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The Impact of Fear of Animals on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) And Daily Activity in Bangkok

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ABSTRACT: The fear of animals in urban environments has become an emerging concern, especially in densely populated areas like Bangkok. As urbanization expands, human-wildlife interactions have become more frequent, often resulting in intense fear responses that may contribute to mental health challenges. This study aims to examine the relationship between fear of animals and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms, as well as the impact on daily life activities among Bangkok residents. Using a structured questionnaire, we collected responses from 360 participants, measuring levels of impact in PTSD response to daily activities in response to fear of animals. Our findings suggest that encounters with animals may contribute to psychological distress, with women potentially being more affected. One potential explanation is that higher estrogen levels in women may increase sensitivity to stress and emotional recall, whereas testosterone in men might stabilize stress responses, Highlighting the importance of better understanding human-animal interactions in urban settings, which could inform mental health support and related policies. These results predispose consideration of gender and hormonal differences in understanding stress responses and psychological well-being during animal encounters to improve mental well-being.

KEYWORDS: Daily Activity, Fear of animals, Mental health, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Specific phobia.

INTRODUCTION

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms of PTSD, such as flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event, can significantly impact a person's daily life, making it difficult to concentrate, sleep, and maintain healthy relationships. Individuals with PTSD may experience heightened fear and anxiety, which can be exacerbated by specific triggers, including extreme fears (National Institute of Mental Health, 2024). These fears can range from mild discomfort to debilitating anxiety, leading to avoidance behaviors. One such fear is the fear of animals, often termed zoophobia or animal phobia, is a specific phobia that can significantly affect an individual's mental health and daily functioning. While animal phobia itself may not directly cause PTSD, it can exacerbate symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, heightened anxiety, and hypervigilance, that significantly impact daily life. A traumatic event involving an animal can lead to the development of both PTSD and animal phobia, as highlighted by Balayan et al. (2014), indicating that such experiences heighten the risk of developing specific phobias and related psychological conditions. The anxiety associated with animal phobia can result in avoidance behaviors, such as avoiding public places or environments where animals are likely to be encountered. This can limit social interactions, restrict outdoor activities, and overall diminish an individual's quality of life. Additionally, the heightened anxiety and hypervigilance commonly experienced by individuals with PTSD can be intensified by the presence of animals, leading to increased distress and challenges in managing daily routines (Norberg et al., 2023).

There are studies from recent findings highlighting the complex relationship between traumatic experiences, fear responses, and long-term psychological effects. In Goswami et al. (2013) study they have addressed that PTSD is a debilitating condition that develops in a proportion of individuals following a traumatic event, such as snake bite according to Bhaumik et al. (2020) study have provide us that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was the most commonly studied mental health condition after snakebite. In Daskalakis et al.'s study (2013) review covers recent translational approaches to bridge the gap between human and animal PTSD research. Additionally, Urban settings provide a unique lens on the fear of animals and its effects on mental health. People who live in the city often encounter feral or stray animals less frequently, which can heighten anxiety during rare encounters, particularly for those with conditions like PTSD. The fast-paced urban environment itself adds stress making unexpected encounters with animals

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even more daunting. This can lead to hypervigilance and avoidance behaviors that limit social interactions and daily activities (Shannon et al., 2011). These insights collectively inspired our research to explore how animal-related fears manifest in an urban setting, like Bangkok, impact daily functioning.

Past studies have explored the psychological mechanisms behind fear responses to animals, offering valuable insights for our research. Notably, Davey's study in 1994 examined how conditioning and cognitive biases contribute to the development and reinforcement of animal-related phobias. His findings indicate that individuals can acquire intense fear responses through direct negative experiences with animals or by observing others 'fearful reactions. This is significant for our research topic, our research topic on fear of animals and PTSD,' as it highlights how these conditioned fears could lead to PTSD symptoms and disrupt daily life. Davey's work suggests that repeated exposure to feared animals may not only intensify phobic reactions but also exacerbate stress responses, particularly in an urban environment like Bangkok, where interactions with stray animals are common. While the impact of PTSD on daily life is well-documented (Kessler et al., 1995), also in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014) study that PTSD symptoms may affect family and friends. Understanding the specific challenges faced by individuals with PTSD who also experience fear of animals remains an evolving field. PTSD makes it hard to do everyday things and this may lead to unmet family needs. Existing research primarily focuses on animal models of fear and anxiety (Zanette et al., 2019), which may not translate well to human experiences. Additionally, studies exploring the interaction between phobias and PTSD often lack a specific focus on animal phobias (Gallagher et al., 2020). Additionally, while urban areas may not seem conducive to human-wildlife interactions (HWI), rapid land use transformations can result in frequent encounters with wildlife in the context of changing habitats, as well as encounters with species that thrive in urban settings. In Asia, the processes of rapid land-use change can bring into sharp relief the juxtaposition of biodiversity hotspots with urban space (Kaja Wierucka et al., 2023). Encounters between humans and animals in urban environments often pose challenges to both ecosystems and public health. Urban expansion frequently results in habitat loss, driving wildlife into city areas and intensifying competition for limited resources. Furthermore, these interactions increase the risks of disease transmission and potential property damage (Schell et al., 2020). This lack of targeted research creates a gap in our knowledge regarding the specific challenges faced by individuals with animal phobia and PTSD, particularly within urban environments like Bangkok, where encounters with animals are frequent and might be contrasting to the urban setting. Despite existing research on animal-related fears and disgust sensitivity, there is limited analysis focused on urban areas in general. Davey's (1994) study emphasizes the influence of conditioning and cognitive biases on development of phobias in an adult UK population, Which provides insights into how fears of animals develop in cultural and urban contexts, such as Bangkok, suggests that negative encounters, cultural beliefs, and cognitive biases can exacerbate fear responses. This study aims to explore how these factors influence the experience of PTSD and daily life for individuals living in such environments..However, applying these findings to Southeast Asian populations, particularly regarding trauma-related neurological changes and PTSD symptoms, remains a challenge. Current animal PTSD models identify neurological alterations associated with trauma, but further exploration is needed to connect these models to a real urban environments like Bangkok.By focusing on urban contexts, your research can provide insight into how animal fears may influence mental health challenges like PTSD, as urban living conditions are shown to impact mental well-being and stress levels (Xu et al., 2023).

The aim of this research is to investigate the correlation between the fear of animals and the severity of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as well as its impact on daily activities, encompassing social interactions, work performance, overall quality of life, and mental health. The study employs a questionnaire to survey a sample group. This investigation seeks to assess how the fear of animals influences the behavior and daily routines of individuals with PTSD. Additionally, this study is to find a relationship between fear of animals, PTSD, and daily activities. The hypothesis posits that fear of animals can contribute to the development of PTSD and subsequently influence daily activities. In animal models, studies indicate that the fear of predators can cause long-lasting changes in the neural circuitry of wild animals, resulting in behavior similar to PTSD (Zanette et al., 2019). This suggests that the fear of animals can induce profound and lasting psychological effects in animals, which could also be the case in humans. This research may contribute to the development of new treatment and prevention strategies that could benefit humans (Goswami et al., 2013). Overall, these studies add to our understanding of how fear of animals can influence PTSD and related daily activities, while also offering potential insights for enhancing therapeutic outcomes and supporting the daily lives of individuals with this disorder.

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INSTRUMENT (Ngamcharoensukphon et al., 2024)

Part 1: General Information

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Most afraid type of animal
4. Do you have bad experiences or traumatic memories about animal
5. Have you ever received treatment or remedy for a psychiatric condition

Part 2: Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

1. You feel extremely frightened when encountering the type of animal you most fear.
2. When you get frightened by animals, you are reminded of a traumatic experience about that animal.
3. You experience difficulty sleeping (e.g., insomnia, nightmares) because of trauma involving animals.
4. On the day that you encounter an animal that you are afraid of, your emotional state of the day will be greatly affected (e.g., anxiety, stress).
5. You often avoid situations, places, or animals that remind you of traumatic experiences.
6. When you see an image of an animal you fear, you often panic and get restless.
7. You often feel cautious and uneasy if a friend or someone you know talks about the animal you are afraid of.
8. You often feel a sense of guilt or blame yourself for the traumatic event involving an animal.

Part 3: Fearing animals with daily activity

1. You often change your route when traveling to avoid animals that you fear.
2. Your fear of animals affects your daily routines, like how you plan your day.
3. You avoid activities that remind you of past experiences with animals.
4. Your fear of animals extremely affects your ability to perform at work or school.
5. You often feel that fear of animals affects your ability to interact with others.
6. Frequently encountering animals that scare you can cause sleep deprivation.
7. When you encounter animals that you fear you can't do your normal daily routine.
8. Often your fear of animals makes you stop doing the activity you are as soon as you encounter the animal you are afraid of.
9. You often get agitated when you meet scared animals.

METHODOLOGY

The survey research aimed to reveal the correlation between the impact of fear from animals on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and daily activity in Bangkok. The questionnaire is comprised of three sections: 1) General Information, 2) Impact of fear of animals on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and 3) Impact of Fear of Animals on Daily Activity. Responses were collected using a multiple choice responses in section 1 and 5-point Likert scale in sections 2 and 3 The Likert scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey employed a convenience sampling method to collect data. The questionnaire was revised by two specialists and attained an Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) index score of 0.955. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaires for pilot testing (N = 30). We distributed questionnaires to a targeted sample group after which we administered the official questionnaire, yielding an acceptable value of 0.883, indicating high internal consistency (Bujang et al., 2018). The survey was administered via Google Forms through Line and Instagram applications in October 2024, obtaining a total of 330 participants. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30.0.0.0 (172). Pearson's correlation was used to find the correlation between variables, a one-way ANOVA (F-test) to examine differences among three or more groups.

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RESULTS

Table 1: General information (N = 360)

	Frequency	Valid percentage
Gender		
Men	139	38.6
Women	209	58.1
Others	12	3.3
Age		
15 years or less	55	15.3
More than 15 years up to 27 years	126	35.0
More than 27 years up to 43 years	70	19.4
More than 43 years up to 59 years	97	26.9
More than 59 years	12	3.3
Most afraid type of animals		
Mammals, such as dog, cat, tiger etc.	23	6.4
Reptile and amphibian, such as snake, lizard, crocodile etc.	176	48.9
Arachnid and insect, such as spider, Cockroach, worm etc.	129	35.8
Avian, such as bird, chicken, duck etc.	5	1.4
Others	27	7.5
Do you have bad experiences or traumatic memories about animals		
Yes	183	50.8
No	177	49.2
Have you ever received treatment or remedy for a psychiatric condition		
Yes	30	8.3
No	330	91.7

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Table 1 shows the general information of 360 participants. Most participants are women (58.1%). Most respondents were aged 16-27 (35.0%), followed by those aged 44-59 (26.9%). The respondents are afraid of reptiles and amphibians for 48.9%, arachnids and insects 35.8% and the rest are a minority. About half of respondents have bad experiences or traumatic memories about animals (50.8%). Lastly, only 30 respondents have ever received treatments for psychiatric conditions (8.3%).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (Mean and Standard deviation)

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	360	2.60	0.956
Fearing animals with daily activity	360	2.47	0.990

The responses range from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning strongly disagree and 5 meaning strongly agree. The mean of the responses for fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) of all 360 participants is 2.60, indicating a lower likelihood of PTSD-like responses when encountering animals they fear. The mean impact of fear of animals on daily activity of all 360 participants is 2.468, indicating a lower likelihood of disruption to daily activities when encountering animals they fear.

Table 3: One-way ANOVA (F-test): Gender and Fearing animal with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	8.754	2	4.377	4.893**	0.008
Within group	319.352	357	0.895		
Total	328.106	359			

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
One-way ANOVA results obtained with a p-value of 0.008, meaning PTSD from fear of animals is significantly different between genders as the p-value is less than 0.05.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA (F-test): Gender and Fearing animal with Daily Activity

	SS	df	MS	F	p
Between group	9.451	2	4.725	4.920**	0.008
Within group	342.852	357	0.960		
Total	352.303	359			

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

One-way ANOVA results obtained with a p-value of 0.008, meaning daily activity from fear of animals is significantly different between genders as the p-value is less than 0.05.

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Table 5: Pearson's correlation between Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Fearing animals with Daily Activity

		Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Fearing animals with Daily Activity
Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	Pearson Correlation		0.778**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<0.001
	N	360	360
Fearing animals with Daily Activity	Pearson Correlation	0.778**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	
	N	360	360

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The r-value between the responses on PTSD and daily activity from fear of animals is 0.778, which indicates a significant correlation between the two variables: Fearing animals with PTSD and Fearing animals with Daily Activity.

DISCUSSION

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a complex mental health condition that significantly impacts a person's ability to perform common daily tasks. Individuals with PTSD may experience flashbacks, anxiety, and difficulty concentrating, which can interfere with work, relationships, and daily life (Kessler et al., 2005). In busy cities, fears related to animals, such as stray dogs and urban wildlife, can worsen these symptoms, leading people to avoid certain areas or situations and limiting their daily activities (Verywell Mind, 2021). Although there is considerable research on PTSD triggers, few studies specifically examine how fear of animals affects daily functioning. This study is conducted in Bangkok and aims to explore how the fear of animals correlates with PTSD symptoms and affects individuals 'daily life.

As shown in Table 2, the mean score for fearing animals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is 2.60, which is below the midpoint of the rating scale of 3, which show that a majority of the respondents have a fear of animal that is not enough to meet PTSD criteria according to American Psychiatric Association (2022). Firstly, to be diagnosed with PTSD, a person must have experienced a traumatic event, such as a life-threatening situation or severe injury. Secondly, they need to have at least one intrusive symptom, like avoiding reminders of the trauma. Thirdly, this is often accompanied by negative thoughts about themselves or the world and heightened arousal symptoms like trouble sleeping. Lastly, these symptoms must last for over a month, cause significant distress or interfere with daily life, and should not be due to substance use or other medical issues. From this criteria fear of animals can fit in first or third of the criteria only that may make a mean score of our result below the midpoint.

According to Table 3, gender has a significant impact on having PTSD from fear of animals. One reason for this gender difference could be biological factors. Generally, women are more likely to develop PTSD following trauma due to hormonal fluctuations, such as changes in estrogen and progesterone, which can intensify their responses to fearful events. This aligns with Shansky's research (2015), which stated that hormone variations, particularly in estrogen and progesterone, play a role in making women more sensitive to trauma and fear responses. Furthermore, Olff's study (2017) reviews both psychosocial and biological factors that may contribute to this difference, such as differences in trauma exposure, stress response, and the role of oxytocin. It is concluded that women have a 2-3 times higher risk of developing PTSD compared to men (2017). As a result, both our survey results and the findings by Shansky and Olff support the idea that gender impacts PTSD, showing that women have a greater tendency to develop PTSD in general. However, their research does not indicate that this is specifically due to the fear of animals.

As shown in Table 4, fear of animals disrupts daily activities more significantly in women, likely due to the interaction between cortisol, the primary stress hormone, and estrogen. Estrogen fluctuates across the menstrual cycle, influencing cortisol

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dynamics and amplifying stress responses. Around ovulation, estrogen peaks, slowing cortisol clearance and intensifying stress reactions, leading to heightened fear and avoidance behaviors. Research by Kirschbaum & Kudielka (2002) and Lebron-Milad & Milad (2012) supports this, showing that high estrogen levels increase sensitivity to stress and emotional recall of negative experiences, which can disrupt daily routines involving potential animal encounters. In men, hormonal dynamics differ. Testosterone, the primary male sex hormone,, appears to mediate cortisol's effects, resulting in a more stable and generally lower stress response to fearful stimuli. According to Kajantie & Phillips (2006), this buffering effect contributes to reduced fear-related disruptions in men, as they experience fewer hormonal fluctuations compared to women. Overall, these findings suggest that estrogen and testosterone modulate cortisol differently in women and men, contributing to gender-based differences in animal-related fear. This insight highlights the potential for hormone-based interventions to help manage fear-related disruptions, especially for those experiencing heightened sensitivity due to hormonal influences.

As shown in Table 5, Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are correlated with Fearing animals with Daily activity ($r = 0.778$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals who experience fear of animals due to PTSD are significantly more likely to have their daily activities disrupted by this fear. Additionally, in Table 2, the average fear of animals among individuals with PTSD (mean = 2.60) is lower than the midpoint of the rating scale, indicating that fears related to animals are a notable factor contributing to their overall distress but not severe enough to meet PTSD criteria. This correlation can be explained by the fact that PTSD often amplifies anxiety responses, and fear of animals, particularly in the city, can trigger hypervigilance and avoidance behaviors, which interfere with daily functioning. This explanation aligns with the work of Kessler et al. (2005), who stated that individuals with PTSD are prone to heightened anxiety and avoidance, especially when faced with triggering stimuli, such as animals in crowded urban environments. Furthermore, research from Lindberg (2023) has highlighted that in urban areas like Bangkok, where stray animals are common, these fears can exacerbate PTSD symptoms, leading individuals to avoid certain areas and experience further isolation. This research supports the idea that environmental factors can play a critical role in worsening PTSD symptoms and affecting daily activity. As a result, both our survey results, as well as the work by Kessler and Lindberg, support the idea that Fearing animals with Daily Activity and Fearing animals with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are correlated. This relationship emphasizes the importance of addressing environmental triggers to help improve the daily functioning of individuals with PTSD.

CONCLUSION

This study found that there are differences in fear of animals between genders, with women reporting stronger fear responses that may suggest symptoms of PTSD. From the discussion after getting results we found many works that show that heightened fear is linked to hormonal and psychosocial factors that amplify stress and anxiety. Fear of animals disrupts daily life through avoidance behaviors, such as avoiding certain routes or places, and emotional distress, including heightened anxiety and hypervigilance. These disruptions can interfere with daily routines, work or school performance, and social interactions. The study also found that fear of animals is closely tied to difficulties in daily life, which reduce opportunities for normal social and outdoor activities, ultimately impacting quality of life.

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