

**CHRIST**(DEEMED TO BE UNIVERSITY)
BANGALORE · INDIA

Notice for the PhD Viva Voce Examination

Ms Rijita Mukherjee, Registration Number: 1750079, PhD Scholar at the School of Psychological Sciences, CHRIST (Deemed to be University) will defend her PhD thesis at the public viva-voce examination on Friday, 11 July 2025 at 2.00 pm in Room No. 044, Ground Floor, R & D Block, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Bengaluru - 560029, Karnataka, India.

- Title of the Thesis** : **Understanding Human-Pet Relationships in Urban India**
- Discipline** : **Psychology**
- External Examiner - I** : **Dr Parul Bansal**
Associate Professor
Lady Shri Ram College for Women
University of Delhi
Lajpat Nagar
New Delhi -110024
- External Examiner - II** : **Dr Sindhu Radhakrishna**
Professor and Head
Animal Behaviour and Cognition Programme
National Institute of Advanced Studies
Indian Institute of Science Campus
Bengaluru - 560012
Karnataka
- Supervisor** : **Dr Madhavi Rangaswamy**
Professor
School of Psychological Sciences
CHRIST (Deemed to be University)
Bengaluru - 560029
Karnataka

The members of the Research Advisory Committee of the Scholar, the faculty members of the Department and the School, interested experts and research scholars of all the branches of research are cordially invited to attend this open viva-voce examination.

Place: Bengaluru
Date: 09 July 2025

Registrar (Academics)

ABSTRACT

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a marked increase in pet ownership within urban environments, which contributed to enhanced human well-being but also led to a rise in animal abandonment. Among pet owners, some individuals perceive their pets as akin to children, investing in their care similarly to biological offspring. This trend, prevalent in Western contexts, is increasingly observed in Indian urban areas. This study investigates the relationships between Indian pet owners and their pets, as well as the concept of pet parenting, through the lens of Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Methodology: A sequential mixed-method approach was employed. In Stage 1, a survey was conducted to evaluate pet owners' attitudes, behaviors, attachment, and empathy using the Lexington Attachment to Pet Scale, Pet Attachment Questionnaire, and Animal Empathy Scale. Content analysis was performed on questions exploring the motivation, preparation, and experience of pet ownership. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA and CFA) were conducted on data from 538 respondents to identify factors modeling Indian pet owners' relationships with their pets. These factors were examined for associations with attachment and empathy measures. Stage 2 involved in-depth interviews with 20 individuals from Stage 1 to gain insights into pet parenting and interspecies family dynamics. Braun and Clark's reflexive thematic analysis was utilized to identify themes elucidating the meaning-making processes of pet parents and the roles of pets. Although the range of pet species is extensive, their prevalence in our urban sample was insufficient for reliable analysis.

The survey indicated that while a love for animals motivates pet ownership, there is often inadequate preparation for cohabiting with another species. For most owners, living with pets is highly rewarding. Deep mutual attachment and time spent together create an upward transformative spiral. Factor analysis identified five factors explaining pet-owner relationships: Affective Attachment, Prosocial Engagement, Parenting, Space Negotiations, and Objective Engagement, with the latter two negatively correlating with the first three. Interview themes revealed two major facets: the dynamics of pet parenting and interspecies family. The influence of pets on familial practices, such as kinship, household routines, childhood socialization, were also discussed. By examining the role of pets in "doing" family and their implications for this social arrangement traditionally regarded as distinctly human, this study drew on extensive research in these areas. Overall, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the role that pets play in contemporary family dynamics.

Keywords: *Pets, Companion animals, Interspecies family, Pet parent, Human – animal relationship*

Publication:

1. Volsche, S., Mukherjee, R., & Rangaswamy, M. (2022). The difference is in the details: Attachment and cross-species parenting in the United States and India. *Anthrozoös*, 35(3), 393- 408.