



## An Explanatory Sequential Study on Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parental Readiness of Fur Parents

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### Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and parental readiness among fur parents—individuals who consider their pets children, form deep emotional bonds, and assume caregiving roles akin to traditional parenting. An explanatory sequential design was employed, combining quantitative data with qualitative insights. Participants were adults aged 18 or older who identified as fur parents and had chosen not to have biological children. The ACE-Q and READI-SF instruments were utilized to assess ACE exposure and parental readiness. The READI-SF is a 17-item measure assessing readiness to engage in parenting roles, with higher scores indicating greater readiness. An a priori power analysis suggested a sample size of 115 participants; however, due to the group's niche nature, 81 participants were recruited. Quantitative analysis revealed a weak positive correlation between ACE scores and parental readiness ( $r = 0.17$ ), which was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.14$ ). The average ACE score was 0.36 ( $SD = 0.34$ ), indicating low exposure to adverse experiences, while the average READI-SF score was 3.87 ( $SD = 0.42$ ), reflecting a moderate level of parental readiness. These findings suggest that, within this sample, a history of adverse childhood experiences does not significantly impact an individual's readiness to assume parenting roles. This may be attributed to the limited sample size or conceptual differences between ACEs and readiness for parental involvement. In the qualitative phase, four key themes emerged: (1) Parental Priorities, revealing factors influencing the choice of fur parenting over biological children; (2) Parental Perspectives, reflecting how past experiences shaped views on parenting; (3) Parental Alternatives, examining outcomes and experiences associated with fur parenting as an alternative to traditional parenting; and (4) Fur Parenting Attachment, illustrating how childhood experiences motivated participants to become better caregivers, not only to their pets but also, potentially, to children in the future. These themes provide context for understanding how fur parents perceive their roles and readiness. Overall, the study underscores the need for further research to identify other potential influences on parental readiness.

**Keywords** *Explanatory Sequential Study; Fur Parents; Fur Baby; Adverse Childhood Experiences; Parental Readiness*

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of family is evolving as more individuals choose to welcome "fur babies"—pets considered beloved family members—rather than having biological children. This shift reflects changing societal norms influenced by factors such as the rising cost of living, adverse childhood experiences, environmental concerns, and other caregiving responsibilities (Pearcy, 2024). The term "fur baby," which emerged in the late twentieth century, has gained widespread popularity through social media and pet-focused communities, capturing the profound emotional bonds and commitment that owners form with their pets (Klugman, 2024). As traditional family structures diversify, understanding caregiving within these non-traditional contexts becomes increasingly important.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and parental readiness among individuals who identify as "fur parents," those who consider their pets as children and engage in caregiving roles similar to traditional parenting. The study aims to understand how early life adversity impacts one's emotional and psychological readiness for caregiving, particularly in the context of non-traditional parental roles.

This study explores the lived experiences of fur parents, particularly how their past experiences, including childhood adversity, inform their motivations and emotional attachment to

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their pets. It also examines the statistical relationship between ACE scores and levels of parental readiness, as measured by standardized tools (ACE-Q and READI-SF). And explain how early emotional experiences (trauma or otherwise) may influence the development of caregiving identities in non-traditional contexts, using the theoretical lenses of Attachment Theory and Role Theory. Lastly, it is to identify emergent themes that shed light on the motivations, perceptions, and emotional preparedness of fur parents, through qualitative interviews.

Central to caregiving capacity are early life experiences, particularly Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)—including abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence—that disrupt attachment processes and have enduring effects on emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and caregiving potential throughout life (Spinazzola et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2023). Attachment Theory elucidates how early bonds with primary caregivers form the basis for later caregiving behaviors and relational security (Bowlby, 1969, as cited in Simply Psychology, 2024). Despite extensive research on the impact of ACEs on traditional parenting, a notable gap remains in understanding how these early adversities influence parental readiness within alternative caregiving roles, such as pet parenting.

To better frame caregiving as a socially constructed role, Role Theory emphasizes how parenting is shaped by both individual identity and societal expectations, emphasizing the negotiation of roles within evolving family structures (Biddle, 1986). By integrating Attachment Theory with Role Theory, this study offers a comprehensive perspective on how early emotional experiences intersect with socially defined caregiving roles. This integrated approach addresses the critical gap regarding how ACEs relate to parental readiness among fur parents, shedding light on the formation and negotiation of caregiving identities beyond biological parenthood. Such insights contribute to developmental psychology and resilience theory, expanding readiness models to reflect the realities of diverse and emerging family configurations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Fur Parenting

Attachment Theory—originally centered on child-caregiver bonds—to explain human relationships with pets, showing that secure attachments to pets can alleviate stress and offer companionship, while anxious attachments may contribute to emotional struggles. Role Theory further elucidates how individuals assume the role of “fur parents,” influencing their daily routines, social lives, and identity formation. Although research on Filipino fur parents remains scarce, these theoretical frameworks provide a meaningful lens to explore human-animal bonds. Empirical findings demonstrate that pets enhance emotional stability and social development, particularly among individuals with challenging pasts, such as those experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These insights challenge traditional notions of parenting and caregiving, suggesting alternative pathways to fulfilling nurturing roles, especially for those affected by trauma. Role Theory is instrumental in explaining identity negotiation within non-traditional family contexts, where individuals redefine parental roles in ways that diverge from normative expectations. For people with ACEs, adopting the fur parent role may serve as an adaptive strategy to meet caregiving needs without the pressures of biological parenthood. This role adoption is not merely behavioral but entails complex identity construction and social negotiation, as evidenced by LGBTQ+ fur parents who navigate both emotional support and social stigma. Parental readiness, in this context, emerges as a multifaceted construct shaped by emotional regulation, resilience, and cognitive preparedness—domains profoundly impacted by ACEs. Research by Hughes et al. (2025) and Lanius et al. (2024) reveals that ACEs can undermine emotional regulation critical for parenting, yet strong social support can buffer these effects, facilitating healthier parenting transitions. Integrating resilience theory with readiness models thus frames parental readiness as

a dynamic developmental process influenced by both adversity and protective factors.

Connecting these perspectives to developmental psychology, parental readiness is best understood as an evolving outcome shaped by early experiences, current resources, and future-oriented hope. The importance of hopeful and emotionally nurturing environments in fostering positive developmental outcomes—principles that also extend to fur parenting as a form of caregiving that nurtures empathy and emotional health. The increasing trend of childfree lifestyles and the rise of fur parenting reflect important socio-cultural shifts in family and caregiving definitions, challenging rigid frameworks of parental readiness. Research reveals pets' therapeutic role for trauma survivors, reinforcing the need for explanatory sequential studies that combine quantitative assessments of ACEs and parental readiness with qualitative insights into identity negotiation and meaning-making. This integrated approach, grounded in Role Theory, developmental psychology, and resilience frameworks, promises a nuanced understanding of caregiving identities and readiness across diverse family structures, including fur parenting.

### **Fur Parenting in Philippine Context**

A *Life of a Fur Parent* reflects a notable cultural shift through personal narratives illustrating the joys and challenges of raising pets as if they were children. While the distinction between pet care and child-rearing is widely acknowledged, the emotional connection experienced by “fur parents” is genuine and profound. This emerging form of caregiving invites further examination, particularly when viewed through the lens of parental readiness—a construct traditionally associated with human offspring but increasingly relevant in non-traditional family configurations. The emotionally fulfilling experience of fur parenting suggests a redefinition of readiness that encompasses diverse caregiving roles, which is crucial for understanding identity negotiation in contemporary family systems. Exploration of childless Filipino couples shows how pets often fill emotional voids where children might have been, providing purpose and happiness. This aligns with developmental psychology frameworks that emphasize the human need for attachment and meaningful relationships throughout the lifespan. Moreover, these insights suggest that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)—which often disrupt traditional attachment patterns and emotional regulation—can shape an individual's perception of caregiving by guiding them toward emotionally safe and more manageable alternatives like pet parenting.

In line with these dynamics, sheds light on the societal expectations faced by childfree couples in the Philippines, revealing fur parenting as not just a substitute but a fulfilling and self-affirming choice. This reimagining of caregiving identity resonates with Role Theory, which explores how individuals internalize and perform socially constructed roles. Within this framework, fur parenting emerges as a negotiated identity, shaped by personal history and social context. For individuals who have experienced ACEs, adopting a fur parent role may represent a resilient and intentional response to past trauma—an emotionally safe avenue to express nurturance. By drawing on resilience theory and models of readiness, one can gain a deeper understanding of how emotional recovery and the availability of support systems contribute to the emergence of caregiving identities beyond traditional parenthood. Taken together, these perspectives deepen our understanding of how parental readiness is not solely a matter of biological potential but also a reflection of developmental pathways, lived experiences, and evolving family norms.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences**

Childhood trauma can lead to significant psychological distress, including post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), which in turn influence critical life decisions such as parenthood. Survivors of trauma often avoid having children due to fears of perpetuating cycles of abuse or neglect. This pattern is echoed, that individuals with histories of childhood trauma are more likely to opt out of parenthood. A further complicate the issue by revealing how trauma can disrupt parenting styles, causing survivors to doubt their caregiving capacities. The discussion by linking Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to a range of health and behavioral outcomes that ultimately shape major life choices, including those related to

forming a family. Similarly, how developmental trauma can impair both social cognition and physiological functioning, which in turn influence decisions around caregiving and family planning. The challenges associated with high ACE scores are particularly evident in the domain of parental readiness, where difficulties in attachment and emotional regulation—key to successful caregiving—can hinder individuals' confidence in taking on parenting roles. Add that some trauma survivors may find comfort in caregiving roles that feel more emotionally manageable, such as caring for pets, a choice that reflects shifting ideas about family and caregiving. *Locally*, shows how trauma impacts mental health and reproductive decision-making in the Philippines, while discussing the separate but compounding issue of infertility. Furthermore, reveal the long-term developmental consequences of abuse and neglect, reinforcing the broader implications of trauma on family life.

Amid these personal and social complexities, the idea of readiness to parent—whether in traditional or alternative forms—takes on deeper meaning. For individuals shaped by difficult early experiences, stepping into caregiving roles may involve reimagining what it means to nurture and connect. Roles like fur parenting can offer a fulfilling avenue for emotional expression, especially when the traditional path feels fraught or uncertain. This redefinition is not only practical but also deeply personal, woven into layers of identity, resilience, and healing. Understanding these patterns involves looking beyond trauma's immediate effects to the adaptive ways people seek connection, care, and meaning in their lives. As caregiving roles continue to evolve in response to cultural shifts and personal histories, exploring how people reconstruct their readiness and capacity to care for pets, children, or others—offers a richer and more compassionate view of human development.

### **Parental Readiness**

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) profoundly impact emotional and psychological development, thereby influencing an individual's readiness to assume the role of parenting. Research consistently shows that individuals with a history of ACEs often exhibit difficulties in emotional regulation and resilience—both essential components for effective parenting (Hughes et al., 2025). Poor emotional regulation, as demonstrated by Hughes and colleagues, undermines the capacity to provide children with a stable and nurturing environment, thereby potentially disrupting the formation of secure attachment. This disruption not only challenges parenting efficacy but also reveals how early trauma compromises foundational developmental processes central to caregiving. Moreover, ACEs shape how prospective parents perceive the demands and challenges of parenthood. Lanius et al. (2024) reveal that women with ACE histories often experience heightened anxiety about replicating harmful parenting patterns, underscoring the complex identity negotiation involved in transitioning to motherhood. This aligns with Role Theory, which posits that individuals actively construct and negotiate caregiving identities, particularly in contexts where prior experiences complicate traditional role enactment. The presence of strong social support networks—comprising family, friends, and partners—emerges as a critical factor in resilience, facilitating healthier transitions into parenting despite adverse backgrounds.

Equally important is recognizing how the effects of childhood adversity can extend beyond a single generation. As Howell et al. (2021) note, unresolved ACEs may be passed on through intergenerational trauma, continuing cycles of dysfunction unless disrupted by meaningful intervention. In this context, resilience becomes more than a personal trait—it serves as a pathway for change. The integration of resilience theory and readiness models offers a nuanced lens to understand how individuals not only cope with but also grow beyond their pasts. From a developmental standpoint, this means viewing parental readiness as something fluid and responsive, shaped by both early adversity and the protective buffers that support healing and growth. Instead of a fixed quality, readiness becomes a journey of identity renegotiation, emotional learning, and support-building—a process especially vital for those navigating the lasting effects of ACEs.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a mixed-methods design, specifically an explanatory sequential approach. This method first gathers quantitative (closed-ended) data, followed by qualitative (open-ended) data to address research questions. This order enables the further clarification of quantitative results through qualitative insights. Combining surveys with interviews or observations provides a more comprehensive understanding, offering a richer perspective on the research topic. This integration of both data types allowed for deeper insights into the research questions.

The data collection process occurred in two (2) phases. First, the researchers posted a "Call for Participants" on social media, outlining the eligibility criteria to reach potential participants. Afterward, participants were invited to take part in the study through online surveys. An informed consent form was provided to ensure participants understood the study's purpose and the implications of their responses. Once consent was given, participants completed the ACE-Q and READI-SF surveys via Google Forms. An a priori power analysis using G\*Power software determined that a sample size of 115 participants was necessary to achieve adequate statistical power for the study. However, due to the niche nature of the target population, only 81 participants were gathered. Despite not meeting the initial sample size recommendation, this number was deemed sufficient for the study's objectives, considering the specificity of the group. The data were then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), where descriptive statistics summarized the responses and Biserial correlation assessed the relationship between ACE scores and readiness for pet ownership. The second phase focused on collecting qualitative data. After completing the quantitative phase, four (4) participants were selected for in-depth interviews based on their ACE-Q and READI-SF responses, ensuring a diverse mix of ACE scores and readiness levels. The semi-structured interviews aimed to explore participants' personal experiences with pet ownership, particularly their decision to choose pets over biological children and their perceived readiness to care for them. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of their responses. This sample size aligns with [Coker \(2021\)](#) methodological guidance for phenomenological research, which suggests that data saturation is typically attainable with four (4) to five (5) participants, making this sample sufficient to support an in-depth exploration of lived experiences.

Once the interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, ensuring that all details, including tone and emotion, were accurately captured. The transcriptions were then reviewed for accuracy to prevent any misinterpretations or omissions. To ensure data validity, member checking was conducted, where the researchers returned the transcriptions to participants for review. Participants confirmed the accuracy of their responses, and any discrepancies were addressed. After member checking, the data was organized and analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed qualitatively to connect participants' experiences with the study's focus on ACEs and parental readiness in pet ownership, ensuring the findings were reliable and comprehensive.

To identify emerging themes, the researchers used QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative data analysis software. They imported interview transcripts and open-ended survey responses, manually reviewing the text to identify key themes, categories, and keywords. Using the software's coding functions, they organized the data into meaningful themes. A qualitative data analyst then validated these themes. Since there are no specific reliability or validity studies for QDA Miner Lite, the theme extraction process relied on the researchers' judgment. Once validated, the themes were exported into Excel or text files for further analysis, ensuring the results were both insightful and accurate. Inductive coding, a data-driven approach where codes emerge directly from the data without predefined categories, was utilized in the generation of themes; as such, the codes generated

emerged from the data.

To mitigate subjectivity throughout the transcription, coding, and theme validation processes, the triangulation strategies described above were employed. Member checking enabled participants to verify the accuracy of their transcriptions, thereby reducing potential researcher bias in interpretation. The involvement of a qualitative data analyst in validating the coded themes provided an independent perspective, minimizing the risk of subjective bias in theme identification. Additionally, the use of qualitative data analysis software facilitated a systematic and transparent approach to organizing the data. Collectively, these triangulation methods enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings by ensuring that data interpretation was cross-verified through multiple sources and perspectives.

### **Adverse Childhood Experiences—Questionnaire (ACE-Q)**

For the quantitative portion of the study, the researchers used two (2) tools for data collection. The first was the Adverse Childhood Experiences Questionnaire for Adults (ACE-Q), a 10-item survey designed to screen for adverse childhood experiences. Participants answered "yes" or "no" to each item, and their cumulative score categorized their level of risk for toxic stress physiology as low, intermediate, or high. This classification was based on the number of reported adverse experiences and whether the participant showed ACE-related health conditions ([Aces Aware, 2020](#)). Although the ACE-Q reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67—slightly below the ideal threshold—it is still within an acceptable range for studies of this nature ([Lance et al., 2006](#), as cited by [Hansen-Oja et al., 2025](#)).

### **Readiness, Efficacy, Attributions, Defensiveness, & Importance Scale—Short Form (READI-SF)**

The second tool used by the researchers was the Readiness, Efficacy, Attributions, Defensiveness, & Importance Scale - Short Form (READI-SF). This scale measures an individual's readiness and confidence in taking on parenting or caregiving responsibilities. Participants respond to a series of statements using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Higher scores indicate a greater level of perceived readiness. The READI-SF has shown strong reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 ([Proctor et al., 2018](#), as cited in [Hatley-Cotter et al., 2022](#)), making it a reliable tool for assessing emotional preparedness in caregiving contexts.

For the qualitative portion of the study, the researchers employed a validated semi-structured interview guide, which facilitated open and flexible conversations with participants. This approach allowed the researchers to explore participants' personal experiences in-depth and gain meaningful insights into their perspectives.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The participants of the study were the selected fur parents. They were chosen according to the results of the quantitative data collection.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants of the Study

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>Total Percentage</b>
<b>BATANGAS</b>	47	58.02%
<b>LAGUNA</b>	20	24.69%
<b>CAVITE</b>	14	17.28%
<b>Total</b>	81	100%

The quantitative phase of the study included 81 fur parents who reported a preference for having fur babies over biological children. Although the initial target sample size was 115, only 81

participants were obtained due to limited response rates within the study area. A sample size ranging from 30 to 500 is generally considered adequate for most research studies; thus, the sample of 81 participants was deemed sufficient to satisfy the requirements of the present study.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Participants of the Study

Participant	Age	Address	Sex
1	19 years old	City of Santo Tomas, Batangas	Female
2	19 years old	City of Santo Tomas, Batangas	Male
3	19 years old	City of Santo Tomas, Batangas	Female
4	23 years old	City of Santa Rosa, Laguna	Female

The qualitative phase of the study comprised four (4) participants, as indicated in Table B. This sample size was purposefully determined based on [Coker \(2021\)](#) methodological guidance for phenomenological research, which suggests that data saturation is generally attainable with four (4) to five (5) participants. In this study, data saturation was reached with these four participants, as no new themes emerged beyond those already identified. Utilizing this sample size allowed for an in-depth and rigorous examination of participants lived experiences while maintaining feasibility within the study's scope. The participants were purposively selected from the 81 individuals in the quantitative phase, specifically those who exhibited high levels of both Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parental Readiness. This deliberate selection sought to gather detailed and relevant data related to the primary concepts under investigation, thereby enhancing the rigor and depth of the study's findings.

### What is the level of Adverse Childhood Experiences among fur parents?

**Table 3.** Level of Adverse Childhood Experiences Among Fur Parents

Indicative Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Did you feel that you don't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?	0.31	0.46	Low Occurrence	7
2. Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death or other reason?	0	0	Very Low Occurrence	8
3. Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?	0.48	0.5	Moderate Occurrence	4
4. Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?	0.46	0.5	Moderate Occurrence	5
5. Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?	0.62	0.5	High Occurrence	3
6. Did you live with anyone who went to jail?	0	0	Very Low Occurrence	8
7. Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	0.68	0.47	High Occurrence	1

Indicative Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
8. Did a parent or adult in your home ever beat, kick or physically hurt you in any way?	0.63	0.49	High Occurrence	2
9. Did you ever feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?	0.44	0.5	Moderate Occurrence	6
10. Did you experience unwanted sexual contact?	0	0	Very Low Occurrence	8
<b>General Assessment</b>	0.36	0.34	Low Occurrence	

**Table 4.** Interpretation of Mean Range

Mean Range	Verbal Interpretation
0.00 – 0.20	Very Low Occurrence
0.21 – 0.40	Low Occurrence
0.41 – 0.60	Moderate Occurrence
0.61 – 0.80	High Occurrence
0.81 – 1.00	Very High Occurrence

The overall mean ACE score was low ( $M = 0.36$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ), indicating that while verbal abuse was relatively common, more severe adverse experiences were infrequently reported. As shown in Table 3, the item “Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?” had the highest mean score ( $M = 0.68$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ), suggesting a notable prevalence of verbal abuse within the sample. In contrast, items such as “Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reasons?”, “Did you live with anyone who went to jail?” and “Did you experience unwanted sexual contact?” all yielded mean scores of zero ( $M = 0.00$ ,  $SD = 0$ ), indicating that these more severe adversities were rare among participants.

While Attachment Theory posits that experiences such as verbal abuse may hinder the development of secure emotional bonds, the findings suggest that participants may have developed adaptive emotional resilience, potentially mitigating long-term negative impacts. Role Theory also emphasizes the influence of early family stability on one’s ability to adopt caregiving roles; thus, the lack of major familial disruptions in the sample may have contributed to the stable formation of caregiving roles. These interpretations emphasize the resilience of Filipinos in the face of adversity, and reveals individuals’ capacity to overcome exposure to violence. However, national data indicating higher rates of sexual abuse and violence ([Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2023](#)) render the low reporting of such experiences somewhat unexpected. These findings suggest the need to consider resilience, cultural context, and alternative pathways to caregiving readiness beyond what traditional theoretical frameworks might predict.

### What is the level of Parental Readiness among fur parents?

**Table 5.** Level of Parental Readiness Among Fur Parents

Indicative Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. It is very important that my child's behavior problems are fixed	4.15	0.99	High Readiness	2.5
2. It's very important that my child and/or I get help	4.02	1.01	High Readiness	8
3. I have problems that are more important than my child's behavior	3.17	0.82	Moderate Readiness	14

Indicative Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
right now				
4. It's worth it to spend money to help my child with his/her behavior.	3.86	0.79	High Readiness	10
5. I need to learn to be more consistent.	4.32	0.9	Very High Readiness	1
6. I am willing to do whatever it takes to be sure that we get help.	4.05	1.01	High Readiness	6.5
7. Things with my child's behavior have to change very soon.	3.74	0.97	High Readiness	12
8. If things don't change, my child's future could be hurt.	4.04	0.86	High Readiness	5
9. <i>I'd like to learn what will work to change my child's behavior.</i>	4.11	1.17	High Readiness	4
10. <i>I'm ready to change my parenting.</i>	3.68	0.92	High Readiness	13
11. <i>I'm eager to learn any skills the therapist can teach me.</i>	4.15	0.88	High Readiness	2.5
12. <i>I want to change the way I discipline my child.</i>	4.01	0.96	High Readiness	9
13. <i>I will work on my child's behavior problems later.</i>	3.03	1.14	Moderate Readiness	15
14. <i>It might be hard, but I'm ready to parent differently.</i>	3.78	0.91	High Readiness	11
15. <i>It's time to change the way my child and I get along.</i>	4.05	0.87	High Readiness	6.5
General Assessment	3.87	14.2	High Readiness	

**Table 6.** Interpretation of Mean Range**Mean Range Verbal Interpretation**

1.00 – 2.49 Low Readiness

2.50 – 3.49 Moderate Readiness

3.50 – 4.49 High Readiness

4.50 – 5.00 Very High Readiness

The overall mean score for parental readiness was high ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 14.20$ ), indicating that fur parents generally perceived themselves as prepared for intentional parenting. As shown in Table 5, the item "I need to learn to be more consistent" received the highest mean score ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), suggesting very high readiness and an acknowledgment of the importance of consistency in parenting. In contrast, the item "I will work on my child's behavior problems later" had the lowest mean score ( $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ), interpreted as moderate readiness. This suggests that while many fur parents value addressing behavioral issues, others may still be developing confidence or strategies in this area.

Zhang et al. (2025) reported that parental adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are associated with challenges in children's emotional and social development. However, resilience-building strategies have been shown to support more consistent and effective parenting practices, contributing to the prevention of intergenerational trauma. In the present study, participants demonstrated high levels of readiness for consistent parenting, which may reflect adaptive functioning despite prior adversity. Through the lens of Role Theory, this readiness indicates that fur parents have actively adopted and internalized parenting roles, aligning their behaviors with socially constructed expectations of what it means to be a parent. Attachment Theory further

explains that the prioritization of consistency in responses—evident in the participants' high agreement with statements related to consistent parenting—demonstrates an orientation toward fostering secure attachments. In contrast, lower mean scores on items related to behavioral management suggest differentiated expressions of attachment security or confidence, rather than an absence of readiness. These theoretical perspectives show the complexity of parenting readiness and the varied ways it manifests in non-traditional parenting contexts.

### Is there a significant relationship between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parental Readiness among fur parents?

**Table 7.** Pearson Correlations of the study variables

	Sig. (2 tailed)	Adverse Childhood Experiences	Parental Readiness
Adverse Childhood Experiences	0.14	1	0.17
Parental Readiness	0.14	0.17	1

*Note: N=81; \*\*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)*

The means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients for Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parental Readiness were calculated based on a sample of 81 participants, as shown in Table 7. The correlation coefficient ( $r = .17$ ) indicated a weak positive relationship between these variables; however, this association was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.14$ ). This lack of significance suggests that, within this sample, adverse childhood experiences may not have a direct or meaningful influence on parental readiness. One possible confounding factor is the limited sample size, which may have reduced statistical power and hindered the detection of smaller effect sizes. Additionally, the conceptual distance between childhood adversity and the construct of parental readiness contributed to the weak correlation, as these variables represent distinct domains that may interact indirectly rather than in a linear manner.

Further complexity arises from potential moderating or mediating variables not captured in the current study, such as individual coping strategies, availability of social support, and the severity or recency of adverse experiences. Incorporating these factors in future research—potentially through mixed-methods designs—could provide a more nuanced understanding of how past adversity influences readiness for parenting.

From a theoretical standpoint, Attachment Theory offers insight into the weak correlation observed. Secure attachment patterns and effective coping mechanisms may serve as protective factors that buffer the potential negative effects of childhood adversity, enabling individuals to develop readiness for parenting despite their histories of adversity. Role Theory similarly suggests that parental readiness is not solely a function of past experiences but is shaped by the individual's current social roles, expectations, and available support systems. These theories imply that parental readiness is multifaceted and influenced by dynamic, context-dependent factors beyond early adversity alone.

In contrast to these findings, previous studies have reported significant negative associations between childhood adversity and parenting behaviors, particularly in biological parent-child interactions (Wattanatchariya et al., 2024). This discrepancy shows the importance of considering different parenting contexts, such as non-traditional parenting roles, which may involve distinct psychosocial processes. Furthermore, Hawkins et al. (2024) emphasize the complexity of pet ownership, noting that a holistic perspective is necessary to understand the mental health implications for both owners and their pets. This suggests that parental readiness among fur parents may be influenced by factors unique to this caregiving context, which merit further investigation.

## What is the lived experience of Fur Parents as to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Parental Readiness?

Interview Question 1: What specific factors led you to choose fur babies over biological children?

### Parental Priorities

The first question led to the emergence of the theme Parental Priorities, which refers to the factors participants considered when choosing fur babies over biological children. This theme encapsulates the participants' awareness of the weight and responsibility involved in having biological children compared to the more manageable commitment of caring for pets and their preferences. As a subtheme, Financial Capacity is often a major consideration, as some individuals may find the lower costs of pet care more manageable, while raising a child comes with long-term financial commitments. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 1 when she stated:

*I also have that disease, a skin disease, and it took years before I got myself checked because of my financial capacity, and I understood that life is really hard.—Participant 1*

Another subtheme is Personal Preference, which also contributes, as many people are drawn to the companionship pets offer without the extensive responsibilities of traditional parenthood. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 2 when he stated:

*I would say that it's valid for me, though, I would say that this decision is only applicable to me, I can't recommend the idea because it's just for me.—Participant 2*

Additionally, the subtheme, Personal Capacity—both emotional and psychological—affects this decision, as some individuals may feel more equipped to handle the more manageable commitment of fur parenting, which offers fulfillment with fewer ongoing pressures. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 3 and 4 when they stated:

*“Do you know that feeling where you always worry, like one time, I went home early because my cat isn't eating.”—Participant 3*

*“Like if they don't eat, you'll be worried.”—Participant 4*

The theme Parental Priorities aligns with Attachment Theory, which suggests that individuals with ACEs may prefer pets over children due to past attachment experiences, as they feel more capable of handling the less complex emotional demands of pet care. The manageable responsibility of caring for a pet can satisfy their need for secure, predictable relationships. From a Role Theory perspective, participants' choices reflect their ability to fulfill parenting roles, with factors such as Financial Capacity and Personal Capacity influencing their decision. These factors suggest that participants may perceive parenting as financially and emotionally overwhelming, leading them to prioritize fur parenting instead (Aruah et al., 2019 as cited by Andrade et al., 2024). Both theories reveal that ACEs affect how individuals perceive and navigate parenting roles, with pet care being seen as a more manageable commitment.

Interview Question 2: Can you give adverse childhood experiences that you have faced and explain how these experiences influence your views on parenthood?

### Parental Perspectives

The second question led to the emergence of the second theme, Parental Perspectives, which refers to the participants' experiences that influenced and changed their views on parenting. One subtheme, Family Mediator in Conflicts, arose from participants' experiences of mediating conflicts within their families. This was exemplified by Participant 1, who shared:

*“I pacify them, to the point that he (the father) almost stabbed my mother, but I was trying to mediate in their conflict.”—Participant 1*

Another subtheme, Absence of Adverse Experiences, encapsulates the lack of negative experiences that shaped participants' views on parenting. This was reflected in Participant 2's response:

*"I have not seen any abuse; I haven't seen physical violence."—Participant 2*

The third subtheme, Weight of Parenthood, reflects how participants' experiences with responsibility shaped their understanding of parenthood as a significant commitment. This was evidenced by Participant 3, who said:

*"The weight of having a child, I need to be responsible, so if you are ready to have a child, I'm not saying that you should be perfect, but, maybe, at least, somehow like that... That's why I don't want to have a child; I am not ready."—Participant 3*

Finally, the subtheme Stereotypes emerged from participants' experiences of being labeled, often negatively, based on societal perceptions. This was evident in Participant 4's statement:

*"Am I being promiscuously involved with the father of my friend? I was fourteen, it was iconic, because even after ten years, I can still remember it."—Participant 4*

From an Attachment Theory perspective, the Family Mediator in Conflicts subtheme suggests that early experiences of managing family conflicts can shape parenting roles. Mediation fosters a learning process that continues after resolution, providing both painful and beneficial insights. While negative insights can be difficult, they lead to changes in participants' thinking, resulting in positive shifts in behavior and feelings (Doyle, 2017). In contrast, the Absence of Adverse Experiences subtheme suggests that participants who did not face negative childhood events may develop a more secure attachment style, contributing to a more positive outlook on parenting. Childhood experiences play a predictable role in shaping family health in adulthood. Positive experiences, even in the presence of early adversity, can help foster better family dynamics in adulthood (Daines et al., 2021). Furthermore, from a Role Theory perspective, the Weight of Parenthood subtheme emphasizes the recognition of parenting's significant responsibilities. Many millennials view pets as a more affordable and ethical form of companionship (Inspire Veterinary Partners, Inc., 2024). The decision to wait until one feels ready to parent reflects the negotiation of social and familial roles, while the Stereotypes subtheme shows how societal expectations and labels influence one's perception of the parental role, especially when past negative societal judgments are internalized. Internalized stigma, or self-stigma, involves recognizing negative stereotypes, agreeing with them, and applying them to oneself (Corrigan et al., 2011 as cited by O'Donnell and Foran, 2024).

Interview Question 3: Has being a fur parent sparked a desire in you to have biological children or has it solidified your decision not to?

### **Parental Alternatives**

The third question led to the emergence of the third theme, Parental Alternatives, which explores participants' experiences related to the outcomes of fur parenting, including the reasons they chose fur parenting over traditional parenting. One subtheme, Longing for a Sibling, reflects how participants turned to fur parenting for companionship, particularly when they longed for a sibling but were unable to have one due to fate. This was evident in the response of Participant 1, who said:

*"I really long for a sibling but fate denied me..."—Participant 1*

Another subtheme, Feelings of Emptiness, describes how fur babies fill a void in the lives of their fur parents. This was evidenced by Participant 2's statement:

*"You'll be enticed to see them grow, they have their moments, they fill my heart with joy."—Participant 2*

The subtheme Financial Stability emerged as participants acknowledged the challenges of

raising a child, recognizing that financial stability is crucial before making such a commitment. This was evidenced by Participant 3, who said:

*"You should be able to afford it."—Participant 3*

From an Attachment Theory perspective, the sub themes Longing for a Sibling and Feelings of Emptiness show how childhood experiences of isolation or unmet emotional needs drive individuals toward fur parenting in search of attachment and companionship. Pets provide love, care, and structure, reducing stress, easing loneliness, and offering unconditional support, which fulfills emotional voids created by insecure or absent early attachments ([Health Benefits of Pets: How Your Furry Friend Improves Your Mental and Physical Health, 2024](#)). From a Role Theory perspective, choosing fur parenting over biological parenting reflects the negotiation of social roles, particularly concerning Financial Stability. Participants recognize the need for financial stability before committing to biological parenthood, aligning with the practical demands of parenting. Fur parenting, as an alternative, offers a fulfilling role that balances emotional attachment with the practicalities of responsibility, bypassing some challenges of traditional parenthood, as fertility intentions are influenced by economic resources ([Guo et al., 2021](#)).

Interview Question 4: How do your life experiences shape your current motivations, emotions, as it pertains to being a parent or a fur parent?

### **Fur Parenting Attachment**

The fourth question led to the emergence of fourth and final theme Fur Parenting Attachment where it was laid out that the products of their experiences in childhood made them be motivated to be a better parent not only to fur babies but children (if it so happens). The subtheme Emotional Attachment refers to the attachment the individual feels from their fur parent that they cannot acquire from other persons. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 2 when he stated:

*"I feel the love more from them than other people."—Participant 2*

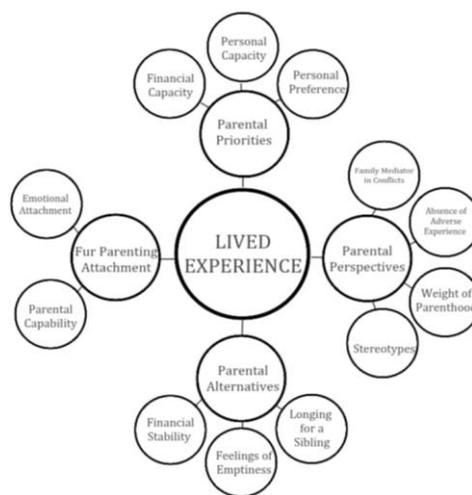
The second and last subtheme Parental Capability refers to the motivations of having enough resources to proceed with any decisions in parenting. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 3 when she stated:

*"I don't want to be not ready emotionally and financially if I were to have my own children..."—Participant 3*

From an Attachment Theory perspective, the subtheme Emotional Attachment shows how participants form strong bonds with their fur babies, fulfilling emotional needs unmet during childhood and providing the love they may have missed from human relationships. A growing number of individuals consider pets as part of their family ([Podberscek et al., 2000](#), as cited by [Martin et al., 2021](#)). This attachment influences their readiness to care for children, as they learn to form healthy attachments through their pets ([Lass-Hennemann et al., 2022](#)). From a Role Theory perspective, Parental Capability shows the importance of being emotionally and financially prepared for parenting, whether for pets or children. Participants assess their readiness by considering both emotional bonds and practical responsibilities, demonstrating how attachment needs and role responsibilities shape their preparedness for parenting. Similarly, the socioeconomic environment in which a family resides can significantly impact parenting, affecting both parental mental health and access to resources. Additionally, parents' knowledge of childrearing and cultural values may differ based on socioeconomic status, which in turn influences parenting practices.

In summary, this research delves into the personal reasons behind participants' choices to care for pets instead of having children, uncovering four key themes. Parental Priorities reflect the factors that influence these decisions, such as financial challenges, the ease of caring for pets

compared to children, and emotional readiness. For many, the financial burden of raising a child makes pet care a more feasible option, and the emotional commitment of having a pet feels more manageable. Parental Perspectives captures how personal experiences, such as mediating family conflicts or growing up without negative experiences, shape participants' views on parenthood. These experiences make them consider the responsibility of having children more seriously and also show how societal labels can affect their readiness to parent. Parental Alternatives explores the comfort and companionship that pets provide, especially when participants longed for things like sibling relationships or to fill an emotional gap. Financial stability also plays a role in their decision to avoid traditional parenthood. Finally, Fur Parenting Attachment focuses on how past experiences motivate participants to be better caregivers, not just to pets but also to potential children. Pets offer a kind of unconditional love and emotional connection that may be absent in human relationships, and many participants stress the importance of being both emotionally and financially ready for parenthood.



**Figure 1.** Emergent Themes

Figure 1 illustrates the central phenomenon of fur parenting, highlighting four key themes: Parental Priorities (influenced by personal, financial, and preference-based factors), Fur Parenting Attachment (emotional bonds and caregiving roles), Parental Alternatives (financial stability, emotional needs, and sibling longing), and Parental Perspectives (shaped by conflict resolution, absence of trauma, parenting burdens, and societal views). These themes offer a nuanced understanding of fur parents lived experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the association between adverse childhood experiences and parental readiness within the context of non-traditional parenting, focusing on individuals who identify as fur parents. Quantitative findings revealed a low average ACE score of 0.36 and a high average parental readiness score of 3.87. Although a weak positive correlation was observed between ACEs and parental readiness ( $r = 0.17$ ), it was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.14$ ), indicating no meaningful relationship between the two variables. While attachment theory often suggests that early childhood adversity may hinder the ability to form secure emotional bonds and engage in caregiving roles later in life, these results indicate that such childhood adversity does not necessarily reduce parental readiness in alternative parenting contexts. Similarly, role theory emphasizes the influence of social expectations and identity in adopting caregiving roles. Still, the findings suggest that a broader range of factors beyond early adverse experiences shapes parental readiness among fur parents. Together, these findings

contribute to a more nuanced understanding of parental readiness that recognizes resilience and the importance of current social and personal motivations.

The qualitative findings, analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, provided depth and context to the statistical results. Four (4) major themes emerged: Parental Priorities, Parental Perspectives, Parental Alternatives, and Fur Parenting Attachment. Parental Priorities and Parental Perspectives reflected the influence of internal motivations and societal expectations on perceptions of readiness—aligning with role theory, which posits that individuals adopt roles based on culturally constructed norms and expectations. Parental Alternatives and Fur Parenting Attachment illustrated how participants experienced emotional fulfillment and caregiving competence through pet parenting, consistent with attachment theory, which emphasizes the formation of emotional bonds beyond traditional parent-child relationships. Overall, the findings suggest that a history of childhood adversity does not necessarily diminish one's perceived readiness to parent in alternative forms. Instead, parental readiness among fur parents appears to be shaped more by current emotional, social, and identity-related factors than by past trauma. These insights challenge traditional notions of parenting and show the legitimacy of non-biological caregiving roles. Furthermore, this supports the utility of a sequential explanatory approach, where qualitative insights enrich and contextualize quantitative data, ultimately challenging conventional views on parenting and affirming the legitimacy of non-biological caregiving roles. Future research should continue to examine how attachment dynamics and social role expectations influence diverse caregiving pathways.

#### **LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH**

This study was limited to fur parents aged 18 and above residing in Batangas, Laguna, and Cavite, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other geographic or cultural contexts. The use of convenience and snowball sampling through social media platforms may have introduced sampling bias, resulting in a participant pool that lacked demographic and experiential diversity. While the intended sample size was 115, only 81 participants responded, which may have reduced the statistical power of the quantitative analysis. Moreover, the study exclusively focused on individuals who voluntarily chose pets over biological children, excluding the perspectives of those who are involuntarily childless or undecided about parenthood. This scope limitation may have excluded relevant dimensions of parental readiness and caregiving motivations. Finally, the reliance on self-report measures raises concerns regarding the potential influence of recall bias and subjective interpretation, particularly in relation to sensitive topics such as adverse childhood experiences.

To build upon the insights of this study, future research should include a broader and more diverse participant base, both geographically and demographically, to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Including individuals who are involuntarily childless or uncertain about becoming parents could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the spectrum of caregiving attitudes and experiences. Cross-cultural comparative studies would also be valuable in examining how different societal norms and expectations shape fur parenting and parental readiness. Additionally, employing a longitudinal mixed methods design could offer richer insights into how past adversity and caregiving roles evolve over time. This approach would allow researchers to observe changes in attachment, identity, and role fulfillment, offering a deeper understanding of how non-traditional forms of parenting develop and persist across the lifespan.

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