

# The Effects of Care Recipients' Companion Animals on the Caregiving Experience

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This study examined the impact of older adults' companion animals on informal caregivers' instrumental and emotional experiences. Older adults report strong emotional bonds with their companion animals (specifically cats and dogs) which often become increasingly important as health declines and dependence upon others increases. Individuals requiring assistance meeting their own needs are likely to need assistance in meeting the needs of their companion animals. Consequently, the care recipient's companion animal may be an important, though presently overlooked, factor in the caregiving experience.

This study measured the amount of care tasks/activities informal caregivers of older adults devoted to their care recipients' companion animals. Role theory was used to model the impact of the companion animals (i.e., number of tasks/activities performed and caregivers' perceived costs of the companion animals) on the caregiving experiences of burden, satisfaction, and mastery. The results of this study found care recipients' companion animals do require the caregivers' resources of time, energy, and possibly finances. However, care recipients' companion animals may provide opportunities to facilitate role enhancement and caregiving mastery. Care recipients' companion animals are likely to impact both the instrumental and emotional experiences of informal caregivers for older adults.