



## Experimental procedures involving animals rise slightly, show British figures

Matthew Limb

London

The number of experimental scientific procedures involving animals has increased slightly, but those causing a major change in the animals' health or wellbeing have decreased, the latest figures for Great Britain have shown.

The figures for 2015 reported that the proportion of "severe" experimental procedures had reduced since 2014, when the government started to assess what animals actually experienced in laboratories (previous data did not cover severity of procedures). Procedures were classified as severe if they caused a "major departure in animals' usual state of health and wellbeing." The proportion of severe procedures fell to 6% (123 000) in 2015, from 8% the previous year, Home Office statistics reported.

Leading scientists told a media briefing in London that the reporting of severity assessment was a step forward in openness and transparency. Dominic Wells, chair of the Royal Society of Biology's Animal Science Group, said, "These data should reassure the public that the majority of animal experiments cause little, if any, pain or suffering, although there is clearly room to further decrease the number of moderate and severe procedures."

Procedures classified as "moderate," including most surgery under general anaesthetic, significantly disturbed an animal's normal state but not for long. Pain or suffering in "mild" procedures was deemed as no worse than "slight or transitory." Of the 2.08 million experimental procedures completed in 2015, 51% were assessed as mild, 24% moderate, 13% sub-threshold, and 6% non-recovery.

Experiments accounted for just over half of the total of 4.14 million scientific procedures on animals in Great Britain in 2015, which was a 0.5% increase on the 4.12 million recorded in 2013. Just under half (2.06 million) of these procedures involved creating or breeding genetically altered animals.

Most experimental procedures in 2015 involved mice (61% (1.26 million)), 14% were carried out on fish, 12% on rats, and

7% on birds. Experimental procedures involving non-human primates, such as macaques, rose to 3600 (a 12% increase on 2013) but remained a small fraction (0.2%) of procedures overall.

Less than 1% of procedures involving monkeys were severe, while 73% were classed as mild and 26% moderate.

Roger Lemon, Sobell chair of neurophysiology at University College London, said, "I think the general public will be reassured by the fact that, in the case of the use of primates in research in Britain, the great majority of these experiments are in the mild and moderate categories."

He said that most tests on primates (86%) were regulatory tests that needed to be carried out on new drugs and procedures before they could be used in human patients. Lemon said, "A very small percentage of animal [procedures] fall into the severe category. That's certainly true for research involving neuroscience and monkeys in the United Kingdom."

He continued, "The research [is the] cornerstone of a lot of our understanding about how the brain works and how brain disorders occur.

"The picture we're getting is that most animals experience the minimum harm necessary to get the results we need."

Sarah Bailey, senior lecturer in the department of pharmacy and pharmacology at Bath University, said the severity ratings were "good news" and probably reflected a change in procedures. "Scientists are refining what they do all the time. These data are very good at capturing those refinements," she said.

1 Home Office. Annual statistics of scientific procedures on living animals in Great Britain 2015. Jul 2016. [www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/537708/scientific-procedures-living-animals-2015.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/537708/scientific-procedures-living-animals-2015.pdf).

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