

RAINBOW BRIDGE: PREPARING AND DEALING  
WITH THE DEATH OF A BELOVED  
ANIMAL-COMPANION

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L-Università  
ta' Malta

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of individuals who had to prepare and deal with the death of an animal-companion. As the research explored direct experiences of bereaved animal-owners, a qualitative approach using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was considered the most appropriate for this study. The study also addressed participants' impressions about counselling and their perception of counselling in relation to animal-companion grief. Semi-structured audio-recorded individual interviews were conducted with seven participants. The findings suggest that when participants needed to provide care for larger animals for a period of time before the animal passed away, they experienced anticipatory grief and caregiver's burden and stress. The data also show that anticipatory grief has both negative and positive aspects. Participants noted that they were quite unhappy with the services provided by their veterinarians and that veterinarians need to meet the clients' needs on an individual basis. The need for a pet cemetery was highlighted as participants did not have a means whereby they could bury their animal-companions and then be free to visit them when they wanted. The data also evidence that, even though participants grieved for their animals, they experienced disenfranchised grief as the death of an animal-companion is not acknowledged by all sectors of society. The study highlighted the fact that, because participants were unsure of what was normal behaviour, they did not seek individual counselling as they prepared and dealt with the death of their animal-companions.

Recommendations as elicited from the data include further research as to how counselling helps those preparing and dealing with the death of an animal-companion, the training of counsellors and veterinarians in grief therapy and an awareness of the effects of losing an animal-companion. The implementation of a national policy which caters for bereavement leave for those grieving the loss of an animal-companion is also recommended. This policy should include the establishment of a pet cemetery. Public awareness on animal grief counselling and the experiences of such individuals is highlighted.

**Keywords:** animal-companions; attachment; preparing and dealing; death of an animal-companion

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## List of Abbreviations

APA	American Psychiatric Association
AVMA	American Veterinary Medical Association
EU	European Union
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
MACP	Malta Association for the Counselling Profession
MVA	Malta Veterinary Association

## Dedication



Peppi 2013-2018



Grinch 2001-2016



Pluto 2002-2014



Zico 1988-2002



Shandy 1987-1988

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I would like to genuinely thank my partner for his continual support throughout the last four years. I am aware that without his help and support I would not be where I am today.

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Course Masters in Counselling

Title of Dissertation  
Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and dealing  
with the death of a beloved  
animal-companion

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27.4.2018  
Date

MICHELLE FRENDU  
Name of Student (in Caps)

# Chapter 1

“Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole.”

(Caras, n.d.)

*My animal-companions, to whom this study is dedicated, have taught me that even though owning an animal-companion provides many benefits, it also brings with it heart break. As I reflect on my experiences I am reminded of the stress, anxiety and grief I experienced as I watched each of them become sick and eventually pass away.*

*A lot of the stress and anxiety was caused by the fact that, as I watched them wither away, I knew that eventually I would have to decide between allowing them to die a natural death or opt for euthanasia. What made it worse was knowing that they would not always be there to give me unconditional love and support.*

*The death of each was made much more difficult as not everyone could understand what I was going through. Therefore, instead of seeking support from family and friends, I distanced myself from both.*

*I can truthfully say that preparing and dealing with the death of an animal-companion is not easy and that during stressful times it would have been helpful to have someone who was willingly to offer me compassion and support.*

### **Background to the Research**

This research is based on my belief that love and affection are important aspect of one's emotional wellbeing (Maslow, 1943) and are required to help one gain a sense of self-worth (Abulof, 2017). This is important to the research because in today's society people not only need to feel that they belong, but it is essential that they feel needed (Abulof, 2017; Bowlby & Parkes, 1970).

Research evidences that on the Maltese Islands there has been a 7.1% increase in people living alone (Eurostat, 2017). Such data are relevant to the study as international studies have evidenced that people living alone are turning to animal-companions to meet their emotional needs (American Veterinary Medical Association, 2013; Irvine, 2013; Kurdek, 2008). With this shift to animal-companionship comes the need for society to recognise the emotional impact associated with pet loss (Wrobel & Dye, 2003). This is necessary because pet loss is not always considered as being a significant loss and pet-owners are at risk of experiencing disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012).



### **Rationale of the Study**

The idea for the study developed after a personal counselling session in which my past and present relationships with my animal-companions had been discussed. After the actual session, I felt as if I had been hit by a truck. However as the days passed, I felt as if a heavy weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Being able to talk about my feelings to someone who did not judge me, who did not say “get another” or “put him out of his misery” actually helped me to start to feel better (Farber, Berano, & Capobianco, 2004; Saypol, 2010).

Through reflection it dawned on me that, if it were not for personal-counselling, these feelings may have lain dormant, perhaps causing irreparable damage. I then pondered on various questions such as: Do those who lose an animal-companion seek professional help? If so, which services do they reach out to? Are they aware that counselling provides a space to talk freely about feelings and experiences without being judged? These are some of the questions that I endeavoured to answer throughout this study.

### **The Significance of the Study**

This study attempted to explore the experiences of those who had lost an animal-companion. The criteria for participation within the study was that participants had to have lost an animal-companion as they are viewed as family members who take on many roles and not just that of being a mere pet (Cohen, 2002; Grandgeorge & Hausberger, 2011; Veldkamp, 2009).

This study is relevant within a European and Maltese context. Statistics evidence that in 2016 families within the European Union (EU) owned approximately 296 million pets (Statista, Number of pet animals in Europe in 2016, by animal type., 2018a). No statistics were included on the Maltese Islands. In addition, social media have made us aware of the important roles animal-companions have taken on in people’s lives and of the intense grief felt when an animal-companion dies (Adrian & Stitt, 2017; Archer & Winchester, 1994; Cordaro, 2012).

The study is important as there is a need for veterinarians and those working within the helping professions to be aware of the emotional turmoil which is caused as one prepares for and loses an animal-companion (Brown, 2006). Lastly, through my own experience as a trainee counsellor I have been made aware that bereaved pet-owners do not recognise the benefits counselling offers in times of grief.

### **Research Aims and Research Question**

The aim of the research was to explore the experiences of bereaved pet owners whilst preparing and dealing with the death of an animal-companion and to then address impacts on counselling for the clientele population. The objective was to address pet-bereavement counselling and increase awareness of the benefits of counselling during such difficult times through the participants' voices.

It is amidst these reflections and aims for improved pet-bereavement services that I present the research question which framed my study: What are animal-companions' experiences of preparing and dealing with the loss of a beloved animal-companion?

As I sit and think about the ideas and beliefs which prompted me to take on this research and what theories these are connected to, I realise that in spite of having read for an undergraduate, I have never reflected on what a theory is but just accepted them. I am currently aware that my layman's ideas on how society and individuals function are substantiated by theories, "set[s] of assumptions, propositions or accepted facts that attempt to provide a plausible or rational explanation of cause and effect (casual) relationships among a group of observed phenomenon" (Izogu, Chikerenma, & Elfenkew, 2015, p. 27).

### **Conceptual Framework**

This section presents the conceptual framework of my research, namely "the actual ideas and beliefs that [I] hold about the phenomena studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39). I will first discuss my laymen's views and then provide academic theories to validate my own ideas and beliefs. The third aspect of the conceptual framework will conclude this section, namely the epistemological underpinnings of my chosen methodology.

**Layman's view.** My first belief is that we all need to have a sense of belonging (Maslow, 1943) and that this may be provided by more than one attachment figure whom we place in a special order of importance (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Trinke, 1993). I also believe that an attachment figure does not necessarily have to be a person, but may be an animal or object (Kurdek, 2008).

My second belief is that, as life changes, so do the creatures or objects we form emotional bonds with (Antonucci, 2009; Elder, 1998). I believe that each person comes into our life at a certain point in time to meet a specific need, and once that need is met, they slowly and silently retreat away from our life (Antonucci, 2009). My

final belief is that people are affected by the loss of an animal-companion, and grieve for the animal in the same way they would grieve the loss of a human-companion (Sife, 1998).

I subscribe to these world views because, throughout the course of my own life, I always needed to feel that I mattered to someone. However I am aware that over the years this role was filled by different individuals who quietly entered and, just as silently, disappeared from my life. Each and every individual played a specific role, and in their own special way contributed in providing me with a sense of belonging. However, when feeling abandoned by human-kind my animal-companions were always there to provide a sense of belonging and security.

Since each animal-companion met different needs at different times in my life, I am aware that I did not grieve their loss in the same manner. Thankfully I have not experienced the grief associated with human loss, however I do not imagine that the grief I felt with the loss of certain animal-companions will be any less than that I may experience with the loss of significant others in my life.

**Academic theories informing the research theme.** Theories are “a set of concepts and ideas and the proposed relationship among these, a structure that is intended to capture or model something in the world” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 48). When researching the theories which best fit my worldview as to why a person would turn to an animal to acquire a sense of belonging I became aware that my ideas were based on a number of theories, namely Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), Bowlby’s Attachment Theory (1982) and Trinke’s Hierarchies of Relationships (1993).

According to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943) the need of love, affection and belonging are an essential part of human motivation which is only preceded by physiological and safety needs. Maslow (1943) assigns importance to love needs. He believed that the thwarting of these needs is one of the major causes of maladjustment and severe psychopathology. Baumeister and Leary (1995) find that “many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness...[and] evidence suggests...[that] being rejected, excluded or ignored leads to potent negative feelings such as anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy and loneliness” (p. 508).

Love, affection and belonging are generally provided by those we have built an emotional attachment with (Bowlby, 1988). An attachment is an emotional bond

with another living thing or object, described as being an enduring psychological connectedness between individuals (Ainsworth, 1991; Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). For a person to be considered as an attachment figure, there not only needs to be an emotional bond with the figure, but the individual needs to also rely on their attachment figure to fulfil safe haven and secure base functions (Bowlby, 1982; Trinke, 1993). In addition, Trinke (1993) argues that the individual also needs to be aware that the loss of that figure would have an effect on them.

Throughout life we form “multiple attachment bonds with others such as siblings, romantic partners, friends, and companion-animals” (Bowlby, 1982; Meehan, Massavelli, & Pachana, 2017). However, people’s relationships with attachment figures vary in closeness, quality, function and structure (Antonucci, Ajrouch, & Birditt, 2014; Elder, 1998) and are generally placed within an attachment hierarchy which “reflects a framework for understanding” (Meehan et al., 2017, p. 275). Trinke’s (1993) Hierarchies of Attachment Relationship Theory contends that adults generally have more than one attachment figure, and that these are placed in hierarchal order depending on the amount of contact time the individual has with the attachment figure.

My second premise that through our life course we form many social relations which affect our health and wellbeing is based on Elders (1998) Life Course Theory and Kahn and Antonucci’s (1980) Convoy Model of Social Relations. Elder’s theory (1998) calls attention to how “chronical age, relationships, common life transitions and social change, shape people’s lives from birth to death” (Hutchison, 2011, p. 8). The theory illustrates how through natural development “people’s needs and circumstances change as they move through the life course” (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980).

Kahn and Antonucci’s (1980) theory describes the formation of social relations and how they affect health and wellbeing (Antonucci, 2009). The theory proposes that “social support is important to individual wellbeing throughout the life course” (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980, p. 255). It also posits that it is the positive qualities of a relationship, such as support, companionship and affection which are connected to a person’s health and wellbeing (Antonucci et al., 2014). It is the combination of needing to be provided with the positive aspects of a relationship and an animal’s ability to provide for these needs which cause people to turn to animals to form such social relations (Kurdek, 2008).

My final premise is that the grief felt after the loss of an animal-companion is no less than one would feel after experiencing a human loss. This is based on Sife's Theory (1998) on Grieving the Loss of an Animal-Companion, which posits that "the mourning of a pet can be far more intense than for a human... [as one is] actually mourning the death of your dearest friend, as well as a very close member of your immediate family" (Sife, 1998, p. 3). Sife (1998) argues that people mourn intensely for those they are emotionally dependent on, even if it is an animal-companion and that during such times a person needs support and compassion.

### **Epistemological Underpinnings**

The research question begged a qualitative paradigm, namely interpretative research, as it involved the researcher making "interpretation of what they find" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21) within social constructivism (Cotty, 1998). A qualitative approach was chosen as I wanted to "study things in their natural settings... [and attempt] to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 3). Qualitative research not only allows the researcher to present the lived experiences, multiple realities and different perspectives of the phenomena being studied but permits one to also present the commonalities (Creswell, 2007).

Before embarking on the study I needed to reflect on the philosophical foundations which were to support my research. These included my position toward the nature of reality and my notions as to how people get to know what they know also known as ontology and epistemology (Creswell, 2007).

Bearing in mind the fact that the area of research was human experience (Landridge, 2007) the theoretical basis chosen for the study was phenomenological. It was preferred over other approaches as it provides a systematic way of studying and learning about phenomena which are not generally observable and/or measureable (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). More importantly, its "central concern is with the phenomena itself and with attempting to understand the object of the experience of it" (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 99).

I concluded that IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) was the most appropriate form of inquiry to address the research question (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015) as it permitted me to be able to present the participants' voices through the themes which emerged from the data (Creswell, 2007). Furthermore, it provided a

structured means by which I could explore, describe, interpret and situate the means by which participants made sense of their world (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2008).

**Social construction.** Both my ontological view as to the nature of reality and my epistemological view as to how we know what we know are based within the constructionist paradigm. This is because I understand reality as being constructed and contextually bound rather than being an absolute or a given (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). By the same token I view knowledge construction as involving relative interactions between knower and known (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

**Social constructivism.** The view of social constructivism is that “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Cotty, 1998, p. 42). The social constructivist paradigm is concerned with the way people develop subjective meanings of their experiences in order to understand the world in which they live and work in (Creswell, 2007; Daper & Macleod, 2013).

However social constructivists also believe that an individual’s “view of the world will always be subjective, as each individual will interpret experience via a different pre-existing framework of understanding and will develop their own unique view of the world” (Daper & Macleod, 2013, para 3). Creswell (2007) posits that meanings “are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social construct) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual’s lives” (p. 21).

As a researcher working within a social constructivist paradigm my aim was not to start the study with a theory, but to create a pattern of meaning by depending on the participants’ experience as much as possible (Creswell, 2007). This was achieved by asking broad and general questions which allowed the participants to construct meaning to their experience. Meanings which were generally construed in discussions or interactions with other people. My intent within a social constructivist paradigm was to make sense of or interpret the meanings the participants had about their world (Creswell, 2007).

The constructivist position of qualitative research also meant that I - with my own values, opinions, biases and feelings - brought to the research process an experiential world which ultimately influenced the phenomena being studied (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Therefore, as an insider researcher (Costely, Elliot, & Gibbs,



2010) it was important that I bracketed off my own thoughts and beliefs and reflected on the participants voices as to their experience of preparing and dealing with the loss of an animal-companion.

### **Overview of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. This chapter presented the background information which led to the research question and the conceptual framework which embraces this research. The second chapter addresses, discusses and critiques the available literature. The third chapter presents the methodology and research methods, whilst the fourth provides an overview of the research findings and a discussion of these results with the literature. The fifth and final chapter presents the limitations of the research, implications on counselling and recommendations for future research, practice, policy and training.

It should be noted that topics such as caregiver burden which emerged during the analysis of the data were not included within the literature review chapter. However whilst keeping within a qualitative framework, and after discussion with my supervisor literature on the subject was included in the findings chapter.

### **Reflection**

In this chapter I have tried to demonstrate my motivation for taking up the proposed research. I have linked my layman's concept of how the world functions to a set of academic theories in the hope of providing insight into my world view and the phenomena being studied. The theories presented illustrate how the need to belong may cause a person to develop an attachment relationship with an animal-companion. Additional theories illustrate how animal-companion owners grieve the loss of an animal-companion in the same way as they would the loss of a significant other human-being (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Durkin, 2009; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). In addition the opportunity to reflect on my conceptual framework provided me the right framework to work with (Cotty, 1998; Creswell, 2007; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005).

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

“The risk of love is loss and the price of loss is grief. But the pain of grief is only a shadow when compared with the pain of never risking love”

(Zunin, n.d.)



This chapter presents a literature review of how people prepare and deal with the loss of an animal-companion. The literature will first present a historical overview of the animal-person relationship and of the effects of such a relationship. Literature on bereavement, mourning and grief and their role within the context of animal-companion loss will then be discussed, followed by an example of the literature interlaced within my own story of animal-companion loss.

A search of the literature using the HyDi search engine provided by the University of Malta, evidences that to date of completion of this study, literature on preparing and dealing with the loss of an animal-companion within the Maltese context was limited to a study carried out by an undergraduate student who read a higher diploma in psychology (Gauci, 2016). Therefore reference will be made to worldwide literature.

### **Animal-Human Bond**

For some, the idea of a close relationship between humans and animals may be inconceivable, whilst for others such a relationship is quite natural. There is evidence that the special bond between people and their animals is not a recent phenomenon, but has actually existed for thousands of years (Atwood, 2007; Pastino, 2006; Sife, 1998). Examples include ancient cave drawings depicting dogs sitting around the camp fires of our prehistoric ancestors (Sife, 1998), the discovery of a three thousand year old mummified puppy buried by the Chiribaya people of Peru (Atwood, 2007) and of individual graves of dogs wrapped in finely woven llama wool blankets in a thousand year old pet cemetery in Peru (Atwood, 2007; Sife, 1998).

Initially animal-people relationships were characterised by animals serving human's needs: providing people with protection, companionship and to improve hunting and herding (DeMello, 2012; Sife, 2005). Whilst today many people choose to keep animals solely as companions, animals still continue to play traditional and newer roles within our lives (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Endenburg & Lith, 2011; Herzog, 2002). Traditional roles include being a source of food, doing our hard work, and as a form of transportation (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; DeMello, 2012; Herzog, 2002). Newer roles include detecting explosives, illicit substances and people lost in disaster, providing therapy, assisting people with disabilities and helping with child development (DeMello, 2012; Derr, 2004; Endenburg & Lith, 2011).

The concept of an animal as a companion developed around 260 years ago, when people could afford to keep animals for amusement, entertainment and eventually companionship (Sife, 1998). It was during this time that relationships began to transform into the special bond we know today (Sife, 1998).

**Animal-companion.** The term animal-companion refers to animals whose main role is to have close relationships with humans, who live within a household and who are normally given a name (DeMello, 2012; McColgan & Schofield, 2007; O'Haire, 2010).

Statistics by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) show that pet ownership has been rising and that during 2011 more than 56% of American households owned at least one pet (DeHaven, 2017). A European study in 2016 evidences that there were over 290 million pets within the EU (Statista, 2018). The rise in pet-ownership has resulted from the fact that more single, divorced and widowed people are turning to animals as companions and attachment figures (DeHaven, 2017; Sife, 2005; Zilcha-Mano, Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2011). Such relationships prove beneficial to humans as animals are able to provide security, a safe-haven, a sense of belonging and self-worth (Field, Orsini, Gavish, & Packman, 2009; King & Werner, 2011). Animal-companions also provide unconditional love and support, a link to the past and a reason to get up in the morning (Durkin, 2009; Irvine, 2013; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). In addition they provide therapy and help ward off feelings of depression and anxiety (Irvine, 2013; Sable, 1995; Walsh, *Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family therapy*, 2009b).

However not all studies evidence that the relationship between a person and an animal-companion help increase one's wellbeing (Wells, 2009; Winefield, Black, & Chur-Hansen, 2008). Wells (2009) argues that the different results may be due to "differences in methodological design, attachment to pet, participant's recruited severity of depression, measurement scales etc." (p. 530).

Participants view the relationships with their animal-companions as being similar to those they have with their own children and other family members (Cohen, 2002; Rémillard, Meehan, Kelton, & Coe, 2017; Wong, Lau, Liu, Yuen, & Wing-Lok, 2017). They also regard animal-companions as being significant family members and surrogate children who play "an integral part of the family support system, on both a daily basis and during times of family crisis and loss" (Reisbig, Hafen Jr, Siqueira Drake, Girard, & Breunig, 2017, p. 126). However some people still believe

that relationships between humans and animals are inferior to relationships people have between themselves (Herzog, 2002; Morley & Fook, 2005).

Participants who own more than one animal-companion generally place their animals within a hierarchy (Meehan et al., 2017), which cause them to treat their animals differently (Meehan et al., 2017; Trinke, 1993). Placement within the hierarchy is generally based on the person's attachment to that particular animal, with preference being given to primary attachment figures (Meehan et al., 2017; Trinke & Bartholomew, 1995).

### **Therapeutic Effects of Owning an Animal-Companion**

In contemporary Western society animals have taken on a number of therapeutic roles (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006). These include supporting those who have sensory and physical impairments as well as being included in care plans for those with ill mental health (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; McColgan & Schofield, 2007; Wells, 2009). In prisons they are used to help rehabilitate offenders and enhance the psychological wellbeing of prison-inmates, whilst in nursing homes they help keep residents happier, alert and more responsive (McColgan & Schofield, 2007). An animal may also be an elderly person's only source of companionship and means of emotional expression and outlet (McColgan & Schofield, 2007; Veldkamp, 2009; Walsh, Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family therapy, 2009b)

An animal's therapeutic success is due to the secure emotional attachment they are able to establish with human beings (Herzog, 2011; Peacock, Chur-Hansen, & Winefield, 2012; Wells, 2009). The ability to form such relationships with people is possible due to the human qualities animals possess (Field et al., 2009), as these enable them to provide love, reassurance, companionship, and emotional support (Melson, 2001; Morley & Fook, 2005; Walsh, Human-animal bonds II: The role of pets in family systems and family therapy, 2009b).

Menninger (1951) argues that when an individual attaches to a particular animal, the animal generally represents a symbolic figure. This representation is a result of an unconscious transfer of feelings for a human being, such as a child, mother, father or any other significant other, to whom these emotions may not have been shown, (Menninger, 1951). This may be linked to both Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1982) and Maslow Hierarchy of Needs (1943).

Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011) contend that the human-pet bond is such that it helps people restore emotional equanimity during stressful times. However, evidence has shown that “generalisations about health benefits of pets are unwarranted” ( Winefield et al., p. 308) and that “the scientific literature about the health effects of companion animals is inconsistent in its conclusions” (Winefield et al., 2008, p. 303).

### **Loss**

The most challenging losses experienced in life are the death of loved ones, as they are irreversible, bring pain, disruptiveness, bereavement, grief and mourning (Buglass, 2010; McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Zisook, et al., 2014). However, loss is not only experienced with the death of a loved one, but may include the loss of an object holding deep personal meaning: such as the breakup of a marriage, children leaving home as well as the literal loss of an object or animal (McCoyd & Walter, 2016; Perchy, 2004; Sife, 1998). Loss causes profound pain and stress, which may manifest itself in different forms such as; shock, depression, anger and loneliness (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Westerink & Stroebe , 2012; Zisook, et al., 2014).

The loss of an animal-companion has been described by their owners as the hardest experience in their lives, stating that they “miss the deceased pet more than humans who had previously died” (Packman, et al., 2014, p. 346). The effects of animal loss is so profound that individuals are thrown into a state of mourning (Carmack, 1985; Dobbs, 2011; Sife, 1998), after which they continue to be burdened with doubt, regrets and self-blame regarding the decisions taken prior to the animal’s death (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Packman, et al., 2014; Wong et al., 2017). This grief can be likened to that experienced by a small child who is separated from its attachment figure. Bowlby (1980) explains that when a child is separated from their mother their world is shattered and the child becomes frantic with grief.

### **Natural Death/ Euthanasia**

Most pet owners would wish their animal-companion to die a natural death (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002), however a natural death seldom occurs without struggle and pain (Durkin, 2009). A pet owner then has the option to end their animal-companion’s suffering in a humane, peaceful and loving manner through euthanasia (Dobbs, 2011). However the decision to end an animal’s life is not generally taken lightly and requires “one to weigh the longing for more time with the animal against concerns about its quality of life” (Durkin, 2009, p. 27). But, when the

decision is taken, the knowing that one has provided a dignified and easy death for their animal-companion provides comfort (Packman, et al., 2014).

It is not quite clear as to how grief affects those who choose to euthanize their animal-companion as McCutcheon and Fleming (2002) evidence that those who chose euthanasia reported experiencing “significantly less grief than owners who had lost their pet due to natural causes”. (p. 181). On the other hand Davis, Irwin, Richardson and Malone (2003) evidence that “[o]wners who had their pet euthanized were much more likely to experience extreme grief than owners of pets where euthanasia did not occur” (p. 66). Since euthanasia is considered to be a humane and not a religious issue, it has been evidenced that religious beliefs do not impact a person’s decision as to whether an animal should be euthanized or not (Davis et al., 2003).

### **Religion, Bereavement, Grief and Mourning**

People often turn to their religion during bereavement as a way to deal with the loss of their animal-companion (Brown, 2006; Davis et al., 2003; Lee, 2016). They are often comforted in believing that their pet’s “souls reside in a better place and that they will reunite with them in the afterlife” (Lee, 2016, p. 123). It has been evidenced that even though religious beliefs help participants cope, these beliefs do not lessen the pain associated with grief (Davis et al., 2003, Lee, 2016).

The terms bereavement, grief and mourning are generally used interchangeably but they have different meanings (Frost, 2014). Small (2001) states that “grief is the pain and suffering experienced after the loss; mourning is a period of time during which signs of grief are made visible; and bereavement is the process of losing a close relationship” (p. 20). Feelings associated with bereavement include loneliness, emptiness, frustration and yearning (Saber, 2000).

The first signs of grief occur when an owner becomes aware of physical or mental change associated with a pet’s age or, when an animal-companion has been diagnosed with a terminal illness (Havelin, 2014). This is known as anticipatory grief and is the grieving that occurs prior to an actual loss (Dobbs, 2011; Havelin, 2014; Hewson, 2014). Like all forms of grief it is unique to the individual and occurs in many forms (Rames, 2016).

Besides being a unique experience, grief is also an adaptive experience that is universal and instinctual, however it does not touch everybody in the same

manner (Saber, 2000; Sife, 2005). For some it may go unnoticed, whilst for others “it can be a devastating experience, an emotional tsunami ripping apart a person’s sense of meaning and belonging” (Zisook, et al., 2014, p. 2). Research shows that the grief reaction of participants with strong attachments to their animal-companions are long and intense, and similar to that experienced by those suffering a human loss (Carmack, 1985; Quackenbush, 1985; Sharkin & Knox, 2003).

Mourning is the “public process involving recognition by others of the loss, family and community presence and support, and social, cultural, and religious customs and rituals” (Saber, 2000, p. 154). However there is an absence of universally accepted social standards for mourning the loss of an animal-companion with the consequence that the animal’s loss may go unacknowledged causing one to experience disenfranchised grief (Donohue, 2005; Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002; Taboada & Johnson, 2014).

**Disenfranchised grief.** Disenfranchised grief occurs when there is empathic failure or “the failure of one part of a system to understand the meaning and experience of another” (Neimeyer & Jordan, 2002, p. 96). However, it may also be self-imposed by those who believe their experience will not be understood by professionals (Wong et al., 2017). In the case of pet owners this occurs when the death of the animal companion is not fully validated or acknowledged by others within society (Pilgram, 2010).

Disenfranchised grief is further effected by the fact that “many veterinary practices still do not offer clients particular support for, or information about grief” (Hewson, 2014, p. 380). Pilgram’s (2010) study has evidenced that none of her participants (veterinarians) had received training on how to deal with supporting grieving animal owners. In addition whilst reviewing the module details of veterinary courses at an Italian and English University it was noted that no module on pet bereavement support was included (Universita Degli Studi Di Milano, 2018; University of Liverpool, 2018).

Experiencing disenfranchised grief results with the bereaved having to grieve in private, amidst feelings of loneliness and isolation (Cordaro, 2012; Doka, 2008; Donohue, 2005). The effects of keeping one’s grief inside was also recognised by Charles Darwin: “he who remains passive when overwhelmed with grief loses his best chance of recovering elasticity of mind” (Darwin, 1897, p. 365).



**Social acceptance.** Even though the death of a companion-animal is a significant loss, the social acceptance of grieving and mourning animals is affected by numerous factors (Davis et al., 2003; Saliba, 2016; Wrobel & Dye, 2003). One factor is the social placing and labelling of an animal (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). According to Arluke and Sanders (1996) animals are ranked within a structure of meaning which is based on the placing of animals within a hierarchal order (Appendix A). The lower the animal is on the scale, the less socially acceptable it is to grieve for that creature. (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). An example is provided by Herzog (1989). He describes how one morning he found himself in a situation where he was honouring his son's dead pet mouse with "a burial in a flower garden, a tombstone made of slate and a mini-funeral" (Herzog, 1989, p. 5), whilst in the evening he was setting mouse traps in an attempt to rid himself of mice he viewed as being pests.

Research findings also reveal that animal owners are socially ridiculed for displaying intense feelings of grief for animals who are not considered good enough to be mourned by other individuals (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Herzog, 1989; Morris, 2012). Morris (2012) notes how a veterinary professional commented that "...this guy is nuts. He is crying about a mouse!" (p.357).

Some people also feel pressured to go back to work after the death of their animal-companion so as not to be socially ridiculed or labelled as neurotic or hysterical (Taboada & Johnson, 2014). This need to keep one's feelings bottled up due to social inhibitions may also result with the person experiencing disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012).

### **Theories on Grief**

The grief of losing an animal-companion is no different to that experienced by those who lose a significant other person (DeMello, 2012; Durkin, 2009; Morley & Fook, 2005). However, most models of grief have been developed to explain the phases/stages people pass through when they experience a human loss (e.g. Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Freud, 1957; Kübler-Ross, 1969). It was for this reason that Sife (1998) adapted Kübler-Ross's (1969) five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance to cater for animal bereavement.

The stages developed by Sife (1998) differ from Kubler-Ross's because in addition to denial, anger, and depression he includes alienation and distancing, guilt and shock and disbelief. Sife also removes the bargaining stage and replaces

acceptance with resolution. Sife argues that the stages may not develop in chronological order but may manifest themselves simultaneously or in a different sequence, however will “appear in due course and then fade away, if resolved” (p.45). Sife’s six-stage model does not distinguish between experiences which included or excluded anticipatory grief. For example, my experiences of such losses indicate that I have not gone through all the stages with the death of my pets. This is because each death was preceded by a period of ill health which resulted in anticipatory grief (Havelin, 2014) rather than shock and disbelief, and denial. Through my research I have not come upon a model which may explain this phenomenon.

It must be noted, that the “idea that one must work at dealing with grief is not a universal concept” (Webster, 2018, para 5) as it “reflect[s] an Anglo-American cultural perspective” (Davies, 2003, p. 512).

### **My Story of Animal Loss: Examined Through the Literature**

*My own story of companion animal bereavement illustrates how a person grieving an animal companion may pass through Sife’s (2005) model and the theories presented in my conceptual framework. Taken from a constructionist and phenomenological point of view I will describe my experience and understanding of the grief process I went through with the loss of Pluto, my third animal companion who came into my life in 2003. We originally got Pluto as a companion for Grinch, however he eventually became my closest companion because he accepted me for who I was and was always there when I needed comforting.*

*At around the age of six Pluto developed a perineal hernia which was not operable. From that day onwards, I never stopped worrying about Pluto’s wellbeing. One could say anticipatory grief had started when I was given his diagnosis (Havelin, 2014). After his initial diagnosis we approached another vet who said he could help Pluto through surgery. However, there was a high risk of infection. We decided not to operate as the thought of losing Pluto was too painful (Havelin, 2014). At times I still feel guilty for not having taken the chance with the operation (Sife, 2005).*

*Pluto went on to live a relatively normal life until the age of 12. One day in January 2014 I noticed that his hernia seemed different than usual. This made me realise that the day I had been dreading for five years was getting closer. This realisation brought with it much anxiety (Dobbs, 2011; Havelin, 2014; Hewson,*



2014). *Even though I do not consider myself to be a very religious person I still prayed to God to make him well (Davis et al., 2003; Lee, 2016). This episode passed but he did not return to his normal self. From then on, every day I went to work full of anxiety, worried about how he was coping and fearful of what I would find when I returned home (Havelin, 2014).*

*One month later I found him in pain again, and even after having taken him to the veterinarian he kept looking up at me from his basket with his sorrowful eyes. It felt as if he was crying out to me to stop the pain for him. I could not stand to see the suffering and pain in his eyes anymore so, against my will, we decided to end his suffering humanely through euthanasia (Dobbs, 2011; Durkin, 2009; Morris, 2012).*

*Since I considered him to be my child, after his death I could not stop thinking about him and felt as if my life had ended (Bowlby, 1988). I was saddened by the fact that I would not see him again and I cried continuously for weeks. As I reflect back, I realise that during that time I experienced quite a lot of anger, guilt and depression (Sife, 2005).*

*I felt guilty (Sife, 2005) as I wondered whether we had made the wrong decision by deciding not to operate him; or if we had rushed and should have waited a while longer before putting him to sleep (Morris, 2012). I felt that in some way my decisions directly caused his death (Wong et al., 2017).*

*My anger was aimed at my partner and the vet (Kübler-Ross, 1969; Sife, 1998), at my partner because at one point he had lifted him in a way which I thought may have aggravated his situation; at the vet because I had been at the veterinary clinic earlier and an hour later had to return to euthanize him.*

*As the days turned to weeks, I became depressed as I could not forget him. I would cry myself to sleep thinking about him. As the weeks turned to months and then years, the yearning for his companionship did not subside, even though I had another dog, Grinch and a cat Tiny. With his death I had lost a child, a friend, a companion and someone who would cuddle next to me every night (Cordaro, 2012; Donohue, 2005; Durkin, 2009). He provided me with a sense of security and belonging (Bowlby, 1988; Maslow, 1943).*

*Even though I still had a caring partner and Grinch and Tiny, Pluto was in the highest position in my Hierarchy of Attachment Relationships as he met many of my emotional needs (Bowlby, 1988; Meehan et al., 2017; Trinke, 1993). The only way I can explain my attachment to him is the fact that I have no children and for me he*

*represented the child I never had (Wong et al., 2017). McCutcheon and Fleming (2002) suggest that “owners who find adjustment to pet loss most difficult are those who have fewer home-related relationships” (p.175). However these findings do not explain the fact that I have a very caring partner and family.*

*After his death, I could not handle people telling me he was just a dog and I could get another one (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Morris, 2012). At the time not many people could understand my grief ‘over a dog’. For this reason I alienated and distanced (Sife, 2005) myself from people and grieved alone and in silence thereby experiencing disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012; Wong et al., 2017).*

*As I look back at this period I realise that I had actually passed through many of the stages/ phases described within human theories on grief (e.g. Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Worden, 2009) such as bargaining, anger, distancing, guilt, and depression. After four years I still cannot truthfully say that there is closure/resolution/acceptance, as memories of him still occasionally come to the forefront which bring with them a longing for his presence.*

*Since Pluto’s death Grinch and Peppi have also passed away, however I was not affected by their death in the same manner as I was by Pluto’s passing. As I think about this, I realise that if I look at this experience through Trinke’s (1993) Attachment Hierarchy of Relationships it could be because Pluto was my main attachment figure and placed higher within the attachment hierarchy. If I look at it through the Life Course Perspective (Elder, 1998) I may argue that there were other personal issues going on at the time of Grinch and Peppi’s death which did not permit me to mourn them.*

*I could also look at it from Kahn and Antonucci’s (1980) Convoy Model of Social Relations, and argue that the positive qualities of my relationship with Pluto were enough to sustain my emotional wellbeing while he was alive and when he died these were lost. I will never know for sure why I grieved for him as I did, but I do know I will never forget any of my animal-companions as they all had their special roles in my life, which I thank them for.*

*As part of my Master of Counselling coursework, I had to attend mandatory counselling sessions. It seemed that Pluto came up in every session, meaning I still had not accepted the fact that he was gone. As a form of guided mourning my counsellor asked me to bring a photo of him and to talk to him as if he were still with me (Beder, 2004). The ability to speak freely to my counsellor about Pluto and*

*having someone to listen to me non-judgementally helped me to work towards adjusting to the environment without him. I do not feel I have totally accepted his death but, I have relocated him in the structure of things and am trying to move on with my life (Beder, 2004; Worden, 2009).*

### **Counselling**

The aim of counselling is to alleviate the distress, anxiety, and concerns that bereaved pet owners can present (Richards, 2009) and to return a client to pre-crisis functioning (Counselling Association of South Australia, 2002). However before being able to do this, counsellor's first need to acknowledge and be aware that the grief associated with pet loss is no less debilitating than that felt after the loss of a human being (Cordaro, 2012; Durkin, 2009; Endenburg, 2005). Counsellors also need to acknowledge the loss, and focus on the subjective meaning of the client's experience (Cordaro, 2012). They also need to be able to "understand the depth of the emotional bond, the role of the pet in the client's life, and the quality of the client's social support network" (Cordaro, 2012, p. 389).

By showing an understanding of the context and the meanings individual's place on their experiences counsellors are then able to provide bereaved pet owners with the support necessary to help them work through their grief (Cordaro, 2012, Wong et al., 2017). However, if bereaved pet owners feel misunderstood and/or belittled by their counsellor they will discontinue therapy (Wong et al., 2017).

Discontinuation of therapy may then result in bereaved animal owners developing disenfranchised and complicated grief (King & Werner, 2011; Shear, 2015; Shear & Gribbin-Bloom, 2017). Complicated grief has been defined as being "an intensified, chronic state of grief which does not get better with time" (Zisook, et al., 2014, p. 482), which causes impairment in daily functioning (Adrian & Stitt, 2017; Field, 2006; Shear, 2015). It is also associated with sleep disturbances, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Adrian & Stitt, 2017; Field, 2006; Shear, 2015).

Research indicates that bereaved pet owners also opt to seek refuge in pet loss support groups, as these provide them with community support, a chance to interact with bereaved animal owners and an increased feeling of mutual support and empathy (Hess-Holden, Monaghan, & Justice, 2017, Wong et al., 2017). Such support groups have been conducted by "Kathleen Dunn, a social worker affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania's Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital" (Hess-

Holden et al, 2017, p. 446). However to my knowledge no such groups currently exist in Malta.

### **Conclusion**

Through the use of literature and my own experiences this chapter explored the human-animal bond, the benefits associated with such a relationship and the experiences of losing such a relationship. Literature shows how grief felt by bereaved animal owners mimics that of those grieving the loss of a human. Moreover, the chapter illustrated how a lack of societal norms on mourning rituals for deceased animal-companions results with disenfranchised grief.

My own experience of pet loss allowed me to reflect on the grief process in relation to theories and research findings and how counselling helped me come to terms with the passing of my own beloved pet. The final section of this chapter discussed issues regarding counselling. It discussed the importance of a counsellors need to acknowledge the grief of pet loss and of understanding the attachment that develops between an individual and their animal-companion. In the next chapter I will be presenting the rationale behind the methodology of this research.

# **Chapter 3**

## **Methodology**

“Until one has loved an animal, a part of one’s soul remains unawakened”

(France, n.d)

The aim of this study was to explore how counsellors can better assist those who are preparing for and dealing with the loss of a beloved animal-companion. Currently pet bereavement is a form of disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012; Donohue, 2005; Pilgram, 2010), therefore I hope this study will provide professionals with a deeper understanding of grief experienced by those who lose a much loved animal-companion. In order to be able to gather the data to present to professionals I needed to develop a research approach which would allow me to present the participants' voices. This chapter provides a detailed description of the methodology employed in the data collection and analysis and reasons for these choices. It presents details regarding the research approach, design and tools employed.

### **My Positioning as an Insider Researcher**

Since I have experienced the loss of numerous animal-companions, I do not consider myself to be an objective outsider studying a subject external to myself, but consider myself to be an insider researcher firmly embedded within the research setting (Gilling, 2013). By taking an insider's perspective I was able to penetrate the participants' frame of meaning and provide details about their behaviour, emotions and personal characteristics (Snape & Spencer, 2003). I am also cautious that this also needs bracketing because I bring my own ideas and experiences to the research which may influence how I perceive the data collected (e.g. Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Weed, 2005).

### **Research Approach**

Qualitative research was chosen for this study as it permits one to "study things in their natural settings... [whilst] attempting to make sense of or interpret these things in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin, 2007, p. 99). This allows for an "in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of the research participants" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 3). However qualitative research carries with it a number of limitations such as the time needed to analyse the data, researcher bias, small sample size, and the inability to make generalisations and replicate the research (McLeod, 2001).

Participants involved in qualitative research also yield a number of benefits and risks themselves (Opsal, et al., 2015). Benefits include the ability of self-expression through the sharing of one's story, enhanced self-understanding, knowledge and skill acquisition, and a sense of helping others through participation

(Opsal, et al., 2015). Opsal et al. (2015) report that by partaking in research, participants develop a sense of connectedness by sharing their story and provides a sense of purpose by helping to meet participants' personal and/or community's goals, needs or interests.

Risks associated with qualitative research include concerns with regard to participants' emotional wellbeing as interviews may be emotionally difficult (McLeod, 2001). Other risks reported include participants' fear that their stories may be misused, concerns about anonymity and that participation may cause problems for themselves or others through misrepresentation or negative representation (Opsal, et al., 2015; Partington, 2001). These will be addressed later on in this chapter.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Approach**

Interpretative, Phenomenological, Analysis (IPA) was chosen because it is an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research which allows the researcher to explore, describe, interpret and situate the means by which participants make sense of their experiences (Larkin et al., 2008; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is informed by concepts and debates from three key areas of philosophy of knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

According to McLeod (2001) both phenomenology and hermeneutics "assume an active, intentional, construction of a social world and its meanings by reflexive human beings" (p. 57). The difference between the two being that phenomenology has been defined as being the "study of personal experience" (Landridge, 2007, p. 10), whilst hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation (Zimmerman, 2015).

IPA is phenomenological as "it involves detailed examination of the participants' lived experience; it attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event" (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015, p. 25). IPA's link to hermeneutics is its interpretive stance (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015; Weed, 2005) which is not only present during analysis of the data but throughout the whole process (Sammut, 2016).

Interpretation within IPA involves a double hermeneutic, meaning participant's first try to make sense of their world, whilst the researcher attempts to make sense of the participants as they try to make sense of their world (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015). In order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' lived



experience IPA engages in both a hermeneutics of meaning of recollection through empathic engagement, and a hermeneutics of suspicion through critical engagement (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, 2007).

IPA is explicitly idiographic as it is committed to examining in detail the experience of each case in turn, before moving to more general claims (Smith & Osbourn, 2015). Idiography, which is knowledge about unique events, entities and trends requires an in-depth focus on the particular (Shinebourne, 2011). Idiography also requires an understanding of “how particular experiential phenomena (an event, process or relationship) have been understood from the perspective of a particular person, in a particular context” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 29). When working within an idiographic stance I had to be thorough and systematic in my examination of the data to ensure that there was a depth of analysis that produces particular detail (Smith et al., 2009).

**Advantages and disadvantages.** IPA is an ideal approach as it is flexible and supported by a clear theoretical framework and by comprehensive and practical procedural guidelines (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010). A further advantage of IPA is that through its idiographic stance it permits the researcher to explore the meanings people attribute to their own lived experiences through small in-depth studies (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015; Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

Disadvantages include the laborious work involved in transcribing and analysing the data (Smith et al., 2009; Theobald, 1997). An obstacle to interpretation may also arise through any difficulty researchers may have in bracketing off their own ideas (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith, 2007; Weed, 2005).

### **Feminist Research Approach**

I wished for the interviews to be a collaboration between myself and the participants therefore I had to avoid taking a hierarchal role (Doucet & Mauthner, 2007). This was done by adopting a feminist research approach which permitted me to step out of the role of researcher and participate in the discussion during the interviews (Legard, Keegan, & Ward, 2003). A disadvantage of the feministic approach is that a close rapport may develop between the interviewer and the participants which could lead to a quasi-therapeutic interview (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012).



## Participants' Selection

Purposeful sampling was originally employed to recruit participants as it involves “identifying and selecting individuals...that are especially knowledgeable about ...[the] phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas, et al., 2015, p. 534). This method of sampling was chosen over others since the study was concerned with developing an understanding of complex issues relating to human behaviour through why and how questions (Marshall, 1996; Smith & Osbourn, 2015; Suri, 2011). However, as participants recommended other individuals who had shown an interest in the study a snowball process was also used (Heckathorn, 2011; Shaghghi, Bhopal, & Sheikh, 2011; Suri, 2011).

**Procedure.** I rigorously followed a number of ethical clearances which are detailed below. I first sent a recruitment letter (Appendix B) to a veterinary doctor to ask if she would be my gatekeeper. Upon accepting I provided her with an information letter in English (Appendix C) and in Maltese (Appendix D) which were passed on to clients who had recently lost an animal-companion. I ensured an opt-in rather than an opt-out decision-making process and seven people came forward. Four participants were recruited with the help of the veterinary’s intervention and three participants were recruited through snowball sampling (Handcock & Gile, 2011; Heckathorn, 2011).

**The research participants.** The participants were five females and two males. Table 1 below presents the profile of the participants and their pets.

**Table 1**

### *Profile of Participants*

Pseudonym	Animal's Name	Animal's Age	Natural Death or Euthanasia	Year of Death
Emma	Sheila	10 Years	Natural	2016
Deidra	Larry	11 Years	Natural	2016
Andrew	Lionel	11 Years	Natural	2016
Martina	Mia	5 Years	Natural	2017
Sally	Ben	11 Years	Natural	2017
Mary	Sheila	14 Years	Natural	2017
Nigel	Gary	15 Years	Euthanasia	2016

After discussing further in detail what the research consisted of, the participants and I arranged to hold the interviews at a time and place of their choice. The interviews were held in the preferred oral language of the participant, namely in Maltese and/or English. In one case even though I had arranged to conduct the interview with the wife, the husband also took part as he was present. They presented two very different meanings to the same experience. I do not feel that this affected the outcome of the data collected as both were open about their feelings and I did not feel that they held back in any way. The difference was that the husband had a much closer relationship with the animal than the wife did. This resulted with them not totally agreeing as to where animal-companions should be kept.

### **Research Tool**

Given that the study was interested in the way one prepares oneself and copes with the death of a beloved animal companion, semi-structured interviews were chosen, as is also usual when using IPA (Ashworth & Osborn, 2015). Interviews were preferred over other methods as they allow for a “detailed investigation of each person’s personal perspective, for an in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the phenomenon is located and for very detailed subject coverage” (Lewis, 2003, p. 58). Interviews are also able to elicit meaningful information as people tend to enjoy the opportunity to talk about their thoughts and feelings at length, especially to a person whose purpose it is to listen without being judgemental (Denscombe, 2010).

Advantages of interviews include their flexible nature, the depth of information that may be gathered through verbal and non-verbal cues, the insight a researcher gains from the participants own experience, and the need for simple equipment (Denscombe, 2010; Opdenakker, 2006). They also result with answers being “more spontaneous without an extended reflection” (Opdenakker, 2006, para. 10).

Interviews also carry a number of disadvantages, such as the fact that they are a “managed verbal exchange whose effectiveness heavily depends on the communication skills of the interviewer” (Newton, 2010, p. 1). The interviewer also needs to be able to “clearly structure questions; listen attentively; pause; probe; or prompt appropriately and encourage the interviewee to talk freely” (Newton, 2010, p. 1). At times it was difficult to listen attentively to the participants as my thoughts

wandered to the similarities between their experiences of losing an animal companion and my own.

Denscombe (2010) argues that a further disadvantage of interviews is that the way participants respond depends on the way they perceive the person asking the questions, also known as the interviewer effect (Newton, 2010). Factors which influence how an interviewer is perceived include their gender, age and ethnic origins (Denscombe, 2010; Newton, 2010).

Opsal et al. (2015) argue that even though interviews based around sensitive topics may at times become “emotionally intense, distressful, and sometimes painful they are also cathartic, empowering, and therapeutic” (p. 1139). However, the authors also state that “to date there is little evidence that even the most emotionally charged qualitative interviews cause lasting harm” (p. 1139).

The topic of this research did cause the participants to become emotional and I had to offer to stop the interviews many times. However the participants wanted to continue as they found it relieving to be able to talk about their experiences (Denscombe, 2010). To ensure the participants’ wellbeing I employed debriefing after the interview by calling each of them to enquire as to their emotional state and to ask if they would like to be referred to counselling services. Since I had anticipated that the interviews may awaken certain emotions I had prepared a list of practitioners the participants could be referred to if the need arose (Appendix E).

**Interview schedule.** For the interview session, interview schedules in English (Appendix F) and Maltese (Appendix G) were prepared. These contained a number of key questions which were grouped thematically and were used as a reference and prompts when necessary (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Newton, 2010). A disadvantage of using an interview schedule is that the interviewer needs to have what is termed as “double attention” (Wengraf, 2004, p. 194). This means that on the one hand the researcher needs to be paying attention to the participants’ answers to ensure they thoroughly understand what the participants are trying to explain (Wengraf, 2004). Whilst on the other hand, they need to keep in mind that they have to get all the questions answered within the allocated time and within the depth and detail required (Wengraf, 2004).

At times I found the interview schedule a hindrance as answers pertaining to certain themes/topics had been answered before they were asked. This resulted with me becoming agitated and putting the interview schedule aside. By doing this I was

then able to actively listen to what was being said by the participants. To ensure that all themes/ topics had been discussed I then went through the questions with the participants towards the end of the interview.

**Rapport.** Due to the nature of the topic I felt it was important to be able to converse and build a rapport with the participants. As previously discussed I achieved this by adopting a feminist research approach which allowed for me to step outside the formal role of the interviewer (Legard et al., 2003). Even though I found it helpful to build a rapport with participants, Kvale (2006) argues that:

Creating trust through a personal relationship in such situations serves as a means to obtain a disclosure of the interview subjects' world ... [and] serves as a Trojan horse to get behind defence walls of the interview subjects, laying their private lives open and disclosing information to a stranger, which they may later regret. (p. 42)

In order to deal with any regrets the participants may have had, they were given a copy of the transcript and could indicate if there was anything which they would have like removed.

**The interviews.** The first interview was used as a pilot interview to provide an advance warning as to how the research project could fail (Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). The process was then discussed with the participant who provided positive feedback.

Six of the interviews were audio-recorded-and lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The seventh participant preferred notes to be taken rather than being audio-recorded. Interviews were terminated when it became evident that participants had nothing more to say. In cases where participants wanted to share more information after we finished recording, they were asked to send further emails, which they did and the data was used within the study.

The interview schedules (Appendix F & G) were informed by literature on the topic. The questions were developed more as a guide rather than as a stringent schema which needed to be followed. Initially the questions were referred to as a guide to ensure that the necessary themes/topics were covered. However for reason's previously discussed they were then referred to at the end of the interview as a check. Additional prompts and questions were also used to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experience (Partington, 2001).

Due to the sensitivity of the subject it was ensured that supportive statements were empathic and nonverbal actions were expressed which indicated that I sympathised with the participants experiences (Partington, 2001). After each interview I reflected on my feelings and thoughts in regards to the interview process.

### **Analysis of the Data**

To keep within an IPA framework and its underpinning theories I was required to engage in an interpretative relationship with the transcript and analyse each case in the following manner before moving on to the next transcript (Smith & Osbourn, 2008).

The interviews were individually transcribed verbatim and placed within a table, with those in Maltese being translated into English. As part of the audit trail the transcriptions were sent to the participants to check that they were correct (Discussed in ethical considerations). After receiving feedback from the participants each transcription was closely re-read a number of times with significant notes placed in the right hand margin (Smith et al., 1999).

The next stage made use of psychological concepts and abstractions to identify and label emergent themes in the left hand margins (Smith & Eatough, 2007). At this phase titles needed to be conceptual as well as capture and reflect an understanding of the text (Pietkiewicz & Smith , 2012). Descriptive labels were then added, by making connections between the preliminary themes and clustering them appropriately (Smith et al., 1999; Willig, 2013). As this was a very selective process, some of the initial themes selected during the second stage were dropped. Willig (2013) states that the selected themes should “capture something about the quality of the participants’ experience of the phenomenology under investigation” (p. 264). Finally a table was produced showing each subordinate theme and the themes it was comprised of (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Keeping in mind the delicate nature of the research question and the potential risks involved, a number of ethical considerations were considered and implemented to ensure the wellbeing and privacy of all participants. Ethical approval (Appendix H) to conduct the research needed to be sought and given before the start of the study. This involved submitting the research proposal (Appendix H) to the Faculty Research

Ethics Committee and the University Research Ethics Committee before the research began.

Participants were provided with an information letter in English (Appendix C) and Maltese (Appendix D). This described the aims of the interview and informed the participants that they were to be audio-recorded. It also stated that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time without needing to provide an explanation. Those who accepted to participate were provided with a consent form in English (Appendix I) and Maltese (Appendix J). This explains my obligations as well as the participants' rights, while ensuring anonymity. Participants were informed that the data would be stored securely in both paper and electronic form for a period of one year after the research study had been completed and would then be destroyed.

Due to the sensitivity of the subject and to ensure the participants' emotional wellbeing a list of helping professionals (Appendix E) was prepared. Participants could be referred to anyone on the list had they felt the interview brought up issues which needed to be further dealt with.

The participants were provided with a copy of the transcript to make any changes and to confirm content. They were also offered the findings chapter to read to ensure that they were satisfied with the way their experience was presented.

### **Reflexivity**

This line of research was chosen because of my own experiences with animal-companions. I believed my experiences would allow me to relate closely to the participants, however they also led me into the study with preconceived ideas. My theories as to how animal-companions should be treated resulted with me questioning whether certain participants' really had animal-companions or just pets.

During the interviews there were times in which I needed to bracket off my own ideas and views on particular subjects as I found myself judging the participants' behaviour through my own values and beliefs (Theobald, 1997). At times this was not always possible, especially when the issue of euthanasia arose as I do not believe that one should allow an animal-companion to suffer when they can offer them a good death through euthanasia (Davis et al., 2003).

### **Credibility, Dependability, Transferability and Confirmability**

An important issue in qualitative research is the notion of trustworthiness (Anderson, 2010). When a study like the current one is based within a constructivist

paradigm, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability are the four main qualities which ensure trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a). A constructivist paradigm is one which “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005a, p. 13).

Credibility refers to how the researcher establishes confidence in the findings and interpretations of the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Techniques for assuring credibility include; persistent observation, triangulation of sources, methods, theories and researcher, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Morrow, 2005; Morse, 2015).

In order to ensure credibility a well-established research method was used (IPA). Thick and rich data were acquired (Morse, 2015) by selecting appropriate participants and an adequate sample size. In order to see patterns in the data collected peer debriefing was done. Even though alternate viewpoints were listened to I took final responsibility for the results, their implications and applications (Morse, 2015).

In order to ensure that the exact essence of what the participants wanted to say was captured and that the participants' articulation were accurately understood, a member check was carried out (Lincoln & Guba, 2013; Shenton, 2004). This was done by providing the participants a copy of the transcribed interviews so that they could either correct the data, add additional data or remove anything which they saw as being inappropriate.

In a positivist study transferability refers to external validity, however in interpretivism this is not an aim (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). In interpretivism, “transferability is possible through thick description (Geertz, 1972) where the researcher provides enough description of the context so that the reader can determine whether the findings apply to his or her context” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 105).

Dependability address the issue of how the “findings and interpretations could be determined to be an outcome of a consistent and dependable process” (Lincoln & Guba, 2013, p. 105). Dependability was ensured by being consistent in the way data were collected, analysed and in the techniques used. An audit trail, which according



to Morrow (2005) is a detailed chronological log of “research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories, or models; and analytic memos” (p. 252) was also kept. This demonstrated the decisions taken and the procedures used, so that interested parties are able to follow the course of the research step-by-step (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability in qualitative research is associated with the researcher’s concern to objectivity (Shenton, 2004). As much as possible it was ensured that the findings of this study resulted from the experiences and ideas of the participants rather than my own. This was at times challenging as my own preconceived ideas as to how an individual experiences and deals with the impending and eventual loss of a beloved pet needed to be bracketed (Shinebourne, 2011).

The reason the methodology described above was chosen was that I needed the participants’ voices to be heard in order to be able to create an awareness of how pet loss is experienced by those who regard their animals as a companion. Unfortunately even though I have tried my utmost to insure trustworthiness, some of my own biases may appear as it is not always possible to remove one’s own beliefs and judgements no matter how hard one tries.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter provided a thorough description of the methodology employed in the study. This was done by explaining and discussing in detail the different approaches and methods used to gather and analyse the data. It also presented the ethical considerations taken to make certain that the participants’ wellbeing was guaranteed and the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the study.



## Chapter 4

### Findings and Discussion

There's something missing in my home,  
I feel it day and night,  
I know it will take time and strength  
before things feel quite right.

But just for now, I need to mourn,  
My heart... it needs to mend.  
Though some may say,  
"It's just a pet,"  
I know I've lost a friend.

You've brought such laughter to my home,  
and richness to my days.  
A constant friend through joy or loss  
with gentle, loving ways.

Companion, friend, and confidante,  
A friend I won't forget.  
You'll live forever in my heart,  
My sweet, forever pet.

(Taylor, n.d.)

*As I approach my counsellor's office I feel like a sleeping volcano-calm, cool and sombre. What I do not realise as I sit down in front of my counsellor is that I am actually a raging volcano ready to explode. As I talk to my counsellor, session after session and my emotions start to emerge like molten lava I become aware of how much the loss of Pluto had and still was affecting me.*

*Through counselling I became aware that Pluto's death is an issue which had lain dormant within and which needed to be dealt with. Within this safe space I can talk about my feelings for Pluto and his loss without being judged and not made to feel guilty that I was missing "an animal" who always made me feel loved.*

*After Pluto's death I noticed that on Facebook many people expressed feelings of grief when their animal-companion was unwell and/or had passed away. This made me wonder: how do other people prepare and deal with the loss of an animal-companion?*

*By reflecting on how counselling helped me I wondered as to how others managed to dispel their grief. Did they do it alone? Did they seek professional help? Did they just allow the grief to remain dormant within? These are the questions that led me to research how others have prepared and dealt with the loss of their animal-companions and what this could mean for the counselling profession.*

With these personal reflections I present the voice of those who have endured the loss of a beloved animal-companion interwoven with research findings and discussion.

## **Overview**

This chapter presents an analysis of the lived experiences of individuals who have had to prepare and deal with the death of a beloved animal-companion as well as their experience with counselling. The participants' similar, yet varied experiences contributed to the richness of the data gathered. The data illustrate how preparing and dealing with the loss of an animal companion provided very similar yet unique experiences for each individual. Table 2 presents the identified themes from the data and Appendix K presents verbatim quotes related to the themes and subthemes.

Table 2

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***Main Themes and sub-themes***

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**Theme A. The Relationship**

Attachment

Role within the family

Preferring animals to people

**Theme B. Owners Experience Before Death of Animal**

Caregiver burden and stress

    Total dependence

    Physical burden

    Psychosocial functioning

    Financial burden

Anticipatory grief

**Theme C. Euthanasia**

**Theme D. Experiencing the Death of Animal-Companion**

Veterinary support

Personal presence

Preparation through anticipatory grief

**Theme E. Experience After Death**

Disenfranchised grief

Stages of grief

    Guilt

    Depression

    Isolation and alienation

    Anger

New Pets

Remains

**Theme F. Religion**

**Theme G. Support and Counselling**

Support

Counselling

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### **Theme A. The Relationship**

The relationships people have with their pets are like those they have with other humans. These vary in closeness, warmth, commitment and emotional involvement (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). The way the participants spoke about the

attachment between themselves and their animal-companions indicates that even though they all had relationships with their pets, the depth of the relationships differed (Carlisle, 2014; Irvine, 2013; Sife, 2005).

Qisni wellidtu jien, Hekk nisbjergaha jiena. Dan il kelb qisni wellidtu jien. Kien qisu t tifel tiegħi.(Sally)	It's like I gave birth to him. That's how I explain it. This dog it is like I gave birth to him. He was like my son.
--	--

Sally presents the depth of the relationship with her animal-companion as well as the fact that not only did she regard her animal-companion to be part of her family, but also as being her child (Tzivian, Friger, & Kushnir, 2014).

Even though Martina, Deidra and Andrew spoke about their animal-companions as being family members, unlike other participants, they did not allow them to sleep in their bed at night and the animals were kept outside when the participants were not home. Andrew explained that he would have allowed Lionel to sleep and stay indoors but his wife would not. The reason Deidra gave for not allowing Larry inside was that he had started to cause a lot of damage when he found himself alone.

The data also show that the participants not only felt that their animal-companions were related to themselves, but considered them to be relatives to other members of the family:

Imissek qiegħed tibki miegħi. Mietet oħtok, għax hekk kont ngħidlu, mietet oħtok. (Emma)	You should be crying with me. Your sister died, that's what I used to say to him, your sister died.
--	---

**Attachment.** Zilcha-Mano et al. (2011) note that, as attachment figures, animal-companions often meet the four prerequisites for an attachment relationship: proximity seeking, safe haven, secure base and separation distress. Sally's comment below illustrates how Ben was able to satisfy her safety and security needs (Bowlby, 1988) thereby allowing Ben to become an attachment figure:

Jekk kien jiġrili xi ħaġa f'ħajti, jew forsi inkun f'relazzjoni <i>and there is a break up</i> dejjem kont ngħid I aqwa li għandi lil dan, speċi li meta immur id dar għandi lilu. (Sally)	If something happened in my life, or if I was in a relationship and there is a break up, I always used to say the main thing is I have him, when I go home I have him.
--	--

On the other hand, Emma's relationship with Katie was not always healthy as her need to constantly be at home caused her stress and anxiety. As indicated by

the APA (American Psychiatric Association) (2013) results suggest that the relationship between Emma and Katie may have brought an element of separation anxiety. These findings correlate with Winefield et al.'s. (2008) argument that "generalisations about health benefits of pets are unwarranted" (p. 308):

<p>Jekk ħallejtha waħedha nħossni mdejqa pereżempju ngħid iġri nasal. (Emma)</p>	<p>If I left her alone I used to feel upset and would think to myself: I can't wait to get back.</p>
--	--

Trinke's (1993) Hierarchy of Attachment Relationships posits that attachment figures are placed within a hierarchy according to the attachment needs they satisfy (Meehan et al., 2017). They claim that animals are also placed within a hierarchy of attachment. Sally's experience highlights how a different placement within a hierarchy may have permitted her to euthanize one animal-companion but not the other.

<p><i>I don't regret it</i>, għax miet mewta naturali, għalija dik kienet grazzja minn Alla, u dik il-ħaġa li nieħdu, forsi il-kelb l-ieħor nasal biex b'xi mod nieħdu. Imma dan kien wisq id-dinja tiegħi, ma kontx nasal. (Sally)</p>	<p>I don't regret it because he died a natural death, and for me that was a blessing from God, and that thing that I take him (to be euthanized), maybe the other dog I might somehow find a way to take him. But this one was <i>wisq</i> (too much) my world and I wouldn't to do it.</p>
---	---

The participants' voices have allowed me to further understand how attachments between people and animals contain elements which are both beneficial and harmful towards human-beings. It was evidenced that beneficial relationships help satisfy emotional and attachment needs on many different levels (Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). However unhealthy attachments are also capable of causing an individual to suffer ill mental health (Winefield et al., 2008) such as separation anxiety (APA, 2013).

**Role within the family.** Animal-companions take on many roles within a family: such as being a confidante, a best friend and even one's therapist (Field et al., 2009; Turner, 2005; Walsh, 2009). Sable (1995) explains that, through these many roles, animals are able to help increase an individual's wellbeing, increase feelings of happiness, security and self-worth, as well as help reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation.

The participants discussed the various roles their animal-companions had taken on throughout their lives. Each role corresponded to a certain stage of life (Turner, 2005). These findings can be linked to Elders (1998) Life Course Perspective which posits that people's needs change as they progress through the life cycle.

Martina explained that when her father was at the stage of life in which he needed exercise due to ill health, he was able to get this by taking Mia out for walks. Mary recalled how, when she had become a mother for the first time, she found that Sheila "was the best baby sitter ever", and that by entrusting Sheila to sit with her son she could get other things done. On the other hand, Andrew's comment that "Jien kont kollox għalih" (*I was his everything*), illustrates how Lionel's role was to make Andrew feel special.

Even though the data have evidenced that the relationship between Emma and Katie was stressful, Emma's understanding of the relationship was that Katie was her saviour during and after her divorce.

<p>Għenet ħafna hekk, jien meta kelli d-<i>depression</i> wara s-separazzjoni ehe hi kienet qisha l-<i>main thing</i> li għenet li noħroġ minnha hekk, l-imħabba tagħha. (Emma)</p>	<p>She helped a lot like that, when I was depressed after my separation, she was like the main thing that helped me come out of it, her love.</p>
---	---

As Emma spoke about Katie my understanding was that during such a trying time Katie was considered to be a safe haven who provided Emma with a sense of belonging (Bowlby, 1988; Maslow, 2000).

The data have shown that the different roles animals take on within an individual's life are indicative of the biopsychosocial needs of the owner/family at that particular point in time (Irvine, 2013).

**Preferring animals to people.** In some circumstances the bond between a person and their animal-companion is so strong, that when participants were asked whom they would take with them on a desert island, they chose their animal-companion (Cohen, 2002). Participants within this study were not asked such a question. However through their discourse they let it be known that they also preferred animals to people.

<p>Aħjar minn bniedem, aħjar minn bniedem, jien hekk ngħid, u nibqa' ngħid sakemm Alla joħodni. (Andrew)</p>	<p>Better than a person, that's what I say and what I will continue to say until God takes me.</p>
--	--

Mary stated that she preferred communicating with animals rather than people. She explained that this was because she had not been able to find people who actually understood her. Likewise, Sharkin and Bahrack (1990) argue that when people feel disconnected from human attachments, they turn to animals because animals provide the caring and supportive qualities which are significant in a relationship.

**Reflections.** Regarding the relationships people have with their companion-animals, the data have evidenced that the bonds between the participants and their animal-companions were all unique. It was noted that each relationship was based on the different needs of the participant and their family at particular stages through their life cycle (Elder, 1998). For example Sally who was childless, regarded Ben as being her child (Wells, 2009). For Mary who did not get on well with other people, Sally took on multiple different roles to make up for the missing relationships in her life (Sharkin & Bahrack, 1990; Trinke, 1993). Emma who was separated turned to Katie to provide a feeling of belonging (Maslow, 2000).

The type of relationship one has with their animal-companion is significant to counsellors as it may affect the psychological impact during and after the loss of the animal (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002). Having such information may help counsellors predict the severity of symptoms and the length of the grieving process (Wrobel & Dye, 2003).

### **Theme B. Owners Experience before Death of Animal**

*During the years and months preceding the death of my animal-companions, I did not realise that the dread and anxiety I felt was anticipatory grief combined with caregiver's burden and stress. Nor was I aware that anticipatory-grief was silently preparing me for their death (Chang, Chiou, & Chen, 2010; Havelin, 2014; Spitznagel, Jacobson, Cox, & Carlson, 2017).*

**Caregiver Burden.** The way one prepares for the death of an animal-companion is affected by the animal's condition before it passes away. When companion-animals are old and/or sick and require long term care, participants experience caregiver burden and stress (Spitznagel et al., 2017). Spitznagel et al.

(2017) explain that caregiver burden and stress are the effects of providing long-term care to an ailing or ageing person or animal. Chang et al. (2010) evidence that because of the effects of caregiver burden and stress those taking care of the sick experience “greater symptoms of depression and anxiety, and lower quality of life” (p. 324). It also effects an individual’s mental and physical health, family relations, jobs and finances (Carretero, Garces, Rodenas, & Sanjose, 2009).

**Total dependence.** The participants’ stories illustrate how aging animals become dependent on their owners in order to survive (Spitznagel et al., 2017) and that they were not prepared for the amount of work needed to care for a sick and/or aging animal (Dobbs, 2011; Havelin, 2014; Hewson, 2014).

Ma kontx naf x’inhu ġej għalija, li dan, jekk ħa jagħmel pipi ħa jagħmlu fuqu, ma setax jiekol, ma setax, ma seta’ jagħmel xejn, kien *fully dependant* fuqi. Jiġifieri ridt nagħtih x’jiekol, ridt nagħtih x’jixrob, ridt inqandlu,... [u] imbagħad *I learnt about the nappies*, bdejt, ma kont naf b’xejn jien x’ridt nagħmel. *It’s like taking care of a disabled person.* (Sally)

I didn’t know what was coming for me that if he urinated he would wet himself, he couldn’t eat, he couldn’t do anything, he was fully dependent on me. Meaning I had to feed him and give him to drink, I had to carry him... [and] then I learnt about the nappies, I didn’t know anything about what I had to do. It’s like taking care of a disabled person.

**Physical burden.** As the participants explained how they had to physically strain themselves in order to be able to meet the needs of their ailing animal’s, it was shown that the love and dedication felt towards their animal-companions resulted in physical pain (Spitznagel et al., 2017). This pain did not subside with the death of the animal, but was still an issue at the time of the interviews.

Ridt indaħħlu fil banju, 30 kilos u jien għandi *l-fibromyalgia*, kundizzjoni li ikolli *muscle pain* u għajja... [u] għada tuġagħni sal-lum. (Sally)

I had to put him in the bath, 30 kilos and I have fibromyalgia, a condition in which I have muscle pain and fatigue... [and] it still hurts today.

**Psychosocial functioning.** Spitznagel et al. (2017) evidence that participants who care for an animal-companion with a chronic or terminal illness are likely to experience reduced psychosocial functioning. This results in individuals experiencing a number of negative emotions and dysfunctional behaviour, such as anxiety, depression, high stress levels and social isolation (Bastawrous, 2013; Carretero et



al., 2009; Witt, Stumpel & Woopen, 2017). As the participants discussed their experience Sally commented that she had also chosen to:

Qtajt is- <i>social life</i> , qtajt lil kulħadd,	I cut out my social life, I cut everyone
qtajt il-ħbieb, qtajt kollox, għext biss	off, I cut off my friends, I cut out
għalih. (Sally)	everything, I only lived for him.

Nigel also explained that the stress of not knowing what awaited him upon his return home was too much to deal with so he chose to stay at home.

The data evidence that the stress of looking after an ailing animal-companion not only affects relationships outside the house, but also personal relationships within the family (Overton & Cottone, 2016). This was highlighted by Mary's comment that after Sally had died, she "had to work on like, our relationship because... it had gone in a very sour state".

**Financial burden.** Taking care of an animal-companion with a chronic or terminal illness also involves high financial costs (Spitznagel et al., 2017). Reisbig et al. (2017) argue that participants who opt to keep an animal-companion in spite of high personal and financial costs, are those who have strong bonds with their animals. However the data did not indicate that the strength of the bond affected how much money the participants spent on their animal-companion. I say this as my understanding of the data is that Mary had a much stronger bond with Sheila than Martina had with Mia. Notwithstanding, both had spent between €2500 and €3000 on medical bills.

**Anticipatory grief.** Anticipatory grief has been defined as being the natural reaction which occurs when one realises that they will soon be saying goodbye to someone or something dear to them (Havelin, 2014; Rames, 2016; Reynolds & Botha, 2006). It is not only about grieving the possible loss of a loved one, but also involves other losses such as stability, security and one's own identity (Williams & Haley, 2017). Research findings and the present data evidence that anticipatory grief was experienced by the participants as they watched their animal-companions become sicker (Havelin, 2014; Rames, 2016; Reynolds & Botha, 2006).

Researcher: Meta toqgħod taħseb	R: When you think about it, when
fuqha, meta tibda tarahom qed jikbru	you see them get older, you also sort
wkoll tibda qisek qed tipprepara ruħek.	of start to prepare yourself.

Deidra: Mela, mela kif ġrali jien, kif għedtlek, ffit qabel kont qed ngħidlu Madonna x'qed jikber, konna qed narawlu hawn jibjad, il-mustaċċi bojod, wiċċu jibda jinżel. (Deidra)

D: Yes, yes how it happened to me, like I told you, a little while before I was telling him *Madonna* his getting older, we could see here (muzzle) getting whiter. His moustache white, his face becoming withdrawn.

Mary, Nigel and Sally's stories present that the participants did all that was humanely possible to keep their animal-companions alive. However they also revealed that the fear which accompanies anticipatory grief was so powerful that it blinded them to the reality of their animal-companions' situation (Havelin, 2014; Rames, 2016; Reynolds & Botha, 2006).

Like all forms of grief, anticipatory grief is also unique and experienced differently by each participant (Rames, 2016). In Sally's case anticipatory grief affected her physically as she had a panic attack and fainted when Ben had his first fit and she thought he was going to die. Andrew, was affected emotionally and mentally when he realised that Lionel's health was deteriorating.

Il-kelb anke qabel ma ġiet il-*vet* ma baqax dak il-kelb, tifhem, bdejnt narah sejjer lura bis-siġħat ... [u] tħossok ħażin ovvjament... [u] anka x-xogħol u taħseb. (Andrew)

The dog even before the vet came wasn't the same dog, understand, I could see him deteriorating by the hour... [and] you start to feel bad obviously ... [and] even at work you think about it.

As the participants spoke about their demeanour whilst their animal-companions were dying (Discussed in sub-theme: Preparation through anticipatory grief) it became clear that anticipatory grief is also an adaptive mechanism, as it mentally prepared them for the eventual loss (Reynolds & Botha, 2006). However, the way Emma started crying "tmutlix tmutlix, qumli" (don't die for me, get up for me), whilst Katie was dying evidences that anticipatory grief does not always prepare an individual for the loss (Discussed in sub-theme: Preparation through anticipatory grief).

**Reflections.** The second theme which centered around the participants' experience before the death of their animal-companions, has evidenced that taking care of a chronic or terminally ill animal resulted in participants experiencing caregiver burden and stress (Chang et al., 2010; Spitznagel et al., 2017). The

severity of the symptoms (sub-themes) experienced by the participants were found to be associated with the animal's size, health and medical needs. It was evidenced that the strength of the bond between the owner and animal did not affect the amount of money spent on medical and veterinary cost.

The data also revealed that anticipatory grief was experienced by the participants before the passing of their animal-companion (Rames, 2016). At times, this helped prepare the participants for the passing of their animal-companion, thus evidencing that anticipatory grief carries with it both negative and positive aspects (Reynolds & Botha, 2006).

### **Theme C. Euthanasia**

Euthanasia is a difficult issue to deal with. On the one hand it provides participants with a way to end the suffering of their animal-companions (Davis et al., 2003; Durkin, 2009; McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002); but on the other, it brings with it many elements of doubt and guilt (Davis et al., 2003).

*My experiences of euthanasia vary. In Pluto's case, I had accepted the fact that I had no other choice but to relieve him of his pain. However, as regards Grinch, who had become totally dependent on us for his wellbeing, the issue was discussed in group counselling many times. A question I kept asking was whether I kept insisting with my partner on performing euthanasia on Grinch to relieve the carer burden I felt, or if it was out of real concern for Grinch's quality of life.*

Research evidences that before taking the decision to euthanize an animal-companion, participants weigh the longing to have more time with the animal against concerns about its quality of life (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). The participants' voices evidence that they were not ready to carry the guilt associated with euthanasia (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002) and that the thought of separating from their animal-companion convinced them that the animal wanted to live and not die (McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002; Morley & Fook, 2005).

I thought it was a very, very selfish thing to do, to put an animal down because it had become a burden on you and because it is taking a lot of your energy and your strength... [and] I refused to do so... because I really believed she wanted to live a day more. (Mary)

Mary's belief that Sheila wanted to live a day more was echoed by Sally and Nigel as they also believed their animal-companions were showing them that they

were not ready to die. The difference between the participants was that when Nigel felt that Gary had shown him the time had come, he choose to end his suffering through euthanasia (Davis et al., 2003; Durkin, 2009; McCutcheon & Fleming, 2002). The data revealed that Martina would have ended Mia's suffering through euthanasia but since she was not her actual owner, the final decision was not hers to make.

When Martina was asked whether she was angry that Mia had passed away, she commented that "we all have an expiry date, why should I be angry because there was an expiry date... I know everything and everyone has to go". Through my interpretation of the data my understanding is that Martina and Nigel were accepting of euthanasia as they were acquiescent of the fact that death is a part of life (Davis et al., 2003).

The data indicated that, with regard to the issue of euthanasia, the defence mechanism of denial (APA, 2013) was unconsciously being used. This was done to help participants create a temporary distraction from the pain which comes from putting an animal to sleep (Rames, 2016). Mary and Sally spared themselves the pain of having to decide to euthanize their animal-companions by believing that the animals were showing them that they were not ready to die. In Emma, Andrew and Deidra's case, this was achieved by questioning and not accepting the original diagnosis (Rames, 2016).

U jien qisni m'acċettajtx li tmut, għax...  
ta *five days antibiotics* u bdiet tinżel ...  
għedt kieku mhux ħa jinżel mill-ewwel.  
B'li nifhem jien ħa ngħid hekk jew x'ridt  
nifhem. (Emma)

I like didn't accept it was a tumour  
because ... he gave her five days  
antibiotics, and it (lump) started to go  
down...I said (if it was a tumour) it  
wouldn't go down straight away. From  
what I understand, let's say that or  
from the way I wanted to understand  
it.

**Reflections.** The theme of euthanasia has evidenced that in theory participants believed in the concept of euthanasia. The reality was that the idea of separating from their animal-companion blinded them to the severity of the animal's condition (Sharkin & Knox, 2003). In addition it indicates that participants associated feelings of guilt and uncertainty with euthanasia, which kept them from being able to end the animals suffering (Davis et al., 2003).

The data also demonstrate how denial served multiple purposes. By rejecting the seriousness of the animal's situation (APA, 2013) participants did not have to decide as to whether their animal-companion should be put to sleep. Denial helped to prolong the animal's life and removed any burden or guilt associated with having to decide an animal's fate (APA, 2013; Davis et al., 2003; Tzivian et al., 2014).

#### **Theme D. Experiencing the Death of an Animal-Companion**

Every loss in life is difficult, and the way it is experienced is unique to each individual, however a number of commonalities did arise in the participants' stories (Creswell, 2007). Commonalities included seeking veterinary support and the need to be with the animal at the time of death (Pilgram, 2010; Sharkin & Bahrack, 1990; Toray, 2004).

**Veterinary support.** The data present that, at the time of their animal-companions' death, the participants' first instinct was to call their vets for support. This was done because the participants believed that a vet's role is to provide support and assurance, constant updates and clear information (Reisbig et al., 2017). However the participants' stories evidence that they were far from satisfied with the services provided by their veterinarians.

Sally and Emma believed that blood results given days before the demise of their animal-companions were misleading. Martina was angry at the fact that she felt that they were not given a truthful prognosis which resulted with them spending thousands of euros to "cure the incurable". Mary was extremely upset that vets would not make home visits as this was not their policy and felt that considering the situation they should have made an exception.

These results do not correlate with research which indicates that vets are aware of the importance of providing a clear prognosis and of communicating emotional, informational, and instrumental social support (Pilgram, 2010). This makes me reflect that perhaps not all vet training courses have training in this area. Pilgram's participants all "indicated that they received no course-work on communicating social support to grieving clients" (2010, p. 208).

**Personal presence.** People who own animal-companions tend to feel it is their responsibility to be present when their animal-companion passes away, and if for some reason they were not able to be present they experienced a sense of guilt (Margolies, 1999). The participants' stories evidence that after all they did for their

animal-companions, emotions of guilt still arose after the animal's death. Sally explained that she was feeling guilty because:

L-iktar lejli li kellu bżonn, jien ma kontx      The night he needed me most I wasn't  
hemm, irqadt, kelli bżonn norqod, kont illi      there, I slept, I had to sleep, I hadn't  
ħafna ma norqod. (Sally)      slept in a long while.

Mary's guilt arose from the fact that she was not with Sheila the night Sheila had actually passed away. Even though Mary understood that it was her body's way of coping with an unpleasant situation she was still carrying around the guilt at the time of the interview.

(Crying) Weeks before I kept on waking up during the night to check on her ...[but] that night I slept like a log, I didn't wake up at all, I didn't hear her vomiting, which I still find strange today. So I think I knew, and I somehow persuaded myself not to wake up or it was my own self like protecting me from hurting more. (Mary)

The study also indicates that Mary and Sally's bodies had realised that their animal-companions were in a bad state, and their way of unconsciously protecting themselves from experiencing the pain was to sleep (Maricutoiu & Crasovan, 2016). However the continuous guilt both participants still carried with them demonstrates how denying and avoiding painful stressors is also mal-adaptive (APA, 2013).

The study also reveals that not all participants discussed issues of guilt related to the fact that they were not present when their animal-companion died. My understanding of the data is that it was those participants who had strong emotional bonds with their animals that experienced guilt for not being with their animal-companions in their last moments of life.

**Preparation through anticipatory grief.** Anticipatory grief has positive aspects as it mentally and emotionally prepared participants for the passing of their animal-companions (Havelin, 2014), as shown by how Sally had reacted when she had first thought that Ben was going to die. She had panicked and fainted, as opposed to the calm way she reacted when he had actually passed away (Havelin, 2014; Overton & Cottone, 2016).

(Tibki) Bqajt miegħu, għannaqtu,      (Crying) I stayed with him, I hugged  
kellimtu tal-aħħar, għedtlu *thank you*      him, I spoke to him for the last time, I  
ta' kollox... [u] imbagħad ċempilt lil      thanked him for everything...[and]



ommi, ċempilt lil oħti...[u] ċempilt lil  
*my best friend* u kollha ġew. (Sally)

then I called my mother, I called my  
sister...[and] I called my best friend,  
they all came.

The fact that, like Sally, the death of Martina and Nigel's' pets were also a peaceful event, evidences that anticipatory grief had mentally prepared them for the eventual death of beloved animal-companions (Havelin, 2014).

Emma was the only participant to have spoken about reacting negatively at the time of Katie's death. Emma's reaction illustrates how, even though she had experienced anticipatory grief, she still was not prepared for Katie's death. One explanation for her behaviour could be the fact that Katie was her main source of support after her divorce, therefore her loss had reactivated past losses (Walsh, 2009b).

U bdejt ngħajjat tmultix tmultix, qumli,  
dak il-ħin xtaqt nagħmlilha *mouth to*  
*mouth*. (Emma)

I started shouting, don't die for me,  
please get up for me, at that time I  
wished to give her mouth to mouth.

**Reflections.** The theme of experiencing the death of an animal-companion and its sub-themes has evidenced that the first source of support participants reached out to whilst their animal companions were dying were their vets (Pilgram, 2010). However it was found that many participants were disappointed with the support provided by their vets.

It was also shown that those participants with a strong bond with their companion-animals experienced emotions of guilt for not being with their animal-companion at their time of death (Field et al, 2009, Margolies, 1999). In addition the positive and negative aspects associated with anticipatory grief were also highlighted (Havelin, 2014).

### **Theme E. Experience after Death**

The death of a loved one is generally followed by a period of bereavement, grief and mourning (Archer & Winchester, 1994). However, finding social and emotional support after the loss of an animal-companion is not always possible as not all sectors of society acknowledge the death of an animal to be significant enough to warrant one's grief (Tzivian et al., 2014). To further complicate the grieving process, grieving animal owners are immediately faced with the issue of

what is to be done with the animal's remains (Chur-Hansen, Black, Gierasch, Pletneva, & Winefield, 2011).

**Disenfranchised grief.** To display grief and publically mourn the loss of a loved one is part of the grieving process (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Sife, 2005). However, grieving for a pet is not always recognised as being appropriate and results with animal-owners feeling ashamed when displaying their grief (Hess-Holden et al., 2017). Emma's uncertainty of how to grieve after Katie's passing illustrates how her fear of social ridicule kept her from seeking professional help (Donohue, 2005).

Lanqas nimmaġina immur *counselling*  
għax jgħidu din sew jew? Ma nafx.  
Lanqas nimmaġina li jeżisti  
*counselling* għax tifle il-*pet*, imma  
normali fil-verità? (Emma)

I couldn't imagine going to  
counselling because they would say  
*din sew jew* "is she in her right mind"  
I don't know. I don't imagine that  
counselling for pet loss exists, but in  
reality is it normal?

The inability to openly acknowledge, mourn or seek support after a loss, such as the death of a pet, a secret lover, or a home is called disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012; Doka, 2008; Gilbert, 2007). A consequence of disenfranchised grief is complicated or unresolved grief (Cordaro, 2012; Pilgram, 2010; Worden, 2009). The effects of complicated or unresolved grief include medical conditions such as insomnia, fatigue, and depression (Bylund-Grenklo, Furst, Nyberg, Steineck, & Kreicbergs, 2016). The importance of being able to openly display one's grief was also noted by Bowlby (1980): "Sooner or later, some at least of those who avoid all conscious grieving break down--usually with some form of depression" (p. 158).

Even though participants were not sure of how they should act in public, Emma, Nigel and Sally found comfort with honouring the death of their pets privately and in their own way (Reisbig et al., 2015). Emma did this by having a memorial plaque made for Katie. Nigel kept Gary's ashes (after Gary was cremated, the cremation service in Malta was stopped in 2017). Sally was comforted in knowing that Ben's special ball was in a safe place where no one could touch it. Deidra was the only participant who did not want to have any reminders of Larry, as she gave everything away and even requested that his pen be dismantled.

**Stages of grief.** Grief theories describe a number of stages/phases the bereaved pass through after the death of a loved one (Bowlby & Parkes, 1970;



Kübler-Ross, 1969; Worden, 2009). However, theories such as those belonging to Bowlby and Parkes (1970), Kübler-Ross(1969) and Worden(2009) were created to deal with human loss. Due to a lack of theories dealing with the issue of pet loss, Sife (2005) adapted Kübler-Ross's (1969) theory and applied it to pet bereavement. Sife's (2005) six phases of pet bereavement are: shock and disbelief, anger, alienation and distancing, denial, guilt, depression and resolution. The author also notes "these stages are characteristic and transitional, and they may manifest themselves simultaneously or in a different sequence than listed" (p.45).

**Guilt.** As was previously discussed, during the time of the interviews Mary and Sally had still been carrying around a certain amount of guilt associated with the fact that they had slept the night before their animals passed away. Participants also expressed feelings of guilt for things they felt they could have done differently whilst their animal-companions were alive. Emma expressed remorse in not having taken Katie to the vet, Andrew, Deidra and Nigel all voiced their regrets at not having spent more time with their animal-companions whilst they were alive. Deidra also felt guilty for not allowing Larry to stay inside.

**Depression.** Theorists such as Freud (1957), Kübler-Ross (1969) and Sife (2005) posit that depression is a normal response to loss. According to APA (2013), depression is a medical illness consisting of a range of emotional and psychological symptoms. Symptoms include feelings of sadness, emptiness, irritability, as well as somatic and cognitive changes that affect an individual's capacity to function (APA, 2013; Sife, 1998).

Emma was the only participant who verbally admitted to feeling depressed after Katie died. However, through my understanding of the data Sally and Mary also exhibited certain behaviours and thoughts which may be attributed to depression such as feeling sad, not wanting to go out, not sleeping well and wanting to die (Sife, 2005).

You can't afford to just give in and go jump off somewhere, because you have other people and other responsibilities that you have to focus on.

(Mary)

lx-xahrejn ta' wara ridt immut, ma ridtx  
ngħix...(u) *literally* bdejt nitlob 'l Alla

The 2 months after I wanted to  
die... [and] literally I started to pray

joħodni, li mmut *naturally* biex immur to God to take me, to die a natural  
ħdejh. (Sally) death so I can go near him. (Sally)

According to Sife (2005) people who display suicidal ideations (not an actual attempt) after the death of an animal-companion such as illustrated by Mary and Sally's comments above, are experiencing symptoms of acute grief. Acute grief is characterised by "yearning and longing, decreased interest in ongoing activities, and frequent thoughts of the deceased" (Shear, Ghesquiere, & Glickman, 2013, p. 405). Furthermore, Sife (2005) argues that if grief is repressed rather than confronted and dealt with "it will probably fester for the rest of the person's life" (p.57).

**Isolation and distancing.** The participants' discourse evidences that after the death of their animal-companions they experienced feelings of anger, loneliness and alienation (Archer & Winchester, 1994; Brown, 2006; Hewson, 2014).

Each participant described their feelings of loneliness and isolation differently. For Emma her loneliness stemmed from the fact that she believed that nobody would accept her love in the way Katie had. Sally's isolation resulted through her decision to stay at home and not socialise with family and friends. Even though Andrew was married with children, his feelings of emptiness arose as no one came to greet him when he arrived home.

Mingħajr annimal id-dar naraha Without an animal at home I feel it  
totalment vojta. (Andrew) is totally empty.

The data reveals that the one commonality the participants shared with regard to loneliness, was the fact that they all needed to adjust to the environment without their animal-companion's presence in it (Worden, 2009).

**Anger.** The data evidenced that participants did experience anger for various reasons after the death of their animal-companion. However, it also highlighted the fact that a common source of anger was the anger participants had felt towards their vets (as discussed in sub-theme veterinary support of Theme D).

Mary explained that she was also "angry at life, I couldn't deal with my emotions, I couldn't cope. I use to burst it out on anyone possible. Emma discussed the fact that she was also angry at her son as he did not cry after Katie had died.

**New pets.** People tend to believe that a replacement pet will help lessen the grief (Durkin, 2009; Tzivian et al., 2014; Wrobel & Dye, 2003), therefore one of the first things the bereaved will hear after losing an animal-companion is get a new pet (Kaufman & Kaufman, 2006; Tzivian et al., 2014).

However, owning new or other pets did not help lessen the severity of the grief felt by participants (Field et al., 2009). The data evidenced that the desire to die after the death of an animal companion existed both in participants who owned other animals and those who did not. This could be explained through Trinke's (1993) Attachment Hierarchy of Relationships which claims that relationships are ranked according to the attachment functions an individual fulfills, as well as the length of time a participant has known the attachment figure.

**Remains.** Research indicates that bereaved pet owners find it easier to move through the grieving process when they are able to hold a ritual or memorial service to be able to say good-bye to their animal-companion (Chur-Hansen et al., 2011). However, participants evidence that the matter of animal's remains in Malta is still an ongoing issue (Mifsud, 2016). Mary's voice below illustrates how moving on is made more difficult when one has no access to private land on which to bury an animal and has to resort to cremating their animals at the local abattoir (Ganado, 2018).

We deserve to say goodbye to our pets with dignity. Burying an animal in Malta is quite challenging due to the lack of space... It is heart breaking to just throw your animal in a freezer on top of other dead animals leading to the only other option of it being cremated with the remains of meat products. It would help put your mind at ease, and help you to better cope with the loss. (Mary)

Martina and Sally, who both owned large animals and were able to bury their animals on private land, spoke of the difficulties they faced in getting the bodies of their animals to the place they were to be buried, and that they had to help dig the animals' graves.

What makes these situations difficult is the fact that animal-owners consider their animal-companions to be part of their family, and this is not the way human family members are treated after their death (Herzog, 2011; McColgan & Schofield, 2007; Wells, 2009).

**Reflections.** Experience after death and its emerging sub-themes has shown that participants experienced many but not all the stages of grief (Sife 2005). These were experienced in the same manner experienced for human loss (Sife, 2005). The difference between mourning a person and an animal-companion was that participants did not feel comfortable expressing their grief in public, which resulted in

disenfranchised grief (DeMello, 2012; Packman, et al., 2014; Sharkin & Bahrack, 1990), and could not experience the burial process with dignity.

Participants also refrained from seeking professional help as they themselves were uncertain of how they were supposed to behave and whether it was normal to seek help for the loss of an animal-companion (Hess-Holden et al., 2017).

Not finding an acceptable way to deal with the removal of the remains of the animals and to be able to continue to honour them after death affected the grieving process. Getting a new pet, or owning other pets did not help lessen the participants' grief (Davis et al., 2003).

### **Theme F. Religion.**

It is believed that in times of grief people turn to their religious or spiritual beliefs for solace and understanding, as one's faith can often be a basic part of the coping process (Hood, Hill, & Spika, 2009). However, a study by Feldman, Fischer and Gressis (2016) indicates "that some beliefs may be comforting, while others less comforting" (p. 537). Participants admitted that their belief in religion and the afterlife helped them cope with the death of their animal-companion (Davis et al., 2003).

Qed jistennieni, xi darba ħa narah, *I mean they are creatures of God so I'm sure they are waiting for us.* (Sally)

He is waiting for me, I will see him one day, I mean they are creatures of God so I'm sure they are waiting for us.

**Reflections.** The theme of religion presents that participants felt comforted by the after-life doctrines associated with their different faiths (Davis et al., 2003). However the fact that the data have shown that both Mary and Sally had wanted to die after the death of their animal-companions, and that one believes in the afterlife and the other does not, evidences that religion does not always help reduce the intensity of her grief (Davis et al., 2003, Feldman et al., 2016).

### **Theme G. Support and Counselling**

Being supported during times of stress is imperative as it has been shown that having people available for support and assistance during stressful times can enhance coping and provide a buffer against stress (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). In addition, Abdollahpour, Nedjat, Noroozian, Salimi and Majdzadeh (2014) argue that participants in their study who felt supported whilst taking on a caregivers role such as the participants of this study, reported an increase in their wellbeing.

Even though caregivers benefit from financial and/or physical assistance, they also require emotional and moral support, such as that provided through bereavement support groups and/or personal counsellors (Hess-Holden et al., 2017; Sharkin & Bahrack, 1990)

**Support.** Mary, Sally and Martina reported that they had very little, if any, financial, emotional, moral and/or physical support and that such help would have made life much easier for them (Abdollahpour et al., 2014).

Mary commented that having “someone helping me to clean her (Sheila) would have been help, as well as having someone to speak to who has passed through the same things”. Sally disclosed that in today’s technological society she turned to social media for support.

Fil-fatt kont tfajt fuq il-Facebook,  
hemm xi nies għaddejjin minnha?  
Għax għandi bżonn support. (Sally)

In fact I had posted on Facebook, is  
there any one going through it?  
Because I need support.

Spitznagel et al, (2017) argue that those seeking support from social media are likelier to experience higher levels of depressive symptoms. Sally displayed depressive symptoms such as sadness, not wanting to socialise and wanting to die (APA, 2013).

**Counselling.** In Western society, seeking support after the death of a person is a behaviour encouraged, but discouraged after the loss of an animal-companion (Hess-Holden et al., 2017; Morley & Fook, 2005; Sharkin & Bahrack, 1990). The study evidenced that Sally was the only participant who admitted she would have gone to group counselling before and even after Ben passed away. She also explained that she had actually turned to social media for support but could not find any local support groups.

The data evidence that participants did not seek counselling for fear of social ridicule (Arluke & Sanders, 1996; Herzog, 1989; Morris, 2012). Mary explained that she did not seek support because “lots of people do not understand the love that you have for an animal so I preferred like to not speak about it”. However she did state that if a support group had existed she would have considered going if she knew at least one other person in the group.

Even though the participants evidenced that they would not seek professional support for their grief, participants did admit that they found solace in talking to trusted friends and family. In contrast Andrew and Nigel stated that they preferred to

deal with their emotions alone. After the interview Martina said she would suggest counselling to a friend if they found themselves in a similar situation as she found that talking about her experience helped her feel better.

Even though the aim of the study was to bring an awareness of positive aspects of counselling after the loss of an animal-companion, Brown (2006) argues that a counsellor needs to have the appropriate foundation in grief theory if they are to provide grief and bereavement counselling to those who have lost a pet. In addition counsellors also need to be sensitive and understanding to the issue of pet loss (Cordaro, 2012; Toray, 2004).

**Reflections.** The final theme of counselling and support has provided evidence that support after the death of an animal-companion is not sought because bereaved pet owners are unsure of what society deems to be acceptable behaviour (Cordaro, 2012). In addition, participants were convinced that mainstream society does not yet understand the strength of the bond between a human and their animal-companion. It was also shown that participants looked for and were willing to attend help groups both before and after their animal's death, however none were found through social media.

### **Concluding Comments**

Structured in seven themes, this chapter presented the voices of bereaved pet-owners and discussed them with literature and research findings. The seven themes extracted from the data conclude that the bond between bereaved pet-owners and their animal-companions were affected by the participants' life context: such as whether they had children, whether they lived alone and how they related to other human beings. The themes elicited from the data are linked to the theoretical framework of the study. These included Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1988), Trinke's Theory on the Hierarchy of Attachment Relationships (1993), Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (2000), and Elders Life Course Perspective (1998).

The participants have also shown how there were a number of factors which affected their mental and physical wellbeing before the death of their animal-companion. These included the animal's health, the amount of support provided and anticipation of the animal's death. Participants stressed the importance of receiving support before and after the animal passed away. This was especially important for participants who became caregivers to their chronically or terminally ill animal-



companions. These participants revealed that the strain of looking after a large, sick animal caused both physical and emotional stress.

Even though participants believed in the concept of euthanasia, their bodies made use of the defence mechanism of denial to spare them the pain and guilt associated with having to decide their animal's fate and the consequence of such a choice (separation).

The data revealed that the participants experienced grief in the same manner as those who had suffered a human loss. The difference being that the participants felt that their loss was not always acknowledged which led to disenfranchised grief.

It was evidenced that participants believed in the after-life, and this helped them cope after the animal's death. But, this in itself was not enough to protect them from experiencing intense grief.

Even though participants felt that emotional support would have been helpful before and after the animal's demise, they indicated that they did not consider going to counselling. Participants were under the impression that it is not normal to grieve the death of an animal-companion, and that there must be something wrong with them for doing so. This presents a need for public and professional awareness, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Personal Note**

*Personally I feel that the voices of the participants have shown that we all need to be loved and for some, there is no one better to offer that love than an animal-companion. They love unconditionally, accept people for who they are and expect nothing in return.*

*I was saddened to see that even after many months, each and every participant was still grieving the loss of their most cherished animal-companion. Participant's cried as they recalled the many happy days they shared with their pets as well as the harrowing last few months/days before they passed away.*

*This experience has made me aware of how important it is that, as a counsellor, I work towards helping animal-owners realise that it is ok to cry and miss your animal when it passes away. I also feel that it is important to work towards offering services which will support bereaved pet owners.*

## **Chapter 5**

# **Conclusions and Recommendations**

“The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not ‘get over’ the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to.”

(Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 240)



This research presented the experiences of those preparing and dealing with the death of an animal-companion. The chosen methodology helped me present the voices and lived experiences of the participants through the various themes and sub-themes which emerged through the data. Their voices have helped me reflect and deepen my perceptions and knowledge of how individuals cope whilst preparing and dealing with the death of a companion-animal and has also reflected some of my own experiences. Further, I have become more aware of the need for public and professionals' awareness as to the effects felt by those preparing and dealing with the loss of an animal-companion.

### **Implications of the Findings**

Within the Maltese context, this is, to my knowledge, the first study which researched the experiences of losing an animal-companion from a psychological perspective. Therefore it has the potential to expand counsellors' and other helping professionals' understanding of grief within this area. It also allows for counsellors to apply skills that include advocacy, intervention and education.

One of the first implications of the study is that, even though the data have shown that participants experienced caregivers burden and stress, anticipatory grief (Havelin, 2014), and grief (Sife, 2005) before and after their animal-companions passed away, they did not seek support. The results have indicated that it would have been beneficial for participants to attend counselling and/or groups where support and understanding is offered to them, both whilst their animals were sick and when they eventually passed away (Brown, 2006).

A second implication of the study is that if a counsellor is to be responsive to an animal-owner's grief they need to be able to "understand the depth of the emotional bond, the role of the pet in the client's life, and the quality of the client's social support network" (Cordaro, 2012, p. 289). However for this to be done they, themselves need to be trained within the area of animal bereavement.

A third implication of the study is that, within the Maltese islands, there is a lack of facilities which cater for the removal and burial of the animal's remains. This implies that Malta is in urgent need of services to remove the bodies of animals from individuals' homes, a pet cemetery and/or crematory service. At the moment, animals are either taken away by the vet or buried by the individual.

A further implication of the study is disenfranchised grief. Because society still does not recognise the bond that may form between an individual and their animal-

companions, participants are affected by disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012). This results with individuals grieving in silence and having to return to work and performing duties soon after the death of an animal-companion (Cordaro, 2012), seriously affecting their wellbeing and work output (Hewson, 2014; Peacock et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2017).

These findings confirm the need for all sectors of society to recognise the reality of animal-companion grief. The implications are that grieving pet-owners would benefit if there was more public and professional awareness of the issues associated with caring for an ailing animal and the grief associated with the animal's loss. Pet owners would also benefit if counsellors and veterinarians were provided with training on grief associated with animal-companion loss and if a policy is developed to ensure the emotional wellbeing within a work environment. The study has also shown a need for society to provide services which help with the removal of animals' remains and a place where animals may be buried and/or cremated.

### **Recommendations**

Several recommendations for practice, training and continued professional development, policy making, and future research were elicited from the findings.

**Recommendations for training.** With regard to training, it is recommended that counsellors attend continuous personal development courses so that they are in a position to help those grieving the loss of an animal-companion. Training should include topics on the close attachment some people forge with their animal-companions; the process by which bereaved pet owners cope with grief (Cordaro, 2012), and specialised training on pet loss grief. A number of courses dealing with the issue of pet-bereavement counselling are offered online (Jasani, 2018). These include courses such as the Certificate in Pet Bereavement Counselling (Sadgrove, 2018) and Pet Loss Counsellor Training (Association for Pet Loss and Bereavement, 2018) (Appendix K). In practice, once the dissertation is complete, I will advocate for such training with the University and Malta Association for the Counselling Profession (MACP).

It is also recommended that veterinarians be trained on how to address and handle grief and its course (Hewson, 2014). Through such training, veterinarians would be in a better position to help grieving clients as they would know what to say to grieving pet owners. This in turn could help reduce the effects of disenfranchised

grief. There are a number of courses available for training in pet bereavement support online (Bluecross, 2018; Dawson, 2018) (Appendix L). In practice, I will advocate for such Continuous Personal Development with The Malta Veterinary Association (MVA) (2018).

**Recommendations for practice.** Since participants did not consider going to counselling, it is recommended that the counselling profession work towards educating the public on the effects of losing an animal-companion and of promoting the benefits of grief-counselling (Donohue, 2005). This can be achieved in many ways. A counsellor could either work alone or “in conjunction with veterinary personnel to offer information sessions or presentations with a focus on helping people understand the effects of pet loss and grief” (Donohue, 2005, p. 189). They could work with local television producers to include story lines around relationships between characters and their animal-companions in local television dramas so that there can be social learning (Bandura, 1977; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1987). The Department of Counselling within the Faculty for Social Wellbeing at the University of Malta may itself promote this concept by finding practicum placements in this area.

To further bring about a public awareness on the effects of preparing and dealing with the death of a companion-animal, pamphlets which provide information about caregivers burden, anticipatory grief, disenfranchised grief and the necessity for support could be drawn up by the health department and distributed to veterinarians' and doctors' offices. The pamphlets could also include issues which arise when one is contemplating euthanasia. Such education must be carried out in collaboration with veterinarian and other animal societies. I myself will be promoting this dissemination once the dissertation is complete and approach MACP, as well as the MVA, to create this pamphlet perhaps using national funds by, for example, applying for the Small Initiative Scheme Projects (Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector, 2018). I will, in fact, present a proposal to MACP in this regard (Appendix M).

It would be recommended that counsellors look into the possibility of developing support groups for those caring for a sick animal-companion. This would benefit individuals by providing them with a safe space to talk about their experiences without fear of being judged. By volunteering amongst themselves, members could also be relieved of some of the stress associated with carers burden (Spitznagel et al., 2017). By being a member in a support group run by a counsellor,

members are also unconsciously benefitting from the support of a professional. Animal societies and veterinarians could promote such activities through local councils and parish offices. I myself will promote this strategy.

It would also be recommended that counsellors look into the possibility of forming animal bereavement groups. Such groups could help “facilitate open communication and shared experiences of loss between participants by encouraging healing rituals, expression of feelings and mutual support” (Walsh, 2009b, p. 490). A bereavement group would also provide the participants with validation, support and reinforcement of healthy coping strategies. In addition they would also help to address the problem of disenfranchised grief (Cordaro, 2012). I will also recommend this to MACP.

The data have shown that many pet owners relied on their veterinarians as a primary source of support whilst their animal-companions were dying. For this reason counsellors with animal grief training may train and/or provide educational material to help veterinary staff understand the grief process and stages of bereavement (Donohue, 2005). It is also recommended that counsellors be directly connected to a veterinary clinic so that they may be in a position to serve as a primary provider of grief counselling services (Donohue, 2005).

**Recommendations for policy.** As the data have shown that grief experienced by participants after the loss of their animal-companions is just as intense as that felt by those losing a human, it is recommended that there be “social legitimization of grief resulting from the death of an animal-companion” (Tzivian et al., 2014, p. 116). This may be done by amending Subsidiary Legislation 452.101 (Minimum Special Leave Entitlement Regulations, 2008). The amendment required would be to list an animal-companion amongst those whose death entitles a person to bereavement leave. I will present such amendments to the relevant minister and shadow minister, once this study is complete.

The current Veterinary Services Act (2001) and its Subsidiary Legislation 437.106 (Private Veterinary Establishments Licensing, 2014) do not include any acts requiring veterinary surgeons to display fees or with an obligation to provide a true prognosis of the animal’s condition. Therefore, in order to safe-guard animal owners from spending money to try and “cure the incurable” (Martina) the law should be changed so that if it is found that veterinary surgeons were not truthful they would face criminal charges. An act should be included which requires veterinaries to

display a schedule of fees so that people know what expenses they will be incurring. I will e-mail the relevant Minister on this issue once the dissertation process is complete.

Because of the issues participants experienced with the remains of the animals' bodies, I would recommend that an amendment be made to Part VI of Chapter 439 of the Laws of Malta (Animal Welfare Act, 2002) to cater for the removal of an animal-companion, and for the creation of a public area for a pet cemetery and crematorium. This is so that those people who do not have access to private land are provided with a place to bury their animal-companion should they choose to. It should be noted that as of January 2018 the Island Sanctuary at Marsaxlokk were in the process of fundraising for the animal cremator even though it had been ordered (Island Sanctuary, 2018). Even though in 2016 the local media had reported that there had been a call for tenders for a pet cemetery to be built in Ta'Qali (Times of Malta, 2016), to date nothing has been finalised. Therefore I would suggest that this development be taken up by the Maltese Government itself in the proposed site. I will e-mail the relevant Minister on this issue once the dissertation process is complete. In other countries for example Australia, services can be purchased which allow animal-companions "to be cremated and the ashes placed in an urn, interred in a pet cemetery, or taken home, perhaps with a memorial of some type" (Chur-Hansen et al, 2011, p. 250)

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

An interesting area of study would be to see whether people acquire an animal-companion for the first time after they have separated/divorced, been widowed or have decided to live alone. I feel that this is important since the rate of people living alone in Malta has steadily risen over the past years from 6.9% in 2007 to 9.5 % in 2016 (Statista, Share of Malta's population living in a single-person household from 2007 to 2016, 2018b). Another area of study could involve researching what form of animal is chosen as a companion. I feel that this is important as our society generally views dogs as being a man's best friend (Walsh, 2009b) since they have shown to be empathic towards people (Anonymus, 2012). However we do know that during ancient Egyptian times both cats and dogs were treated with great respect (Walsh, 2009a). Such a study would indicate whether one is able to build an attachment relationship with other forms of animals, this would be interesting since I have not been able to find any such studies.

A further study could be done to monitor animal-carers' emotional and physical wellbeing if counselling or group support is offered when an initial diagnosis is given. This could involve two different groups of participants whose animal-companions had just been diagnosed with a terminal or long term illness. Counselling or group support could be offered to one group, whilst the second could continue as they would normally (with no support). This would provide evidence as to whether emotional and/or physical support would lessen the effects of carer's burden and anticipatory grief of participants.

Due to the fact that one requires time to work through their grief, a longitudinal study to understand how individuals work through the process of grieving the loss of an animal-companion would help researchers identify the most crucial periods in which support would most be necessary. This would provide counsellors with a structure to work from. If such a study were to include people who own different species of animals, it would also help evidence whether people grieve the loss of one form of animal more than others and whether strong bonds may be formed with other animals besides dogs. I have not found research on this topic.

Lately, through social networking, I have been surprised to see how many animal-companions literally get lost or run away. Another interesting study would be to study the long term effects of such a loss, and whether the grief felt when one literally loses an animal-companion is comparable to a loss by death.

### **Limitations of the Research Project**

Even though the primary aim of doing qualitative research is to provide a complete detailed description of the data collected, having more participants with different experiences would have enriched the discussion.

A second limitation was the fact that the participants who volunteered for the study all owned dogs. I feel that ownership of different creatures would have shown how and if, preparing and dealing with the death of different species of animals affects people, if at all.

A further limitation was caused by the title of the dissertation and the research question as its emphasis was on preparing and dealing with the actual death of an animal-companion. For this reason, the study did not enable me to explore people's experience when an animal-companion gets lost or runs away.

A fourth limitation was the fact that only one participant had chosen to euthanize their animal-companion. This did not allow for the research to be able to



provide different perspectives as to how choosing euthanasia affects different individuals.

A fifth limitation was the fact that none of the clients had actually sought counselling or group support. It would have been interesting to compare the outcomes of participants who had been going to counselling in comparison to those who did not attend counselling or group support.

### **Final Reflections**

Even though Shandy, Zico, Pluto, Grinch and Peppi all played important roles in my own life, I was not aware that there are others like me who turned to their companion-animals as attachment figures. Nor was I aware that many people pass through similar experiences as I did when they lose an animal-companion. This ignorance on my part did not prepare me for the intense show of emotions the participants displayed.

What this study has done is bring to light the fact that both the public and animal-companion owners themselves, are unaware as to whether it is appropriate to mourn and grieve the loss of an animal-companion. Instead of seeking help to come to terms with their loss, participants preferred to keep their emotions hidden, thinking that such grief was inappropriate. For this reason I believe that, as a counsellor, it is my responsibility to help those that are preparing and dealing with the loss of an animal-companion. I believe the first step needs to be to help bring about a public awareness of the effects of such a loss.

This study presents how, as humans, we need to gratify our need to belong (Maslow, 2000) and that we will satiate this need through any means possible, even if it requires building an attachment relationship with another species (Bowlby, 1982; Sable, 1995; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). The implications and recommendations of the study are important as the relationships between a person and their animal-companions need to be recognised by society as being similar if not equal to those attachments which people form between themselves (Ainsworth, 1991; Trinke, 1993; Zilcha-Mano et al., 2011). Society also needs to understand that, as one prepares and deals with the loss of an animal-companion, the anxiety and grief they feel (Havelin, 2014; Sife, 1998; Spitznagel et al., 2017) is comparable to that felt by those preparing and dealing with the loss of a significant other human (Bowlby, 1980; Sife, 1998; Worden, 2009). Therefore it is hoped that the findings and recommendations



of this study will help to move towards catering to the needs for animal-owners at such a sad and difficult time.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: The Socio-Zoological Scale

The socio-zoological scale is a hierarchy of animals—a moral ordering, based on traditions and prejudices. People rate animals as morally more or less important, and therefore more or less worth protecting, according to a number of factors (McKeegan, 2013).

### How does one become a pet?

- A pet is one who is both in a human household, and is named. Naming them incorporates them into our social world and allows us to use their name as both a term of address and a term of reference. In both cases, this allows for interaction and emotional attachment. By telling about them to others, the animal then gains a history, a biography, a subjectivity. All of this remains even after the animal is dead.
- A lab animal, meat animal or fur animal is both one who is spatially separate from a pet animal. They are NEVER in a home. They also never get a name. They are objects, not subjects. They have no history, no biography, no intentions, and no emotions. They live in a space where they are crowded with others, reducing their individuality; they are handled rarely, when necessary, reducing an emotional connection; they are given numbers if necessary to refer to them (but not to address them); they do not feel pain so they are not anesthetized nor killed with humane methods; and they have no agency, no ability to control their own lives. Ultimately, they are a product.

### The Sociozoologic Scale

- Since the time of Aristotle, humans have always ranked higher than animals; the sociozoologic scale ranks animals in a structure of meaning that allows humans to define, reinforce, and justify their interactions with other beings.
- Those at the top deserve more privileges and those at the bottom have earned their poor place in society.
- In other words, animals can be different things to different people: a beloved Labrador can be a best friend, a chicken can be dinner, a sea otter can be local color, a lab rat can be a research subject. And how we respond to their loss tells us a lot about the value we place on them: while we mourn the passing of a pet, we tend to write of the death of lab animals as a "loss of data."
- Good animals are pets and tools (farm, lab, and work animals). They allow us to use them and thus are nicely incorporated into human culture.
- Bad animals are vermin and pests, who both stray from their proper place and also resist being used.
- Rats, for instance, can be both a good animal and a bad animal.
- These categories involve defining the animal to fit the category, and then applying certain treatment to them. Cow = food, and thus the cow is made to be killed and eaten.

Taken from: <http://studylib.net/doc/5802394/the-sociozoologic-scale---animals-and-society-institute>. (DeMello, 2012).

### **Appendix B: Recruitment Letter**

Dear Dr Vella,

I am currently reading for a Master in Counselling at the University of Malta. As part of the course I must complete a dissertation and the research topic I have chosen is: "Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet". I would like to ask if you could please act as gatekeeper for the recruitment of potential participant.

I will be using individual semi-structured interviews as the research tool to collect data for this study. The interview will last approximately forty five minutes to an hour and will be audio-recorded and transcribed. After I have analysed all the information and the dissertation process is complete, I will destroy the recordings. I would appreciate it if you were to distribute the attached information letter and consent form to clients who are over 18 years of age and have passed through the experience of watching the health of their companion pet deteriorate and then having their beloved companion either die a natural death or have death induced via euthanasia. Through this process they could take an informed decision whether they want to participate or not.

Kindly note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and individuals are free to decline participation. Anonymity will be respected and identities will not be disclosed at any point. Participants have the right to not answer any questions they would not like to answer. Further participants may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide an explanation for their withdrawal. Their data would then not be used. Participants will be given their transcripts and the results chapter to review (audit trail), as well as a copy of the study once the dissertation process is complete.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Frendo

Contact details: shellfrendo@gmail.com Mob: 7746-1095

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Supervisor: Dr Ruth Falzon

Contacts: ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt / 23403518 / 79092910

### Appendix C: Information Letter English

Name of researcher: Michelle Frendo

Title of dissertation: Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet

I am writing this letter to see whether you, as a person who has lost a companion pet are interested in taking part in the research I shall be conducting. I am at currently reading a Master in Counselling at the University of Malta. As part of the course I must complete a dissertation and the research topic I have chosen is: "Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet."

I am looking for individuals and who are willing to be individually interviewed and asked about their experience preparing and dealing with the death of a pet. The interview will last approximately an hour and in order to process the data I would need to audio-record these interviews.

Kindly note that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and participants are free to decline participation. Anonymity will be respected and identities will not be disclosed at any point. Participants have the right to not answer any questions they would not like to answer. Further participants may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide an explanation for their withdrawal. Their data would then not be used. Participants will be given their transcripts and the results chapter to review (audit trail), as well as a copy of the study once the dissertation process is complete.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Frendo

Contact details: shellfrendo@gmail.com Mob: 7746-1095

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Supervisor: Dr Ruth Falzon

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**Appendix D: Information Letter Maltese**

Ittra ta' informazzjoni lill-partecipanti prospettivi

Isem Ir-riċerkatura: Michelle Frendo

Titlu ta' dissertazzjoni; Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet.

Jien qed nikteb din l-ittra biex nara jekk inti, bħala bniedem li tliet animal li kien companion tiegħek intiex interessat li tiegħu sehem fi riċerka li ha inkun qed nagħmel.

Bħal issa qeda naqra għal Masters in Counselling fil Università ta' Malta. Parti mill-course tinkludi dissertazzjoni,, u it-titlu tiegħu huwa Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet. L-intervista iddum madwar siegħa u se tiġi r-rekordjata b'mod awdjo.

Il-partecipazzjoni f'dan l-istudju hija kompletament volontarja u inti liberu/libera li tirrifjuta li tiegħu sehem. L'anonimità se jiġi rrispettat. Il-partecipanti jkollhom id-dritt li ma jwiegħbu kwalunkwe mistoqsija li ma tixtieqx iwiegħbu. Il-partecipanti jistgħu jirtiraw mill-istudju meta jridu mingħajr ma jagħtu spjegazzjoni għala rtiraw. Id-data tagħhom imbagħad ma tintużax. Il-partecipanti se jingħataw it-traskrizzjoni tagħhom u l-kapitlu dwar ir-riżultati sabiex jeżaminaw, kif ukoll kopja tal-istudju għaladarba jkun intemm il-proċess tat-tiswija.

Grazzi

Michelle Frendo

Dettalji ta' kuntatt: shellfrendo@gmail.com      Mob: 7746-1095

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Superviżur: Dr Ruth Falzon

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## Appendix E: List of Professionals

For counsellors refer to:

[http://macpmalta.org/web/macp.nsf/0/CD0A8D094B28B3E3C1257F80002E41F0/\\$FILE/Private%20Practice%20List%202016.pdf](http://macpmalta.org/web/macp.nsf/0/CD0A8D094B28B3E3C1257F80002E41F0/$FILE/Private%20Practice%20List%202016.pdf)

### Counsellors

- |   |  |   |
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Warrant No. Title. Surname Name

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MPPB014	Dr. Darmanin Alfred	MPPB057	Dott.Tanti Burlò Helena Maria
MPPB051	Dott. Darmanin Kissaun		

Greta

Clinical Psychologists

MPPB098	Ms.	Abdilla Nadia	MPPB009	Ms	Farrugia Debono
MPPB011	Dott.	Agius John			Roberta
		Alexander	MPPB079	Fr	Farrugia Joe
MPPB155	Ms	Aquilina Charlene	MPPB068	Dr	Galea Michael
MPPB045	Ms	Attard Helen	MPPB021	Rev. Dr	Galea Paul
MPPB012	Dott.	Attard Roberta	MPPB109	Ms	Galea Rose
MPPB015	Ms	Bonnici Cynthia-	MPPB118	Ms	Giannikakis
		Rose			Eugenia
MPPB062	Ms	Borg Denise	MPPB156	Ms	Gingell Danae
MPPB013	Dott.	Camilleri Mary-Joan	MPPB114	Ms	Hamarsnes Ann
MPPB027	Mr	Caruana Bernard	MPPB110	Ms	Jacuch Beata
MPPB023	Dr	Cassar Anna Maria	MPPB125	Ms	Horseling Janneke
		Cristina	MPPB094	Ms	Martin Antoinette
MPPB096	Mr	Cassar Laner	MPPB084	Ms	Mateva Rayna
MPPB001	Ms	Chase Bernadette	MPPB108	Ms	Mercieca Graziella
MPPB020	Dott.	Curmi Edward	MPPB054	Dott.	Micallef Ann Marie
MPPB122	Ms	Dalli Charmaine	MPPB039	Mr	Micallef Martin
MPPB042	Dr	Darmanin Sandra	MPPB034	Dr	Micallef Daniel
MPPB133	Ms	Duca Charlene	MPPB151	Dr	Micallef Konewko
MPPB101	Dott.	Ellul Veronica			Emma
MPPB124	Dr	Falsone Alessio	MPPB082	Ms	Mifsud Bons Fleur
MPPB158	Ms	Farrugia Tania			
MPPB056	Ms	Pellegrini Petit	MPPB032	Mr	Sciberras Paul
		Mireille	MPPB024	Dott.	Scicluna Dorothy
MPPB128	Ms	Rhodin Nystrom			Sandra
		Ingalill	MPPB047	Dr	Shields Victor
MPPB002	Ms	Sammut Carmen	MPPB123	Ms	Smith La Rosa
MPPB134	Ms	Schembri Lia Elaine			Mikela

MPPB138	Dr	Van Tuyll Van Serooskerken Claire Monique	MPPB050	Dott.	Vella Camilleri Sharon
MPPB143	Ms	Vella Rosalind	MPPB052	Dott.	Vila Mireille
			MPPB033	Dott.	Xuereb Monica

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MPPB048	Ms	Borg Cunen Mary Ann			Clarissa
MPPB038	Ms	Psaila Claudia	MPPB022	Dr	Scicluna Calleja Sandra

Counselling Psychologists

MPPB031	Sr	Agius Maria	MPPB102	Ms	Evtimova Penka
MPPB016	Rev.	Agius Robert V	MPPB107	Ms	Galea Marita
MPPB132	Dr	Aquilina Carly	MPPB074	Mr	Gatt Anthony
MPPB136	Mr	Aquilina Joshua	MPPB146	Mr	Gatt Benjamin
MPPB026	Ms	Azzopardi Claudine	MPPB157	Dr.	Geraldi Gauci
MPPB141	Dr	Bezzina Valentina			Miriam
MPPB070	Ms	Blackman Mariella	MPPB111	Ms	Giordimaina Maria
MPPB120	Ms	Boccatto Calleja Dorothy			Dolores
MPPB129	Dr	Bonnici Patricia	MPPB008	Ms	Grech Lanfranco
MPPB150	Dr	Borg Bartolo			Ingrid
		Stephanie	MPPB093	Ms	Hessabi Forough
MPPB025	Mr	Briffa Henry	MPPB092	Ms	Houlton Louisa
MPPB105	Mr	Cachia Nick	MPPB080	Sr	Jones Jacqueline
MPPB010	Mr	Cachia Pierre	MPPB100	Ms	Mamo Mariella
MPPB095	Dr	Caruana Julian	MPPB003	Ms	Mangion Anna
					Maria
			MPPB086	Ms	Mizzi Antonella
MPPB140	Dr	Cauchi Marlene	MPPB090	Ms	Muscat Marcella
MPPB049	Mr	Copperstone Jason	MPPB037	Mr	Psaila Patrick
		Anthony	MPPB117	Dr	Rossi Alexia
MPPB085	Ms	Demarco Melanie	MPPB126	Mr	Sammut Greg
MPPB088	Ms	Eminyan Luisa	MPPB069	Dr	Sciberras Audrey
MPPB061	Ms	Engerer Cher	MPPB152	Ms	Srsen Masa

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MPPB059	Dr	Cefai Carmel	MPPB076	Dr	Mehrzad Margaret
MPPB040	Prof.	Falzon Joseph M.			

Educational Psychologists

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MPPB106	Ms	Azzopardi Marisa	MPPB154	Ms	Galea Katja
MPPB153	Mr	Azzopardi Meli Ian M	MPPB028	Dr	Mercieca Daniela
MPPB006	Ms	Barthet Natasha	MPPB004	Mr	Mulè Stagno Gino
MPPB058	Ms	Bason Marie Louise	MPPB121	Ms	Muscat Genovese Erika
MPPB139	Dr	Borg Daniel	MPPB007	Ms	Padovani Ginies Liza
MPPB159	Ms	Bugeja Maria Stephanie	MPPB119	Ms	Schembri Mariella
MPPB091	Mr	Camilleri Juan	MPPB005	Ms	Scicluna Jo
MPPB135	Dr	Camilleri Louis John			Christine
			MPPB145	Ms	Spiteri Marika
MPPB104	Ms	Cassar Clare	MPPB041	Mr	Zammit Stanley
MPPB089	Ms	Cini Jennifer			Francis
MPPB127	Dr	Evans Margaret			

Academic and Social Psychologist

MPPB029	Prof	Clark Marilyn	MPPB018	Prof	Lauri Mary Anne
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Social Psychologist

MPPB046	Dr	Galea Seychell Olivia
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Forensic Psychologist

MPPB142	Mr	Attard Joseph Matthew	MPPB113	Ms	Fava Cassar Jeanette
MPPB097	Ms	Avellino Chantal	MPPB043	Ms	Holland Roberta
MPPB073	Ms	Caruana Vella Sharon	MPPB078	Mr	Sammut Henwood Kevin

Health Psychologist

MPPB077	Ms	Dutton Elaine	MPPB144	Ms	Savona Ventura
MPPB116	Ms	Muscat Priscilla	Stephanie		
MPPB103	Ms	Portelli Pamela	MPPB053	Ms	Sullivan Christiane

Academic, Research and Health Psychologist

MPPB130	Dr	Borg Xuereb Christian
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Sports Psychologist

MPPB055	Ms	Muscat Adele
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Academic Psychologist

MPPB060	Prof.	Borg Mark	MPPB115	Ms.	Holland Roberta
MPPB099	Dr.	Grech Anna			

Research Psychology

MPPB127	Dr	Evans Margaret	MPPB075	Ms	Grey Clare Christienne
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Occupational / Organisational Psychology

MPPB063	Ms	Attard Catherine
MPPB149	Ms	Barbara Cardona Josette
MPPB066	Ms	Bonello Elaine Claire
MPPB064	Ms	Borg Chiara
MPPB081	Dr	Cassar Vincent
MPPB087	Ms	De Giovanni Katya
MPPB065	Ms	Ellul Maria
MPPB071	Ms	Fenech Roberta
MPPB137	Mr	Flores Denis
MPPB072	Mr	Formosa Ventura Kenneth
MPPB148	Dr	Mallia Marianna
MPPB147	Ms	Spiteri Kim
MPPB067	Ms	Swain Maryanne

Child & Adolescent Psychology

MPPB083	Ms	Dela Samantha
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Registered Partnerships

Maia Psychology Centre

**Appendix F: Interview Schedule English**

1. Could you tell me a little about your pet?
  - a. What was your pet's name?
  - b. What kind of animal was s/he?
  - c. How long had you had [pet's name]?
2. How would you describe your relationship with [pet's name]?
  - a. Was [pet's name] your only pet?
  - b. What was it you liked most about [pet's name]?
3. Can you tell me how [pet's name] died?
  - a. How long is it since [pet's name] died?
  - b. Was [pet's name]'s death expected?
  - c. Was [pet's name] ill or in an accident?
  - d. If [pet's name] was ill, how did this affect your everyday life?
  - e. Did you decide to have [pet's name] put to sleep?
4. Tell me about how you made your decision whether or not to have [pet's name] put to sleep.
  - a. Was the information that your vet gave you important in making your decision?
  - b. Did the advice and help you received from your vet make your decision easier?
5. Can you describe your experience of going to the vet?
  - a. Did your vet explain to you what was happening?
  - b. Did you understand the explanation?
  - c. Were you happy with what your vet did?
  - d. Did your vet talk to you about what you wanted done with [pet's name]'s body?
6. How did you feel when [pet's name] died?
  - a. How did [pet's name]'s death influence your daily routine?
  - b. How did your family members feel when [pet's name] died?
  - c. If you had other pets at the time how did they behave?
  - d. Do you think they missed [pet's name]?
7. What things made the time around [pet's name]'s death and afterwards difficult?
  - a. What things did you do to help you cope with [pet's name]'s death?
  - b. Did you have a ceremony for [pet's name]?
  - c. Did you get a new pet quickly?
8. Now that you think back on your experience at that time, what were the most helpful things any one did for you and [pet's name]?
9. Was there anything else that helped (or would have helped) at this time?



### Appendix G: Interview Schedule, Maltese.

Intervista Gwida: Partecipanti Malti

1. Tista' 'tgħidli f'it dwar il-pet tiegħek?
  - a. X'kien l-isem il-pet tiegħek?
  - b. X'tip ta 'animal kien hu / hi?
  - c. Kemm kien dam għandek [isem animal]?
  
2. Kif tiddeskrivi r-relazzjoni tiegħek ma '[isem animal]?'
  - a. Kien [isem animal] l-uniku pet tiegħek?
  - b. X'iktar kien joġbok dwar [isem animal]?
  
3. Tista' 'tgħidli kif miet [isem animal]?'
  - a. Kemm ilu li miet [isem animal]?
  - b. Kien mistenni il-mewt ta [isem animal] ?
  - c. [Issem animal] kien miet marid jew f'incident?
  - d. Jekk [l-isem pet] kien marid, dan kif affitwatlek il-ħajja ta 'kuljum tiegħek?
  - e. Inti iddeċidejt li traqqad [ l-isem animal] ?
  
4. Tista 'tgħidli dwar kif inti għamlet id-deċiżjoni tiegħek biex traqqad lil [isem animal] ?
  - a. L-informazzjoni li tagħak il veterinarju kien importanti biex tieħu id-deċiżjoni tiegħek?
  - b. Il-parir u l- jgħinuna li tak il veterinarju ħinek tagħmel id-deċiżjoni tiegħek aktar faċli?
  
5. Tista' 'tiddeskrivi l-esperjenza tiegħek ta meta mort għand il veterinarju?
  - a. Il veterinarju spjega x'kien qed jgħri?
  - b. F'himt l-ispejgazzjoni?
  - c. Kont kuntent b'dak li għamel il-veterinarju?
  - d. Il-veterinarju kellek miegħek dwar dak li ridt jsir b' ġisem '[isem animal]?
  
6. Kif ħassejt meta miet [isem animal]?'
  - a. Il-mewt ta [isem animal] kif influwenzat ir-rutina ta 'kuljum tiegħek?
  - b. Il membri tal-familja tiegħek kif ħassew meta] miet [isem animal]?
  - c. Kellek animali oħra dak iż-żmien, jekk iva kif aġixxew?
  - d. Taħseb li im-missjaw lil-[isem animal]?
  
7. X'affarijiet għamli iż-żmien tal-mewt u wara diffiċli?
  - a. X'għamilt biex għand lilek innifsek wara il-mewt ta '[isem animal]'
  - b. Kellu ċerimonja għal [isem animal]?
  - c. Inti ġibt pet ieħor?
  - d. Jekk iva, għada ħafna żmien?
  
8. Issa li inti taħseb lura fuq l-esperjenza tiegħek f'dak iż-żmien, liema kienu l-aktar affarijiet utli li x'ħadt għamel għalik u għal [isem animal]?
  
9. Kien hemm xi ħaġa oħra li għen (jew setta 'għen ) f'dan il-ħin?

### Appendix H: University and Research Ethics Committee Approval

Michelle FREUDO  
SWB065/2017

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
*Check list to be included with UREC proposal form*

Please make sure to tick **ALL** the items. Incomplete forms will not be accepted.

		YES	NOT APP.
1a.	Recruitment letter / Information sheet for subjects, in English	X	
1b.	Recruitment letter / Information sheet for subjects, in Maltese	X	
2a	Consent form, in English, signed by supervisor, and including your contact details	X	
2b	Consent form, in Maltese, signed by supervisor, and including your contact details	X	
3a	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in English		X
3b	In the case of children or other vulnerable groups, consent forms for parents/ guardians, in Maltese		X
4a	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc, in English	X	
4b	Tests, questionnaires, interview or focus group questions, etc, in Maltese	X	
5a	Other institutional approval <i>for access to subjects</i> : Health Division, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health, Curia...		X
5b	Other institutional approval <i>for access to data</i> : Registrar, Data Protection Officer Health Division/Hospital, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Department of Public Health...		X
5c	Approval from person <i>directly responsible for subjects</i> : Medical Consultants, Nursing Officers, Head of School...		X

Received by Faculty office on	16/03/2017
Discussed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee on	07/04/2017
Discussed by university Research Ethics Committee on	

1

## UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

**Request for Approval of Human Subjects Research**

Please type. Handwritten forms will not be accepted

You may follow this format on separate sheets or use additional pages if necessary.

FROM: <i>(name, address for correspondence)</i>  Michelle Frendo 9 Sisters Str Paola PLA1041	PROJECT TITLE:  <b>Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet</b>
TELEPHONE: 27571800/77461095	
E-MAIL <a href="mailto:shellfrendo@gmail.com">shellfrendo@gmail.com</a>	
COURSE AND YEAR: MASTER IN COUNSELLING 2014-2018	
DURATION OF ENTIRE PROJECT:  MAY 2017 – APRIL 2018	FACULTY SUPERVISOR'S NAME:  DR RUTH FALZON

ANTICIPATED FUNDING SOURCE:  <i>(include grant or contract number if known)</i> Not applicable
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<p>1. Please give a brief summary of the purpose of the research, in non-technical language.</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals facing the impending death and death of a companion animal can be better supported.</p> <p>The rationale behind the study came from both personal experiences and from watching others trying to come to terms with the fact that their companion animal may soon die. Audio-recorded individual semi-structured interviews will be used. The data elicited will be used to make recommendations for further research, training, policies and practice.</p>
<p>2. Give details of procedures that relate to subjects' participation</p> <p>(a) How are subjects recruited? What inducement is offered? (<i>Append copy of letter or advertisement or poster, if any.</i>)</p> <p>Participants will be recruited from the general public through a gatekeeper Dr Mirelle Vella (Veterinary).</p> <p>To ensure that potential participants are provided with an opt-in decision a recruitment letter (Appendix A) with the accompanying relevant Maltese and English information letter (Appendix B and C) and consent forms (Appendix D and E) for participants will be sent to Dr Mirelle Vella from the Blue Cross Veterinary Clinic. Once the participants have accepted, a consent form will be given. Given that participants might not all have a SEC level of English, it was deemed necessary to present information letters and consent forms in both English and Maltese. Dr Mirelle Vella has given preliminary consent for dissemination should ethical clearance be granted (Appendix F)</p> <p>Participation will be voluntary and the participants will have the right to withdraw from this research at any time, without the need to give any explanation. Further transcripts and the results chapter will be given to the participants for verification and any amendments. Once the dissertation process is complete, participants will be given a copy of the work.</p>





(b) Salient characteristics of subjects—number who will participate, age range, sex, institutional affiliation, other special criteria:

Six to eight participants will take part in the research

- a) Aged 18 +
- b) Have lost an animal companion not less than six months and not more than two years.

(c) Describe how permission has been obtained from cooperating institution(s)—school, hospital, organization, prison, or other relevant organization. (*Append letters.*) Is the approval of another Research Ethics Committee required?

Appendix F evidences that the provisional permission has been obtained by Dr Vella from the Blue Cross Veterinary Clinic, should this proposal be given ethical clearance.

(d) What do subjects do, or what is done to them, or what information is gathered? (*Append copies of instructions or tests or questionnaires.*) How many times will observations, tests, etc., be conducted? How long will their participation take?

Participants who accept to participate will be asked to attend one individual audio-recorded semi-structured interview which should last around an hour. Interviews will be audio-recorded and carried out at a venue, date and time convenient to the participants. Interviews will be carried out in the participants' choice of oral language. Appendix G and H presents the interview guide in English and Maltese respectively.

To ensure credibility and audit trail, participants will be given their transcript as well as the results chapter to provide them with the opportunity to clarify and confirm whether the transcripts truly represent their voices.

(e) Which of the following data categories are collected? Please indicate 'Yes' or 'No'.

Data that reveals – race or ethnic origin	NO
political opinions	NO
religious or philosophical beliefs	YES
trade union memberships	NO
health	NO
sex life	NO
genetic information	NO

3. How do you explain the research to subjects and obtain their informed consent to participate? (If in writing, append a copy of consent form.) If subjects are minors, mentally infirm, or otherwise not legally competent to consent to participation, how is their assent obtained and from whom is proxy consent obtained? How is it made clear to subjects that they can quit the study at any time?

Participants will be briefed about the nature and aim of the study through the detailed information letter (Appendix B and C) which they will receive through Dr Vella. This information letter also encourages participants to address any queries related to the study by communicating with me or my supervisor.

The consent form (Appendix D and E) clearly explains the rights of the participants, including the right to withdraw and that they may do so at any point in the research and their data would then not be used. The contents of the consent form will again be discussed right before the individual audio-recorded semi-structured interview.

4 .Do subjects risk *any* harm—physical, psychological, legal, social—by participating in the research? Are the risks necessary? What safeguards do you take to minimize the risks?

Given the research question, subjects do not risk any harm by participating in this research. If the process might evoke particular emotions that might affect participants' well-being I will present the participants with a list of helping professionals (Appendix I). Due to the multiplicity of roles I would not be able to conduct such sessions myself.

I will ensure quality and integrity in my research. I will seek informed consent of the participants and will explain to them the aim of my study. Anonymity of the research respondents will be respected and participants will be given the option to choose their own pseudonym. All audio-recordings will be destroyed a year from the publication of the dissertation. As noted above, I will also ensure that participation will be entirely voluntary through the process of an opt-in procedure, where participants will have the right to withdraw from this research exercise at any time.

5. Are subjects deliberately deceived in *any* way? If so, what is the nature of the deception? Is it likely to be significant to subjects? Is there any other way to conduct the research that would not involve deception, and, if so, why have you not chosen that alternative? What explanation for the deception do you give to subjects following their participation?

Subjects will not be deceived in any way.

They will be duly informed that their participation would be on a voluntary basis and that they are free to withdraw from participating.

To protect their identity, the participants' names will be changed into pseudonyms when writing up this dissertation. Participants will be given the option to choose their own pseudonyms.

After the participants give their permission to have their interviews recorded, they will be ensured that all recordings would be destroyed a year after the end of the study.

6. How will participation in this research benefit subjects? If subjects will be "debriefed" or receive information about the research project following its conclusion, how do you ensure the educational value of the process? (*Include copies of any debriefing or educational materials*)

Through this research, participants will be given the opportunity to voice their experiences, which will lead to recommendations for further research, policies, training and practice.

Further, not only will debriefing take place right after the individual semi-structure interview between the participants and myself, but participants will be able to review their transcripts and give feedback on the results chapter.

I consider debriefing an important ethical consideration as it gives participants the space and opportunity to process the data collection exercise and the researchers to ensure that participants are fully informed about the research process and that they are comfortable with the data collection process. During the debriefing process, I will again discuss the consent form with them and remind them that:

- (a) I would be sending them the transcript for their feedback;
- (b) Later on I would send the results chapter for their feedback;
- (c) Give them a copy of the work after the dissertation process is complete (December 2018); and
- (d) They are free to withdraw from the research and that if they do, their data would not be used





TERMS AND CONDITIONS FOR APPROVAL IN TERMS OF THE DATA PROTECTION ACT

- Personal data shall only be collected and processed for the specific research purpose.
- The data shall be adequate, relevant and not excessive in relation to the processing purpose.
- All reasonable measures shall be taken to ensure the correctness of personal data.
- Personal data shall not be disclosed to third parties and may only be required by the University or the supervisor for verification purposes. All necessary measures shall be implemented to ensure confidentiality and, where possible, data shall be anonymized.
- Unless otherwise authorized by the University Research Ethics Committee, the researcher shall obtain the consent from the data subject (respondent) and provide him with the following information: The researcher's identity and habitual residence, the purpose of processing and the recipients to whom personal data may be disclosed. The data subject shall also be informed about his rights to access, rectify, and where applicable erase the data concerning him.

I, the undersigned hereby undertake to abide by the terms and conditions for approval as attached to this application.

I, the undersigned, also give my consent to the University of Malta's Research Ethics Committee to process my personal data for the purpose of evaluating my request and other matters related to this application. I also understand that, I can request in writing a copy of my personal information. I shall also request rectification, blocking or erasure of such personal data that has not been processed in accordance with the Act.

Signature: *A. Frendo*

<p>APPLICANT'S SIGNATURE: <i>I hereby declare that I will not start my research on human subjects before UREC approval</i></p> <p><i>A. Frendo</i></p> <p>DATE March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017</p>	<p>FACULTY SUPERVISOR'S SIGNATURE I have reviewed this completed application and I am satisfied with the adequacy of the proposed research design and the measures proposed for the protection of human subjects.</p> <p><i>[Signature]</i></p> <p>DATE March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017</p>
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*Return the completed application to your faculty Research Ethics Committee to be completed by Faculty Research Ethics Committee*

We have examined the above proposal and advise

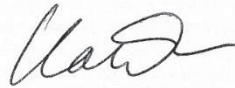
**Acceptance**

**Refusal**

**Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature



Date

7/4/17

*To be completed by University Research Ethics Committee*

We have examined the above proposal and grant

**Acceptance**

**Refusal**

**Conditional acceptance**

For the following reason/s:

Signature



Date

15/5/17



### Appendix I: Consent Form English

Name of Researcher: Michelle Frendo  
 Mobile No: 77461095  
 Email: shellfrendo@gmail.com  
 Title of dissertation:  
 Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet

Statement of purpose of the study: I will be exploring the ways in which individual prepared and dealt with the loss of their animal companion.

Methods of data collection: Individual audio-recorded semi-structured interviews.

Use made of the information: For dissertation research purposes only.

With this Consent Form, I, Michelle Frendo, promise to keep to the following conditions throughout the whole research process. I will abide by the following conditions:

Your real name and identity will not be used at any point in the study and you have the option to choose your own pseudonym.

1. You are free to withdraw yourself from the study at any point in time and for whatever reason without there being any consequences. In the case that you withdraw, all records and information collected will be destroyed.
2. There will be no deception in the data collection process of any form.
3. The interview will be audio-recorded.
4. You will be given a copy of your transcript, as well as the results chapter, for your feedback and verification,
5. Your audio-recording will be destroyed one year after the research process is complete.
6. A copy of the research will be handed to you through a CD or as a hard copy at your request.

Participant: I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to these conditions.

Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to the conditions.

Signature of researcher Ms Michelle Frendo

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of dissertation supervisor

Dr Ruth Falzon (ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt/79092910)

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J: Consent Form Maltese

Formola ta' Kunsens

Isem ir-Riċerkatur: Michelle Frendo  
 Nru tat-Telefown: 99209345  
 Indirizzi elettronici: shellfrendo@gmail.com  
 Titlu tad-dissertazzjoni:  
 Rainbow Bridge: Preparing and Dealing with the Loss of a Beloved Pet

Dikjarazzjoni tal-iskop tal-istudju: Jien se nesplorja kif l-individwi jippreparaw ruħhom u jiffaċċjaw il-mewt ta' animala maħbubin tagħhom.

Metodi ta' ġbir tad-data: Intervisti individwali semi-strutturati u r-rekordjati b'mod awdjo.  
 Kif se tintuża l-informazzjoni: Bi skop ta' riċerka għad-dissertazzjoni biss.

B'din il-Formola ta' Kunsens jien, Michelle Frendo, imwiegħed li nonora l-kundizzjonijiet li ġejjin matul il-proċess kollu tar-riċerka. Jien se ninrabat b'dawn il-kundizzjonijiet:

L-isem reali/l-identità tiegħek mhuma se jintużaw f'ebda stadju tal-istudju u inti għandek il-possibbiltà li tagħzel il-pseudonimu tiegħek.

1. Inti liberu/libera li tirtira mill-istudju fi kwalunkwe stadju u għal kwalunkwe raġuni mingħajr ma jkun hemm konsegwenzi. Fil-każ li tirtira, ir-rekords u l-informazzjoni kollha miġbura jiġu meqruda.
2. Mhu se jkun hemm ebda forma ta' qerq fil-proċess tal-ġbir tad-data
3. L-intervista se tkun irrekordjata b'mod awdjo.
4. Inti se tingħata kopja tat-traskrizzjoni tiegħek, kif ukoll il-kapitlu dwar ir-riżultati, għar-reazzjonijiet u l-verifika min-naħa tiegħek.
5. Il-materjal irrekordjat se jinqered sena wara li jkun intemm il-proċess tar-riċerka.
- VI. Tingħata kopja tar-riċerka fuq CD jew f'għamla stampata fuq talba tiegħek.

### Parteċipant

Jien, \_\_\_\_\_ naqbel mal-kundizzjonijiet:

Firma tal-partiċipant \_\_\_\_\_ Data \_\_\_\_\_

### Riċerkatur

Jien, Michelle Frendo naqbel mal-kundizzjonijiet.

Firma ta riċerkatur \_\_\_\_\_ Data: \_\_\_\_\_

Firma tas-superviżur tad-dissertazzjoni: Dr Ruth Falzon

\_\_\_\_\_ Data: \_\_\_\_\_

(ruth.falzon@um.edu.mt/79092910)

**Appendix K: Training For Counsellors**

Course Name	Website	Course Content Site
Pet Bereavement Support Training	<a href="http://www.theralphsite.com/index.php?idPage=23">http://www.theralphsite.com/index.php?idPage=23</a>	
Pet Bereavement Counsellor Diploma Course	<a href="https://www.centreofexcellence.com/shop/pet-bereavement-counsellor-diploma-course/">https://www.centreofexcellence.com/shop/pet-bereavement-counsellor-diploma-course/</a>	<a href="https://www.centreofexcellence.com/shop/pet-bereavement-counsellor-diploma-course/">https://www.centreofexcellence.com/shop/pet-bereavement-counsellor-diploma-course/</a>
Certificate in Pet Bereavement Counselling  The Blackford Centre for Pet Bereavement	<a href="https://www.inst.org/pet-bereavement-courses/index.htm">https://www.inst.org/pet-bereavement-courses/index.htm</a>	<a href="https://www.inst.org/pet-bereavement-courses/syllabus.htm">https://www.inst.org/pet-bereavement-courses/syllabus.htm</a>
Pet Bereavement Counsellor Course	<a href="https://www.animal-job.co.uk/pet-bereavement-course.html">https://www.animal-job.co.uk/pet-bereavement-course.html</a>	<a href="https://www.animal-job.co.uk/pet-bereavement-course.html">https://www.animal-job.co.uk/pet-bereavement-course.html</a>
APLB Online Seminars  Pet Loss Counselor Training	<a href="https://aplb.org/training/counselor_training.html">https://aplb.org/training/counselor_training.html</a>	<a href="https://aplb.org/training/counselor_training.html">https://aplb.org/training/counselor_training.html</a>

**Appendix L: Training for Vets**

Course Name	Website	Course Content Site
Pet Bereavement Support CPD course for professionals	<a href="https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support-course-professionals">https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support-course-professionals</a>	<a href="https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support-course-professionals">https://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support-course-professionals</a>
Pet Bereavement Counselling in Veterinary Practice – Online Vet Nurse CPD	<a href="http://ecpd-vetnurse.com/2012/03/01/pet-bereavement-counselling-in-veterinary-practice-online-vet-nurse-cpd/">http://ecpd-vetnurse.com/2012/03/01/pet-bereavement-counselling-in-veterinary-practice-online-vet-nurse-cpd/</a>	Pet Bereavement Counselling in Veterinary Practice – Online Vet Nurse CPD

**Appendix M: MACP Proposal Letter**

Michelle Frendo

December, (Date to be added) 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

I have completed my Master in Counselling which included a dissertation on how people prepare and deal with the death of an animal-companion. The results indicate that there is a lack of public awareness on how people are affected by the death of a beloved animal-companion. The data also evidence that the inability to have one's grief acknowledged results with individuals experiencing disenfranchised grief.

Recommendations elicited from these findings lead me to communicate with my association to propose that I, with the help of the Malta Association for the Counselling Profession, work towards raising awareness of this situation. I propose to do this by kindly asking MACP to apply for national funds through the Small Initiative Scheme Projects to prepare and distribute a pamphlet which provides information about caregiver's burden, anticipatory grief, disenfranchised grief and the necessity for support. These could then be distributed to veterinarians' and doctors' offices. The pamphlets could also include issues which arise when one is contemplating euthanasia. One could also work in conjunction with veterinarians and other animal societies.

I look forward to meeting with you, to further discuss the possibility of this project.

Thanking you in advance

Yours Sincerely

Michelle Frendo

## Appendix N: Excerpt from Andrew's Interview

<p>Andrew: Il-kelb anke qabel ma ġiet il-vet ma baqax dak il-kelb, tifhem? Bdejt narah sejjer lura bis-sigħat .</p>	<p>Andrew: Even before the vet came the dog wasn't the same dog, you understand? I could see him declining by the hour.</p>	<p>Could already sense the dog was not well. (Anticipatory Grief)</p>
<p>Researcher: Inti bdejt tħossu jġifieri? Kif kont qed tħossok dak iż-żmien?</p>	<p>Researcher: So you started feel it? How did you feel during that time?</p>	
<p>Andrew: Tibda tħossok ħażin, tħossok ħażin ovvjament, jġifieri, <i>plus</i> li kien għaddej fuq il-kura u hekk. Anka x-xogħol, u taħseb, u kif ċemplitli u hekk fil-fatti.</p>	<p>Andrew: You start to feel bad, you feel bad obviously, plus that he was on medication and like that. Even at work you think about it, and when she called me in fact.</p>	<p>Feeling anxious about the animal's health. Affecting daily life as thinking about him. Could sense the animal's death.</p>
<p>Researcher: Kont qisek qed tistennieha?</p>	<p>Researcher: It's as if you were waiting for it?</p>	<p>Anticipatory Grief</p>
<p>Andrew: Ma kienx qiegħed sew u bdejt narah ħafna sejjer lura. Mhux dak il-Lionel li kif nidħol jitle' miegħi u jifagħni fl-art, tifhem. Kif niġi jġġennen, jġġennen, kont narah il-kelb, u mgħaxxex, minn wara telaq, beda jaqa' bum jaqa'. Imbagħad dik ix-xi ħaġa li narah ibati jien imbagħad.</p>	<p>Andrew: He wasn't well, I saw him going downhill, he wasn't the Lionel that used to come and greet me and push me down to the floor when I used to come in. He used to go crazy when I came home, and then you see him become really subdued and unable to carry his own weight from behind, he use to fall down boom, when I saw him suffering.</p>	<p>Loss of the animal he had, getting older a different animal. Animal used to greet him, feelings of belonging, security. Health was deteriorating, start to worry.</p>

<p>Researcher: lebsa hux?</p> <p>Andrew: Ma, nippreferi mbagħad li Alla jieħdu, speċi u jingabar mal-oħrajn. Milli dak it-tip miskin toqgħod tara dik it-tbatija <i>man</i>.</p>	<p>Researcher: It's hard isn't it?</p> <p>Andrew: I would have preferred that God take him and he goes with the others. Then poor thing, you witness that suffering.</p>	<p>Religious belief, belief in after-life. Did not euthanize, but did not want to see him suffer.</p>
<p>Researcher: lebsa ħafna, ħafna iebsa.</p>	<p>Researcher: It's very hard.</p>	
<p>Andrew: Naħseb li min jemmen f'Alla min imut imur fejn Alla. Qed tifhem? U hekk u għall-anqas ma jbatix.</p>	<p>Andrew: I think, those that believe in God, when someone dies they go next to God. Do you understand? And at least they don't suffer</p>	<p>Religious beliefs, way of coping with death</p>
<p>Researcher: Mhe</p>	<p>Researcher: Mhe</p>	
<p>Andrew: U għall-anqas ma jbatix.</p> <p>Researcher: Meta miet ħassejtek irrabjat għax miet hekk? Għax telaq u ħalliekom.</p>	<p>Andrew: At least they don't suffer.</p> <p>Researcher: When he died did you feel angry that he had died? That he had left and left you.</p>	
<p>Andrew: L-ewwel ħaġa li ġietni f'moħħi kien in-nuqqas tiegħi lejha.</p>	<p>Andrew: The first thing that came to mind were my shortcomings towards him.</p>	<p>Feelings of guilt after the animal died. Phase of grief.</p>

## Appendix O: Excerpt from Deidra's Interview

<p>D: Waqt li dan (Don) kien jiġi jaħdem hawn kien iġibu miegħu tiela' u niežel warajh u kien jieħu pjaċir.</p> <p>Imbagħad ħa jintefagħlek hekk bilqiegħda, imma basta qiegħed miegħek. Postu meta ġejna ġod-dar il-ġdida, hawnhekk kien ġol-bitħa, għandi <i>L-shape</i> u tajtu parti mil-L għalih, għamiltlu <i>gate</i>, jiġifieri kien joqgħod hemmhekk u meta nkunu hawnhekk kont niftaħlu.</p> <p>Kien jidħol u joqgħod naqra ħdejna u dawn l-affarijiet.</p>	<p>D: When Don used to come and work here he used to being him with him. He use to follow him up and down the stairs and he use to enjoy it. He would lay down, but the main thing is that he is with you. When we moved into the new house his place was in the yard, I have an L-shape and we gave him a part of the L we made him a gate, he use to stay there. And when we were here I use to open for him and he use to come and stay next to us.</p>	<p>The dog was a companion for the husband. Dog enjoyed being with people.</p> <p>The dog had to stay in the yard due to his bad behaviour when they weren't home.</p> <p>Animal was not really a companion to the wife as she made him stay outside.</p>
<p>Imbagħad, darba fost l-oħrajn bdejt ninnota li l-kelb beda jkollu problemi b'saqajh. Issa dan qed ngħidlek qatt ma kellu problemi ta' saħħa kien enerġetiku għad-dinja, kien jaqbeż anke minn bejt għall-ieħor. Konna ngħidu llallu ara kif jaqbeż mingħajr ma jmiss maċ-ċint.</p>	<p>Then one day I started to notice that the dog started to have problems with his legs, but like I said he never had health issues He was really energetic, he use to jump from one roof to another. We use to say wow, look at how he jumps right over the walls, without touching them.</p>	<p>Symptoms of illness.</p> <p>The dog started to show symptoms of illness. It was not expected even though she was already anticipating his death as he was getting older.</p>
<p>Imbagħad bdejt ninnota li qed imur minn siequ. U lejn l-aħħar kont ħriġt jiena u kien qiegħed hawn il-kelb. U rajtu jimxi flok bil-<i>paw</i> hekk,</p>	<p>I started to notice his legs started to get weaker and towards the end I had gone out and the dog was here, I noticed that instead of</p>	<p>Did not call vet straight away allowed the symptoms to get worse</p> <p>Turned to vet for support.</p>



<p>kien qed jimxi hekk u kont ċempilt il-vet niftakar... u għedtilha ejja arahuli naqra jien. U niftakar li r-raġel kien ħaduli u kienu tawh xi <i>steriods</i> u anke pilloli. L-għada ġie qisu mhux hu. Għedt ejja jien, <i>thanks God it was worth the money</i>. Ma xtaqtux imut ovvjament, għax ara kemm kien ilu għandna.</p> <p>R: Kemm kellu mela?</p> <p>D: 11 <i>years</i>, xi 11 <i>years</i>, u l-għada ngħidlek ġie, ħareġ barra ħdejna. Niftakar kienu qed jarmaw għall-festa u beda jħares u beda jimxi u dana. Imbagħad kont qed nizbogħ il-ħadid tat-taraġ u ma dañħalniehx, għax jien għedt minħabba r-riħa, u mort biex noħroġ barra biex niftaħlu xħin lestejt u nsibu mal-art daqshekk.</p> <p>R: <i>Just hekk all of a sudden?</i></p> <p>D: ... kienet ġejja terġa' tarah il-<i>vet</i>. Għedtilha, bħal speċi kellha l-appuntament biex tiġi, u niftakar ma kinitx</p>	<p>walking with his paw like this it was folded backwards. I remember I had called the vet and I asked her to come and see him, and my husband took him and they gave him steroids and pills. The following day he seemed to have come back to normal, I was relieved and said thanks God, it was worth the money. I didn't want him to die, because we had had him for a long time.</p> <p>R: How old was he?</p> <p>D: He was around 11 years old and the next day he came outside next to us, I remember they were putting up the feast decorations, he was looking and walking. Then I remember I was painting the stair rails and we didn't bring him inside, because of the paint fumes. When I finished I went outside to open for him and I found him on the floor, that's it.</p> <p>R: So just like that, all of a sudden?</p> <p>D: like that, the vet was going to come and see him again, I told her, I remember she had an appointment to</p>	<p>Husband took him to vet, vet did not come even though he was a large dog. Religion, faith, Felt relieved Larry seemed to be getting better. Did not want to lose him, did not regret the Money spent False hope as she saw him better, so was not prepared for his passing.</p> <p>He died a natural death. Was alone. No regrets that she was not with him.</p> <p>Vet did not keep appointment, Feels like vet may be to blame since she didn't come to see him.</p> <p>Death was a shock even though she knew he was unwell, but had thought he was better. Deidra had a physical reaction.</p> <p>Anticipatory grief due to age and physical appearance</p>
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<p>ġiet imbagħad qaltli li kienet sa tittawwal jumejn wara. U għedtilha, il-kelb jidher mhux ħażin... u ma laħqitx, ma laħqitx ġiet. Friġt barra u niftakar rajtu mitluq mal-art, u minn ħalqu... u bdejt ngħajjat għax ħadtha bi kbira u ġejt niġri, u telagħli ġismi kollu bir-<i>rash</i> bil-qatgħa... 'il dan (lir-raġel) kont għedtlu, ftit qabel bdejt ngħidlu Madonna Larry x'qiegħed jikber, bdejt ngħidlu l-biża' tiegħi hi li xi darba nsibu mejjet jien. Qisni bdejt inħoss l-affari ġejja u hekk kienet.</p>	<p>come and she didn't come and then she told me she would come in two days' time. I told her the dog seems not too bad and she didn't get to him in time. I remember I went outside and I saw him spread on the floor with that from his mouth. I started to scream, I ran in here my body got full of a rash with the shock. I had just told him, wow how Lincoln is growing, I told him my fear is that one day I will find him dead.</p>	<p>Vet did not keep appointment.</p> <p>Not present at time of death.</p> <p>A somatic reaction to his death.</p> <p>Anticipatory grief, seeing him get older</p>
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**Appendix P: Excerpt from Emma's Interview**

<p>E: Katie, Yorkshire ġibtha meta kellha xi <i>two months, three months</i> għax kienet diġà kbira, il-<i>baby</i> tiegħi u mietet meta kellha <i>10 years</i>.</p>	<p>E: Katie is a Yorkshire, I got her when she was 2 months, 3 months, I she was already big, my baby, and she died when she was 10 years</p>	<p>Considered pet as her child.</p>
<p>R: <i>10 years</i>.</p>	<p>R: 10 years</p>	
<p>E: Imma kellha <i>10 years</i> mimlija tagħha. Hi kienet <i>lucky</i> għax kienet għandi, u jien kont <i>lucky</i> ħafna li kelli lilha.</p>	<p>E: she had 10 full years, she was lucky that I had her and I was very lucky that I had her.</p>	<p>Believes they were both lucky to have each other.</p>
<p>R: So anke inti tħossok furtunata li kellek lilha?</p>	<p>R: So you also feel fortunate that you had her?</p>	<p>Lucky to have Katie</p>
<p>E: Iż-żgur, żgur ħafna <i>lucky</i>.</p>	<p>E: Yes, for sure, very lucky.</p>	
<p>R: X'relazzjoni kellek, <i>what sort of a relationship</i> kellek magħha?</p>	<p>R: What sort of a relationship did you have with her?</p>	<p>Relationship was one of mutual understanding. Believes they can communicate non-verbally. Believes they both</p>
<p>E: Ehe jien naħseb kont nifhem lilha, emm u hi tifhem lili. Speċi ta anke ħarsa tagħha jien ninduna xi trid, jekk forsi tridx toħroġ, jew tridx tiekol, jew tridx toqgħod ħdejja, jew ehe jien nifhem u hi tifhimni wkoll hekk. Il-ħin kollu maġenbi, il-ħin kollu tħobb tiffissid, il-ħin kollu mmellisha, u jien</p>	<p>E: I think I use to understand her and she use to understand me. For example even with her look I use to understand what she wanted. If she wanted to go out, if she wanted to eat, if she wanted to stay with me, ehe I understand her and she understands me, all the time near me, she use to</p>	<p>understood each other. Find solace and comfort in each other's company. Use to provide a sense of belonging and security, however also had a sense of being needed.</p>

<p>kont nibbraxxjaha, il-ħin kollu nibbraxxjaha u fl-istess ħin kont noqgħod nimmassaġġjaha hekk.</p> <p>R: Jigifieri kontu tiffhmu 'l xulxin?</p> <p>E: Ehe kelli l-lingwa tagħha. Jien kont nifhimha lilha. It-tinbiħ differenti, nifhimhom għaliex tinbaħ, jekk hux biex tiekol, jew biex nifħilha xi bieb. U hi ehe l-istess ħaġa jekk tara lili pereżempju <i>down</i>, jew fuq is-sufan tiġi mill-ewwel ħdejjja. Allavolja fl-aħħar qisha ma kinitx qed tiflaħ biex titla' għax kienet żdiedet fil-<i>weight</i> u hekk imma ehe kienet tagħmel mezz li titla' ħdejjja.</p> <p>R: Qisek tgħid mhux bħal animal, kont tittrattaha iktar.</p> <p>E: Le</p> <p>R: <i>Much closer than an animal.</i></p>	<p>like to cuddle all the time, I use to stroke her all the time, I use to brush her all the time and at the same time I use to massage her.</p> <p>R: So you use to understand each other?</p> <p>E: Ehe, I had her language, I use to understand her. The barks use to be different and I used to understand why she used to bark, whether it was for her to eat or to open a door for her. And she was the same, if she saw me down or on the sofa she used to come near me straight away. Towards the end it was as if she was finding it hard to get up because she had put on weight. She used to try her hardest to get up next to me.</p> <p>R: It's as if you are saying you didn't treat her as an animal, more, you used to treat her more...</p> <p>E: No</p> <p>R: Much closer than an animal.</p>	<p>Believes she had Katie's language and could understand her needs.(attachment)</p> <p>Also believed Katie could read her moods and meet her needs. (belonging/ attachment)</p> <p>Realized Katie was getting older. (Anticipatory)</p> <p>Treated her as a family member, not as an animal.</p>
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<p>E: Le, iħobbuk iktar, iktar mit-tfal naħseb, mhux naħseb.</p> <p>R: Ħassejt li kont tħobbha aktar milli kieku kellek it-tfal?</p> <p>R: Lilha biss kellek? Katie biss kellek?</p> <p>E: <i>Pet</i> ija ehe.</p> <p>R: Dak il-ħin ma kellek 'il ħadd magħha ?</p> <p>E: Għandna l-qattus, imma l-qattus iktar mhux tiegħi u l-qattus jaf li mhux tiegħi. Fil-fatt kemm ilha li mietet il-kelba xorta qisni jagħtini <i>hard time</i> biex infissdu. Hu ma jkunx irid jiġi, qisu jgħid issa għax mietet il-kelba ġejja ħdejja.</p> <p>R: Għalkemm kellek it-tnejn xorta hi kienet tiegħek?</p> <p>E: Iwa hi <i>n-number one</i> tiegħi.</p>	<p>E: No, I think they love you much more than your kids, I don't think.</p> <p>R: You feel you use to love her more that your own kids</p> <p>R: Was she the only pet you had? Did you only have Katie?</p> <p>E: Pet yes</p> <p>R: At the time did you have any one else with her?</p> <p>E: We have the cat, the cat isn't really mine, the cat knows he isn't mine, in fact even though my dog died, he still does not want to come to me to cuddly him. He still gives me a hard time. He still doesn't want to come, it's like he says, and now that the dog has died she is coming next to me.</p> <p>R:Even though you had both of them, she was still yours?</p> <p>E: Yes, she was my number one.</p>	<p>Felt that she loved her more than a child. (Emma had an 18 year old son that I did not know at about).</p> <p>Even though she had a cat, Katie was still special as she met many of her needs. Was higher in the hierarchy of attachment relationships.</p> <p>Having another animal did not make Katie's death any easier to accept.</p> <p>Emma also did not feel comfortable approaching the cat as she felt she was using him.</p>
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**Appendix Q: Excerpt from Mary's Interview**

<p>R: You mentioned that no body realised, how long was it from the arthritis till she passed away?</p>	
<p>M: A whole year.</p>	
<p>R: A whole year, thinking back now, how do you feel that a whole year passed? I imagine you took her to the vet quite a lot and medicines, how does it make you feel?</p>	<p>Vets did not realise what Sheila had. It took them a whole year to give her a prognosis</p>
<p>M: I changed vets three times to get second opinions and so I tried to understand what was going on. You do kind of realise that something is wrong and you want to do as much as possible to help her. I was kind of very upset that they didn't tell me before, and of the condition. Because, like the condition she had could of easily been treated with this pill and because, like we prolonged it so long her body was in shock kind of and it couldn't take it anymore. So she died because the treatment was given to her so late. But I changed vets, I tried everything possible. But apparently it was an English vet that realised and she told me this was quite common, so (laugh) that upset me even more. But there was nothing I could do then.</p>	<p>Tried to do what she could, got many second opinions, and changed many vets. Anticipatory grief as she realised something was wrong. Helplessness as could not do anything to help her get better. What Sheila had was curable and a common illness in dogs. Angry at vets for not realising what was wrong. Died because vets realised to late what she had. Dog suffered un-necessarily. Upset at vets</p>
<p>R: So what you are saying, so it sounds like you did all you could do from your side, what about anger, were you angry at the vet's for not realising before?</p>	

<p>M: I was, for a time but I had to understand that her conditions weren't that clear, as in because she had other stuff complicating whatever she had. It was hard for them like to pinpoint exactly what was wrong. It was so hard for us to take her to the vet because she was so heavy and I couldn't lift her up on my own and like to do the blood tests, which again the vet convinced us to prolong, it took some time as well but like the anger passed and then you have to cope with what you can do at home.</p>	<p>Tried to rationalise why the vets did not realise beforehand what was wrong. Had many illnesses.</p> <p>Difficult to lift and take her to the vets because of her size. Vet told her not to do more blood tests. Tried to cope as best she could. No support</p>
<p>R: What about financially? Did it effect you financially with medicines and everything?</p>	
<p>M: I was spending 200 euro a week on the medication and vitamins, and apart from that I was buying the special food, I was buying the nappies and all the stuff to clean her messes and so it was a big financial burden. But I really didn't care so I would steal or borrow or do whatever was necessary to get the money to give her whatever she needed.</p>	<p>Financial burden, Sheila had many needs. Expenses also cleaning materials since she was dirtying herself.</p> <p>Would do anything to get the money to take care of Sheila's needs.</p>
<p>R: So you were willing to spend whatever was necessary just as long as you could keep her alive.</p>	
<p>M: It would have been much easier and financially better to just put her to sleep. But I didn't want to do that because if there was something that I could do to perhaps get her feeling better, which the vet at the time kept me, kind of longing for and saying that</p>	<p>She realised it would have been easier to euthanize her preferred the burden of being a carer and of having her with her rather than losing her. Vet kept giving her hope.</p>

<p>it was a possibility, I didn't want to see her suffer but if there was something I could do I was willing to pay anything or do anything possible.</p> <p>R: You also mentioned that with the arthritis she was heavy and you had to carry her, does that mean she became immobile?</p> <p>M: At the end she spent about two months, about five months like really having hard trouble to walk. I brought her the harness to lift her up from the back, she kept on pooping in the harness, and I kept on swearing to clean it but at the end she was totally pillow ridden like and peeing and doing everything under her and I had to clean her and lift her somehow and do everything from the floor.</p>	<p>Says didn't want to see her suffer however animal was totally dependent on her for her survival.</p> <p>She had become immobile, had to be helped to get around</p> <p>Found it stressful to clean after her</p> <p>Physical strain because Sheila was dirtying herself and Mary had to clean up after her.</p>
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### Appendix R: Excerpt from Martina's Interview

<p>M: As if you're seeing this frail old person giving up on life and your there watching, watching her like.</p> <p>C: It's just disappearing.</p> <p>M: <i>Hekk, lanqas</i> (not even) disappearing ta, it was...</p> <p>C: What could have helped you at that time, what could have helped you at that time?</p> <p>M: Taking her out of misery, my, ah mm, when my, when Peter, Peter landed like 24 hours after, because the second we told him, like <i>isma</i>, she's taking a bad. She took a bad turn, like his ok I am coming down. Breaking the news on the phone, Madonna. I mean, it was harrowing, harrowing, harrowing, harrowing, harrowing...</p> <p>C: So for you it would have been better to have made the decision to put her down instead of leaving her like that?</p> <p>M: Definitely, and we're lucky, we're lucky that we have fields of our own, so we took her to Hal-Far you know we dug, we dug up the earth.</p> <p>R: You buried her...?</p> <p>M: And placed her, and now it's all flowers over there.</p> <p>R: Oh how nice.</p>	<p>Compared her to an ailing person.</p> <p>She would have chosen euthanasia as not to let her suffer.</p> <p>Dog was not hers so could not make the final decision.</p> <p>Had taken on responsibility for Mia.</p> <p>Found it difficult to break the news of her death.</p> <p>Would have chosen euthanasia,</p> <p>Place to bury Mia, own property.</p> <p>Had to help dig grave herself</p> <p>Has a place to visit her.</p> <p>Consoled knowing there are flowers growing on her grave</p>
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<p>M: Hekk</p> <p>R: Do you feel angry that she passed away so young or...?</p> <p>M: I mean we all have an expiry date, why should I be angry because there was an expiry date <i>taf kif</i>. I lost a nephew aged 5 months, so I know everything and everyone has to go, so whether it's now, later...</p> <p><i>Below is another section of Martina's interview because at this point Martina discussed that Mia did not have puppies.</i></p> <p>R: How does it feel talking about? I don't think you have been to counselling or anything like that?</p> <p>M: No, now thinking about it <i>hekk</i>. And venting it all off, <i>hekk</i>, saying the truth and nothing but the truth <i>ouff</i>.</p> <p>C: So if somebody was to lose a pet would you recommend they go talk to someone?</p> <p>M: Yes I think I would because for the first, especially for the first 48 hours I cried and cried. I was with my young people at work and I cried, I cried in the manager's office, I cried at the CEO's office, I was constantly bawling my eyes out. You know, I mean I was of no use to the world for 4 days and it was tough because even our life had to readjust, you know. Even simply opening the door at home had to like, took another a dimension, because usually she would be badoom, badoom, boh in your face.</p>	<p>Accepts death as a part of life</p> <p>Lost loved one at a very young age</p> <p>Had not been to seek professional help but found it helpful to talk about it</p> <p>Would recommend counselling to help anyone in a similar situation.</p> <p>Could not function for four days afterwards</p> <p>Cried a lot, had support from work</p> <p>Very emotional</p> <p>Had to readjust to life with Mia at home.</p> <p>Opening the door at home was not the same</p>
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**Appendix S: Excerpt from Nigel's Interview**

<p>R: Can you tell me a little about the relationship you had with Gary?</p>	
<p>N: We had two dogs and although I love them both I felt that only one of them was my pet. I had an emotional bond with the eldest one...maybe because it was the first one we got. The other dog was more bonded to my wife rather than me. Maybe this was because she bought it and I only wanted one dog at the time.</p>	<p>Was attached to one animal more than another. Spoke of loving the animals Had an emotional bond with Gary more than with the other dog</p>
<p>R: Did you consider Gary to be part of your family?</p>	
<p>N: For me they were both as family members and when we are discussing them we usually refer to them as the older one and the younger one as if they were our children since we have no children. For us they were our children.</p>	<p>Animals were considered to be family members. Were considered children Had no children so surrogate children</p>
<p>R: So besides seeing Gary as your child, did he take on any other roles?</p>	
<p>N: As already stated we treated them as family members. A good companion for long walks which sometimes I miss. Sometime I also preferred his company to other peoples.</p>	<p>He was a companion, helped provide exercise. Misses him, preferred his company to that of other people</p>
<p>R: Can you please explain to me what happened when Gary started to get sick?</p>	

<p>N: When Gary started to lose mobility in his back legs after he hurt himself he became quite dependent on me, especially since he could not get up or down the stairs. He was ok inside as he learnt how to drag himself around.</p> <p>When he started getting tired and could not drag himself around with his front legs, he started to dirty himself so we had to leave him upstairs so that he could have access to the roof. However most times he would not go out to relieve himself and for a long period we would get home after work and find him sitting in his own faeces.</p> <p>R: How did this affect you?</p> <p>N: He could not walk and would drag himself around, but we lived upstairs and we would have to carry him up and down the stairs all 16 kilos of him. Whenever we left the house for work or to run an errand we would come home and find him sitting in his own mess, and we would have to wash him and the floor every day. This went on for months. It got very tiring and stressful. It also affected my relationship.</p> <p>My wife and I discussed euthanasia a number of times during his illness, as she kept suggesting we put him to sleep, but I always hoped it to be a natural death but that is a shock. With euthanasia at least you are preparing yourself for the separation from the pet. I believe an animal</p>	<p>Became totally dependent on Nigel          Needed to be carried up and down stairs          Gary would drag himself around          Started dirtying inside so had to be left in room upstairs to be able to go dirty on the roof          Got to point where he was dirtying himself upstairs as well.          Come home and find a mess</p> <p>Physical burden, Medium sized dog          Leave the house and come back to mess          Mess himself, Wash floor every day</p> <p>Went on for months, Stressful/ tiring/ affected relationship          Had to leave animal in another room because of mess.          Physically stressful.</p> <p>Wife wanted euthanasia, he did not          He wanted a natural death but feels that would have been a shock          Euthanasia helps you prepare for the loss          Believes an animal will show you themselves when they are ready to die</p>
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<p>will show you themselves when they have given up.</p> <p>R: How did you manage after his death?</p> <p>N: For us it was hard. It is not easy going home from work and there is no dog to greet you, but we have two cats as animal companions. Although cats are more independent not like dogs.</p>	<p>Hard to manage afterwards, need to re-adjust, lonely, no one to greet you</p> <p>Has other pets but not the same</p>
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## Appendix T: Excerpt from Sally's Interview

<p>S: Imbagħad kelli nidfnu ftit wara. Ċempilt ħabib tiegħi li għandu ftit għelieqi u ħaffrilna l-ħofra bil-lest. Imbagħad komplejna nħaffru, kelli nidfnu jiena bl-għajjnuna tal-ħabib tiegħi.</p>	<p>S: Then I had to bury him a little later. I called my friend who owned some land, he started to dig the hole for us, and then we continued to dig. I had to bury him with my friends help.</p>	<p>Had responsibility of burying him and helping to prepare the grave.</p>
<p>R: <i>Do you still go can you go and see him?</i></p>	<p>R: Do you still go? Can you go and see him?</p>	
<p>S: Għadni ma rajtx, għadni ma kellix il-kuraġġ immur. Fil-fatt semmejtha issa lil Robert, xi jumejn ilu għedtlu marelli Rob, għedtlu illum ħsibt biex immur imma ma tanix. Għadni vera, għaddew kemm kwazi sitt xhur u għadu ma tanix li mmur ħdejh, għadu ma tanix.</p>	<p>S: I still haven't gone, I still haven't built up the courage to go, in fact I mentioned it to Richard, two days ago, I said "my goodness Rich, today I thought about going, but I still can't bring myself to go" almost 6 months have passed and I am still not ready to go near him.</p>	<p>Still not ready to go visit his grave. Grief is still intense. Prolonged grief. No resolution</p>
<p>Però nista' ngħid fuq ix-xahrejn ta' wara. Ix-xahrejn ta' wara ridt immut, ma ridtx ngħix. Ehmm meta ngħid ma ridtx ngħix, ma ridtx immur nagħmel <i>suicide</i>, imma <i>literally</i> bdejt nitlob 'l Alla li joħodni, li mmut naturali biex immur ħdejh. Ma stajtx, ma stajtx nikkonċepja f'moħħi kif dan f'daqqa waħda</p>	<p>But I can say on the 2 months afterwards. The 2 months after I wanted to die, I didn't want to live when I say I didn't want to live, I didn't want to commit suicide, but literally I started to pray to god to take me, to die a natural death B32 so I can go near him. I couldn't accept in my mind how all of a sudden he disappeared,</p>	<p>Wanted to die, not commit suicide. Her need to be with him was so strong she prayed to God to take her.  Could not accept his death.</p>

<p>sparixxa, dik il-kelma, sparixxa minn ħajti.</p>	<p>that's the word, disappeared from my life.</p>	
<p>R: Ħallielek ħafna vojjt.</p>	<p>R: He left a lot of emptiness</p>	
<p>S: Dik il-kelma kont nuża mhux miet, li dan sparixxa minn ħajti, kif jista' jkun, kif jista' jkun. Jiena ħajti bih, kif jista' jkun m'għadux f'ħajti dan sparixxa, u niftakar kont ħażin ħafna, ma ridtx noħroġ, kelli ċ-ċans kollu li noħroġ imma ma ridtx.</p>	<p>S: that's the word I used to use, not that he died, but that he disappeared from my life. How can it be, how can it be, my life was with him, how can it be that he is no longer in my life, he disappeared. I remember I was really bad I didn't want to go out, I had the chance to go out, but I didn't want to.</p>	<p>Feelings of emptiness Could not accept his not being around anymore.  Signs of depression. Wanting to isolate self from others.  Emotional, religious beliefs</p>
<p>Imbagħad darba ħabibti ħarġitni mid-dar, morna l-quddies, għamilt quddiesa nibki kulħadd iħares lejja.</p>	<p>And then one day my friend took me out, she took me to church, I spent the whole mass crying and everyone was looking at me.</p>	
<p>Imbagħad xħin ħriġna nfqajt fil-karozza u nibki għedtilha Dor, għedtilha emminni, għedtilha, toħodnix ħażin b'li ħa ngħidlek, għedtilha imma jien nixtieq immut, irrid immut, minn qalbi ta' qed ngħidlek irrid immut. Taħsibx li ħa mmur nagħmel suwiċidju imma jien irrid immut, għedt jien irrid immur ħdejh.</p>	<p>Then when we went out I burst out crying in the car, I told her, Dor believe me, don't take what I am going to say in a bad way, but I wish to die, I want to die, from my heart I am telling you, I want to die, don't think I am going to commit suicide, but I want to die, I want to go be with him.</p>	<p>Wanting to die, emotional  Wants to be with him wants to die</p>

<p>Ma rridx ngħix aktar mingħajru, irrid immur f'idejha. U qaltli u l-kelb l-ieħor, għax 10 <i>days</i> qabel ma miet sibt wieħed fit-triq, u l-<i>parents</i> u hekk? Għeditilha rrid immut, lilu irrid, qatt ma f'habbejt daqskemm f'habbejtu. Lilu rrid, miegħu rrid ningħaqad. Imbagħad ftit, ftit, insomma <i>you know....</i></p>	<p>I didn't want to live anymore with him I wanted to go be with him, and she told me what about the other dogs, 10 days before I had found another in the road, and your parents, I told her I want to die, I want him, I have never loved as much as I loved him, I want him, I wanted to reunite with him, but then slowly, slowly, you know....</p>	<p>Friend tried to make her see other important things in her life, these did not matter to her. Attachment Hierarchy.</p> <p>He was loved more than others</p> <p>Religious belief reunite with him</p> <p>Slowly accepting his death.</p>
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### Appendix U: Elicited Themes and Quotes

Main Themes and sub-themes	
A. The Relationship	<p>Qisni wellidtu jien, hekk nispejga jiena. Dan il-kelb qisni wellidtu jien. Kien qisu t-tifel tiegħi...[u] <i>he was the centre of my life</i>, li ħafna nies kienu jgħiduli inti wisq iffissata fuq dan il kelb, <i>its not healthy</i>. Imma għaliġa kien kollox. (Sally)</p> <p><i>It's like I gave birth to him. That's how I can explain it, this dog it's like I gave birth to him, he was like my son... [and] he was the centre of my life. A lot of people use to tell me you are too entwined with this dog and it isn't healthy but for me he was everything.</i></p>
Attachment	<p>For me they were both as family members and when we are discussing them we usually refer to them as the older one and the younger one as if they were our children since we have no children. For us they were our children. (Nick)</p>
Role within the family	<p>Maya's dad, his philosophy was that we are going to lose Anthony, the one that's getting married so we are getting a new brother or sister, so I become an aunt to Mia, my parents were grandma and granddad and Anthony was another uncle. (Martina)</p>
Preferring animals to people	<p>Sometimes yes, I prefer an animal's company to people. (Nick)</p>
<p>B. Owners Experience before Death of Animal.</p> <p>Caregivers Burden and Stress</p> <p>Total dependence</p>	<p>When he started getting tired and could not drag himself around with his front legs, he started to dirty himself so we had to leave him upstairs so that he could have access to the roof. However most times he would not go out to relieve himself and for a long</p>

	period we would get home after work and find him sitting in his own feces. (Nick)
Physical burden	The tension was so bad that I have knots all over my back it really hurt even like moving your neck but I didn't care and like I didn't have lots of help. (Mary)
Psychosocial functioning Social Interaction	I couldn't communicate well with people, I couldn't communicate well with Simon, I couldn't communicate well with my son for a while. (Mary)
Financial burden	The amount of money we spent, like thousands in 3 months, I think we hit the 3 thousand mark, each time because he, because of her liver he had to send these blood tests abroad to England, 700 hundred, 700 hundred and how many 700 hundreds. (Martina)
Anticipatory Grief	<p>Is-sajf ta qabel mietet kienet intelqet, ħadniha l'emergenza... ċempilt lil ta l-emergency u qaltli nitfagħha ġo fliskatur b'l-ilma, qaltli għax sa tmutlek, tfajtha ġo fliskatur kiesaħ u ġiet mill-ewwel. Imbagħad ħadtha għal vista u qaltli heat stroke. Allura fis-sajf dejjem nibża' plus naf li bdiet tikber ukoll. (Emma)</p> <p><i>The summer before she died, she fainted and we took her to the emergency clinic, I called the emergency number and she told me to put her in a basin of water because she will die. I put her in a basin of cold water and she came around straight away. I then took her for a check-up and she told me she had a heat stroke, so during summer I am always scared, plus knowing that she is also getting older.</i></p>

<p>C. Euthanasia</p>	<p>Researcher: Nista nistaqsikom, jekk tippreferu kif gara, ... [li] miet ħabta u sabta? Jiena kelli niddeċiedi li inraqqadhom it-tnejn. Tañseb kienet tkun iktar iebsa kieku rajtuh marid u kellkom tiddeċiedu intom?</p> <p>Andrew: Le aħjar hekk, ħabta... kont ix-xogħol u ċemplitli u qaltli. (Andrew)</p> <p><i>Researcher: Can I ask you a question? Do you prefer his death happened as it did, all of a sudden, I had to decide to put them both to sleep, do you think it would have been harder if you had to witness him being sick and then you had to decide yourselves to end his life?</i></p> <p><i>A: I think it is better this way, all of a sudden. That I was at work and she called.</i></p>
<p>Defence mechanism/ denial</p>	<p>Qalli (il-vet) dan il-kelb qed ibati, qalli qed tneħħilu d-dinjità tiegħu. Għedtlu vera, għedtlu imma l-imħabba? Għedtlu l-imħabba mhux ikbar minn kull ħaġa... [hu] kien jidher li mdejjaq fl-istess ħin kellu l-imħabba tiegħi. <i>That's what I thought at least, I didn't want to separate from him.</i> (Sally)</p> <p><i>He (the vet) had told me this dog is suffering and you are removing his dignity. I told him, true but love, isn't love bigger than all else... [and] you could tell he was not happy, at the same time he had my love, that's what I thought at the time. I didn't want to separate from him.</i> (Sally)</p>
<p>D. Experiencing the Death of Animal-Companion. Veterinary support</p>	<p>Kważi, kważi kont ħadtha kontra il-veġ, għax bdejnt ngħid din żgur tatu xi doża qawwiya għax il-kelb qatt ma kellu xejn ħlief</p>

	<p>il-problema li nnutajt dan l-añhar ta' saqajh. (Deidra)</p> <p><i>I was angry with the vet because I thought that she had given him a large dose, because except for the problem with his foot which I had noticed lately, he never had anything wrong.</i></p>
Personal presence	<p>Kuntenta li mietet fi jdejja..allaħares ġejt u sibtha mejta għax kont neħodha bi kbira ħafna, ħafna li mietet waħedha u miskina, li mietet fi jdejja nħossni <i>happy</i> biha l-ħaġa. (Emma)</p> <p><i>I am happy that she died in my arms... God forbid had I come and found her dead, I would have been really upset that she died alone poor thing. I am happy that she died in my hands.</i></p>
Preparation through anticipatory grief	<p>It wasn't sudden, I mean we could see that you know, her, her strength was wilting, she was literally, her fur was no longer shiny, glossy, there was no wag in her tail. I mean given that she went blind... although her senses were still there and so she knew where she was going, you know she would hit her nose against, bang, bang her nose against doors. It was harrowing seeing her. (Martina)</p>
E. Experience After Death  Bereavement, grief and mourning	<p>Bħal meta titlef xi membru familjari u tibda tgħid kemm nixtieq li kelli ċans ingawdih aktar. Qisu il-<i>guilt</i> li jħoss kulħadd wara li jitlef lil xi ħadd. Hekk naraha jiena. (Deidra)</p> <p><i>Like when you lose a member of the family and you start to say I wish I had a chance</i></p>

	<i>to spend more time with him... [and] it's like the guilt that everyone feels when they lose someone, that's how I see it.</i>
Disenfranchised Grief	There are not many people who understand, there are not many who have passed through something like that, especially in Malta. I don't think lots of people understand the love that you have for an animal so I preferred like not to speak about it. Definitely the healing process took much longer. It's really hard like to get over and just move on over someone who was such a big part of your life. (Mary)
Guilt	<p>Aħna bqajna nħossu il-<i>guilt</i> għal Larry għax bdejna ngħidu miskin abli ġieli kellu żminijiet li kien waħdu li aħna ma stajniex, li kieku stajna qattajna ħafna iktar ħin miegħu, ma nafx għalfejn nħossu hekk... għax fil-verità dejjem kellu <i>the best</i>. (Deidra)</p> <p><i>We still feel guilty towards Larry, we had started to discuss that there may have been times that he spent alone. We just couldn't, if we could have, we would have spent more time with him. I don't know why we feel like this because in reality he had the best of everything.</i></p>
Depression	<p>Interviewer: Għedtli li qisu qabdek anke naqra <i>depression</i>.</p> <p>Emma: Ehe kelli mingħajrha, għax kienet kumpanija tiegħi speċi ta, u jien kont inkellimha... xħin inkun waħdi hawn m'għandi lil ħadd. Xi ffit ilu kellna aċċident aħna, għamilt ħmistax b'saqajja, u kont ngħid kieku hawnhekk qiegħda,</p>

	<p>nimmissjaha, għadni nimmissja lil xi ħadd lil min infissed hekk. Qisni rrid inħobb lil xi ħadd u daqskemm tagħtik <i>love</i> hi speci ta u taċċetta il-fsied u hekk. Ma naf lil ħadd li joqgħod jaċċettahom. Għadni nimmissjaha ħafna.</p> <p><i>Interviewer: you had mentioned that you felt a little depressed.</i></p> <p><i>Emma: Yes I had a little, she was company for me, and I use to talk to her. When I am here alone I have no one. A little while back we had an accident I spent 2 weeks inside with an injured foot and I use to think if she was here next to me, I miss, I still miss having someone to cuddle. It's like I want to love someone, she use to give so much love and be accepting of the cuddles and I don't know anyone who accepts them. I still miss her. (Emma)</i></p>
Isolation and distancing	It is what makes me angry, emptiness and loneliness. And... it can't be replaced by anything, so you feel the hole and you have to deal with it. (Mary)
Anger	I can still feel the anger of not having...[told] the doctor to go pack, my brother for not telling me, giving me the permission to take her out of her misery. (Martina)
New pets	(Crying) My aunt, my aunties, ah you will get another dog. No I can't, nobody can fill her place. Nobody can fill her place. (Martina)
Remains	Xtaqt li kieku kien hawn ċimiterju għall-klieb għax fejn qiegħda... vera għand il-ħbieb tagħna imma ma nistax noqgħod immur.

	<p>Xtaqt li hekk nagħmilha il <i>memory</i> tagħha ħdejha u mmur ħdejha. (Emma)</p> <p>I wished that there was a pet cemetery for dogs, because even though she is buried on a friends property I cannot keep going there. I wished I could have placed her memory plaque where she is buried and that I can go next to her.</p>
F. Religion	<p>(Tibki) Qisu ftit, ftit... tibda 'tgħid ok xi darba ħa narah, <i>you know</i>, xi darba ħa narah. Qed jistennieni. Xi darba ħa narah. <i>I mean they're creatures of God so I'm sure they're waiting for us as well...[u] I look forward to the day when I reunite with him, I think of him every day with that vision of that one day we will reunite.</i>(Sally)</p> <p><i>(Crying) Slowly you start to say one day I will see him, you know, one day I will see him. He is waiting for me, one day I will see him. I mean they are creatures of God, so I am sure they are waiting for us as well...[and]: I look forward to the day when I reunite with him, I think of him every day with that vision of that day we will reunite.</i></p>
G. Support and Counselling Support	<p>Jien naħseb <i>emotional support</i> li mmissjajt, preżenza ta' nies. Ehmm għax inqtajt mid-dinja <i>literally</i>. Li xi ħadd jiġi jarani speċi jagħmel dik is-siegħa miegħi. (Sally)</p> <p><i>I think I missed the emotional support, people's presence because I literally cut myself off from the world. That someone comes and visits me that they spend that hour with me.</i></p>



Counselling	<p>Interviewer: If there was a support group at the time, do you think you would have gone?</p> <p>Mary: I am not that type of person to go to look for support, it may be my stupid thing but I look down on people, I prefer communicating with animals then actually communicating with people because I haven't found that many people who actually understand you (sobbing). So I wouldn't have looked for support. Maybe it may just be my perception of how I see people. (Mary)</p>
	<p><i>Definitely, naħseb yes, grupp kelli bżonn u waqt li ma kienx qed jimxi u hekk u anke wara... iva, support groups nemmen ħafna bihom jiena. (Sally)</i></p> <p><i>Yes definitely, I think yes. I needed the group whilst, and when he wasn't walking etc, and also after. I really believe in support groups.</i></p>

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