

The Association Between College Students Experiencing Animal Companionship and Their Overall Health

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Introduction

In recent years, there has been a significant decrease in the overall health among college students. College takes a large mental and physical toll on students, whether it be from course load, the student's major, or another factor. According to the American College Health Association's Executive Summary, 28% of students reported that stress was the most significant factor negatively impacting their individual academic performance.

The following research focuses on the niche group of people who are exposed to animal companionship while being a college student. For this study, the research was focused on the goal of answering, "what is the association between college-aged students experiencing animal their overall health?" To achieve this, the following must be described. The relationship between animal exposure and physical activity, the relationship between animal exposure and stress levels, the relationship between animal exposure and the prevalence of a history of mental health issues, the relationship between animal exposure and overall happiness, and the difference in mental health before animal exposure versus after.

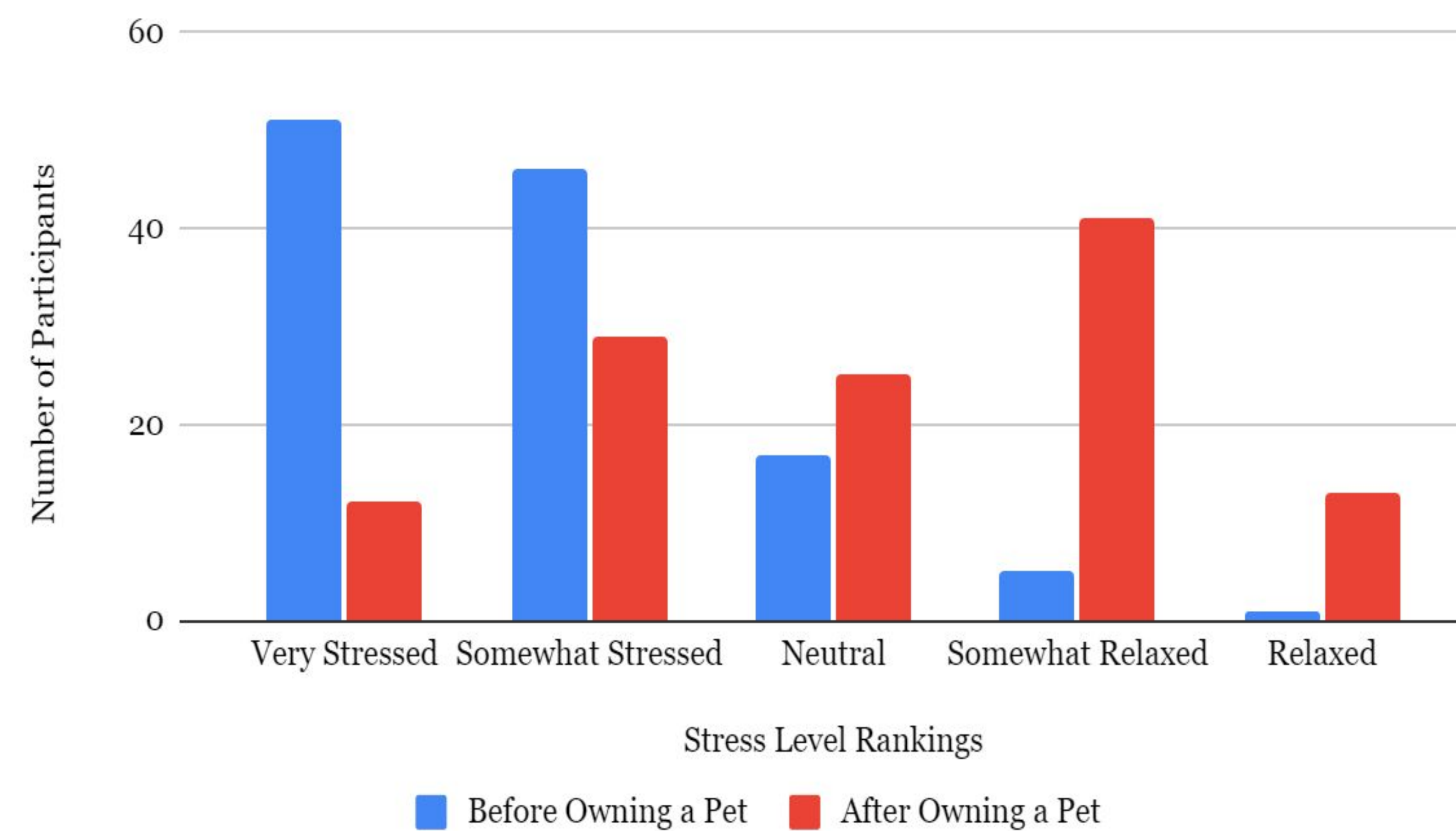
Materials & Methods

In this study, a questionnaire through Google Docs was used to test the sample population. The questionnaire was created using questions that addressed demographics, as well as more specific questions addressing mental and physical health. The questionnaire amounted to 120 participants, and each participant was recruited for this study through online means. The creators of this study used social media, email, and text messaging to spread the questionnaire to eligible study participants. Each study participant was required to currently attend college and have consistent animal exposure in order to be eligible to complete the questionnaire.

Data management and analysis for this study was conducted through Google Docs and Microsoft Excel, as well completing separate calculations for the results of the study. Google Docs provides comparative graphs and percentages for all 120 sets of data resulting from the answers through the questionnaire.

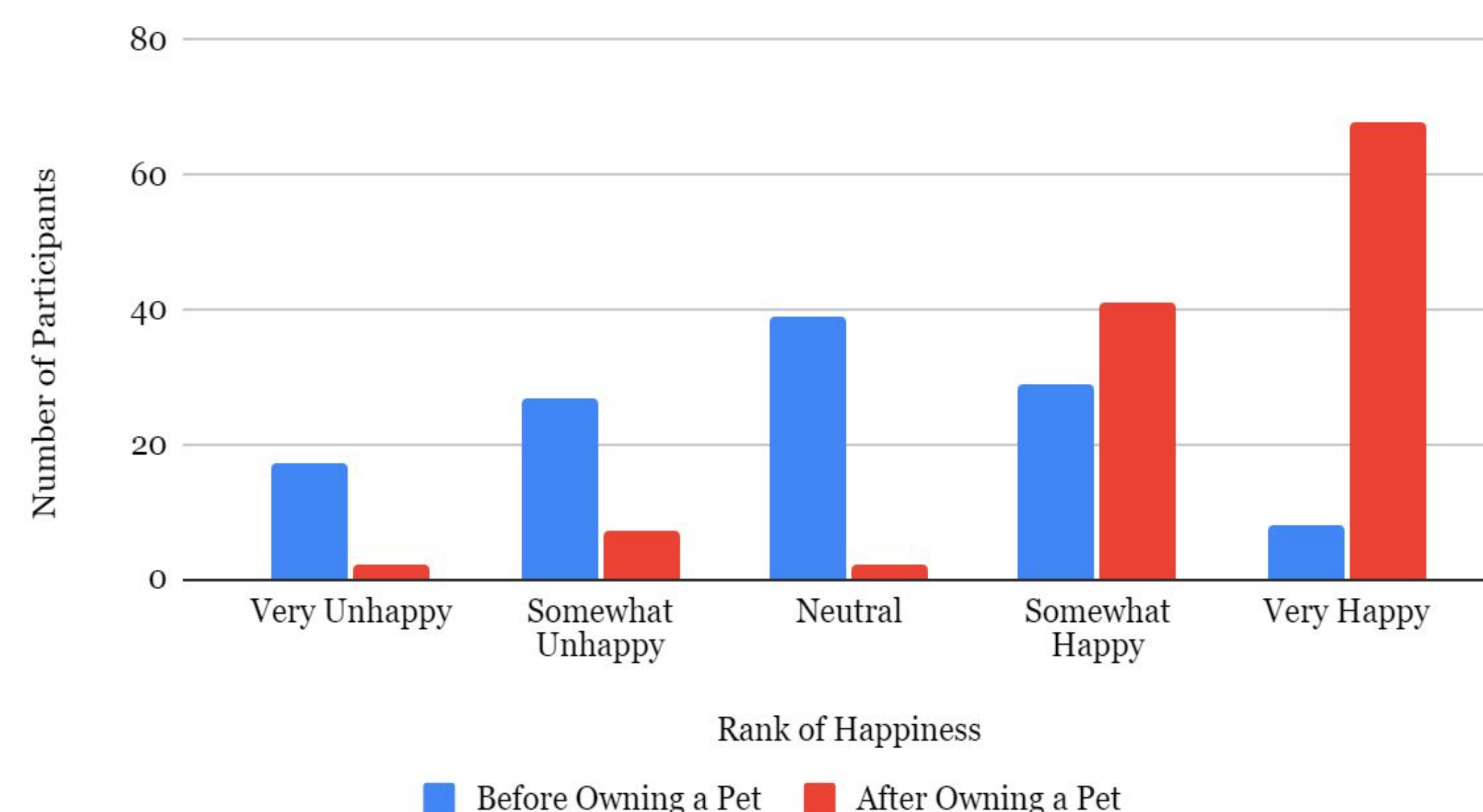
Results

Stress Level of Participants Before Owning a Pet Versus After Owning a Pet



Prior to animal companionship, 42.5% of participants were very stressed, and 38.3% of participants were somewhat stressed. Additionally, 14.2% of participants were very unhappy, 22.5% of participants were somewhat unhappy, and 32.5% participants were neutral. After companionship, only 10% of participants were very stressed and 24.2% of participants were somewhat stressed. 56.7% of participants were very happy and 34.2% of participants were somewhat happy. 43.0% of the participants' physical activity had increased. Overall, 85.9% of participants reported their health was positively affected after animal companionship.

Happiness of Participants Before Owning a Pet Versus After Owning a Pet



Discussion

The article "Reducing university students' stress through a drop-in canine-therapy program" is a study conducted by Binfet JT, et al in British Columbia, Canada. The results from this study concluded significantly lower stress levels after canine therapy intervention. This study supported our data and claim that participants had lower stress levels after animal exposure. "And in the Middle of My Chaos There Was You?- Dog Companionship and Its Impact on the Assessment of Stressful Situations," is a study that was conducted by Krouzecky C, et. al. This study concluded participants experience their pet companions as a helpful coping mechanism when dealing with stressful situations. This study can also support our data in relation between pets and lower stress levels. The strengths of our study included detail-oriented questions, an adequate number of participants to complete the Google Form, and self-reported answers in lieu of other research options due to online restrictions. Our study provided useful data to compare to scientific articles and supported the hypothesis. The weaknesses of our study include relying on self-reported answers of stress levels.

References

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