

Reports and Comments

Public attitudes to animal research in 2016

This Report details the findings of an IPSOS-MORI opinion poll which surveyed public attitudes in the United Kingdom to the use of animals in scientific research in 2016. Almost 1,000 adults were surveyed in this second in a series of polls intended to track attitudes of the British public to animal use in research over time, following on from the first report in 2014.

The headline results of the study show that there appears to be a majority view in support of the use of animals for some scientific research (65%) and that this figure remains little changed from 2014. Perhaps unsurprisingly, public support is strongest for medical research using animals and weakest for non-medical testing of chemicals upon animals.

The public still maintain significant species biases when considering the acceptability of animal use in research. Forty-eight percent think it acceptable to use rats in research while less than 20% consider the use of cats, dogs or monkeys acceptable. This finding mirrors the special protection afforded to cats, dogs, equines and non-human primates by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act which regulates the use of animals in research in the UK, although whether either the public attitudes or special protections of the Act are backed by the scientific evidence is a question which is yet to be fully answered.

The Report also shows that public understanding of the permissible purposes for the use of animals in regulatory testing lags behind the reality with many still believing that cosmetics are tested on animals in the UK, and a very large majority believing this should not be permitted. In fact, the testing of finished cosmetic products has been banned in the EU since 2004 and testing of ingredients for cosmetic products has been banned since 2013. Indeed, the results of

the survey show that a majority of the public do not feel well-informed about animal research in general (only 34% felt very or fairly well informed). Well over half those surveyed were interested to find out more, yet the great majority of respondents (76%) could not recall any news on the topic over the previous year. These results suggest that despite current attempts to be more open with the public, such as the Concordat on Openness in Animal Research, a scheme designed to promote the sharing of information about animal research by the organisations performing research, signed by many UK universities and research institutions, there is still work to be done to provide information on animal research to the general public. A significant and increasing proportion of the public perceive institutions carrying out animal work to be secretive (44 as opposed to 42% in 2014).

The Report also contains many other statistics on public attitudes to research, the legitimacy of various approaches to protesting against animal research and the regulation of research on animals. Since the UK's procedure for carrying out a harm/benefit analysis on proposed animal research specifically includes a provision to take into account issues of societal concern regarding experiments on animals, this survey will provide a useful barometer for where such concerns lie.

Public Attitudes to Animal Research in 2016 (2016). A4, 63 pages. IPSOS MORI Social Research Institute, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Report by M Clemence and J Leaman. Available at <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/Assets/Docs/Publications/sri-public-attitudes-to-animal-research-2016.pdf>.

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