

Pet owners with hoarding tendencies may take toll on health of themselves, animals in care, study finds

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Mississippi State Department of Psychology faculty members studying hoarding behavior are teaming with faculty in the university's College of

Veterinary Medicine to look at implications of this disorder and its relation to pet ownership.

Animal lovers who strive to care for many pets—and have personal [hoarding](#) tendencies —may risk the quality of their own wellbeing and that of those under their care, a recent MSU collaborative study finds.

The resulting paper "Increased animal ownership in the home is correlated with [worse health outcomes](#) based on healthcare indicators investigated in canines and felines in rural Mississippi" has been published in a recent online edition of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

Written by Mary E. Dozier and Ben Porter, assistant professors in MSU's Department of Psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences, and Jacob Shivley and Mary "Becky" Telle, both assistant clinical professors in CVM's clinical sciences department, the paper also will be published in the forthcoming hard copy issue of JAVMA.

"Although most folks with hoarding disorder collect objects, for some folks their main struggle is having more animals than they can care for," said Dozier, whose primary research focus is on the characterization and treatment of hoarding disorder. "Most research on animal hoarding has focused on extreme cases. We wanted to look at what normative patterns of animal ownership look like, particularly in a rural setting, and if there were any trends we could discover related to animal [health](#)."

Dozier and Porter examined a decade's worth of records from the MSU College of Veterinary Medicine Community Veterinary Services, looking for number of canine and feline animals per household and indicators of [animal health](#), both positive—such as dental visits—and negative—such as hydration problems.

Dozier said individuals with animal hoarding disorder may not recognize how their hoarding tendencies interfere with the health of their pets because they often feel they are "saving" the animals and are unable to recognize the toll on both the animals and on themselves.

Their research revealed animals from households with eight or more animals were associated with worse health, likely stemming from owners possessing more animals than they have capacity to adequately handle.

Dozier said, "One of my goals is to find ways to identify people who might need help. This research project was the first step toward finding ways to screen for animal hoarding and then connect those individuals with [mental health services](#) in the community."

More information: Mary E. Dozier et al, Increased animal ownership in the home is correlated with worse health outcomes based on health-care indicators investigated in canines and felines in rural Mississippi, *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (2023). [DOI: 10.2460/javma.22.12.0589](#)

Provided by Mississippi State University

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