & SIGNIFICANCE OF PETS

SIGNIFICANCE OF PETS

HOW DO OWNERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR PETS AND THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON THEIR LIVES?

The 9 items measuring attachment functioned well as a scale (Cronbach's alpha = .853). Of those who were experiencing challenges with a pet, those with dogs showed stronger attachment to them (n=343, mean=3.4, s.d.=0.4) than those with cats (n=140, mean=3.3, s.d.=0.4), $t(1, 481) = 4.639, p < .001$.

There was a significant, albeit weak, negative association between attachment and the experience of different challenges, as well as the perceived impact of those challenges (see Table 8.1 in the Appendix for correlational data). This means that those with stronger attachments to their pet/s have lower scores on the pet ownership challenges scales, and vice versa.

It is possible that the experience of challenges threatens attachment to the pet. Alternatively, those who have a strong attachment may be less likely to perceive challenges. They may be able to better tolerate the challenges the pet poses for them. Similarly, those with stronger attachments are less likely to feel the challenges experienced have a strong negative impact on their quality of life and vice versa.



RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

FULL SAMPLE

PET OWNERSHIP AND CONCERNS

Of the full sample (n=1361), 91% (n=1244) currently had at least one pet. The majority (44%) had one pet animal, a quarter had two pets, and 12% had three. 19% had 4 or more animals. As Table 3.1 shows, dogs were the most common type of pet owned, followed by cats, and other small mammals. 23% of the sample were concerned about their dog/s or they were presenting challenges at the time of the survey. 10% of the sample had concerns about/challenges with their cat/s.

Table 3.1 Pet ownership and concerns in the sample

Type of pet	Pet ownership		Concerns about/challenges with pets	
	n with this pet type	% of sample	n with concerns about a pet of this type	% of sample
Dogs	922	67.7	318	23.4
Cats	508	37.3	132	9.7
Rabbits	67	4.9	18	1.3
Other small mammals	99	7.3	18	1.3
Reptiles/ amphibians	52	3.8	10	0.7
Birds	78	5.7	10	0.7
Fish	87	6.4	13	1.0
Horses	62	4.6	19	1.4

RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

FULL SAMPLE

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Participants were asked if they had ever experienced any of the problems in Table 3.2 that made it difficult to meet the costs of keeping a pet. 58% (n=794) reported that none applied to them. Just under a quarter of the sample reported that the increased cost of living had made meeting the costs of pet ownership difficult. 14% reported that a reduction in salary or joint income had made this more difficult.

Table 3.2 Problems making it difficult to meet the costs of keeping a pet

Problem posing difficulty	n	% of sample
Increased cost of living	325	23.9
Reduction in salary or joint incomes	185	13.6
Reduction or delay in benefits payments	110	8.1
Moving into private rental accommodation	88	6.5
Redundancy	78	5.7
Increased childcare costs	24	1.8
Study/education costs	55	4.0
Other	86	6.3

THOSE EXPERIENCING CHALLENGES

When asked to share with us the animal that was giving the most cause for concern, or presenting them with the most significant challenges, just over half of the sample (n=628) said none of their pets were a concern or challenge for them. 31% (n=378) of those responding to this question reported on a dog and 12% (n=146) a cat. The numbers reporting on other animal types giving cause for concern were too low to include in any analyses.

Dog owners - background

The majority of people experiencing challenges with a dog, had owned them for more than 6 years (36%, n=130). 20% (n=73) for less than a year, 18% (n=65) for 1-2 years, the same for 3-4 years and 8% (n=31) for 5-6 years. 60% (n=228) had insured the dog, 86% (n=326) were registered with a vet, 59% (n=221) had been neutered, and 24% (n=91) had received individual/specialist behavioural support.

22% (n=80) had sourced their dog through someone they knew (friend, family member or neighbour). 19% (n=68) got them from a UK-based rescue/rehoming centre/animal welfare charity and 14% (n=49) from a Kennel Club Assured Breeder (2 people from a Scottish SPCA Assured Breeder). 10% (n=36) had purchased through a classified website that sells pets (Gumtree, Pets4Homes). 9% (n=31) had an overseas rescue/rehoming charity. Only 4% (n=16) had bought through a private social media advert.

Cat owners - background

The majority of people experiencing challenges with a cat, had owned them for more than 6 years (48%, n=68). 16% (n=23) had them for 3-4 years, 15% (n=22) for 1-2 years, 10% (n=14) for less than year, and 11% (n=16) for 5-6 years. 34% (n=48) had insured the cat, 91% (n=127) were registered with a vet, 90% (n=126) had been neutered, and 11% (n=15) had received individual/specialist behavioural support.

34% (n=49) had sourced their cat through a UK-based rescue/rehoming centre/charity. 27% (n=39) from someone they knew. 7% (n=10) had bought through a private social media advert, and only 4% (n=5) had purchased through a classified website selling pets.

RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

KEY ISSUES FOR DOG OWNERS

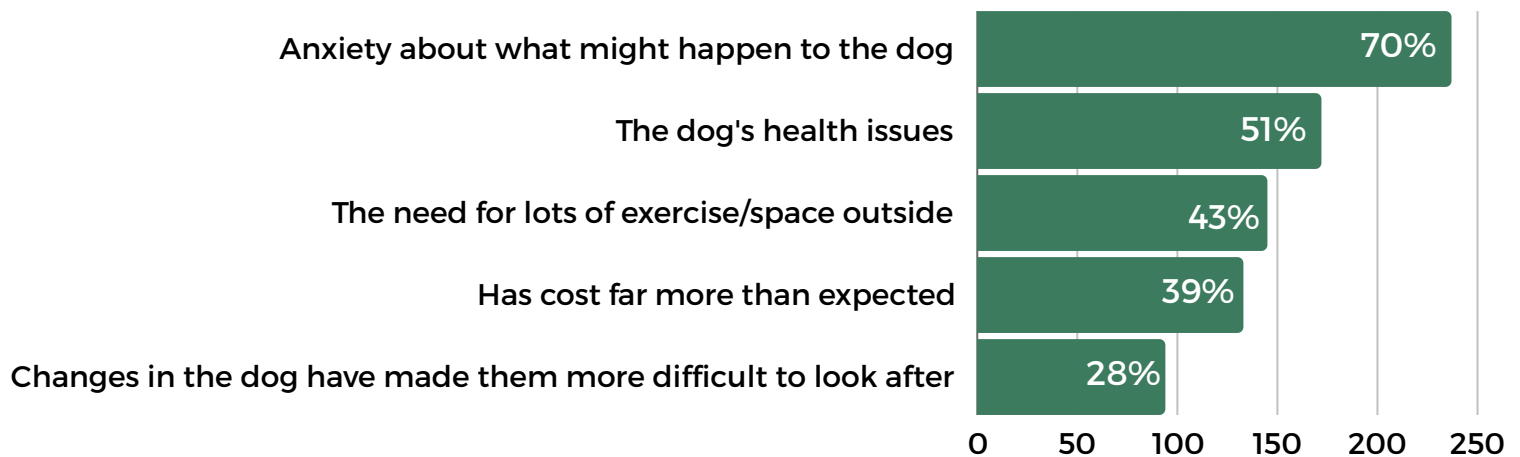


Figure 3.1 The five most common challenges among those with dogs (n & %)

Box 3.1: The most common breeds of dog that were described as presenting challenges

- 15.4% Mongrel/cross-breed - medium (n=56)
- 6.6% Labrador Retriever (n=24)
- 5.8% Border Collie (n=21)
- 4.9% Mongrel/cross-breed - large (n=18)
- 4.4% Mongrel/cross-breed - small (n=16)
- 4.4% Staffordshire Bull Terrier (n=16)
- 3.8% German Shepherd (n=14)
- 3% Jack Russell Terrier (n=11)
- 2.7% Akita (n=10)
- 2.7% Bichon Frise (n=10)

RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

KEY ISSUES FOR DOG OWNERS

Box 3.2: Qualitative data relating to health issues & other signs of distress

Examples of health issues:

Hip dysplasia, osteoarthritis, epilepsy, pancreatitis, brain atrophy, knock-on effects of missing a leg, allergies, stiff leg joints, ligament injuries, lameness, sarcoma, teeth problems, cysts, itchy skin and fur loss/casting, mange, spondylitis, gut problems/diarrhoea, shortened bowel, cataracts, blindness, eye problems, partial deafness, pseudomonas, gum fistulas, compromised immune system, incontinence/bladder problems, pyometra, heart murmur, weight loss, over-weight, food intolerance/allergies, kidney disease/stones, Addison's Disease, diabetes, ear infections, kennel cough, puppy teeth extraction, Cushing's disease, canine dementia, cancer, tumour, back/spinal issues, self-harm, collapsing trachea, respiratory disease, over-heating, noise sensitive, tail problems, brittle coat.

Other signs of distress:

Leash reactive, seizures, anxiety, fear-based aggression, separation anxiety, yapping/attention seeking, boredom, dog ears, heavy panting, reactive to other dogs, does not tolerate being touched by strangers, anxious around strangers, anxious being left alone, reactive barking, confusion, fearful, lack of confidence, attacks feet and bites when over-stimulated, hyper-arousal, whining, pacing, scratching, excessive paw licking, scared when travelling in the car, pseudo-pregnancies and mastitis, over-territorial, possessive behaviour with food, barks incessantly at men, compulsive tail chasing, listless, snapping, trembling.

A key concern, as the following quotation illustrates, was deteriorating health and how this might be dealt with financially and emotionally, ensuring they were giving the best care to their pet:

"He has a few lumps under his skin. One in the leg muscle. I'm extremely worried that when they do get bigger I won't be able to pay for it, and that makes me feel such a let down to my boy. I took him on so I need to make sure he is happy and healthy no matter what"

RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

KEY ISSUES FOR CAT OWNERS

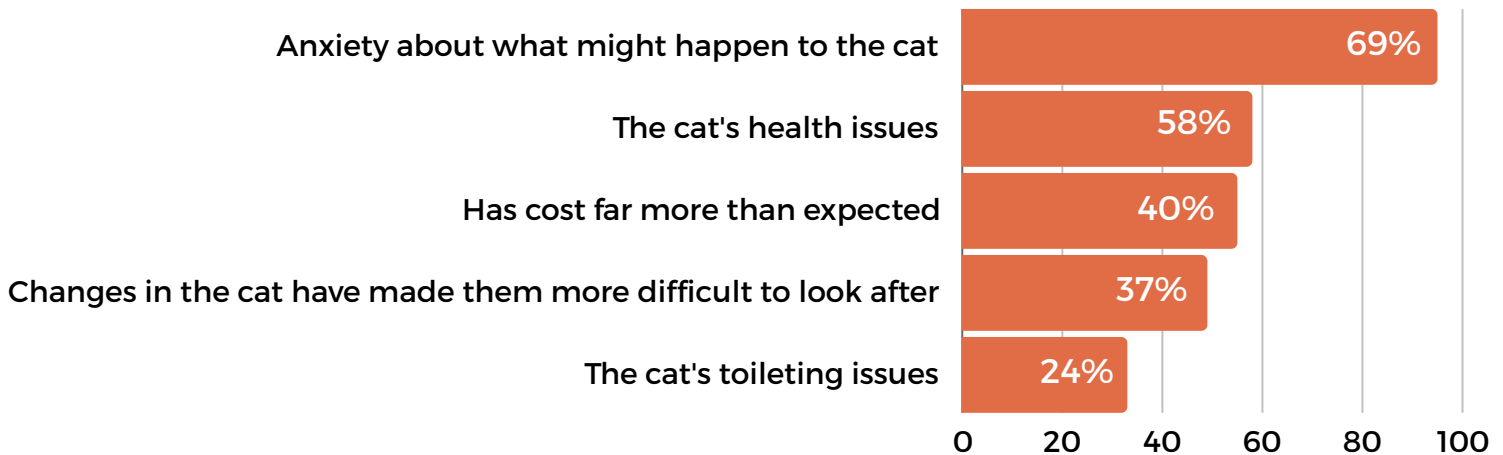


Figure 3.2 The five most common challenges among those with cats (n & %)

Box 3.3: Qualitative data relating to health issues & other signs of distress

The most common breeds of cat that were described as presenting challenges:

35% Domestic short-hair moggie (n=50), 15.4% British short-hair (n=22), 9.1% Domestic long-hair moggie (n=13).

Examples of health issues:

Gastrointestinal issues, cardiomyopathy/heart disease, arthritis, birth defect, issues connected with aging (deaf, blind, high blood pressure), tumour, road traffic accident injuries, thyroid, colitis, kidney problems, under investigation (growths in intestines, vomiting, unexplained weight loss), teeth problems, diabetes, urine stones, respiratory issues, weight (under and over), dementia, bladder issues, stomach inflammation, ulcerated eye, allergies/skin condition, cancer, toilet issues, cat flu & sinusitis, diverticulitis, hypertension, not eating, nephritis, not grooming self.

Other signs of distress:

Anxious, bites self, terrified of everything, nervous, not eating well, hiding away, not going out, sleeping a lot more, stress at losing sibling, constant meowing, wary, doesn't relax, difficulty settling, separation anxiety, needy, growls/hisses at other cats, playing/ interacting less, agitation, skittish, refusing favourite treats, confused.

RQ3 / CHALLENGES OF PET OWNERSHIP

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THOSE WITH DOGS & CATS

People with dogs scored higher ($m=41.44$, $s.d.=9.25$) than those with cats ($m=39.40$, $s.d.=9.89$) on the full pet ownership challenges scale (this included all questions relating to specific challenges with the pet) $t(1, 463)$, $p=.035$. Whilst there were no differences between these groups on the sub-scales relating to the fit between the animal and the environment/family $t(1, 463)$, $p=.875$, or support-related challenges $t(1, 463)$, $p=.382$, those with dogs scored higher on the **animal-related challenges** ($m=19.05$, $s.d.=4.59$) than those with cats ($m=18.13$, $s.d.=4.90$), $t(1, 474)$, $p=.052$. Dog owners also scored higher on the **owner-related challenges** sub-scale ($m=13.96$, $s.d.=3.15$) than cat owners ($m=13.19$, $s.d.=3.62$), $t(1, 474)$, $p=.021$.

HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC INTENSIFIED PET OWNERSHIP CHALLENGES?

21% ($n=69$) of the owners experiencing challenges with a dog and 19% ($n=24$) with a cat, reported that having the pet had added stress to the current coronavirus situation. However, the majority felt they had not added stress (dog owners: 78%, $n=252$, cat owners: 81%, $n=104$). 51% ($n=166$) felt their dog had actually helped them during the pandemic, with 45% ($n=58$) of those experiencing challenges with a cat feeling the same. Only 7% ($n=24$) reported that they had considered giving up the dog (8 because they needed extensive veterinary care, 6 due to their aggression towards other animals or people, 5 as a result of family conflict and 9 for 'other' reasons). 10% ($n=13$) considered giving up their cat (5 because of toileting problems, 4 as they needed special food, 3 they were destructive, and 3 as a result of their aggression).

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESPONSIBILITY

People who agreed with the statement 'I feel responsible for the challenges I am experiencing with my pet' scored higher on the pet challenges scale ($n=254$, $mean=44$, $s.d.=10.2$) than those who disagreed ($n=170$, $mean=37.7$, $s.d.=8.8$) or were not sure ($n=80$, $mean=40.5$, $s.d.=8.5$), $F(2, 505) = 22.600$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the impact of the challenges was also stronger among those who felt responsible ($n=258$, $mean=18.9$, $s.d.=4.9$) than those who did not ($n=170$, $m=15.4$, $s.d.=4.8$) or were not sure ($n=80$, $m=17.4$, $s.d.=4.5$), $F(2, 505) = 26.674$, $p < .001$.

RQ4 / ACCESS TO & UTILITY OF SUPPORT

THE EXTENT TO WHICH PET OWNERS HAD ACCESSED SUPPORT SERVICES

Only 22% (n=281) of those answering the question about whether they had ever accessed any support to help them care for their pets had done so. 67% (n=187) had accessed support from a veterinary practice, 18% (n=50) from the Scottish SPCA, 7% (n=19) from Blue Cross, and 22% (n=63) from another animal welfare charity (Edinburgh Dog and Cat Home, Scottish Greyhound Sanctuary, Dogs Trust, PDSA, Cats Protection, Chiltern Dig Rescue Society, Beloved Rabbits, Loving Homes Dog Rescue, Podencos in Need Scotland, Pawprints to Freedom, Cat Protection League, Dalmation Welfare, Canine Campus Rescue, Oak Tree Animal Charity, Cat Protection League, Underheugh Ark, and the Kennel Club). Table 4.1 shows specific support accessed and perceptions.

Table 4.1 Support/services accessed & perceptions of them (top 5 highlighted)

Type of support	n (%*) accessed	n (%) positive experience	n (%) neutral experience	n (%) negative experience
Help with veterinary care	142 (58.0%)	99 (79.2%)	20 (16.0%)	6 (4.8%)
Pet care support/advice	97 (45.5%)	66 (74.2%)	22 (24.7%)	1 (1.1%)
Behaviour training support	91 (42.9%)	56 (70.9%)	18 (22.8%)	5 (6.3%)
Pet sitting/walking	69 (33.3%)	51 (79.7%)	12 (18.8%)	1 (1.6%)
Emergency short-term care (board/foster)	41 (20.2%)	27 (77.1%)	8 (22.9%)	0
Financial assistance for pet care	40 (19.0%)	19 (52.8%)	13 (36.1%)	4 (11.1%)
Bereavement support	33 (16.5%)	17 (54.8%)	11 (35.5%)	3 (9.7%)
Pet food banks	32 (15.6%)	13 (50.0%)	11 (42.3%)	2 (7.7%)
Rehoming advice	31 (15.3%)	16 (43.2%)	16 (43.2%)	5 (13.5%)
Other	16 (14.5%)			

* % is valid percent (proportion of those who accessed support/services and answered the question relating to type of support (Yes compared with No))

RQ4 / ACCESS TO & UTILITY OF SUPPORT

ARE SOME PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO ACCESS SUPPORT? IF SO, WHY?

Of those who answered the question asking if they had ever accessed any support to help them care for their pets, 77% (n=966) had not. The main reasons for not accessing support are provided in Figure 4.1. An additional 24% (n=229) chose 'other reason', the majority explaining that support was not required. Other reasons mentioned included Covid restrictions, receiving support from family, living in a remote rural location where services are not available, believing that services are means-tested so would not qualify, wanting another animal but not knowing if services are available to help out when owner is unwell, feeling it is their responsibility, being scared about where pet might be rehomed to, use Facebook groups for support or watch training videos, not eligible for financial support in spite of struggling, used to get support from PDSA but it stopped, or could not find the right person to help,

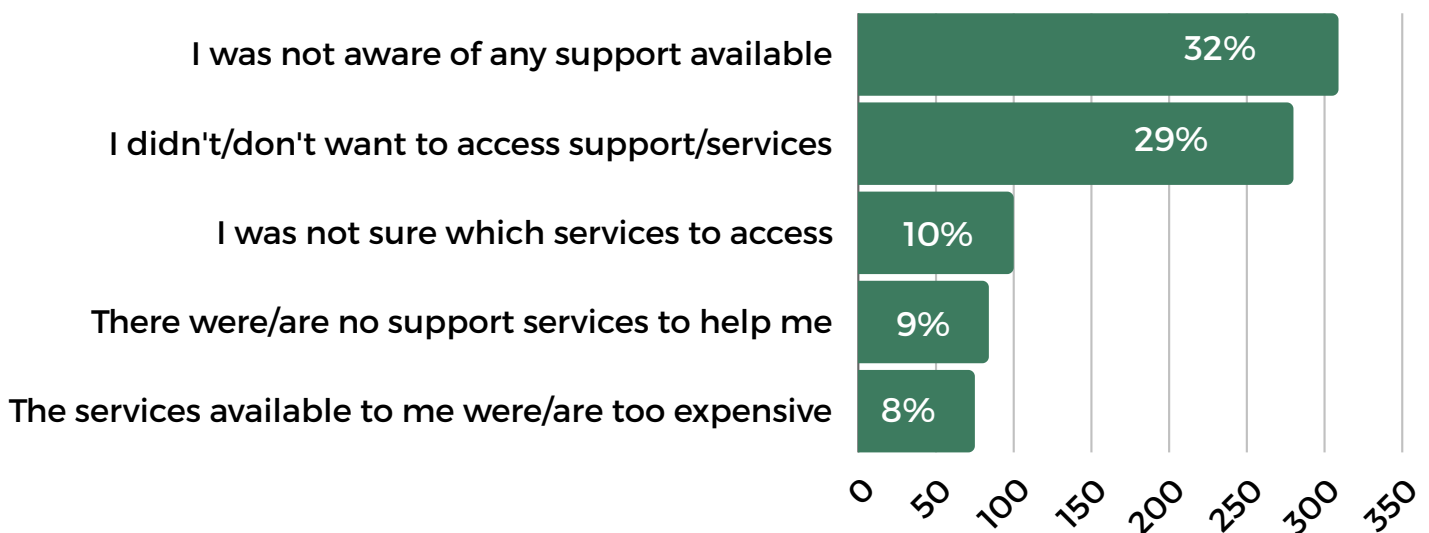


Figure 4.1 The five most common reasons for not accessing support/services (n & %)
% is of the 966 people who reported not accessing support/services

RQ4 / ACCESS TO & UTILITY OF SUPPORT

THE TYPE OF SUPPORT/SERVICES LIKELY TO BE MOST SUCCESSFUL

The data suggest that pet owners are not entirely sure what support is available to them (i.e., what is on offer, associated costs, and eligibility). It is also interesting to note that just under a third of the sample did not want to access services. Qualitative data (see Box 4.3 for examples) suggest that people want to manage on their own, see caring for their pet as their responsibility, or do not think any of the services or support will apply to them.

Box 4.3: Example reasons for why support was not accessed

“Most support services are means tested and we wouldn’t receive help. Sadly finance isn’t always the reason people require support but it’s the main reason services are made available. If money is not a worry people are expected to source private support and those services are often over-priced or not suitable and typically difficult to find the most suitable one.”

“My animals are my responsibility and I put their needs before my own.”

“I prefer to pay my own animal bills, fortunately both vets I’ve used in my time of caring for animals have allowed me to pay anything short in instalments ... a luxury not available to some people.”

“I have wanted to have another dog so much but don’t know if any support is available to help with taking a dog out when I have bad days?”

“Not at that level yet. I did mention stiffness to vet at his last vaccination. She immediately suggested regular metacam which I felt was overkill (it can have gastrointestinal and liver damaging side effects, especially over long periods of use). I increasingly feel vets are quick to sell medications, food and supplements not really required. My last cat was more overweight, and always hungry, on vet prescribed weight loss food than cheaper brands. He became suddenly ill with liver failure, and was pts a week later, long after being prescribed methadone and tramadol for an injured paw/leg. I think he was over medicated and may have recovered and lived longer without the opiates.”

“Thought I could manage myself trying to calm her, train her, desensitize her. She was a rescue, subdued when we got her but her nervous behaviour, yapping has got worse.”

RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

THE MAIN REASONS FOR RELINQUISHMENT

Of those who responded to the question concerning whether they had a pet in the past that they had to give up (through rehoming, leaving them, or having them put to sleep by a vet), 33% (n=395) reported that they had. Of these, 64% chose to tell us more about a dog they had given up, and 24% a cat. The majority of those who had given up a dog (40%, n=159) had them for more than 6 years, 23% (n=90) for 1-2 years, and 19% (n=72) for less than a year. The majority of those who had given up a cat (42%, n=39) had them for more than 6 years, 24% (n=22) for 3-4 years, and 15% (n=14) for 1-2 years. 10% (n=9) had them for less than a year or 5-6 years.

The main reasons provided for giving up dogs and cats are outlined in Table 5.1. Participants were asked to choose up to three main reasons that applied to their situation. The number of participants providing information on other types of animal was too small to include in the analyses.

Table 5.1 The top 3 reasons for relinquishing dogs and cats

Reason for relinquishment	n giving up a dog	% of those who gave up a dog	n giving up a cat	% of those who gave up a cat
Animal had a lot of health issues	59	23.5	27	28.7
Animal was too aggressive/destructive	36	14.3		
I wanted them to have a better life	36	14.3	13	13.8
Not allowed to keep pet in new housing			15	16.0
Other reason	122	48.6	39	41.5

The majority of 'other' reasons provided were connected to having the pet put to sleep as a result of inoperable conditions (often due to old age) or poor quality of life due to ill health, usually on the advice of a vet. However, there were examples of pets being relinquished as they did not get on with/attacked another pet in the household, or due to change in living arrangements (marital break-up, moving in with parents where pet not allowed, moving country too distressing for pet).

RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

Other family demands were also cited as an explanation for relinquishment (having a new baby in the household, a child with serious health issues or a disability, or elderly relatives to care for). Changes in employment were also an issue for owners who felt it was unfair to keep an animal on its own for too long. Changes in housing sometimes meant that either people were only allowed to have one pet, or the accommodation was unsuitable for their pet. Finally, there were issues with the behaviour of rehomed/rescue pets that meant they were too difficult to manage. One participant's words best summarise this feeling of being *"underprepared for the challenges I am facing."*

WAS SUPPORT SOUGHT/ACCESSED PRIOR TO CONSIDERING RELINQUISHMENT?

Overall, 35% (n=135) participants reported that they had accessed support. Therefore, the majority (65%, n=248) had not. 38% (n=92) of those who had given up a dog and 34% (n=31) a cat, had accessed support to help them manage the challenges of caring for them. 10% (n=25) of the dog owners and 3% (n=3) of the cat owners had accessed support from the Scottish SPCA, 2% (n=6) and 3% (n=3) respectively, from Blue Cross, and 8% (n=19) and 11% (n=10) respectively, from another animal welfare charity. 20% (n=50) of those who had given up a dog and 19% (n=18) of those who had given up a cat had sought support from a veterinary practice.

Examples of other animal welfare charities from which support was accessed included Dogs Trust, PDSA, Cats Protection, Burmese Cat Society, CATFLAP, CPL, Cat Action Trust, Dalmatian Rescue, Breed Rescue Society, Angus Cat Rescue, Loving Homes Dog Rescue, Fairly Beloved Rabbit Care, and Edinburgh Cat and Dog Home.

Table 5.2 shows the types of support accessed by pet owners before relinquishing them. Please note the small sample size, especially for ratings of the support they accessed. The most common sources/types of support accessed were veterinary care, pet care support/rehoming advice, behaviour training support, and pet sitting/walking.

RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

Table 5.2 Support/services accessed & perceptions of them (top 5 highlighted)

Type of support	n (%*) accessed	n positive experience	n neutral experience	n negative experience
Help with veterinary care	65 (57.5%)	36	11	0
Pet care support/advice	41 (39.8%)	16	30	0
Rehoming advice	36 (36.0%)	10	9	5
Behaviour training support	35 (34.3%)	15	11	3
Pet sitting/walking	19 (19.2%)	10	5	1
Pet food banks	16 (15.8%)	2	5	2
Emergency short-term care (board/foster)	15 (15.5%)	4	5	1
Financial assistance for pet care	13 (12.7%)	7	4	2
Bereavement support	11 (11.0%)	4	5	1
Other	18 (11.6%)			

* % is valid percent (proportion of those who accessed support/services and answered the question relating to type of support (Yes compared with No))

Of the 383 people who answered the question asking if they had ever accessed any support to help them care for their pets prior to relinquishing them, 65% reported that they had not. The reasons for not accessing support, provided by 248 people are provided in Figure 5.1. 23% of the participants who had not sought support (n=58) chose to provide an 'other' reason, the majority explaining that there had been no need for external support. It was clear that they felt responsible for the animal but also had people to rely on for help if required. It was also clear, as Table 5.3 highlights, that giving up a pet is not easy. It was associated with sadness/distress for almost three quarters of the sample, and just over a third felt guilty/ashamed.

RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

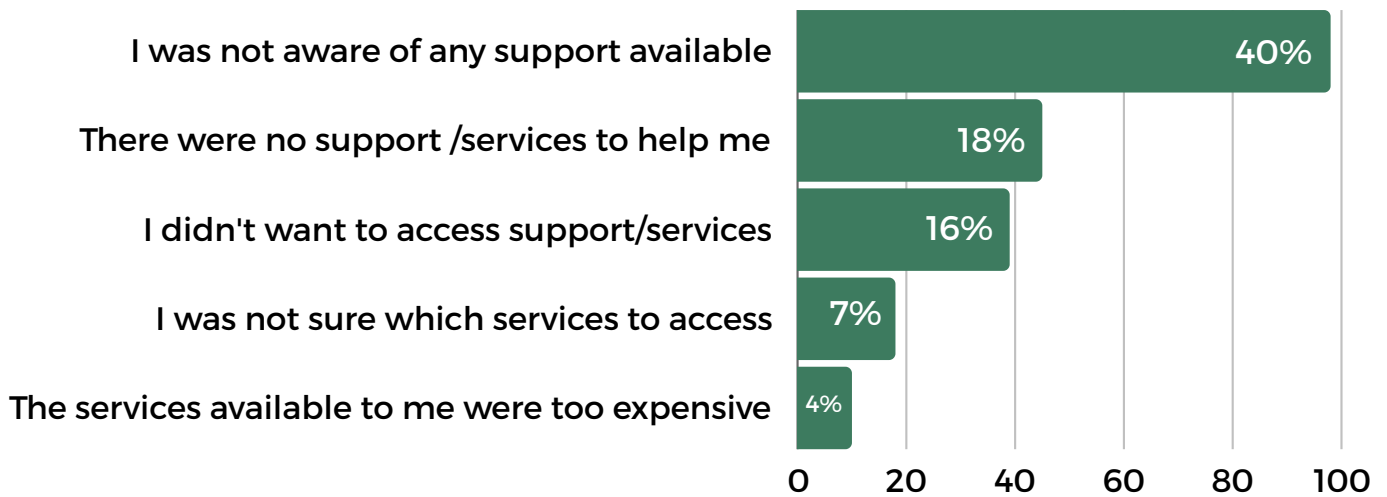


Figure 5.1 The five most common reasons for not accessing support/services (n & %)

Only 8 people who had given up a pet felt the coronavirus situation had, or may have, played a role. 10% (n=37) had sought support since giving up the pet (bereavement support for example), compared with 323 who had not. 57% (n=21) found the support 'very helpful', 41% (n=15) 'somewhat helpful' and 1 person 'not very helpful'. The next page highlights evidence from qualitative data relating to the emotional impact of giving up/losing a pet. It was common to feel 'heartbroken', but anger also featured. This was directed at partners/family for not being supportive, and was sometimes connected to feelings of guilt that they had not been able to do more for the animal.

Table 5.3 The impact of giving up a pet

Feelings experienced	n	% of sample
Relieved	63	15.9
Sad/distressed	289	73.2
Disappointed	66	16.7
Guilty/ashamed	140	35.4
Other feelings	65	16.5

RQS / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS - THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT

Significant loss

"Grief, because I had lost a beloved companion"

"Absolutely devastated. I had them by my side for nearly 16 years. She was the perfect dog. I miss her so much"

"Bereft. I still am. He was the best dog, and the grief of losing him has made it harder to bond with my current dog"

"Traumatised, lost, heart-broken"



Wanting the best for the animal

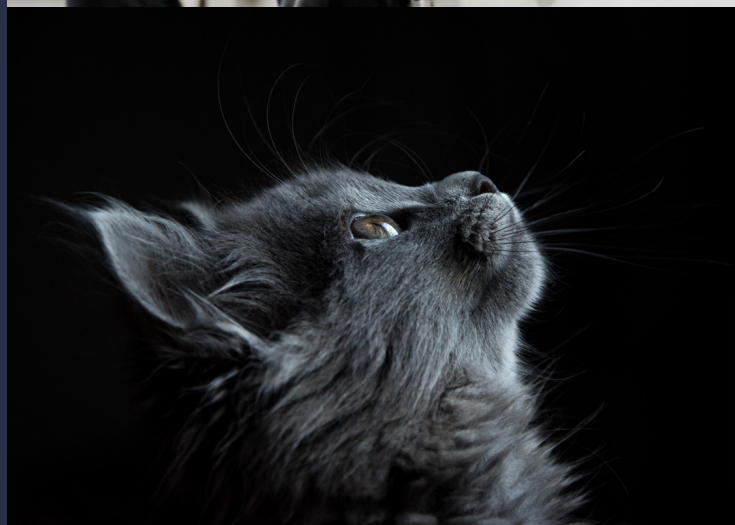
"Happy and sad but knew he would be well loved"

"Heartbroken that she couldn't be saved but we also knew it was the right thing to do"

"Sad but knew he was going to a really good home"

"Happy that he would have a better freer life"

"Glad he got a great home. Sad he was no longer mine. Relieved, I wasn't able for the heavy work involved"



Anger towards others

"Angry that I was put in the situation where I had to give them up"

"Heartbroken/angry. She was still fairly young as I got her as a kitten as company for my other adopted cat... I also had to pay to give her to the charity, that made the whole thing worse"

"Angry at my ex partner for not supporting or helping me"



RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

Table 5.4 shows where participants took their pets or left them when they gave them up. The majority selected 'other' for this question. This was largely due to the pet having to be put to sleep due to significant health issues, usually on the advice of a vet (i.e., the pet was not given up so much as taken away from them). The majority of the others took them to a local rehoming/rescue centre or gave them/sold them to a family member or friend.

Table 5.4 Where participants took/left their pets (three most common are highlighted)

Where given up/left?	n (%) of dogs	n (%) of cats
A local rehoming/rescue centre	43 (19.2%)	14 (15.6%)
The local veterinary practice rehomed them	5 (2.2%)	3 (3.3%)
Veterinary practice put to sleep (behaviour/financial)	17 (7.6%)	6 (6.7%)
A charity	6 (2.7%)	6 (6.7%)
Gave/sold them to a family member or friend	33 (14.7%)	19 (21.1%)
I left them at my previous home	2 (0.9%)	1 (1.1%)
I sold them online	3 (1.3%)	2 (2.2%)
Other	115 (51.3%)	39 (43.3%)



RQ5 / FACTORS INVOLVED IN RELINQUISHING PETS

WHAT SUPPORT/SERVICE MIGHT PREVENT RELINQUISHMENT?

Figure 5.2 shows the type of support that participants agreed would have been useful to them when they were struggling. It is interesting to note that a third of those who gave up a pet did not know what would have helped. A quarter of the sample provided additional information relating to 'other' support that would have been useful. However, the vast majority were people whose pets were suffering and therefore had to be put to sleep. They explained that nothing would have helped in their situation.

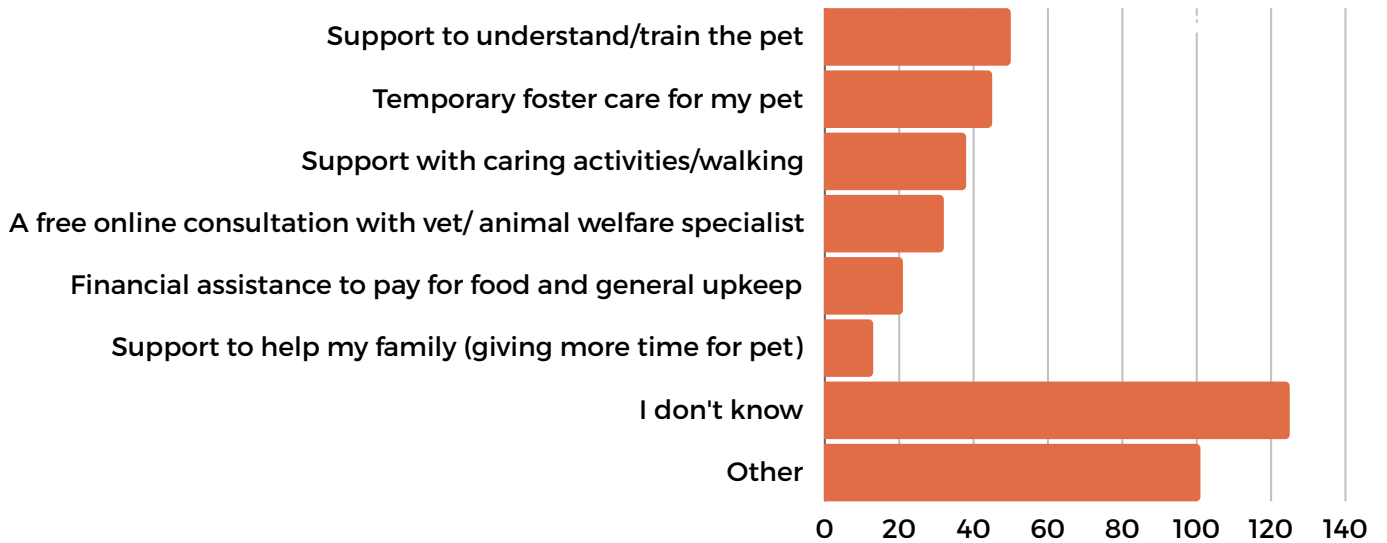


Figure 5.2 The type of support that participants felt would have been useful prior to relinquishment (n & %)



5 / SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS

This section synthesises key findings and draws out implications for future provision of animal welfare support across Scotland.



KEY FINDINGS & IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PROVISION OF OPTIMAL SUPPORT IN SCOTLAND

RQ1 PEOPLE EXPERIENCING THE GREATEST CHALLENGES WITH PETS

Summary of key findings

- 1.1 There were no marked geographical variations in pet challenges and support needs based on analysis of differences between local authorities.
- 1.2 Those with lower resources (indicated through employment status, receiving means-tested benefits and use of food banks) were most likely to experience challenges.
- 1.3 Lone parent families were experiencing greater challenges with their pets than other people/families.
- 1.4 Men reported greater challenges with their pets than women.
- 1.5 No differences in perceived challenges with pets were found as a result of participants' health status, disability, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity. However, data were not always sufficient to permit detailed analysis.

IMPLICATIONS

- While targeting specific areas of Scotland for intervention may be helpful if local welfare issues arise (e.g., incidents of cruelty), the findings suggest that a universal national approach to service provision is important, ensuring services reach those experiencing poverty or deprivation. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a useful tool, enabling providers to map deprivation geographically, and highlight areas within local authorities where residents are likely to be facing the most significant challenges with their pets.
- Lone parent families could be targeted for additional support and social marketing should ensure that information about services reaches them.
- Previous research shows that men may not seek support in times of difficulties with their own health and wellbeing. Accordingly, as they reported greater challenges with their pet/s than women, there is a case for promoting support to men directly through appropriate social marketing of services and inclusive imagery in campaigns.
- Further research is required to examine the influence of health status and the specific challenges experienced by highly vulnerable or marginalised groups (e.g., those who are homeless, or those with specific health/mental health issues who are highly attached to or reliant on the support offered by companion animals).



RQ2 SOURCING OF PETS AND ATTACHMENT

Summary of key findings

- 2.1 When pets are sourced, information about their care and welfare is not always provided, and this is more evident for cats than dogs. The advice focuses on meeting basic needs, and, to a lesser extent, the health background of the animal.
- 2.2 Overall, pet attachment is strong even when challenges arise, especially among dog owners.
- 2.3 There is a negative association between attachment to pets and scores on the pet challenges measures. This suggests that a strong bond may be a protective factor. Alternatively the experience of challenges with your pet may threaten the bond.

IMPLICATIONS

- There is a need to highlight the broader needs of pets from a positive welfare perspective. This might include supporting people's decision making in terms of purchasing pets and ensuring there is a good fit between the pet's needs and the resources/time the owner has to provide for these needs.
- Attachment to pets is a protective factor against animal harm and is negatively related to experience of pet owner challenges. Promoting attachment to pets and understanding of the human-animal bond as it relates to all species will be important in social marketing campaigns and animal welfare support.





RQ3 KEY CHALLENGES PET OWNERS ARE FACING

Summary of key findings

- 3.1 Increased cost of living and (to a lesser extent) a reduction in salary or joint income, are the most common reasons for difficulties meeting the costs of keeping a pet.
- 3.2 The most common challenges facing owners with dogs *and* cats relate to feeling anxious about what might happen to their pet and the pet's health issues. Similar proportions of dog and cat owners feel they have cost far more than expected and that changes in their pet had made them more difficult to look after.
- 3.3 Among dog owners, the need for lots of exercise/space outside is also a key challenge, while for cat owners, toileting issues are an additional problem.
- 3.4 People with dogs report greater challenges than those with cats, as a result of the animal's behaviour or health issues (animal-related challenges), or the personal, social or financial issues implicated in caring for the pet (owner-related challenges).
- 3.5 Only a small proportion of people had considered giving up their pet as a result of the challenges, and the majority felt their pet (dogs especially) had helped them during the coronavirus pandemic. A fifth of those with dogs and cats felt that having them had added to the stress associated with the pandemic.
- 3.6 People who felt responsible for the challenges they were experiencing with their pet/s scored higher on the pet challenges scale. The impact of the challenges was also stronger for them.

IMPLICATIONS

- It is important that potential pet owners are fully aware of all the financial costs associated with having specific pets and this should be a focus of animal welfare education.
- Outlining common health issues that affect specific types of pet (including as a result of aging) and how to deal with them would help owners anticipate and better prepare for the challenges.
- As pets are loved and viewed as members of the family, when they are ill or distressed this has a profound impact on owners. Services that support owners through difficult times (perhaps an extension of pet bereavement services), in addition to pet care/behavioural support for the animal, might alleviate associated stress and help owners cope better.
- The experience of challenges is often accompanied by a strong sense of personal responsibility for that animal. This may prevent people seeking support and should therefore be borne in mind when promoting support services.



RQ4 ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES

Summary of key findings

- 4.1 There is a lack of awareness of support services available to pet owners, but also a reluctance to seek support.
- 4.2 Whilst it was common for people to report that support was not needed, there are indications that assumptions are being made about eligibility for support. People often feel a strong sense of personal responsibility for the animal and express a desire to manage on their own.
- 4.3 Most support comes for veterinary practices.

IMPLICATIONS

- Pet owners appear largely unaware of the full range of services available to them, including those that could support them as opposed to provision specifically for the animal. Marketing strategies need to acknowledge and respond to the reluctance to seek support and the strong sense of personal responsibility people often feel for their pet/s.
- Collating information on where to source financial support for various purposes would be extremely useful and eligibility (as most people assume they will not be eligible).





RQ5 PET RELINQUISHMENT AND ITS EFFECTS

Summary of key findings

- 5.1 Dogs *and* cats are typically relinquished as a result of having health issues, or the owners wanting them to have a better life. Among dog owners, aggressive or destructive behaviour also plays a role.
- 5.2 A large proportion of the sample explained that they had to have their pet put to sleep as a result of severe health conditions and/or poor quality of life.
- 5.3 Other family demands or changes in people's living circumstances (employment, housing, or relationships/family composition) often lead to pets being given up. Active support with pet care may reduce relinquishment.
- 5.4 Pet relinquishment can be psychologically distressing for owners.

IMPLICATIONS

- To avoid stressful challenges and voluntary pet relinquishment, it is important that prospective pet owners are fully aware of all the costs (emotional, logistical and financial) associated with introducing an animal into the family.
- People should be encouraged to think carefully about the long term implications, and how a pet might fit the person/family if there are changes in living circumstances.
- Short online courses or an advice line on pet behaviour, health challenges and welfare needs might help people facing crisis challenges with pets that can result in relinquishment.
- Dog walking and other pet services and support (e.g., temporary foster care) would enable some pet owners to keep their pets.
- As highlighted earlier, services are required to support owners through difficult times and the process of relinquishment. There is potential for the pet bereavement service offered by Blue Cross to have a beneficial impact on Scottish pet owners who have lost or relinquished pets. If feasible, expanding this service might be beneficial.

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7 / APPENDIX

Additional data tables are presented here. The first shows the correlations between key scales in the survey (highlighted in the sections relating to RQ1 and RQ2). The second and third provide details of the specific problems experienced by two groups who reported greater challenges in our study: lone parents, and men.



Table 8.1 Pearson correlations between attachment, perceived challenges, and the impact of the challenges

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Attachment to pet	1	-.332**	-.165**	-.288**	-.204**	-.298**	-.259**
2 Animal-related challenges	-.332**	1	.631**	.654**	.531**	.909**	.658**
3 Owner-related challenges	-.165**	.631**	1	.609**	.585**	.854**	.671**
4 Animal-environment fit	-.288**	.654**	.609**	1	.672**	.815**	.688**
5 Support-related challenges	-.204**	.531**	.585**	.672**	1	.703**	.606**
6 Pet challenges overall	-.298**	.909**	.854**	.815**	.733**	1	.771**
7 Impact of challenges	-.259**	.658**	.671**	.688**	.606**	.771**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).



Table 8.2 Specific pet ownership challenges faced by men compared with women (top 5 highlighted in bold)

Specific challenge	men n (%)*	women n (%)*
They are a nuisance to others (e.g., makes a lot of noise, chases other animals, annoys neighbours)	19 (29%)	99 (21%)
My pet is aggressive towards, or is a threat to, other animals or people	16 (25%)	73 (16%)
They are destructive and damage things in the house/ garden/ enclosure	21 (32%)	74 (16%)
They have toileting issues	19 (29%)	81 (17%)
They need a lot of exercise or time/space outside their enclosure or sleeping accommodation	31 (48%)	172 (37%)
They have health issues	31 (48%)	252 (54%)
My pet does not seem happy	13 (20%)	52 (11%)
My pet shows other signs of distress	16 (25%)	107 (23%)
They are difficult to look after/train	16 (25%)	92 (20%)
My pet is hard to live with (e.g., they need a lot of attention)	20 (31%)	75 (16%)
I cannot afford the costs associated with feeding, vet bills or specialist equipment	19 (29%)	104 (22%)
Looking after my pet has cost me far more than I expected	26 (40%)	187 (40%)
I am not well enough or able to give my pet the care they need	12 (19%)	32 (7%)
I do not understand my pet's behaviour or communication	17 (26%)	67 (14%)
I am anxious about what might happen to them (illness, injury, escape, stolen)	40 (62%)	325 (70%)
It is difficult to look after my pet at the moment due to other family commitments	12 (19%)	43 (9%)
Having my pet prevents me from seeing my friends or having visitors	19 (29%)	59 (13%)
Changes in my living arrangements mean it is difficult for me to look after my pet	14 (22%)	41 (9%)
Personal/family challenges mean that my pet is not right for me/us anymore	13 (20%)	19 (4%)
Changes in my pet (in their behaviour/health) mean it is more difficult to look after them	27 (42%)	135 (30%)
I can't leave my pet in the care of other people that live with me	15 (23%)	68 (15%)
I do not have enough support to help me look after my pet	17 (26%)	53 (12%)

* The number and proportion of participants (male/female) who agreed or strongly agreed that the specific challenge applied to them

Table 8.3 Specific pet ownership challenges faced by lone parent households (top 5 highlighted in bold)

Specific challenge	n (%)*
They are a nuisance to others (e.g., makes a lot of noise, chases other animals, annoys neighbours)	19 (38%)
My pet is aggressive towards, or is a threat to, other animals or people	13 (26%)
They are destructive and damage things in the house/ garden/ enclosure	14 (28%)
They have toileting issues	21 (42%)
They need a lot of exercise or time/space outside their enclosure or sleeping accommodation	29 (58%)
They have health issues	38 (66%)
My pet does not seem happy	17 (34%)
My pet shows other signs of distress	23 (46%)
They are difficult to look after/train	21 (42%)
My pet is hard to live with (e.g., they need a lot of attention)	20 (40%)
I cannot afford the costs associated with feeding, vet bills or specialist equipment	24 (48%)
Looking after my pet has cost me far more than I expected	31 (62%)
I am not well enough or able to give my pet the care they need	11 (22%)
I do not understand my pet's behaviour or communication	18 (36%)
I am anxious about what might happen to them (illness, injury, escape, stolen)	37 (74%)
It is difficult to look after my pet at the moment due to other family commitments	14 (28%)
Having my pet prevents me from seeing my friends or having visitors	15 (30%)
Changes in my living arrangements mean it is difficult for me to look after my pet	14 (30%)
Personal/family challenges mean that my pet is not right for me/us anymore	10 (22%)
Changes in my pet (in their behaviour/health) mean it is more difficult to look after them	23 (50%)
I can't leave my pet in the care of other people that live with me	13 (28%)
I do not have enough support to help me look after my pet	13 (28%)

* The number and proportion of lone parents who agreed or strongly agreed that the specific challenge applied to them



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our on-line survey. Thanks also go to our partners, the Scottish SPCA and Blue Cross.

MORE INFORMATION

Please contact Dr Janine Muldoon if you have questions regarding this study.

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More information on our other research relating to human-animal relationships can be found on the Children, Adolescents and Animals Research (CAAR) website and on our Facebook and Twitter feeds.



caar

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/health/research/centres/cadp/child-animal-research>



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SCOTTISH SPCA
Scotland's Animal Welfare Charity



Pets change lives
We change theirs



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