

# Attitudes and opinions about pets: A population-based study in France (2017)



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## What did we do?

- In 2017, we surveyed a representative sample of the French population including 1035 persons who did not own a pet and 968 others who had at least one pet.
- Our sample included pet owners and non-owners.
- We used the Pet Attitude Scale (PAS), a validated scale developed in the United States in 1981 and reviewed in 2004 to study people's attitudes to animals.
- To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that the PAS or any other comparable tool to analyse human-animal relationships has been applied to a representative sample of the French population.
- The PAS analyses 3 major aspects of our relationship with animals:
  - Love and interaction
  - Pets at home
  - The joy of owning a pet.

## Results:

### Is France a nation of pet-lovers?

- Almost 50% of French people live with a pet (49.7%).
- For the statement “I like pets”:
  - 78% of people answered YES.
  - 15% of people answered NO.
  - 7% of participants expressed no opinion on this matter.
- For the statement “Pets bring happiness to my life or they would if I had one”:
  - 71% of participants agreed.
  - 20.5% of participants disagreed.
  - 8.5% of participants expressed no opinion on this matter .

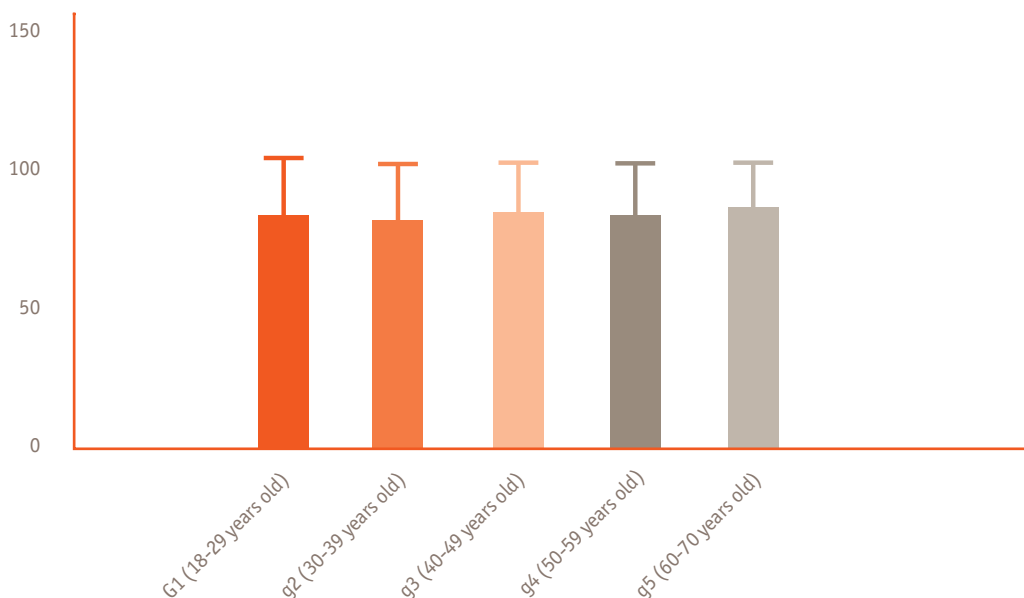
### Take-home messages:

- Our results support the idea that France actually is a nation of pet-lovers.

### Does age influence the way people think about animals?

- We did not find significant differences between the average PAS score among the different age groups (Figure 1).

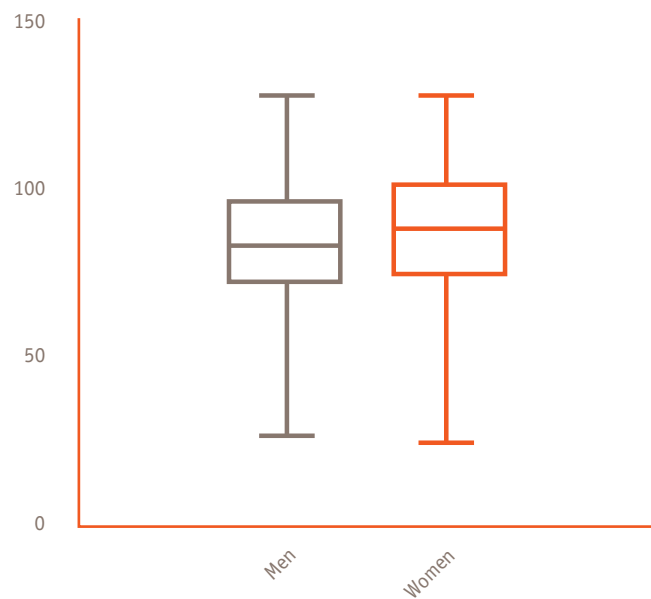
Figure 1. Average PAS score by age group



## Are there any differences between men and women regarding how animals are perceived?

- According to our results, on average, women scored 3% higher than men on the PAS (Figure 2). This difference was statistically significant.

Figure 2. Average PAS score by gender



### Take-home messages:

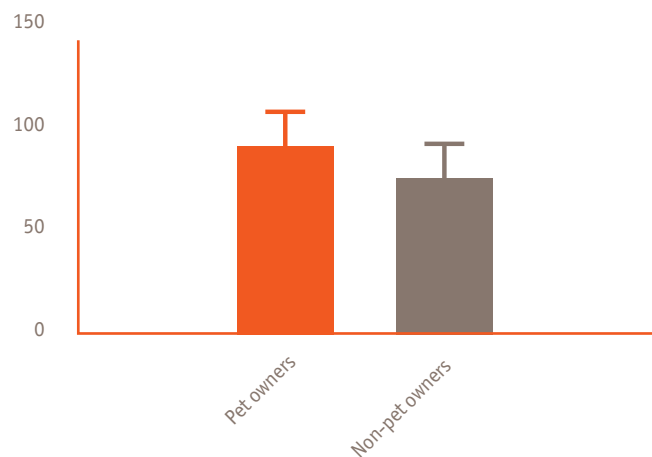
- Our results are in accordance with previous research that showed a more positive attitude to animals among women.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that even if it is statistically significant, the difference is small.

## Are there any differences between pet owners and non-pet owners regarding how animals are perceived?

- According to our results, pet owners scored 13% higher on PAS than non-pet owners (Figure 3). This difference was statistically significant.

**Figure 3. Average PAS score according to whether a person owns a pet or not**



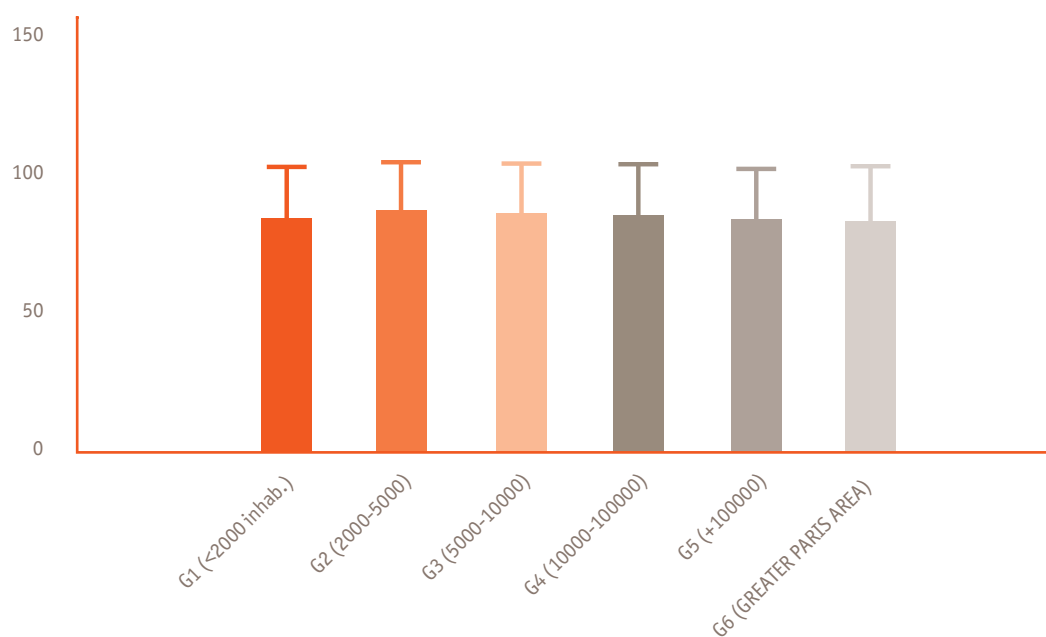
### Take-home messages:

- As we could expect, pet owners seem to have a generally more positive attitude towards animals than non-pet owners.

## Are there any differences between the different demographic areas in France regarding how animals are perceived?

- We compared the results on the PAS between different towns according to their size, from towns under 2000 inhabitants to the Greater Paris area.
- According to our results, there is no difference in PAS score between small villages and very large cities (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Average PAS score according to the size of the village/town



### Take-home messages:

- Attitude towards pets does not seem to depend on the size of the town.

## How important are pets for French people?

- 78% of the people asked declared that a pet should be treated with as much respect as if it were a human member of the family.
- 58% of the people asked said that they understand and communicate with their pets or that they would do if they had one.
- 57% of the people asked talk to their animals or would do if they had one.
- 55.5% of the people asked play with their pets every day or they would do if they had one.
- 22% of people asked considered that their pet is more important than any of their friends.

### Take-home messages:

- Most people consider pets as members of the family.
- Animals seem to play a role in many people's social life.

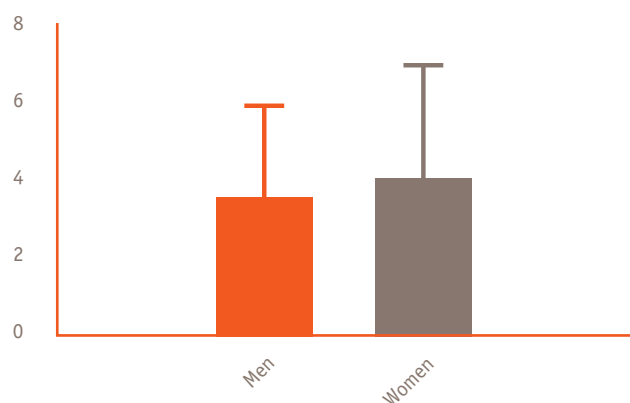
## Is it worth having a pet?

- 59% of people asked think that living with a pet is worthwhile.
- 41% of people asked like seeing their pets enjoying their food.
- 73% of people asked were against the idea that pets are a waste of money.
- After looking at the whole population, we tried to find differences between men and women, pet owners and non-pet owners, demographic areas and the different age groups on different aspects of living with a pet. Here are the most relevant results:

### For the statement "I like living or I would like to live with a pet":

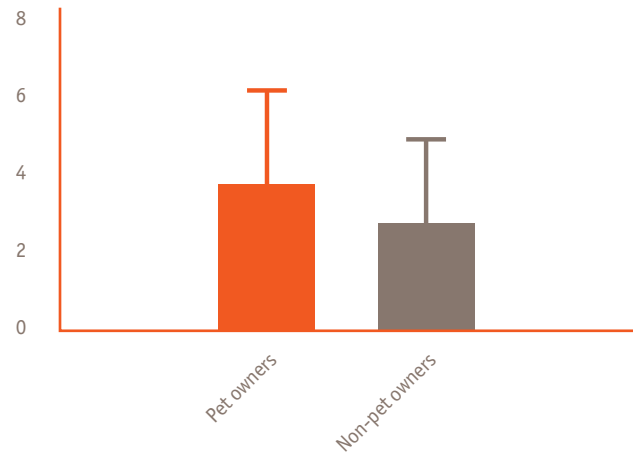
- On average, women scored 7% higher than men (Figure 5). This difference was statistically significant.

Figure 5. Differences between men (orange) and women (grey) on wishing to live with a pet



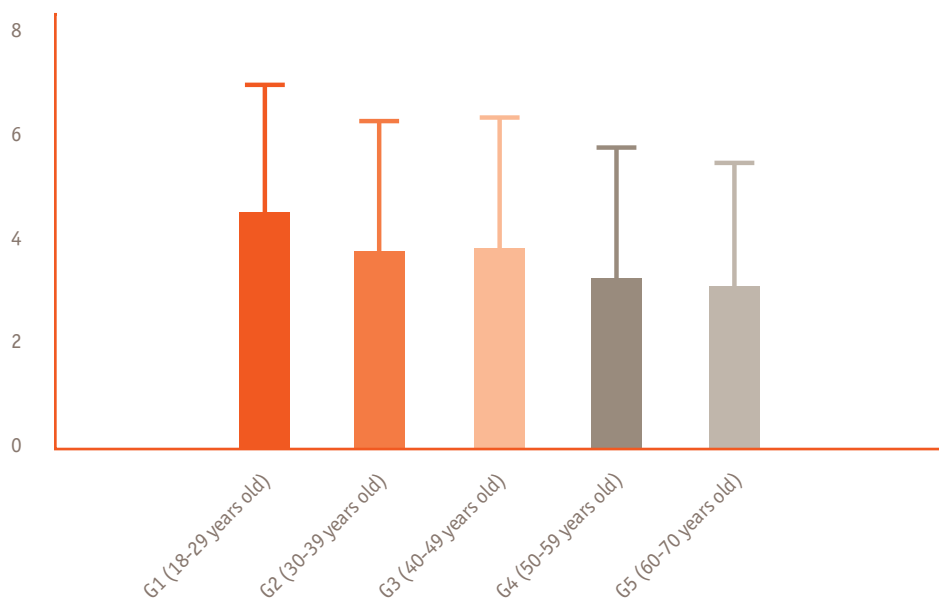
- On average, pet owners scored 14% higher than non-pet owners on the PAS (Figure 6). This difference was statistically significant.

**Figure 6. Differences between pet owners (orange) and non-pet owners (grey) on wishing to live with a pet**



- We found significant differences between the different age groups, where young people show a more positive attitude to living with a pet than older people

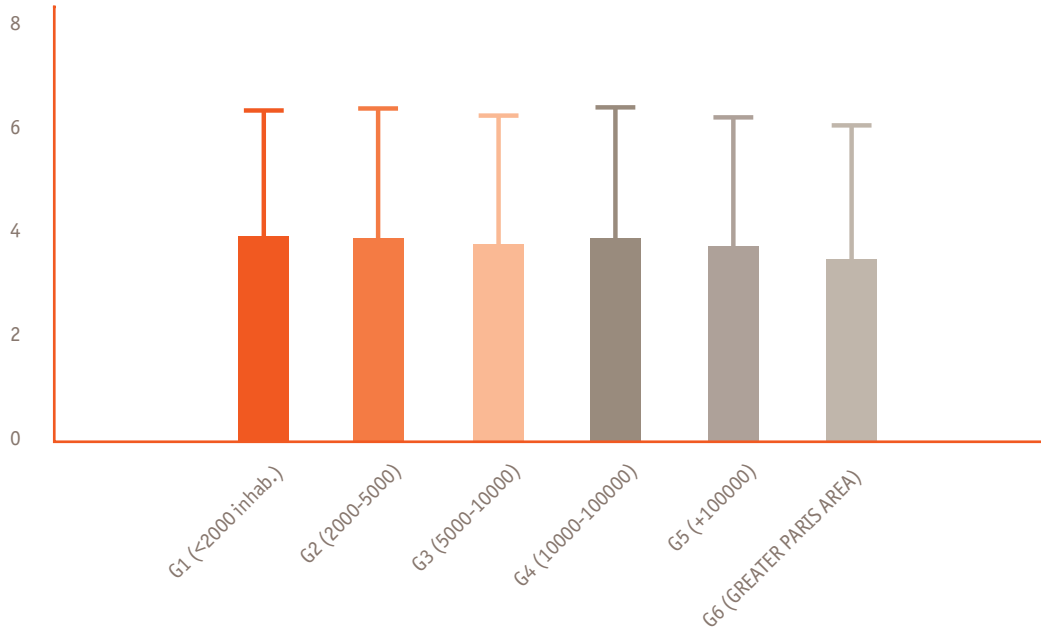
**Figure 7. Differences between age groups on wishing to live with a pet**





- We did not find any differences between demographic areas (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Differences between demographic areas on wishing to live with a pet**



### Take-home messages:

- Most French people think that sharing their life with pets is worthwhile.
- Contrary to popular belief, the type of area where a person lives does not have a strong influence on their wish to live with a pet. This result seems to follow current research suggesting that the human-animal bond is a universal phenomenon that is influenced but not determined by socio-demographic factors.
- Although we have not found any differences between age groups regarding the general attitude towards animals, we have found differences on the wish to live with a pet. Actually, young people seem more predisposed to live with a pet than older people. It is difficult to explain this difference as it may involve many factors. Young people seem more open to new experiences, which might influence their attitude to animals. Older persons might be more aware of the responsibilities implied by living with a pet.

### For the statement “My pet is more important to me than any of my friends (or would be if I had a pet)”:

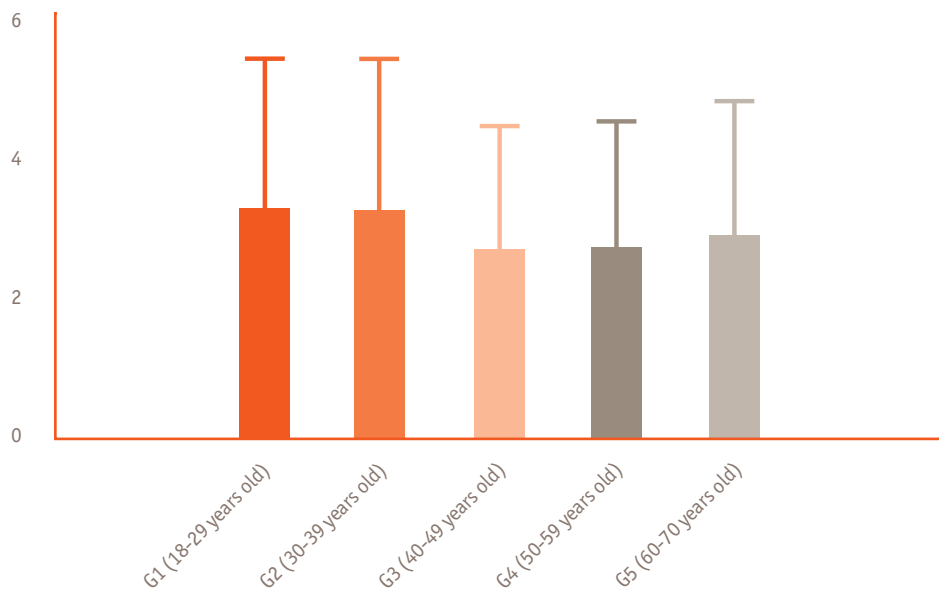
- We did not find any differences linked to gender or demographic area.
- We found a statistical difference between the different age groups, where young people agreed more with the statement than old people (Figure 9).

The 18-39 age group scored 8 to 9% higher than the 40-59 age group on this question. The 60-70 age group’s score fell between young people and middle-aged people.

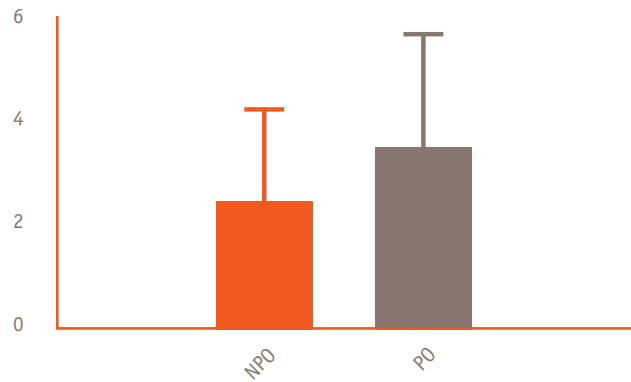
- We found a statistical difference between pet owners and non-pet owners (Figure 10).

Pet owners scored on average 13% higher than non-pet owners.

**Figure 9. Differences between age groups regarding their opinion on the statement “My pet is more important to me than any of my friends (or would be if I had a pet)”**



**Figure 10. Differences between pet owners and non-pet owners on the statement “My pet is more important to me than any of my friends (or would be if I had a pet)”**



### **Take-home messages:**

- Pet owners value their pets a lot, even compared with friends. This has two potential explanations that are actually rather compatible. Firstly, people who feel closer to animals are more predisposed to interact with them. Secondly, the experience of living with a pet deeply affects people, even those who had a different perception before becoming cat and dog owners.
- Very young and very old people demonstrate stronger opinions than middle aged people. Perhaps the key to understanding lies in the middle-aged group, based on their lifestyle, their responsibilities, their workload and the composition of their family. Young people often need someone to talk to, and for older people, pets are often an important source of social interaction.

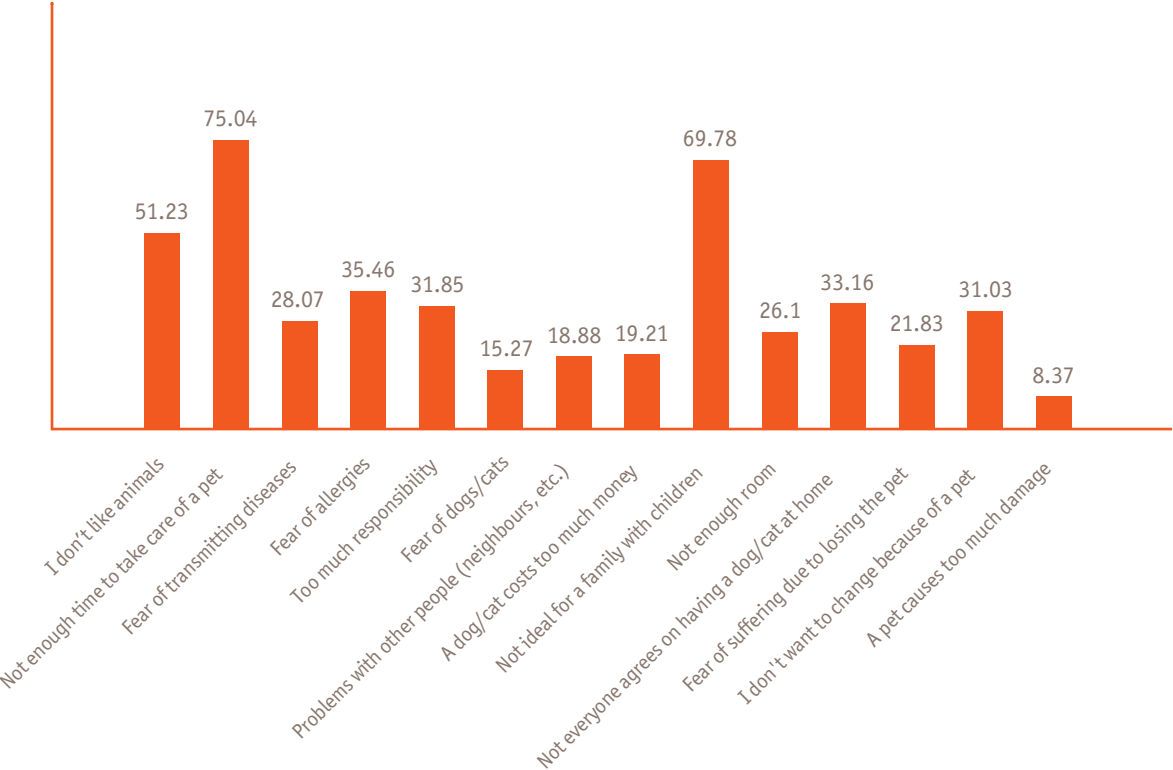
## Are there any differences between pet owners and non-pet owners regarding how animals are perceived?

- To understand the reasons why a person would not be interested in pets, we included in the study 1035 persons who do not currently live with a pet. This part of the sample can be divided into 2 main groups: those who have never lived with a pet (611 persons) and those who do not own a pet but have owned one in the past (424 persons).

### Firstly, let's look at people who have never lived with a pet.

- The most obvious question would be “Would you like to live with a pet?”
  - 77% of the people asked stated that they would not like to live with a pet.
- After this first question, we asked them about a series of statements that are generally mentioned as the main reasons for not living with a pet.
- Here are the most interesting results (detailed results are in figure 11):
  - First and foremost, 51% of these people said that they do not like animals.
  - 75% of them stated that they do not have enough time to look after a pet.
  - 70% of these people thought that pets are not good for families with children.
  - 35% of people were concerned about allergies, 28% about contagious diseases and 15% were afraid of pets.
  - 33% of people stated that there was disagreement within their family on the possibility of adopting a pet.
  - 22% of people were concerned about the suffering involved in losing a pet.
  - The financial costs did not seem particularly important for people who have never had a pet (19%).

**Figure 11. Opinions on living with a dog or cat among people who have never lived with a pet**



**Take-home messages (concerning people who have never lived with a pet):**

- It is interesting to note that many people are still concerned about the health risks involved in owning a pet.
- In the same way, it is surprising that a vast majority of persons in the study think that pets are not suitable for families with children when a lot of research on this matter indicates the exact opposite. Once again, there is still a long way to go for education and information campaigns regarding the benefits of owning a pet.

## Now, let's look at people who do not live with a pet but who have had one in the past.

- Once again, the most obvious question would be “Would you like to live with a pet?”
- Now, the percentage of persons in the study stating that they would not like to live with a pet falls to 54.23%.
- As we did previously with the other group, after this first question, we asked them about a series of statements that are generally mentioned as the main reasons for not living with a pet.
- Here are the most interesting results (detailed results are in figure 12):
  - The first and, once again, most important aspect, 16% of the persons asked who have lived with a dog say that they do not like animals and 21% of them who have lived with a cat say the same thing. This is a much lower percentage that found among people who have never had a pet.
  - The most frequent reason to justify not living with a pet is once again the lack of time to take care of a dog or a cat (59% for dogs and 60% for cats).
  - The figures concerning health risks are higher for cats than for dogs. This could be associated with certain illnesses such as toxoplasmosis, thought to be related to owning a cat.
  - One interesting fact, 51% and 40% of the former pet owners declared fearing the suffering involved in respectively losing a dog and a cat. This is a much higher percentage than found among people who have never had a pet and could reflect a previous negative experience.
  - The feeling of not having enough space at home is much higher for dogs (52%) than for cats (25%).
  - Here, the percentage of persons who believe that pets are not a good thing for families with children is lower (35% for dogs and 42% for cats).
  - One interesting fact, concerns about possible conflict with neighbours due to having a dog seem to be higher in this group than in the group of people who have never owned a pet (33% vs 18%). Again, this could be explained by a past negative experience.
  - Concerning the financial costs linked to a pet, the percentage for dogs (29%) is higher than for cats (17%). Now, if we compare these results with people who have never had a pet, the percentage for dogs among older animal owners is considerably higher.

### Take-home messages: (concerning people who do not live with a pet but who have already had one):

- Obviously, the percentage of people saying that they don't like animals is much lower.
- Concerns about health problems are similar to the group of people who have never had a pet. This suggests that these are received ideas on pets, that should be the focus of education campaigns.
- The reason of financial costs linked to a pet seems to be higher in comparison with the group of people who never had a pet, but mainly for dogs. This would suggest that at least for certain people, who already have experience as pet owners, the cost of owning a dog might stop them adopting another dog.
- The percentage of persons who declare that pets are not suitable for families with children is still relatively high.
- Finally, people who do not have a pet but who have already had one in the past show more concern about losing an animal. This fits in with research into the human-animal bond indicating that the grief process for an animal is comparable with losing a person.
- In summary, it seems that negative experiences linked to having a pet could explain why certain former pet owners would not be interested to repeat the experience in the future.

**Figure 12. Opinions on living with a dog or cat among people who do not live with a pet but who have already owned one:**



**Finally, let's pool those who have never had a pet with those who do not have a pet but who have already had one in the past.**

- As we might expect, the percentages here fall somewhere between each of the two groups.
- A majority of the people asked (67%) state that they would not like to live with a pet.
- The reason for not living with a pet that comes up most often is the lack of time (Figure 13).
- Once again, the vast majority of people asked think that pets are not suitable for families with children. As we mentioned previously, this contrasts with relevant research suggesting that pets are actually suitable for families with children.

**Figure 13. Opinions on living with a dog or cat among people who do not currently live with a pet:**

