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COMPANION ANIMALS IN FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS :
A SURVEY OF ATTITUDES

A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

During the last three decades, there has been growing interest in the relationship between humans and their animal companions. The majority of research has been undertaken in Great Britain and the United States. The present research adds to this body of information through a survey of companion animals in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The aim of the study is to explore the role of pets and their positions within the family or household, relative to human family members. The focus of the research is the extent to which people think of their pets just as animals or as actual family members.

The subjects were 117 pet owning volunteers 68 percent of whom were female. The questionnaire was based on those used by Cain (1977) and Horn and Meer (1984) and was distributed to pet owners through veterinary surgeries, pet shops and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). Sample demographic characteristics and frequency data relating to the survey questions are reported. A set of cross-tabulations were undertaken to investigate question responses in relation to demographic variables, and Chi-square tests performed.

It was found that most respondents considered their pets to be members of the family and the majority thought them to be human or almost human members. Significant gender differences were found with respect to how respondents view their pets on the human/animal continuum. Significant differences between cats and dogs were also

found concerning obedience, outings and neutering.

The current data have been contrasted with other studies where the same or similar questions have been asked. Overall, this sample of New Zealand animal owners does not appear to be markedly different to overseas respondents in their views on companion animals.

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