

The Impact of Pet Loss on Psychological Well-Being and Coping among Pet Parents

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Abstract: ***Background:** The emotional bond between human caregivers and companion animals is a profound relationship that often rivals human attachments. However, when a pet dies, the resulting bereavement is frequently socially minimized or unacknowledged, leading to a phenomenon known as disenfranchised grief. **Objectives:** This study investigated the psychological impact of companion animal loss on pet parents in India. Specifically, it assessed the levels of psychological well-being, the intensity of grief-related distress, the types of coping strategies deployed, and the role of perceived social support in mitigating post-loss distress. **Methodology:** A quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational research design was utilized. Data were collected from a purposive sample of 96 primary caregivers (65.6% male, 34.4% female) who had experienced the death of a companion animal (cats: 35.4%, dogs: 32.3%, fish: 32.3%). The majority (87.5%) experienced sudden, unexpected pet deaths. Well-being was evaluated using the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, coping via selected items from the Brief COPE, and social support through the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. **Results:** The study revealed near-universal intense grief, with 95.7–100% of participants reporting persistent crying, loneliness, and functional disruptions. Psychological well-being was severely compromised, yielding a mean WHO-5 percentage score of 37.2%; significantly, 90.3% of the sample fell below the clinical well-being threshold, and 29.0% met the criteria for likely major depression. Furthermore, 96.8% of participants reported that their grief was minimized by others, confirming widespread disenfranchisement. Avoidance-based coping (distraction, denial, substance use, and self-blame) was the dominant management style. Correlational analysis demonstrated that attachment bond strength significantly predicted grief intensity ($r = .616, p < .001$), but uniquely showed a strong positive correlation with well-being ($r = .603, p < .001$), suggesting a protective, resilience-building role of continuing bonds. Perceived social support did not correlate significantly with well-being ($r = .070, ns$), indicating that general social availability is ineffective if it lacks grief-specific validation. **Conclusion:** Companion animal loss in India constitutes a major psychological stressor carrying high psychiatric risk. The near-universal experience of disenfranchised grief and heavy reliance on avoidance coping emphasize an urgent need for targeted, approach-oriented clinical interventions, culturally adapted pet-loss support networks, and increased public awareness to validate pet bereavement.*

Keywords: pet loss, disenfranchised grief, psychological well-being, companion animals, avoidance coping, human-animal bond, WHO-5, India