Humane World for Animals

Insights

Compassion Index of Kolkata

Analysis and report by Dr Vrushti Mawani

About Humane World for Animals India

For over 70 years, Humane World for Animals - formerly Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International - has worked to tackle the root causes of animal cruelty and suffering and create permanent change.

With millions of supporters and work happening in over 50 countries, we are focused on creating long-term solutions to the biggest problems facing animals, working to end the cruellest practices, caring for animals in crisis and building a stronger animal protection movement.

We work across borders to shift human behaviour and drive policy change, bring diverse expertise to the most complex issues, and do it all with a compassionate and welcoming approach. Driving for the greatest global impact, we aim to achieve the vision behind our name.

Incorporated in India: 2012

Type: Section 8 not- for-profit company

Reach: Presence across 10+ states in India

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Executive summary

Humane World for Animals India Foundation (Humane World India) surveyed Kolkata to assess residents' levels of compassion toward animals. A total of 2,021 people participated. The key findings are summarised below:

Awareness and attitudes to animal welfare

- **Awareness of infrastructure:** Awareness of local animal welfare infrastructure, including shelters and veterinary clinics, is moderate. About one-third of respondents (33.49%) knew of some shelters or clinics, but only 10.83% knew the location and role of all of them. Nearly one quarter (24.24%) had no awareness of any such infrastructure.
- **Laws and punishment:** A plurality of respondents (43%) believe current animal welfare laws are effective. A much larger majority (83.76%) agreed or strongly agreed that people who abuse animals should be punished.
- **Key concerns:** Animal farming practices were the leading concern (24%), followed by animal cruelty (21%) and animal testing (21%).
- **Animal welfare in education vs direct support:** More than 80% of respondents agreed that animal welfare education should be included in school curricula, while 65% said they were willing to support animal welfare directly. This suggests stronger support for a systemic, education-based approach than for direct personal involvement.

Compassion and attitudes towards street animals

- **Perceptions of street animals:** Dogs and cats are the animals most commonly associated with the term 'street animals', identified by 64% of respondents.
- **Comfort levels:** Fifty-eight per cent of respondents said they feel comfortable around street animals, 22% were neutral, and 20% expressed discomfort.
- **Response to relocation:** The largest share of respondents (37%) said they would be happy or very happy if street animals were relocated, while nearly one-third (32%) were neutral. Among those who supported relocation, more than 55% reported moderate knowledge of street animal welfare guidelines. This suggests that support for relocation does not necessarily stem from discomfort with street animals or a lack of knowledge about welfare guidelines.
- **Satisfaction with the ABC program:** Public opinion is nearly evenly split. While 35.86% of respondents said they were satisfied with Kolkata's ABC program, 36.23% said they were dissatisfied. 5. Feeding street animals: A large majority of respondents (86%) believe feeding street animals is necessary.

Compassion and attitudes towards farm animals

- **Improvements to slaughter processes:** An overwhelming 74.75% of respondents feel that some form of improvement is needed for current chicken and goat slaughter processes. Almost 72% also agreed that the open slaughter process in Kolkata requires improvements.
- **Reaction to injured animals:** Compassion varies significantly by species:
  - **Calf:** An injured calf elicits the highest share of proactive help, such as providing food/water (37%) or calling a rescue team (24%).
  - **Street dog:** Reactions are fragmented. Twenty-six per cent would provide food or water and 26% would call for help. However, another 26% would also 'feel sorry and walk away'.
  - **Chicken:** An injured chicken receives the least compassionate and proactive response, with 46% responding with passive disengagement. The willingness to seek professional help (17%) is significantly lower than for dogs or calves.
- **Dietary choices:** A majority of respondents (65%) consume animal-based products regularly (daily or a few times a week), with health (43.29%) and taste (26.42%) being the dominant drivers of these choices.
- **Plant-based diets:** Over one-third of respondents (34.25%) are open to adopting a plant-based diet for animal welfare. This contrasts with the finding that only 7% of respondents consider ethics their primary dietary motivation, suggesting a gap between general sentiment and actual behaviour. Even among those who agree that plant-based diets are nutritious, a majority still consume animal products frequently, with health and taste being the main motivators.

Compassion and attitudes towards wild animals

- **Importance of wild animal welfare:** Seventy per cent of respondents view the welfare of wild animals as important or very important.
- **State-level actions:** Perceptions are divided. While 39% believe that enough is being done by the state for wildlife welfare, 34% believe more needs to be done.
- **Pressing issues:** Poaching and illegal trade (31.61%) were identified as the top concern, followed by climate change (22.81%) and pollution (19.04%).

Key recommendations

The findings highlight important opportunities to strengthen animal welfare in Kolkata through evidence-based policies, greater public awareness, stronger community participation, and enhanced institutional collaboration. By acting on the strategic recommendations presented in this report, government agencies, civil society organizations, educational institutions, veterinary professionals, communities, and citizens can work together to build a more compassionate and humane Kolkata for both people and animals.

Context

Animal welfare in Kolkata is a pressing and complex issue shaped by high population density, rapid urbanisation and the close interdependence of human and animal lives. The city's diverse animal populations – including street animals, working animals on peri-urban margins, farmed animals and urban wildlife in shrinking habitats – often face cruelty, poor nutrition, inadequate shelter and limited access to veterinary care throughout their lives. Despite multiple initiatives, many animals in Kolkata still do not receive humane treatment or adequate care.

Goal

The overall goal of this research is to examine the current state of animal welfare in Kolkata. The study focuses on four key areas: street animals, farm animals, wildlife, and food consumption habits. It aims to identify key concerns, assess public attitudes and knowledge, and propose actionable recommendations to improve animal welfare standards in the city.

Objective

This research has three broad objectives:

1. Assess public attitudes and knowledge:

- Measure public comfort levels and understanding of street animals, including views on the rules and guidelines that affect their welfare.
- Assess public awareness and perceptions of animal welfare in relation to farm animals and wildlife.
- Examine how familiar residents are with existing animal welfare laws and how effective they believe current practices are.

2. Evaluate animal welfare practices:

- Examine the effectiveness of existing animal welfare programs, including the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Programfor street animals.
- Analyse the condition of street animals and farm animal welfare practices in Kolkata.
- Assess how food consumption habits affect animal welfare and explore public willingness to shift toward plant-based diets.

3. Identify key issues and gaps:

- Identify the most pressing animal welfare issues in Kolkata based on public opinion and data analysis.
- Highlight gaps and shortcomings in current animal welfare regulations and practices.
- Propose evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, animal welfare organizations, and the public.

Research design

1. Methodology

- **Survey design:** A questionnaire was developed to collect data from a diverse sample of Kolkata residents. It covered demographics, attitudes toward street animals, farm animal welfare, wildlife, food habits, and animal cruelty.
- **Sampling:** Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across age groups, genders, education levels, and income brackets. The target sample size was 2,000–2,500 respondents to support statistical significance.
- **Data collection**: The survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews, with responses recorded digitally using an electronic questionnaire. The questionnaire was available in Bengali, Hindi and English to reflect the city's linguistic diversity.
- **Data analysis**: Survey responses were analysed to identify trends, correlations, and key areas of concern.

2. Key areas of focus

- **Street animals:** Assess comfort levels around street animals, public responses to their removal, and awareness of relevant regulations.
- **Farm animals:** Evaluate views on welfare standards for farm animals, as well as perceptions of slaughter and transportation practices.
- **Wildlife:** Examine the importance respondents place on wildlife welfare, their reactions to wildlife-related issues, and their perceptions of current protection efforts.
- **Food habits:** Analyze dietary habits, the motivations behind food choices, and willingness to adopt plant-based diets to support animal welfare.
- **Animal cruelty:** Assess satisfaction with existing animal welfare programs, particularly the ABC program, along with public views on feeding street animals and open slaughter practices.

Expected outcomes

- **Comprehensive understanding:** Build a clear picture of public attitudes toward animal welfare in Kolkata, including views on street animals, farm animals, and wildlife.
- **Identification of gaps:** Identify weaknesses and gaps in current animal welfare practices and regulations.
- **Actionable recommendations:** Develop practical recommendations for policymakers, animal welfare organizations, and the public to improve animal welfare standards.
- **Public awareness:** Increase awareness of animal welfare issues and encourage more informed, compassionate public action.

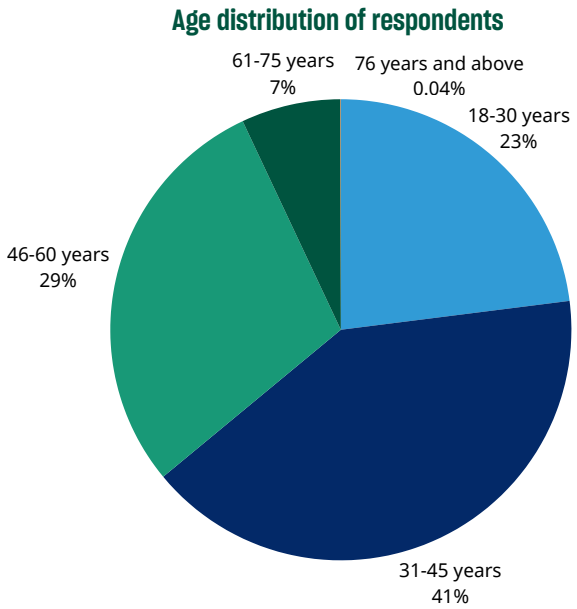
Demographic profile of participants

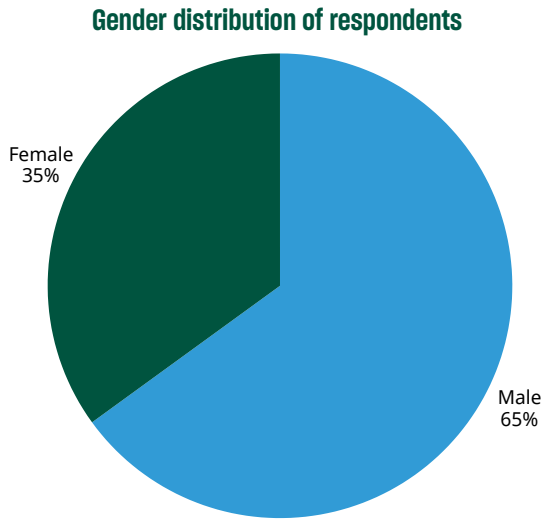
Age distribution

A total of 2,021 individuals across Kolkata participated in the survey. The largest share of respondents was in the 31–45 age group (41%), followed by the 46–60 age group (29%). The 18–30 group also made up a substantial share (23%). Older age groups accounted for a much smaller proportion of respondents.

Gender distribution

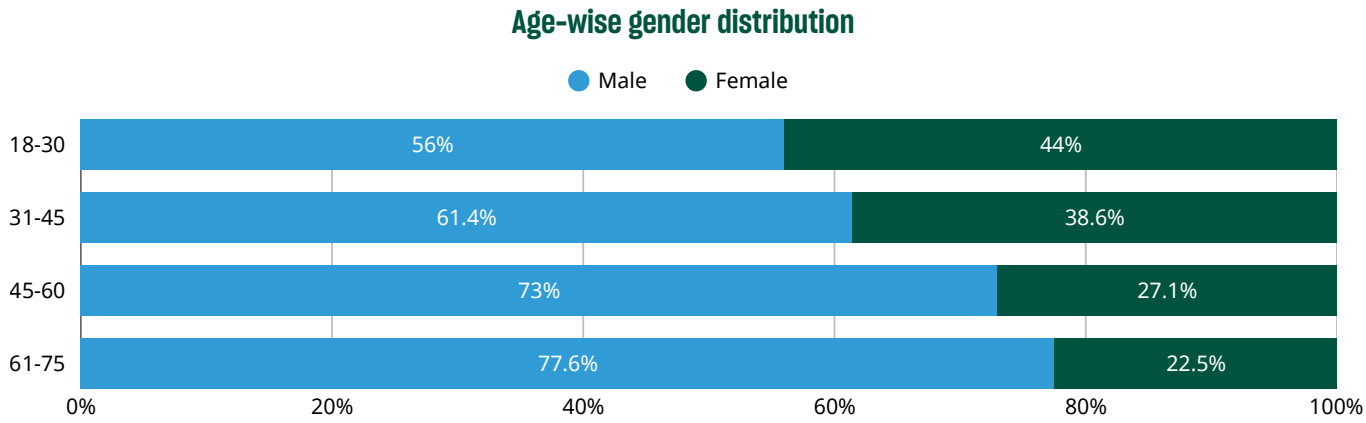
The survey included substantially more male respondents than female respondents.





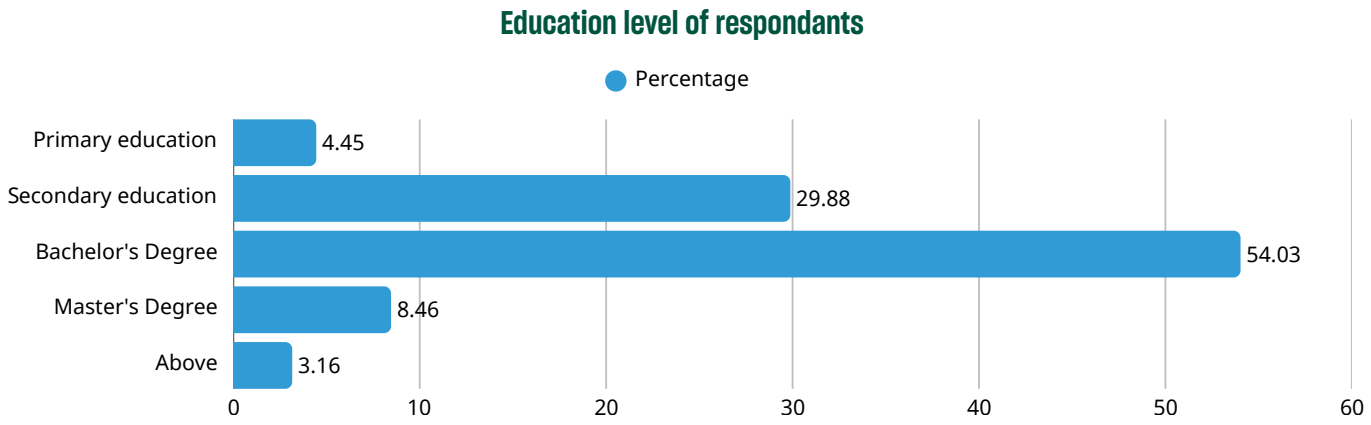
A closer look at gender distribution across age groups shows the following:

- **Male respondents predominate across age groups:** In every age group shown, men make up a much larger share of respondents than women.
- **Gender disparity narrows among younger respondents:** The gap between male and female participation is smaller in younger age groups and widens progressively in older groups.



Education levels

More than half of respondents (54.03%) held a bachelor's degree, making this the largest education category in the sample. By contrast, relatively few had postgraduate qualifications (8.46% held a master's degree and 3.16% had pursued higher degrees). Those with only primary education also made up a small share (4.45%).



Implications for program design or messaging:

The education profile of respondents suggests that Programmaterials and messaging may need to be simplified, translated, or localised to engage a broader audience effectively, especially people with lower or more varied educational backgrounds.

Income levels

More than half of respondents (54.67%) fell in the ₹1,00,000–₹5,00,000 annual income bracket, while just over one-quarter (25.18%) were in the ₹5,00,000–₹10,00,000 bracket. Only 5.19% reported an annual income below ₹1,00,000.

A further 7.37% of respondents reported annual incomes of ₹10,00,000–₹30,00,000, 3.56% reported ₹30,00,000–₹50,00,000, and 3.41% reported more than ₹50,00,000. Taken together, these groups represent a sizeable upper-middle-income segment—close to 15% of the sample.

Sources of news and information

Television (35%) and newspapers (26%) together accounted for 61% of respondents' primary news sources, indicating that traditional media remains highly influential. Social media (24%) and internet research (10%) together represented 34% of primary news consumption, highlighting the growing role of digital media.

When this data is broken down by age for the three most commonly cited news sources (social media, television, and newspapers), two clear trends emerge:

- use of social media increases as age decreases; and
- reliance on newspapers declines among younger age groups.

These patterns can help inform age-specific public outreach strategies.

Awareness and attitudes to animal welfare

Moderate awareness of animal welfare infrastructure was the most common response. A total of 33.49% of respondents said they knew of some animal shelters or clinics, suggesting at least a basic level of familiarity.

Only 10.83% said they knew the location and role of all shelters and clinics. This very low figure points to a significant gap in comprehensive public knowledge and may help explain the low share of people who take injured animals to shelters or veterinarians, as later sections of the report suggest.

A total of 24.24% of respondents (490 people) said they had no awareness at all of the city's animal welfare infrastructure. In other words, nearly one-quarter of the sample is entirely disconnected from these services. Another 14.1% (285 respondents) said they knew of only one or two such facilities.

A closer look at the two lowest-awareness categories shows a clear age-related pattern: **awareness tends to increase with age.**

Viewed alongside earlier findings on how different age groups access news and information, this pattern suggests a clear Programimplication: outreach on urban animal welfare infrastructure should be strengthened through social and digital media.

Perceptions of the effectiveness of current animal welfare laws

A combined 43% of respondents believe current animal welfare laws are effective (31% effective and 12% very effective). However, the single largest category is "neutral," with 32% of respondents expressing no clear view. This large neutral segment may reflect apathy, limited awareness, or both.

A further 25% of respondents viewed current laws as ineffective to some degree (22% ineffective and 3% very ineffective). Even within this group, however, the share who see the laws as very ineffective remains relatively small.

Opinion on whether animal abusers should be punished

The data shows overwhelming support for punishing animal abusers, with 83.76% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Specifically, 42.8% agreed, and 40.96% strongly agreed, indicating a broad and strongly held view that animal abuse should have consequences.

Another 11.42% were neutral on this question, which may reflect limited awareness, apathy, or the view that punishment is not always the best response. Only 4.79% disagreed overall (2.96% disagreed and 1.83% strongly disagreed).

Key concerns regarding animals in India

Moderate awareness of animal welfare infrastructure was the most common response. A total of 33.49% of respondents said they knew of some animal shelters or clinics, suggesting at least a basic level of familiarity.

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Animal farming practices (24%):

Nearly one-quarter of respondents identified animal farming practices as their top concern. Although the survey does not provide further details, this likely includes issues such as factory farming conditions, livestock transport, and slaughter methods.

Animal cruelty and animal testing (21% each):

General concerns about animal cruelty likely span pets, working animals, and animals used in entertainment. Animal testing emerged as an equally prominent issue, indicating that it is a major concern for respondents.

Street animal-related issues (18%):

This category likely covers concerns such as overpopulation, animal health and welfare, and human–street animal conflict.

Human–wildlife conflict (16%):

This was the least widely cited concern, which may indicate that such issues receive relatively less public attention or campaign visibility.

Opinion on whether educational institutions should include animal welfare education in their curriculum

More than 80% of respondents agreed that animal welfare education should be included in the curriculum of educational institutions (56.85% agreed and 23.30% strongly agreed).

Another 16.32% were neutral, which may reflect limited understanding of the issue, concerns about implementation, or general apathy. Only 3.51% disagreed overall (2.67% disagreed and 0.84% strongly disagreed).

Willingness to support animal welfare

A total of 65% of respondents expressed willingness to support animal welfare directly (43% willing and 22% very willing). This may indicate both a strong interest in supporting animal welfare and a perception that current efforts are insufficient. Nearly 29% were neutral, suggesting uncertainty, apathy, or limited knowledge of how to help. Only 6% said they were unwilling to support animal welfare (5% unwilling and 1% very unwilling).

Inclusion of animal welfare in educational curricula vs. willingness to support animal welfare directly

When support for animal welfare education is compared with willingness to support animal welfare directly, both results indicate broadly positive public attitudes. A total of 80.15% of respondents supported including animal welfare in education, while 65% said they were willing to support animal welfare themselves.

However, support for including animal welfare in the curriculum is clearly higher than willingness to engage directly. This suggests that many respondents favour a formal, system-level approach over personal involvement. In other words, education may be seen as a foundational and more sustainable route to improving animal welfare outcomes.

The neutral segment is also much smaller for the education question (16.32%) than for direct support (29%). Similarly, only 3.51% disagreed with including animal welfare in education, compared with 6% who said they were unwilling to support animal welfare directly.

Together, these findings suggest stronger and less ambiguous public support for animal welfare education than for direct participation in animal welfare efforts.

Program implications: The data strongly support prioritizing efforts to integrate animal welfare into educational curricula.

Compassion and Attitudes towards Street Animals

Animals Perceived as Street Animals

Dogs and cats together were most commonly identified as street animals, with 64% of respondents selecting this option. A further 22% considered all the animals listed in the survey (cows, cats, and dogs) to be street animals.

When considered individually, 11% identified only dogs as street animals, 1% identified only cats, and 2% identified only cows.

This suggests three key patterns:

- Residents of Kolkata most commonly associate the term "street animals" with dogs and cats together.
- A sizeable group of respondents uses a broader definition that also includes cows.
- Cows are less likely to be considered street animals when viewed on their own, especially compared with dogs and cats.

Comfort Level with Street Animals

More than half of respondents (58%) said they feel comfortable around street animals, including 43% who said they were "comfortable" and 15% who said they were "very comfortable." Another 22% were neutral, suggesting an opportunity for awareness campaigns or community programs to shift attitudes further toward comfort and coexistence. A smaller but still notable 20% expressed discomfort (13% "uncomfortable" and 7% "very uncomfortable"), though the share reporting strong discomfort was relatively limited.

Self-reported Knowledge of Guidelines on Street Animal Welfare

The largest share of respondents (38.29%) reported having low or no knowledge of rules and regulations related to street animal welfare, including 26.32% who described themselves as "not very knowledgeable" and 11.96% who said they were "not knowledgeable at all." This indicates that a substantial proportion of respondents are either partly or wholly uninformed about street animal welfare guidelines.

About one-third of respondents (33.8%) considered themselves knowledgeable or very knowledgeable (24.14% and 9.66%, respectively). The largest single category, however, was "somewhat knowledgeable" at 27.90%, suggesting that many people feel they have a basic or partial understanding rather than in-depth knowledge of these guidelines.

When this data is broken down by age, the differences are modest, but a few patterns stand out:

- **18–30 age group:** This group had the lowest share of respondents who said they were "not knowledgeable at all" (9.85%) and the highest share who said they were "somewhat knowledgeable" (31.29%), suggesting a broader base of partial understanding.
- **31–45 age group:** This group had the highest share of respondents who said they were "not knowledgeable at all" (13.46%), indicating that a somewhat larger proportion feels completely uninformed.
- **46–60 age group:** This group had the highest share of respondents who said they were "not very knowledgeable" (27.05%), suggesting that many feel they lack substantial knowledge.
- **61–75 age group:** This group had the highest share of respondents who described themselves as "very knowledgeable" (11.56%), which may indicate a smaller but relatively well-informed subgroup.

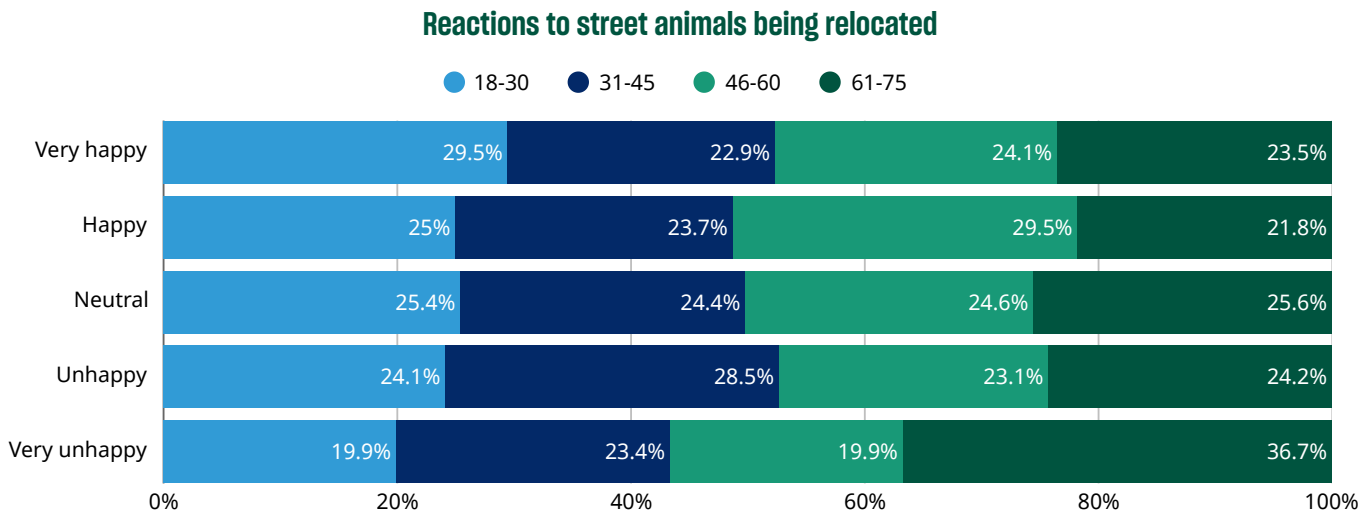
Reactions if street animals were relocated

A combined 37% of respondents viewed relocation positively (26% "happy" and 11% "very happy"), indicating that more than one-third of the sample supports the relocation of street animals. The single most common response, however, was "neutral," with about one in three respondents expressing no strong view either way.

A smaller share—29% in total—said they would be unhappy about relocation (22% "unhappy" and 7% "very unhappy"). In other words, only about three in ten respondents expressed negative sentiment toward the prospect of relocation.

When these responses are examined by age group, several patterns emerge:

- Positive responses were most prominent in the 46–60 age group, which may indicate relatively stronger support for relocation in this segment.
- The 18–30 age group showed the highest combined positive sentiment (happy + very happy = ~31.1%) and the lowest combined negative sentiment (unhappy + very unhappy = ~27.6%) toward relocation.
- The 31–45 age group showed the highest resistance to relocation, with combined unhappy and very unhappy responses at about 32.6%.
- The 61–75 age group had the highest share of "very unhappy" responses (~9.4%). This aligns with the same group's relatively higher self-reported knowledge of animal welfare guidelines.



The relatively high shares of "somewhat knowledgeable" and "very knowledgeable" respondents within the pro-relocation group suggest two possibilities:

- they may not fully understand what the guidelines say about relocation
- they may understand the guidelines but still feel uncomfortable with street animals or prefer their relocation.

Self-reported knowledge levels of groups 'happy' and 'very happy' about relocation of street animals

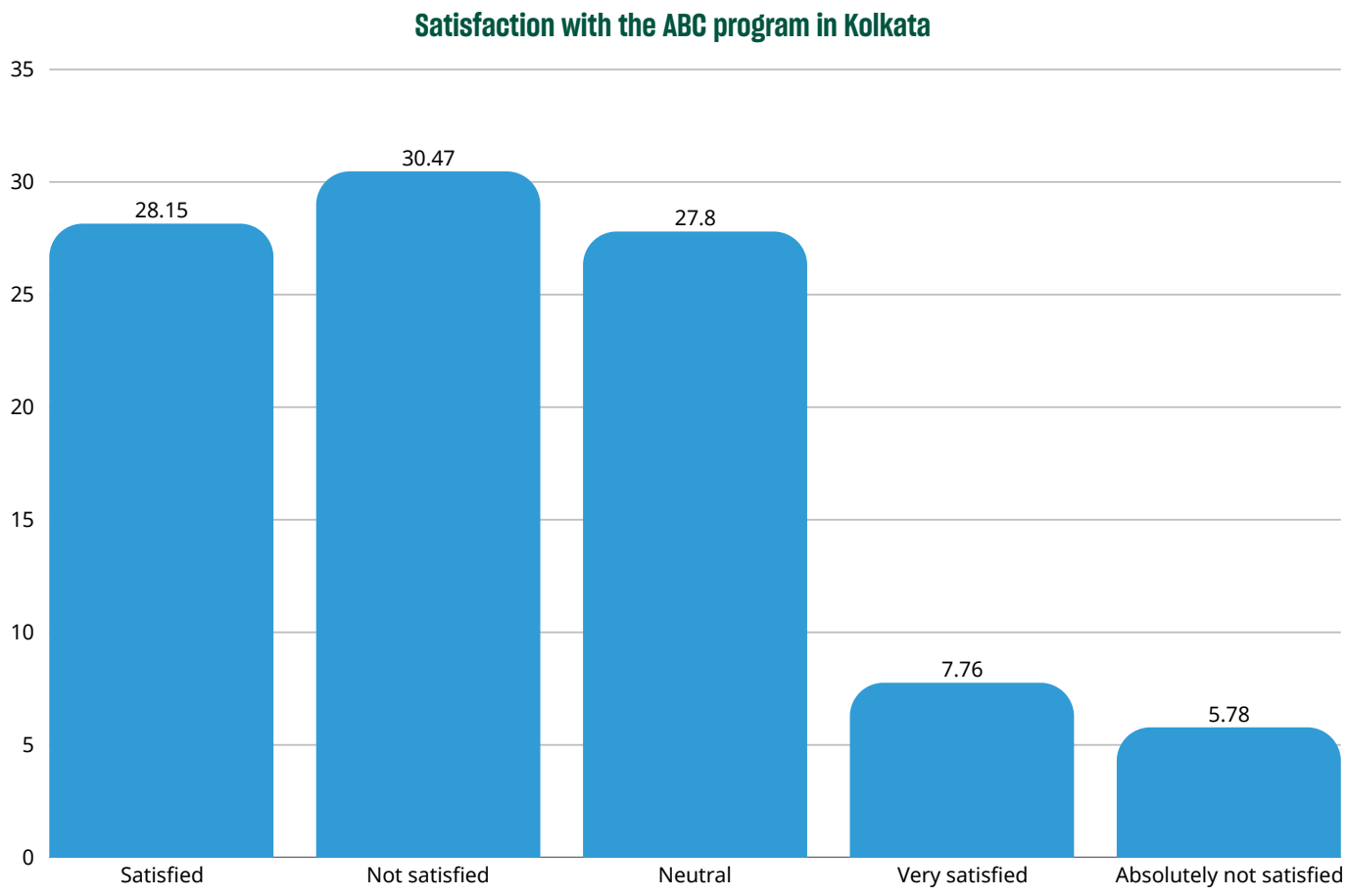
To test the second possibility from the previous section, this analysis looks at comfort levels among respondents who described themselves as somewhat knowledgeable, knowledgeable, or very knowledgeable and who also said they would be "happy" or "very happy" if street animals were relocated.

- Comfort levels are high across all sub-groups: Across all knowledge levels, "comfortable" remained the largest category, ranging from 55.56% to 59.22%.
- Higher knowledge levels are associated with greater comfort: A total of 67.47% of the somewhat knowledgeable group, 82.35% of the knowledgeable group, and 89.9% of the very knowledgeable group said they were "comfortable" or "very comfortable" around street animals. This indicates a clear relationship between greater knowledge of welfare guidelines and higher comfort levels.

These findings suggest that support for relocating street animals does not always stem from discomfort or lack of knowledge about welfare guidelines. This raises an important question: why do so many respondents who report both knowledge of the guidelines and comfort with street animals still support relocation?

Satisfaction with the ABC Programin Kolkata

Respondents are split almost evenly between satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Kolkata's ABC program. A total of 35.86% said they were satisfied (28.1% "satisfied" and 7.76% "very satisfied"), while 36.23% said they were dissatisfied (30.47% "not satisfied" and 5.76% "absolutely not satisfied"). Another 27.86% were neutral, suggesting indecision, disinterest, apathy, or limited awareness of the Programand its effectiveness.



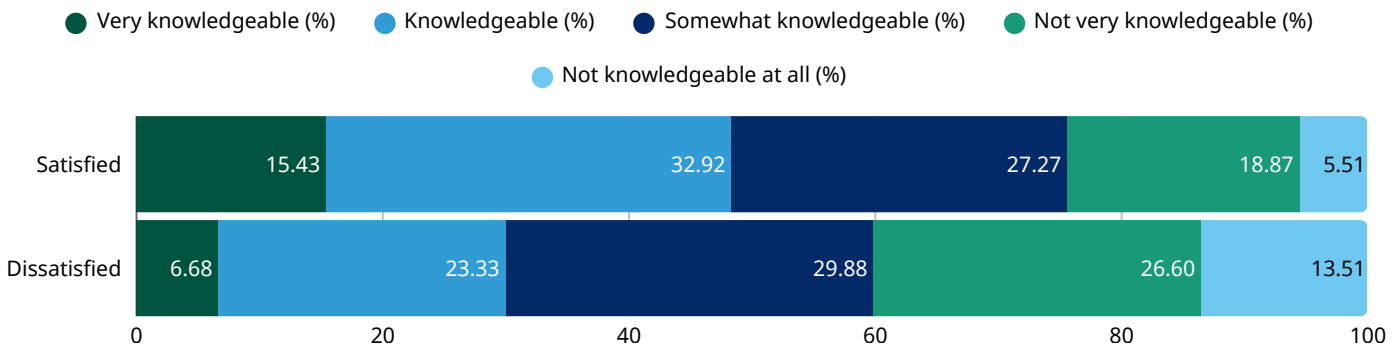
Key insights from this data include:

- **Divided public opinion:** The near-equal split between satisfaction (35.86%) and dissatisfaction (36.23%) may reflect uneven implementation across areas or over time, though the underlying reasons require further investigation.
- **Importance of the neutral group:** The 27.86% of respondents who were neutral represent a meaningful group that could shift toward satisfaction or dissatisfaction depending on future Programperformance, public communication, and how effectively concerns are addressed.
- **Need to identify sources of dissatisfaction:** Dissatisfaction with the ABC Programmay be linked to several factors, including:
  - **Effectiveness in controlling stray dog populations:** People might not see a noticeable reduction in stray numbers.
  - **Treatment of dogs during the process:** Concerns about how animals are handled.
  - **Post-operative care:** Perceived lack of proper care after sterilisation.
  - **Awareness and communication:** Lack of information about the program's objectives, schedule, or benefits.
  - **Geographic unevenness:** The Programmight be more effective in some areas than others.

To explore the first point further, it is helpful to compare knowledge of street animal welfare guidelines among respondents who were satisfied with the ABC Programand those who were dissatisfied. Among the 726 respondents who said they were "satisfied" or "very satisfied," and the 733 who said they were "dissatisfied" or "absolutely dissatisfied," two patterns stand out:

- **Satisfaction with the ABC Programis associated with higher knowledge of welfare guidelines:** A combined 48.25% of the satisfied group described themselves as "knowledgeable" (32.92%) or "very knowledgeable" (15.43%). In contrast, only about 30% of the dissatisfied group did so (23.33% "knowledgeable" and 6.68% "very knowledgeable").
- **Dissatisfaction may partly reflect lower knowledge:** A much larger share of the dissatisfied group reported low or no knowledge of the guidelines. In the satisfied group, 24.38% fell into this category (5.51% "not knowledgeable at all" and 18.87% "not very knowledgeable"), compared with 40.11% in the dissatisfied group (13.51% and 26.60%, respectively).

How knowledge ratings split between satisfied and dissatisfied respondents



Opinion on feeding stray animals

An overwhelming 86% of respondents believe feeding stray animals is necessary (56% “necessary” and 30% “very necessary”), indicating broad support for feeding practices. Another 10% were neutral, which may reflect apathy or uncertainty. Only 4% said feeding stray animals was not necessary (3% “not necessary” and 1% “absolutely not necessary”), showing very limited opposition.

Perceived condition of Kolkata’s street animals

The largest share of respondents (40%) described the condition of Kolkata’s street animals as “bad” (26%) or “very bad” (14%), indicating a widespread view that these animals are struggling or poorly treated. A slightly smaller share (36%) described conditions as “good” (26%) or “very good” (10%), suggesting that more than one-third believe street animals are adequately cared for.

Another 24% were neutral on this question, which may reflect uncertainty, apathy, or insufficient information to form a clear view.

Compassion and attitudes towards farm animals

Standardised welfare for farm animals and companion animals

A plurality of respondents (47%) believe farm animals should be afforded welfare standards similar to those for companion animals (37% "agree" and 10% "strongly agree"). This suggests meaningful public empathy toward animals raised for food, not only pets.

Almost one-quarter of respondents (24%) were neutral on this question. Their indecision may reflect a tension between compassion for animals and dietary habits, limited awareness, or general apathy. This group may be especially responsive to targeted education on why welfare standards should not differ by animal type. Overall, 29% of respondents disagreed that farm animals and companion animals should have similar welfare standards (22% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed).

Opinions on current chicken and goat slaughter processes

A large majority of respondents (74.75%) believe current chicken and goat slaughter processes need improvement. Of these, 47.05% said improvements are "a little needed," while 27.70% said they are "very much needed."

Another 16.03% were neutral on the need for improvements, which may indicate apathy or limited awareness. A much smaller share said improvements were not needed (7.81%), and only 1.38% said they were absolutely not needed.

Examining the opinions on slaughter processes in light of views on standardised welfare for farm animals and companion animals, we find that:

- **Improvements to slaughter processes are widely supported, but views differ on urgency:** While 74.75% of respondents agreed that chicken and goat slaughter procedures need improvement, opinion within that group is divided. Nearly half (47.05%) felt only limited improvements were needed, while 27.70% believed major improvements were necessary. This suggests broad concern, but varying perceptions of how serious the problem is.
- **Public concern is stronger for slaughter processes than for lifetime welfare:** While 74.75% supported improving slaughter processes, only 47% believed farm animals should receive welfare standards comparable to those of companion animals throughout their lives. This suggests that concern may be greater for animals' final moments than for their overall quality of life. Practical concerns, emotional responses, and perceived economic implications may all play a role. One Programimplication is the need to better understand and address the reasons behind this gap.
- **Large neutral segments represent an opportunity:** The sizeable neutral groups on slaughter improvement (16.03%) and welfare equality (24%) may be receptive to awareness and education efforts, particularly those aimed at challenging entrenched views about the role and treatment of farm animals.

Improvements needed to Kolkata's open slaughter process

Nearly 72% of respondents agreed that Kolkata's open slaughter process requires improvement (42% "agree" and 29.98% "very much agree"), indicating strong public concern about the current system. A further 20.03% were neutral, which may reflect apathy or limited awareness. Fewer than 8% felt improvements were unnecessary (6.25% "do not agree" and 1.68% "do not agree at all").

Standardised welfare for farm animals and companion animals

A plurality of respondents (47%) believe farm animals should be afforded welfare standards similar to those for companion animals (37% "agree" and 10% "strongly agree"). This suggests meaningful public empathy toward animals raised for food, not only pets.

Almost one-quarter of respondents (24%) were neutral on this question. Their indecision may reflect a tension between compassion for animals and dietary habits, limited awareness, or general apathy. This group may be especially responsive to targeted education on why welfare standards should not differ by animal type. Overall, 29% of respondents disagreed that farm animals and companion animals should have similar welfare standards (22% disagreed and 7% strongly disagreed).

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Reactions to finding an Injured Street Dog

A total of 59% of responses involved compassionate or concerned action toward an injured street dog. This included 26% who said they would offer food or water, 26% who would call someone for help, and 7% who would take the dog to a vet or bring it home for treatment. Another 26% said they would "feel sorry and walk away," reflecting compassion without action.

Only 7% said they would take concrete steps to secure medical care, pointing to a gap between concern and action. A small share said they would document and share the situation online, which may reflect growing social media engagement but does not necessarily lead to direct assistance. Indifference was the least common response category (6%).

Reactions to finding an injured chicken

Nearly one-third of respondents (32%) said they would provide water to an injured chicken, indicating a willingness to help, but in a limited and low-effort way. This suggests that empathy exists, but may be constrained by perceptions that chickens are less deserving of full intervention.

A total of 46% said they would respond in ways that amount to passive disengagement, including 28% who would move the bird to the side of the road and 18% who would ignore the situation entirely. This low level of engagement may reflect the view that chickens are less deserving of attention than dogs, or it may stem from discomfort, uncertainty, or lack of knowledge and resources. Only 17% said they would call a rescuer or take the bird to a vet, and just 5% would bring it home and contact a vet. Compared with responses to injured dogs, chickens receive less proactive care.

Reactions to finding an injured calf

The largest share of respondents (37%) said they would provide food or water to an injured calf, reflecting a low-threshold compassionate response that may be driven more by accessibility than by knowledge of what care is medically best. Another 37% said they would pursue organised rescue or medical intervention. This is similar to responses for other animals, but somewhat more weighted toward calling rescue teams than arranging veterinary care, possibly because of the calf's size.

Another 23% said they would feel bad but take no action, highlighting a clear empathy–action gap. Awareness campaigns may be especially effective with this group. Ignoring the calf was the least common response (3%), suggesting strong social norms against inaction in such cases. Overall, responses to injured calves were more compassionate than responses to injured chickens or street dogs.

Comparing reactions to injured street dog vs. injured chicken vs. injured calf: Speciesism in Action

Comparing these three response patterns helps illuminate how compassion differs by species.

- **Injured calf:** This animal prompted the highest share of proactive, hands-on responses, including immediate care and professional intervention. The very low tendency to ignore an injured calf suggests a strong sense of responsibility and empathy, possibly influenced by the calf's vulnerability, perceived value, or status as a young animal.
- **Injured street dog:** Responses were more mixed. While offering food or water (26%) and seeking help (26%) were both common, direct personal intervention—such as taking the dog to a vet or home—was much less common (7%). This suggests empathy, but often in the form of indirect help. The high share of respondents who would "feel sorry and walk away" (26%) also points to concern without action.
- **Injured chicken:** Injured chickens received the least compassionate and least proactive responses. Nearly one-third of respondents said they would leave the bird at the side of the road (28%), and this category also recorded the highest share of "ignore/do nothing" responses (18%) among the three animals. Willingness to seek help (17%) or bring the animal home (5%) was low, suggesting that chickens are perceived as less worthy of intervention than calves or dogs.

Reaction	Injured calf	Injured street dog	Injured chicken
Provide food / water	37%	26%	32%
Call a rescue team / call somebody	24%	26%	-
Feel bad / feel sorry and walk away	23%	26%	-
Arrange rescue facility and call veterinarian / Take to nearest vet clinic or call rescuer	13%	-	17%
Ensure animal gets help by taking to vet/home / Bring the animal home and call the vet	-	7%	5%
Take a picture and share on social media	-	9%	-
Ignore / Do nothing	3%	6%	18%
Keep on the side of the road	-	-	28%

Additional insights from this comparison include the following:

- **Apathy ("ignore/do nothing"):** This was lowest for calves (3%), followed by dogs (6%), and highest for chickens (18%), underscoring a clear empathy gap in responses to chickens.
- **Empathy without follow-through:** Street dogs (26%) and calves (23%) often triggered emotional concern without action ("feel sorry and walk away"). There was no equivalent category for chickens, which may reflect a different pattern of disengagement or a greater normalisation of injury in birds.
- **Active rescue:** Dogs (26%) received the highest share of active rescue responses, followed closely by calves (24%). Chickens lagged at 17%, suggesting that dogs and calves are seen as more deserving of coordinated or professional help.
- **Basic immediate care:** Providing food or water was most common for calves (37%), followed by chickens (32%) and dogs (26%).

Opinions on current transportation processes

The largest share of respondents—nearly one-third (29.88%)—felt neutral about the current transportation of farmed animals, suggesting uncertainty or ambivalence. This may reflect apathy or limited awareness and would be useful to explore in future versions of the survey.

Among the remaining respondents, opinions were divided in broadly similar proportions. A combined 36.61% were happy with current transportation practices (28.05% "happy" and 8.56% "very happy"), while 33.49% were unhappy (24.98% "unhappy" and 8.51% "very unhappy"). However, because the survey does not reveal what specifically shaped these views, it is difficult to interpret this measure as a clear indicator of compassion.

Perception of Victoria horse rides

The largest share of respondents (46%) did not view Victoria horse rides as cruel, with 36% agreeing and 10% strongly agreeing.

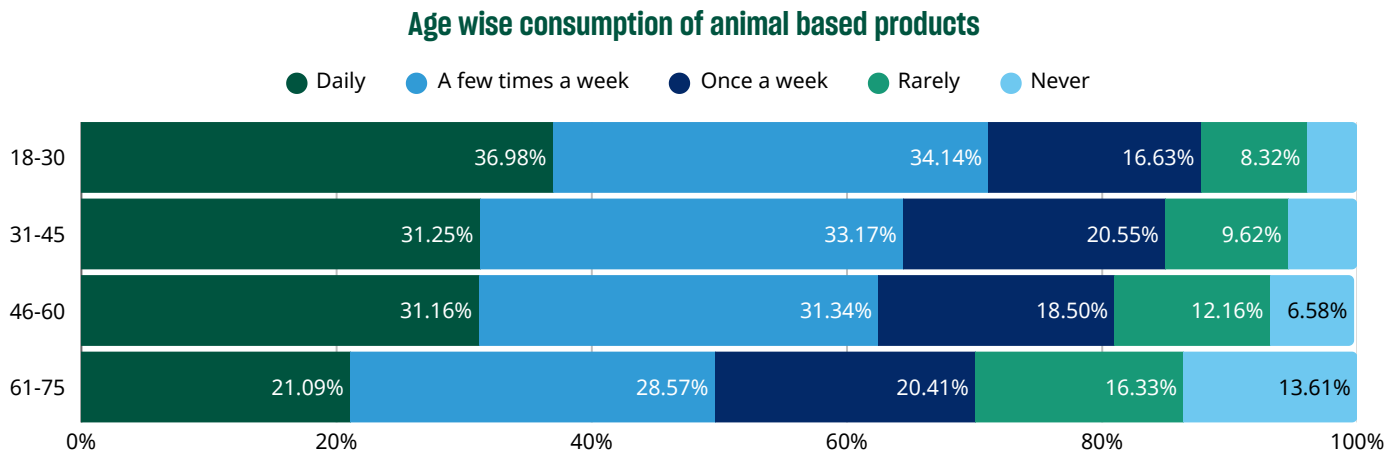
A further 33% were neutral on this issue, which may reflect limited engagement, apathy, or lack of awareness about the rides' impact on horses. This group may perceive both humane and inhumane aspects and could be a useful audience for targeted outreach. The smallest share—21% in total—viewed Victoria rides as cruel (16% "disagree" and 5% "strongly disagree" with the statement that the rides are not cruel).

Frequency of consuming animal-based products

A majority of respondents (65%) consume animal-based products regularly (33% a few times a week and 32% daily), indicating that such foods remain a routine part of many diets. Another 19% consume them once a week, while 10% do so rarely and 6% report never consuming them.

When the data is broken down by age, two broad patterns emerge:

- **Frequent consumption is common across age groups:** Large shares of respondents in every age group reported consuming animal-based products either daily or a few times a week, suggesting that these foods are a regular part of the diet regardless of age.
- **Consumption declines with age:** The shares of respondents who reported "never" or "rarely" consuming animal-based products increased with age. Respondents aged 61–75 were the most likely to abstain from or limit their consumption.



These trends can inform public outreach campaigns on plant-based diets in terms of the media chosen to reach target audiences.

Motivations driving dietary choices

Health is the dominant driver (43.29%): Nearly half of respondents said health-related considerations shape their dietary choices. This suggests strong public interest in nutrition and disease prevention and can help guide public outreach.

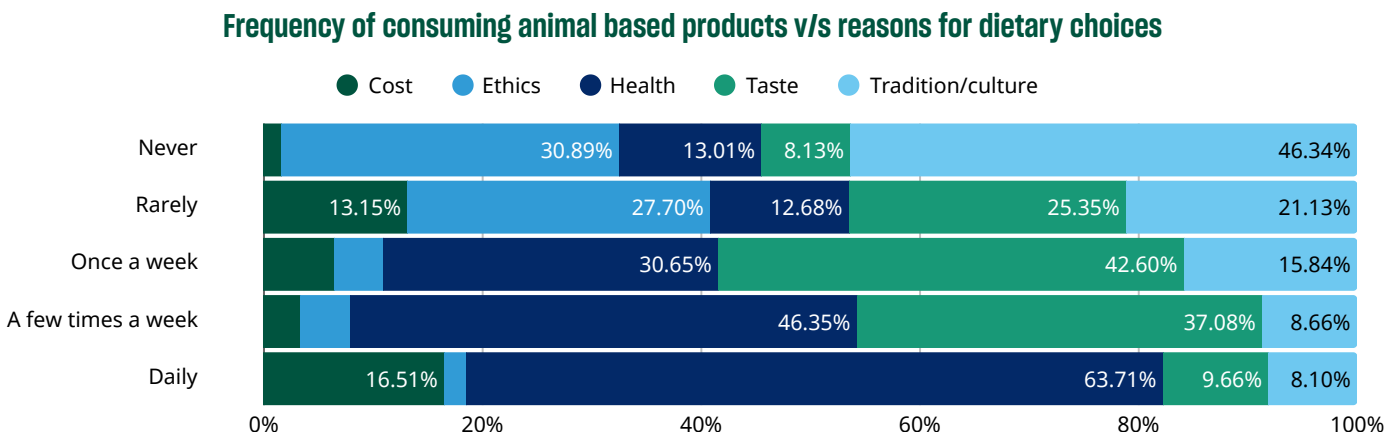
Taste (26.42%): Taste is the second most important factor, with more than one-quarter of respondents prioritizing the sensory appeal of food. This suggests that taste may outweigh motivations such as ethics or cost for many people.

Tradition/religion (13.45%): Cultural and religious influences continue to shape dietary patterns and may be especially important in communities with strong dietary norms or restrictions.
Cost (9.05%) and ethics (7.76%) are least influential: Ethical concerns, such as animal welfare or environmental impact, influenced the smallest share of respondents. Cost also ranked relatively low, which may suggest that many respondents feel they have access to a range of dietary options.

Frequency of consuming animal-based products vs. reasons for dietary choice

Comparing how often respondents consume animal-based products with the motivations behind their dietary choices reveals a complex interaction of preferences, values, and practical considerations.

- Ethics and tradition/culture are associated with low consumption:
  - **Never consumers:** For respondents who never consume animal-based products, tradition/culture (46.34%) and ethics (30.89%) are the dominant motivations. Health, cost, and taste play only a minor role for this group.
  - **Rarely consumers:** Among respondents who rarely consume animal-based products, the influence of ethics (27.70%) and tradition/culture (21.13%) remains important, though somewhat lower than among never consumers. Taste (25.35%) and cost (13.15%) are more prominent in this group, suggesting that occasional consumption may be shaped by convenience, affordability, or enjoyment despite ethical or cultural restraint.
- Health and taste are associated with higher consumption:
  - **Daily consumers:** Among respondents who consume animal-based products daily, health (63.71%) and cost (16.51%) are the leading motivations. This suggests that many perceive animal products as both beneficial and practical to include regularly. Taste (9.66%) and tradition/culture (8.10%) are less influential for this group, while ethics (2.02%) is almost absent as a daily driver.
  - **A few times a week consumers:** Similar to daily consumers, this group is mainly driven by health (46.35%) and taste (37.08%). Cost (3.34%), ethics (4.56%), and tradition/culture (8.66%) play relatively minor roles.
  - **Once a week consumers:** Taste (42.60%) and health (30.65%) remain the leading motivations for moderate consumption. Tradition/culture (15.84%) plays a somewhat larger role here than among more frequent consumers.



Acceptable dietary changes to support animal welfare

More than one-third of respondents (34.25%)—the largest single group—said they would be willing to adopt a plant-based diet to support animal welfare. At the same time, 25.92% said they were unwilling to make any dietary changes for animal welfare, indicating strong attachment to animal-based foods.

Nearly 40% of respondents said they would prefer reducing specific animal products (23.94% + 6.72% + 9.1%) rather than switching fully to a plant-based diet. Only 9.1% said they would reduce eggs and 6.72% said they would reduce dairy, which may suggest that these products are seen as less directly linked to animal welfare or are harder to give up because of consumption habits.

Overall, the data suggests meaningful openness to dietary change for animal welfare, even though a substantial share of respondents remain unwilling to alter their eating habits. Incremental changes appear to be more acceptable than a complete shift to plant-based eating.

Motivations driving food choices vis-à-vis willingness to shift to plant-based diets for animal welfare

Comparing dietary motivations with willingness to shift to a plant-based diet for animal welfare reveals two important patterns.

- **The "ethics gap":** There is a clear mismatch between the share of respondents willing to shift to a plant-based diet for animal welfare (34.38%) and the much smaller share who identified ethics as their main dietary motivation (about 7%). This suggests that broad support for dietary change on animal welfare grounds does not always translate into everyday food choices. For many respondents, willingness may reflect general sentiment rather than a deeply embedded ethical commitment.
- **Programmatic implications:** Appealing to ethics alone may not be enough to shift behaviour toward plant-based diets. Outreach is more likely to be effective if it also addresses health and taste alongside animal welfare.
- **Health and taste as bridges to plant-based diets:** Since health (43.29%) and taste (26.42%) are the strongest dietary motivators, and adopting a plant-based diet is the most acceptable animal-welfare-related change (34.28%), many respondents who are open to plant-based diets may be more effectively persuaded through health and taste messaging than through ethics alone.

This approach may also help address the concerns of the 25.92% of respondents who said they cannot give up meat, dairy, and eggs. The next section adds more detail to this barrier.

Motivations driving food choices of those unwilling to give up meat, dairy, eggs

A total of 523 respondents said they "can't give up my meat, dairy, and eggs." Examining the motivations within this group provides useful insight into barriers to adopting more plant-based diets.

- **Health (53%):** Health is the dominant motivation in this subgroup, suggesting a strong perception that meat, dairy, and eggs are important for well-being.
- **Taste (21%):** Taste is the second most important factor, indicating that enjoyment and sensory satisfaction are major reasons many respondents are unwilling to reduce or eliminate these foods.
- **Tradition/Religion (12%) and Cost (10%):** Tradition and religion remain meaningful influences, highlighting the cultural importance of these foods for some respondents. Cost also matters for a smaller segment, which may reflect the perception that animal products are more affordable or more practical than plant-based alternatives.
- **Ethics (4%):** Ethics is the least influential motivation in this subgroup.

Knowledge of plant-based dietary options

Almost half of respondents reported being knowledgeable about plant-based dietary options available in their local cuisine (40% "knowledgeable" and 9% "very knowledgeable"). Another 35% reported partial knowledge. Taken together, this means that almost 85% of respondents have at least some awareness of plant-based options, which suggests a strong foundation for plant-based outreach.

However, only 9% described themselves as "very knowledgeable," which suggests that while general awareness is widespread, deeper practical knowledge—such as cooking, nutrition, or sourcing—may still be limited.

Opinion on whether plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate

Nearly 62% of respondents agreed to some extent that plant-based diets can meet all nutritional needs for a healthy lifestyle (44.92% agreed and 16.72% strongly agreed). Another 27.65% were neutral, which may reflect limited awareness, uncertainty, or apathy. Less than 11% disagreed overall (8.46% disagreed and 2.22% strongly disagreed).

Overall, the data suggests considerable openness to the idea that plant-based diets can be nutritionally adequate. The large neutral segment points to an opportunity for awareness campaigns, especially when combined with evidence on the motivations shaping dietary choices.

Frequency of consumption of animal-based foods among those who agree that plant-based diets are desirably nutritious

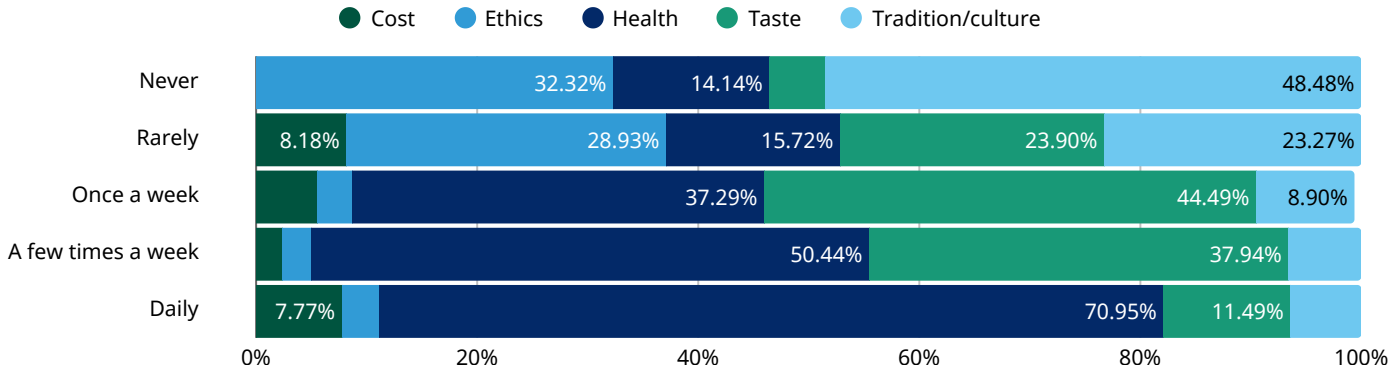
Knowledge–action gap: Among the 1,246 respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that plant-based diets can support a healthy lifestyle, the following patterns emerge:

- **The largest share (36.60%) consume animal-based products a few times a week:** Even among respondents who acknowledge the nutritional adequacy of plant-based diets, more than one-third still consume animal-based foods several times a week.
- **Daily consumption remains high (23.76%):** Almost one-quarter of this subgroup consume animal-based foods daily despite recognising that plant-based diets can be nutritionally adequate. This highlights that awareness alone does not necessarily lead to reduced consumption.

- **a.Once a week (18.94%) and rarely (12.76%):** Smaller but still meaningful groups consume animal products infrequently.
- **b.Never (7.95%):** Only a small minority of respondents who view plant-based diets as nutritious abstain completely from animal-based foods.

Motivations shaping the knowledge–action gap: Looking more closely at the motivations of these same 1,246 respondents shows that ethics and tradition/religion tend to become more influential as consumption falls, while health and taste remain dominant among more frequent consumers.

Motivations driving dietary choices of those who agree on plant-based diets being desirably nutritious



Daily consumers: Health (70.95%) remains by far the strongest motivation for daily consumption of animal-based foods, even among respondents who agree that plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate. This suggests a disconnect between belief and behaviour: although this group recognises the potential adequacy of plant-based diets, they still view animal-based foods as the better option for their own health. Taste (11.49%) plays a much smaller role in this subgroup.

A few times a week consumers: Health (50.44%) remains the leading motivation, though less strongly than among daily consumers. Taste (37.94%) is also a major driver for this group.

Once-a-week consumers: Taste (44.49%) becomes the leading motivation for this subgroup, while health (37.29%) remains important but secondary.

Rarely consumers: Ethics (28.93%) becomes a leading motivation among respondents who rarely consume animal products. Taste (23.90%) and tradition/religion (23.27%) are also important, while the role of health drops substantially (15.72%).

Never consumers: Tradition/religion (48.48%) is the strongest motivation among respondents who never consume animal products, followed by ethics (32.32%).

Programmatic implications:

Health dominates for frequent consumers: Among respondents who consume animal-based foods daily or a few times a week, health remains the strongest driver—even when they also agree that plant-based diets can be nutritionally adequate. This suggests that efforts to reduce animal-product consumption should place greater emphasis on the health benefits of plant-based eating.

Taste as a barrier to reduction: As consumption frequency declines, taste becomes increasingly important. This suggests that the sensory appeal of animal-based foods may be a major barrier for people who otherwise recognise the value of plant-based diets. Effective strategies may therefore need to highlight both flavour and health benefits.

Ethics and tradition drive low or no consumption: Ethical concerns are a strong motivation among respondents who rarely or never consume animal products, while tradition/religion is the single strongest driver of complete abstinence. This highlights the importance of cultural and moral factors in sustained dietary change.

The "desirably nutritious" paradox: This analysis adds nuance to the knowledge–action gap. It suggests that the main barriers to shifting toward plant-based diets are not simply lack of information or lack of intellectual agreement, but the continued influence of perceived health benefits and taste preferences associated with animal-based foods. It also highlights the need for targeted messaging tailored to different consumption patterns.

Compassion and attitudes towards wild animals

Perceived importance of the welfare of wild animals

A total of 70% of respondents consider the welfare of wild animals important (46%) or very important (24%). Another 20% were neutral, which may reflect limited knowledge of wildlife welfare issues or a lack of direct concern. Only 10% said wild animal welfare is not very important (8%) or not important at all (2%), indicating limited opposition to wildlife welfare considerations.

Perceptions of current state-level actions for wildlife welfare

The largest share of respondents (39%) believe enough is being done for wildlife welfare in West Bengal, including 29% who said enough is being done and 10% who said more than enough is being done. This suggests a moderate level of public satisfaction with state-level efforts.

By contrast, 34% felt that more should be done, including 28% who said some efforts are being made but are insufficient and 6% who believed nothing is being done. Another 27% were neutral, which may indicate apathy, limited awareness, or both.

Perceived importance of wild animal welfare vs. perceptions of current state-level actions for wildlife welfare

Comparing the perceived importance of wild animal welfare with views on state-level action shows that, although wildlife welfare is widely seen as important, opinions differ substantially on whether current government efforts are adequate.

Two findings are especially relevant for Programdesign:

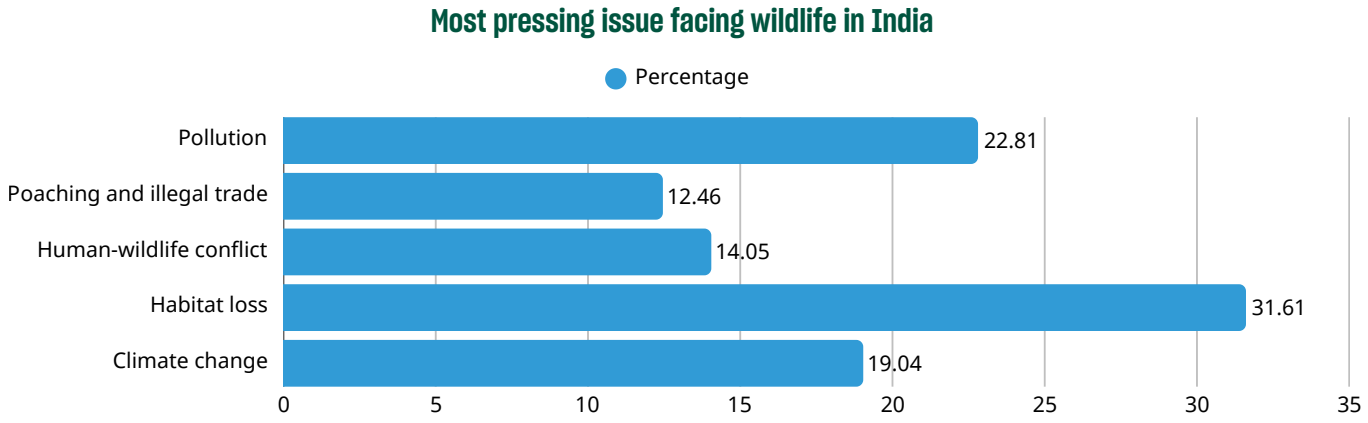
- **Among respondents who view wild animal welfare as "very important" or "important," the most common responses are either "enough is being done" or "some, but not enough, is being done":** Among those who said wild animal welfare is "very important," the largest share believed enough is being done (37.60%), followed by those who said some, but not enough, is being done (22.69%). Notably, 10.29% of this group also believed nothing is being done. Similarly, among those who said wild animal welfare is important, the largest share believed some, but not enough, is being done (34.01%), closely followed by those who felt enough is being done (31.12%). These mixed perceptions suggest a need for more nuanced understanding of how people evaluate state action on wildlife welfare.

- **Among respondents who are neutral about wild animal welfare, neutral views on the adequacy of state action also predominate:** A striking 60.14% of those who were neutral about the importance of wild animal welfare were also neutral about how much is being done at the state level. This suggests that a significant share of the population is generally disengaged or insufficiently informed on the issue. Such respondents may be difficult to mobilise without clear, compelling, and accessible information.

Most pressing issues affecting wildlife in India

Poaching and illegal trade emerged as the top wildlife concern in this survey (31.61%), suggesting that nearly one-third of respondents recognise these as major threats. Climate change was the second most commonly cited issue, with 22.81% selecting it as their primary concern. This indicates growing awareness of how ecological disruption affects wildlife, habitats, and food chains in India. Pollution was the third most cited issue (19.04%), reflecting concern about the effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on natural ecosystems and wildlife.

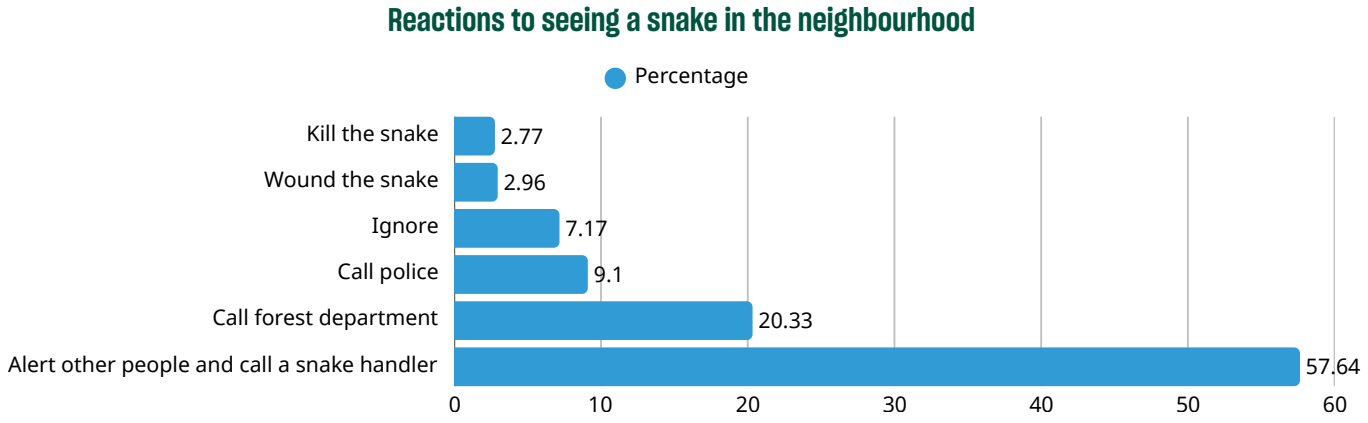
Human–wildlife conflict (14.05%) and habitat loss (12.46%) were selected by fewer respondents, suggesting that these issues may be relatively under-recognised, possibly because they are less visible to the public.



Reactions to seeing a snake in the neighbourhood

More than three-quarters of respondents (77.97%) preferred non-lethal, expert-led responses to seeing a snake in the neighbourhood. This included 57.64% who said they would alert others and call a snake handler, and 20.33% who said they would contact the forest department. Another 9.1% said they would call the police, which may reflect uncertainty about the appropriate authority to contact or immediate safety concerns. Roughly 7% said they would ignore the snake, which may indicate apathy, lack of awareness, or familiarity with such encounters.

A total of 5.73% said they would respond violently, including 2.96% who said they would wound the snake and 2.77% who said they would kill it. These responses may be driven by fear, misinformation, or cultural attitudes toward snakes.



Strategic directions and recommendations

The findings of the Kolkata Compassion Index Survey 2025 suggest that residents generally hold positive attitudes toward animal welfare and coexistence with animals. At the same time, the survey highlights clear opportunities to strengthen awareness, responsible behaviour, institutional support, and community participation. Based on the survey findings and field observations, the following strategic recommendations are proposed.

Strengthen Public Awareness and Humane Education

Although awareness of animal welfare issues is relatively high, important gaps remain in public understanding of animal behaviour, animal welfare laws, responsible caregiving, and the value of humane coexistence.

- Launch city-wide awareness campaigns focused on compassion, coexistence, and responsible community engagement with animals.
- Integrate animal welfare education into school and college programs.
- Use social media, community radio, local newspapers, and digital platforms to share positive stories and accurate information.
- Promote empathy-based messaging that highlights the role of animals in urban ecosystems.

Promote human–animal coexistence

The survey suggests that a substantial share of residents are comfortable with the presence of street animals in their communities. This creates a clear opportunity to strengthen coexistence-based approaches.

- Develop neighbourhood-level coexistence programs.
- Establish community volunteer networks to support responsible feeding and caregiving.
- Create awareness materials on safe interactions with street animals.
- Encourage resident welfare associations and local communities to adopt humane conflict-resolution approaches.

Strengthen support for the Animal Birth Control (ABC) program

The survey points to varying levels of awareness of, and satisfaction with, the ABC program. Clearer communication, greater transparency, and stronger public engagement could help build confidence in the program.

- Increase public awareness of the objectives and benefits of ABC programs.
- Regularly publish Programachievements and impact indicators.
- Strengthen partnerships among municipal authorities, animal welfare organizations, veterinary institutions, and communities.
- Improve grievance redressal and citizen feedback mechanisms.

Enhance community engagement and volunteerism

Many residents expressed willingness to support animal welfare initiatives, but may lack clear and accessible opportunities for meaningful engagement.

- Create structured volunteer programs for animal welfare activities.
- Establish community ambassador initiatives to promote compassionate behaviour.
- Support local animal welfare groups through training and capacity-building.
- Organise community events that celebrate positive human–animal relationships.

Increase awareness of farm animal welfare

The survey suggests lower public awareness of farm animal welfare issues than of issues affecting street animals, indicating a need for more focused outreach in this area.

- Develop educational campaigns that highlight key farm animal welfare concerns.
- Promote responsible, informed consumer choices.
- Facilitate public discussions on the ethical treatment of animals across sectors.
- Encourage partnerships with academic institutions and civil society organizations to expand awareness.

Strengthen data, research, and monitoring

As the first Compassion Index Survey conducted in Kolkata, this study provides an important baseline for future assessment, comparison, and tracking of change over time.

- Conduct the Compassion Index survey periodically to track change over time.
- Expand future surveys to capture more nuanced measures of attitudes and behaviour.
- Strengthen data collection on city-wide animal welfare indicators.
- Develop a city-level Compassion Index dashboard to monitor progress and support decision-making.

Foster Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

Long-term improvements in animal welfare will require coordinated action by government agencies, civil society organizations, educational institutions, veterinary professionals, and citizens.

- Establish a city-level platform for collaboration on animal welfare initiatives.
- Encourage partnerships between municipal authorities and animal welfare organizations.
- Promote cross-sector learning and the sharing of best practices.
- Align animal welfare initiatives with broader urban sustainability and public health goals.

Way Forward

The Kolkata Compassion Index provides an important baseline for understanding public attitudes toward animals and animal welfare. The findings show that compassion exists across communities and can serve as a foundation for more inclusive, humane, and sustainable animal welfare efforts. By strengthening awareness, promoting coexistence, improving institutional programs, and expanding community participation, Kolkata can position itself as a leading compassionate city that advances animal welfare while fostering harmonious human–animal relationships.

Humane World for Animals™

Formerly known as
Humane Society International India

Our mission

Together, we tackle the root causes of animal cruelty and suffering to create permanent change.

Humane World for Animals India, formerly Humane Society International India, is making India a better place for animals through direct care programs, policy change, capacity-building and humane education. We are one of India's largest not-for-profit animal protection organisations and one of the only groups that works to protect all animals. We are a global organisation with a footprint in more than 50 countries, and we believe animal welfare is the key to creating a more humane world, one that's free from violence and discrimination.

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