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# STRAY DOGS CAUSE HEALTH RISKS IN THAILAND

Kadie Brigham, psychology major, art history minor, VCU



## INTRODUCTION TO PROBLEM

Although Thailand is facing economic and social challenges, the government is playing little attention to the problem of stray dogs. However, the overpopulation and health threats that these dogs pose needs to be addressed. Through my research, I am hoping to attain better knowledge on the problem while addressing a potential solution.

## INITIAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the health risks that humans can contract via dogs?
- How is this issue being dealt with?
- How many dogs are actually vaccinated and sterilized?
- What other issues is the Thai government facing?

## METHOD OF RESEARCH

I explored sources focusing on epidemiology, psychology, economics, and veterinary sciences and evaluated their results to find a potential solution.

Populations in Thailand

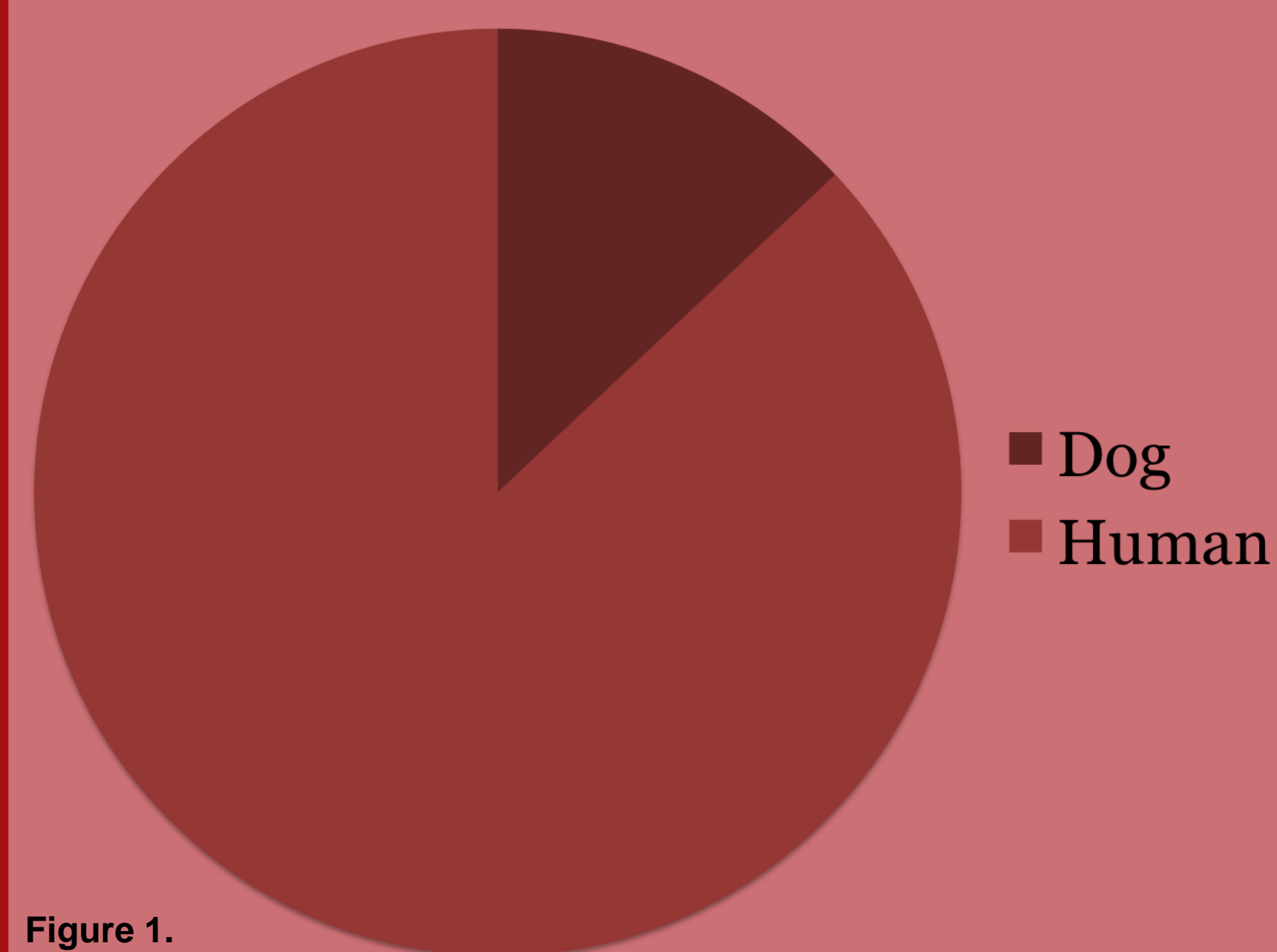


Figure 1.

Populations in United States

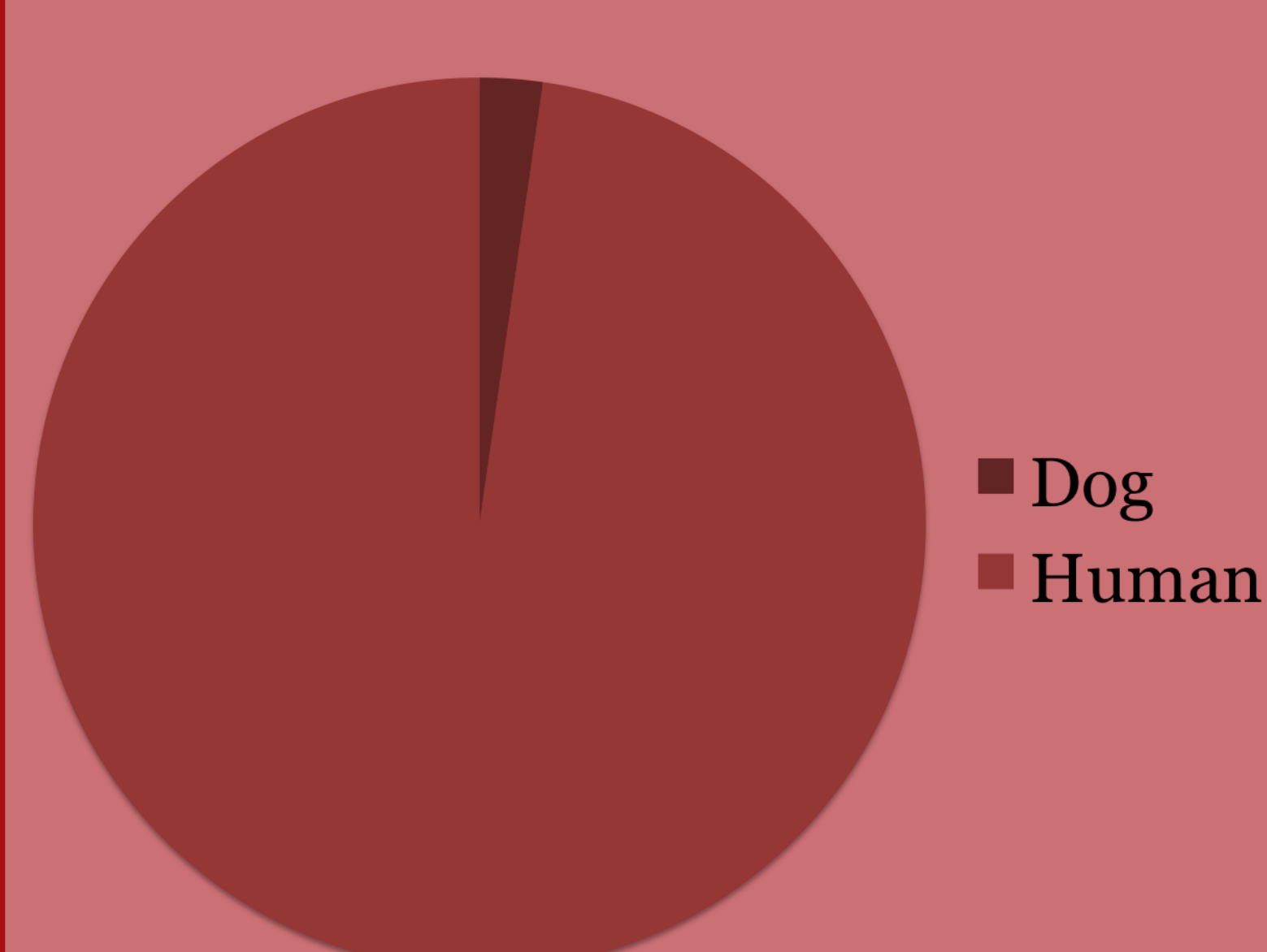


Figure 2.



## RESEARCH PROCESS

- I began my research with looking at epidemiology sources about the types of diseases that stray dogs can contract in South East Asia. This led me to seek out information about arthropods (fleas, ticks, lice) and rabies
- While investigating the many diseases, I found that tropical climates increased the development rate of the arthropods that carried the diseases.
- A faster growth rate in arthropods could correspond to a higher infected dog population so this prompted me to check the actual stray dog population. However the number wasn't as high as I thought, so I researched how many dogs were actually vaccinated and sterilized.
- The overpopulation prompted me to look into why there were so many stray dogs. Upon my research, I found that cultural and religious attitudes towards this animal plays an important part towards the overpopulization.
- Seeing as how this is a large problem for Thailand, I began to seek out the current and past actions that are and have been taken.
- Finalizing my research, I questioned what other social and economic problems were diverting the attention of the Thai government from this issue.

## CONCLUSION

Unfortunately it is unlikely that the stray dogs will become an priority any time soon because of other problems in Thailand diverting their attention. Mass sterilizations and vaccinations could reduce the overpopulation and diseases that could be passed on to people. However, an obstacle towards this are national economic problems, religious and cultural attitudes. Hopefully the rising desire to "westernize" will cause people to change their attitudes to help stray dogs. Sterilization and vaccinations have been tried in the past by the Thai government but not enough resources were deloyed compared to the population of dogs to have an major impact.

## RESULTS

### ❖ Diseases and Rabies

- Dogs can contract a variety of diseases from arthropods such as: babesiosis (from ticks which is virus that enters the red blood cell and can cause anemia), canine monocytic ehrlichiosis (can be contracted by humans from dogs as well, it causes fatal hemorrhaging), lymphatic filariasis (inflammation of the lungs. These are only a few diseases that dogs can contract
- Rabies is a viral disease that causes the brain to inflame and it is transmitted through animal attacks and if not immediately treated it could result in death. Kasempimolporn found in his study that the Thai government is spending roughly 10,000,000 USD per year on post-exposure prophylaxis, which is a treatment that is started immediately after the victim is infected to prevent any further development of the rabie pathogen.

### ❖ Climate and overpopulation

- Arthropods grow quicker in warmer climates so there are more that the dogs could come in contact with. Ticks are able to develop fully in about a year in tropical climates. Female ticks lay up to 4,000 eggs and takes only 2-3 months to develop.
- Around 10,000,000 stray dogs are currently roaming the streets of Thailand compared to the 67,000,000 (Fig. 1) people that currently live there. Wasi estimates that about 80% of the stray dogs are in desperate need to be vaccinated so that rabies can't infect them. Kasempimolporn found in his study that less than 20% of the estimated dog population in Thailand is either sterilized or vaccinated.

### ❖ Economic issues, religion and cultural attitudes

- In Eastern religions, reincarnation and that every life is precious are major beliefs. Many of these religions practice vegetarianism and non-killing lifestyles.
- Owning animals in Asia isn't as big as it is in the United States but people want to become "westernized" by adopting purebred animals.
- Hickens found in his study that the Thai government has representatives that could be solely about a single issue to change since that was what they campaigned that they would change and so they don't consider the other countrywide problems that may occur during their term or campaign).

### ❖ Solutions

- Veterinarians treat the pain and suffering of stray animal instead of immediately euthanizing them, however this is just a slower way to kill the animal. If a stray dog is found and turned in, after three days of not being claimed, the dog will be euthanized, however adoption of animals is promoted in Thailand.



All Photos are Taken by <http://kakanow.com> Photography Blog

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