

Survey: Pets Substitute for Kids in Tough Times

Cash-strapped couples in the U.K. are putting off starting a family.

Posted: Dec. 2, 2008, 3 a.m. EST

A cat, dog or other pet are seen as substitutes to starting a family, according to a survey in the United Kingdom. Couples in Britain are making plans to start a family by bringing a new cat or dog into the home, not a baby, according to a new survey. The preference for a pet instead of a child indicates a desire to save money during a tough economic climate, said the company behind the survey.

Petplan, a U.K.-based pet insurance provider, conducted the survey, which found that nearly 60 percent of people said they would put off starting a family during the current economic downturn. However, one-quarter of those said they would invest in a pet instead.

The decision to put family life on hold in favor of looking after a four-legged friend was equally divided between men and women. The top 10 most popular "child substitutes," according to the survey: Dog Cat Rabbit Guinea Pig Rat Hamster Mouse Gerbil Reptile Bird

A total of 3,000 pet owners responded to the survey.

"It seems that pets of all shapes and sizes are now being considered a perfectly sensible alternative to starting a family for cash-strapped couples," a Petplan spokesperson said in a statement. "We know that many owners develop very strong emotional ties to their pets that are often treated as part of the family. But we do urge all would-be pet owners to understand that pet ownership does come with responsibilities, just like parenthood."