

A data base survey of primate research in Asia

Animal experimentation in general, and primate experimentation in particular, has been a cause for concern in the general population of most countries around the world.¹ Opponents to animal experimentation justify their opposition with ethical arguments which go as follows. First, it is argued that primates are genetically very close to humans. So, experiments that would be unethical for humans should also be unethical on primates. Second, quite a few primates, especially chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos are on the verge of extinction because of habitat destruction. This drives even further the point that all experimentation on primates should be abolished. The ethical opposition has led to a political debate in which the response was to enact legislations and develop guidelines to limit even further, experiments on primates.²⁻³

With all the controversy surrounding primate experimentation, scientists have begun to focus on describing what kind of research is still going on around the world. Two methodologies are mainly used. The first is a compilation of governmental data from different countries¹ the second uses database search of published articles.¹ The present study⁴ is a fine example of the latter. Its aim is not the take sides for or against primate experimentation. Rather, this study describes the context of primate utilization in Asia via database searches of published articles for the year 2001.

First, studies were divided into invasive (which includes more or less painful research on conscious animals) and non-invasive (studies for which pain was minimal). Invasive studies represent the most important category for the general population because they involve procedures which are performed on conscious animals and pain is part of the procedures. Two more categories are also worth mentioning: cadaver and *in vitro* studies. The former means that animals are sacrificed while the

latter are cell or tissue research which quite often do not require animals at all.

Thus, one learns that more than half (56.7%) are non-invasive studies where little pain is involved, and more importantly, few chimpanzees, gorillas and bonobos are actually participating in scientific research. These studies mainly consist of behavioural and ecological research where animals are observed in natural settings. Moreover, the results of this study are in line with results from Europe and America.⁵⁻⁶

Studies such as these show trends in primate research over time and places. They also emphasize very broad changes that occur over time within the research community reflecting again, changes in mentalities within the general population.

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