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Pets in the workplace: a scoping review

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ABSTRACT

There is a large and growing body of literature proposing that there are benefits to employees and workplaces when pets are allowed to accompany their owners to work. This article reports a scoping review of research that is workplace-based and that provides information on the reported benefits or problems of allowing employees' pets at work. The databases Scopus, Discover and Google Scholar were searched with the initial search terms "pets AND workplace AND research." Results were reviewed initially by title to remove items where, for instance, "PET" was used as an acronym. Studies were included if they provided information on research into human well-being and/or work or task performance and pets at work. This included research into the presence of pets while working from home, as the home can be considered a workplace in this situation. A total of 189 papers on pets at work were identified from the searches. The abstracts were reviewed and papers that did not report research into the benefits and challenges of employees' pets at work were excluded, leaving 31 results. The majority of studies used survey methods and did not include validated psychometric measures of key variables including stress. Findings indicated that the presence of employees' pets at work may reduce stress and lead to more positive work-related attitudes, but these findings may not apply to all employees or all workplaces. Negative aspects of pets in the workplace include health risks to humans and animals, cultural concerns and dislike or fear of some animals, and the proportion of participants who raised these concerns or agreed with them varied widely between studies. However, there is little evidence on the prevalence of risks or how they are addressed, and there was no data on how work performance, absenteeism or staff turnover were related to pet-friendly policies at work. More research is required, and some directions for future research are suggested.

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Pets at work; stress; well-being; human health

Introduction


The benefits for human health of the human-companion-animal bond have been widely discussed. Pet ownership has been found to be associated with lower stress and higher well-being and satisfaction with life (Budimir 2021; Acquadro Maran *et al.* 2022), lower blood pressure and heart rate (Bowin 2019), and increased oxytocin concentrations (Krouzecky *et al.* 2019). Benefits are thought to come from the unconditional social support that pets provide and from the physical activity of walking dogs, which improves physical health and provides opportunities for positive interactions with other people (Acquadro Maran *et al.* 2022). The benefits might be greatest when pets are treated as family members and when owners feel a strong sense of attachment to their pets (Wu *et al.* 2018; Lytle 2021; Balzan 2022).

There are, however, contradictory findings. Some studies find no relationship or an inverse relationship between pet ownership and owners' health and well-being. For example, studies have found that life events that require adjustment (e.g. changes to personal, financial or family circumstances) were more

stressful for dog owners than non-dog owners (Krouzecky *et al.* 2019); that oxytocin increased for women but not men interacting with a pet (Miller *et al.* 2009), and that pets can cause problems for owners in accessing housing or healthcare or leaving abusive situations (Lytle 2021). Another caution comes from Islam and Towell (2013), who warn that many studies are methodologically flawed and rely on correlational studies with subjective self-reporting, that causal links cannot be established, and there is often little information on the length of pet ownership, time spent with pets and quality of the interactions with pets.

Given the potential benefits of pet ownership, and supported by concerns from pet owners about leaving pets alone at home all day (Norling and Keeling 2010), there is interest in whether allowing owners to bring their pets to work will support employee well-being and productivity. Some workplaces are proudly "pet-friendly" and promote their policies (Glassdoor 2015; Clark 2018; Crosswell 2023). These pet-friendly workplaces claim to have seen drastic improvements in employees' physical and mental health, productivity and morale, although

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there is often little or no information available on the evaluation process. A range of reasons for these improvements is suggested: positive social interactions (Fitzgerald and Danner 2012); mini-breaks from work and dog-walking which provides exercise (Tarkan 2017; Clark 2018), and increased feelings of connection, cooperation, trust, support and psychological safety (Clark 2018). For organisations, the benefits could be the ability to “brand” themselves as positive places to work, which should make them attractive to employees (Wilkin *et al.* 2016; Clark 2018; Robertson 2021). Improvements in work-life balance are also suggested, although there is a counterbalancing suggestion that employees can spend more hours at work and do more overtime if they do not need to worry about getting home to their pets (Zimmerman 2016).

Many of the commentaries on the benefits of pets at work include claims like “research has shown” to support their conclusions, but the sources of evidence are rarely given. Some writers cite large surveys by the pet care industry (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Nationwide 2018; Pet Sitters International 2024) in support of their claims, but details of the methodologies of these studies are not always available. Without information on the study, including sample size and study population, the credibility of the findings is hard to establish.

Another concern is where claims about the benefits of pets at work are based on research using samples comprised of students (Brown 2017; Colarelli *et al.* 2017). For example, the “work groups” in one study (Colarelli *et al.* 2017) were undergraduate students working on tasks either with or without a dog present. Groups working in the presence of a dog showed greater interpersonal trust, cohesion and positive emotions than groups without a dog. Perrine and Wells (2006) and Wells and Perrine (2001a) asked students to rate pictures of offices with or without pets present and found that offices with pets present were rated more positively than those without pets. Stewart (2009) and Stewart and Strickland (2013) found that students completing clerical tasks reported less stress when a dog was present but only if the students were dog owners and tasks were not very difficult.

Another source of information comes from scenario-based studies, which have found that people with positive attitudes towards pets viewed a hypothetical company with a pet-friendly policy as more attractive than one without such a policy (Geil 2018; Sousa *et al.* 2022). Other approaches that aim to assess the benefits of pets at work without including actual pets in the workplace investigated, for example, fish in aquariums not owned by specific employees (Clements *et al.* 2024), robotic dogs or digital pets (Cheklin *et al.* 2016), pictures or videos of animals (Carstens 2013), or an online interface that allowed workers to “play” with shelter dogs remotely

(Cheklin *et al.* 2016). There is little if any evidence for the effectiveness of these approaches.

Given that some claims about the benefits of pets at work are based on studies that are not workplace-based, there is a need to look at how well workplace-based research using employees as participants support these claims. The aim of this review is to find what research evidence exists for the benefits to employees of pets in the workplace. The focus is on research that is workplace-based and provides information on the reported benefits or problems of allowing employees’ pets at work.

Materials and methods

Search strategy

Searches were carried out using Scopus, Discover and Google Scholar literature databases during October 2023 and May 2024. No time frame was set to limit the search, the language was set to English and no restriction was placed on publication status. No definition of pets or restrictions in relation to pet species were applied. Initial search terms were *pets* AND *workplace* AND *research* (Scopus: 219 results; Discover: 1,913 results, Google Scholar: 83,000 results). Additional searches on each database were *dogs* AND *workplace*, and *cats* AND *workplace*, but these did not provide additional relevant items (Figure 1).

Article titles were viewed online to exclude those which were clearly not about pets and work (e.g. PET used as an acronym). For Scopus and Discover, where the number of results was manageable, the full list of results was reviewed. Given the large number of Google Scholar results, the review strategy was to look at only the first 10 pages (100 results; sorted by relevance) and to download the citations and abstracts for any relevant research papers not previously found. Only four additional research papers were found using this strategy, and none after the eighth page of results. Citations and abstracts for papers that provided information on research into human well-being and/or work or task performance and pets at work were downloaded into Endnote (Clarivate; Philadelphia, PA, USA) and duplicate entries were removed, leaving 189 articles. Research papers, reviews, guidelines, surveys and case studies were initially included so that the reference lists/bibliographies could be examined for any additional relevant material.

Eligibility criteria for inclusion in the review

Studies were included in this review if they met the following criteria: (1) they concerned the effects on human well-being and/or work performance of having employees’ pets in workplaces, and (2) they collected data from employees and/or managers. This included research

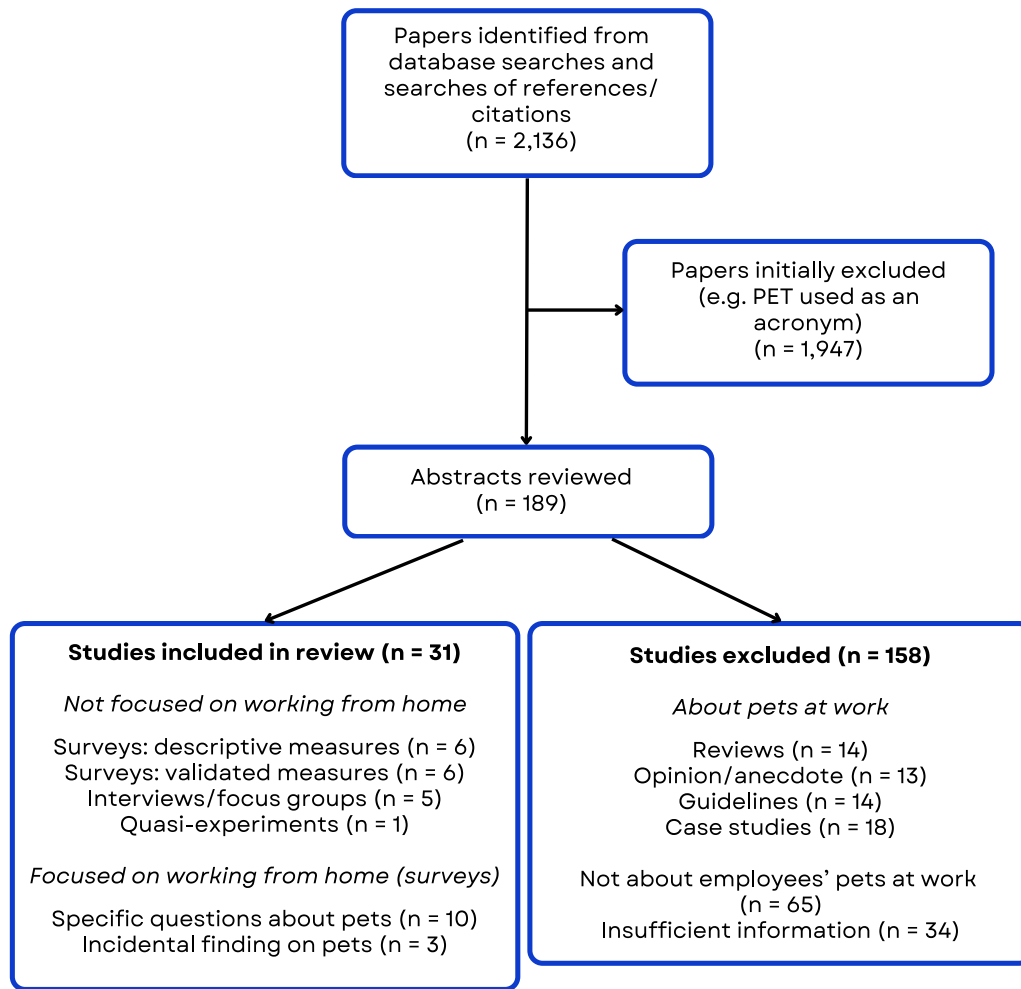


Figure 1. Overview of the selection process for studies included in a scoping review of the potential benefits and drawbacks of pets in the workplace.

into pets present while working from home as this is a relatively new and growing area of research due to the rapid increase in working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The home can therefore be thought of as a workplace in this context. (3) They reported on research that collected, analysed and reported data on human well-being and/or work or task performance, and pets at work. There was no requirement for articles to have been peer-reviewed, in order to allow, for example, research carried out by the pet care industry to be included.

Exclusion criteria were: (1) studies about pet ownership in general, pets on campus for students' stress management, therapy or assistance dogs in the workplace or animals that were not employees' own pets; (2) reviews, reports, opinions, blogs and anecdotes (which made up the bulk of the retrieved results) that did not include data collection and analysis; (3) full text was not available.

Procedure

Once all identified relevant articles had been collated in Endnote, the full text of each was reviewed again

for relevance to research into the implications for humans of having employees' pets in the workplace using the criteria defined above. First, articles that were not about pets at work were excluded (n = 65), along with those where the full text was not available (n = 34; Figure 1). The remaining papers were then listed in a table by author and year, and each was coded as "research" (i.e. contained literature review, data collection and analysis); "review" (literature review but no data collection); "opinion/anecdote" (which could include reference to research and/or case studies but did not include data collection and analysis), "guidelines" (with no data collection and little literature review), "case studies" (descriptive information about one or a small number of workplaces), and pets in the context of working from home. Review articles (n = 14) and guidelines (n = 14) were read first but did not lead to further research studies. Case studies (n = 18) were identified and read but then excluded as none were presented in line with systematic case study methodologies (Priya 2021); they were largely indistinguishable from anecdotes about the benefits, and more rarely the problems, of pets at work.

The remaining articles ($n = 31$) that were based on research about pets at work were copied into a separate Microsoft Word table which tabulated authors' names, year of publication, country, peer review status, research design, participants and sample size, outcome measures, and key results. No meta-analysis could be attempted due to the diversity of the studies. A narrative approach was used to summarise and report on the review findings.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 provide provides a summary of the 31 publications that were included in the review. Additional details are presented in Supplementary Tables 1 and 2 (measures assessed and key findings). The studies in the review came from the USA ($n = 14$; 45%), South Africa (4; 13%), Portugal (3; 10%), the United Kingdom (3; 10%), Sweden (2; 6%), and one (3%) each from Austria, Australia, India, Germany, and an international online survey. Studies mainly reported collecting data via surveys ($n = 25$; 81%) or interviews ($n = 5$; 16%), with one quasi-experimental study reported (Barker *et al.* 2012). Sample sizes ranged from 4 (Barker 2005) to 2,254 (Applebaum *et al.* 2020).

Fourteen studies (all surveys) included information on the presence of pets while working from home (see Table 2 for further details). Of the 14 studies on working from home, five included at least one

measure with validated psychometric properties (Applebaum *et al.* 2020; Hernández *et al.* 2021; Hoffman 2021; Junça-Silva 2023, 2024). Of the studies not focused on working from home (Table 1), 6/12 of the survey-based studies (Johnson 2006; Francis *et al.* 2007; Naumann 2015; Hall *et al.* 2017; Rice 2019; Junça-Silva 2022) and the quasi-experimental study (Barker *et al.* 2012) used validated psychometric measures, but no interview-based studies did. There was no consistency in the measures used. Stress, for example, was measured with a visual analog scale (Barker *et al.* 2012), the Perceived Stress Scale (Hernández *et al.* 2021) and the Stress in General Scale (Naumann 2015). There was considerable variety in the other variables examined using validated measures, including attachment to pets (Naumann 2015; Hall and Mills 2019; Applebaum *et al.* 2020), satisfaction (Barker *et al.* 2012; Rice 2019), organisational commitment (Barker *et al.* 2012), perceived organisational support (Barker *et al.* 2012; Naumann 2015), burnout (Francis *et al.* 2007), personality (Francis *et al.* 2007), quality of life (Hall and Mills 2019), work engagement (Hall and Mills 2019; Junça-Silva 2022), turnover intentions (Hall and Mills 2019; Rice 2019), well-being (Hoffman 2021; Junça-Silva 2022), mindfulness (Junça-Silva 2024), and work-family conflict (Naumann 2015).

None of the studies used randomisation or blinding. Survey data were collected using online survey

Table 1. Summary^a of studies included in a scoping review of the benefits and drawbacks on workers' well-being of allowing workers' pets in the workplace.

Author/date	Country	Peer-reviewed	Design	Participants
Banfield Pet Hospital (2016)	USA	No	Survey	Employees ($n = 1,660$) and managers ($n = 200$) from "a mix of company sizes and industries"
Barker (2005)	USA	Yes	Survey	Senior (managerial) employees ($n = 4$) in dog-friendly workplaces
Barker <i>et al.</i> (2012)	USA	Yes	Between-group design with repeated measures	Fulltime employees of a "service-manufacturing-retail" company
Carstens (2013)	SA	No ^b	Interviews (semi-structured)	Employees ($n = 11$)
Francis <i>et al.</i> (2007)	UK	Yes	Survey	Priests ($n = 1,468$); 17% own a dog and/or cat
Hall <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Int ^c	Yes	Survey	Office workers ($n = 776$; 95 whose workplaces allow dogs; 681 whose workplaces did not (or unknown))
Hall and Mills (2019)	UK	Yes	Survey	Dog owners ($n = 749$) who worked in an office environment
Johnson (2006)	SA	No ^b	Survey	Employees ($n = 28$) of an advertising agency
Junça-Silva (2022)	Portugal	Yes	Survey	Working pet-owners ($n = 208$)
Nationwide (2018)	USA	No	Survey	Full-time office employees ($n = 2,002$) in businesses with ≥ 100 employees
Naumann (2015)	USA	No ^b	Survey	Full-time employees ($n = 188$) in a variety of occupations
Norling and Keeling (2010)	Sweden	Yes	Interview	Working dog-owners ($n = 204$); employers ($n = 90$) (some linked to the dog owners)
Rambaree and Sjöberg (2019)	Sweden	Yes	Focus group	University staff (and students) some of whom were pet owners ($n = 22$)
Ranjan (2021)	India	No ^b	Survey	Employed workers ($n = 21$)
Rice (2019)	USA	No ^b	Survey	Employed dog owners ($n = 544$) from "dog interest groups"; 391 bought dog to work; 111 did not
Wagner and Pina e Cunha (2021)	Germany	Yes	Interview (semi-structured)	Employees ($n = 12$) from 5 companies with dog friendly policies from the creative agency sector
Wells and Perrine (2001b)	USA	Yes	Survey	Employees and managers ($n = 193$) from 31 companies that allowed pets in the workplace

^aFor more information on these studies (measures assessed, key findings) please see Supplementary Table 1.

^bMaster's thesis or student research report.

^cInternational sample: UK, USA, Finland, Australia, Netherlands, Brazil.

SA = South Africa.

Table 2. Summary^a of studies of employees working from home (WFH) that were included in a scoping review of the benefits and drawbacks on workers' well-being of allowing workers' pets in the workplace.

Author/date	Country	Peer-reviewed	Design	Participants
Applebaum <i>et al.</i> (2020)	USA	Yes	Survey	Pet-owning teleworkers during COVID-19 pandemic (n = 2,254)
Awada <i>et al.</i> (2021)	USA	Yes	Survey	Workers (n = 988) in a variety of occupations, WFH during COVID-19 pandemic
Beno and Hvorecky (2021)	Austria	Yes	Survey	Employees (n = 154) of a sports and leisure product company WFH during COVID-19 restrictions
Bolstad <i>et al.</i> (2021)	USA	Yes	Survey (quantitative and qualitative analyses)	Dog- or cat-owner (n = 102) during COVID-19 pandemic
Chapman and Thamrin (2020)	Australia	Yes	Survey (prospective cohort)	Staff (n = 163; 23 had pets) of research institutes WFH during COVID-19 restrictions
Ford <i>et al.</i> (2021)	USA	Yes	Survey (qualitative and quantitative analyses)	Microsoft technical employees WFH during COVID-19 pandemic: (n = 1,369 (WA); n = 2,265 (wider USA))
Hernández <i>et al.</i> (2021)	UK	Yes	Survey	Employees WFH (n = 184) during COVID-19 restrictions
Hoffman (2021)	USA	Yes	Survey	Office workers (n = 454): 369 primarily WFH; 301 have dogs and/or cats
Junça-Silva (2024)	Portugal	Yes	Survey	Pet owners (n = 400) WFH
Junça-Silva (2023)	Portugal	Yes	Survey, interview	Pet owners (n = 16) WFH in a variety of occupations: interviews (n = 16); survey (n = 969)
Scholtz (2022)	SA	Yes	Survey	Pet owners (n = 77) WFH
Tylke (2021)	USA	No ^b	Survey	Employees (n = 82) of 2 organisations with "dog friendly" policies
Victor and Mayer (2023)	SA	Yes	Interview (semi-structured)	Pet (dog or cat) owners (n = 10) WFH during COVID-19 restrictions
Xiao <i>et al.</i> (2021)	USA	Yes	Survey	Employees (n = 988) in a variety of occupations WFH due to COVID-19 pandemic

^aFor more information on these studies (measures assessed, key findings) please see Supplementary Table 2.

^bMaster's thesis or student research report.

SA = South Africa; WA = Washington state; WFH = working from home.

tools such as Qualtrics or MTurk. Response rates could not be calculated as it is not known how many potential participants received the surveys or were invited to take part in the studies. All studies were at high risk of having unrepresentative or biased samples. Some selected participants from dog-friendly workplaces (Barker 2005), or participants who were employed dog owners (Norling and Keeling 2010; Hall *et al.* 2017), or from a small number of companies (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Johnson 2006; Carstens 2013; Tylke 2021; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). The largest studies were by organisations focused on the pet care industry (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Nationwide 2018). However, these studies were difficult to draw firm conclusions from as the quality of the reporting was poor. For example, in the Banfield study data are reported as the proportion of workers in "pet-friendly workplaces" who agreed with a statement regarding pets in the workplace, however, no definition of a pet-friendly workplace is provided. Neither the Banfield nor Nationwide study provided information on how the workplaces and employees surveyed were recruited (so bias cannot be assessed), and it is not clear exactly how questions were asked and scored.

Pets at work and employee stress and well-being

In general, there was support for the conclusion that having employees' pets present in the workplace

reduced stress (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Johnson 2006; Barker *et al.* 2012; Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Hall *et al.* 2017; Hall and Mills 2019; Rice 2019; Ranjan 2021; Tylke 2021; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021), although most sources were simply reporting respondents' (who may or may not have been pet-owners) level of agreement with statements regarding pets and stress. Bringing pets to work was also associated with better morale (Barker *et al.* 2012; Banfield Pet Hospital 2016), higher work engagement (Nationwide 2018; Hall and Mills 2019; Ranjan 2021), job satisfaction (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Nationwide 2018; Hall and Mills 2019; Rice 2019; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021; Junça-Silva 2022, 2023), well-being (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Hall and Mills 2019), and work-home balance (Hall and Mills 2019), although bringing pets to work may allow employees to work longer hours (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016).

There were some contradictory findings. Naumann (2015) found that stress reduction at pet-friendly workplaces only applied to dog owners, as participants who did not own dogs showed no difference in stress levels between pet-friendly and non-pet-friendly workplaces. In contrast, Rice (2019) found that dog-owning employees who brought their dogs to work were no more satisfied with their work schedules, ability to control stress or overall health than those without dogs at work.

The most highly cited study concerning stress and pets at work is Barker *et al.* (2012). Participants in this study were in three groups: 18 participants who brought their dogs to work ("DOG" group); 38

employees who owned dogs but did not bring them to work (“NODOG”) and 19 employees without pets (“NOPET” group). All participants worked for the same company in the USA that had a policy allowing dogs in the workplace for the previous 15 years. Participants in the three groups were similar with respect to age, education and tenure. The company premises had 20–30 dogs present each day. For the study, participants in the DOG group were asked to bring their dogs to work on study days 1 and 3, and not to bring the dog to work on study days 2 and 4. As well as self-reported measures of stress, salivary cortisol was measured as a physiological indicator of stress. The finding that has attracted the most attention was that for the NODOG group (dog owners without their pets at work), self-reported stress increased during the working day, while for the DOG and NOPET groups, stress levels did not increase. There was, however, no evidence of differences in self-reported stress between the DOG and the NOPET groups. Furthermore, there was also no evidence for differences in perceptions of organisational support, affective commitment or job satisfaction, or on cortisol concentrations, although these non-significant findings are rarely noted in the broader literature.

In relation to employee well-being and the presence of pets while working from home, employee well-being was not related to work location (home or office) or to the presence of pets in two studies (Hoffman 2021; Xiao *et al.* 2021). A survey of Catholic clergy, for whom the home is also a workplace, found no psychological benefit from owning a cat, while dog ownership was associated with statistically significant but small increases in scores for burnout (Francis *et al.* 2007). Other studies, however, reported more positive findings. When working from home, pet owners reported spending more time with their pets, had more physical contact with their pets and exercised their dogs more (except during lockdown orders) (Bolstad *et al.* 2021). Owners appreciated the time spent with pets and the opportunity to take care of pets’ needs (Ford *et al.* 2021; Hernández *et al.* 2021). Participants reported that pets reduced their stress, created a homely atmosphere and provided companionship, love and comfort (Scholtz 2022; Junça-Silva 2023; Victor and Mayer 2023). More interactions with pets during work time were related to more positive affect, work engagement and mindfulness (Junça-Silva 2024), and pet owners’ attitudes towards telework were positively related to their health, job satisfaction and positive affect (Junça-Silva 2023).

Where decreased levels of reported stress were found for pets in the workplace, these were attributed to better communication and more collegial work environments (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Barker 2005; Johnson 2006; Norling and Keeling 2010; Hall *et al.*

2017; Nationwide 2018; Rambaree and Sjöberg 2019; Rice 2019; Ranjan 2021; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). Participants reported that pet-friendly policies created a positive work environment as dogs in the workplace could act as an icebreaker to facilitate communication between managers, employees and customers (Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). They also felt that social cohesion improved, as dog owners supported each other and formed a sub-community that sometimes included non-owners who helped take care of the dogs (Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). Participants also communicated that pets at work could create opportunities for short breaks and exercise during the working day (Hall *et al.* 2017; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021), and reduced owners’ feelings of guilt about leaving pets at home (Johnson 2006; Banfield Pet Hospital 2016).

While it was common for participants of studies to report that the presence of employees’ pets at work had positive impacts on workers’ well-being, results indicate that for some people this would not be true. In a qualitative study of participants’ opinions of policies allowing pets at work, 4/11 participants were afraid of or disliked animals and did not want animals in the workplace (Carstens 2013). A dislike of dogs (16%), cleanliness (7%) and allergies (5%) were cited by respondents as concerns they believe their colleagues may have regarding dogs in the workplace (Hall *et al.* 2017). This issue will be reviewed in more detail below.

Pets at work and employee work performance

In the three-group study by Barker *et al.* (2012) described above, participants’ views on whether bringing a dog to work improved work performance were mixed, with 20% reporting that the dogs’ presence harmed their productivity, 20% reporting that it helped and 60% saying the effect on productivity was neutral (i.e. 80% neutral or negative). Other studies were less equivocal, with reports that pets at work can increase productivity (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Tylke 2021; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). However, all data were self-assessed with no other indicators of whether productivity had changed.

The presence of pets while working at home was not related to productivity in three studies (Chapman and Thamrin 2020; Awada *et al.* 2021; Beno and Hvorecky 2021), while two others reported that pets were positively related to performance (Scholtz 2022; Junça-Silva 2023). Details of performance changes were not provided.

Employee perceptions of organisations

Employees reported that they appreciated their employers’ pet-friendly policies, saw them as perks, and would not like to lose the benefits (Banfield Pet

Hospital 2016; Tylke 2021). Allowing pets in the workplace could create a positive image of the organisation (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Ranjan 2021), leading to greater employee loyalty and commitment, and lower employees' intentions to quit (Banfield Pet Hospital 2016; Hall *et al.* 2017; Nationwide 2018; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021; Junça-Silva 2022), and could create perceptions of a more supportive organisation (Naumann 2015). No information on employee turnover rates or tenure was provided.

Concerns about pets at work

Not all workplaces are suitable for pets, e.g. warehouses, and food-production and animal facilities (Johnson 2006; Hall *et al.* 2017; Rambaree and Sjöberg 2019; Tylke 2021). Human injuries have occurred from people being pulled off their feet by a dog on a leash, or tripping over a dog or its toys (Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021). The suitability of pets in terms of training, behaviour, size and compatibility with other pets was also identified as a concern (Johnson 2006). Other concerns included noise and hygiene (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Hall *et al.* 2017; Ranjan 2021; Tylke 2021). Pets can make a workplace look less hygienic or professional, for example with pet hair on clothing, uniforms and furniture, barking and scattered toys (Wells and Perrine 2001b).

Some people dislike or fear dogs, so the presence of dogs or other pets in their workplace could increase rather than decrease their stress (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Johnson 2006; Carstens 2013; Hall *et al.* 2017; Tylke 2021). People with allergies to pets may also be affected by their presence in the workplace (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Hall *et al.* 2017; Tylke 2021). Some people have cultural or religious concerns about proximity to certain animals (Johnson 2006; Hall *et al.* 2017). The benefits of pets at work might not apply to non-pet-owners or people who find that pets create unwelcome distractions (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Johnson 2006; Ranjan 2021; Tylke 2021). People who dislike pets or are allergic to them could feel left out by not being part of the "pet crowd" at work (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Barker *et al.* 2012).

When working from home, pets could create unhelpful distractions (Beno and Hvorecky 2021; Ford *et al.* 2021; Hoffman 2021). Respondents to a survey reported that bored, restless, disruptive or needy pets demanded attention and interrupted work during the COVID-19 pandemic (Applebaum *et al.* 2020). Owners' feelings of guilt when returning to the office and leaving pets at home were also noted as a concern (Scholtz 2022).

Discussion

The most notable finding was that the presence of employees' pets in workplaces may reduce stress, at

least for some staff in some circumstances. However, the evidence for this is not strong. Many of the studies contributing to this conclusion did not include validated psychometric measures or were qualitative studies of participants' opinions regarding the impact of pets on stress. Where studies generated quantitative results, these frequently assessed the self-reported impact on dog-owners of having their own dog at work. Work-related stress is known to have problematic effects on individual well-being and work performance (Clements *et al.* 2024). Where pets were permitted at work, participants reported they helped to create connections, friendliness, positive distractions and a shared topic of conversation among staff. In relation to employee productivity, the majority of studies focused on the impacts of pets on productivity while workers were working from home, and findings were mixed, with pets providing comfort and company but also at times creating distractions and interruptions. There were indications that pet-friendly policies could make organisations more attractive to potential employees.

These findings may be valuable in pointing towards a way to improve staff well-being, but this review also highlights limitations in the research and areas of concern. In relation to research quality, most studies (25/31, 80%) were surveys; only 12/31 (39%) used validated psychometric measures of stress, engagement or other variables of interest. Self-report data was not supplemented by analysis of workplace data, for example on productivity, absenteeism or staff turnover. No studies found differences in physiological measures of stress or anxiety, raising questions as to whether any benefits for physical health would be realised. Most pets at work in the reviewed papers were dogs. There was little information on the prevalence of problems experienced by pet-friendly workplaces, the measures that had been put in place to help make the policies successful, or how the concerns of people with allergies or a fear or dislike of animals had been addressed (Carstens 2013). Some studies had small samples (Barker 2005; Johnson 2006) or included only participants who owned dogs (Hall *et al.* 2017; Hall and Mills 2019; Rice 2019). There were no pre-post studies of organisations introducing a pet-friendly initiative. Another limitation of the studies is the lack of objective evaluation of effects on performance, absenteeism and staff turnover, and under-representation of the perspectives of people who do not want pets in their workplace.

Implications for research

A starting point for future research needs to be a balanced perspective acknowledging the potential drawbacks, problems and limitations of pets at work, as well as the benefits. Useful approaches would

include data collection before and after the implementation of pet-friendly workplace policies, with comparison or control groups where possible. Longitudinal study designs would allow evaluation of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, and qualitative, quantitative and observational methods can all provide useful information. It is important to use valid and reliable measures. As well as subjective indicators of, for example, stress, well-being, satisfaction and work performance, objective data could include physiological indicators of stress and human resources data on work performance, absenteeism, staff turnover, accidents and incidents. Participants should include pet owners and non-owners, those participating and not participating in pet-friendly initiatives, and the perspectives of employees, managers, human resources personnel and, if relevant, clients. Null and negative findings must be reported alongside positive ones. As well as looking at the benefits and challenges of introducing pet-friendly policies, areas to explore include the prevalence and experiences of workplaces with pet-friendly policies, and ways in which workplace design can support pets, their owners and people who do not want to be in the presence of pets. The outcome should be evidence-based guidelines on whether, when and how to implement pet-friendly workplaces.

Implications for practice

The literature included in this review has pointed to some issues that need to be considered when implementing a pet-friendly policy in workplaces. Clear criteria are required for the number and species of pets present at any one time, as well as pet size, registration, training, behaviour, vaccination, cleanliness, health, and temperament (Johnson 2006; Hall *et al.* 2017; Rambaree and Sjöberg 2019; Ranjan 2021). The requirements of people who do not want to interact with pets at work need to be considered (Johnson 2006; Carstens 2013; Ranjan 2021), and there may need to be designated “no-pet” areas such as meeting rooms, food areas and hazardous areas (Johnson 2006; Ranjan 2021). Policies should address the responsibilities of owners to ensure the pet is controlled, its needs are met, and the workplace is kept clean (Johnson 2006; Hall *et al.* 2017). Work environments need to be safe for people and pets (Ranjan 2021), and schedules and rosters need to allow for pet owners to feed, clean and exercise their pets (Wells and Perrine 2001b; Rambaree and Sjöberg 2019; Tylke 2021; Wagner and Pina e Cunha 2021).

Conclusion

This review has shown there is some evidence that allowing pets in workplaces may reduce employees’

stress. However, the quality of the evidence is weak and the effects were sometimes small and did not apply to all employees. Pet owners and people with positive views of pets seem to benefit more than non-owners, while people who do not like pets or who have allergies or personal or religious concerns may find that the presence of pets increases stress. There is a need for further research in this area. A pet-friendly workplace with well-designed policies may have positive benefits for some staff, and it has become clear that these pet-friendly policies need to be carefully developed, implemented and evaluated.

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†Included in scoping review

*Non-peer-reviewed