

Dogs' family status depends on family's locale

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Man's best friend might just be treated like any other animal depending on where the owners live. A study by David Blouin, assistant professor of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Indiana University South Bend, found that people who think of animals as children tend to have a city background.

"To think of pets as just another animal is not uncommon in rural areas," Blouin said, "which makes sense given the utilitarian relationships people in [rural areas](#) are more likely to have with a range of different animals -- from farm to [wild animals](#)."

But no matter where someone lives, having children often changes the owners' thoughts on their pets.

"If you have kids, you have less time to spend with your pets," said Blouin, who discussed his study on Sunday at the American Sociological Association 2010 Annual Meeting. "That's part of it, but not the whole story. People who think of their pets as their children often re-evaluate this thought when they have human children of their own."

Here are some of the findings of Blouin's study, which involved [pet](#) owners in Indiana:

People often have very intense attachments to their pets and pets are often an integral part of their daily routines.

Ninety-three percent of dog owners and 77 percent of cat owners took their pets to the veterinarian at least one time a year.

Eighty-one percent of [dog owners](#) and 67.5 percent of cat owners spent two or more hours daily with their respective pets, while only 2 percent of dog and cat owners spent time with their pets less than every day.

In interviews many of the pet owners confided that their pet's health was a major concern, especially as their animals got older. Some admitted that they spent significant sums of money on their pet's health, addressing routine care, such as vaccinations, as well more serious conditions such as skin allergies, Crohn's disease and diabetes.

The frequency of interactions owners had with their pets, as well as how often they took them to the veterinarian, were closely tied to how [owners](#) viewed their pets -- whether as a child, a companion, or just another, albeit, useful animal, Blouin said.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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