

[Working Paper Series: 2019 MDRN Survey 6]

Stray Dogs in Yangon

Open Myanmar Initiative (OMI)

Introduction

Stray dogs can become a serious problem in public administration for the development of a city. Stray dogs can mostly be found in streets and public areas. They are waifs that may have been abandoned by their owners due to a number of reasons. Most stray dogs breed freely and have unknown owners. They cause numerous problems by barking, howling, fighting over mating, and attacks, and the smell of dog urine and feces can be very disturbing to people, especially pedestrians, in cities. Stray dog overpopulation occurs in cities where the city authorities assume that it is a minor problem with no need for a systematic and urgent solution.

As of 2018, the global stray dog population was estimated to be 900 million by some sources, while the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates it around 200 million. In Myanmar, the Livestock Breeding and Veterinary Department of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation stated in 2019 that there are 38 million dogs in the country, and 27 million of them are stray. This means that overall, 70% of dogs in Myanmar are stray dogs. The department estimated the number of stray dogs in the Yangon Municipal Area to be between 236,000 and 280,000. The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) stated the fertility of stray dogs ranges from 20% to 25%. In consideration of these statistics, it is essential to set up short-term and long-term policy to decrease the population of stray dogs living in streets and public areas of Yangon Municipal Area in order to control fertility.

This research paper reviews the opinions of city dwellers in Yangon city on the stray dog problem and the YCDC's approaches to resolving it. It also explores the numbers, causes, and impacts of stray dogs and aims to provide useful information not only for policy makers and planners but also the public.

Increasing Stray Dogs, Growing Worries

We conducted a public opinion survey in each district of Yangon to understand how common stray dogs are in each of the areas governed by YCDC. Half of survey respondents stated that there are many stray dogs in the areas where they live. In the southern district, nearly three-quarters of respondents (71.1%) responded that there were many stray dogs in their area. While half of respondents from the northern district (50%) indicated that there were many stray dogs there, 37.8% said there were not many. In the eastern and western districts, more than 50% of respondents

indicated there were many stray dogs where they live (Fig 1).

We asked how the population of stray dogs now compared to two years ago (increase or decrease). In the southern, eastern and western districts, most respondents stated that the number of stray dogs had increased over the last two years. In contrast, the majority of respondents who live in the northern district said that the number of stray dogs had decreased in the same time period. Over half of respondents (52.8%) from the southern district responded that there had been an increase in the number of stray dogs in their area, which was the highest rate among all four districts (Fig 2).

The large number of stray dogs shows that stray dogs are a serious public administration problem in Yangon. The number of stray dogs is increasing over time. Stray dogs are a threat to public safety, and people are concerned about this trend for a number of reasons.

Fig. 1 How many stray dogs are in your district?

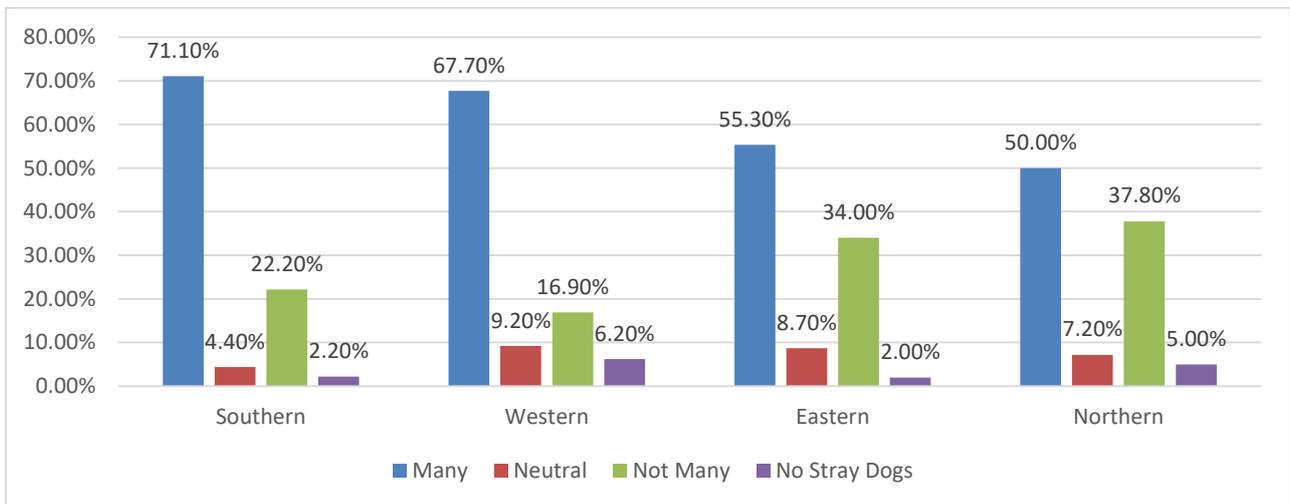
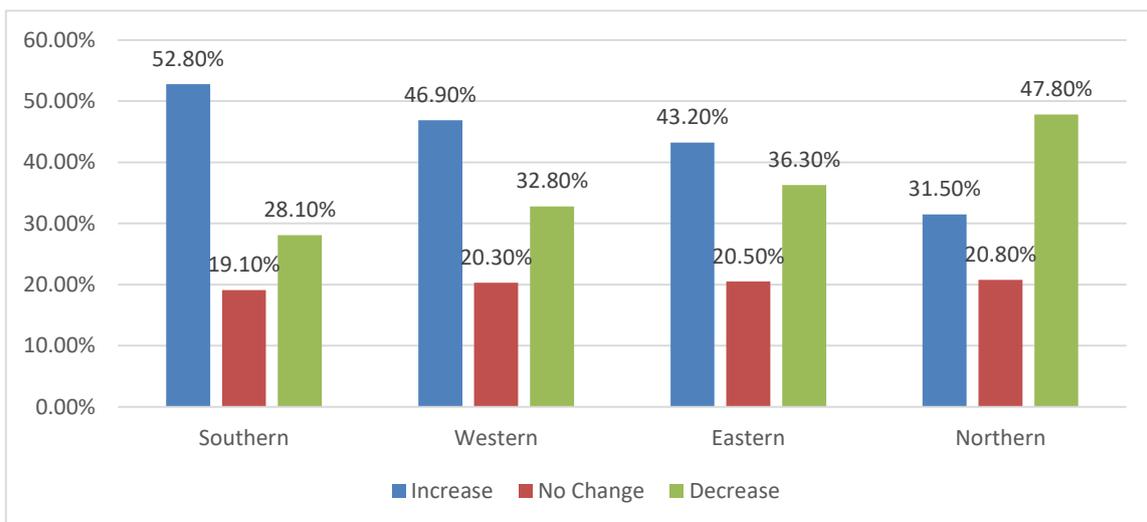


Fig. 2. Has the number of stray dogs increased over the last two years in your district?



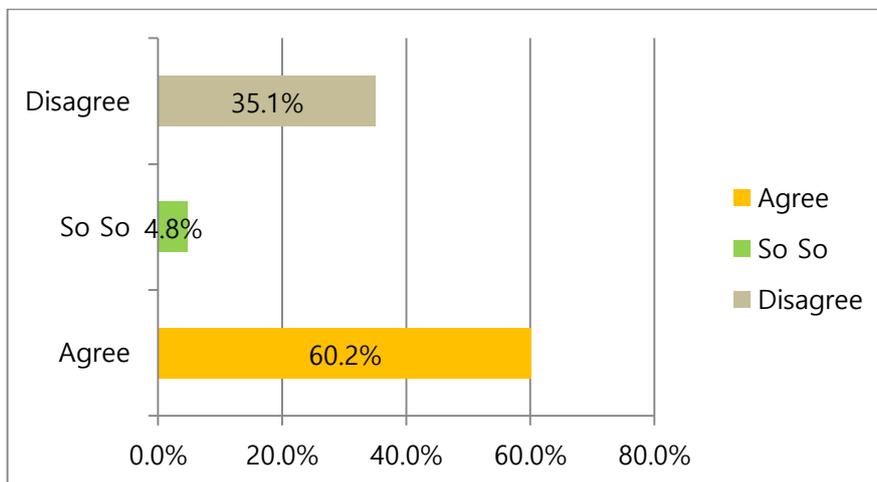
Threats (disruption) from stray dogs

We asked in the survey how respondents felt about the number of stray dogs in the areas where they live. In response, 73% of those surveyed stated that stray dogs are bad whereas 12.4% of respondents answered it is good. Around 15% of respondents had no idea how to respond to this question. The data demonstrates that the majority of Yangon residents are not happy about the presence of stray dogs in the city.

Noise

Stray dogs have many negative impacts on both the environment and public health. Many stray dogs roam at night. Stray dogs are noisy and disruptive. When dogs howl at night, it can be very disturbing to the residents nearby. Our survey revealed that 60.2% of respondents found the noise caused by stray dogs disruptive.

Fig. 3 Do you find the noise caused by stray dogs disruptive?

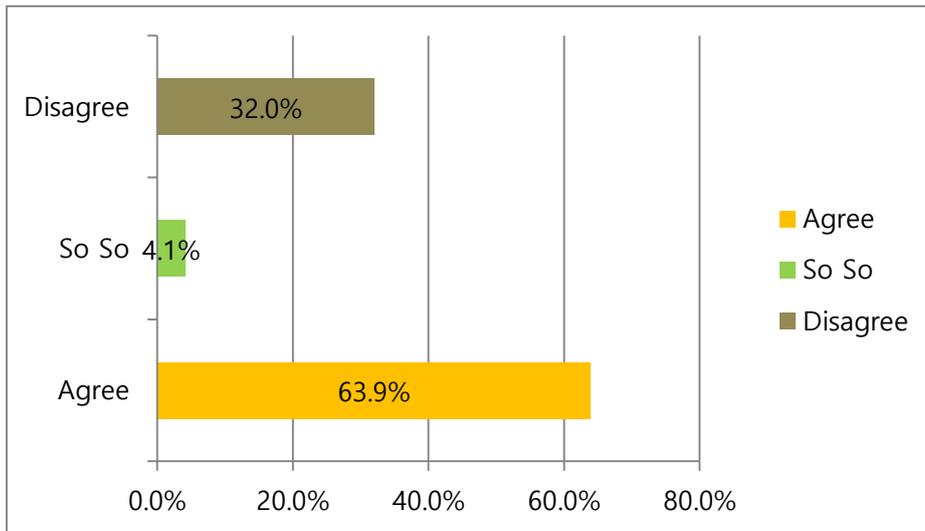


Disturbing for pedestrians

Stray dogs tend to lay in the street, which can bother pedestrians. When asked if stray dogs were bothersome to pedestrians, 63.9% of respondents answered affirmatively, while 32% said that they were not bothered by the dogs. When responses were broken down by district, it was found that more than 20% of respondents in the southern district felt that stray dogs don't cause a disruption.

We also categorized the responses to this question by gender and employment, which showed that 65.7% of men and 62% of women felt that stray dogs in the street rarely bothered pedestrians. In addition, most government officers, dependents, and retired staff answered that the stray dogs were not disruptive to pedestrians.

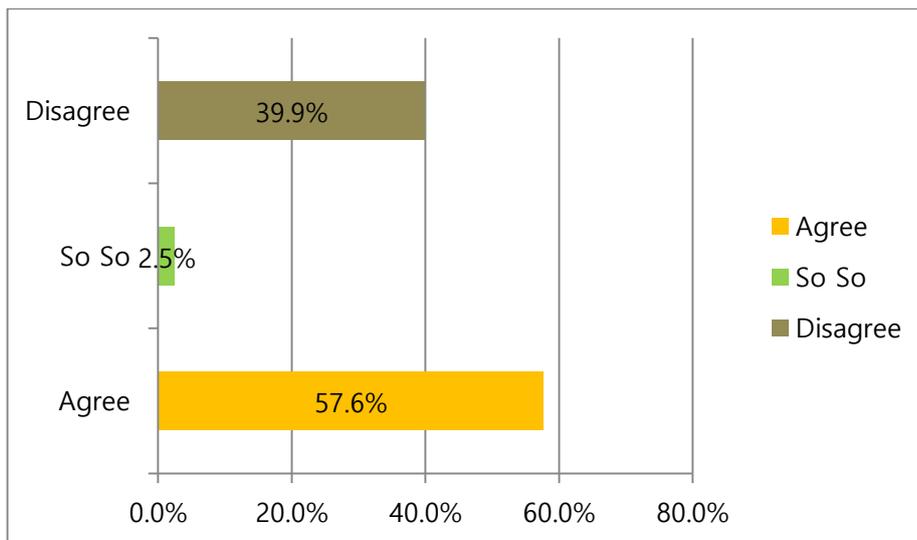
Fig. 4 Are stray dogs bothersome to pedestrians?



Filth and smell

Stray dogs have become a threat to public health. Stray dogs can spread various diseases, and are absolutely dirty because there is no one to clean them. The filth and smell of stray dogs can affect our daily lives. When we asked Yangon residents if they felt the filth and smell of stray dogs were a problem, 57.6% of respondents answered affirmatively while 39.9% answered that it was rarely an issue. When the responses were divided by district, we found that the residents of the southern district were most bothered by these issues (63.3%) while residents of the northern district were bothered the least (53.9%). Regardless, more than half of respondents in all districts felt that the filth and smell of stray dogs was a problem.

Fig. 5 Are the filth and smell of stray dogs a problem?

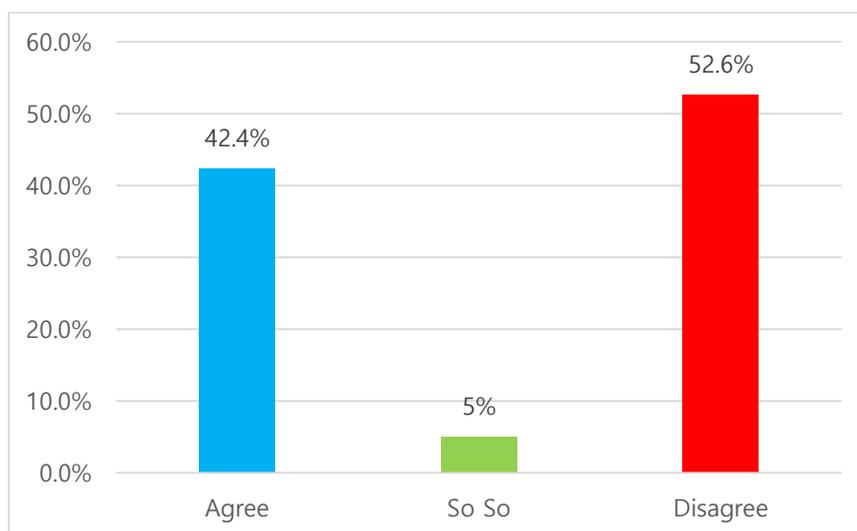


Food scraps

Many people leave food on the streets for stray dogs every day, but they don't clean up the scraps left behind. The food scraps left on the streets by stray dogs dirty the environment and can also cause issues for the residents who live nearby. We asked two questions to find out how many people feed stray dogs in the city and what the general opinion was on feeding stray dogs (good or bad). We found that 47.6% of total respondents fed stray dogs in their areas, and that half of our survey participants believed that feeding stray dogs is good.

When asked whether they were bothered by the food leftovers from stray dogs, 42.4% of respondents said it was a problem, while 52.6% answered there was no issue. Five percent of respondents said that it was normal for them. Residents in the northern district were more likely to indicate that food leftovers on the street were a problem, whereas respondents from the others three districts were more likely to indicate that the food scraps left behind were not an issue.

Fig. 6 Do the food scraps left behind by stray dogs cause a problem for you?

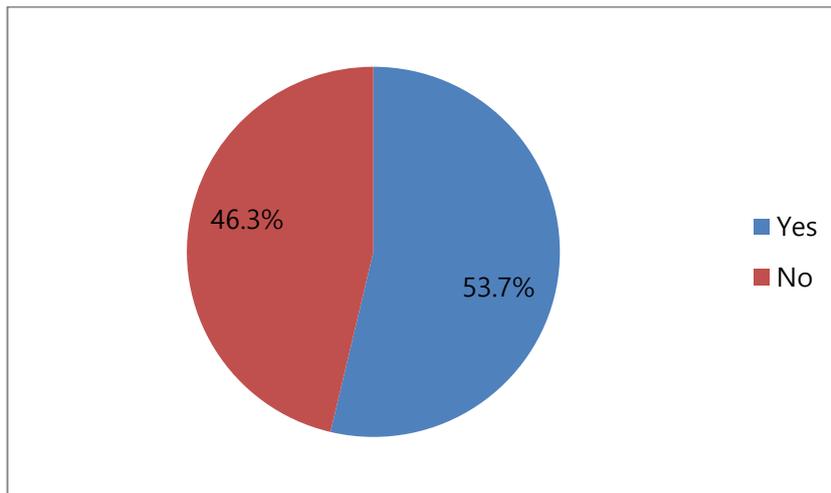


Threats from stray dogs

The overpopulation of stray dogs can pose a risk and cause problems in society. Stray dogs may unexpectedly fight people when they run in the street. Sometime, stray dogs fight with each other, which has the potential to spill over and injure people as well. Some stray dogs are aggressive and can attack people in packs. However, dog bites and dog attacks can also occur when dogs are fighting amongst themselves and pedestrians. Dog bites can be dangerous and spread rabies. We asked respondents about their experiences relating to these dangers posed stray dogs. More than half of respondents (53.7%) said that they have experienced threat or attack from stray dogs, while 46.3% had not.

When responses were divided by district, we found that a large number of respondents from the southern district had bad experiences with stray dogs. At the same time, the majority of respondents from the northern district had not. The survey also found that 55.6% of men and 51.5% of women had not experienced any threats or attacks from stray dogs.

Fig. 7 Have you ever been threatened or attacked by a stray dog?

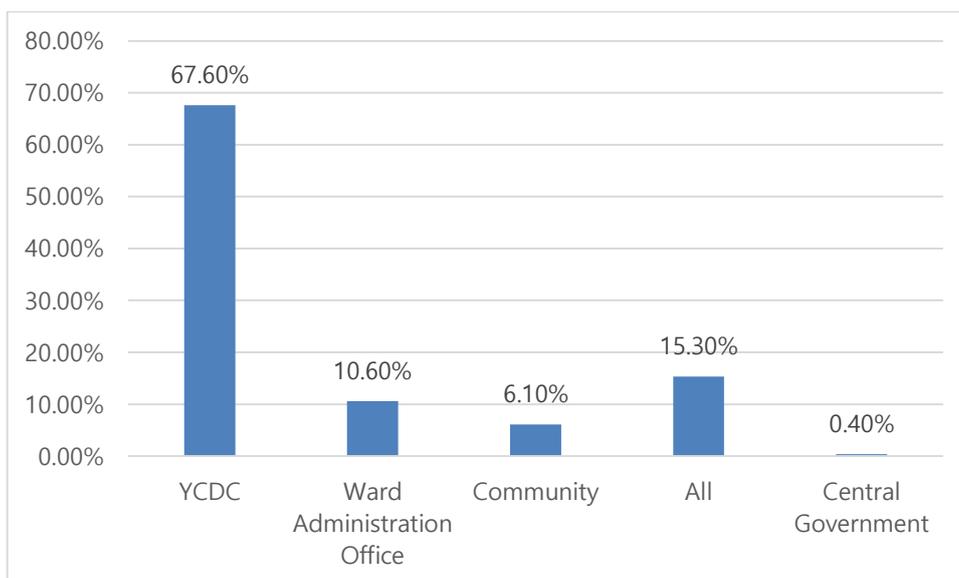


Controlling the problem of stray dogs

Whose responsibility is it?

This question in the survey aimed to gauge what respondents knew about which organizations were responsible of solving the problem of stray dogs. More than half of respondents (67.6%) responded that it is the responsibility of YCDC to solve the problem. Around 11% of respondents indicated that the ward administration office was responsible, 6.1% responded that it was the community’s responsibility, 0.4% responded the central government was responsible, and the remainder (15.3%) responded that all of these were jointly responsible for solving the problem of stray dogs.

Fig. 8 Who is responsible for solving the stray dog problem?



Assessments of YCDC's management of stray dogs

The following survey questions aimed to understand public opinion on YCDC's operation and control system for stray dogs. A large majority of respondents (82%) answered that they had some experience with YCDC's operation and maintenance system for stray dogs, while the remaining 18% did not. When responses were broken down by district, we found that 86.2% of respondents from the western district had some experience with the system, which was a higher rate than other districts.

Although 82% of respondents stated that they had some experience with YCDC's operation and maintenance system for stray dogs, only 48.8% indicated that they had ever witnessed the system in action directly. The remaining 51.2% of respondents said that they had never witnessed the system in operation. Around 60% of respondents from the eastern district answered that they had never witnessed the system in action, which was the highest rate among all districts.

When respondents who had direct experience with YCDC's system were asked more specifically about their experiences, 63.5% of respondents said that they had witnessed YCDC feeding poison to stray dogs while 4.2% said they had witnessed YCDC officials taking dogs off the street to be spayed or neutered and another 4.2% had witnessed dogs being taken to the animal control center. The remaining 28.1% had not witnessed either method in action (Fig.9).

The Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) is the organization responsible for handling stray dogs. Therefore, we asked the survey respondents how they would rate YCDC's performance. About 47% of respondents rated YCDC's performance as good, 25.9% rated their performance as bad, and the remaining 26.9% of respondents rated their performance as average (Fig. 10).

Respondents from the southern district generally rated YCDC's performance highly, while most respondents from the western district gave YCDC's performance a bad rating. Half of women surveyed and more than half of the civil servants surveyed rated YCDC's performance as good.

Fig. 9 What methods have you seen YCDC use to control stray dogs?

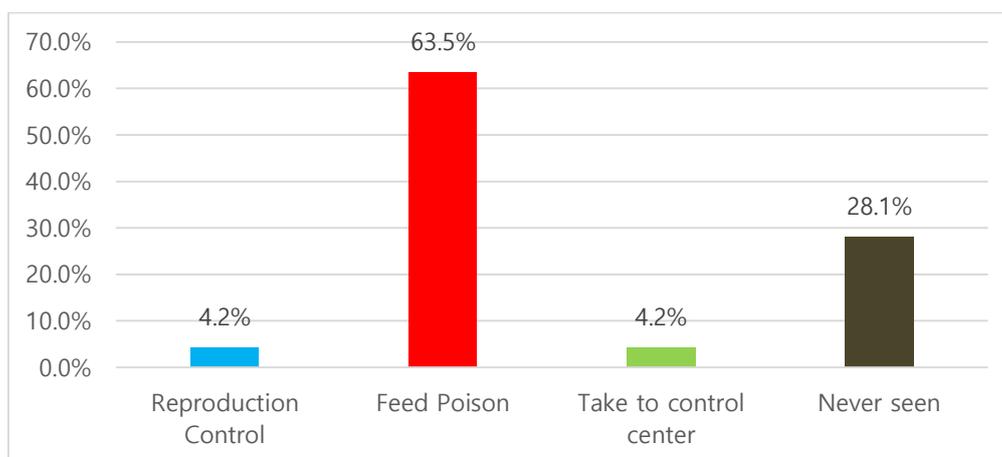
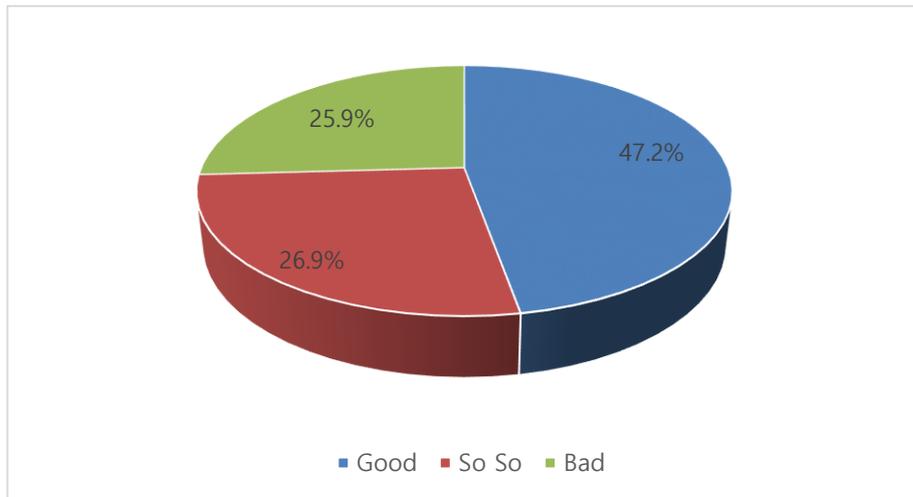


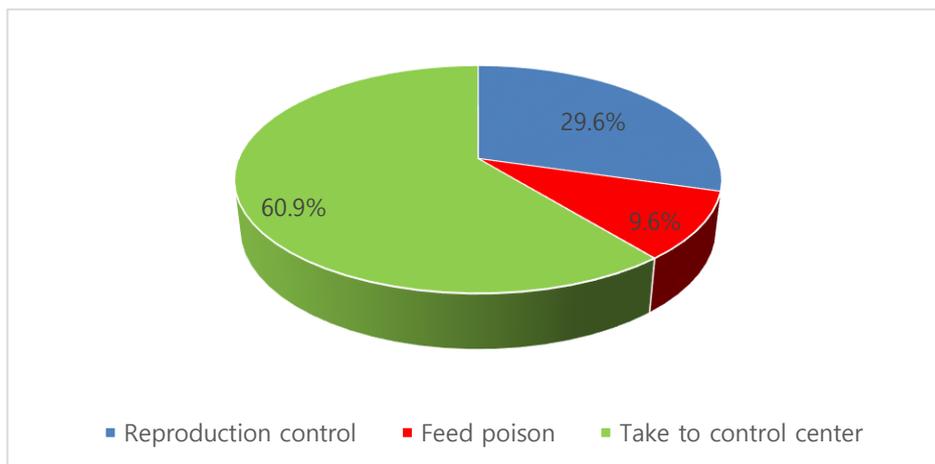
Fig. 10 How would you rank YCDC's performance on the control of stray dogs?



How to control stray dogs

YCDC's primary method of controlling and maintaining the stray dog population has thus far been by feeding them poison, but our survey revealed that most people do not approve of this method. This may make it difficult for YCDC to obtain the participation of the public in reducing the population of stray dogs. We asked respondents what methods they suggested YCDC use to control and maintain the stray dog population. About 61% of respondents suggested that YCDC take them to the control center, while 29.6% suggested YCDC spay or neuter them. The remaining 9.6% of respondents suggested that YCDC should continue to feed them poison.

Fig 11. How should YCDC control the stray dog population?



Conclusion

As Yangon city has developed, the overpopulation of stray dogs has become one of the main problems for Yangon City Development Committee (YCDC) to solve urgently. With the weakness of the current system in controlling the spread of stray dogs, the safety of city residents is threatened. The majority of people know that YCDC is responsible for solving the problem of stray dogs and are satisfied with the committee's performance. If cooperation between the YCDC and the public improves, it can be effective in controlling and maintaining the population of stray dogs. People prefer that YCDC exercise population control by taking the dogs to the control center. YCDC can build more support for its efforts by cooperating and holding discussions with those who are concerned with the control methods used. Stray dogs have negative impacts on public health and business, and the increasing stray dog population in a city can interfere with daily life. The smell of dog urine and dog feces may also negatively affect street food vendors. For this reason, YCDC should mainly focus on dealing with the dogs in the spaces near the market and street vendors.

The available methods for population control are killing, taking the dogs to the control center, and spaying or neutering the animals. Up to this point in time, YCDC has primarily practiced the method of feeding stray dogs poison, but most people do not approve of this control method. This method is not effective to solve the stray dog problem in our society. Most people suggested that YCDC should take the stray dogs to the control center. While this solution may be effective, it is also an expensive one due to the sheer number of stray dogs. This solution requires people, land space, and facilities. Spaying and neutering also require a huge amount of money. In consideration of these factors, it is clear that the problem of stray dogs cannot be solved easily and urgently, and YCDC needs a long-term plan to solve this problem. Enacting a registration process can be effective in controlling and maintaining the stray dog population. YCDC should also provide and support private shelters. YCDC needs specific plans, budgets, technologies, and trained workers to effectively deal with this problem. YCDC should mainly focus on increasing public participation by cooperating with international organizations, non-government organizations, dog lovers, and the public on awareness programs. If the government and everyone can unite, the problem of stray dogs in Yangon can be resolved. Thus, we recommend that YCDC devote a greater amount of energy to solving the problem of stray dogs, which is an important part of urban development. ■

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