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## **Public attitudes towards grief in animals**

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### **Abstract**

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*Animals under human management are often separated from conspecifics, which may lead to behaviour indicative of separation distress or grief. For the purposes of this paper, grief is considered as a biological response to separation, indicated by a bi-phasic 'protest-despair' behavioural response. It is reasonable to assume that only animals which are able to form complex social bonds can experience grief. Scientific experiments have suggested that some farm and laboratory animals experience distress or grief as a result of maternal separation and social isolation. However, little is known about whether the public believe that animals are capable of grief. Therefore, we surveyed 1,000 members of the public to establish what knowledge they have about grief in animals and to compare this to what we know in science. The survey revealed that 90% of the general public believed that some or all animals can experience grief, with 23% believing that all animals can grieve. They attributed grief more to companion animals and animals with higher level cognitive abilities than to farm animals and animals that may be feared. It is concluded that public belief about grief in animals extends beyond scientific evidence, and that educating people about scientific findings and management practices connected with grief and separation distress may improve the welfare of farm and laboratory animals.*

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