

The Effectiveness of Animal Welfare Laws in Nepal: Challenges in Enforcement
and Public Awareness



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Abstract

Animal cruelty remains a persistent yet largely neglected and unaddressed problem in Nepal, where legal protections for animals are limited, incomplete fragmented, and weakly enforced. Street animals, especially dogs and cattle, continue to suffer from neglect and still are exposed to abuse, starvation, disease, and inhumane treatment, which clearly indicates a significant gap and disconnection between law and practice. This research paper overallly examines and analyzes the effectiveness of animal welfare laws in Nepal, with a specific focus on challenges in enforcement and the role of public awareness.

This research study includes a mixed-method approach that combines legal analysis, survey data, interviews, NGO reports, and comparative study of selected South Asian countries, and the study finds that Nepal's animal welfare framework remains fragmented, enforcement of animal welfare is very poor, government implementation is very less and largely symbolic. There is lack of proper and appropriate legislation, Low penalties, lack of institutional responsibility, limited police training, and heavy reliance on non-governmental organizations undermine effective implementation. Survey findings also has help to determine that public awareness plays a very important role in shaping humane behavior and improve animal handling ways with the help of various educational campaigns awareness and proper training.

The study says that animal welfare laws in Nepal cannot be effective without stronger enforcement mechanisms and sustained public education. Its very important to enact a comprehensive Animal Welfare Act, enhanced penalties, institutional capacity-building, and integration of humane education into community and school programs to ensure meaningful protection of animals, and in order to improve the situation of animal laws and welfare in Nepal and establish a proper legal frame work on animal law.

Introduction

Animal cruelty in Nepal is frequently normalized as an unavoidable aspect of daily life.¹ Growing up in Nepal, I have repeatedly witnessed injured street dogs lying untreated on roadsides, animals being beaten or tortured, mistreated and cases of severe abuse passing without intervention. Such incidents reflect a broader social acceptance of animal suffering and a failure to recognize animals as sentient beings capable of experiencing pain, fear, and distress, because people fully do not understand and accept that animals also are living beings and they do have emotions and feelings.

Even Nepal has a strong cultural and religious traditions that shows compassion toward all living beings, still cruelty against animal remains same everywhere. Media reports estimate that Kathmandu alone is home to more than 22,000 stray dogs and approximately 1,200 street cattle, many of whom suffer from road accidents, malnutrition, disease, plastic waste consumption, and intentional abuse, such as physical mistreatment and neglect of injured animals.²

Nepal does not have a single, comprehensive Animal Welfare Act.³ Instead, animal protection provisions are scattered across various laws, directives, and codes, resulting in weak enforcement and limited deterrence. Penalties for cruelty remain low, and animal welfare is often treated as a secondary issue by enforcement agencies.⁴ While non-governmental organizations such as Animal Nepal, Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT Centre), and Sneha's Care play a crucial role in rescue, sterilization, vaccination, and awareness, their efforts cannot substitute for effective state action.

This research is driven by both personal concern and academic inquiry. This research study checks that is, Nepal's animal welfare laws are actually effectively protecting animals, focusing on enforcement challenges and the role of public awareness. By studying laws, survey findings and results, how law is actually used in real life comparing Nepal with other regions, this research study aims to assess the real-world effectiveness of animal welfare laws in Nepal and propose practical solutions for reform.

Background

Nepal is a country with diverse ecosystems, supporting a wide range of wildlife. However, animal welfare remains a relatively under-researched and under-prioritized issue within the broader social

¹ Pant, K. (2021, May 2). *What fuels animal cruelty in Nepal? The Annapurna Express*. "People have normalized cruelty against animals," says Sanjivani, 19, the founder of Life with Furs. Retrieved from <https://theannapurnaexpress.com/story/19477>

² Pokharel, B., 2018. Animal welfare, thehimalayantimes.com, Feb 19, <https://thehimalayantimes.com/opinion/animal-welfare-need-work-nepal>

³ Shrestha, S. (2024, August 9). *Nepal urgently needs an Animal Welfare Act*. MyRepublica. Retrieved from <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/nepal-urgently-needs-an-animal-welfare-act>

⁴ Palais, J., & Singh, V. (2025, October 22). *Nepal needs to enact and enforce animal law*. Nepali Times. Retrieved from <https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/nepal-needs-to-enact-and-enforce-animal-law>

development context. Limited academic literature and mainstream policy attention further highlight the need for greater focus on animal welfare in Nepal.

Animal welfare in Nepal exists within a complex social and cultural framework.⁵ Stray animals, particularly dogs and cattle, occupy public spaces across urban and rural areas, often perceived as nuisances or public health threats rather than sentient beings entitled to care.⁶ Fear of rabies, lack of sterilization programs, irresponsible ownership, and limited veterinary services contribute to negative attitudes toward street animals.⁷ These perceptions significantly shape how animals are treated in public spaces.

Cultural and religious practices also influence treatment of animals. While Hindu and Buddhist philosophies emphasize ahimsa (non-violence), practices such as ritual animal sacrifice and overloading of working animals remain common in many communities. These contradictions reflect a gap between moral values and everyday practices, where cruelty is often normalized or justified as tradition, necessity, or convenience.⁸

Street animals in Nepal face widespread neglect and health challenges. In Kathmandu alone, there are an estimated 22,000 stray dogs and approximately 1,200 street cattle (Pokharel, 2018).⁹ In Pokhara, a study of 171 street dogs found 40.35% were infested with mange, 18.12% had general wounds, 7.60% suffered from respiratory infections, 5.26% had gastrointestinal parasites, and 4.09% exhibited nervous system issues (Acharya & Dhakal, 2016).¹⁰ Surveys conducted by Animal Nepal indicate that before welfare interventions, 60% of respondents considered stray dogs a societal problem, 60% feared rabies, and 50% ignored injured animals. These figures illustrate the widespread health risks and social challenges affecting animal welfare.¹¹

Nepal lacks a single, comprehensive Animal Welfare Act. Instead, protection provisions are scattered across the Muluki Criminal Code, municipal directives, and administrative guidelines,

⁵ "ibid"

⁶ Stray animals, particularly dogs and cattle, occupy public spaces across urban and rural areas and are often perceived as nuisances or public health threats rather than sentient beings entitled to care (Backhouse, 2025). <https://faunalytics.org/humane-stray-population-management-navigating-public-health-animal-welfare-and-human-behavior-change/>

⁷ Fear of rabies, lack of sterilization programs, irresponsible ownership, and limited veterinary services contribute to negative attitudes toward street animals (Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre [KAT Centre], n.d.). <https://katcentre.org/en/rabies-prevention>

⁸ Szűcs, E., Geers, R., Jezierski, T., Sossidou, E. N., & Broom, D. M. (2012). *Animal welfare in different human cultures, traditions and religious faiths*. *Asian-Australasian Journal of Animal Sciences*, 25(11), 1499–1506. <https://doi.org/10.5713/ajas.2012.r.02>

⁹ Pokharel, B., 2018. Animal welfare, thehimalayantimes.com, Feb 19,

¹⁰ Lakshya Deep Devkota (2023). A Review on Animal Welfare and Ethics Situation in Nepal. *Malaysian Animal Husbandry Journal*,

¹¹ Animal Nepal (n.d.), Community Perceptions of Animal Welfare. <https://www.animalnepal.org.np/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/survey-community-perceptions-cnvr.pdf#:~:text=In%20order%20to%20assess%20community,camp.%20The%20results%20were%20very>

creating confusion regarding institutional responsibility.¹² Furthermore, penalties under the Criminal Code—such as fines of Rs. 5,000 or Rs. 10,000—are too low to deter cruelty (Animal Rights Law in Nepal, 2082).¹³ Beyond legislative gaps, challenges in enforcement further limit animal protection outcomes.

Local governments, police, and veterinary offices are responsible for implementing animal welfare measures¹⁴, but they often lack resources, training, and coordination. As a result, cases of animal cruelty are rarely reported, investigated, or prosecuted. Non-governmental organizations such as HART, Animal Nepal, and the Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre play a critical role in animal welfare, though government intervention remains essential.¹⁵

Public awareness plays a central role in the effectiveness of animal welfare laws. Low awareness of legal protections, combined with fear of rabies and social acceptance of cruelty, limits reporting and compliance. Interventions by NGOs demonstrate that awareness campaigns can improve humane attitudes, increase willingness to help injured animals, and promote population control methods such as sterilization.¹⁶ These awareness-related challenges indicate the need for a standardized framework to assess animal welfare conditions.

To evaluate these challenges against global standards, internationally recognized animal welfare frameworks are often applied.

The concept of animal welfare is internationally guided by the Five Freedoms framework, developed by the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council following the Brambell Report (1965). These include freedom from hunger and thirst, discomfort, pain, injury or disease, the ability to express normal behavior, and freedom from fear and distress. This framework serves as a global benchmark for evaluating animal welfare conditions and highlights the gap between ideal standards and actual practices in countries such as Nepal.¹⁷

Persistent incidents illustrate this gap: street dogs in Kathmandu and Thamel face abuse ranging from neglect to brutal killings, yet perpetrators are rarely held accountable (Nepal Connect, 2025;

¹² [Lawmakers discuss Animal Welfare Bill, stress need for legal framework - myRepublica - The New York Times Partner, Latest news of Nepal in English, Latest News Articles | Republica](#)

¹³ [Criminal-Code-Animals.pdf](#) ,([Animal Rights Law in Nepal- Easy guide to all the legal provisions 2082 - Mero Adalat](#))

¹⁴ Chapter 7.7. (n.d.).

https://www.woah.org/fileadmin/Home/eng/Health_standards/tahc/2024/en_chapitre_aw_stray_dog.htm

¹⁵ Rodriguez Ferrere, M. B. (2022). *Animal Welfare Underenforcement as a Rule of Law Problem*. **Animals (Basel)**, **12(11)**, 1411. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12111411>

¹⁶ Laws & More. (2024, December 31). *Understanding animal law and community engagement initiatives*. <https://lawsandmore.com/animal-law-and-community-engagement/>

¹⁷ *Animal welfare - woah - world organisation for animal health*. WOA. (2026, January 26). <https://www.woah.org/en/what-we-do/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/>

myRepublica, 2021).¹⁸ Local authorities sometimes resort to poisoning rather than humane management, highlighting both ethical and operational shortcomings.

Overall, animal welfare in Nepal is shaped by interconnected social, cultural, legal, and institutional factors. Weak enforcement of laws, limited resources, and low public awareness continue to contribute to the poor treatment of street animals. These challenges highlight the need to further examine the effectiveness of existing animal welfare measures and identify the key factors influencing their implementation in Nepal.

Animal welfare in Nepal is governed not by a single, comprehensive law, but by a fragmented system comprising constitutional principles, criminal law provisions, administrative directives, and local regulations. This scattered framework provides limited protection for animals and often lacks clarity regarding enforcement responsibility, resulting in inconsistent implementation across the country.

Statement of the Problem

The above discussion highlights several key issues affecting animal welfare in Nepal, including fragmented legislation, weak institutional coordination, limited enforcement capacity, and low public awareness.

In Nepal, animal cruelty is primarily governed by the Muluki Criminal Code, 2074 (National Penal Code, 2017), which contains the main legal provisions for animal protection. Section 116 addresses reckless conduct involving animals under human control that may cause harm or death. Section 117 prohibits abandonment or leaving animals in public spaces. Section 289 provides specific protection for cows and oxen by criminalizing their killing or injury. Section 290 directly prohibits cruelty towards animals, including beating, overloading, overworking, administering harmful substances, and abandoning sick or old domesticated animals. Section 227 criminalizes bestiality involving animals. These provisions collectively form the legal basis for addressing animal cruelty in Nepal, particularly for street animals such as dogs and cattle.¹⁹

Despite the existence of legal provisions addressing animal cruelty in Nepal, there remains a significant gap between animal welfare legislation and its effective enforcement in Nepal, particularly in relation to street animals. Injured animals are frequently left untreated, cases of intentional cruelty often go unreported, and enforcement agencies rarely take proactive action.²⁰

¹⁸ Subedi, K. (2021, April 12). *Animals are killed brutally time and again, but perpetrators are hardly booked*. myRepublica. <https://myrepublica.nagariknetwork.com/news/animals-are-killed-brutally-time-and-again-but-perpetrators-are-hardly-booked/>

¹⁹ *The National Penal (Code) Act, 2017*. (n.d.). https://linguae.weebly.com/uploads/3/6/5/7/3657496/penal-code-english-revised_2074_.pdf

²⁰ Animal rights in Nepal continue to face critical challenges such as starvation, accidents, and inhumane culling of street animals in urban areas (Alpine Law Associates, 2025)(<https://lawalpine.com/blog/animal-rights-law-nepal>)

This gap is driven by fragmented legislation, weak institutional coordination, limited enforcement capacity, and low public awareness of animal welfare laws. As a result, animal cruelty, neglect, and abandonment continue to persist, and such cases are often underreported or not acted upon.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the key legal, institutional, and social factors contributing to the weak implementation of animal welfare laws in Nepal, with a focus on identifying barriers to enforcement and the role of public awareness in improving animal protection.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of animal welfare laws in Nepal, with particular emphasis on enforcement challenges and the role of public awareness. Although Nepal has established legal provisions aimed at protecting animals, concerns remain regarding their practical implementation. This study therefore seeks to examine how effectively these laws function in practice and how far public awareness influences their enforcement and outcomes.

To achieve this broader aim, several specific objectives have been formulated in line with the research questions of the study.

First, the study aims to identify and analyze the existing animal welfare laws in Nepal. This includes examining the key legal instruments such as the Animal Welfare Directive 2073, the Muluki Criminal Code, and other relevant legislation in order to understand their scope, provisions, and adequacy in addressing animal welfare concerns.

Second, the study seeks to examine how these laws are enforced by government and local authorities, and to understand the mechanisms involved in their implementation. It also aims to explore the challenges that hinder effective enforcement, including institutional and practical limitations that affect compliance and implementation in reality.

Third, the research focuses on assessing the level of public awareness regarding animal welfare laws in Nepal. It also examines public attitudes and behavioral practices toward animals, in order to understand how awareness (or lack of it) influences animal welfare outcomes. This is based on structured surveys and in-person interviews conducted with members of the public and households in selected communities.

Fourth, the study aims to explore the role of non-governmental organizations in supporting animal welfare in Nepal. This includes understanding how NGOs contribute to awareness creation, advocacy, and support for animal protection efforts, and how their activities influence public understanding and welfare practices.

Fifth, the study undertakes a comparative analysis of Nepal's animal welfare framework with selected South Asian countries. The purpose of this comparison is to identify strengths,

weaknesses, and best practices that may be useful for improving Nepal's legal and institutional framework for animal welfare.

Finally, the study aims to propose legal and policy recommendations to improve animal welfare in Nepal. These recommendations are based on findings from legal analysis, public surveys, interviews, and comparative study, and are intended to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, improve legal provisions, and enhance public awareness.

Research Questions

This study is guided by a set of research questions that are directly aligned with its objectives and overall aim of evaluating the effectiveness of animal welfare laws in Nepal. First, it seeks to identify what animal welfare laws currently exist in Nepal by examining the relevant legal framework, including key legislation and directives that address the protection of animals. Second, the study investigates how these laws are enforced by government and local authorities, with particular attention to the mechanisms involved in implementation at different levels of governance.

In addition, the research explores the challenges that hinder the effective enforcement and implementation of animal welfare laws, including institutional, practical, and structural barriers. The study further examines the level of public awareness regarding animal welfare laws in Nepal, as well as how citizens understand and interpret these legal provisions. Closely related to this, it also investigates how public attitudes and everyday behavioral practices influence animal welfare outcomes in practice.

Furthermore, the study considers the role of non-governmental organizations in supporting animal welfare in Nepal, particularly in terms of awareness generation, advocacy, and community engagement. A comparative dimension is also included, where the study examines how Nepal's animal welfare framework compares with those of selected neighboring South Asian countries in order to identify gaps and best practices. Finally, the study seeks to determine what legal and policy reforms are necessary to improve the overall effectiveness of animal welfare protection in Nepal.

Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of Nepal does not explicitly recognize animal rights. However, it includes several provisions that indirectly support animal welfare through its emphasis on environmental protection, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development. In particular, Article 30 guarantees the right to a clean and healthy environment, while Article 51(g) sets out the State's policy on the conservation of natural resources and biodiversity (Constitution of Nepal, 2015).

Since animals are an integral part of ecosystems, these constitutional commitments may provide a normative basis for animal protection.²¹

Without explicit recognition, animal welfare is often considered secondary to human-centered environmental concerns. This contributes to low prioritization by state authorities and weak legislative or institutional action.

Muluki Criminal Code, 2074

The Muluki Criminal Code 2017 contains several provisions addressing cruelty towards animals and related offences. These include Section 116 and Section 117, which deal with reckless handling and abandonment of animals; Section 227, which prohibits bestiality; Sections 289 to 291, which provide protection to cows and oxen and restrict public slaughter; and Section 290, which explicitly prohibits cruelty towards animals, including acts such as beating, overloading, over-driving, or subjecting animals to unnecessary suffering. Collectively, these provisions demonstrate that the legal system formally recognizes the need to protect animals from harm.²²

Despite this recognition, the effectiveness of these provisions is limited due to weak enforcement and minimal penalties. The prescribed punishments, which generally include small fines and short-term imprisonment, are insufficient to act as a strong deterrent against cruelty. Furthermore, the law lacks clear procedural guidelines for reporting, investigation, and prosecution of animal cruelty cases, which results in inconsistent implementation across different regions.

These enforcement gaps are evident in real-world cases. For example, in the Khotang case (2025), a man who hanged a dog was sentenced to only one week of imprisonment and fined Rs. 5,000, despite the statutory provisions allowing for stricter punishment (Chand, 2026). Similarly, in urban areas such as Kathmandu, although community feeding and rescue programs exist, street animals continue to face neglect, abuse, and occasional culling due to insufficient veterinary support and weak municipal coordination. These examples highlight the gap between legal provisions and practical enforcement.²³

As noted in recent media coverage, many incidents are not formally reported due to lack of awareness, fear of legal involvement, and the perception that such cases are not taken seriously.

Overall, while Nepal's legal framework provides a foundational structure for animal protection, its impact is weakened by low penalties, procedural gaps, and inconsistent enforcement practices.

²¹ The Constitution of Nepal does not explicitly recognize animal rights, though environmental protections may indirectly support animal welfare (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). ([Constitution-of-Nepal 2072 Eng www.moljpa.gov .npDate-72 11 16.pdf](#))

²² [Criminal-Code-Animals.pdf](#), ([Animal Rights Law in Nepal- Easy guide to all the legal provisions 2082 - Mero Adalat](#))

²³ Chand, A. (2026, January 4). *When animals are abused, reporting is rare and punishments minimal*. The Kathmandu Post. [Link](#)

Role of Judiciary in Protecting Animal Welfare

The judiciary in Nepal has played an important but limited yet significant role in advancing animal welfare through constitutional interpretation and judicial activism. In certain cases, the Supreme Court has moved beyond a purely human-centered interpretation of law and recognized the ethical and legal importance of protecting animals from cruelty and unnecessary suffering.

A key example is **Supreme Court Decision No. 10224 (०७४/०९/२२)**, where the Court emphasized that animals cannot be treated merely as objects or property. The Court held that animals are living beings with intrinsic value and therefore deserve protection from cruelty, neglect, and exploitation. This marked an important shift from a traditional property-based view of animals toward a more welfare-oriented legal approach. In this judgment, the Court extended protection to **domestic animals, companion animals (pets), wild animals, and animals used in agriculture, transport, and scientific or commercial purposes**. This broad interpretation is significant because it shows that animal welfare obligations are not limited to a single category of animals but apply across different contexts where animals are used by humans. The Court further aligned Nepalese legal understanding with internationally accepted standards of animal welfare, particularly the **Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare**, which include freedom from hunger and thirst, freedom from discomfort, freedom from pain and disease, freedom from fear and distress, and freedom to express normal behavior. By referencing these principles, the Court indirectly recognized that animal welfare is not only about preventing cruelty but also about ensuring basic living conditions that support a humane and dignified existence.

However, despite this progressive interpretation, the role of the judiciary remains largely **reactive rather than proactive**. Courts typically intervene only when a case is filed and do not have the authority to create a comprehensive enforcement system for animal protection. As a result, judicial protection depends heavily on litigation brought by individuals or organizations, which limits its overall effectiveness.

Another major limitation identified by the Court is the **absence of a comprehensive Animal Welfare Act in Nepal**. Although there are scattered provisions in criminal law, veterinary laws, and environmental regulations, they are fragmented and not specifically designed to address animal welfare in a holistic manner. This legislative gap restricts the judiciary from developing a stronger and more consistent body of animal welfare jurisprudence. Therefore, while the judiciary in Nepal has made important contributions in recognizing animal rights principles and aligning domestic law with international standards, its impact remains constrained by the lack of a dedicated legal framework. This highlights the need

for comprehensive legislative reform to support and strengthen judicial efforts in protecting animal welfare.²⁴

Enforcement Challenges

Despite existing legal provisions, enforcement remains weak and inconsistent.²⁵ Police and law enforcement officers lack training and awareness of animal welfare laws. Cases are often treated as low priority, leading to delays or failure in prosecution²⁶.

These challenges can be better understood through the structure of law enforcement in Nepal. The Nepal Police is the primary national (federal-level) law enforcement agency operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It is responsible for maintaining law and order, preventing crime, and conducting criminal investigations across the country. It operates through metropolitan and district police offices in all 77 districts and handles criminal matters, including animal cruelty cases under the Muluki Criminal Code 2017. In contrast, municipal authorities are local government bodies responsible for administrative functions such as public health, waste management, and stray animal control, but they do not possess criminal enforcement powers. They may only refer complaints to the police or coordinate with non-governmental organizations. Therefore, they cannot investigate or prosecute offences.

In cases of animal cruelty within a municipality, the Nepal Police are the competent authority: complaints are filed at the police station, followed by investigation, evidence collection, and possible detention of suspects. The case is then forwarded to a government prosecutor and finally adjudicated by the court. Thus, while municipalities play a supportive role in animal management, enforcement of animal cruelty laws lies primarily with the Nepal Police.²⁷

Low Penalties and Lack of Deterrence

The enforcement of animal protection laws in Nepal is further weakened by low penalties and limited deterrence. Minor fines and short-term imprisonment are generally insufficient to discourage acts of cruelty against animals. For instance, in the Khotang case (2025), despite public outrage and clear evidence of severe cruelty, the offender was sentenced to only one week of imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 5,000, which reflects the lenient application of existing legal provisions (Chand, 2026).²⁸

Dependence on NGOs

²⁴ https://nkp.gov.np/full_detail/9274. (Supreme Court of Nepal)

²⁵ [Criminal-Code-Animals.pdf](#), ([Animal Rights Law in Nepal- Easy guide to all the legal provisions 2082 - Mero Adalat](#))

²⁶ Chand, A. (2026, January 4). *When animals are abused, reporting is rare and punishments minimal*.

²⁷ Wikipedia contributors. (2026, March 30). *Nepal Police*. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal_Police

²⁸ "Ibid"

NGOs rescue injured animals, conduct sterilization programs, and run awareness campaigns. While invaluable, reliance on NGOs reflects systemic enforcement gaps, as NGOs cannot prosecute or enforce laws.²⁹

Lack of Reporting and Public Participation

A significant challenge in the enforcement of animal welfare laws in Nepal is the lack of reporting and limited public participation. Fear of legal involvement, lack of awareness, and social acceptance of cruelty contribute to widespread underreporting of animal abuse cases. Without active community cooperation, legal provisions remain difficult to implement effectively, as most cases never reach formal investigation or prosecution. Without community cooperation, laws remain largely ineffective.³⁰ Even in countries with animal welfare laws, incidents of cruelty persist due to weak enforcement and social acceptance. A recent example from Haryana, India, involved a cow being forced to consume alcohol and pull a cart during Holi, demonstrating the gap between legal protections and real-world practices³¹

Methodology and Rationale

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative in-person interviews and quantitative online surveys, to explore public perceptions, awareness, and behavior regarding animal welfare in Nepal. This approach was selected because it allows the researcher to capture both the depth of personal attitudes and beliefs through interviews and the quantifiable patterns of awareness, attitudes, and practices through surveys. The study is exploratory and preliminary in nature, as it is among the first attempts to examine the compassion–implementation gap in Nepal’s animal welfare context. The findings are intended to inform future research, policy-making, education, and advocacy rather than to produce fully generalizable national conclusions.

In terms of sampling, the study included 8–10 individuals and families for in-person interviews, selected from the researcher’s own community. These interviews explored perceptions of animal

²⁹ (The **Kathmandu Animal Treatment Centre (KAT Centre Nepal)** runs humane animal birth control (sterilization), rescuing injured and abused street animals, and public awareness programs — all without government enforcement power. **Link:** <https://katcentre-nepal.org/about-us/>),

(VOAN conducts **sterilization (Animal Birth Control), anti-rabies vaccination camps, rescue operations, and awareness programs** for street animals, but as an NGO it doesn’t have prosecution or law-enforcement authority: **Link:** <https://voan.org.np/programs.php>),

(A reliable news article notes that *government support for animal welfare is limited*, so several NGOs (Sneha’s Care, KAT Centre, Nepal Street Animal Rescue) take the lead in rescue, sterilization, vaccination, and education — highlighting enforcement limitations:

Link: <https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/nepal-needs-to-enact-and-enforce-animal-law>)

³⁰ (Fear, lack of awareness, and social attitudes contribute to underreporting of animal cruelty incidents in Nepal, resulting in weak enforcement and limited community participation (Chand, 2026)<https://kathmandupost.com/national/2026/01/04/when-animals-are-abused-reporting-is-rare-and-punishments-minimal>

³¹ Rahul, M. (2026, March 2). Video alleges ‘Gau Mata’ forcefully made to drink alcohol, push cart by drunk men during Holi celebrations in Haryana. *Free Press Journal*. <https://www.freepressjournal.in/viral/video-alleges-gau-mata-forcefully-made-to-drink-alcohol-push-cart-by-drunk-men-during-holi-celebrations-in-haryana>

cruelty, cultural practices, and knowledge of legal protections. In addition, 22 respondents from the researcher's personal social circle participated in an online survey, which captured data on knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to animal welfare.

The study acknowledges several limitations. The findings are representative only of the participants' community, which is primarily urban and socially connected to the researcher. Awareness, attitudes, and behavior may differ significantly in rural areas due to differences in education, access to NGOs, and cultural norms. Furthermore, the small sample size limits statistical inference, and the results should therefore be considered indicative rather than conclusive.

For data analysis, interviews were analyzed thematically in order to identify recurring patterns, cultural influences, barriers to reporting, and gaps between moral concern and action. Survey responses were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages to identify trends in awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. A combined analytical approach was then used to triangulate findings and provide a holistic understanding of how moral concern is constrained by cultural, social, and institutional factors.

Findings

The findings of the study are divided into qualitative interview findings and quantitative survey findings. The interview findings revealed that many participants perceive animal cruelty as a normal or socially accepted behavior that does not always require intervention. This normalization reflects cultural attitudes in which everyday mistreatment of animals is often not considered a serious issue. Participants also reported that animal sacrifice practices, including those involving cows, buffaloes, and goats, are largely seen as traditional and generational customs. Even when individuals express discomfort, many still believe these practices should continue due to their cultural and religious significance. Furthermore, although some moral concern toward animals exists, there is generally limited awareness of formal legal protections and reporting mechanisms. As a result, most individuals prefer informal or community-based responses rather than engaging with institutional systems.

The online survey findings complement the interview data by providing quantitative insights into awareness, attitudes, and behaviors. The purpose of the survey was to assess awareness of animal welfare laws, attitudes toward stray animals, knowledge of legal remedies, and perceptions regarding cruelty, punishment, and reform. The survey was exploratory in nature and was not intended to produce fully generalizable results, but rather to identify trends and gaps. Responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages.

The survey revealed that awareness of animal protection laws in Nepal is very low. A majority of respondents reported no awareness of such laws, while only a small proportion indicated that they were aware. Specifically, 13.6 percent reported awareness, 54.5 percent were not aware, and 31.8 percent had no idea. This indicates that legal awareness regarding animal welfare is significantly

limited even among relatively educated and socially connected individuals, reflecting weak dissemination of legal information.

Among those who reported some awareness, knowledge of specific animal welfare laws was fragmented and inconsistent. Many respondents were unable to clearly identify legal provisions or enforcement mechanisms. Some responses included general references such as protection from cruelty and torture, prohibition of bestiality, special protection for cows, references to the Criminal Code, and endangered species protection, while others demonstrated unclear or no specific knowledge. This suggests that even when awareness exists, it remains superficial and lacks legal depth, which reduces its practical effectiveness.

Regarding awareness of punishment for animal cruelty, just over half of respondents indicated that they knew animal cruelty is punishable by law, while others remained uncertain or unaware. Specifically, 54.5 percent answered yes, 18.2 percent answered no, and 27.3 percent answered maybe. This uncertainty reflects weak legal literacy, which may reduce deterrence and discourage reporting behavior.

Knowledge of reporting procedures was also found to be extremely limited. Only a small number of respondents demonstrated clear understanding of formal reporting mechanisms. Some responses included filing a case or FIR registration, while others reflected confusion or informal responses such as retaliation. This indicates a lack of accessible guidance and weak institutional awareness among the public.

Attitudes toward stray animals were generally positive. A majority of respondents believed that stray animals should be cared for and protected, while only a very small proportion viewed them as a problem or nuisance. Specifically, 4.5 percent saw them as a problem, 27.3 percent were neutral, and 68.2 percent supported their protection. This demonstrates strong empathy toward vulnerable animals despite limited legal awareness.

When asked about responses to injured or sick animals, most respondents preferred informal or direct action rather than formal reporting. A majority indicated that they would help or feed the animal, while fewer would report to authorities. Specifically, 59.1 percent would help or feed, 22.7 percent would report, 13.6 percent would ignore, and 4.5 percent would call an NGO. This reflects limited trust in formal systems and a preference for compassion-based responses.

All respondents unanimously agreed that animals have rights, indicating a strong ethical consensus. However, despite this moral belief, actual reporting behavior was extremely low. Only 4.5 percent reported having ever reported an animal cruelty case, while 95.5 percent had not. This demonstrates a clear gap between moral belief and practical action, reinforcing the existence of a compassion–implementation gap.

More than half of respondents reported engaging in informal care for stray animals, such as feeding or helping them. Specifically, 54.5 percent said yes and 45.5 percent said no. This suggests that while formal reporting is rare, informal welfare actions are relatively common in practice.

There was overwhelming support for stricter legal punishment for animal cruelty, with 90.9 percent supporting stronger penalties and 9.1 percent responding maybe. This indicates strong public support for legal reform and stronger enforcement mechanisms.

Respondents reported mixed sources of education and awareness about animal welfare. Approximately 31.8 percent gained awareness through school or university, 22.7 percent through NGOs or media, while 45.5 percent reported having no formal education on the issue. This highlights a significant gap in structured education and institutional awareness.

Most respondents believed that public awareness campaigns are effective in reducing animal cruelty, with 81 percent responding yes and 19 percent responding no. This suggests strong public support for awareness-based interventions.

Respondents identified multiple causes of animal cruelty, including lack of awareness, weak enforcement of laws, cultural attitudes, fear of diseases such as rabies, poor stray management, and lack of empathy. This indicates that animal cruelty is perceived as a systemic issue rather than an isolated behavior problem.

Participants also suggested several measures to improve animal welfare, including stronger laws, public awareness campaigns, stray population management systems, animal shelters and rescue centers, accessible reporting mechanisms such as helplines, and integration of animal welfare education into school curricula. These suggestions reflect a desire for structural and institutional improvement.

Awareness of the Muluki Criminal Code was found to be extremely low, with 13.6 percent aware, 81.8 percent not aware, and 4.5 percent unsure. This further confirms weak dissemination of legal knowledge.

Respondents also acknowledged that cultural and religious beliefs influence attitudes toward animals. While some reported strong influence, others indicated moderate or occasional influence, showing that cultural norms play a significant role in shaping behavior.

There was near-unanimous support for including animal welfare education in formal education systems, indicating strong public support for long-term educational reform. Similarly, most respondents believed that public awareness of animal welfare in Nepal is very low, reflecting widespread perception of inadequate knowledge in society.

All respondents supported the development of a comprehensive animal welfare law, demonstrating unanimous agreement on the need for legal reform. Although many respondents expressed willingness to intervene in cases of animal cruelty, actual intervention remains limited in practice. Additionally, most respondents recognized a connection between animal cruelty and human violence, indicating awareness of broader social implications.

Discussion

The findings of the study suggest a significant gap between moral attitudes and actual behavior regarding animal welfare in Nepal. While respondents strongly believe in animal rights and demonstrate empathy toward animals, this does not translate into legal awareness or reporting behavior. Cultural and religious traditions play a major role in shaping attitudes, particularly in relation to animal sacrifice practices, which are often considered generational customs. These cultural influences sometimes override legal awareness and discourage formal intervention.

The low level of awareness regarding legal frameworks such as the Muluki Criminal Code further contributes to weak enforcement and minimal reporting of cruelty cases. Even though respondents express strong support for stricter laws, lack of knowledge about legal procedures limits practical engagement. Overall, the findings highlight that animal cruelty is not only a behavioral issue but also a structural and institutional one, influenced by gaps in education, cultural norms, and weak dissemination of legal knowledge.

Suggested measures

The study identifies several key measures to improve animal welfare and strengthen enforcement in Nepal. These include the establishment of a comprehensive and well-publicized animal welfare law supported by strong enforcement mechanisms. Public awareness campaigns are essential to educate communities about responsible animal care and legal responsibilities. Accessible reporting systems, such as helplines and community-based mechanisms, are also necessary to ensure timely response to cruelty cases. In addition, education reform through the integration of animal welfare topics into school curricula can help build long-term empathy and awareness. The development of shelters and effective stray population management systems is also important to reduce human–animal conflict and ensure humane treatment of animals. Together, these measures form a coordinated approach to addressing both institutional and social gaps in animal welfare protection.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that although Nepal has existing legal provisions for animal welfare, there remains a significant gap between law and practice. The legal framework, particularly the Muluki Criminal Code and other administrative provisions, exists but is fragmented, weakly enforced, and poorly understood by the public. The findings reveal extremely low awareness of animal protection laws, minimal reporting of cruelty cases, and strong influence of cultural and religious norms on animal-related behavior. At the same time, there is overwhelming public support for stricter laws and stronger enforcement mechanisms.

The study clearly identifies a compassion–implementation gap, where individuals express strong empathy and moral concern for animals but fail to translate these beliefs into action due to lack of legal knowledge, weak institutional systems, and cultural constraints. NGOs play an important role in awareness and rescue activities, but they cannot replace state enforcement mechanisms. Therefore, effective animal welfare in Nepal requires a comprehensive legal framework, improved

enforcement capacity, stronger public awareness programs, and integration of animal welfare education into formal systems.

Ultimately, aligning Nepal's animal welfare system with international standards and strengthening both institutional and social awareness is essential to ensure that animals are not only legally protected but also respected in everyday practice.

Comparative Analysis: Nepal vs. Other South Asian Countries

Nepal's approach to animal welfare can be better understood by comparing it with neighboring countries. Compared to all these countries, Nepal lacks a comprehensive animal welfare law. Public awareness efforts in Nepal are less systematic compared to countries such as India, Thailand, Bhutan and Pakistan. From reviewing the animal welfare laws of India, Thailand, Bhutan, and Pakistan, I learned that effective animal protection systems depend on three key elements: clear legal definitions of cruelty, strong enforcement mechanisms, and preventive welfare regulations supported by institutions and experts.

Key Learnings from Each Country

India

From the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, I learned that the Act defines cruelty under Section 11, including beating, overloading, torturing, and neglecting animals. It establishes the Animal Welfare Board of India under Section 4. It also places a duty on animal caretakers to ensure proper care and prevent unnecessary pain or suffering under Section 3. Section 11 makes acts such as beating, overdriving, overloading, or neglecting animals offences when they cause unnecessary suffering.

Thailand

From the Cruelty Prevention and Welfare of Animal Act, 2014, I learned that the law defines cruelty as any act or omission causing physical or mental suffering, pain, illness, or death (Section 3). It establishes animal welfare governance structures, including Animal Welfare Organizations and Animal Aid Centres (Sections 11–14). It prohibits cruelty without justification (Section 20), while allowing exceptions such as veterinary treatment, disease control, food production, and religious purposes (Section 21). The Act also places responsibility on animal owners to provide proper care (Section 22) and grants officials powers to investigate, enter premises, seize animals, and conduct rescues (Section 25). Penalties include imprisonment of up to two years or fines (Section 31).

Bhutan

From the Livestock Act of Bhutan, 2001, I learned that the Act regulates livestock breeding, health, production, and trade. It promotes livestock productivity while preventing disease spread. It regulates breeding practices such as artificial insemination and embryo transfer and ensures the use of certified, disease-free genetic materials. It also establishes farms for genetic improvement, enforces quarantine measures, and regulates animal movement, inspection, certification, and slaughterhouse hygiene. The Act includes provisions on animal welfare and prevention of unnecessary suffering, and gives inspectors authority to enforce compliance, conduct searches, seize illegal goods, and ensure regulatory adherence. It also outlines penalties such as fines, imprisonment, and license suspension, with oversight by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Pakistan

From the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1890, I learned that the law defines cruelty as acts such as overdriving, beating, overloading, abandonment, and neglect of sick or injured animals (Section 3). It criminalizes specific practices such as phooka or doom dev, killing animals in an unnecessarily cruel manner, and using unfit animals for work (Sections 4–6). It gives enforcement powers to police and magistrates to inspect premises, seize animals, and order treatment or destruction of severely suffering animals (Sections 7–10). It also provides for infirmaries and pinjrapoles for animal care (Section 6B) and allows provincial governments to regulate animal welfare standards (Section 15).

From reviewing the animal welfare laws of India, Thailand, Bhutan, and Pakistan, several approaches already used in these countries could be relevant for Nepal. First, clear legal definitions of cruelty, as seen in India (Section 11) and Pakistan (Section 3), help ensure that acts such as beating, overloading, neglect, and unnecessary suffering are clearly recognized as offences. Second, institutional mechanisms such as India's Animal Welfare Board of India and Thailand's Animal Welfare Organizations and Animal Aid Centres show how dedicated bodies can support coordination and animal care activities. Third, enforcement provisions such as inspection, search, seizure, and rescue powers in Thailand (Section 25) and Pakistan (Sections 7–10) demonstrate how authorities can respond directly to cases of animal cruelty. Finally, welfare support systems such as Pakistan's infirmaries and pinjrapoles (Section 6B) and Bhutan's structured regulatory system for livestock health, quarantine, and inspection show how animal protection can be integrated with health and management systems. Therefore, Nepal can take similar strategies and ideas from these countries and try to adopt those that are suitable for its own context, implementing measures that would strengthen its animal welfare system.

Final Note

This study underscores that effective animal welfare is not only a legal or institutional matter but also a social one. Empathy exists, but without education, enforcement, and systemic support, legal protections remain symbolic. Aligning Nepal's legal framework with international standards and fostering public engagement can bridge the compassion–implementation gap, ensuring animals are both protected by law and respected in daily life.