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Does owning a companion animal influence the belief that animals experience emotions such as grief?

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Abstract

This paper investigates public attitudes towards emotional experiences in animals. We surveyed 1,000 members of the public to investigate how companion animal ownership affects the attribution of emotions to animals and beliefs about whether animals can grieve. Respondents who owned a companion animal were more likely to believe that some animals can experience grief compared with respondents that did not own a companion animal. The non-owning respondents were more likely to believe that animals do not experience emotions including: anxiety, distress or depression, do not show behavioural changes when they are experiencing grief and do not grieve as a result of separation from a conspecific. Our findings show that companion animal ownership plays a significant role in the public perception of the emotional experiences of animals and belief in the animals' ability to grieve.

Keywords: animal welfare, companion animal, emotions, grief, public attitudes, separation