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Review Article

Is Grief and Mourning for a Pet and a Family Member the Same? A Narrative Review

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Many people live with pets, and most of them are considered family members. So, when a pet dies, people experience grief and mourning. Despite the recent increase in research interest in human-pet relationships, as far as I know, there is no review that answers this question: are grief and mourning for a pet and for a family member the same thing? The present narrative review can be a first step in answering this question.

Methods: This review was conducted according to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) statement in the PubMed database. After the removal of duplicates and examination of titles and abstracts, 50 papers were included in the review. The retrieved articles were selected and evaluated by reading each of them in full text. The author of this study is one, therefore, to reduce the probability of bias in the selection process, this selection was repeated after three months.

Discussion: Only one study among those examined directly compared the severity of grief over human death and the death of a pet. In this study, no significant differences were found between pain severity levels. However, since grief is a subjective experience, this work has the limitation that the same person did not experience the loss of a family member and a pet. It also presents other critical issues since it does not examine the factors that can influence the response to the loss.

Furthermore, three other research articles dealt in depth with the topic of mourning following the loss of a pet, although their main objective was not the analysis of the comparison between the pain of losing a pet and that of a human family member. ^[1] developed a systematic review whose objectives were to better understand the grieving process and experience in humans after the loss of a pet to promote mental health well-being in the workplace. The second research identified is that of ^[2], whose objective was to validate the HHHMM quality of life scale in the Italian context^[3]. The third paper, ^[4], has the aim to validate a new tool, the Mourning Dog Questionnaire, but is limited to the pain and mourning resulting from the loss of a dog.

Conclusions: Research indicates that pet owners experience a spectrum of pain and pain intensity when their pet dies, ranging from moderate to excruciating.

This grief is often compared to that felt over the loss of a close family member. However, many variables influence the intensity of mourning: age, social condition (living alone or in a family context) of the caregiver/pet owner, age of the deceased animal, etc. Therefore, further research is needed.

Furthermore, this review reveals widespread underestimation of the grief associated with the loss of a pet, both by society at large and by individuals who do not own a pet.

This disenfranchised grief can have a profound emotional impact on those who experience the loss of a pet.

It is also clear that veterinarians can play a role in helping pet owners grieve and in improving the well-being, resilience, and quality of life of people experiencing pet loss. Additionally, further research is needed to develop a measure of grief disavowal specific to pet loss.

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Terminology

The following terms have been adopted:

- **Animal companions (ACs):** animals kept as companions to humans and generally of domesticated species. Commonly dogs, cats, horses, rabbits, smaller mammals, birds, and reptiles, and excluding fish. I avoid the term 'pet' in this paper because it does not adequately reflect the current scientific understanding of animals' sentience, cognitive complexity, and individuality, or the complexity and modern reality of the relationships between animals and their owners.
- **Grief:** the behavioural, social, psychological, and emotional reactions that a person has in response to the rupture or ending of a significant relationship with another.
- **Animal companion bereavement:** the period following the death of an animal companion during which grief may be experienced and mourning may occur.
- **Disenfranchised grief:** it is defined by the American Psychological Association (APA) as "*grief that society (or some element of it) limits, does not expect, or may not allow a person to express*".

Introduction

In the world, especially in the Western part, there are more and more families living with a pet. For example, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association^[5], in the United States, approximately 88.8 million dogs and 61.9 million cats inhabited 62 million and 37 million U.S. households, respectively; based on a survey conducted in 2017^[6] in South Korea, 29.4% or 5.74 million out of 19.52 million households in the country raised pets; according to the latest Assalco-Zoomark Report 2023 data, in Italy, there are 65 million pets, of which approximately 10 million are cats and 9 million are dogs.

As a result, a considerable number of individuals share a significant part of their lives in the company of animals. These individuals often develop deep emotional bonds with their pets, to the extent that the vast majority of owners of dogs, cats,

and other pet species in the Western world consider them members of their families^{[7][8]}.

Most common pet species have considerably shorter lifespans than humans, ranging from about 18 months (hamsters) to seven years (rabbits and giant dog breeds), 13–17 years (many cats and dogs), and 20 years (some cats). For many pet owners, particularly those with multiple animals, this means experiencing grief more frequently than their human loved ones^[9].

It is therefore very likely that during their lifetime, the owners/caretakers of these animals may experience grief due to the loss/death of their pet. The experience of loss is often related to grief and mourning, which are behaviours exhibited by AC owners. But the pain and grief resulting from the death of pets are often underestimated or even unacknowledged (not allowed) by others, which results in a lack of understanding regarding the extent and consequences of unallowed grieving (DG)^[10].

Previous studies have investigated attachment bonds between pet owners and the animals when they were alive, as well as bonds between owners when their pets were dead. Additionally, they observed coping mechanisms implemented following the loss of a pet^{[11][12][13]}.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first narrative review to seek to understand whether and how the pain and mourning associated with the loss of a pet are comparable to the pain and mourning associated with the loss of a significant person.

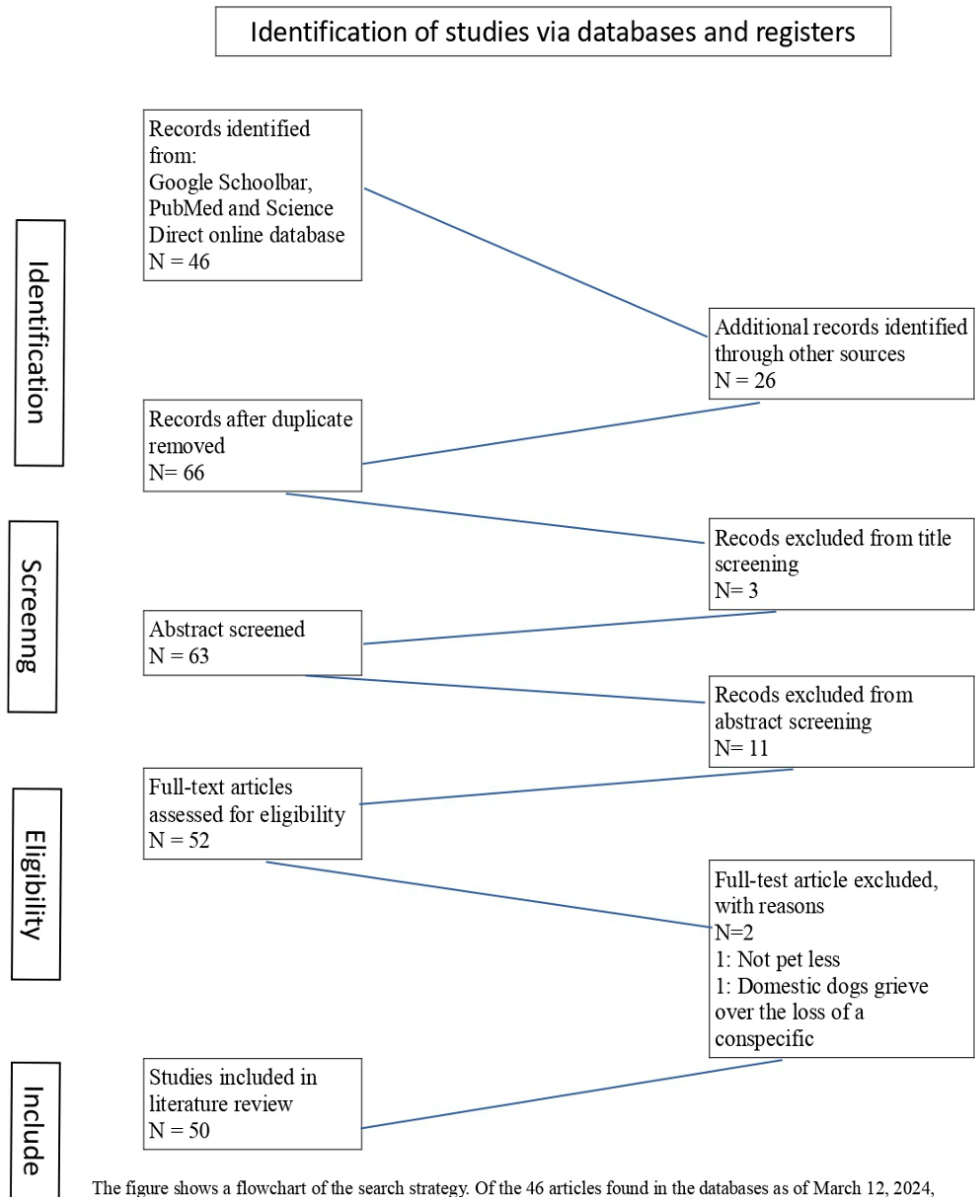
Methods

This review was developed in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement (Table 1). The PubMed database was searched for primary research, including original research articles, systematic reviews, and articles written in any language. The search was conducted, including ahead-of-print publications, up to March 12, 2024, containing the terms "grief," "grieving," "bereavement," "loss," and "pet." A total of 46 documents were identified through the initial search. An additional 26 documents were added through other sources. After removing duplicates and examining titles and abstracts, 50 records were included in the review (Table 2). The retrieved articles were selected and evaluated twice, after three months, by reading each one in full text (see Table 3 for further details). The selected papers were those that evaluated and/or compared the pain and mourning associated with the loss of a pet with the pain and mourning associated with the loss of an individual who plays an important role in one's emotional life.

<div>Inclusion criteria:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Original research article,• Systematic review,• Article written in any language,• Including ahead of print,</div>
<div>Exclusion criteria:</div> <div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cross-sectional studies that have investigated an association between the mourning of an animal and the psychopathological mental state of the owner or other members of the animal keeper's family unit,• Studies that have investigated the positive and/or negative factors of living with a pet,</div>
<div>Search strategy (PubMed)</div> <div>(Grief[Title/Abstract]) OR (Grieving[Title/Abstract]) OR ([Bereavement [Title/Abstract]]) AND (Loss[Title/Abstract]) AND (Pet[Title/Abstract])</div> <div>#1 Grief OR Grieving OR Bereavement AND Loss AND Pet</div>

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria and search strategy

Flow diagram depicting the inclusion process of the studies in the meta-analysis.



The figure shows a flowchart of the search strategy. Of the 46 articles found in the databases as of March 12, 2024, adding the 26 identified through other sources and removing duplicates, the title screening yielded 66 original articles. Subsequently, 52 articles were selected through title and abstract screening. Finally, 50 articles were included in the final review.

Table 2.

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
1) Beyond RecoveryLutto per la perdita di animali da compagnia in Cina ^[14]	The aim of this study was to investigate whether postbereavement growth is possible from pet loss bereavement when appropriate coping strategies are adopted	Qualitative study interviews	n.31 animal lovers recruited through convenience and snowball sampling in Hong Kong	Hong Kong SAR, China	Identified seven common themes: self-reliance, social-supported, or professional-support coping behaviors	Animal loss bereavement appears to share similar features to other forms of bereavement but also has its unique features. The intensity of grief seemed to be affected by factors like the strength of the human-animal bond, lack of empathy from close ones, being married without children, and euthanasia decision.
2) Grief following pet and human loss ^[15]	compare grief severity and its predictors	Quantitative study interviews?	Two equivalent college student samples who had experienced the death of a pet (n = 211) or a person (n = 146) within the past 2 years	Oregon, Usa	The human death sample reported higher grief severity, $p < .01$, but effect sizes were small ($d_s = .28-.30$).	Closeness to the deceased was overwhelmingly the strongest predictor of grief severity
3) Pet Bereavement and Coping Mechanisms ^[16]	To examine the relationship between pet loss and owner grief response	Literature Review	48 studies included	North Carolina, Usa and Online	this review was able to identify a consensus among the literature that bereaved pet owners are likely to experience disenfranchisement surrounding their loss	Factors that influence the grief response, the disenfranchised nature surrounding pet loss, ambiguous pet loss and coping mechanisms used: isolation, social support, continuing bonds and memorialization, religion and spirituality and relationships with other animals
4) Grieving the loss of a pet ^[17]	explored the psychosocial impact of bereavement and grieving the loss of a pet	Qualitative systematic review	19 qualitative papers from 17 studies that	Australia		Five themes: Their Relationship; Their Grief; Their Guilt; Their Supports; and Their Future.
5) Pet loss and continuing bonds in children and adolescents Schmidt M, Naylor PE, Cohen D, Gomez R, Moses JA Jr, Rappoport M, Packman W, 2020	explore the different ways that children use continuing bonds (CB) to cope following the death of a pet	mixed-methods study	32 children (5-18 years) and their parents	California, Usa	Children answered four questionnaires and the Continuing Bonds Interview. Parents answered a demographic questionnaire.	All children utilize CB while grieving the loss of a pet, although CB expression varies depending on the age of the child, the level of grief following the loss, and the strength of attachment to the pet.

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
6) Relationship Between Childhood Trauma Experience and Coping With Pet Loss ^[18]	Explore relationship Between Childhood Trauma Experience and Coping With Pet Loss	online survey conducted with non-clinical adult participants who had experienced the loss of a companion animal	sample of 137 individuals who had experienced pet loss	Korea	standardized assessments, including the Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG), the Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), and the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI). Childhood trauma was evaluated using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)	People who experienced pet loss had significant psychological symptoms, ranging from 32% to 55%. Childhood trauma experiences affect complicated grief, depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, insomnia and prolonged grief disorder after pet loss
7) How We Disenfranchise Grief for Self and Other, Cesur-Soysal G, Ari E, 2022	Examine perceived disenfranchisement, self-disenfranchisement and disenfranchisement of others about grief and pet loss	Empirical Study Online ahead of print	Null	Turkey	attachment and social support are significantly related to the evaluations of the disenfranchised grief process	attachment and social support are significantly related to the evaluations of the disenfranchised grief process
8) Pet Grief: Tools to Assess Owners' Bereavement and Veterinary Communication Skills ^[19]	The aim of this study is the Italian adaptation of instruments for veterinary counseling services	Participants were selected through Facebook. An invitation with a link to the survey was posted on the social media platform	377 pet owners who responded to the questionnaire, 354 (318 females and 36 males)	Italy	The study analyzed Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ) to describe the individual experience of pet-grief; Regret of Bereaved Family Members (RBFM) to assess the family regret; Shared Decision-Making Questionnaire (SDM-Q-9) for decision making in end of life; Consultation and Relational Empathy Measure (CARE) to assess the veterinarian relational empathy during clinical encounters	All the instruments obtained good internal reliability, and the results of the confirmative factor analysis of all the Italian versions were in accordance with the original ones The path analysis suggests that developing a veterinary relationship-centered care practice may be beneficial for pet owners facing end-of-life issues and the death of their companion animals since it showed that shared-decision making strategies and empathic communication may reduce negative dimensions of bereavement that may complicate grief.
9) Grieving the Loss of a Pet Needs the Health System Recognition ^[20]	The aim of this study is to anticipate, identify and address physical and psychosocial symptom burdens in a timely manner	null	null	India		Unlike the loss of a child, spouse or parent which become a shared tragedy; others may not understand the depth of sadness

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						and a sense of void in a grieving pet owner. Emotional pain and physical distress due to the loss of a companion animal are likely to be pronounced
10) Expressions of Grief in Online Discussion Forums-Linguistic Similarities and Differences in Pet and Human Bereavement, [21]	compare online discussion forum posts related to pet loss to those related to human bereavement.	Original study	401 posts were analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software for frequencies of word use relevant to bereavement	Usa and online	poor	There were some similarities in partners and pets in the word use related to friends and social connectedness
11) Relationship between Attachment to Pet and Post-Traumatic Growth after Pet Loss [22]	analyze the moderating effect of a cognitive emotion regulation strategy mediated through separation pain on the relationship between attachment and post-traumatic growth after pet loss among owners	Original study	303 owners who have experienced pet loss	Korea	It analyzed the mediated moderating effects by PROCESS macro	The results showed that the adaptive cognitive emotion regulation strategy strengthened the effect of attachment to pets on post-traumatic growth and decreased the effect on separation pain
12) The Impact of Continuing Bonds Between Pet Owners and Their Pets Following the Death of Their Pet, [12]	Analyze the role of ongoing bonds with a living pet and the impact of these bonds after the animal's death	Systematic Narrative	null	UK	null	Continuing bonds can sometimes aggravate and intensify grief experiences, particularly when pet grief is perceived as disenfranchised grief. Identifying appropriate bonds can be useful to moderate the intensity of grief and be a valuable mechanism of support. CB can also help post-traumatic growth of owners.
13) Owners' Expectations for Pet End-of-Life Support and After-Death Body Care: Exploration and Practical Applications. [23]	The study explores the perceptions and expectations of pet owners in the United States regarding end-of-life issues, with a particular focus on postmortem care	Systematic Narrative	anonymous online survey, 2043 participants	Usa	Participants living in the US who were the current owners of at least one cat or dog, had a regular veterinarian, and had made end-of-life decisions for at least one pet	The majority of these owners indicated they preferred to work with a specific crematory (43%) or cemetery (70%) and over 95% of these owners reported feeling it important to work with their preferred after-death body care service
14) Online survey as empathic bridging for the	Investigated grief reactions of bereaved individuals	Online survey. Qualitative methodology	Respons of U.S. and French Canadian	Usa and Canada	Four major themes emerged: lack of validation and	Findings confirm that, for both the U.S. and French

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disenfranchised grief of pet loss, Packman W, Carmack BJ, Katz R, Carlos F, Field NP, Landers C, 2016	following the death of a pet		participants to open question on our online pet loss survey.		support; intensity of loss; nature of the human pet relationship; and continuing bonds	Canadian participants, pet loss is often disenfranchised grief and there are ways to facilitate expressions of grief.
15) Posttraumatic Growth Following the Loss of a Pet. ^[24]	The study examined Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) experienced by bereaved pet owners in the United States, French-Canada, Japan, and Hong Kong following the death of their pet	Online survey qualitative methodology	Respons of United States, French, Canada, Japan, and Hong Kong participants	Usa, French-Canada, Japan, and Hong Kong	Study explored to what extent the cross-cultural responses mapped onto the five factors of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI).	For the U.S. sample, 58% of responses mapped onto the PTGI. For French-Canada, 72% of responses mapped onto the PTGI. For Japan, 50% of responses mapped onto the PTGI and for Hong Kong, 39% of responses mapped onto the PTGI
16) Older women's experiences of companion animal death: impacts on well-being and aging-in-place. ^[25]	The aim of multiple methods study was to develop a greater understanding of the impact of companion animal death on older women living alone in the community, as older women are a distinct at-risk group, and the supports that should be available to help these individuals with their grief.	Research Article	Online questionnaire Participants (n=12) were recruited from across Alberta, a Canadian province, through seniors' organizations, pet rescue groups, and social media groups of interest to older women. All were older adult (age 55+) women, living alone in the community, who had experienced the death of a companion animal in 2019.	Alberta, Canadian province	On the standardized measures, participants scored highly on attachment and loss, but low on guilt and anger. The interview data revealed three themes: catastrophic grief and multiple major losses over the death of their companion animal, immediate steps taken for recovery, and longer-term grief and loss recovery.	The findings highlight the importance of acknowledging and addressing companion animal grief to ensure the ongoing well-being and thus the sustained successful aging-in-place of older adult women in the community.
17) Does the DSM-5 grief disorder apply to owners of deceased pets? A psychometric study of impairment during pet loss. ^[26]	This study aimed to validate the DSM-5 grief disorder construct to owners of deceased pets	Research Article	395 adults who were impaired during bereavement.	Usa	Confirmatory factor analyzes indicated that the grief symptoms cohered into the symptom clusters proposed by the DSM-5	Findings support the application of the DSM-5 model of grief to owners of deceased pets.
18) "My pet has passed": Relations of adult attachment styles and current feelings of grief and trauma after the event, Olivia K Brown, Douglas K Symons, 2015	This study examined attachment relationships and emotional distress after the passing of a pet	Research Article	73 university students 17-26 years of age who had lost a family pet within the past 5 years.	Usa	They completed measures of attachment styles toward people and their pet, as well as complicated grief, depression, and trauma	Findings positive relations between attachments with people and pets, and anxiety in pet attachment was positively related to complicated grief, even when attachment with people was controlled

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19) Validation of the HHHHHMM Scale in the Italian Context: Assessing Pets' Quality of Life and Qualitatively Exploring Owners' Grief, ^[21]	The study aimed to validate the HHHHHMM Quality of Life Scale in the Italian context.	Mixed-methods design	314 people	Italy	The Mourning Dog Questionnaire (MDQ), Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale (LAPS), Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ), and open-ended questions were adopted to test the research hypotheses and qualitatively explore the grieving experience	The results showed that the model's fit was partially adequate, with all parameters being significant and over 0.40. Moreover, human guardians' anger levels were high when their companion animal's quality of life was poor, and greater levels of grief were associated with higher levels of attachment.
20) The End of the Partnership With a Guide Dog: Emotional Responses, Effects on Quality of Life and Relationships With Subsequent Dogs, ^[27]	The study examined the experiences and feelings of people who experienced the ending of at least one partnership with a guide dog to explore issues arising at the end of the partnership and how this may impact on relationships with subsequent dogs.	Research Article	36 people	New Zealand	Results indicate that the majority of handlers experienced a reduction in their quality of life due to a decrease in independent mobility followed by the loss of a friend and companion, curtailment of social interactions, and loss of self-esteem/confidence.	The majority of handlers expressed feelings of extreme grief when the partnership ended, whether it was successful or not. Feelings of extreme grief were more common for first than subsequent dogs. The depth of emotion was compared to losing a family member or other loved one, which has been reported in some person and pet relationships.
21) Psychiatric investigation of 18 bereaved pet owners, ^[28]	This study explores the grief associated with the loss of a pet	Survey using a self-administered questionnaire	50 bereaved pet owners attending a public animal cremation service, and we received 18 responses.	Japan	8 of the 16 valid responses indicated depression and/or neurosis	Statistical analyses showed that the following factors were significantly associated with grief reactions: age of owner, other stressful life events, family size, age of deceased animal, rearing place, and preliminary veterinary consultation
22) The mental health effects of pet death during childhood: Is it better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all? ^[29]	The study investigates the occurrence of grief following death of a pet	Research Article	A sample of 88 people. 40-item questionnaire based on reactions following human bereavement	U.K.	The questionnaire showed high internal reliability, and total scores were significantly positively correlated with the degree of affective attachment to the pet, the suddenness of the death and whether the respondent lived alone; but not with the type of pet, the	Overall these findings indicate a parallel reaction to that following a human bereavement, but with a lower frequency of affective distress.

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					time since it had died, and how long the owner had been with it.	
23) Role of attachment in response to pet loss, [30]	This study examined the impact of attachment on grief severity following the death of a pet	They observe a set of measures to deceased pet, social support, and complicated grief symptoms	71 people who had lost a dog or cat within the past year	Usa	The observed measures included an attachment measure assessing individual differences in attachment anxiety and avoidance, the continuing bond with the deceased pet, social support, and complicated grief symptoms. No significant mediators of the effect of attachment anxiety on grief were found	The results highlight the importance of distinguishing strength of attachment from attachment security in examining the effect of attachment on response to pet loss.
24) Exploring how veterinary professionals perceive and use grief support resources to support companion animal caregivers in Ontario, Canada [31]	The aim of this study was to qualitatively explore veterinary professionals' use and perceptions of grief resources and services to support companion animal caregivers following companion animal euthanasia	A qualitative study consisting of group and individual interviews	38 veterinary professionals and staff from 10 veterinary hospitals	Ontario, Canada	Conclusion: Overall, findings suggest that there are substantial opportunities to improve and embed a provision of grief resources within the veterinary profession. There is a need to develop adequate resources to meet caregivers' supportive needs and implement these resources within the greater veterinary profession.	Results indicated that typically resources were only provided if a caregiver requested information, or when veterinary professionals recognised that the caregiver may benefit from these resources. To assess a caregiver's need, participants reported considering their age, the strength of the human-animal bond, their previous and ongoing life circumstances, and their emotional state.
25) Practitioner Experiences of the Death of an Equine in an Equine-Assisted Services Program, [32]	EAS practitioners. The goal of the study was to explore the experiences of practitioners and identify the socioemotional processes that occur upon the death of an equine within an EAS program	Research Article	Online survey distributed to EAS practitioners. Open-ended response. 84 people	Indiana, Usa	Responses are situated into two themes (1) Processing the death of an equine and (2) Practical implications.	Experiences processing the death of an equine can be situated within Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning, extending a grief model previously only considered in the context of human death to animal death.
26) Associations between stress and quality of life: differences between owners keeping a living dog or losing a dog by euthanasia, [33]	The main objectives of this study were to compare the levels of stress and to explore the correlates of QOL of healthy adults who currently own or	QOL was assessed with the WHOQOL-BREF questionnaire and divided into four major domains: Physical, Psychological,	The study sample contained 110 current, and 103 bereaved dog owners, all females, who lost their dogs	Israel	RESULTS: Stress levels were significantly higher in bereaved owners. QOL in three of the four domains (Physical, Psychological, and Relationship) of	CONCLUSIONS: The results suggest that a loss of a dog is associated with stress for the bereaved owner and reduced physical,

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	who have just lost their dog	Relationship, and Environmental.	due to euthanasia.		current owners were significantly better than among bereaved owners. Stress was significantly associated with these three domains of QOL. Quality of life was found to be positively associated with social support. Age was related directly only to current owners' QOL	psychological, and relationship QOL. Lack of social support in the case of death of a companion animal has a strong effect on owners' grief reactions
27) Social work with a pet loss support group in a university veterinary hospital, ^[34]	The article describes the development of a bereavement support group for pet owners in a university veterinary hospital.	Observation of a group of work	Null	Pennsylvania, Usa	The group is predicated on the understanding that a human-animal relationship can be strong and the loss of that bond, through the animal's death, can produce a grief reaction	The discussion and conclusion support the development of interdisciplinary collaborations among veterinarians, owners and social workers in other veterinary hospitals.
28) <u>Overcoming the social stigma of losing a pet</u> ^[35]	A goal of the review is to provide counselors with perspectives to consider in their practice when working with clients who have attachments to their companion animals and to acknowledge the therapeutic benefits of working through the grief process to resolution as a way to continue the bond with a deceased pet.	Narrative review	Null (The present review is built on research in the field of pet loss and human bereavement and factors in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on human-animal attachment)	Rhode Island, Usa	Pets play a significant role in the lives of their caregivers, taking on different attachment roles depending on the needs of the individual.	Grieving the death of a pet continues to be disenfranchised in society. Perceptions of judgment can lead individuals to grieve the loss without social support.
29) Fare thee well: how to help owners (and yourself) deal with the death of a beloved pet, ^[36]	The authors present advice on how to communicate with grieving clients as well as how to cope with a personal sense of loss when a patient dies.	Article	Null	Pennsylvania, USA	Pet owners often seek reassurance from their veterinarian after making the decision to have their pet euthanized	
30) Mourned Pets. About Coping with Animal Death in Veterinary Practice and Caregiver's Experience Mourned Pets. About Coping with Animal Death in Veterinary Practice and Caregiver's Experience, ^[37]	The author tries to provide explanation for her feelings and for veterinarian behavior,	Article	1 person	Poland	The article is written from the first-person perspective as an autoethnographical attempt to describe the experience of loss of a pet companion, a cat,	The author introduces new kind of veterinarian in-home services for palliative care and euthanasia.
31) Bereavement for Companion Animals: Intensity, Moderating Variables, and	The study examines the intensity of grieving experienced by volunteers from animal protection	Article. Study of regression analysis ANOVA	130 volunteers (86% female; M = 42.0 years	Spain	Volunteers reported on their reactions to loss following the death of animals under their care, levels of empathy,	The results showed that 65.5% of participants displayed signs of general

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Effects on Wellbeing ^[38]	organizations in southern Spain				anthropomorphism, and attachment experienced toward these animals, received social support, and overall health status	complicated grieving (83% on the grief scale; 40% on the anger scale; 47% on the guilt scale)
32) Attachment styles, continuing bonds, and grief following companion animal death ^[13]	The study explored how attachment styles, continuing bonds, and time since loss interacted to predict grief severity in a large sample of individuals grieving the loss of a variety of companion animals	Research Article	Online survey using two questionnaires: The Pet Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011) and The Pet Bereavement Questionnaire (PBQ; Hunt & Padilla, Citation2006) 496 participants aged between 18 and 79 years	Online	The authors recommend reconsideration of the non-human animal exclusion in prolonged grief disorder, and suggest that bereavement supports embrace targeted approaches that consider attachment styles.	The results showed that higher attachment anxiety predicted more severe grief, a relationship partially moderated by continuing bonds, whereas attachment avoidance predicted less severe grief irrespective of continuing bonds
33) Support for bereaved owners of pets, ^[39]	The study explores The bond that exists between people and their pets and its impact on physical and mental health	A comprehensive review of the bereavement of animals	Null	Usa	It is important to provide an environment of acceptance and understanding for bereaved pet owners to enhance efforts toward adaptive grief and bereavement and promote adaptive coping and reinvestment in life	A comprehensive review of the bereavement of animals
34) Pet Humanisation and Related Grief: Development and Validation of a Structured Questionnaire Instrument to Evaluate Grief in People Who Have Lost a Companion Dog, ^[4]	The aim of this study was the scientific validation of a novel instrument (the Mourning Dog Questionnaire) designed to allow a comprehensive quantitative analysis of grief responses in dog owners after the death of a pet dog, which is a still underestimated issue	The research model was based on a grid of five different questionnaires: the PBQ, the LAPS, the AHCS, the PScale, and the Testoni Death Representation Scale	A sample of 369 Italian dog owners	Italy	The Mourning Dog Questionnaire was based on a grid of quantitative measurable outcomes that combines five different questionnaires concerning levels of attachment to pets, responses to the loss of a pet, outlook on life events and grief, perceptions of animals in terms of emotions, needs and legal right.	Authors found that pet owners have the tendency to humanise their pet and perceive animals no differently from humans in terms of emotions, needs and legal rights. In addition, after the death of the pet, a negative view of life was described according to the findings
35) ^[40]	This study investigated and compared experiences of human death or the death of a companion animal	Research Article	Online self-report questionnaire. 50 participants aged 18 to 65 years who had experienced the death of a human (n = 35) or the death of a companion animal (n = 15)	Australia	There were no significant differences between the levels of grief severity, however, the qualitative analyses highlighted the complexities associated with attempting to compare these grief experiences	These results highlight the importance of therapists acknowledging and validating companion animal grief
36) Exploring pet owners'	The aim of this study was explore	An online questionnaire	N=2354 participants.	Null	Overall, participants reported high levels	Findings contribute to

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
experiences and self-reported satisfaction and grief following companion animal euthanasia [41]	the relationship between pet owners' experiences and their resulting satisfaction and grief following companion animal euthanasia	conducted with pet owners who had experienced euthanasia within the last 10 years	Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and multivariable linear regression		of satisfaction with their euthanasia experience. Their experience with the administration practices (i.e., payment and paperwork), emotional support, follow-up care and care for their pet's remains was found to be associated with overall satisfaction. Participants' grief was associated with the number of euthanasia previously experienced, the type of human-animal bond, if the euthanasia was emergent and the emotional support they received	existing research and shed light on some of the most important practices associated with companion animal euthanasia. Several practical recommendations are made, including developing standard operating procedures for companion animal euthanasia; exploring owners' previous experiences, expectations and emotions; the importance of reassurance; and access to grief resources and services.
37) Expressions of Grief in Online Discussion Forums-Linguistic Similarities and Differences in Pet and Human Bereavement, [21]	The study compared online discussion forum posts related to pet loss to those related to human bereavement	Research Article	401 posts	Null	Posts were analyzed using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software for frequencies of word use relevant to bereavement	There were some similarities in partners and pets in the word use related to friends and social connectedness. Our results highlight the similarities in the vocabulary in pet and human bereavement
38) Comparing grief over people and pets, [42]	The aim of the current study was to extend previous findings by (1) asking identical questions to participants bereaved of a person or a pet, respectively, and (2) correlating grief level with an improved measure of closeness to the deceased.	Research Article	An open invitation from the study elicited 366 participants, of whom 58% had lost a person and 42% a pet.	Denmark	Method: Two standardized grief scales were reworded to be applicable across species, and closeness was measured by 8 items representing two dimensions of attachment.	Results: Measures proved reliable (chr α = .89-.94). For neither grief measure did level of grief significantly differ between those having lost a person and those having lost at pet (t-tests, ps > .4). Attachment consistently correlated with level of grief across species and across grief measures (rs = .39-.53, ps < .001).
39) The Lived Experience of Companion-animal Loss: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies. [43]	The aim of this systematic review was to evaluate qualitative studies of the lived experience of companion-animal loss and grief	Systematic Review conducted on 11 eligible studies	peer-reviewed articles from 1970 to July 2015. Only primary empirical studies were included.	Null	Prolonged grief was associated with self-disenfranchisement, whereas subjective healing was associated with remembrance, in which the animal remained as a	Analysis revealed that pets were often labeled as family, and strong emotional connections between animals and humans were

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					memory in a "new" normal.	reported in some studies. Grief was described in five studies, with participants' experience ranging from low to overwhelming.
40) Older adults and companion animal death: A survey of bereavement and disenfranchised grief, ^[10]	This study deepens our understanding of older adults' experiences of disenfranchised grief DG in relation to companion animal death	Participants were recruited to participate in an online questionnaire	98 participants (Older adults)	Alberta, Canada	One-third of participants identified that they needed to be careful about who they disclosed their grief, as they were not certain that they would be supported.	The study found that DG is experienced by a sizable group of older adults following their companion animal's death and that many participants perceived that socially legitimized recognition of loss and accompanying bereavement resources were lacking
41) Human grief on the death of a pet. ^[44]	The aim of this study was explore the disenfranchised nature of the human grief response to the death of a pet	A series of five structured, time-limited and closed pet loss support groups were facilitated	18 participants	Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada	Several participants expressed resentment that their own veterinarians had not offered a support group, but that they had to learn of the existence of the support group from a different source	Thirteen participants indicated that relationships with family and friends who did not understand their grief had been strained. Sixteen of the 18 participants indicated that attending the group had helped them come to terms with their grief All 18 of the respondents indicated that they felt that information about a pet loss support group should be provided to all bereaved pet owners, and that they
42) Coping with Animal Companion Loss: A Thematic Analysis of Pet Bereavement Counselling, ^[45]	This study aimed to contribute to the existing knowledge base on animal companion loss and provide a preliminary research base on the potential salience of PBC, 'Pet Bereavement Counselling'	Research Article: inductive thematic analysis	Six qualified and accredited PBC therapists were recruited and took part in semi-structured interviews	U.K.	The analysis revealed participants' perspectives on the acknowledgement of animal companion loss societally and within counselling professions, the diverse ways animal companion loss can impact on bereaved owners, as well as the distinctive attributes and delivery of PBC.	The findings have implications for how animal companion loss is conceptualised within counselling professions, teaching and research

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
43) Companion Animal Death: A Qualitative Analysis of Relationship Quality, Loss, and Coping ^[46]	The present study qualitatively describes human-animal relationships and the subsequent loss and coping experienced by owners of beloved companion animals	Research Article	Qualitative analysis	U.K.	Comparison with human and other types of loss and factors unique to companion animal loss are discussed. Veterinary and other helping professionals need basic information about the experience of companion animal loss in order to help support and normalize the experiences of grieving companion animal owners.	Relationships with animals are often viewed as inferior to human relationships. This becomes problematic during times of loss and grief when members of a grieving companion animal owner's support system do not understand the salience of the relationship with the animal.
44) Pet loss and disenfranchised grief: Implications for mental health counseling practice ^[47]	The purpose of this article is to elucidate (a) the process of coping with grief as experienced by bereaved pet owners; (b) the negative impact of disenfranchised grief on pet bereavement; and (c) the use of grief counseling and other resources for pet loss.	Research Article	Qualitative analysis	Texas USA	This article is essentially a call to practitioners to consider pet loss as a normative bereavement process that carries an additional layer of complexity because societal attitudes toward the death of a pet discourage bereaved pet owners from openly grieving the loss of a beloved companion.	Given the close attachments some forge with their pets, significant grief reactions when a pet dies are common. Considering the grief reactions resulting from such a loss, a better understanding of the process of how bereaved pet owners cope with grief is needed. Considering pet loss as a normative grief process is not only an indication to bereaved pet owners that their loss is valued, it is also an initial step toward reinstating within our society a stigmatized grief
45) Can pets function as family members? ^[48]	This exploratory study investigated how clients of a large urban veterinary center viewed the role of their pet in the famil and how they compared this role to that of humans.	Research Article	Comparative Study. Randomly selected clients (N = 201) completed a questionnaire containing scales delineating family relationships and pet attachment	New York, Usa	In Phase 2, 16 participants from Phase I completed a social network instrument and answered questions about family roles and boundaries.	Thirteen of the 16 respondents said that there were circumstances in which they would give a scarce drug to their pet in preference to a person outside the family.
46) Grief for animal companions and an approach to supporting their bereaved owners ^[2]	This article presents an overview of grief for animalNull companions and current approaches to bereavement	Narrative review	Null	U.K.	Bereaved AC owners commonly have four particular difficulties: A) Lack of societal understanding; B) Guilt following	These four particular pressures may compound a bereaved AC owner's grief, especially

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
	support for bereaved owners				euthanasia; C) Animal as link to other significant relationships or experiences; D) Frequency of bereavement	because their distress may seem like an over-reaction to those around them. At work or in the family, others may remark accordingly eg. 'It was only a hamster'; 'Get over it!'. Such remarks can cause the bereaved owner further distress, and engender a sense of shame for the grief
47) Pet Death and Owners' Memorialization Choices ^[49]	This study was designed to better understand how people memorialize their pets through the use of continuing bonds (CB) expressions, as well as their choices pertaining to after-death body care, decisions related to taking time off work following the death, the impact of their religious beliefs on memorialization choices, and how their veterinarian responded to the death.	Research Article	Online, anonymous, cross-sectional survey distributed to pet owners who had experienced the loss of a companion animal. 517 participants	Usa	The study found that choices regarding the expression of CB in response to pet death are similar to those witnessed after human loss.	Results suggest that it is essential that those grieving the death of their pet be supported and reassured that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, with all options recognized as legitimate in the experience and expression of one's grief
48) When the bond breaks: Variables associated with grief following companion animal loss, ^[50]	This research investigated variables related to grief following pet loss.	Research Article	Online quantitative survey. 85 participants	Null	Variables included type of relationship, animal species, amount of time since death, cause of death, attachment, and social support. We also examined emotions hypothesized to be associated with pet loss: grief, guilt, and loneliness. The cohort was divided into three groups representing high, middle, and low levels of grief. Individuals in the high grief group experienced the highest level of guilt and loneliness when compared with those with low and medium levels of grief	Grief was also related to the way in which participants described their pets. Those who classified their pet as their "child" or "best friend" reported significantly higher levels of grief in comparison with those who considered their pets to be "good companions." Other variables related to level of grief included age, which was inversely related to grief, guilt, and loneliness, and the presence of supportive others ameliorated guilt and loneliness. Species of animal was related to guilt and grief,

Study details	Aims and purposes	Study design	Characteristics of the participants	Country	Additional setup/considerations	Setting Theme(s) of included articles/Results
						with rabbit owners exhibiting significantly less guilt and grief than dog and cat owners.
49) [51]	This study investigated the relationship between disenfranchised grief, memorialization, and posttraumatic growth in bereaved pet owners.	Research Article	an online survey, respondents (n = 133) completed standardized measures, including the Pet Bereavement Questionnaire, the Loss of Social Support subscale from the Grief Experience Questionnaire, and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory-Short Form (PTGI-SF).		There was a significant interaction between disenfranchised grief, grief severity, and posttraumatic growth, suggesting that disenfranchised grief inhibits posttraumatic growth when grief severity is high.	This study shows that disenfranchised grief can inhibit posttraumatic growth following the loss of a pet, highlighting the complicated relationship between posttraumatic growth, grief intensity, and disenfranchised grief.
50) Pet Loss and Grieving Strategies: A Systematic Review of Literature. [11]	The purpose of this review is to understand the further grieving process and experience in humans after the loss of a pet.	Systematic review	On 675 articles found, 15 items met the criteria. They included bereavement leave for pet loss in any workplace, not just for healthcare workers, and non-scholarly articles	Arizona, Usa	Themes identified as important are, first, if non-human life is grievable or not, second, levels of attachments and bonds between humans and pets, and third, self-compassion during the bereavement process, including returning to work post grief, supporting variables in a person's grieving process, and quality of the pet's life in the time of covid	Literature shows that pet humanization is more common than publicly recognized and grieving after the loss of a pet is experienced similar to the loss of a human. There needs to be more information regarding managing pet grief and normalizing that most participants view their dogs as an extension of their family. Organizations that have offered bereavement leave for pet loss are perceived as compassionate. Social constructs may negatively affect grief.

Table 3. Table of characteristics of included studies

Discussion

Among the works examined, only one study directly compares the severity of pain for human death and that of a pet^[40]. In this paper, the experience of 50 participants aged between 18 and 65 who had experienced the death of a human being (n=35) or the death of a pet animal (n=15) was studied and compared. Participants were recruited in Australia and completed a package of online self-report questionnaires, measuring grief severity, social support, and emotional connection to the deceased. No significant differences were found between pain severity levels. However, given that grief is a subjective experience, this work has the limitation that the loss of a family member and a pet were not experienced by the same person.

Furthermore, as the authors themselves recognised, their work presents critical issues as “qualitative analyzes have highlighted the complexities associated with the attempt to compare these pain experiences”^[40]. In fact, there are many factors (the owner’s age, gender, occupation, level of education, and whether they live alone or with their family, age, cause of death, whether sudden or after an illness, and type of pet) that can influence the response to the loss and therefore to the pain it causes.

However, three other research articles dealt in depth with the topic of mourning following the loss of a pet, although their main objective was not the analysis of the comparison between the pain of losing a pet and that of a human family member. Cervantes^[1] developed a systematic review whose objectives were to better understand the grieving process and experience in humans after the loss of a pet to promote mental health and well-being in the workplace. The second research identified is that of Testoni et al.^[2], whose objective was to validate the HHHMM quality of life scale in the Italian context^[2]. The third paper, ^[4], had the aim to validate a new tool, the Mourning Dog Questionnaire, but is limited to the pain and mourning resulting from the loss of a dog. The Mourning Dog Questionnaire is a tool designed to enable a comprehensive quantitative analysis of grief responses in dog owners following the death of a companion dog, so if this review were limited to the pain and mourning resulting from the loss of a dog, the study by Uccheddu et al.^[4] would respond perfectly and exhaustively to the question of the present review.

The Mourning Dog Questionnaire is based on and includes five different questionnaires: the Pet Bereavement Questionnaire, the Lexington Annex to Pets Scale, the Animal-Human Continuity Scale, the Positivity Scale, and the Testoni Death Representation Scale. However, the article by Uccheddu et al.^[4] is just one example; further research would be necessary.

In the paper by Uccheddu et al.^[4], people may be at risk for extreme grief responses following the death of their companion animal, on a continuum of reactions ranging from moderate to excruciating grief to suicidal ideation. The main factors related to grief for humans (being guilty, in pain, angry, with intrusive thoughts) are often present after the loss of a pet. People who had recently lost a pet were much more likely to report symptoms of depression than the normal population and exhibited all of the variables that are typically described in complicated grief related to human loss. In fact, scores on the P scale (which measures the tendency to see life and experiences with a positive perspective) were negatively correlated with the negative dimensions of pain: guilt, pain, anger, intrusive thoughts, and decisional regrets that are captured by respective questionnaires (the Pet Bereavement Questionnaire and the Testoni Death Representation Scale). The Testoni Death Representation Scale is a 6-item self-report measure that assesses individuals’ attitudes toward the ontological representation of death as a passage to an afterlife or as a form of destruction. Lower scores indicate that the individual represents death as a transition, while people with higher scores represent death as total annihilation.

Inconsistent or insufficiently clear data have emerged regarding the age related to the sense of guilt or anger at the loss or vulnerability following the death of one’s dog.

To definitively address the question of whether grief and mourning for a pet are the same as for a human family member, it is crucial to utilize specific tools such as the Mourning Dog Questionnaire, Pet Bereavement Questionnaire, Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale, or Animal-Human Continuity Scale. These tools take into account various crucial factors, including the owner’s demographics, the pet’s characteristics, and the circumstances of the pet’s passing.

While this review did not find specific criteria for comparing grief for the loss of a pet and grief for the loss of a human, recurrent themes did emerge from the literature that was examined.

Intensity and quality of pain

In the research by Wilson et al.^[25], all participants reported significant grief after the loss of their animal companion, with the majority of participants rating grief as 10/10. This high level of pain continued for weeks, if not months. Furthermore, this work highlights how social conditions, being elderly, and often being alone as women, are factors of great importance^[25].

For many people, the death of a pet can produce effects similar to those caused by a variety of other losses, including the death of a spouse, child, or job^{[4][46]}. An increasing number of people view their pets as family members, and the death of a pet often induces a grief reaction of comparable severity to the loss of a significant human relationship^[49].

Evaluation of the relationship between the owner/handler and his animal

In a study^[25], all AC owners reported that their relationship with the animal is emotionally significant. In all the works examined, it emerges that animals were considered an integral part of the family^{[43][49]}, and there was often a tendency for individuals to anthropomorphize their pets^[4].

An individual's view and perspective on life after the loss of their pet

In the articles where the Mourning Dog Questionnaire was used^{[4][2]}, the results confirm the pessimistic vision of life after the death of a pet, and much research indicates that the loss of a pet can cause depression^{[52][53][54]}. Uccheddu et al.^[4] and Testoni et al.^[19] found that the human-pet attachment increased the level of grief experienced. Moreover, Bussolari et al.^[24] found that self-compassion, continuing bonds, and social constraints play a major role in grieving the loss of a pet.

The underestimation of the pain of losing a pet by society and the social context in which it occurs

The grief associated with the death of a pet is often underestimated, misunderstood, or even unacknowledged by others^[10]. Many owners/caregivers of deceased pets indicated that relationships with family and friends who did not understand their grief had become strained and worsened^{[44][16][46]}. The death of a pet typically does not involve the same rituals that allow owners to express their grief, and the resulting grief may be considered pathological^[45].

Despite the relatively high frequency and intensity of grief over pet death among pet owners, this process is largely socially unrecognized and under-explored in research.

Conclusions

Research indicates that pet owners experience a spectrum of pain and pain intensity when their pet dies, ranging from moderate to excruciating.

This grief is often compared to that experienced in the loss of a close family member.

To know the exact intensity of this phenomenon, it would be necessary to use an appropriate instrument, such as the Mourning Dog Questionnaire or Pet Bereavement Questionnaire, in addition to the Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale or the Animal-Human Continuity Scale, which would take into account a set of variables, including the owner's age, gender, occupation, education level, and whether they live alone or with family; and the age, cause of death, and type of pet.

Furthermore, this review reveals a widespread underestimation of the grief associated with the loss of a pet, both by society at large and by individuals who do not possess such a bond. This disenfranchised grief can have a deep emotional impact on those experiencing the loss of a pet.

It is also clear that veterinarians can play a role in supporting AC owners during the grieving process. Further studies are needed to develop a measure of DG specific to CA loss in humans^[10].

The present study is not without limitations. The lack of research on this specific topic and the lack of access to the full text of other studies have led to the identification of multiple limitations. However, this field of research may prove important for the development of effective strategies for primary prevention.

Statements and Declarations

Author Contributions

S.M. conceptualized the study, conducted the literature search and analysis, and wrote the manuscript.

Data Availability

The data for this review consist of previously published studies. All studies included in this narrative review are cited in the References section. The search strategy used is detailed in the Methods section.

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