



Article

Remote-Workers and Their Furry Co-Workers: A Multimethod Exploration of New Avenues for Work-Related Exhaustion and Job Satisfaction

Salomé Elizabeth Scholtz

WorkWell Research Unit, School of Economic and Management Sciences, North-West University,
Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa; 22308563@nwu.ac.za

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic fast-tracked the remote-working trend and placed many employees in a unique situation: conducting work in the presence of household pets. Despite research on pet-friendly workplaces, little work is available on the impact pets may have on remote-working owners. A simultaneous multimethod study was conducted to explore the impact of pets on remote-working employees' work-related exhaustion and job satisfaction. The current study reports on the qualitative findings of the multimethod study. Using purposive sampling data were collected from remote-working pet owners ($n = 77$) through an online survey. Qualitative content analysis shows that pets served as a social resource to remote workers and influenced participants' willingness to continue remote working. Some remote workers also saw their pets as a demand. This study provides preliminary insight into pets' role in job satisfaction and work-related exhaustion through social support.

Keywords: COVID-19; coronavirus; employee productivity; job stress; occupational stress; pets; remote work; work exhaustion; work fatigue



Citation: Scholtz, Salomé Elizabeth. 2022. Remote-Workers and Their Furry Co-Workers: A Multimethod Exploration of New Avenues for Work-Related Exhaustion and Job Satisfaction. *Social Sciences* 11: 501. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11110501>

Academic Editor: Nigel Parton

Received: 14 September 2022

Accepted: 26 October 2022

Published: 31 October 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

The highly contagious COVID-19 virus and lockdowns prompted companies to use flexible strategies such as remote work to protect their employees (Lund et al. 2020). Remote work is made possible by technological advancements like audio or video conferencing and can hold various benefits for employees and their organizations (Wienclaw 2009). For example, employees have the advantage of schedule (Wienclaw 2009) or geographical flexibility (Choudhury et al. 2021) and less commute time (Bloom et al. 2015). At the same time, organizations benefit by having employees with higher productivity and less sick leave (Bloom et al. 2015). However, despite the benefits of remote work, the COVID-19 pandemic placed many employees in an unexpected and unique situation by locking down their work and family lives for an extended period (Powell 2020). Research has shown that the benefits for employees of voluntary remote work differ vastly from forced remote work (Allen et al. 2021). The pandemic also added new stressors, such as school closures or social distancing measures which caught most organizations and employees unprepared (Dunatchik et al. 2021). Pandemics commonly increase experiences of stress with fears of death, joblessness and social isolation during quarantine (IFRC 2008). Research showed growth in stress and other disorders across the globe during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pieh et al. 2020). For example, samples from Austria (see Pieh et al. 2020) showed increased symptoms of depression and anxiety during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. An Italian sample reported that during the pandemic, post-traumatic symptoms, insomnia and stress increased, and the situation was even direr for those employees who worked from home and cared for children who suffered from parental burnout (Thompson et al. 2020).

White-collar employees are more willing to remote work (Streitfeld 2020). However, these employees experience lower job satisfaction, higher work-family conflict, turnover

intention, emotional exhaustion and work stress when involuntary working from home (Kaduk et al. 2019). Work stress occurs when disharmony exists between the employee's ability to cope with work demands within a set time frame and the demands of the situation (Burman and Goswami 2018; De Silva et al. 2017). According to the job-demands-resources (JDR) model, employees' work conditions can serve as a job demand or job resource (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Job demands are aspects (social, organizational and physical) of work that require extended mental or physical effort to complete, leading to physical or psychological costs to the employee (Demerouti et al. 2001). Examples of job demands are increased workload, work responsibility (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004) and time pressure (Lesener et al. 2019). Emotional exhaustion is often the outcome of high job demands leading to employees feeling physically and emotionally overexerted (Maslach and Leiter 2008) and causing various mental and physical illnesses (Tokunaga 2011). On the other hand, job resources are aspects (social, psychological, physical or organizational) of work that limits job demands and costs, increasing employees' personal development and growth (Demerouti et al. 2001).

Social support has been shown to be a practical resource against emotional work exhaustion caused by the depletion of emotional resources through work responsibilities (Maslach et al. 2001; Thompson et al. 2020). Emotional, informational and instrumental support are all forms of social support (Daly and Baumeister 2009) and renders the work stressors less threatening and increases the employee's perception of their ability to deal with the stressor (Cohen and Wills 1985). Social support refers to the assistance or perception of formal or informal networks (Wedgeworth et al. 2017), promoting positive feelings of belonging or being cared for and limiting ill health in individuals (Daly and Baumeister 2009). Social support is therefore seen as a job resource comprised of social interactions provided by peers and supervisors that can increase work dedication, commitment (Bakker et al. 2003), whilst limiting work-life-conflict and turnover intention (Kossek et al. 2011). For example, academic institutions employed positive approaches, such as emotional support from others, to effectively deal with occupational stress during the COVID-19 period (Shen and Slater 2021). However, the required social isolation during lockdown increased work stress and lowered perceived remote work productivity and satisfaction (Toscano and Zappalà 2020).

Additionally, virtual support through technology provided fewer mental and physical health benefits than close physical proximity, further exacerbated by social distancing (Powell 2020). Recent research indicates that pets played an essential role in easing the overall stress during the COVID-19 pandemic by promoting physiological changes ("happy hormones") that made owners feel better (Gee et al. 2021). Studies also show that pets provided owners with the support they needed to lighten the impact of the changes caused by the COVID-19 lockdowns (Bowen et al. 2020). For example, an Australian study found pets to be a significant buffer against loneliness in live-alone adults during lockdown (Oliva and Johnston 2020). Consequently, many countries had a surge in pet adoptions during lockdowns (Barr 2020; Huang et al. 2020) as many new owners used pets for comfort and to ease loneliness (Oliva and Johnston 2020).

Household pets are often seen as part of the family (Tanaka et al. 2019). The type of pet can include any domesticated animal (mammals, amphibians, invertebrates, etc.), and the most popularly owned type of pet globally is the dog, followed by cats and fish (World Population Review 2022). Irvin and Cilia (2017) highlight pets' place in the family by discussing how pets are often used as abusive tools to manipulate or harm others in domestic abuse. They conclude that pets are not merely seen as family; they *are* family to the other family members (Irvin and Cilia 2017). Research has shown that pet owners often form stronger bonds with their pets than other family members (Beck and Madresh 2008). For example, older pet owners who live alone experience the same psychological health benefits as those living with families due to pet relationships (Taniguchi et al. 2018). Furthermore, pets serve humans' emotional needs (Serpell 2011), create social support (Casciotti 2014), improve overall health or sleep (Headey et al. 2008) and decrease stress

(Foreman et al. 2017). Pets can provide comparable companionship to humans (Serpell 2011) and show attachment behavior towards their owners (Wanser et al. 2019).

The benefits of the pet-owner relationship depend on the owner-pet attachment relationship, i.e., if the owners perceive the pet as supportive and fulfilling their human psychological needs (Kanat-Maymon et al. 2016). Pet-owner attachment is influenced by owner gender, length of ownership, other pets and type of pet (Smolkovic et al. 2012) and can influence both the pet and owner's emotional well-being (Solomon et al. 2019). Pets in strong owner-pet relationships provide a more significant buffer against stress for their owners than human partners or friends (Foreman et al. 2017; Hall et al. 2016; Lass-Hennemann et al. 2020). Moreover, strong attachment to a pet can resemble a caregiver-infant relationship (Payne et al. 2015), and owner personality can determine pet behavior (Finka et al. 2019). Research has investigated how different kinds of pets influence their owners (Machová et al. 2019); for example, research on dog owners shows they have higher life satisfaction than cat owners (Bao and Schreier 2016). According to Machová et al. (2019) horses increase owners' physical activity more than other pet types. At the same time, dogs have a more significant positive impact on pet owners' well-being than cats and other pet types (Amiot et al. 2022).

Differences in pet-ownership between countries show China was estimated to own 200 million dogs and cats in 2021 (Statista 2021b), and almost half of the Polish and Romanian households own a dog (Statista 2021a). In 2021/22, dogs were owned by 69 million American households, with 45.3 and 11.8 households owning cats and fish (World Population Review 2022). Brazil's pet owners own the most exotic animals (Statista 2022), and their pet ownership is most common among childless homeowners (Defelipe et al. 2020). Research also indicates that pet owners are mostly young, white, employed, married living with children in rural areas (Fraser et al. 2020). Other demographics have also been investigated for example, a small Irish study found domestic pet owners had higher educational attainment than exotic pet owners (Goins and Hanlon 2021).

Organizations have recognized the beneficial role pets play in their employees' work-life balance and wellness; consequently, some companies started 'pet-friendly workplaces' (PFWs). This trend in PFW is growing (Fronstin and Helman 2013) in small and large companies such as Amazon and Google (Wilkin et al. 2016). Amazon has invited employees to bring well-behaved pets to their offices and even provides employees with pet recreation, such as dog parks (Bishop 2017). These PFWs realized that pet initiatives fall under worksite wellness (Barker et al. 2012) and focused on adding a range of pet-friendly aspects, such as pet insurance and bringing your pet to work (Wilkin et al. 2016). These PFWs aim to enhance employee health and company recruitment, productivity, retention, and bottom-line results (Wilkin et al. 2016). Various studies have also investigated the effects of bringing your dog to work. For example, a quantitative survey by Barker et al. (2012) found no statistical difference in perceived organizational support or physiological stress. However, this study did show that perceived stress decreased throughout the workday for dog owners and work stress increased for non-dog owner-employees. Dog owners also experienced the same increase in stress levels throughout the day as non-dog owners when dogs were not brought to work (Barker et al. 2012). A more recent study by Etingen et al. (2020) shows that dog-assisted support programs improved healthcare workers' moods and lowered patient-related burnout facets and promoted job satisfaction (Crowe et al. 2018). Job satisfaction represents how a person feels about various intrinsic or extrinsic factors and whether they are satisfied with their job (Abad-Jorge 2018). Students from a Spanish university reported lower stress levels and increased social skills interacting with a therapy dog for one hour a week (Gill et al. 2019). A systematic review of service dogs in the workplace showed employees' productivity, health and workplace attractiveness increased when dogs were present (Hunter et al. 2019).

Hall et al. (2016) found that a female sample of employees who brought their dogs to work experienced improved general well-being, job satisfaction and feelings of control over their work. These studies encourage organizations to employ well-designed workplace pet

policies to reap the benefits of employee owner-pet relationships (Hall et al. 2016). These benefits may be even more significant in the current remote working context, where many of the disadvantages of PFWs are countered. For example, a pet that is kept at home with a remote worker will not be able to disrupt, cause conflict or endanger co-workers (for example, allergies, zoonoses, fall hazards, phobias or bites) (Foreman et al. 2017). This work arrangement will also avoid conflict due to cultural differences and fears for pet welfare (Foreman et al. 2017). Ikeuchi et al. (2021) investigated if USA remote-working employees' attitudes, physical activity and psychological well-being varied between pet-owners and non-pet owners. Their findings showed increased pet-owner interactions, more human socialization and physical activity. A recent Australian study by Oliva and Johnston (2020) also notes pets' role in alleviating remote-work stressors during the pandemic. Despite these benefits, employees also experienced increased pet distractions during work. Ikeuchi et al. (2021) did not find a relationship between positive or negative effects and pet ownership regarding work location. Their study encouraged further research to consider pet and employee personality and studies investigating the role of the owner-pet relationship in reaping the benefits of pets for remote-working employees.

1.1. Problem Statement

Currently, more employees are remote working, which will drastically change the future of work post-pandemic (Rigotti et al. 2021). Therefore, employers and employees are encouraged to consider what they've learned from their pandemic work experiences to devise strategies for the way forward to create new optimal workplaces (Makarius et al. 2021). Studies show that during the COVID-19 pandemic, pets played an essential role in providing social support to their owners (Martin et al. 2021). Various studies have shown the benefits of having pets at work (see Foreman et al. 2017). However, there is a lack of research investigating the effect of owner-pet relationships as job resources through support for remote working employees. A previous study by Ikeuchi et al. (2021) addressed the gap in research regarding pet companions and remote working during the COVID-19 lockdown. However, their study did not consider the owner-pet relationship to determine the benefits of pet companions during remote work. A study by Oliva and Johnston (2020) slightly considered pets' role in remote-working life as one of many factors. Interactions with close pets whilst remote working can be a potentially overlooked job resource for employees and organizations. Thus, the current study aimed to explore if owner-pet relationships influence remote-working employees' experiences of work-related exhaustion and job satisfaction.

1.2. Contributions

This study contributes insight into the effectiveness of owner-pet relationships for promoting remote working benefits and shows this relationship's impact on work exhaustion. Managers can use results from this study to improve work experiences of the new remote workforce and start devising PFW policies for those employees who may return to work to improve employee work experiences and, thereby, the organization's bottom line. Additionally, Foreman et al. (2017) reviewed dogs in the workplace, which showed that previous studies mainly researched controlled laboratory work settings with limited generalizability to real-life contexts. A few non-experimental studies have followed since Foreman et al. (2017); however, none have considered remote work following COVID-19 lockdowns and pet support. Therefore, this study contributes to the limited literature as research was conducted outside a controlled setting in the unique context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3. General Objective

The current qualitative study formed part of a larger simultaneous multimethod project that applied quantitative and qualitative research methods (Morse 2003). The overarching aim of the multimethod project was to explore the structural aspects, and the meaning participants attach to remote working with pets regarding job satisfaction and work exhaustion (Fielding and Fielding 1986). Therefore, the current qualitative study pro-

vides depth and opportunity for expanding and explaining experiences (Schutz et al. 2003). At the same time, the ongoing quantitative study (cross-sectional survey) creates a breadth of the experiences (Schutz et al. 2003). To achieve this aim the following research question was addressed: What is the influence of owner-pet relationships on work-related exhaustion, the willingness of remote workers to remain remote and job satisfaction?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The multimethod research design was used in this study. Multimethod studies can be presented as standalone or combined studies depending on the role of each method or the publication standards (Brewer and Hunter 2006). Initially, the qualitative section was expected to be used as a supplement to the quantitative results. However, due to the depth of responses provided by participants who completed the qualitative question, it was deemed appropriate to apply formal qualitative analysis in a standalone report (Brewer and Hunter 2006). A qualitative descriptive design was therefore followed, utilizing a pragmatist paradigm. Qualitative descriptive studies aim to create straightforward descriptions of participants' experiences (Sandelowski 2010) and are not focused or committed to a theoretical analysis of data (Doyle et al. 2020) or increasing conceptual understanding (Chafe 2017). This study's philosophical underpinning is pragmatism, which aims to address a problem's demands and not a set of methods, which is appropriate for multimethod and qualitative descriptive studies (Brewer and Hunter 2006; Schutz et al. 2003).

2.2. Sampling

Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling through international online pet communities or social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, pet forums and Facebook). There was no restriction on the sample country or animal type, and a variety of pet-type platforms (e.g., mammal, reptiles, etc.) were invited. The inclusion criteria for participation were (Kobus and Pietersen 2016): pet-owning remote-working employees from any employment sector that remotely worked (before, during or after the COVID-19 lockdowns) who had internet access. From the total ongoing multimethod sample ($n = 162$), a subset of ($n = 77$) participants completed the qualitative section of the survey. Sample demographics are presented in Table 1:

Table 1. Sample demographics.

Item	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	Mean	43	
	Mode	36/41	
	Median	42	
Gender *	Female	69	90%
	Male	7	9%
	Missing	1	1%
	Other	0	0%
Ethnicity *	White	68	88%
	Of colour	2	3%
	Indian	3	4%
	African	1	1%
	Other	3	4%
	Asian	0	0%
Highest qualification	Post-graduate degree	25	32%
	Degree (Graduate/Honours)	26	34%
	Diploma	15	19%
	High school	11	14%

* Note: Designations are used in line with the terminology of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 for designated and non-designated groups. No offence is intended.

2.3. Data Collection

The multimethod survey was placed on typeform.com to be completed by participants online at a convenient time. Typeform.com is an online software that generates surveys and applications (Typeform.com 2022). A general open-ended question was added to the end of the quantitative online survey where participants could respond in free text (Brewer and Hunter 2006). General open-ended questions are posed to obtain insight into participants' general experience regarding the topic of study and are standard practice when applying qualitative descriptive designs in survey research (Kim et al. 2017). Thus, the following qualitative question was posed at the end of the survey: Do you have anything to add regarding your experience as a pet owner and remote worker during COVID-19? Voluntary participants who wished to participate in the study were automatically de-identified upon agreeing to the informed consent form on the online survey platform Typeform.com.

2.4. Data Analysis

Following the qualitative descriptive design, conventional qualitative content analysis was used to describe participant experiences (Sandelowski 2000), which went beyond word frequencies and examined the meanings and themes of the text. The following (Table 2) stages of content analysis identified for qualitative descriptive studies were followed (Doyle et al. 2020):

Table 2. Descriptive qualitative analysis.

-
1. Sort/transcribe data.
 2. Create initial codes.
 3. Add comments or reflect on codes.
 4. Identify patterns and themes between codes.
 5. Use patterns for additional data collection is applicable.
 6. Elaborate or create generalizations on consistencies found in data.
 7. Link generalizations to existing knowledge or theories.
-

2.5. Research Procedure and Participant Context

After ethical approval had been obtained, the researcher invited potential participants by posting an invitation with the survey link on the identified social media sites. Interested participants could click on the survey link, which directed them to the online survey on Typeform.com. Upon clicking "Agree" to the terms and conditions, the participants could complete and submit their survey answers. Typeform.com anonymizes participants when they click on the link. Typeform.com presents anonymous data in a Microsoft Excel workbook format for data analysis.

Data for the qualitative study were collected from 31 January 2022 to 30 April 2022. Participants were instructed to complete the questionnaire at their convenience in an environment of their choosing. Invitations to the study were posted on various international social media groups/sites to allow all possible interested participants to take part in the survey.

2.6. Trustworthiness

To promote the trustworthiness of the collected data the following techniques were employed; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Credibility, i.e., the extent to which findings represent participant experiences was ensured by providing prolonged engagement with the data, a thick description of the phenomenon, purposive sampling and a well-established research method (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Generalizing findings from a qualitative study is not the aim of the method; however, readers can discern the transferability of findings to themselves or other groups. To provide readers with insight into the transferability of findings, we have provided a thick description of the phenomenon, participants and research design (Nieuwenhuis 2016). The dependability of the findings is promoted by providing insight into the application of the research design,

documenting changes and being transparent about the creation of codes and themes (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Inter-coder reliability was conducted, utilizing Microsoft excel, through consulting with a co-coder who analyzed the data set and ensured the accurate representation of the data (O'Connor and Joffe 2020). The co-coder was a well-published industrial and research psychology professor. Any disagreements between the coders were discussed and documented. Lastly, the researchers provided participant quotes, an audit trail of their methodological application and reflected on their position and presumptions with regard to the research study to enhance the confirmability of their findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016).

3. Results

Remote work preference and pet demographics were asked as part of the demographics section of the survey (Table 3). Most participants have been remote workers for 1–2 years (57%) and preferred remote working (71%) compared to other working arrangements. Most participants also had four or more pets, with dogs (60%) being the most popularly owned pet. Pets indicated in the “Other” category included a hamster, a parrot and one missing value. More than half (71%) of owners had their pets for five or more years.

Table 3. Remote working and pet ownership.

Item	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Willingness to remote-work	Not at all	1	1%
	Sometimes	4	5%
	Often	19	25%
	Almost always	53	69%
Remote working time	6 months or less	11	14%
	1–2 years	44	57%
	3–4 years	8	10%
	5 or more years	14	18%
Remote working preference	Home	55	71%
	Office	2	3%
	Both	20	26%
Pet amount	1	15	19%
	2	23	30%
	3	11	14%
	4 or more	28	36%
Kind of pet	Dog	60	60%
	Cat	37	37%
	Other *	3	3%
Time owned pet	Less than 1 year	4	5%
	1–2 years	5	6%
	3–5 years	13	17%
	5 or more years	55	71%

* All participants that selected “other” as a kind of pet also owned dogs or cats. Type of pet is based on total pets indicated and not participant amount.

Almost half of the participants (47%, f 77) in the ongoing multimethod study completed the open-ended question of the online survey. Data were coded into 22 codes, and categorized into three themes: Pets as a social resource, Remote work experience/perceptions, and Pets as a demand. Table 4 shows the identified codes and is further described in the subthemes below.

Table 4. Themes and codes.

Theme	Code	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Pets as a social resource	Happiness and meaning	19	15%
	Get through the day	3	2%
	Break	12	10%
	Physical activity	5	4%
	Calming/comfort	10	8%
	Stress relief	9	7%
	Social interaction	10	8%
	Productive	3	2%
	Motivation	2	2%
	Protection	1	1%
	Mental health	6	5%
Remote work experience/perceptions	Improved relationship	4	3%
	Luxury/gift	2	2%
	Proximity	4	3%
	Better compared to the office	1	1%
	Stress from being away	3	2%
	Enjoyed remote-working	7	6%
	Hybrid	3	2%
	Guilt/pets benefit/neediness	7	6%
	Prefer remote work due to pets	6	5%
	Balance	2	2%
Pets as a demand	Stress increase	7	6%

3.1. Theme 1: Pets as a Social Resource

Overall, participants reported their pets contributed to a positive remote-working experience by decreasing stress, promoting positive feelings, breaks, mental and physical health and providing social support, motivation and productivity. These five subthemes are presented below:

Decrease work stress. The most common experience expressed by participants (Table 4) was that their pets served as a resource in alleviating work stress, providing comfort and creating a calm work environment. For example, “having access to my pets during the day definitely helps with stress management” (P45), and “whenever I get stressed, I go get a little squeeze in from one of the fluffs [pets], and I feel much better” (P8). Participant 55 adds that “remote working is much more comfortable when I have my pets lounging beside me”, and “if I’m feeling stress[ed], I’ll step away from the computer and walk over to a cat and dote on him or her. It releases tension and if I pick up the cat, hold it, and it purrs, it’s very calming” (P2). Pets, therefore, “add joy and [the] work environment is calmer” (P14) for some of the sampled participants.

Positive feelings. General positive feelings were reported in relation to remote working and pets. Participant 3 felt that “having my pets close to me makes me happy” (P3), “they are great work partners and make me smile every day” (P7) and “my animals love helping me with my work and provide countless moments of joy and laughter throughout the day!” (P19). Furthermore, pets made owners feel accepted and valued while working from home: “It’s good to have my pets who give me unconditional love and who love me being home” (P20) and “my dog is crucial in making me happy and [feeling] valued” (P73).

Breaks. Prompts to take breaks were seen as crucial beneficial roles pets played in supporting their remote working owners; “my cat gets in my lap when he senses I’m stressed with a work call or task. It sometimes forces me to take [a] break, which is actually really needed. I don’t get that when I’m physically at the office” (P4). Participant 29 noted that their pet “... would signal me if I have not taken a break in a long time, by bringing me a toy”. Pet owners also expressed that they would take fewer breaks whilst remote working, if they did not own a pet; “I definitely take more breaks because of my dogs, since they bother me to go play about twice a day. Without them, I’d take less breaks a day” (P65). These breaks with pets was also considered different and more fulfilling than breaks without a pet; “A 5 min break that involves a chin tickle and a fluffy snuggle is better/more enriching than an hour long break that doesn’t” (P32).

Mental and physical health. Remote workers commented on the various ways in which pets supported their mental and physical health. For example, in the case of mental health, participants stated, "... my pets help keep me sane" (P70), "... having a pet has really improved my mental health" (P11) or "my pet gives me a sense of sanity when my work becomes overwhelming ..." (P75). Participants also highlighted the role of their pets in their mental health during the "... overwhelming virtual era of COVID and its overly-connected remote working culture. His [pet] absence has been absolutely devastating and brought into focus the profound positive impact he had on my mental wellness (and physical wellness, too) during this time." (P53). Participant 52 adds, "during the lockdown phases, my dogs really gave comfort and support, also assisting with improving mental health ...".

In addition to improving mental health, taking breaks with pets also increased participants' physical health. Participant 33 said, "having a pet I've noticed I take more breaks meaning my body is getting the movement it needs", and "my pet forces me to get up from my desk a few times a day to feed them or play with them ... " (P66). Lastly, two participants mentioned their pets' role in protecting them whilst working from home. For example, participant 71 stated that their "... dog sits next to my pc when I'm working. He keeps me company and protects me!".

Social support. Pet owners saw their pets as social companions who helped them get through their work day as they; "... often talk to my cats" (P14), "I always have company" (P18) and "I love having company working remotely and being able to take a tea or lunch break and be with my animals" (P39). Pets also combated the feeling of isolation and were seen as "... alleviating loneliness" (P52) from working at home. Participants further commented; "I enjoy having my dogs around for company as I am self-employed and home alone" (P37), "having them [pets] around me while working makes me feel less remote" (P72), and "I like knowing that my dog is around the house" (P24). Participant 5 adds that their pet not only provided companionship but also created opportunities for socializing with others: "having a pet relieves isolation, both from their company and neighbors who want to greet them when we're outside".

Motivation and productivity. Some participants made specific reference to their pets' support in motivating them during their workday; for example, "when I feel disheartened or demotivated, I play with them or bother them, and I feel better" (P70). Some pets were seen as an owner's "... Greatest motivation" (P76). Encouraging owners to take breaks, as stated above, and move around also increased work productivity "I am more productive and get more activity by taking breaks to go outside with my pets or interact with them in the house" (P56).

3.2. Theme 2: Remote Work Experience/Perceptions

The second most popular theme that was found from the data focused on how participants experienced remote working with their pets compared to other work arrangements such as hybrid work (i.e., alternating between the office and home). Results from the sample that completed the qualitative section of the survey concur with the frequency indicated in Table 3, namely that the majority expressed the desire to continue remote working. Participants' responses concerning their work arrangements are presented in the following sub-themes:

Remote working with pets. Those owners who stated that they preferred remote working were "very happy to work remotely as I get to spend more time with my fur child in the comfort of my own home" (P13) and "wish working remotely could be permanent" (P31). Remote working with pets was seen as "an immense gift" (P2) and a "luxury" (P15) by some participants. Some owners even consciously chose or preferred remote working positions to stay home with their pets. Participant 6 highlighted this decision in that "... the primary reason behind my most recent job change was finding something that allowed me the freedom to work from home and travel with my pups" and "I prefer working from home because I can be with my cats all day" (P16).

Pet benefit. Working at home was beneficial not only for participants but also for their pets' training and care. Participants stated that they were able to "... monitor her [pet] activity and condition better than if I were away all day" (P57). Participant 61 described how working at home with a sick pet helped them "... focus on work and get my projects done, because she [pet] was in the room with me, sleeping on the floor. If I had been in the office, I would have been mentally consumed with thinking of her [pet] and if she was ok and probably would have missed work and definitely been less productive" (P61).

Hybrid working. Despite the majority of participants indicating they preferred working from home (Table 2), there were some participants who chose a mixed work schedule to full-time remote working. Participants who answered the qualitative question provided some insight into their willingness to have a hybrid work arrangement; Participant 67 felt that they were "glad to be able to go to the office some days a week. Liked having the dogs close when I was at home". Participant 68 adds that they "... enjoy working from home and from the office".

In addition to enjoying working at both work and home, some participants stated that there was a downside to owners and pets when they returned to work in a hybrid arrangement. This downside included feelings of guilt when leaving pets at home: "Since the dogs are only alone two work days a week, they have developed separation anxiety and guilt on my side for when I do leave the house. I love my hybrid work schedule, loving the extra time at home with the pooches, but also seeing my colleagues every second day, but when I leave the house I feel so guilty that the dogs are alone. A lot more so than before COVID" (P36). Participant 10 adds that they "... stress when I have to be away from my pets" (P10).

Creating balance (create, unbalanced, experiences). Some participants noted the importance of balancing work responsibilities and pet needs as remote workers. Participants attempted to create routines where both work and pet needs could be met: "You need to find a balance between the time of you work and your pet. You need to figure out a routine of when you feed/clean/ play with your animals and balance that with your work" (P26). Finding balance was beneficial for owners and their pets: "It's of utmost importance to keep balance between work and home. However, our pets don't understand that, we need to ensure that there is time for them, work and ourselves. It's therefore just as important to consider the time spent at home creates a routine within our furbabies, and is very likely to cause separation anxiety issues if we are out and about or have to resume to back into the office" (P43). Despite the challenges associated with remote working with pets, some participants still preferred remote work over returning to the office "working remotely has its challenges, but I am more productive working from home than working at the office" (P49).

3.3. Theme 3 Pets as a Demand

Despite most participants seeing their pets as a benefit and resource of remote-working life, some respondents felt their pets were a source of added stress. This added stress came from distraction, interruptions and an increased need for attention from pets. For example, some owners experienced their pets as a distraction "kittens are a huge distraction to remote work" (P47), "misbehaving" (P49) and interrupting "we have dogs for safety reasons and they bark whenever there is someone in the street, but this interrupts my concentration when working at home" (P63). Participant 77 adds that "they cause stress when they want to join a zoom meeting!". Another participant felt that they are "... less productive when working remote because I'd rather cuddle my furbabies" (P59). Working from home also increased pressure on pet owners as it "... makes my pets more needy" (P68), and "my dogs think I am home only to cater to their needs. They have become a lot more demanding" (P23). One participant felt remote working negatively affected both the pets and work: "While I believe that pets bring a lot of joy to my life, caring for them while remote working can be a challenge. I often feel like I'm not giving my best to my work nor my pets" (P38).

4. Discussion

The ongoing multimethod study aimed to investigate the influence of owner-pet relationships on work-related exhaustion, the willingness of remote workers to remain remote and job satisfaction. The qualitative data of this study were analyzed, and three themes were identified: Pets as a social resource, Remote work experience/perceptions and Pets as a demand.

Theme 1 showed that pets serve as a job resource for most participants in terms of informal social support. Pets fulfilled all aspects of social support described by theory in that they promoted positive feelings, mental and physical health and feelings of belonging (Daly and Baumeister 2009). Moreover, participants reported that pets' social support motivated them, made them more productive and got them through the day per psychological and social support's role as a job resource (Bakker et al. 2003; Demerouti et al. 2001). These findings reinforce previous research that found that pets are a source of emotional support (Meehan et al. 2017) and provide physical and social interaction as well as entertainment or comfort during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Applebaum et al. 2021; Nieforth and O'Haire 2020; Oliva and Johnston 2020). In addition to providing support, owners also stated that seeing, touching, or having pets close to them helped them cope with work stress. This finding contributes to previous stress research where the presence of pets was seen as a stress buster (Katcher 1981). In some human pet studies, interacting with a familiar pet has also been associated with releasing oxytocin, which lowers stress (Beetz et al. 2012; Martin et al. 2021). By providing owners with a calm work environment and lowering stress, pets create positive extrinsic and intrinsic work environments for remote workers.

Furthermore, the role of pets in promoting breaks and physical activity could have contributed to the overall positive experience reported by participants, as taking breaks can increase job productivity and effectiveness by addressing basic needs such as hunger (Brennan et al. 2019). Overall the positive feelings experienced by pet-owning remote workers concur with those experienced by employees in PFW who had increased health and social interaction (Wilkin et al. 2016). Junça-Silva (2022) adds that attachment to a pet increases feelings of security, which can be beneficial in the work context. These findings may be helpful to remote workers, as remote working can be threatened by a lack of physical activity, feelings of belonging and social interaction (Grzelczak 2021).

Theme 2 provided insight into the reasons behind this sample's inclination to continue remote working in addition to the social support listed in Theme 1. Theme 2 showed that pet owners expressed joy when remote-working and saw their interaction with pets due to remote working as an added benefit or luxury for themselves and their pets. Ipsen et al. (2021) also explored the willingness to continue remote working and cited an opportunity to focus on work tasks and family as possible reasons. In this sample, pets were often referred to as family (Beck and Madresh 2008; Wilkin et al. 2016) and as a reason to find employment that allows for remote working. The majority of specific samples (e.g., North American) have pets and are more inclined to apply for jobs that may offer access to their pets through PFW policies or remote working (Linacre 2016). A recent overview of news articles suggests that providing this benefit to pet owners can be a critical recruiting tool and may become a requirement for some employees (e.g., Business Wire 2022). Research by Junça-Silva (2022) supports the importance of PFW for employment after the COVID-19 pandemic and found that it increased employee organizational identification, which improved life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Consequently, the inclusion of PFW is encouraged for retaining and recruiting employees (Junça-Silva 2022).

However, despite the positive experiences of remote working for this sample, recent research has also found that being unable to see colleagues, leave the house, or have poor work conditions were disadvantages of full-time remote working (Ipsen et al. 2021). On the other hand, hybrid work, where participants alternate between home and the office, is likely to become the new norm for some employees (Beck and Hensher 2022; Wang et al. 2020). Participants from this study who preferred this hybrid schedule enjoyed the fact that

they could see their pets and colleagues during a work week. However, pet owners may experience added difficulty with this work arrangement as this sample experienced owner guilt, lack of care and disrupted concentration at work when leaving pets at home. This difficulty highlights the importance of incorporating PFW policies when employees are required to return to the office.

For those pet owners working from home, creating a balance between work and pet life by establishing routines where both work and pet needs could be met was important. Finding a balance between work and home was a common theme during remote working due to COVID-19, and researchers referred to this balance as multitasking (Xu et al. 2021). This form of multitasking can influence employees' work-life balance (Weintraub et al. 2019) and job satisfaction (Conte et al. 2019). Pets were undoubtedly one of the aspects that required some multitasking by participants in this sample, as they tried to care for their pets and complete their work simultaneously. This multitasking was often a challenge for both owners and pets; however, this challenge was still met with an air of positivity for most participants.

The select few participants who struggled to balance or experience their pets as a demand in Theme 3 saw them as creators of disharmony between their work demands and work situation (Burman and Goswami 2018). Pets would often interrupt, distract, or require more attention than the remote workers could provide during work hours, making the work conditions a job demand and not a resource (Bakker and Demerouti 2007). Distraction and interruptions may lead to increased physical or psychological effort from the remote worker to achieve their work goals and emotional exhaustion (Maslach and Leiter 2008). Research has noted pets as a workplace distraction and a possible pitfall of PFW (Ikeuchi et al. 2021; Wilkin et al. 2016). The current study adds to the literature and shows that it may also occur in remote-working contexts. However, other research shows these interrupting pets provided some entertainment to co-workers who enjoyed seeing owners' pets in their zoom meetings (Oliva and Johnston 2020). The attachment between owner and pet, if pets are well-behaved or the influence of job demands of the owner may provide more insight into whether the owner experiences a pet requiring attention as an interruption or a break prompt such as in Theme 1.

Remote working is seen as a lasting transformation of the workplace fast-tracked by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, up to 50% of employees became remote workers (Bamieh and Ziegler 2022), and more companies are likely to follow some form of a working-from-home arrangement to uphold work flexibility (European Commission's Science and Knowledge Center 2020). This study's demographic data supports this reality in that most of the participants from the sample have been remote workers since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns (last 1–2 years) and are willing or prefer to continue remote working. The high amount of dog and cat owners also concurs with global statistics on pet ownership (World Population Review 2022). Lastly, this study shows that pets play an essential role in pet-owners' willingness to remote work and serve as a social resource that combat job demands such as stress.

5. Practical Contribution

To optimize workplaces post-COVID, employers are encouraged to learn from employee experiences, especially under the higher productivity strain of combating the negative economic impact of the pandemic (Makarius et al. 2021). Consequently, attention to Work-Life Balance aspects that could lessen the pressure on the workforce under these demands is needed (Gorjifard and Crawford 2021). The current study answers this call and shows that remote-working employees experienced pets as a social resource and a determining factor or luxury in their employment. Therefore, organizations are encouraged to consider pets in their policies in recruiting and retaining their employees. For example, implementing PFW policies such as veterinary care, bereavement leave or 'bring your pet to work day' (Wilkin et al. 2016). These policies may help employees and their pet's transition to hybrid or full office work schedules and provide attractive employment.

Additionally, organizations can highlight the role furry co-workers play in supporting those employees who can stay in a remote-working arrangement to reap the benefits for all parties. Lastly, this study provides research knowledge into remote-working experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the positive features of this qualitative study, it has some limitations to address in future research. The first limitation of this study is that it only provides insight into a phenomenon based on one section of the ongoing multimethod research. The quantitative part of this study will provide more breadth on the impact of owning a pet on remote workers' job satisfaction and exhaustion. However, the large sample of participants who completed the qualitative section of this study still provided interesting and valuable insight into their experiences. The second limitation is that the current purposive sample mainly consisted of white females who own four or more pets, making the sample homogenous. Future research should therefore endeavor to include a more heterogeneous sample.

Furthermore, this sample only included current pet owners which may create sample bias. Therefore, the quantitative section of this sample will attempt to include non-pet owners, and future studies on the topic are encouraged. Despite controlling for pet attachment and behavior in the larger study, the current qualitative analysis indicates that more survey questions should be added that focus on job demands and the misbehavior of pets in the quantitative study. Lastly, participants gave data online without the opportunity for further research probing or clarification on their answers, which is recommended for future research.

The current study provides a preliminary look into the experiences of remote-working pet owners and should be used as a base for further research. For example, some research shows the impact of marital status and children on the attachment of owners and pets and can be investigated as a possible factor in the remote-workers perception of pet support ([Barker et al. 2012](#)). Other individual attributes, such as personality, should also be considered in future quantitative research. It may also be valuable to know which tactics pet owners use to balance remote work and pet needs to assist other pet owners. The current sample indicated that pets played a significant role in their decision to remote work; however, future studies can compare different factors deemed beneficial to remote workers to determine the weight pets carry in employees' decisions. The pets that participants in this sample owned were primarily dogs and cats (97%); it may be intriguing to see the experiences of owners who own other types of pets as well as indoor vs. outdoor pets. Reporting on the reasons for pet adoption may also provide different insights. Participants' country may also influence their lived experiences with their pets, mainly since culture may influence attitudes towards pets and countries addressed lockdowns and remote working differently. Lastly, we recommend comparing results from remote-working pet owners to that of PFW employees to determine the impact of remote vs. office work.

7. Conclusions

From the current qualitative findings of this ongoing multimethod study, it can be concluded that pets are a significant social job resource for some remote-working pet owners, which may influence job satisfaction and lower work exhaustion. Thereby supporting pets as family members who can assist in stressors, such as sudden changes in work and family life. However, differences between pet owners and their job demands may affect their experience of pets as a resource. Moreover, various pet-owner demographics that could influence pet-owner experiences have not been addressed by the current study which should be considered by future research. The current ongoing quantitative study can be adapted to include these demographics and may clarify pets' impact on work satisfaction and work-related exhaustion.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical clearance (NWU-00552-22-A4) from the Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa on 31 January 2022. Participants were provided with informed consent forms before taking voluntary part in the study to describe the purpose, extent and data access of their participation.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by Economic and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee (EMS-REC), North-West University (NWU-00552-22-A4 on 31 January 2022).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is available on figshare: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20166395.v1> (accessed on 14 September 2022).

Acknowledgments: Leon T. de Beer is acknowledged for acting as co-coder.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Abad-Jorge, Ana. 2018. Factors impacting job satisfaction among female predominant allied healthcare professionals: Focus on dietitian/nutritionists, occupational therapists and respiratory therapists. In *Job Satisfaction: Influencing Factors, Gender Differences and Improvement Strategies*. Edited by L. Diaz and R. Rhodes. Hauppauge: NOVA Science Publishers, pp. 1–69.
- Allen, Tammy, Kelly Merlo, Roxanne Lawrence, Jeremiah Slutsky, and Cheryl Gray. 2021. Boundary management and work-nonwork balance while working from home. *Applied Psychology: An International Review* 70: 60–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Amiot, Catherine, Christophe Gagné, and Brock Bastian. 2022. Pet ownership and psychological well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Scientific Reports* 12: 1–14. Available online: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-10019-z> (accessed on 12 September 2022). [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Applebaum, Jennifer, Carlyn Ellison, Linda Struckmeyer, Barbara Zsembik, and Shelby McDonald. 2021. The impact of pets on everyday life for older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Public Health* 9: 292. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Bakker, Arnold, and Evangelica Demerouti. 2007. The job demands-resources model: State of the art. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 22: 309–28. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bakker, Arnold, Demerouti Evangelica, and Wilmar Schaufeli. 2003. Dual processes at work in a call centre: An application of the job demands—Resources model. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 12: 393–417. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bamieh, Omar, and Lennart Ziegler. 2022. Are remote work options the new standard? Evidence from vacancy postings during the COVID-19 crisis. *Labour Economics* 76: 102179. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bao, Katherine, and George Schreer. 2016. Pets and happiness: Examining the association between pet ownership and well-being. *Anthrozoös* 29: 283–96. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Barker, Randolph, Janet Knisely, Sandra Barker, Rachel Cobb, and Christine Schubert. 2012. Preliminary investigation of employee's dog presence on stress and organizational perceptions. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management* 5: 15–30. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Barr, Sabrina. 2020. Coronavirus Pandemic Sees Huge Increase in Dog and Cat Adoptions. Available online: <https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/coronavirus-dog-cat-pet-adoption-battersea-rehome-covid-19-a9426741.html> (accessed on 10 September 2022).
- Beck, Lisa, and Elizabeth Madresh. 2008. Romantic partners and four-legged friends: An extension of attachment theory to relationships with pets. *Anthrozoös* 21: 43–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Beck, Matthew, and David Hensher. 2022. Working from home in Australia in 2020: Positives, negatives and the potential for future benefits to transport and society. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice* 158: 271–84. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Beetz, Andrea, Kerstin Uvnas-Moberg, Henri Julius, and Kurt Kotrschal. 2012. Psychosocial and psychophysiological effects of human–animal interactions: The possible role of oxytocin. *Frontiers in Psychology* 234: 2–15. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Bishop, Todd. 2017. Dog-Friendly Amazon Plans a Place for Pooches in New Downtown Seattle Campus. Available online: <https://www.geekwire.com/2012/dogfriendly-amazon-creates-special-place-canines-campus/> (accessed on 19 July 2022).
- Bloom, Nicholas, James Liang, John Roberts, and Zhichun Ying. 2015. Does working from home work? Evidence from a Chinese experiment. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 130: 165–218. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Bowen, Jonathan, Elena García, Patricia Darder, Juan Argüelles, and Juame Fatjó. 2020. The effects of the Spanish COVID-19 lockdown on people, their pets, and the human-animal bond. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 40: 75–91. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Brennan, Peter, Rachel Oepfen, John Knighton, and Mike Davidson. 2019. Looking after ourselves at work: The importance of being hydrated and fed. *BMJ: British Medical Journal (Online)* 364: 1528. [\[CrossRef\]](#) [\[PubMed\]](#)
- Brewer, John, and Albert Hunter. 2006. *Foundations of Multimethod Research: Synthesizing Styles*. New York: Sage.

- Burman, Richa, and Tulsee Giri Goswami. 2018. A systematic literature review of work stress. *International Journal of Management Studies* 5: 112–32. [CrossRef]
- Business Wire. 2022. 60 Percent of Pet Owners Seek Pet Friendly Workplaces, or Willing to Leave. Available online: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20220329005313/en/60-Percent-of-Pet-Owners-Seek-Pet-Friendly-Workplaces-or-Willing-to-Leave> (accessed on 29 March 2022).
- Casciotti, Dana. 2014. *Pets and Health: The Impact of Companion Animals*; Washington, DC: National Center for Health Research. Available online: <https://www.center4research.org/benefits-pets-human-health/> (accessed on 7 September 2022).
- Chafe, Roger. 2017. The Value of Qualitative Description in Health Services and Policy Research. *Healthcare Policy* 12: 12–18. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Choudhury, Prithwiraj, Cirrus Foroughi, and Barbara Larson. 2021. Work-from-anywhere: The productivity effects of geographic flexibility. *Strategic Management Journal* 42: 655–83. [CrossRef]
- Cohen, Sheldon, and Thomas Wills. 1985. Stress, social support and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin* 98: 310–57. [CrossRef]
- Conte, Jeffrey, Brian Aasen, Caitie Jacobson, Casey O’Loughlin, and Lukas Toroslu. 2019. Investigating relationships among polychronicity, work-family conflict, job satisfaction, and work engagement. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 34: 459–73. [CrossRef]
- Crowe, Remle, Julie Bower, Rebecca Cash, Ashish Panchal, Severo Rodriguez, and Susan Olivo-Marston. 2018. Association of burnout with workforce-reducing factors among EMS professionals. *Prehospital Emergency Care* 22: 229–36. [CrossRef]
- Daly, Michael, and Roy Baumeister. 2009. Social support and mental health. In *Salem Press Encyclopedia of Health*. Pasadena: Salem Press.
- De Silva, Nayanthara, Rasika Samanmali, and Harsha De Silva. 2017. Managing occupational stress of professionals in large construction projects. *Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology* 15: 488–504. [CrossRef]
- Defelipe, Renata, Carine Savalli, and Emma Otta. 2020. Demographics and self-reported well-being of Brazilian adults as a function of pet ownership: A pilot study. *Heliyon* 6: e04069. Available online: <https://www.sciencedirect-com.nwulib.nwu.ac.za/science/article/pii/S2405844020309130> (accessed on 13 September 2022). [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Demerouti, Evangelica, Friedhelm Nachreiner, Arnold Bakker, and Wilmar Schaufeli. 2001. The job demands-resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 86: 499–512. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Doyle, Louise, Catherine McCabe, Brian Keogh, Annemarie Brady, and Margaret McCann. 2020. An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing* 25: 443–55. [CrossRef]
- Dunatchik, Allison, Kathleen Glass Gerson, Jacobs Jerry Jennifer, and Haley Stritzel. 2021. Gender, parenting, and the rise of remote work during the pandemic: Implications for domestic inequality in the United States. *Gender & Society* 35: 194–205.
- Etingen, Bella, Martinez Rachael, Smith Bridget, Hogan Timothy, Miller Laura, Saban Karen, Irvin Dawn, Jankowski Becky, and Weaver Francis. 2020. Developing an animal-assisted support program for healthcare employees. *BMC Health Services Research* 20: 714. [CrossRef]
- European Commission’s Science and Knowledge Center. 2020. *Telework in the EU Before and After the COVID-19: Where We Were, Where We Head to*. Bruxelles: European Commission, pp. 1–8.
- Fielding, Nigel, and Jane Fielding. 1986. *Linking Data*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- Finka, Lauren, Joanna Ward, Mark Farnworth, and Daniel Mills. 2019. Owner personality and the wellbeing of their cats share parallels with the parent-child relationship. *PLoS ONE* 14: e0211862. [CrossRef]
- Foreman, Anne, Margaret Glenn, Jean Meade, and Oliver Wirth. 2017. Dogs in the workplace: A review of the benefits and potential challenges. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14: 498. [CrossRef]
- Fraser, Gloria, Yanshu Huang, Kealagh Robinson, Mark Wilson, Joseph Bulbulia, and Chris Sibley. 2020. New Zealand pet owners’ demographic characteristics, personality, and health and wellbeing: More than just a fluff piece. *Anthrozoös* 33: 561–78. [CrossRef]
- Fronstin, Paul, and Ruth Helman. 2013. Views on the value of voluntary workplace benefits: Findings from the 2013 health and voluntary workplace benefits survey. *EBRI Notes* 34: 14–21. Available online: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2355166 (accessed on 10 September 2022).
- Gee, Nancy, Kerry Rodriguez, Aubrey Fine, and Janet Trammell. 2021. Dogs Supporting Human Health and Well-Being: A Biopsychosocial Approach. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 8: 630465. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Gill, Diana, Mercedes García, and Celia Trujillo. 2019. Dog-assisted intervention at a Spanish university: Pilot study. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education* 12: 344–356. [CrossRef]
- Goins, Matt, and Alison Hanlon. 2021. Exotic pets in Ireland: 1. Prevalence of ownership and access to veterinary services. *Irish Veterinary Journal* 74: 1–7. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Gorjifard, Roya, and Joanne Crawford. 2021. Working from Home: Impact on Wellbeing and Work-Life Balance. *New Zealand Journal of Employment Relations* 46: 64–78. [CrossRef]
- Grzelczak, Agnieszka. 2021. Remote Work and its Consequences for the Employee in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *European Research Studies Journal* XXIV: 399–411. [CrossRef]
- Hall, Sophie, Hanna Wright, Annette Hames, and Daniel Mills. 2016. The long-term benefits of dog ownership in families with children with autism. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior* 13: 46–54. [CrossRef]
- Headley, Bruce, Fu Na, and Richard Zheng. 2008. Pet dogs benefit owners’ health: A ‘natural experiment’ in China. *Social Indicators Research* 87: 481–93. [CrossRef]

- Huang, Qiao, Xiang Zhan, and Xian-Tao Zeng. 2020. COVID-19 Pandemic: Stop Panic Abandonment of Household Pets. *Journal of Travel Medicine* 27: 1–2. [CrossRef]
- Hunter, Caitlin, Artie-Louise Verreynne, Nancy Pachana, and Paul Harpur. 2019. The impact of disability-assistance animals on the psychological health of workplaces: A systematic review. *Human Resource Management Review* 29: 400–17. [CrossRef]
- IFRC (International Federation of Red Cross). 2008. International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Available online: <https://www.ifrc.org/> (accessed on 16 August 2022).
- Ikeuchi, Tomoko, Yu Taniguchi, Takumi Abe, Satoshi Seino, Chiho Shimada, Akihiko Kitamura, and Shoji Shinkai. 2021. Association between Experience of Pet Ownership and Psychological Health among Socially Isolated and Non-Isolated Older Adults. *Animals* 11: 595. [CrossRef]
- Ipsen, Christine, Mark van Veldhoven, Kathrin Kirchner, and John Hansen. 2021. Six Key Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home in Europe during COVID-19. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 18: 1826. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Irvin, Leslie, and Laurent Cilia. 2017. More-than-human families: Pets, people, and practices in multispecies households. *Sociology Compass* 11: e12455. Available online: <https://doi-org.nwulib.nwu.ac.za/10.1111/soc4.12455> (accessed on 17 August 2022). [CrossRef]
- Junça-Silva, Ana. 2022. Friends with Benefits: The Positive Consequences of Pet-Friendly Practices for Workers' Well-Being. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 19: 1069. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Kaduk, Anne, Katie Genadek, Erin Kelly, and Phyllis Moen. 2019. Involuntary vs. voluntary flexible work: Insights for scholars and stakeholders. *Community, Work & Family* 22: 412–42. [CrossRef]
- Kanat-Maymon, Yaniv, Adele Antebi, and Sigal Zilcha-Mano. 2016. Basic psychological need fulfillment in human–pet relationships and well-being. *Personality and Individual Differences* 92: 69–73. [CrossRef]
- Katcher, Aaron. 1981. Interactions between people and their pets: Form and function. In *Interrelationships between People and Pets*. Edited by B. Fogle. Springfield: Charles C Thomas, pp. 41–67.
- Kim, Hyejin, Justine S. Sefcik, and Christine Bradway. 2017. Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health* 40: 23–42.
- Kobus, Maree, and Jeremiah Pietersen. 2016. Sampling. In *First Steps in Research*. Edited by K. Maree. Pretoria: Van Schaik, pp. 192–202.
- Kossek, Ellen, Shaun Pichler, Todd Bodner, and Leslie Hammer. 2011. Workplace social support and work–family conflict: A meta-analysis clarifying the influence of general and work–family-specific supervisor and organizational support. *Personnel Psychology* 64: 289–313. [CrossRef]
- Lass-Hennemann, Johanna, Sarah Schäfer, Roxanne Sopp, and Tanja Michael. 2020. The Relationship between Dog Ownership, Psychopathological Symptoms and Health-Benefitting Factors in Occupations at Risk for Traumatization. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17: 2562. [CrossRef]
- Lesener, Tino, Burkhard Guys, and Christine Wolter. 2019. The job demands-resources model: A meta-analytic review of longitudinal studies. *Work & Stress* 33: 76–103. [CrossRef]
- Linacre, Simon. 2016. Pets in the workplace: A shaggy dog story? *Human Resource Management International Digest* 24: 17–19. Available online: <https://doi-org.nwulib.nwu.ac.za/10.1108/HRMID-04-2016-0042> (accessed on 20 August 2022). [CrossRef]
- Lincoln, Yvonna, and Egon Guba. 1985. *Naturalistic Enquiry*. New York: Sage Publications.
- Lund, Susan, Wan-Lae Cheng, André Dua, Aaron De Smet, Olivia Robinson, and Saurabh Sanghvi. 2020. *What 800 Executives Envision for the Postpandemic Workforce*. Chicago: McKinsey Global Institute. Available online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/what-800-executives-envision-for-the-postpandemic-workforce> (accessed on 23 September 2020).
- Machová, Kristýna, Klára; Dad'ová, Helena Chaloupková, and Ivona Svobodová. 2019. Does having a pet influence the physical activity of their young female owners? *BMC Public Health* 19: 1–7.
- Makarius, Erin, Barbara Larson, and Susan Vroman. 2021. What Is Your Organization's Long-Term Remote Work Strategy? Available online: <https://hbr.org/2021/03/what-is-your-organizations-long-term-remote-work-strategy> (accessed on 13 September 2022).
- Martin, Francois, Katherine Bachert, LeAnn Snow, Hsiao-Wei Tu, Julien Belahbib, and Sandra Lyn. 2021. Depression, anxiety, and happiness in dog owners and potential dog owners during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. *PLoS ONE* 16: e0260676. [CrossRef]
- Maslach, Christina, and Michael Leiter. 2008. Early predictors of job burnout and engagement. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 93: 498–512. [CrossRef]
- Maslach, Christina, Wilmar Schaufeli, and Michael Leiter. 2001. Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology* 52: 397–422. Available online: <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.psych.52.1.397> (accessed on 13 September 2022). [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Meehan, Michael, Bronwyn Massavelli, and Nancy Pachana. 2017. Using Attachment Theory and Social Support Theory to Examine and Measure Pets as Sources of Social Support and Attachment Figures. *Anthrozoös* 30: 273–89. [CrossRef]
- Morse, Janice. 2003. Principles of mixed methods and multi-method research design. In *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*. Edited by C. Teddlie and A. Tashakkori. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publication, pp. 189–208.
- Nieforth, Leanne, and Marguerite O'Haire. 2020. The role of pets in managing uncertainty from COVID-19. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12: S245. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

- Nieuwenhuis, Jeremiah. 2016. Analysing qualitative data. In *First Steps in Research*. Edited by K. Maree. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, pp. 104–30.
- O'Connor, Cliodhna, and Helene Joffe. 2020. Intercoder reliability in qualitative research: Debates and practical guidelines. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19: 1609406919899220. [CrossRef]
- Oliva, Jessica Lee, and Kim Louise Johnston. 2020. Puppy love in the time of Corona: Dog ownership protects against loneliness for those living alone during the COVID-19 lockdown. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 67: 232–42. [CrossRef]
- Payne, Elyssa, Pauleen Bennett, and Paul McGreevy. 2015. Current perspectives on attachment and bonding in the dog–human dyad. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 8: 71. [CrossRef]
- Pieh, Christoph, Sanja Budimir, and Thomas Probst. 2020. The effect of age, gender, income, work, and physical activity on mental health during coronavirus disease (COVID-19) lockdown in Austria. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 136: 110186. [CrossRef]
- Powell, Gary. 2020. Work–family lockdown: Implications for a post-pandemic research agenda. *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 35: 639–46. [CrossRef]
- Rigotti, Thomas, Yang Liu-Qin, Zhou Jiang, Alexander Newman, Nele De Cuyper, and Tomoki Sekiguchi. 2021. Work-Related Psychosocial Risk Factors and Coping Resources during the COVID-19 Crisis. *Applied Psychology/Psychologie Appliquee* 70: 3. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Sandelowski, Margarete. 2000. Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health* 23: 334–40.
- Sandelowski, Margarete. 2010. What's in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in Nursing & Health* 33: 77–84.
- Schaufeli, Wilmar, and Arnold Bakker. 2004. Job demands, job resources, and their relationship with burnout and engagement: A multi-sample study. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 25: 293–315. [CrossRef]
- Schutz, Paul, Courtney Chambliss, and Jessica DeCuir. 2003. Multimethods research. In *Foundations for Research*. Edited by Kathleen Marraais and Stephen Lapan. London: Routledge, pp. 283–98.
- Serpell, J. A. 2011. Historical and cultural perspectives on human–pet interactions. In *Animals in Our Lives: Human–Animal Interaction in Family, Community, and Therapeutic Settings*. Edited by Peggy McCardle, Sandra McCune, James A. Griffin, Leya Esposito and Lisa S. Freund. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., pp. 11–22.
- Shen, Panshuo, and Paul Slater. 2021. The Effect of Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies on Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being among University Academic Staff during the COVID-19 Outbreak. *International Education Studies* 14: 82–95. [CrossRef]
- Smolkovic, Iris, Mateja Fajfar, and Vesna Mlinaric. 2012. Attachment to pets and interpersonal relationships: Can a four-legged friend replace a two-legged one? *Journal of European Psychology Students* 3: 5–23. [CrossRef]
- Solomon, Judith, Andrea Beetz, Iris Schöberl, Nancy Gee, and Kurt Kotrschal. 2019. Attachment security in companion dogs: Adaptation of Ainsworth's strange situation and classification procedures to dogs and their human caregivers. *Attachment & Human Development* 21: 389–417.
- Statista. 2021b. Total Number of Pets in China from 2016 to 2020 with an Estimate for 2021. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1288733/china-pet-population/#:~:text=Forecasts%20showed%20that%20the%20pet,pets%20among%20Chinese%20pet%20lovers> (accessed on 25 October 2022).
- Statista. 2021a. Share of Households Owning at Least One Dog in the European Union in 2021, by Country. Available online: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/515475/dog-ownership-european-union-eu-by-country/> (accessed on 25 October 2022).
- Statista. 2022. Pet Ownership Statistics by Country 2022. Available online: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/pet-ownership-statistics-by-country> (accessed on 25 October 2022).
- Streitfeld, David. 2020. White-collar companies race to be last to return to the office. *New York Times*. May 8. Available online: www.nytimes.com (accessed on 8 May 2020).
- Tanaka, Aki, Jun Saeki, Shin-ichi Hayama, and Philip Kass. 2019. Effect of pets on human behavior and stress in disaster. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* 6: 113. [CrossRef]
- Taniguchi, Yu, Tomine Seino, Tanaka Yui, Nishi Izumi, Yuri Yokoyama, Tomoko Ikeuchi, Akihiko Kitamura, and Shoji Shinkai. 2018. The association of dog and cat ownership and living arrangements with mental well-being among community-dwelling older adults in metropolitan area. Paper presented at 60th Annual Scientific Meeting of Japan Socio-Gerontological Society, Tokyo, Japan, June 9–10.
- Thompson, Meridith, Dawn Carlson, Michel Kacmar, and Ryan Vogel. 2020. The cost of being ignored: Emotional exhaustion in the work and family domains. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 105: 186. [CrossRef]
- Tokunaga, Robert. 2011. Social networking site or social surveillance site? Understanding the use of interpersonal electronic surveillance in romantic relationships. *Human Behaviour* 27: 705–13. [CrossRef]
- Toscano, Ferdinando, and Salvatore Zappalà. 2020. Social Isolation and Stress as Predictors of Productivity Perception and Remote Work Satisfaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Concern about the Virus in a Moderated Double Mediation. *Sustainability* 12: 9804. [CrossRef]
- Typeform.com. 2022. What Is Typeform? Available online: <https://www.typeform.com/help/a/what-is-typeform-360038717092/> (accessed on 26 October 2022).
- Wang, Bin, Yukun Liu, Jing Qian, and Sharon Parker. 2020. Achieving Effective Remote Working During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Work Design Perspective. *Applied Psychology* 70: 16–59. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Wanser, Shelby, Kristyn Vitale, Lauren Thielke, Lauren Brubaker, and Monique Udell. 2019. Spotlight on the psychological basis of childhood pet attachment and its implications. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 12: 469. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

- Wedgeworth, Monica, Michael LaRocca, William Chaplin, and Forest Scogin. 2017. The role of interpersonal sensitivity, social support, and quality of life in rural older adults. *Geriatric Nursing* 38: 22–26. [CrossRef]
- Weintraub, Jared, Murugang Pattusamy, and Scott Dust. 2019. Mindful multitasking: Disentangling the effect of polychronicity on work–home conflict and life satisfaction. *The Journal of Social Psychology* 159: 497–502. [CrossRef]
- Wienclaw, Ruth. 2009. Telecommuting. Available online: <http://www.academicpub.com/map/items/29840.html> (accessed on 10 August 2022).
- Wilkin, Crista, Paul Fairlie, and Souha Ezzedeen. 2016. Who let the dogs in? A look at pet-friendly workplaces. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management* 9: 96–109. [CrossRef]
- World Population Review. 2022. Most Popular Pets by Country 2022. Available online: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-popular-pets-by-country> (accessed on 26 October 2022).
- Xu, Shan, Kerk Kee, and Chang Mao. 2021. Multitasking and Work-Life Balance: Explicating Multitasking When Working from Home. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 65: 397–425. [CrossRef]