



## Participant Information

Research ethics approval number: VREC1601

Project title: The Life with Smalls Study - Interviews

Name of researcher(s): Macy Rowles, Prof Carri Westgarth, Dr Helen Clough, Prof Liz Perkins

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

### **What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this study is to better understand people's experiences of ownership of 'small furry' pets, such as rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, mice, gerbils and hamsters, and the impact this may have on owner wellbeing. This understanding may help to provide better support for small furry pets and their owners and reduce the need for rehoming. It may also be used to support campaigns for more pet-friendly policies, such as those related to accommodation.

This study is funded by the Human-Animal Bond Research Institute

### **Why have I been invited to take part?**

You are being invited to take part in this study as you own one or more 'small furry' pet species and live in the United Kingdom. We would like to speak to a wide range of owners about their experiences, practices, and views around their relationship with their pet(s) and their wellbeing.

### **Do I have to take part?**

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. If you have any queries or concerns that are not covered by this information sheet, please do not hesitate to get in touch (see contact details below).

### **What will happen if I take part?**

You will be asked to take part in an interview with the researcher. The interview will either be carried out face-to-face at a convenient location (such as your home, the University or a public place) or via a virtual platform such as a video call or a telephone audio call. You can choose which method you prefer, and a time convenient for you. The interview will be video/audio recorded so that all points you make can be fully captured. The interviewer may also make notes during the interview. Interviews are anticipated to last roughly an hour, but this depends on how much or little you would like to say about your pet.

The areas to be covered during the interview are:

- Background details about you and your pet(s)

- The relationship you have with your pet(s)
- The activities you do with your pet(s)
- The ways in which you feel owning small furry pet(s) affects your life, including how they affect your mental wellbeing
- Any rewards or challenges you experience in caring for your pet(s)
- Any other points you wish to make.

### How do I take part?

If after reading this information sheet you would like to take part, please:

- Complete the preliminary interest form, if you have not done so already at ....
- Arrange an interview date/time/location with the researcher.
- Complete the online **consent form**, which will be sent to you by the researcher.

### How will my data be used?

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of ‘public task’, and in accordance with the University’s purpose of “advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit”.

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University’s research. Prof Carri Westgarth (the Principal Investigator/Supervisor) acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to Prof Carri Westgarth, Department of Livestock and One Health, University of Liverpool, Leahurst Campus, Chester High Road, Neston, Cheshire, CH64 7TE, Tel: 0151 795 6029, Email: carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk.

Further information on how your data will be used can be found in the table below.

How will my data be collected?	Data will be collected using email, Qualtrics online surveys and a recorded interview either via a virtual platform (video), phone (audio) or face-to-face (audio).
How will my data be stored?	Signed consent forms, preliminary questionnaires containing personal information (such as name, address and telephone number) required for organizing interviews, and diary appointments will be stored on secure university servers and will be encrypted. After the interview, the audio or video recording will be uploaded to a secure password-protected university drive. The recording will then be transcribed into text and any personally identifiable information will be removed and the video file will be deleted. Transcripts and audio will be stored on the University of Liverpool secure drive under password protection.
How long will my data be stored for?	All of your data collected will be stored for 10 years to allow time for the project to be completed. If you give permission on the consent form, a copy of your pseudonymised transcript will be saved

	indefinitely to an archive for potential use in other related projects.
What measures are in place to protect the security and confidentiality of my data?	<p>Any paper data records will be stored on-site in locked cabinets in a locked office. Transcripts, emails, audio and data files will be stored on a secure password-protected university drive. Wherever possible data will be encrypted.</p> <p>Confidentiality may be broken in the very unlikely event that any criminal activity such as severe animal cruelty is disclosed, or a person is deemed to be at risk. Such instances may be reported to the RSPCA or the police.</p>
Will my data be anonymised?	<p>Your data will be pseudonymised; this means that your personal data will be kept separately from your transcript data and any personally identifiable information data (such as names, locations etc.) within the audio/video recordings will be removed or replaced during transcription. Re-identification will only be possible using a de-identification key (which will be encrypted and stored on the University secure server).</p> <p>You can request that your transcript is destroyed up until two weeks after the date of the interview.</p>
Will I be quoted?	Anonymised quotes may be used in publications or presentations. Any quotes used will contain no identifying details so that your identity cannot be recognised from your data/quote.
How will my data be used?	Data will be analysed to uncover themes relevant to our research questions. This analysis will then be used to inform written and oral research outputs.
Who will have access to my data?	Prof Carri Westgarth, Macy Rowles, Dr Helen Clough and Prof Liz Perkins.
Will my data be archived for use in other research projects in the future?	Participants can indicate on the consent form whether they are happy for their anonymised data to be archived in a restricted access repository, so that it can be used for future related research projects. Data will only be released on application to the project authors and for genuine research purposes.
How will my data be destroyed?	All paper copies will be discarded in confidential waste and relevant data entries/files deleted.

### **Are there any risks in taking part?**

There are small risks associated with participation in this study. The interview questions will ask about your relationship with your pet(s) and how this might affect your wellbeing including mental health. They are not expected to cause serious discomfort but could potentially lead to discussion of upsetting or challenging experiences. You are free to answer questions/respond

to discussion prompts in whichever way you like and are free not to answer or to change the topic if preferred. You may also leave the interview at any point.

We will collect personally identifiable information (such as your contact details so that we can arrange the interview and your signed consent form), so breach of confidentiality is a risk of participation. However, we take data protection seriously and follow strict processes to ensure that all personal information obtained during the study is kept private and that all data is handled and stored in line with legal and ethical standards.

### **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

There are unlikely to be any direct benefits to you of taking part, but your input will help to increase understanding of small pet care and pet and owner wellbeing. This increased understanding may help researchers to create initiatives in future which could assist in finding innovative means of overcoming common problems faced by pet owners.

### **What will happen to the results of the study?**

Results will be used to write a research thesis and may be disseminated through conference presentations and published scientific papers, as well as press releases.

Study updates will be published on the WAG-LAB Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/waglab](http://www.facebook.com/waglab)) and the study website [Life with smalls study | Institute of Infection, Veterinary and Ecological Sciences | University of Liverpool](http://Life%20with%20smalls%20study%20|%20Institute%20of%20Infection,%20Veterinary%20and%20Ecological%20Sciences%20|%20University%20of%20Liverpool)

### **What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You don't have to take part in the study, and you can withdraw from it at any time during data collection, without explanation. Up until your data has been anonymized and analysed, you may also request that the information related to you (for example your interview recording) is destroyed and no further use is made of it. If you want to stop the study during the interview, just make the researcher aware. If you wish to have your data destroyed after the interview please contact [lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk)

### **What if I am unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting Prof Carri Westgarth by email ([carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:carri.westgarth@liverpool.ac.uk)) or telephone (0151 795 6029) and she will try to help.

If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the Research Ethics and Integrity Office at [ethics@liv.ac.uk](mailto:ethics@liv.ac.uk). When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling 0303 123 1113.

### **Who has reviewed the study?**

To ensure that your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity are protected the methods for this research have been looked at by an independent group of people called a Research Ethics Committee. This study has been reviewed and approved by University of Liverpool Veterinary School Research Ethics Committee.

## Next steps

Please take time to consider whether you want to be included in this research. The decision to participate is your own and you should feel under no pressure to do so. If you are happy to be involved, please fill in the initial enquiry survey first if you haven't already done so. Please read and complete the consent form you have been emailed and return it to [lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:lifewithsmalls@liverpool.ac.uk). A researcher will then be in touch with you about the next steps.

## If you feel you need more support during or after the study

My pet is having medical issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please contact a veterinarian immediately, preferably an exotic vet who can provide the most appropriate care</li> </ul>
I need general pet behaviour or housing advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Woodgreen Pet Advice <a href="#">Woodgreen Pet Advice</a></li> <li>- PDSA Pet Advice <a href="#">PDSA</a></li> </ul>
I need general pet behaviour advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free individual pet advice <a href="#">Woodgreen Pet Behaviour Helpline</a></li> <li>- Find a behaviorist <a href="http://www.apbc.org.uk">www.apbc.org.uk</a></li> </ul>
I need health advice or low-income veterinary care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Low-income veterinary help <a href="#">Our services - PDSA</a></li> <li>- First aid and health advice <a href="#">Your pet's symptoms - PDSA</a></li> </ul>
I'm thinking of rehoming my pet	<p>If you feel you are unable to care for your pet anymore and wish to give them up, please contact the rescue shelter that you adopted from who will be able to support and advise you how to do this or access some of the resources below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <a href="#">'Thinking of giving up your pet?'</a></li> <li>- <a href="#">Giving up a pet   RSPCA - RSPCA - rspca.org.uk</a></li> </ul>
I am having a mental health crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact <a href="#">Samaritans</a></li> </ul>
I would like to self-assess my wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit <a href="#">NHS Wellbeing Self-Assessment Tool</a></li> </ul>
I would like to speak to a registered counsellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact a counsellor from <a href="#">BCAP</a></li> </ul>
I would like general advice about my mental health or wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit <a href="#">Mind</a></li> <li>- Visit <a href="#">NHS Mental Health</a></li> </ul>
I am struggling after the death of my pet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Contact <a href="#">BlueCross</a></li> <li>- Or Contact <a href="#">BCAP</a></li> </ul>

Thank you very much for considering this information.