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The role of pets in the lives of people with dementia: a scoping review

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This scoping review is designed to understand the role of pet ownership in the lives of people living in the community with dementia.

Method: A five-stage framework for conducting a scoping review guided the review. Two research questions framed the study. Nine databases were searched, with six papers meeting the criteria for detailed review.

Results: Pets can play a central role in the lives of people living with dementia. These relationships can be profound and can provide companionship and a sense of purpose. The activities associated with pet ownership and possible benefits for the person living with dementia have been explored to varying degrees and some benefits have been shown regarding the impact on physical and mental well-being. However, little is known about the challenges that may be faced when caring for a pet.

Conclusion: Despite the importance of pet ownership, experiences of ownership documented among people living with dementia is limited. Still, the studies indicate how pet ownership can support people to remain socially engaged. Future studies should seek to gain a broader understanding of pet ownership across environments such as care homes and hospitals and in the context of social citizenship, active participation and living well. Creative research methods should be adopted to support the inclusion of people living with dementia in research.

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Dementia; pets;
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Introduction

In the United Kingdom pet ownership peaked to a level of 59% in 2020/21 with an estimated 12 million dogs, 12 million cats living in homes (Statista, 2021). Research has shown that pet ownership is associated with benefits to physical and mental health (Curl et al., 2016; Hui Gan et al. 2019; Janevic et al., 2019). With a wealth of research citing the benefits of pet ownership, it is timely to consider the experiences of people living with dementia. Two thirds of people with dementia live at home (Leverton et al., 2021) and there is no evidence to suggest that pet ownership is less prevalent in this group. Given that a substantial number of people with dementia live in their own homes and considering that pet ownership is less common in formalised care settings, there is a compelling rationale for investigating pet ownership specifically among those residing at home. This focus highlights the contrast in living environments and recognizes the unique benefits and challenges that home-based pet ownership may offer to individuals with dementia. Pet ownership amongst people with dementia is significant and there is further scope to understand the potential benefits and difficulties of having a pet alongside a diagnosis of dementia (Opdebeeck et al., 2021). This paper scopes the literature on pet ownership in the lives of people with dementia, identifying gaps in knowledge and opportunities for further work.

The review is framed around two questions:

Question (1): What are the experiences of pet ownership as experienced by people living with dementia?

Question (2): What are the barriers and enablers to maintaining pet ownership for people with dementia?

Method

The review does not consider evaluations of intervention work that introduced animals as part of programme to better support people living with dementia (e.g. Ward et al., 2021; Hodgson et al., 2023). A distinction is also made between pet ownership and Animal Assisted Therapy/Interventions. Animal assisted therapies are goal orientated and serve as an intervention in care (Klimova et al., 2019). Animal assisted therapies focus on planned animal and human interaction and associated activities for therapeutic recreation (Travers et al., 2013) and animal companionship arises from with animal ownership, in which the person is directly involved in the care of the animal (Opdebeeck et al. 2021). It is difficult to present an agreed definition of pet 'ownership'. Literature offers multiple interpretations that range from legal standards of care, matters of property to time spent in a household. However, the inclusion criteria for this scoping review considers the broader aspects of 'responsibility' and 'care giving', consistent with features of pet ownership.

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A scoping review offers an alternative approach to a systematic review and is typically considered exploratory to highlight gaps in research where the topic is broad (Trico et al., 2016). Unlike a systematic review, the relevance of the literature is prioritised over quality, providing an overview of what is known whilst identifying significant gaps in the existing literature and summarises the main findings (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) five-stage framework for conducting a scoping review served as the guide for this review:

Stage 1: Identifying the research questions. What are the experiences of pet ownership as experienced by people living with dementia? What are the barriers and enablers to maintaining pet ownership for people with dementia?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies. Key search terms were identified. Key search terms were used such as 'dementia', 'pet' and 'ownership'.

The literature search was carried out across the following databases: CINAHL, Cochrane library, Medline, NIHR, SAGE Journals, Scopus, PsychINFO and Europe PMC (Pubmed UK). Boolean techniques with varying combinations of key terms were used. Databases were chosen to reflect the subject matter. The literature search did not apply a year of publication criteria, remaining focused on relevance as opposed to age. The literature search was undertaken in January 2022 and revisited in January 2024.

A google scholar search was also undertaken to widen the scope without the need for citation-based membership (Martín-Martín et al., 2018). Duplications and errors were removed from the search (Peralta-Pizza et al., 2019).

Stage 3: Study selection. The third stage involved study selection through the generation of inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1.)

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram (Figure 1) was used to apply the inclusion and exclusion criteria to identify the relevant studies. The number of studies identified are reported with duplicates removed. Titles were initially reviewed for appropriateness, followed by an abstract review where appropriate, aligning to the research question. Further eligibility was

determined by a full text review, with studies not meeting the inclusion criteria being deemed 'out of scope' (Page et al., 2021).

Stage 4: Charting the data. The fourth stage involved a process of organising and charting the data demonstrated in the data summary (Table 2). Selection and characterisation were drawn from the literature.

Stage 5: Collating, summarising and reporting results. This was achieved through multiple readings of each article and reviewing characteristics across the selection of studies.

Findings

The scope of research included two quantitative, three qualitative and one mixed method approaches (Table 2) including a 5-year longitudinal study (Rusanen et al. 2021). A range of data collection methods were used; telephone interviews ($N=2$), face to face interviews (6), online interview (1), focus groups (1). All the studies included some focus on pet ownership and dementia in domestic dwellings, although as we discuss below, the extent to which studies did this varied greatly both in terms of breadth and depth. Key themes were identified in which pet ownership is considered in the lives of people living with dementia. The scoping review questions are used to frame the summary of findings below.

Scoping Review Question 1: What are the experiences of pet ownership as experienced by people living with dementia?

People living with dementia in the UK own or care for pets in their community dwellings and these pets form part of their household during their experiences with dementia (Opdebeeck et al., 2021). Several people living with dementia had been pet owners prior to diagnosis and some became pet owners in response to receiving a diagnosis (Dooley et al., 2021; Connell et al., 2007). People with dementia generally lose the role of pet owner when transitioning into residential care (McGrath et al., 2021; Rusanen et al., 2021) and it is suggested that some people may become less aware of their role of pet owner as symptoms associated with dementia progressed (Connell et al., 2007).

Remaining physically active

Pet ownership can bring beneficial improvements to levels of physical activity and physical health. A longitudinal cohort study carried out by Opdebeeck et al. (2021) examined activity levels of individuals with dementia who were involved in the care of a pet. Findings indicate that a person is 1.8 times more likely to walk if they were included in the care of a pet, 1.4 times more likely to walk if they had a pet but were not involved in its care, 2.5 times more likely to walk if they were involved in the care of a dog, and 1.8 times more likely to walk if they had a dog but were not involved in its care. McGrath et al. (2021) suggests that the responsibilities of pet ownership, such as caring for the animal, may lead to increased activity levels in owners, indicating that engaging in pet care can boost physical activity.

Serota (2020) and Connell et al. (2007) emphasise the importance and joy of playful activities with pets, including throwing a ball and grooming a cat, as described by participants. Serota (2020) presented narratives demonstrating how pets have

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Aspect	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Population	People with a diagnosis of dementia and family carers speaking on behalf of the person with dementia	People who do not have a diagnosis of dementia, and family carers not speaking on behalf of a person with dementia
Concept	Pet: domesticated animal owned by a person for purposes of companionship.	Animals used for intervention such as therapies; Animals used for purposes of rehabilitation, caretaking skills, food and livelihood. Robotic / simulated animals
Context	Coexisting in the community as part of the same household/ shared living environment.	Long term care settings; Hospital settings
Type of Studies	Studies published in English	Studies published in languages other than English; Studies that did not include people living with dementia.

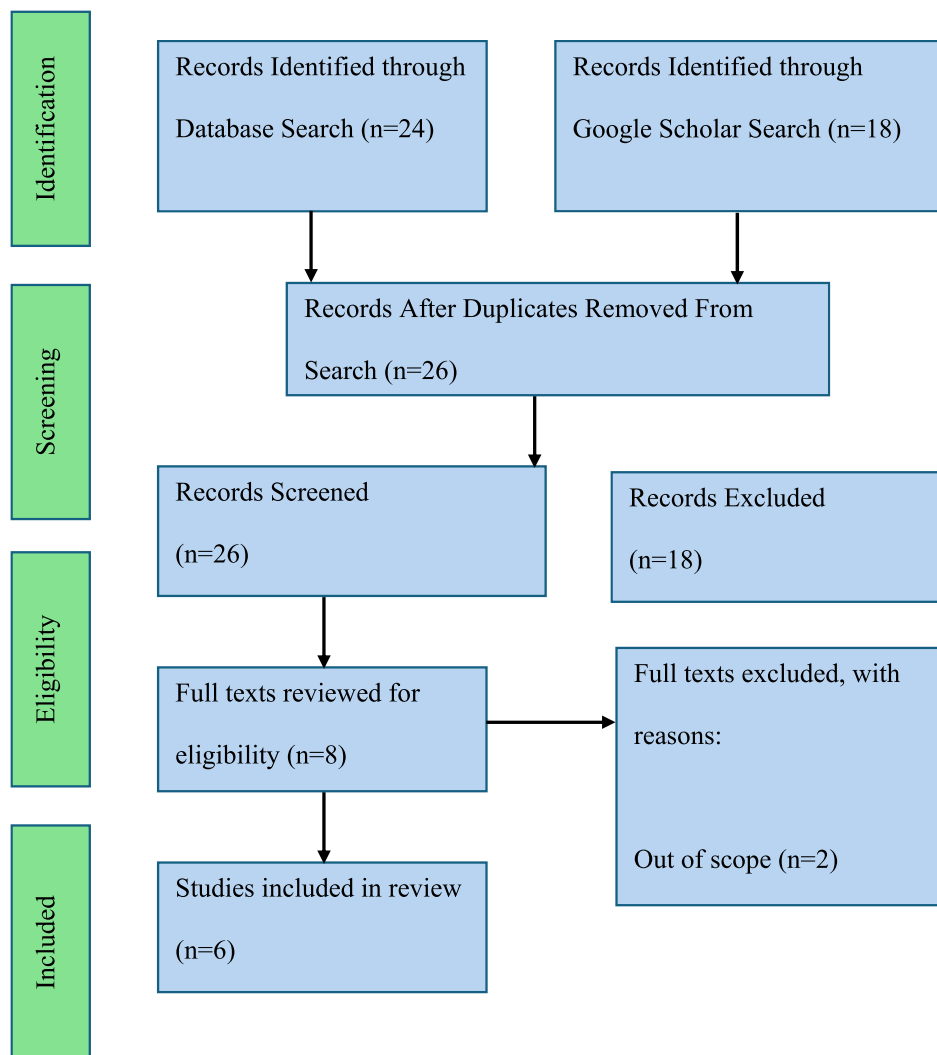


Figure 1. PRISMA Diagram.

enabled greater social engagement with others and Connell et al. (2007) highlights how a dog had supported a participant to engage safely in a hobby.

Increased physical activity is linked to improvements in mental health and physical well-being. Rusanen et al. (2021) found that although individuals with dogs initially had lower Mini Mental State Examination (MMSE) scores at the beginning of the study compared to those without pets, over a period of five years the disparity in MMSE scores between pet owners and non-pet owners diminished to the point of being negligible. The study also found that people with pets had significantly higher mean Alzheimer's Disease Co-operative Study Activities of Daily Living Scale (ADCS-ADL) indicating that having a pet helps maintain functional capacity over time compared to those without pets. Furthermore, Rusanen et al. (2021) found that people with pets reported lower Neuropsychiatric Inventory (NPI) scores than participants without pets. This inventory evaluates behavioural changes and symptoms associated with dementia, suggesting that fewer and less severe symptoms of dementia were experienced by those who have a pet. A participant in Dooley's study (2021) suggests that pets lift them out of negative responses to their diagnosis. Connell et al. (2007) and Serota (2020) both note the role of distraction as being beneficial to mood, providing an alternative focus and activity not related to dementia.

Opdebeeck et al. (2021) notes that active involvement in pet care can enhance physical health and quality of life. They also

report that pet owners who do not engage in caregiving activities might experience a decline in quality of life and increased symptoms of depression, more so than those without pets. Connell et al. (2007) suggests that people may be less tolerant of their pets' needs, although some participants reported a calming and distracting effect, with positive impacts on mood as supported by a participant in Serota's study (2020, p. 135) who expressed appreciation for his dog that would 'listen to him when he is pissed off'.

Meaningful relationships

McGrath et al. (2021) and Serota (2020) discuss the companionship that can be obtained by spending time with a pet. For instance, a participant in Serota's study stated that she spends more time with her pet than with her husband. McGrath's participants suggest that dog ownership is particularly beneficial for those who are living alone and that is the companionship that reduces social isolation and prolongs the length of time of independence within the community. Opdebeeck et al. (2021) suggests that involvement in caring for a pet reduces the risk of depression and increases quality of life.

Companionship is identified as a reason for bringing a pet in to a home following diagnosis (Dooley et al., 2021), although most who do this have had previous experience of pet ownership and already understand what is to be expected (Dooley

Table 2. Included studies.

Study ID	ID1	ID2	ID3	ID4	ID5	ID6
Author	Connell et al. (2007)	Dooley et al. (2021)	McGrath et al. (2021)	Opdebeeck et al. (2021)	Rusanen et al. (2021)	Serota (2020)
Country	USA	UK	Australia	UK	Finland	Canada
Focus of the study relevant to scoping review	Female caregivers asked to report on pet ownership as experienced by themselves and their partners who have a dementia.	Life post diagnosis and data collection method.	Perspectives on stressors and enablers for people living with dementia remaining at home.	People living with dementia- Pet ownership and involvement in pet care impact associated with activity, loneliness, depression or QOL.	Effects of domestic pets on people with Alzheimer's disease whilst living at home.	How people with dementia story their relational experiences with companion animals.
Type of study (design)	Mixed methods Exploratory Study	Qualitative A co-produced photographic study	Qualitative Phenomenological study	Quantitative Longitudinal cohort study	Quantitative Longitudinal Study	Qualitative Narrative Inquiry- storytelling through Photovoice
Participants	157 care givers of which 62 were pet owners.	5 researchers – 3 of which live with dementia. –2 being university academic staff	13 family carers and 11 home care staff	1,547 People with dementia and 1,283 carers	223 people with dementia of which 40 owned a pet	7 people with dementia
Pet- species type	Dogs Cats Bird Fish	Dogs	Dogs	Dogs = 271 Cats = 197 Horses = 5 Fish = 22 Birds = 39 Pigs = 4 Tortoise = 4 Hamsters = 1 Rabbits = 3 Ferrets = 1 Reptiles = 6	Dogs 'Other pets'	Dogs Cats
Extent of symptoms	Not captured	Not made clear but indicates mild to moderate dementia	Not made clear but indicates moderate to severe	Mild to moderate	Mild but developed over the 5 yr. study.	Not made clear but indicates mild to moderate dementia
Carer type if applicable	Informal Carers	Informal Carers	Formal and informal carers	Informal carers	Informal carers	Informal carers
Concept	Changing relationships with pets since caring began	Pet in everyday life post diagnosis	Influences on care need; dog ownership as one aspect	Pet Ownership and pet care – impact on health	Pet ownership and influence on disease symptoms and trajectory	Pet companionship, agency and relatedness
Context	Triadic relationship with pets; carer and person with dementia in own home.	Domestic dwelling,	Experience in domestic dwelling prior to residential move.	Domestic dwellings, person with dementia as carer for pet	Shared domestic dwelling over 5 year period	Pet in the home, member of household
Data Collection Method	Telephone Interviews	Photovoice Telephone consultation, home visit qualitative data collected.	Semi-structured interviews	Home visit, range of quantitative data collected.	Structured Interview, range of quantitative data collected.	Photovoice, interviews- 6 held in a private office, 1 held on zoom.
Analysis	Content analysis	Modified reflexive thematic analysis	Thematic Analysis (after Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Regression Analysis	Comparative analysis.	McCormack's (2004) approach, analysis of narrative and narrative analysis.

et al., 2021; Serota, 2020). A participant in Serota's study expressed that if his dog were to pass away, he would choose to get another dog. That individual wanted to continue his life as a dog owner and to share his life with a dog, with the belief that any dog would provide companionship. Carers of people with dementia also discuss the role of companionship for them during times when they feel particularly isolated. Pets can increase carer capacity and support carers to provide ongoing support to the person with dementia (Connell et al., 2007). Carers have reported on the emotional support a pet provides and talk about the relationship in terms of friendship against the back drop of a depleting social network.

The relationship between a pet owner and their animal involves a unique interplay, where both the owner and the pet

alternately assume the positions of caregiver and care recipient. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of dementia, reflecting a special bond that transcends conventional pet-owner interactions. Participants in Dooley's study (2021) spoke of role reversal where animals can serve to remind the person of their responsibilities to fulfil the animal need, such as nudging to go for a walk or signalling when it is time for food. McGrath et al. (2021) and Serota's (2020) findings also indicate that it is the innate sense of responsibility that drives the person with dementia to keep functioning and providing care as the pet will not see the dementia but sees the person as owner with task to complete. The value of security and protection are raised in Serota's (2020) findings where pets provide confidence for the person with dementia to answer the door, whilst also the protection and comfort provided

by the person with dementia towards the pet, offering a home and care when others may not have done so.

Keeping people connected

In Connell's et al. (2007) study, caregivers observed that the relationships between people with dementia and their pets can change, showing both positive and negative shifts. While Connell et al. (2007) did not delve into the details of these changes, McGrath et al. (2021) explain that the progression of dementia symptoms can affect relationships with pets, citing factors like decreased social and financial support, and declining physical health.

Moreover, Serota (2020) identifies how pet ownership can be an enabler in increasing social connections with others due to shared interest and increased opportunity for interaction. Opdebeeck et al. (2021) found that people living with dementia were significantly less likely to be lonely if they were involved in the care of a dog.

The relationships that individuals develop with their pets are often described as profound and life enriching. Serota (2020), Dooley et al. (2021), and McGrath et al. (2021) highlight the emotional depth and significance of these bonds, emphasising how pets can bring a sense of purpose and joy to their owners. These relationships are not just about companionship. They also provide a sense of fulfilment and add substantial value to the lives of the pet owners. The shared experience of pet ownership also serves as a powerful connecting factor among people with dementia (Dooley et al., 2021; Serota, 2020).

The experience of living with dementia can lead to a unique sense of connection and empathy with a pet. This phenomenon, explored in McGrath et al. (2021), suggests that individuals with dementia might feel a deeper connection with their pets, perhaps because they perceive a kind of kinship or mutual understanding. McGrath et al. (2021) identifies dog ownership as a potential protective factor that supports people to live at home independently for longer. This suggests that the relationship with pets and being in caring role may support a person with dementia to live well for longer. However, as Serota (2020) points out, there is a prevailing stigma around the capabilities of individuals with dementia to adequately care for a pet. This can lead to external doubts and societal judgments, which may impact the self-esteem and confidence of people with dementia. Stigma can impact on people's ability to enjoy the full benefits of pet ownership and potentially undermines the positive aspects of their relationship with their pets.

Several participants across the qualitative studies expressed not wanting to live without their pet (Dooley et al., 2021; McGrath et al., 2021; Serota, 2020) and indicated that the connection with their pet would be instrumental in the future decisions that were made about care and accommodation (Serota, 2020). This may create some worry around future planning and prompted conversation as to what would happen if the person could no longer look after their pet. Whilst loss of a pet was briefly mentioned in Serota's (2020) study, pet ownership in others did not broach the impact of this on the person with dementia.

Scoping Review Question 2: What are the barriers and enablers to maintaining pet ownership for people with dementia?

Barriers to pet ownership

The impact of supporting a person with dementia to remain involved in the care of a pet may add additional carer stress

within the home, although having a pet in the home can bring positive benefits to a carer such as companionship and reduction in stress (Connell et al., 2007). Deterioration in physical health may impact on the ability to care for a pet, lack of support during those times can lead to lack of involvement in care and detrimental impacts on mental health as a result (Opdebeeck et al., 2021; McGrath et al., 2021). The type of animal chosen also requires consideration. For instance, Connell et al. (2007) identifies concern around safety risks such as the pet being a trip hazard. The length of life expected of the companion animal may present complexity in arranging ongoing care (Serota, 2020). The symptoms of dementia may present pragmatic challenges, eventually effecting awareness and recognition of a pet and its needs (Connell et al., 2007). It is interesting to note that the issue of stigma or discussion or assumptions around capabilities was absent in all the studies reviewed.

Enablers of pet ownership

Two studies mentioned time being at the disposal of a person with dementia and recognise this as an opportunity to be able to care for a pet (Dooley et al., 2021; Serota, 2020). Pet ownership can provide a role with, for those experiencing reduced responsibilities in other areas of life. Having a support network to help maintain the role of pet ownership and responsibilities can support provide reassurance to those who have received a diagnosis of dementia and have a pet (McGrath et al., 2021; Serota, 2020). The type of animal chosen as a pet can influence the experience of pet ownership, most studies focused on dogs and cats where the animal's ability to prompt and guide for fulfilment of their needs, supported the person with dementia to remain involved in providing care (Dooley et al., 2021; Serota, 2020). Having an environment where one can keep pets and/or continue to provide care to pets is integral to the maintenance of such relationships, a residential care setting in not often considered as a place where pet ownership is possible (McGrath et al., 2021).

Discussion

Studies of human interactions with pets outside of a dementia context is well established in the wider social science literature (e.g. Charles, 2014); and the health enabling properties of pet ownership have been known for some time (McNicholas et al., 2005). For instance, as a regular presence in an individual's daily life, pets can provide social and emotional support, as well as contribute to better physical and mental health (Brooks et al., 2019a; Kerr-Little et al., 2023). As others have noted, pets also 'provide a form of ontological security "a sense of order and continuity derived from a person's capacity to give meaning to their lives and to maintain a positive view of the self, world and future" which does not appear to be available from elsewhere within social networks' (Brooks et al., 2016; 2019b, p. 2). The perception of self is particularly important in the context of dementia, where affirming identity and maintaining autonomy are needed to uphold personhood. Being a pet owner provides a role that promotes agency and contributes to a self-image that is separate to that of dementia. This role challenges the prevailing perception of people with dementia as 'recipients of care' and can shift perception to that of 'care providers'.

Pets have also been shown to act as conduits to social interaction for their owners through increasing the quality of

existing and supporting the development of new, social connections (Wood et al., 2015), thereby contributing to an individual's social health. As pets generally require care, interaction and routine, this can often increase the level of social interaction required to meet necessities, such as routine calls to the vet, pet stores for food and surrounding areas for walks. Serving as a bridge to social citizenship, pet ownership can support a person to remain connected to their community, challenging the experience social isolation that is often reported alongside dementia.

We identified a surprisingly small number of studies that directly and explicitly investigated pet ownership for those living with dementia. Given the complex social and cultural history of the relationship between humans and companion animals, as well as the health and wellbeing benefits of animal stewardship across the population, this is somewhat surprising. That said, pet ownership has been identified as part of wider studies of the lived experience of dementia (Clark & Philipson, 2019) and work is underway to highlight extant work being undertaken in this area, such as the Multi-Species Dementia International Research Network (see <https://multispeciesdementia.org>).

Notable in this review is the limited inclusion of the firsthand or direct experiences from people living with dementia in research, as highlighted by Dai and Moffatt (2021). While cognitive challenges are frequently cited as a barrier to their active participation in research (Shannon, Montayre, and Neville, 2021), this often leads to continued stigmatisation and marginalisation. The review reveals that while the focus remains on the experiences of those with dementia in relation to pet ownership, not all narratives are directly sourced from people living with the condition. There is thus a need to more directly involve people living with dementia to understand the lived experience of dementia.

Dooley et al. (2021) and Serota (2020) made significant efforts to include personal accounts from people living with dementia, providing valuable insights into their relationship with pets. However, these studies predominantly feature participants in the early stages of dementia, and potentially oversimplifying the lived experience into a limited perspective (Thoft et al., 2018). Rusanen's et al. (2021) worked to address this gap by employing a methodology where carers act as facilitators in the data collection process, though the direct experiences of individuals in the later stages of dementia remain absent. The inclusion of people with advancing symptoms of dementia would provide a greater range of understanding.

This review underscores the necessity of developing methodologies that continue to broaden the inclusion of people living with dementia. Gaining a person's perspective by proxy has been utilised in a number of studies and to some extent had been held as a paragon within the field of dementia research (Convey, 2021). Although, Dooley's study (2021) recognised people living with dementia as co-researchers and the addressed the power shift between those 'researched' and academic staff, with the researchers with dementia shaping and contributing to the study (Breeze et al., 2005). This contrasts with studies conducted by those such as McGrath et al. (2021) where participants who were formal or informal carers were expected to recall what those with dementia may have experienced.

A number of data collection methods were adopted across the studies in this review. Quantitative tools particularly focused on aspects of quality of life, mental health and cognitive ratings as seen in Opdebeeck et al. (2021) have supported the large collection of data with the aim of generalising results (Griffiths

et al., 2020). However, while rigidity and the closed nature of questions can support focus and aide memory, these can also limit what is narrated about experience and limits depth of context (Bart, 2021). Conversely, using such tools can support informal and formal carers to carry out the on-going collection of data, which in the case of McGrath et al. (2021) has supported people with dementia to remain engaged in studies for a longer period of time. Dooley et al. (2021) and Serota (2020) use Photovoice, in which participants take a collection of photographs and provide narratives which leads to new insights. The use of photovoice is growing and goes some way to support the person with dementia to engage in the studies (Phillipson & Hammond, 2018). This review demonstrates that there is opportunity to further explore creative methodologies. Greater consideration could be given to approaches that make use of creative and sensory methods (Fleetwood-Smith et al. 2021).

A range of pets were identified in the lives of people with dementia, particularly in Opdebeeck et al. (2021). Such a breadth of species may limit the possible identification of nuanced benefits of a particular type pet (and most notably dog ownership). Future studies could look to explore relationships between people living with dementia and specific species to further the understand and differentiate between the experience of 'pet' ownership to the unique wants and needs of 'species' ownership (Fraser, 2009), providing greater context to findings. Identifying species specific benefits of pet ownership may support greater insight into what may support people to live well with dementia.

Overall, while some studies have reported on the perspectives of people with dementia by proxy providing valuable insights, the absence of the person voice with dementia must be noted. There has been narrow use of data collection methods restricting context gained to support an understanding of experiences. Across the studies explored there are limited perspectives from those living with a greater extent of symptoms of dementia. Furthermore, little is known individuals' socio-cultural attitudes towards pet ownership. Finally, while the identified studies do focus on the impact of pet ownership, more work is needed on the on the challenges and barriers, especially with a view to providing additional support, to owning a pet for a person living with dementia.

Conclusion

The scoping review found that the role of pets has been associated with companionship and the relationships between pets and their owners have demonstrated strong connections that may feature as a support mechanism for living well with dementia. The experiences of pet ownership, as detailed in response to question one, highlights the emotional and psychological benefits that have resulted from these relationships. People living with dementia can experience a unique relationship with a pet that can provide companionship and alleviate feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Engaging in the daily care of a pet can also contribute to increased physical activity and support cognitive functioning.

The activities associated with pet ownership and the possible benefits for the person living with dementia have been explored to varying degrees, with some evidence about the positive impact on physical and mental well-being. In addressing question two, the review identifies a number of barriers and enablers to pet ownership. Key barriers acknowledge the progressive nature of dementia, identifying how support networks

could be pivotal to the maintenance of such relationships. Ensuring a living environment that accommodates pets and choosing a type of pet that is manageable amidst the increased risk of physical health decline are crucial considerations. The review findings indicate that very little is known about the pragmatic challenges that may be faced when caring for a pet and while studies reviewed here certainly go some way in considering the benefits and experience of pet ownership, more understanding of how to support the maintenance of such relationships may prove useful. For example, future studies may look to review the financial impacts of pet ownership for people living with dementia, managing the ill-health of a pet whilst living with dementia and the experiences of pet ownership in settings such as care homes and hospitals.

The literature reminds us of the importance of pets in the lives of people living with dementia. In linking these insights to broader conceptual issues, it becomes clear that pet ownership not only addresses aspects of immediate well-being but also engages with larger themes of active participation and social citizenship that support a person living with dementia to live well.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Ethical statement

No ethical approval was required for this study as it involved the analysis of previously published literature and did not include any new data collection from human or animal subjects.

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