

Gallup Poll Tuesday Briefing

September 2, 2003

SECTION: HEALTHCARE

HEADLINE: Americans, Britons at Odds on Animal Testing

HIGHLIGHT:

Each year, millions of medical tests are performed on animals for the purpose of advancing research. The practice is widespread in both the private and public sectors of the medical research community as a way to test the effectiveness of drugs and procedures that will eventually be used on humans. But advocacy organizations such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) would like to see medical testing on animals banned completely, arguing that medical testing can be done just as effectively using human tissue and computer technology.

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In spring 2003*, Gallup asked respondents in the United States, Great Britain, and Canada for their views on the moral acceptability of medical testing on animals. Results varied widely among the three countries. While majorities of both Americans and Canadians said that medical testing on animals is morally acceptable, a majority of Britons said that this type of testing is morally wrong.

Majority of Britons Opposed to Medical Testing on Animals

Gallup respondents in each of the three countries were presented with a list of issues and asked if each one is morally acceptable or morally wrong. In the United States, 63% of adults deemed medical testing on animals morally acceptable, and 33% said it is morally wrong. Results in Canada were fairly similar to those in the United States, with 59% of Canadians saying "morally acceptable" and 36% saying "morally wrong." But in Great Britain, the results are nearly reversed. Only 37% of British respondents said medical testing on animals is morally acceptable, and 54% said it is morally wrong. Why the heightened sentiment against medical testing on animals in Great Britain? According to Simon Sarkar, polling director for Gallup UK, the British have traditionally considered themselves to be a "nation of animal lovers."

Sarkar cites a historically high volume of donations to animal welfare organizations in the United Kingdom, but also feels that awareness of animal rights has grown even stronger in Britain recently. "Support for animal rights has flourished over recent years due to high-profile campaigns not only by animal rights organizations, but also by the stance of companies such as The Body Shop a British-owned cosmetics company. In a way, these companies took animal rights mainstream by placing campaigns on the high street, making them part of their powerful brand."

The Age and Gender Factors

There is little variance of opinion by age among Britons and Canadians on this issue. In Great Britain, for example, the percentage of the youngest age cohort (18- to 34-year-olds) who believes animal testing is morally acceptable is not statistically different from the percentage of the oldest age group (those over age 65) who feels this way. In the United States, however, younger Americans are significantly more likely to be morally opposed to animal testing than older Americans are. There is a 23-point gap between the percentages of 18- to 34-year-olds and those over 65 who feel that medical testing on animals is morally wrong.

In all three countries, men are significantly more likely than women to believe that medical testing on animals is morally acceptable. In fact, the gender gaps are almost identical in each country. In Great Britain, 45% of men think this practice is acceptable, compared to 29% of women who think it is acceptable, for a gap of 16 percentage points. In both the United States and Canada, the gender gap is 17 percentage points (71% to 54% in the United States; 68% to 51% in Canada).

Bottom Line

Gallup data suggest that the future of animal testing could be uncertain in Great Britain, especially with a new EU ban on using animals for testing cosmetics. With majorities of their populations not objecting to this testing on moral grounds, Canadians and Americans are less likely to face the same situation. Gallup asked U.S. respondents specifically about their opinions on a complete ban on animal testing. Consistent with the results of the question about moral acceptability, just 35% of Americans "strongly" or "somewhat" support "banning medical research on laboratory animals." In fact, Americans aren't much more willing to support a ban on product testing on animals, even though one would consider this type of testing to be less necessary than medical research. Only 38% of Americans would strongly or somewhat support "banning all product testing on laboratory animals."

* Results in the United States are based on telephone interviews with 1,005 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted May 5-7, 2003. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is +/-3 percentage points. Results in Canada are based telephone interviews with 1,001 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted June 11-17, 2003. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is +/-3 percentage points.

Results in Great Britain are based telephone interviews with 1,009 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted June 4-19, 2003. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is +/-5 percentage points. Results for the Canada and Great Britain surveys may not equal 100% due to rounding error.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.