

Improving the welfare of pet animals in Kazakhstan

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Introduction

What would happen if all animals disappeared? Most individuals would concur that animals are an integral part of global ecosystems, which means they play a vital role in maintaining life on Earth. However, why do some people treat animals and pets with cruelty even when they are aware of animals' importance? What actions can humans take to improve the overall welfare of pet animals?

Nowadays millions of pets live under the threat of being abused; some of them were abandoned and others were born stray, thus, are vulnerable to any kind of human actions. According to PETA, about 100 million animals and pets are used and killed in U.S. laboratories for experimentation purposes (PETA, n.d.). Meanwhile, in Kazakhstan, the president admitted that animals' welfare issues are extremely urgent in the country and requested the government to formulate new laws to address them (24Khabar, 2020). Thus, I am intending to conduct research that aims to find effective ways of improving pet welfare in Kazakhstan.

Results of this study may help in improving the welfare of pet animals in Kazakhstan and in other countries, as they might serve as a source of information for animal rights activists and organizations that may use them to obtain knowledge about some animals' rights protection programs, their effectiveness and general patterns in people's attitudes towards animal rights protection. Beneficiaries of the research are animal rights activists, organizations, pet-owners, and all other Kazakhstani citizens interested in improving pet animals' welfare.

Regarding the motivations behind the research, the main one for me is the fact that I had a dog that passed away after a fight with local stray dogs. Stray pets in Kazakhstan is one of the urgent problems that affect animal welfare in Kazakhstan, which concerns me a lot. Moreover, now I am an owner of two dogs, and therefore, I am interested in their wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of all other pets in my country.

A potential bias of mine could be towards protecting pet animals' rights as much as possible since I have always been caring for and cherishing pets. However, I believe this will not affect the research, as I will conduct it objectively, without bias.

Aims

The main purpose of the research is to investigate ways of improving pet animals' welfare in Kazakhstan. In order to achieve this aim, current situation of animal welfare in Kazakhstan and general citizens' behavior towards protecting animal rights must be researched.

Thus, the following research questions are going to be addressed:

- How protected pets' rights and welfare are in Kazakhstan?
- Are pet owners aware of the fundamental needs and rights of their pets?
- In what ways humans protect or violate animals' rights in their daily life?
- What punishments are determined for those who violate pets' rights?
- What else apart from governmental actions can be done in order to maintain animal welfare in a decent condition?
- What are the most efficient ways of raising awareness about pet animal welfare and rights in Kazakhstan?

It is hypothesized that results will show that pet animals' welfare in Kazakhstan is not in a decent condition as it is in the most developed countries due to the people's mindset, which persuades them that pets are inferior and should not be cared by humans. Additionally, results will most likely show that most of the pet owners are not fully aware of their animals' basic needs because of the lack of publicity in this field.

Context

Animal welfare in broad terms is the concept that describes the well-being of non-human animals usually by several factors, including animals' physical parameters (heart rate, plasma cortisol), feelings (fear, frustration), and the "natural-living" factor (Hewson, 2003). Under most federal laws, animals are regarded as properties and are provided with little-to-no legal rights, which makes them vulnerable to whatever people do to them. Nevertheless, by nature, animals have necessities just like any other living creature, such as food, water, shelter, exercise, and socialization, which should be provided to fulfill the basic health and functioning of an animal (Bjorkenstam, 2001). In terms of ethics, which is defined as a process of determining which action towards a certain problem has the best moral reasons for being undertaken, it is widely considered that people should maintain animal welfare in a healthy state because of the moral values of humans.

Moving onto the area of the cultural lens, Kazakh people used to treat pet animals decently and valued them the most so that they even included animals (horse, eagle, dog) as the three of the seven main valuable things in life of Kazakhs – Jetti Kazyna. However, in recent years people have been treating animals with cruelty and managing to get away with it due to the lenient laws regarding the animal violation acts. That is to say, although in culture Kazakhs used to cherish pets, nowadays it seems that actions violating pets are getting more common and cruel.

On a global scale, the problem of poor animal welfare is quite urgent, as there exist a long list of associated issues, such as animal testing from which about 10 million animals die in the U.S. alone, and blood sports that involves dogs fighting with each other, which often lead to the blood loss and even death of puppies. Even though the latter practice is banned in the United Kingdom, it has been estimated that dogfights took place every day in the U.K. in 2015 (Snowdon, 2015).

Now, viewing these issues through the animal welfare organizations and activists' perspective, organizations like PETA, RSPCA, and ASPCA are primarily aiming to improve animals well-being by taking a variety of actions, such as raising awareness through campaigns, provide animals in need with material support using donated money from the funds. They have a strong belief that all animals should maintain healthy living and should be taken care of by humans (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, 2021).

In Kazakhstan, the issue of animal abuse is also one of the urgent problems in the country, which was admitted by current president of Kazakhstan. From Kasym-Jomart Tokayev and the Kazakhstan government's perspective, the way people treat animals is the benchmark of the civility of the nation (24 Khabar News, 2020). However, Kazakhstan still has problems that are stopping it from reaching a higher level of civility, including the most severe ones – pet animal abuse (not taking enough care of pets, torturing, cutting off parts of their bodies) and pet overpopulation due to the popularity of breeding. Another action that has become common since the COVID-19 pandemic occurred is pet abandonment because of the citizens' fear that their pets might be afflicted by a coronavirus and may then infect humans (TengriNews, 2020). Meanwhile in Oskemen, the issue of stray pets has become a major concern to citizens as the population of homeless dogs attacking children and adults has increased recently.

In order to solve the above-listed problem of animal welfare – overpopulation of stray pets, Kazakhstan government usually allocates money from the government's funds to animal control services, which have been broadly criticized to be "a waste of financial resources" as citizens did not see any dramatic changes in the issue, even though the amount of money allocated was fairly large. The government's stray pets control also was criticized for showing cruelty to animals and killing them in inhumane ways (Muratbayeva, 2007).

Taking everything above into account, the problem of pet animal welfare in the world and in Kazakhstan, in particular, is quite urgent, and in both international animal welfare organizations` and Kazakhstani governments` perspectives, people should improve the welfare of pet animals to solve this problem.

Methods

Problems of animal welfare are extremely urgent in Kazakhstan today. The government allocates a great amount of money on killing stray pets, which is often done in an inhumane way (dogs` corpses are burned on lands near the locality) (Florinskiy, 2020). Kazakhstani citizens` treatment of animals and pets is not discussed and investigated enough yet. Thus, the main aim of this research is to scrutinize ways of improving pet animals` welfare in Kazakhstan. To achieve this goal, pet welfare`s condition in Kazakhstan and citizens` treatment of pets will be examined. Such research methods as internet-based surveys, interviews, and focus group discussion will be used in research to ensure that data gained will be both qualitative and quantitative. While quantitative data (from a survey) will show common patterns in citizens` behavior towards pet welfare, qualitative data (from an interview and a focus group) are likely to propose solutions to the research problem.

First research method – web survey – is used to gather quantitative data from Kazakhstani citizens about current situation of pet welfare in Kazakhstan. There were several reasons for choosing this method: first, online-survey is effective in terms of time and accessibility. Because it is done through an online surveying tool, an unlimited number of respondents can complete the survey for free in short time. Moreover, this tool is easy to use for both respondents and researchers since it has a user-friendly interface and can represent statistical information from responses automatically (Google Forms, 2021). However, one significant drawback of this method in my case is that it provides only quantitative data (no open-ended questions in my survey).

It was decided to survey people aged between 14 and 68 since some questions in the survey (about violating pets` rights) can trigger negative feelings of children younger than 14; also this population is most active online and they can complete the survey without much problem. I am expecting to survey about 100 people so that representing responses will be easier (conclusions might be presented using percentages), and surveying this number appears to be realistic to me. Questions used in the survey are designed to answer some of the research questions; particularly to know whether pet owners are aware of their pet's necessities and rights, and to know how people might protect and/or violate animals` rights in day-to-day life. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that respondents may answer some questions (e.g. about ways of violating/protecting pets` rights) not honestly because they might not want to share the truth.

The next method is a face-to-face interview that was chosen because to compensate for the previous method`s drawback: interviews allow more in-depth qualitative data and researchers may ask follow-up questions for more detailed answers. In addition, using body language and facial expressions are likely to make interviewees comfortable to answer questions more honestly (Marshall, 2016). Regarding disadvantages, interviews are less convenient than questionnaires since they require more time to conducting them, and recruiting interviewees is quite time-consuming.

Interviews will be held online in a quiet room one-on-one with animal rights activists, animal welfare organization representatives, and pet vets. They will be recorded if the interviewee would not mind, and all the personal information will be kept confidential. These groups of people were chosen because these interviews are predicted to answer research questions about the legal aspects of animal welfare in Kazakhstan and current animal protection campaigns and projects. Activists and organizations can share valuable opinions on ways of

improving pets` well-being and raising awareness about it. The challenge that might occur is that due to the fact that I can interview only 1-2 representatives from each group, little amount of qualitative data will be gained through this method.

The last method is focus group discussion that was selected so as to get more important qualitative data. Focus groups are considered to be time-saving because by using this method researchers can sit session with a number of people at once instead of doing several interviews, which also makes data collection much easier. Additionally, focus group sessions can improve the quality of answers to the questions (more detailed and well-considered) since all the participants are free to ask and challenge other participant`s suggestions, and listening to different perspectives makes the whole discussion more objective (Binns, 2021). However, in some cases, person who runs the discussion may be biased towards a certain perspective, and while asking follow-up questions, it might unintentionally lead to certain responses and comments.

The focus group session will be held online with 5 of my animal rights activist acquaintances and other people who have deep knowledge of this issue. Most of them are teenagers; they were chosen because they trust me and will be honest while discussing the questions. Process of sessions will be held the same way as the interview: responses will be recorded and personal data will be kept confidential. Questions that will be discussed are going to answer research questions about the overall situation in Kazakhstan`s animal welfare, punishments for animal mistreatment, a cultural factor of pet welfare, and are likely to propose ways of improving pets` well-being and raising awareness about it. One problem that might occur is that some participants might not be confident enough to share their viewpoint, so it is my responsibility to make the setting plausible and encourage participants to speak up.

Results

This section will look at each research questions and provide the most relevant results (answers) gained from conducted survey, interviews, and focus group discussion.

- How protected pets` rights and welfare are in Kazakhstan?
- What punishments are determined for those who violate pets` rights?

In Fig. 1 it is shown that 30% of the respondents, which is the majority, evaluated pets` welfare situation in Kazakhstan as medium (3) on a scale of 1 to 5. Surprisingly, the numbers of those who evaluated it as poor (1-2) and those who evaluated it as decent (4-5) are the same (35% each). From this result, it is assumed that pets` welfare in Kazakhstan is in the middle.

По шкале от 1 до 5 (где 1 - низкий, а 5 - отличный), как бы Вы оценили уровень благополучия домашних животных в Казахстане?

100 responses

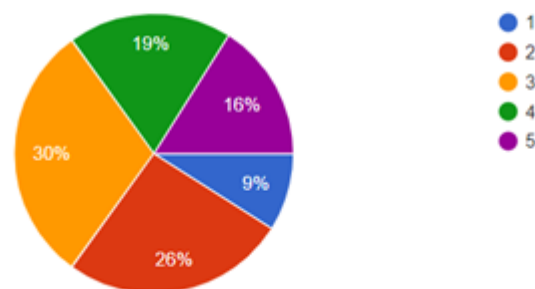


Fig.1 Question from the survey: "On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is considered poor, and 5 is considered excellent), how would you rate pet animals` welfare condition in Kazakhstan?"

While answering the question about strong and weak sides of animal welfare in Kazakhstan, interviewees concurred that the young generation`s activism and online platforms in social networking sites are main strengths. An animal rights activist in interview also noted: “Generally, I believe that most of our citizens positively think towards actions taken to stop the animal welfare problems – they support campaigns of organizations and despise those who violate animals` rights – which is very great”. However, all three interviewees said that law issue is the downside here: even though the new code about animal well-being is being prepared now, it might not contribute any value to this issue as the cases reviewed in it do not cover all possible acts of violation and most of concepts (definitions of animal violation acts and violators) are too vague.

As for punishments we discussed in a focus group, according to current criminal code, the maximum charge that can be determined is 200 Monthly Notional Unit (555 600 tenges in 2020) or an arrest of up to 50 days (Raissova, 2020). In addition, we came to the conclusion that an unknown amount of animal abuse proceedings are not even initiated because of the people`s indifference, so many violators might not even get any punishment.

- Are pet owners aware of the fundamental needs and rights of their pets?

Fig. 2 shows that of 100 surveyed individuals, 53 are pet owners from which 52% answered that they know almost everything they need to know in order to raise a pet, whereas 18.7% admitted that they do not know much about their pets` necessities and rights. The remaining respondents know some of the fundamental needs but are not aware of certain aspects.

*Если Вы ответили да: Вы осведомлены о нуждах и правах своего питомца? (пр: право на еду, кров, прогулку).

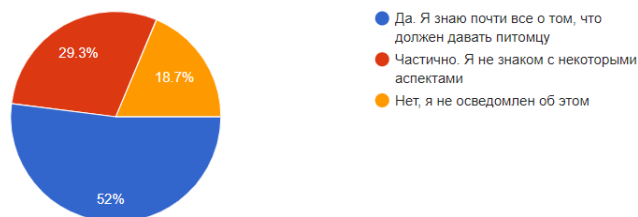


Fig. 2 Question from the survey: “If yes: Are you aware of your pet`s necessities and rights? (e.g. right for food, shelter, walk)”

- In what ways humans protect or violate animals` rights in their daily life?

Questions about ways of protecting and violating animal rights were made as checkboxes so that individuals could choose all the answers they think they can relate to.

For the question about how people protect pets` rights, from 100 respondents: 42 tell other people about the importance of protecting animals, 31 donate money or items to pet shelters, 30 share with other people advice about pet-rising, 14 adopt pets or find owners for them, 8 find and bring stray pets to vets, and 34 respondents answered that they do not protect pets` rights.

For the question about the pet rights violation, from 100 respondents: 40 encountered physical abuse, 36 – abandoning a pet, 33 – cutting off animal`s part of the body, 29 – killing a pet, 26 – not giving a pet enough food/water, 21 – tighten up pet`s collar too tight, 17 – damaging pet`s skin and fur with substances. Only 26 of 100 individuals have never encountered such actions; from those who have encountered animal abuse actions, 54.1% tried to stop the violator, 36.5% wanted to stop but could not do it, and 9.4% did not want to stop the action.

- What else apart from governmental actions can be done in order to maintain animal welfare in a decent condition?

Kazakhstani animal welfare organization representative shared her view on this matter saying that the best way to improve animal welfare in the country is to pass responsibilities of governmental organizations that kill, sterilize, cull of, and microchip the stray pets to the private companies, which should be funded by the authorities. She believes that private companies would improve pets' well-being a lot all across the country. Moreover, she calls all the Kazakhstani citizens that care about living creatures to support animal welfare campaigns and animal shelters as much as they can.

- What are the most efficient ways of raising awareness about pet animal welfare and rights in Kazakhstan?

During the focus group discussion, my acquaintances and I concurred that nowadays majority of Kazakhstani citizens are using gadgets and the number of people involved in online campaigns is increasing. Most of them are run by organizations on social media, and hence the most effective way to raise awareness about the animal welfare problems in terms of people involvement, level of complexity, and the cost is by social networking sites. This solution would ensure that a great number of people could view the posts, stories, and videos about this issue, and it is easy to and completely free. Another step people could make is to spread awareness about this issue through their family and friends since they are more likely to agree with the person that pets' well-being is an issue that should be taken care of.

Overall, the results from methods successfully allowed me to find related answers to all research questions; they were comprehensible and easy to gather.

Discussion and conclusions

The research was conducted to investigate ways of improving pet animals' welfare in Kazakhstan. According to results from methods of the questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussion, the following conclusions were derived.

1. How protected pets' rights and welfare are in Kazakhstan?
Pet welfare is in the average-to-poor condition in Kazakhstan.
2. Are pet owners aware of the fundamental needs and rights of their pets?
Not all: one in two pet owners are not fully aware of it.
3. In what ways humans protect or violate animals' rights in their daily life?
They mostly protect it by raising awareness about the pets' importance and pet care and by donating money/items to pet shelters.
Animal rights violation is commonly done by physical abuse, abandonment, and cutting of a pet's part of the body.
4. What punishments are determined for those who violate pets' rights?
According to current law, the maximum charge that can be determined for them is 200 MNU or an arrest of up to 50 days, but most of them might not even get punishment because of either lenient law or people's indifference.
5. What else apart from governmental actions can be done in order to maintain animal welfare in a decent condition?
Passing the government's responsibilities of pet control to private companies and encouraging citizens to support animal campaigns and shelters might be beneficial.
6. What are the most efficient ways of raising awareness about pet animal welfare and rights in Kazakhstan?
Running online pet welfare campaigns on social networking sites and spreading awareness through relatives and friends.

Results that pet welfare condition in Kazakhstan is not decent, and many pet owners (48% of the surveyed) are not fully aware of their pets' necessities and rights support the hypothesis. As it was discussed in the context section, Kazakhs used to cherish pets, but I

assumed that nowadays their values have changed. However, the result that most of the Kazakhstani people would support animal activism contradicts my hypothesis.

The degree of confidence for conclusions from interviews and focus group discussion is high since the people involved there are reliable and were not biased. However, the generalization of the conclusions from the survey is still in question, as the representatives were mostly from the East-Kazakhstan Region, which is only a part of Kazakhstan. The conclusion about the animal abuse punishments can be supported by the conclusions of Maria Baideldinova and Federico Dalpane`s research (Baideldinova M.).

Evaluation

Overall, when evaluating methods used in this study, all three had some irrelevant questions answers to which would not help the research much. In the survey, however, the question about the place where the respondent was from should have been asked to help decide whether the generalization of conclusion is possible. Nevertheless, the questionnaire was very great to use as it allowed me to gather quantitative data very quickly and its special tools helped organize these data in a more appealing way through diagrams. Speaking of the interview, the whole process and setting was easy and comfortable, and voice recording made it possible to capture every thoughts of interviewees. However, I should consider making the questions more specific since interviewees sometimes went off topic while answering them. While conducting the focus group discussion, participants probably were somewhat shy at first and were not involved much, but I could increase their interest in discussion by asking follow-up questions.

Whole study was conducted in a standard manner as it was supposed to: excluding influence of bias, transparent, and involving representatives with high validity in this field; therefore, the strength of conclusions is considered to be high. Conclusions derived from interviews and FGD could be generalized to the national scale as there are probably many who would concur with the interviewees in other parts of Kazakhstan. However, conclusions from the survey could be generalized only to the local scale since respondents are assumed to be from East Kazakhstan Region. Overall, drawn conclusions can be applied as a source of information when one wants to understand the whole situation of pet welfare in Kazakhstan and analyze effective ways of improving it.

Further research

During the interview, I was quite amazed when one interviewee told me that generally Kazakhstani citizens would support pet welfare campaigns actively; thus, I would like to explore this unexpected result more in-depth. Another suggestion would be to add method of observation or social experiment to directly participate and watch how people would react in certain situations (e.g. when the animal is being abused). Moreover, great suggestion to this research is to gather more statistical data and use diagrams and tables to make the results and findings more comprehensible and appealing. Involving representatives from all over Kazakhstan is also nice idea to improve the confidence of conclusions and making it possible to generalize.

Sending this research paper to pet activist organizations such as KARE or PETA and proposing to investigate the problem with their help is further research that would allow both parties to scrutinize this issue on a more global scale so as to find even more effective ways of solving it. While conducting the research, I have discovered that Kazakhstan has a number of different organizations that are aiming to tackle this issue and analyzing context section made me learn about important concepts of it (e.g. types of animal abuse and biological response of animal's body that is being abused). Nevertheless, my perspective has not been affected much: I am still a pet-lover and will support any living creatures as best as I can.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The survey questions

1. How old are you?
 - a) 14 – 18
 - b) 19 – 28
 - c) 29 – 38
 - d) 39 – 48
 - e) 49 – 58
 - f) 59 – 68
2. What is your gender?
 - a) Female
 - b) Male
 - c) Other
3. Do you agree that maintaining decent animal welfare in the country is important for people?
 - a) Yes, I completely agree
 - b) 50/50, I think it is secondary issue for people to deal with (it is less important than other social issues)
 - c) No, I completely disagree
4. On a scale of 1 to 5 (where 1 is considered poor, and 5 is considered excellent), how would you rate pet animals` welfare condition in Kazakhstan?
 - a) 1
 - b) 2
 - c) 3
 - d) 4
 - e) 5
5. Do you own a pet?
 - a) Yes
 - b) No
6. If yes: Are you aware of your pet`s basic necessities and rights? (e.g. right for food, shelter, walk)
 - a) Yes, I know almost everything about what owners must provide animals with
 - b) 50/50, I am not sure about some aspects
 - c) No, I do not know much about it
7. In your everyday life, in what ways do you help protecting pets` rights? (Select all that apply)
 - a) Share with other people advice about pet-raising
 - b) Tell other people about the importance of protecting animals
 - c) Donate money/items to local pet shelters
 - d) Find and bring to vet stray pets
 - e) Adopt pets from pet shelters (or find good owners for them)
 - f) I do not protect pets` rights

- g) Other (Please specify)
8. Which intentional pets` rights violation actions have you encountered (that were done by you and/or other people)? (Select all that apply)
- a) Not giving a pet enough food or water
 - b) Tight up pet`s collar too tight
 - c) Cutting off animal`s parts of body (e.g. tail, ears, legs)
 - d) Damaging pet`s skin and fur with acids or boiled water (or any other substances)
 - e) Physical abuse (beating up a pet)
 - f) Abandoning a pet far away from owner`s home
 - g) Killing a pet (e.g. drawn new-born pet)
 - h) I have never encountered such actions
 - i) Other (Please specify)
9. If you have encountered any actions listed in previous question`s answer choices, did you make any steps to prevent the action from happening?
- a) Yes, I tried to stop the animal abuse action
 - b) No, I wanted to, but could not stop it
 - c) No, I did not want to prevent the animal abuse action
10. If you have any thoughts about this topic that you want to share, please write your perspective in the answer box below. All opinions of respondents is appreciated.
- Your opinion:

Appendix 2 – The list of animal welfare organizations in Kazakhstan (the large ones)

1. “KARE – Zabota” – Public Fund in Almaty. Contacts: 87078779441
2. “KETAAssociation” – Kazakhstan Animal Welfare Association. Contacts: <https://www.facebook.com/KETAAssociation/>
3. “Dvoryanin” – Public Fund in Ust-Kamenogorsk. Contacts: +7 (7232) 75-47-27, +7 (705) 235-76-98
4. “Predannoe Serdtse” – Public Association in Ust-Kamenogorsk. Contacts: 87055080055
5. “Novyy Shans” – Public Fund in Almaty. Contacts: +77078975727, +77022320431
6. “Dvoryanskoe Sobranie” – Animal Shelter in Almaty. Contacts: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/187551038052801>