The Failure of Policy and Ethics in Pakistan's Stray Dog Management: A Call for Evidence-Based CNVR

Gul-e-Saba Chaudhry*

Institute of Climate Adaptation and Marine Biotechnology, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, 21030, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author: sababiochem@gmail.com; gul.saba@umt.edu.my**

DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500040

Received: 28 April 2026; Accepted: 05 May 2026; Published: 22 May 2026

ABSTRACT

Pakistan's large free-roaming dog population presents significant public health, ethical, and legal challenges. Millions of stray dogs inhabit the country, contributing to frequent dog bites and thousands of rabies-related deaths annually. In response, local authorities often rely on mass culling as a population-control strategy. However, evidence suggests that culling has failed to effectively reduce dog populations or eliminate the risk of rabies transmission. Moreover, such practices raise serious concerns regarding animal cruelty, outdated legal frameworks, and the absence of effective regulatory oversight. Public killing campaigns may also generate psychosocial harm by normalizing violence, causing public distress, and undermining social compassion toward communities and animals alike. This commentary advocates for humane, science-based alternatives, particularly Catch–Neuter–Vaccinate–Return (CNVR) programs, which involve capturing stray dogs, sterilizing and vaccinating them, and subsequently returning them to their original environments. Legislative reform, strengthened public education, sustained vaccination initiatives, and improved infrastructure, alongside CNVR implementation, offer a practical and sustainable pathway for rabies control and dog population management. Collectively, these measures can help protect both public health and animal welfare in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

The staggering stray dog population in Pakistan has created an escalating crisis at the intersection of public health and animal ethics, demanding urgent intervention. There are an estimated three million stray dogs and nearly one million reported dog bite cases in the country, which leads to remarkable human deaths every year from rabies. Local governments have historically used deadly injections and poisons as a means of mass culling in response to these increasing pressures. Nevertheless, this over-reliance on mass killing is a major scientific and ethical error. According to the available evidence, culling is not only ineffective in the long run at resolving public health and zoonotic concerns, but it also ignores more compassionate and productive options. [1-4]

The Inadequacy of Culling and Legal Deficiencies

Worldwide, veterinary and animal welfare organisations denounce the culling procedures that result in the annual slaughter of massive dogs in Pakistan. Despite decades of intensive culling, the stray population continues to grow. This demonstrates the policy's futility. [3, 2, 4, 5] This method is clearly inadequate when measured against international standards. According to the Office International des Epizooties (OIE), sterilising large swaths of wild animals is inhumane and ineffective in reducing disease populations. [2, 5] The Pakistan Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1890 is considered antiquated, though the practice remains legal. It fails to acknowledge stray animals as sentient beings. There are no specific regulations against their mistreatment, suffering, or systematic killing. Thus, the Act does not provide comprehensive protection. Reports indicate that culling is often conducted without a robust constitutional or legal basis, raising questions about its moral justification under animal welfare regulations. [1, 5, 6, 4] Rabies and other zoonotic diseases, along with parasitic

infections, are common in wild dog populations and pose a threat to public health. [9-10] The most commonly observed helminth parasite was *Toxocara canis. It was foun*d in faecal samples from 14 stray dogs and 4 domestic dogs, representing 18 cases (9%). Other identified helminth species included *Trichuris* spp. (9 cases, 4.5%), *Dipylidium caninum* (5 cases, 2.5%), *Strongyloides stercoralis* (5 cases, 2.5%), *Capillaria* spp. (4 cases, 2%), *Taenia* spp. (4 cases, 2%), *Ancylostoma caninum* (3 cases, 1.5%) and *Toxascaris leonina* (1 case, 0.5%) in Pakistan. [11] This study shows that the issue is more than just a cosmetic inconvenience. It is also about controlling disease and pollution. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Organisation for Animal Welfare (OIE) both agree. To manage these populations effectively, it is necessary to address the reproductive cycle and the disease load simultaneously. [4, 5]

Psychosocial and Ethical Impact of Mass Culling

Public poisoning (often with harmful substances like strychnine) or killing dogs as a means of population control has major ethical and psychological implications for the general public. In addition to normalising violence in the community, seeing mass animal killings and the subsequent disposal of their carcasses in public places causes intense emotional pain. In broader scholarly contexts, this graphic exposure serves as a visual embodiment of state-sanctioned cruelty. It connects to vicarious trauma and desensitisation. When children and other vulnerable populations are exposed to cruel death techniques, there is a risk of psychological trauma and desensitisation to suffering. There may also be a possible erosion of society's compassion and respect for life. Animal welfare professionals, humane groups, and caring citizens suffer moral harm and profound ethical turmoil when they see the systematic slaughter of animals they are trying to save or protect. [3] The issue contributes to a highly polarised society. Concerns about zoonoses and rising ethical demands for animal rights often conflict, leading people to distrust and oppose local authorities. [6] In the end, the policy's reliance on brutality—even if some people are only concerned with their own immediate safety—keeps society stuck in a cycle of violence. This is detrimental to moral growth. [6]

Mandate for Humane and Sustainable Alternatives

The Catch, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Return (CNVR) or Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, and Release (TNVR) paradigm is considered the most humane and successful strategy for controlling dog populations and eradicating rabies. This is supported by scientific consensus. CNVR offers a practical, affordable, and sustainable approach. It has been successfully applied in places like Turkey. [3, 5, 2] Key elements include spaying and neutering, which are core to two national-level population control programs. Disease prevention involves addressing public health threats through mass rabies vaccination campaigns. Adequate shelters and long-term plans to control stray animal populations are needed infrastructure. Failure to implement CNVR with full governmental commitment prolongs the public health emergency and harms the nation's reputation. This is evident when even vaccinated and collared dogs are later killed. A national commitment to CNVR and comprehensive legislative reform for animal protection is critical. Only then can an effective and ethical solution be reached. [1, 5]

Conclusion and Potential Recommendations

In conclusion, the current stray dog culling methods in Pakistan are neither scientifically nor ethically viable. For decades, authorities have used culling as the main method to control stray dogs. Yet, high numbers persist. Rabies outbreaks continue, and society faces public health concerns about these animals. This approach is both ineffective and inhumane. Besides psychological trauma, cruelty, and gaps in anti-animal legislation, culling is a legal problem waiting to happen. A more humane and sustainable solution is needed. Authorities should enforce CNVR schemes, strengthen animal welfare policies, initiate awareness campaigns, and provide sufficient resources. Parliament can protect human and animal health only if it uses scientific data. Success requires the government to be willing to implement these policies.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial, personal, or institutional conflicts of interest. No factors influenced the commentary's content, analysis, or conclusions. The views are those of the author, who aims to contribute to evidence-based discussion on stray dog management policies in Pakistan.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author acknowledges the welfare of free-roaming dogs, who often exist in conditions of abandonment or social neglect, and recognises the need for humane, evidence-based policy interventions.

REFERENCES

1. Haroon Ali Sethi v. Punjab Province. (2021). Conference on Animal Law.
2. Qazilbash & Ilyas (2021). Cited in: Pakistan's stray dog problem. The Bulletin Blog.
3. Jamal (2021). Cited in Research Report Series #49 Animal Rights Apathy in Pakistan: What has to be done. SDPI.
4. Nazar, et al. (2024). Advanced management and control methods to eliminate rabies from Pakistan's stray dog Canis familiaris population. Research Journal of Biological and Clinical Sciences, 2024(1), 819.
5. Shah, H., Khan, S. H., Zahid, M., & Khattak, R. M. (2025). An assessment of stray dogs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, as zoonotic parasite sentinels. *International Journal of Agricultural Biology, 34*, 340405.
6. Smith LM, Hartmann S, Munteanu AM, Dalla Villa P, Quinnell RJ, Collins LM. The Effectiveness of Dog Population Management: A Systematic Review. Animals (Basel). 2019 Nov 22;9(12):1020. doi: 10.3390/ani9121020.
7. Umair. (2020). Animal rights apathy in Pakistan: What has to be done. In Research Report Series No. 49. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI).
8. The OIE Guidelines and the World Health Organization (WHO) provide important frameworks for addressing this issue. Fatima Farooq Murawat Cited in: Pakistan's stray dog problem. The Bulletin Blog.
9. Tiwari, H.K., Gogoi-Tiwari, J. & Robertson, I.D (2021). Eliminating dog-mediated rabies: challenges and strategies. Animal Diseases 1, 19 https://doi.org/10.1186/s44149-021-00023-7.
10. Otranto D, Dantas-Torres F, Mihalca AD. et al (2017). Zoonotic parasites of sheltered and stray dogs. *Trends Parasitol*. 33(10):813–825.
11. Khan, J., & Shah, A. (2025). Prevalence of gastrointestinal parasites in pet and stray dogs found in Dir Lower, Pakistan. *Proceedings of Pakistan Congress of Zoology, 43*, 75–81. https://doi.org/10.17582/sajz/2025/43.2.75.81