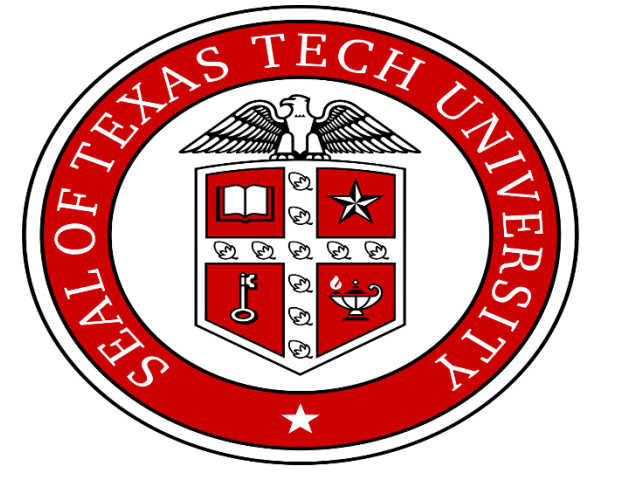
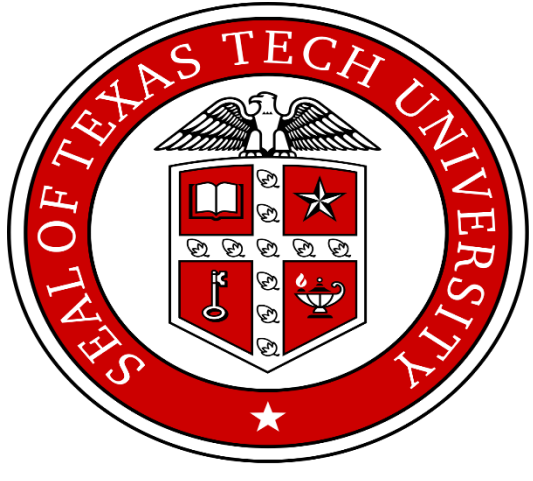


# Effect of Caring for Pets on the Well-being of Older Americans



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## Abstract

This study examines the effects of caring for pets on the well-being of older Americans using the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) and its associated Well-being Module (WBM).

The existing literature examines the relationships between pet ownership and life satisfaction, health outcomes, and psychological well-being but the findings are mixed (Blouin, 2012, McNicholas, 2014; and Gee et al., 2017). In addition, it does not examine the effects of engaging in pet care activity on experiential well-being.

A major contribution of this study is to examine how caring for pets affects the meaning individuals glean from an activity and how happy, sad, stressed, tired, and in pain they are during the activity.

The results show that caring for pets provides greater meaning than other activities. Pet care also reduces sadness compared to other activities.

The results also show that walking, exercising, or playing with pets/household animals increases reported levels of happiness and meaningfulness, and decreases stress compared to other activities.

## Methods and Materials

This study uses data from the 2010, 2012, and 2013 ATUS and its associated WBM. Pet care activity is obtained from the ATUS and the associated measures of experiential well-being (meaningfulness, happiness, pain, sadness, stress, and tiredness) come from the WBM.

The well-being measures are ordinal, ranging from 0 to 6. For the questions relating to happiness, pain, sadness, stress, and tiredness, 0 indicates not at all happy, in pain, sad, stressed, or tired, while 6 indicates very happy, in pain, sad, stressed, or tired. A 0 response in the meaningful measure indicates not meaningful at all, while 6 indicates very meaningful. Given the ordinal nature of these dependent variables, ordered probit models are estimated.

The key explanatory variable is an indicator variable for whether a person cares for animals or pets or not. In a separate analysis, an alternative explanatory variable which is an indicator variable for whether a person walks, exercises, or plays with animals, is examined.

The study applies replicate weights at the activity level using the successive difference replicates (SDR) estimation method.

## Conclusions

Caring for pets and walking, exercising, or playing with pets are more meaningful activities than other activities. Pet care reduces sadness compared to other activities. Walking, exercising, or playing with pets or household animals increases happiness and decreases stress relative to other activities.

### Ordered Probit Estimates of the Effects of Pet Care (1=yes) on Well-being

	Happiness	Meaning	Pain	Sadness	Stress	Tiredness
Not at all						
0	0.0039 (0.0160)	-0.0362*** (0.0085)	-0.0374 (0.0347)	0.0682 (0.0435)	0.0168 (0.0401)	-0.0084 (0.0282)
1	0.0009 (0.0038)	-0.0095*** (0.0025)	0.0003 (0.0003)	-0.0086 (0.0063)	0.0005 (0.0010)	-0.0010 (0.0036)
2	0.0016 (0.0065)	-0.0171*** (0.0049)	0.0022 (0.0018)	-0.0106 (0.0073)	-0.0006 (0.0017)	-0.0008 (0.0030)
3	0.0025 (0.0100)	-0.0325*** (0.0101)	0.0053 (0.0047)	-0.0147 (0.0098)	-0.0023 (0.0056)	0.0004 (0.0013)
4	0.0005 (0.0019)	-0.0188*** (0.0071)	0.0075 (0.0069)	-0.0115 (0.0072)	-0.0032 (0.0077)	0.0020 (0.0066)
5	-0.0018 (0.0075)	-0.0065 (0.0049)	0.0088 (0.0083)	-0.0100 (0.0061)	-0.0040 (0.0095)	0.0031 (0.0104)
Very						
6	-0.0077 (0.0308)	0.1206*** (0.0372)	0.0132 (0.0131)	-0.0129* (0.0072)	-0.0072 (0.0166)	0.0048 (0.0165)

Notes: Data are from the 2010, 2012, & 2013 ATUS & WBM. Marginal effects are shown above standard errors (in parentheses). Survey replicate weights are applied at the activity level. \*\*\*indicates significance at 1% level; \*indicates significance at 10% level. Each model includes household size, female, education, family income, number of children, marital status, age, education, white, Hispanic, and labor force status as additional explanatory variables. N = 39,713.

### Ordered Probit Estimates of the Effects of Walking, Exercising, or Playing with Pets (1=yes) on Well-being

	Happiness	Meaning	Pain	Sadness	Stress	Tiredness
Not at all						
0	-0.0523*** (0.0071)	-0.0462*** (0.0068)	-0.0459 (0.0333)	0.0447 (0.0336)	0.1654*** (0.0420)	0.0387 (0.0356)
1	-0.0151*** (0.0025)	-0.0126*** (0.0021)	0.0003 (0.0004)	-0.0054 (0.0045)	-0.0022 (0.0029)	0.0041 (0.0033)
2	-0.0277*** (0.0045)	-0.0230*** (0.0038)	0.0026 (0.0015)	-0.0067 (0.0054)	-0.0137** (0.0059)	0.0028 (0.0018)
3	-0.0533*** (0.0094)	-0.0453*** (0.0084)	0.0064 (0.0043)	-0.0095 (0.0073)	-0.0281*** (0.0088)	-0.0032 (0.0039)
4	-0.0245*** (0.0062)	-0.0281*** (0.0064)	0.0092 (0.0065)	-0.0076 (0.0056)	-0.0323*** (0.0085)	-0.0095 (0.0091)
5	0.0129*** (0.0029)	-0.0132** (0.0054)	0.0108 (0.0081)	-0.0067 (0.0049)	-0.0357*** (0.0081)	-0.0135 (0.0119)
Very						
6	0.1601*** (0.0290)	0.1683*** (0.0311)	0.0165 (0.0132)	-0.0088 (0.0060)	-0.0533*** (0.0101)	-0.0193 (0.0159)

Notes: Data source is the 2010, 2012, & 2013 ATUS & WBM. Marginal effects are shown alongside standard errors (in parentheses). Survey replicate weights are applied at the activity level. \*\*\*indicates significance at 1% level; \*\*indicates significance at 5% level. Each model includes household size, female, education, family income, number of children, marital status, age, education, white, Hispanic, and labor force status as additional explanatory variables. N = 39,713.

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