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Pet companionship and well-being of transgender individuals in India: A qualitative study

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Background: Transgender individuals confront societal dismissal and stigmatization linked to their gender identity, causing adverse effects on their mental health. In such circumstances, the companionship of pets can be a comforting and potentially therapeutic resource, aiding in the healing process from the diverse traumas faced by transgender individuals.

Objective: This study explores the effect of having pet as family member on the well-being of the transgender individuals considering that these individuals may find distinct advantages in the companionship of animals as a response to the adverse impacts of residing in environments influenced by cisgender bias.

Method: Semi-structured interviews were conducted on 11 Indian transgender individuals of age range 18 to 30 years having dogs or cats as pet animal. The interview questions were themed around their experiences related to the pet companionship.

Result: The interviews were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Five major themes emerged on the experiences of transgender people with respect to pet companionship which includes (1) receiving unconditional love and acceptance, (2) living in the moment rather than focusing on stressors, (3) provides a sense of responsibility, (4) commitment to daily routine and (5) facilitated social interaction.

Conclusion: The findings suggest a positive impact of having a pet as companion on the well-being of transgender individuals. Animals being non-judgmental provide a safe space to the transgender people along with imposing the need to ignore the gender minority stressor and adhere to the daily routine which adds to their overall well-being.

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