



An Animals Asia investigation, Report No.3,  
**China's rural dogs in crisis**

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 **AnimalsAsia**  
Until the cruelty ends

# China's rural dogs in crisis

An Animals Asia investigation into the living conditions of dogs in rural China and the severe threats they face

Dogs throughout rural China are in crisis, with theft by dog-meat traders a growing concern. Humans who consume dog meat also face risks, primarily to their health.

## Introducing the report

In the spring of 2013, Animals Asia commissioned Guangzhou Horizon Research Group to investigate the circumstances of dogs living in rural areas of major Chinese cities and the severe threats they faced.

This report is the third of a series of four Animals Asia reports into the dog meat industry in China. Our groundbreaking research over four years is set to expose the horrifying reality of a trade riddled with crime and extreme cruelty.

Sadly the cat/dog meat issue is not a big priority in China, and little research or investigation has previously been conducted into the industry. In 2011, we launched a full-scale, four-year study into all aspects of the cat and dog meat trade. Our research included multiple secret investigations, market surveys and interviews with local NGOs, community groups, the authorities and people in the trade. Compiling and analysing this information has taken much time and many resources, and we are now in a position to release the reports.

This report focuses on rural dogs. We wanted to understand:

- How the dogs were kept;
- Their living conditions;
- Prevalence of vaccination and sterilisation;
- The number of lost/stolen dogs;
- The trade of dogs for consumption.

## 771 villages, 28 provinces

A total of 1,468 valid responses from 771 villages in 28 provinces, autonomous prefectures and municipalities were collected. Preference was given to village leaders who had lived in the area their whole lives and others who were familiar with the situation for local dogs. Respondents were interviewed face to face and the interviewer recorded their answers in a formal questionnaire.

Horizon Research Group analysed the data and provided a detailed report.

## Notes

1. Unless stated otherwise, "n" refers to the number of research village groups.
2. Depending on the question, in some cases respondents could choose more than one option.
3. Responses refer to the general situation of the village group, not individual cases or the respondent's personal situation.



## Why villagers keep dogs

In the villages investigated, around 37% of households kept dogs (1.5 dogs per household on average.) Most respondents (99.6%) kept dogs for reasons other than monetary gain (fig 1). Respondents could choose one or both reasons.

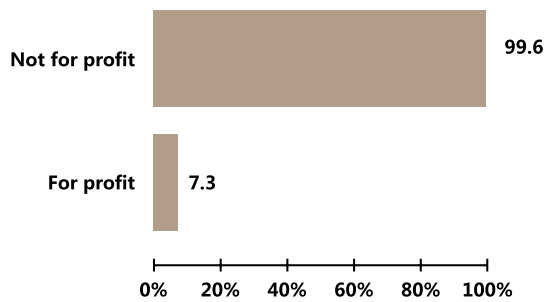


Figure 1: Reasons for keeping dogs (n=1,432, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

## Keeping dogs for monetary gain

Only 7.3% kept dogs for profit (fig 1), and of those 75.6% had fewer than five dogs and 22.3% had 6-10 dogs (fig 2).

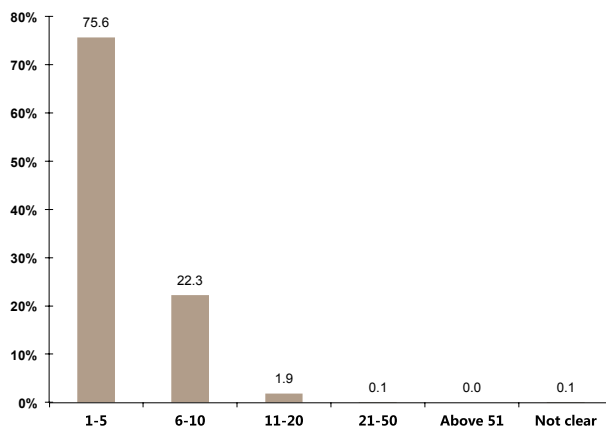


Figure 2: Dogs per household (for profit) (n [household]: 1,514, percentage, single-choice question)

## Keeping dogs not for monetary gain

The main reason respondents kept dogs was to guard their properties (93.6%). Companionship was another common reason (45.1%). (fig 3) Respondents could choose more than one reason.

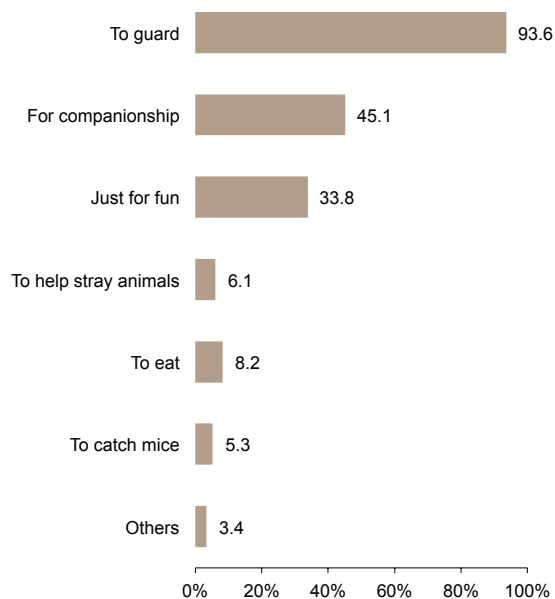


Figure 3: Why dogs are kept (n=1,454, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

The results showed the main ways dogs were raised in rural China were free-roaming (72.5%) and leashed (includes in a cage) (71.1%) (fig 4). While the unleashed dogs enjoyed their freedom, they also became targets of dog-predators. Respondents could choose more than one method.

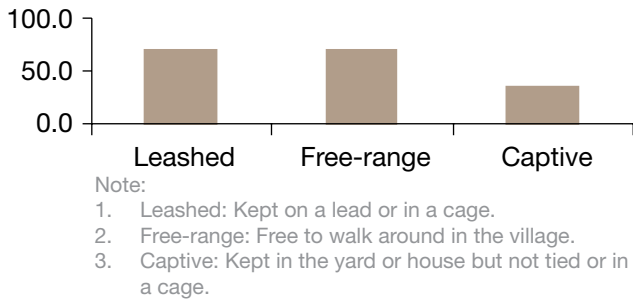


Figure 4: How dogs are kept (n=1,458, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

### Are the dogs sterilised?

In up to 82.3% of villages, no dogs were sterilised, which inevitably leads to many newborn puppies each year.

### Were the dogs vaccinated?

60% of village groups had a rabies vaccination rate under 10%. 38.9% of rural dogs had never been vaccinated (fig 5). This reflects the low awareness among villagers of canine disease prevention. Only 32.1% of the study areas' governments actively arranged for dogs in their areas to receive rabies vaccinations (fig 6). This reflects the fact that canine medical health is low on governments' lists of priorities.

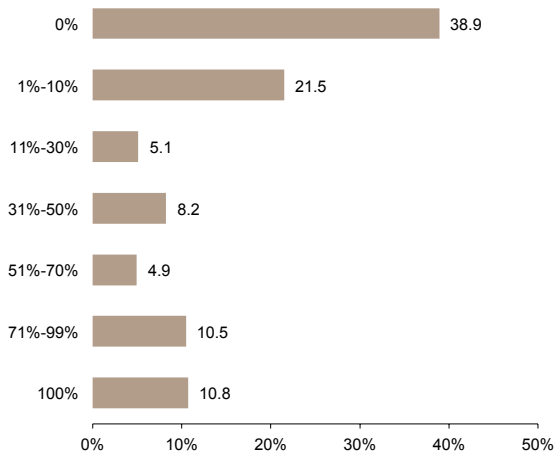


Figure 5: Number of dogs vaccinated (n=1,453, percentage, single-choice question)

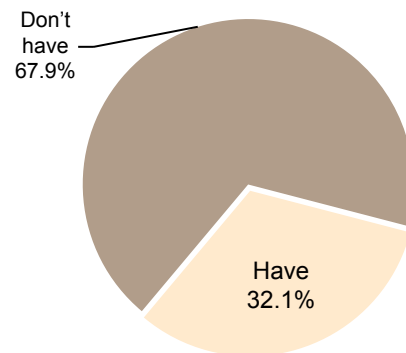


Figure 6: Local governments with rabies vaccine programmes (n=1,416, percentage, single-choice question)

### Why are dogs not being vaccinated?

Respondents' top three reasons for not having their dogs vaccinated were: "not necessary" (56.8%), "too troublesome" (52.6%) and "don't know where to go" (28.7%). The governments' promotion of animal health and distribution of information is critical in changing the villagers' minds about vaccinating their dogs (fig 7). Respondents could choose more than one reason.

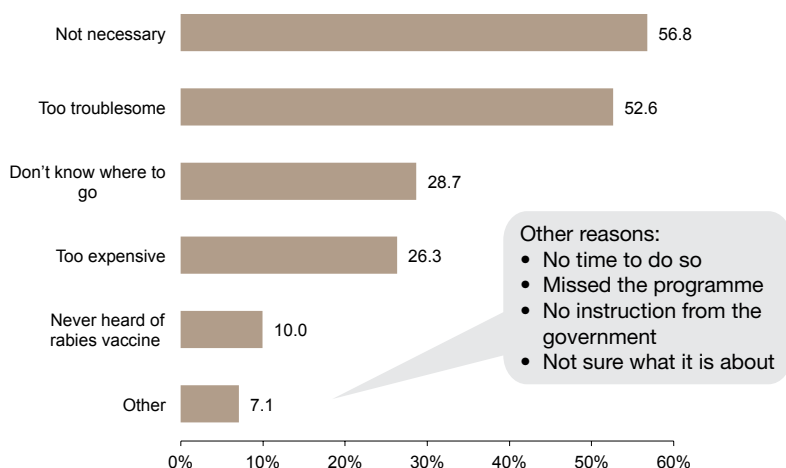


Figure 7: Why dogs are not vaccinated (n=1,346, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

### Dogs lost in the past 5 years

From 2008 to 2012, the number of village groups with cases of lost dogs showed no significant change. 70% continued to report cases of lost dogs.

### Theft seen as main reason for lost dogs

75.9% of interviewees believed the main reason dogs had disappeared in their area was that they were stolen for slaughter (fig 8). Respondents could choose more than one reason.

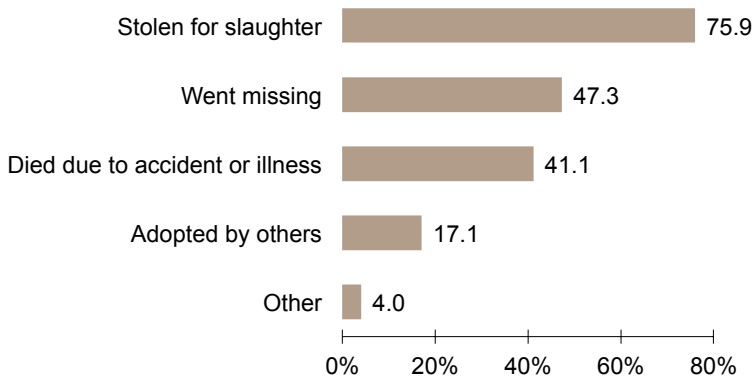


Figure 8: Reasons for dog-loss (n=1,072, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

### Intensive dog-loss

- Nearly 40% of the village groups had high (intensive) numbers of lost dogs (Note: Intensive dog loss referred to cases in which many dogs went missing either (i) during one specific period of time, or (ii) over just one night. In such cases, the villagers strongly suspected that organised teams of dog catchers were responsible for the abduction of the dogs).
- Intensive dog-loss cases mostly happened during the winter months and at night. 73.6% of intensive dog-loss cases happened in winter, followed by autumn (31.2%) (fig 9). In China, dog meat is most popular during these two seasons. Dog abductions mostly happened at night (8pm–2am) and before dawn (2am–6am) (fig 10). Respondents could choose more than one method.

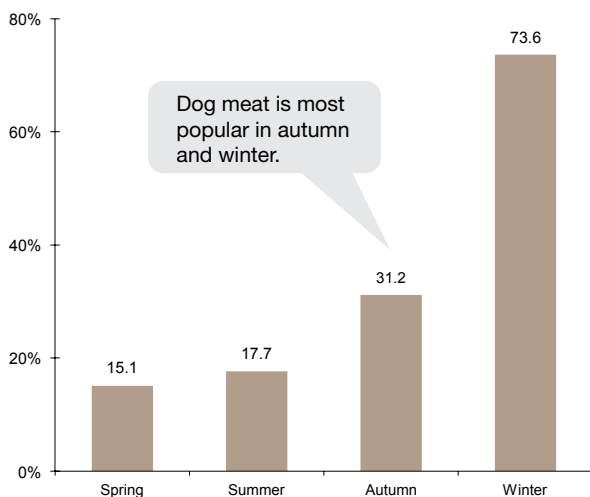


Figure 9: When is dog-loss most common? (n=436, percentage of total number of correspondents, multiple-choice question)

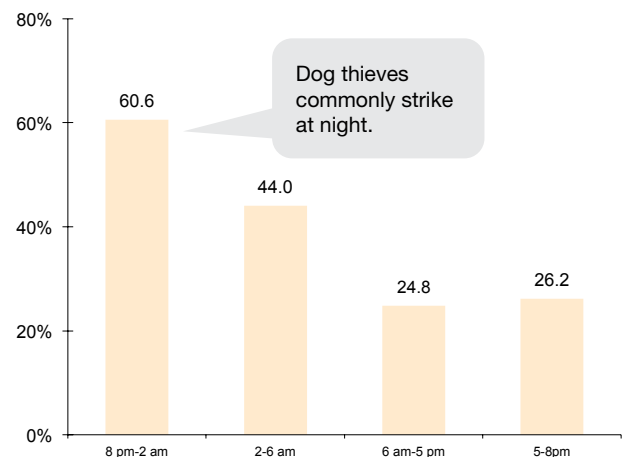


Figure 10: What time of day do the dogs vanish? (n=416, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

## Abduction methods

Nearly 70% of the interviewees believed the dogs targeted are poisoned or drugged (fig 11). Respondents could choose more than one method.

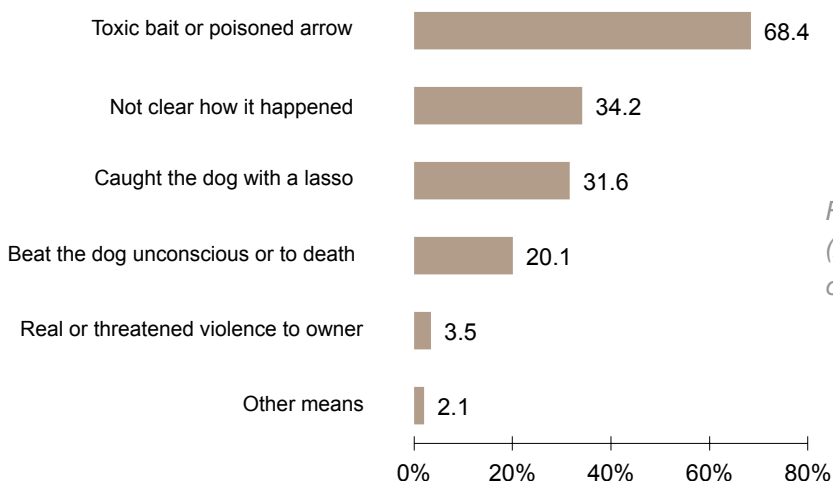


Figure 11: Abduction methods (n=433, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

## Brutal attacks

3.5% of village groups reported brutal attacks on villagers in dog-abduction cases. The attacks were violent and the impact on personal safety and security was significant. (fig 12)

Figure 12: Respondents' description of brutal attacks

**A villager's ear was cut off when he was trying to stop the thief from taking his dog away.**

– Huaibei Lieshan

**Someone put a knife to a woman's throat and told her to give him her dog.**

– Huizhou Boluo

**Once there was a big fight between villagers and thieves who used wire-cable to grab dogs. Once gangsters armed with knives drove a minibus to collect the stolen dogs**

– Zhangzhou Longhai

**One thief shouted at the dog owners: "Wanna live or not!?", then swaggered away; he killed the dogs and stole their chickens.**

– Taizhou Taixin

**One man drugged dogs with toxic bait. He was exposed during his planned escape by motorcycle and the villagers fought with him.**

– Xingyi Xingren

**My neighbour's dog was stolen. He spotted the thief and fought with him, then both of them were sent to hospital.**

– Liupanshui Shuichen

## Protective measures

Only 22.6% of villagers actively adopted protective measures to change the dog-loss situation (including reporting cases to the police, catching the thief, creating more secure accommodation for their dogs). Most villagers said they had no intention of searching for their lost dogs because it was impossible to locate them and claim them back. They did not know where to look for them, and few missing dogs were ever found.

## Seeking help from police

90% of villagers did not report their dog lost/missing to the police (fig 13). Because it was not worth the effort (56.9%); it was too much trouble (50.7%); and police would not care about such trivial cases (48.8%).

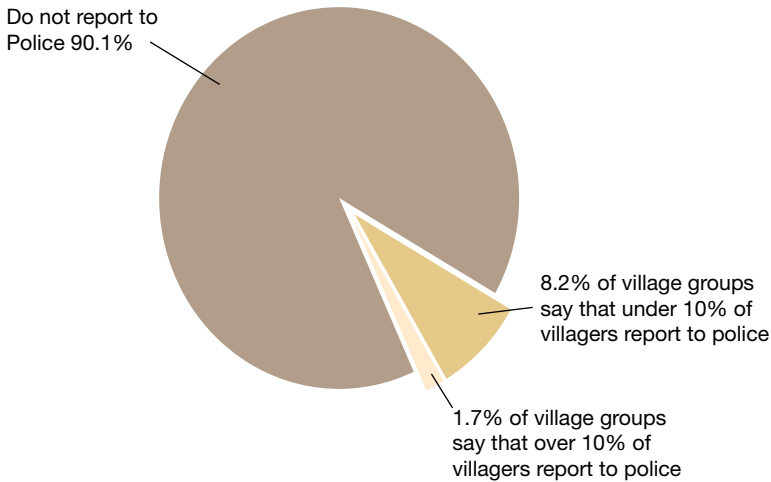


Figure 13: How many respondents report their lost dogs to police? (n=1,061, percentage, single-choice question)

## Impact on dog-owners

- 60% of villagers were traumatised by losing their dogs: 42.1% felt upset, sad and angry; 35.5% felt insecure about losing their guard dog and then developed insomnia; 21.5% of them lost livestock and other property because no dog to guard home (fig 14). Respondents could choose more than one answer.

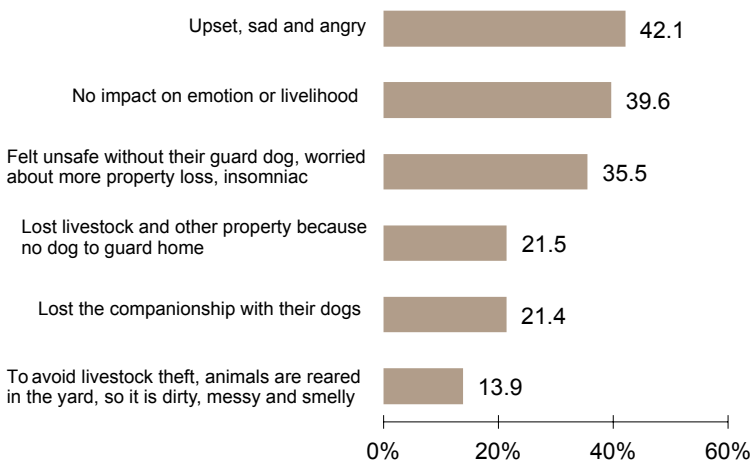


Figure 14: The impact on owners who lose their dogs (n=1,083, percentage, Multiple-choice question)

- After the loss of their dogs, most villagers continued to keep dogs (88.9%) (fig 15). Some villagers chose to keep dogs again after suffering the loss of dogs previously because: they needed the dogs to guard their houses (83.1%), and for companionship (53.2%) (fig 16). Some villagers chose not to raise dogs again after suffering the loss of dogs previously because: they were scared by the possibility of losing their dogs again (47.7%) and afraid of being hurt emotionally again (39.1%). Respondents could choose more than one answer.

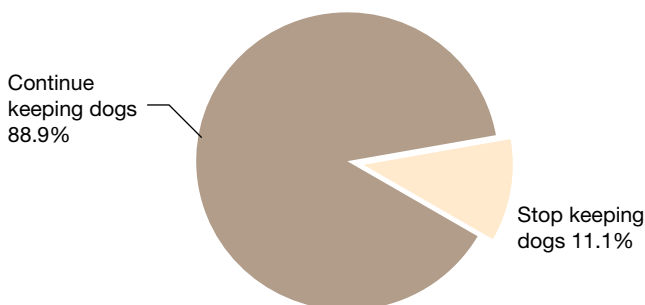


Figure 15: Will they keep a new one after losing their dog? (n=1,081, percentage, single-choice question)

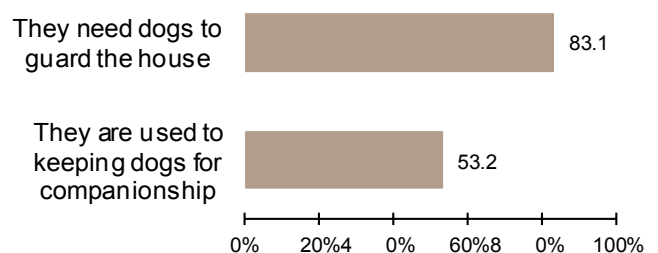


Figure 16: Reasons for keeping new ones after losing their dogs? (n=897, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

### Interviewees' attitudes toward dog theft

92.1% of interviewees think those committing dog theft should be punished (fig 17). After they lost their dogs, villagers became very angry and resentful (63.4%), but felt helpless at the same time, as there was no useful way to deter the criminals (53.6%).

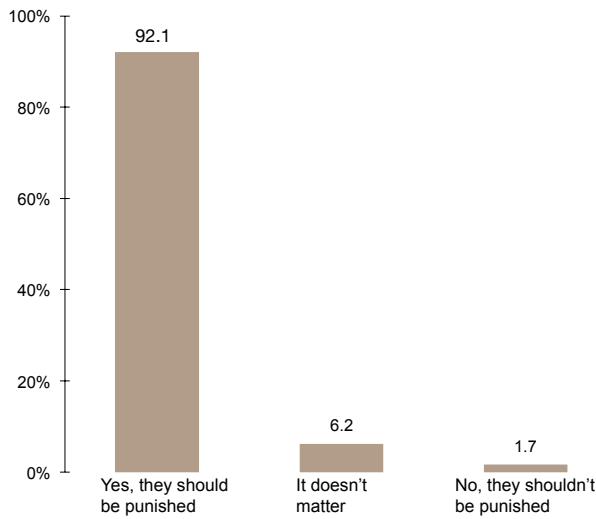


Figure 17: Should dog thieves be punished? (n=1,075, percentage, single-choice question)

### Villagers' solutions

The villagers pointed to a number of solutions to the problem: keep dogs inside the house instead of outdoors (48%); lessen demand for dog meat (38.2%); get more support from the police (27.7%). (fig 18) Respondents could choose more than one solution.

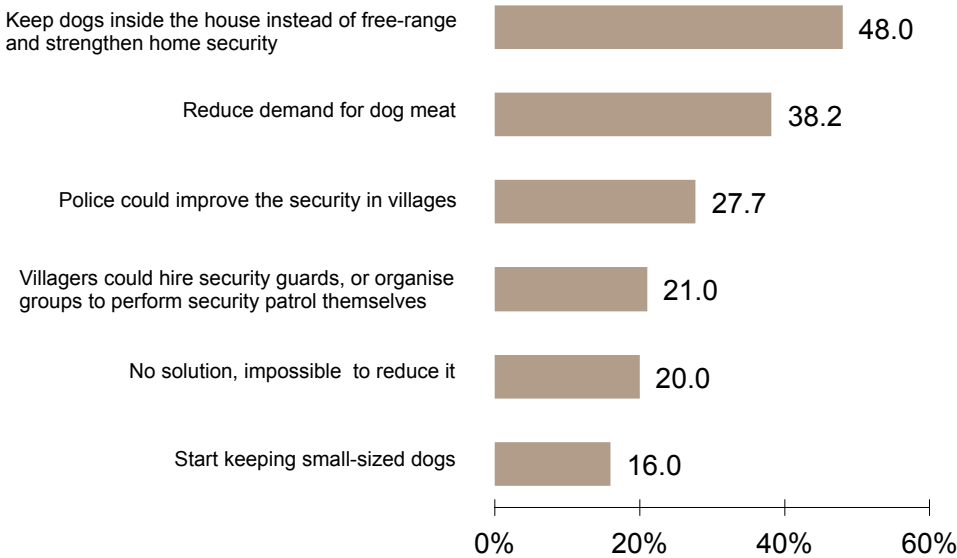


Figure 18: What are the most effective ways to reduce dog theft? (n=1,060, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

### Lost dogs' destination

80% of lost dogs are transferred to other areas for consumption.

While 162 village groups suffered from severe dog loss, 54 village groups reported that dog-meat consumption was popular in their areas. Among the 162 groups, only 22 are areas where dog-meat consumption is popular.

So it is suspected that most lost dogs are transferred to other areas (where demand is greater) for slaughter and sale, rather than for local consumption.



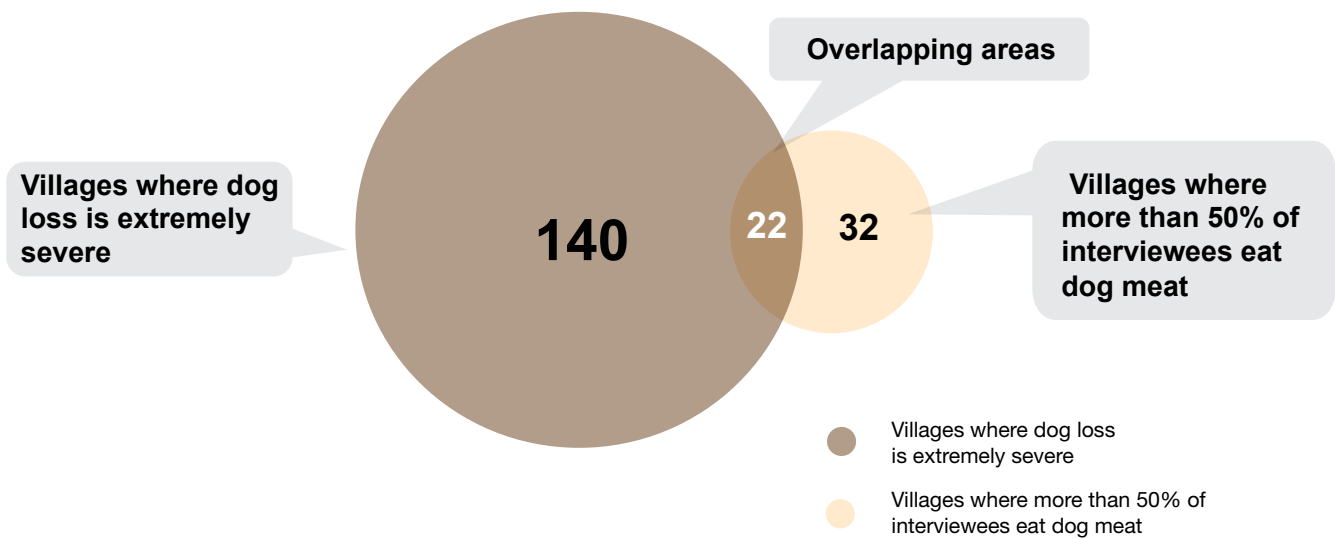


Figure 19: Comparison of villages suffering from severe dog loss with villages where dog meat consumption is popular.

### Villagers unwilling to sell their dogs

A third of the groups (33.7%) say no one would be willing to sell their dogs, and in more than half of the groups (53.8%) only a fraction of villagers would willing to sell their dogs.

Reasons for villagers' unwillingness to sell their dogs include: their need for the dogs to guard their homes (73.0%); the close emotional ties with their dogs (71.0%). This reflects the fact that these villagers need their dogs functionally and emotionally. Dogs are both family members and friends to them. (fig 20) Respondents could choose more than one reason.

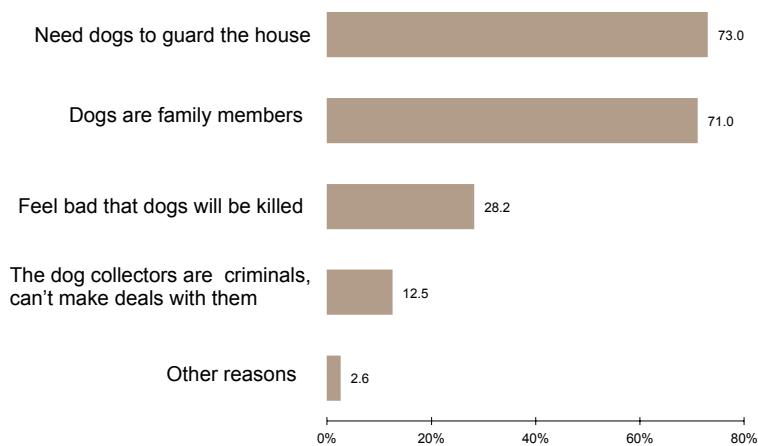


Figure 20: Reasons for interviewees not selling their dogs (n=1,419, percentage of total number of respondents, multiple-choice question)

## Major conclusions

1. Most of the interviewees kept dogs for reasons other than monetary gain. Over 90% kept dogs to guard their property. Very few interviewees were willing to sell their dogs to dog-collectors or keep dogs for monetary gain.
2. Sterilisation and rabies vaccination rates for rural dogs were both low. A large number of rural dogs had never been vaccinated for rabies. This intensifies the risk of canine-human rabies spreading during capture, transport, sale, slaughtering and eventually the delivery to dinner tables, especially spreading cross-regionally.
3. Public health organisations and charities should raise public awareness of the importance of dog sterilisation and rabies vaccination. Government bodies could arrange compulsory rabies immunisation.
4. Interviewees said there had been no significant improvement in the prevention of dog theft in recent years and the methods used by the dog-snatchers were brutal for dogs and people alike. 70% of interviewees thought missing dogs would be slaughtered for consumption.
5. From 2008 to 2012, over 70% of village groups suffered dog losses. Intensive losses usually happened in autumn/winter and during the night. Taking into consideration the number and intensity of dog-loss cases, the villagers suspected organised gangs were responsible.
6. The respondents said that as dogs barked at strangers, the predators chose to drug or poison them with food; use arrows with drugs to anaesthetise or poison them; use a lariat; or even beat the dogs to death. Whichever way they chose, all were brutal attacks and criminal offences. The situation was getting worse as violence escalated between the thieves and the owners. Many villagers believed they were under serious threat of harm.
7. Most villagers said they refused to sell their dogs because they safeguarded their homes and they also served as companions, thus theft was becoming a major source of dog meat.
8. The loss of dogs had traumatic consequences on the villager's lives, with 60% of villagers reporting traumatic feelings as a result of the loss of their dog(s). They were "angry and sad". They also felt insecure in regard to their property and personal safety, as they had lost their guard dog.
9. 90% of villagers had no intention of reporting their lost dogs to police because they felt there was no hope of getting them back.
10. 90% of interviewees thought those committing dog theft should be punished.
11. Most villagers said they did not attempt to find their lost dogs as it was impossible. 90% of villagers said they would continue keeping dogs after their prior loss, because they needed the dogs to guard their homes, as well as for companionship. And the dog-loss cases continue.
12. As a solution to dog theft, nearly 50% of villagers suggested keeping dogs inside their house and strengthening security. About 40% said reducing demand for dog meat would help stop the thefts, and about 30% wanted more support from the police.