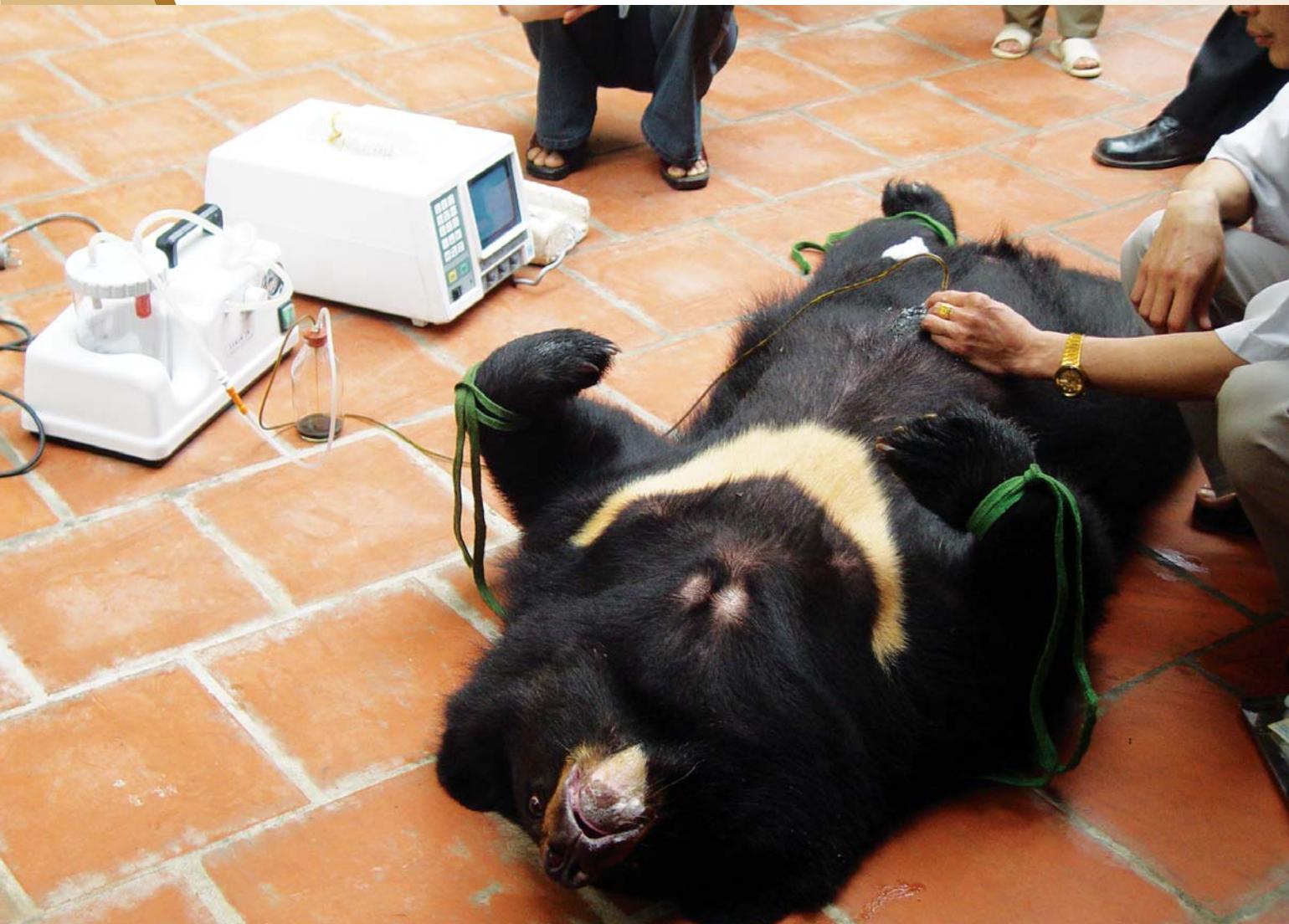


AN ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES AND BEAR BILE USE IN RURAL AREAS OF VIETNAM



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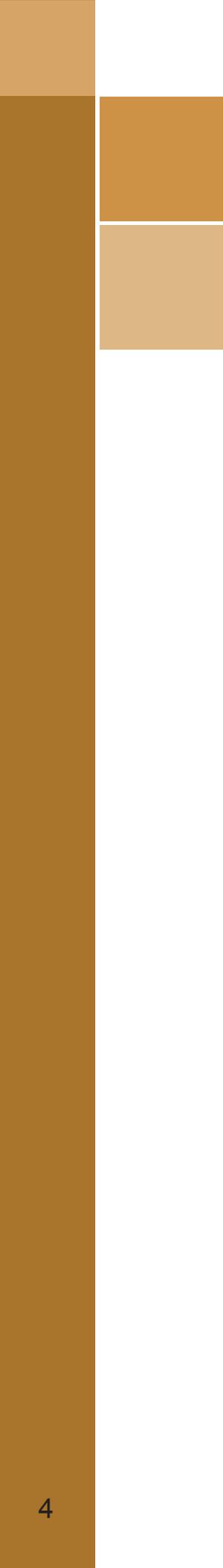
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is home to two species of bears: the Asiatic black bear (*Ursus thibetanus*) and the Malayan sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus*). Both of these species are strictly protected under the Decree 32/2006/ND-CP in Vietnam, and it is illegal to exploit these species for commercial purposes. In addition, both species are also listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Despite their legal protection in Vietnam, both bear species are hunted in the wild and sold to bear farms to support the bear bile industry. Bear farms range in size from one to about a hundred bears. Bear farming has become a major illegal business in Vietnam over the past few decades.

Many Vietnamese people believe that bear bile is a magical medicine that can be used to cure many health problems, ranging from bruises and muscle complaints, to liver problems and cancer. There are two common ways of using bear bile: pure bear bile for external use or mixed bile in rice wine as a drink. Bear bile is not only used for health purposes, but also for entertainment, an exotic drink shared among friends and colleagues.



*A bear farm in Hanoi, keeping more than 80 bears.
Photo: ENV*

Since 2005, ENV has been working with governmental partners and WSPA, as well as other nongovernmental organizations in Vietnam to stop the illegal hunting and trade of bears and end commercial bear farming businesses. ENV has focused on improving laws and policies, strengthening law enforcement, encouraging public participation in stopping the illegal trade, and reducing the demand for bear bile consumption in Vietnam.

The number of captive bears has reduced significantly since 2005 when the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) reported that there were approximately 4,500 bears in captivity on farms in Vietnam. According to recent figures by MARD in 2011, there were less than 3,000 bears in captivity, and this number is continuing to shrink, due mainly to attrition.

In 2009, ENV carried out an extensive study on bear bile use by urban consumers in three major cities in the north, central and south of Vietnam¹. Results from this study have helped ENV develop a more effective public campaign to reduce bear bile consumption in Vietnam.

¹ Vu 2010: *Analysis of attitudes and bear bile use in Vietnam*, Education for Nature-Vietnam

In 2011, ENV carried out a supplemental study on bear bile consumption in rural communities in Vietnam, focusing mainly on northern regions of the country where bear bile consumption was assumed to be greatest based on the findings of the 2009 survey. The rural survey was intended to identify if there were differences in consumption and values associated with use between urban and rural populations, and to feed into ENV's public awareness and bear bile demand reduction campaigns that have been underway since 2005.

Summary of 2011 survey results

- Men in rural communities use bear bile more than women. More than one third (39.1%) of the men surveyed reported having used bear bile in the past, compared to only 24.2% of the women. Men are almost two times more likely to consume bear bile than women.
- Bear bile consumption in rural communities increases with age. People in their 40s and older use more bear bile than younger people.
- Bear bile is mainly used to address health issues. The survey showed that 64.2% of bear bile users use it to cure specific health problems which include treating bruises, arthritis, liver problems, stomach and digestive problems and even cancer. In addition, 39.6% of all rural bear bile consumers use bear bile for general health improvement².

² The total percentage is more than 100% because a user could use bear bile for more than one purpose.

CHAPTER 2 - RESEARCH METHODS

The methods used in this survey were similar to the previous study in 2009-2010. Survey participants were randomly selected and anonymously interviewed via home telephone. The survey was carried out at different times of the day (morning, afternoon and evening) and on weekends to ensure that the survey would reach the widest possible range of respondents representative of these communities. A total of 1,400 people aged 18 or older, representing nine provinces and three geographic areas (north, central, and southern Vietnam), were interviewed during the course of the survey.

Participants were divided into five age groups; 20s (including people of age 18 and 19), 30s, 40s, 50s and 60s (including all persons above 60).

This division was based on the assumption that participants in each age group would have similar health, income and social status. For example, people in their 20s tend to have fewer health problems and are at the beginning of their careers. In contrast, people in their 60s and older are likely to have more health problems and be at or approaching retirement age. People in their 40s and 50s are probably at the peak of their career, still in good health, and likely to have more disposable income.

To analyze the potential relationships between education and the consumption of bear bile, participants were divided into two groups: those with basic education, and those with advanced education. The basic education group included all the respondents who claimed to have studied no further than high school. The advanced education group included respondents who claimed to have pursued further education, such as undergraduate or post-graduate studies or those who had attended vocational schools after completing high school.

Additional information collected from respondents included gender, perceived values of bear bile, purposes of using bear bile, awareness of the law, and attitudes toward animal welfare.

Limitations

- The survey could not profile the participants' professional areas or their annual income because many people did not feel comfortable talking about these matters, and the survey designers felt that information provided may not be accurate.
- The survey did not reach people without house phones or those who use cell phones as their primary form of telephone communication.
- The survey mainly focused on the northern region so the results may not represent attitudes and behaviors toward bear bile and its use across the country.
- The analysis of this study is based on stated responses of the interviewees. Some responses might not reflect participants' actual practices for a variety of reasons or motivations. For example, some respondents might be a bear bile user but were worried about telling the truth to the interviewer via the phone as they were concerned about potential consequences.

CHAPTER 3 - RESULTS

There were 806 women (57.6%) and 594 men (42.4%) participating in the survey. All survey participants claimed to be at least 18 years old. Due to the random sampling method, the distribution of age and education are not the same among different gender groups. Most survey participants (83.6%) claimed that they had only finished the basic level of education (high school or lower).

Based on the results of the survey, 427 people (30.5%) claimed that they had used bear bile at least once in the past. This proportion was very similar to the findings of the previous urban survey in Hanoi where 35% of Hanoi residents claimed that they had used bear bile at some point in their lives.

In addition, 14.4% of those surveyed who claimed never to have used bear bile in the past, stated that they intended to use it in the future (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographics of bear bile users

Bear bile users	Total (N)	Gender		Education	
		Male (N)	Female (N)	Basic (N)	Advanced (N)
Past users	241	130	111	199	42
Current users	186	102	84	147	39
Future users	94	62	32	81	13
Total	521	294	227	427	94

Similar to the findings of the urban survey, age is a very important factor influencing the use of bear bile in rural areas. The use of bear bile increased as age increased. Survey results indicated that only 19.8% of people in their 20s reported using bear bile, compared with much greater percentages of people in their 30s (27.2%), 40s (33.6%) and older (50s: 33.9%, ≥60s: 35.0%).

Bear bile use by people living in rural areas for all age groups exceeded that of people living in urban areas. In particular, there was a much greater percentage of people in their 40s in rural areas (33.6%) using bear bile than in urban areas (19.3%) (Table 2).

When controlling for other factors to test for the significance of age, the statistics regression model indicates that as people in rural areas get older, they are two times more likely to use bear bile than younger people (Table 5).

Table 2: Distribution of bear bile users by age comparing rural and urban respondents

Age group	Rural		Urban	
	N	%	N	%
≤20s	46	19.8	125	14.7
30s	70	27.2	139	23.1
40s	97	33.6	134	19.3
50s	109	33.9	133	26.4
≥60s	105	35.0	123	32.3

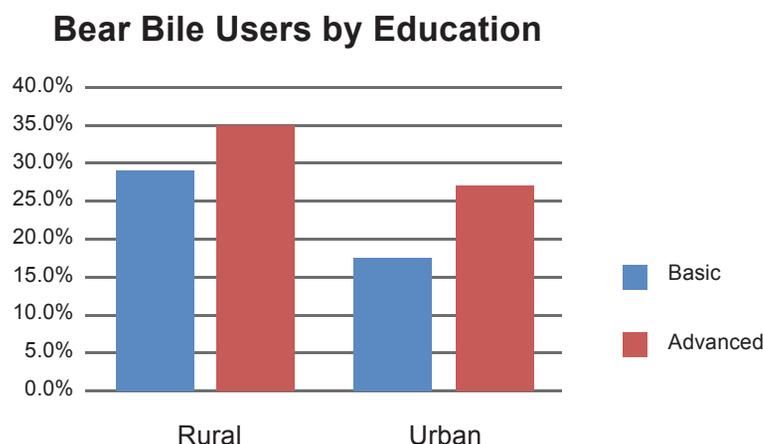
Gender is another important factor in the use of bear bile. In this survey, 232 men (39.1%) indicated that they have used bear bile compared to only 195 women (24.2%) (Table 3). When controlling for other factors to test for the significance of gender, the regression model indicates that men are two times more likely to use bear bile than women. This is very similar to the findings in the previous urban survey (Table 4).

Table 3: Distribution of bear bile users by gender comparing rural and urban respondents

Gender	Rural		Urban	
	N	%	N	%
Male	232	39.1	335	28.9
Female	195	24.2	320	17.1
Total	427	30.5	655	21.6

Education also influenced the use of bear bile in rural areas. People with higher education appeared to use more bear bile than the people with basic education levels. The survey indicated that 35.2% of respondents with advanced education levels claimed that they have used bear bile sometime in the past compared to only 29.6% of those surveyed in rural areas with basic education levels. This difference in bear bile use according to education level is a little more distinguishable in urban areas (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of bear bile users by education comparing rural and urban respondents



When testing the significance of age, gender and education through a binary regression model, age was identified to be the most influencing factor, followed by gender (Table 4). Again, these findings are very similar to the 2009 urban survey.

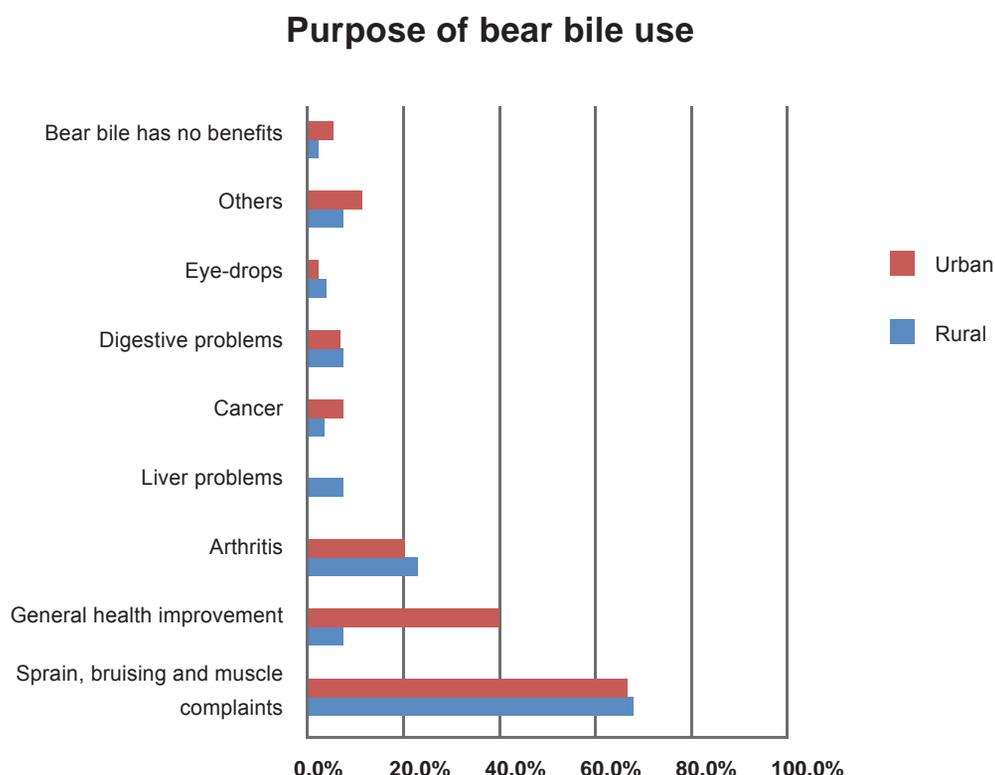
Table 4: Results from logistic regression model of bear bile consumption in rural areas. (The odds ratios Exp (B) indicate the level of statistical significance between bear bile consumption and other factors.)

Factors	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Male	.679	.120	32.299	1	.000	1.972
Advanced Education	.344	.161	4.581	1	.032	1.411
Age of 30s	.453	.219	4.258	1	.039	1.573
Age of 40s	.818	.212	14.876	1	.000	2.265
Age of 50s	.826	.208	15.756	1	.000	2.284
Age of 60s	.826	.211	15.366	1	.000	2.284
Constant	-1.829	.185	97.973	1	.000	.161

Most bear bile users in rural areas stated that they believed that bear bile can be used to treat sprains, bruising and muscle complaints (80.6%). This percentage was much higher than the results from the urban survey (66.9%). In addition, 23.0% of all bear bile users also believed that bear bile can cure arthritis, similar to the values associated with bear bile reported by urban users (Figure 2).

However, while no urban users claimed that bear bile could be used to treat liver problems, 7.5% of all rural users indicated that bear bile had this medicinal value. In addition, similar to urban users, rural users believed that bear bile can cure many other health problems such as digestive problems, and even cancers. Only a small number of rural users (1.6%) believed that bear bile had no medical values (Figure 2).

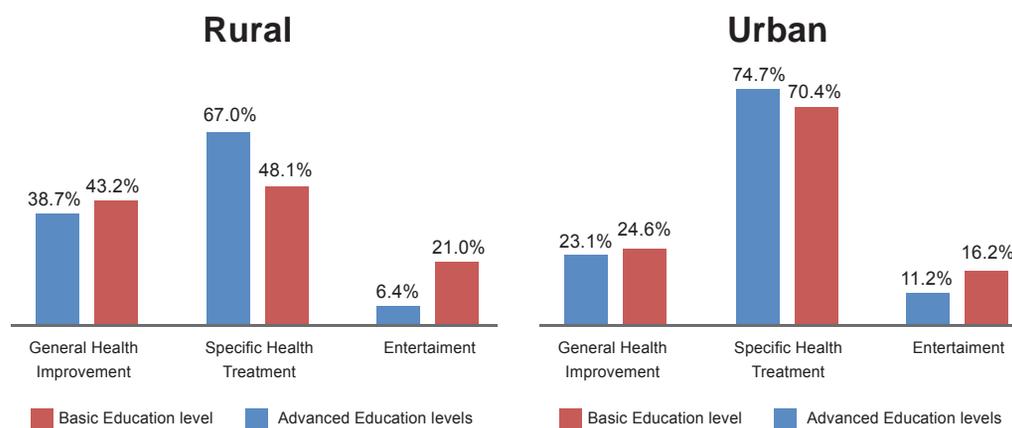
Figure 2: Perceived medical values of bear bile



Similar to the results of the urban survey, most bear bile users reported using bear bile for health reasons, either to treat a specific health problem (64.2%) or to improve their general health (39.6%). There were only a very small percentage of users consuming bear bile for entertainment purposes (9.1%) (Figure 3).

Users with basic education levels in rural areas mainly used bear bile to treat specific health problems (67.0%) and a very small percentage of this group used bear bile for entertainment purposes (6.4%). In contrast, there was a much lower percentage of users with advanced education levels that used bear bile to treat a specific health problem (48.1%), while there was a higher percentage of this group that used bear bile for entertainment purposes. These findings are quite different in urban areas where purposes of using bear bile among the basic education group were very similar to the advanced education group (Figure 3).

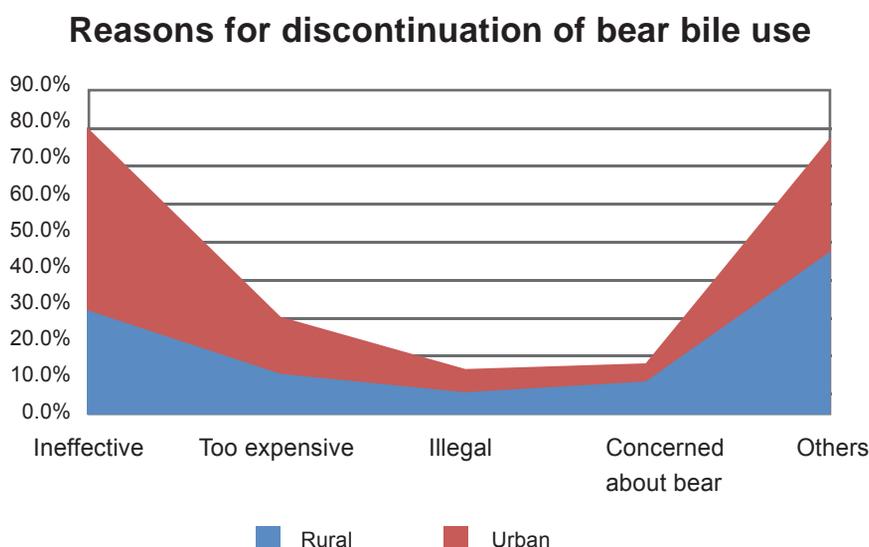
Figure 3: Purposes of bear bile use by education levels in rural and urban areas



More than a quarter of all rural bear bile users claimed that they would not use bear bile again in the future. This percentage is higher than the findings from the previous urban survey (13.0%) (Figure 4).

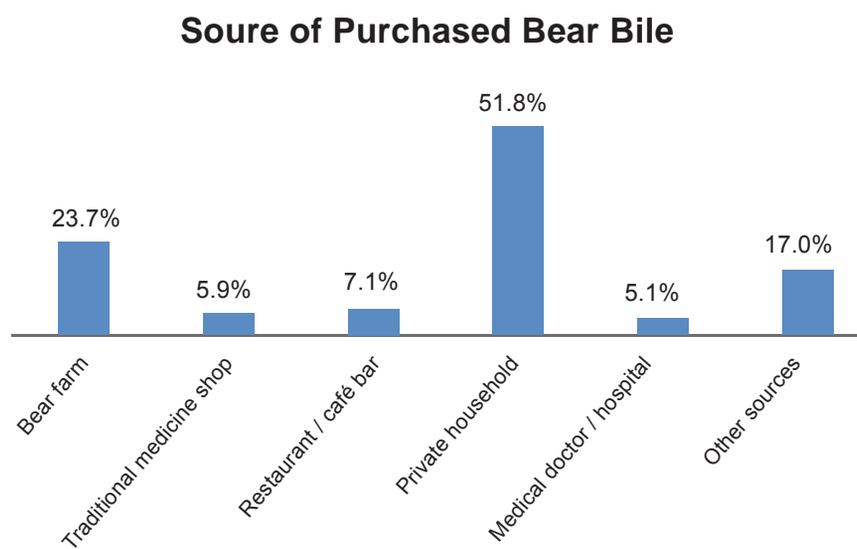
Unlike the urban survey, less than a third of rural users (27.8%) said that their reason for not using bear bile anymore was because it was ineffective. A very small number of rural users said that they would stop using bear bile because it was expensive, illegal or they were concerned about bears. Moreover, a total of 36.5% of all rural bear bile users stated that they were aware that it was illegal to use bear bile. These findings are very similar to results from the previous urban survey (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Reasons for discontinuing the use of bear bile



A total of 253 users (59.3%) claimed that they had purchased bear bile on their own. The most common source for bear bile was from private households (51.8%) followed by bear farms (23.7%). Only a few people reported buying bear bile from traditional medicine shops (3.5%), doctors or hospitals (3.0%), or restaurants (4.2%). Bear bile users also reported purchasing bear bile from other sources such as hunters, markets, middle men, rangers, and ethnic people or even from Laos (Figure 5).

Figure 5: User sources of purchased bear bile



CHAPTER 4 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Bear bile consumption in rural areas was higher than anticipated prior to the study. More than 30% of those surveyed claimed that they had used bear bile in the past. Attitudes and behavior of rural bear bile users were quite similar to urban consumers. The use of bear bile in both rural and urban areas is influenced by similar factors, especially by age and gender.

The study's findings also show that as education increases, so does bear bile consumption and use, which is intuitively in conflict with perceptions that more educated people would rely less on traditional medicines to treat ailments and more on “modern” and professional forms of treatment.

However, analysis of the relationship between education and bear bile use, shows that those with less education are more likely to consume and use bear bile for treatment of specific health problems compared to users with higher education. Moreover, people with higher education levels were found to use bear bile more commonly for general health and entertainment purposes, not treatment of specific ailments. Use of bear bile in this manner may be similar to use of vitamins or eating something healthy in order to feel good and improve vitality. Users may also wish to flaunt their social status and success by entertaining friends and serving perceived luxury goods such as bear bile.

These findings suggest that use of bear bile in Vietnam has a strong link to local culture (traditional values) and social status. Bear bile is perceived to help remedy common, minor ailments such as bruising, sprains, and muscle pain that might not necessitate a visit to the doctor. Thus bear bile may simply be valued as a traditional, affordable, and readily available alternative to professional medical treatment.

The survey findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing demand for bear bile, especially focusing on the northern region of the country is urgently needed. Demand reduction must focus on promoting inexpensive medical alternatives for simple ailments like bruising, sprains, and muscle aches to reduce medicinal users of bear bile. At the same time, the less predictable “vitality”, general health, and entertainment users should be targeted through more creative approaches, aimed at establishing a negative stigma surrounding use of bear bile.



Although bear farm and bile are illegal in Vietnam, both are still openly advertised in some parts of Hanoi.

Photo: ENV

CHAPTER 5 – THE FUTURE

According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), there are fewer than 3,000 bears in captivity on bear farms in Vietnam (2011); this represents a reduction of about 1,500 bears over the past six years, mainly from attrition since 2005 when the Ministry initiated a registration process to prevent new bears from reaching farms. In addition, the price of bear bile has dropped considerably since 2005, most likely as a result of market saturation, and a number of bear farmers have expressed their desire to quit the business, some handing over their bears to authorities.

At the same time, small numbers of new bears trickle in from the wild, mainly as cubs smuggled in from Laos and beyond, and some farmers have successfully bred bears on their farms. These new bears are not clearly controlled under the law, and represent a potentially serious threat to efforts to end bear farming and trade in Vietnam.

However, public attitudes are also changing, with younger generations demonstrating a much stronger concern and commitment to protecting bears and other wildlife. The rise of volunteerism, increased public reporting of bear crimes, and growing support from the public as expressed in the form of pledges not to consume bear bile, are all favorable indicators of change.

Breaking the tradition of bear bile use by consumers, requires a sustained and steady bombardment of media aimed at both preventing use by the younger generations, while altering, as much as possible, the attitudes of older, more change-resistant generations.

ENV is working alongside the government, enforcement agencies, the public, as well as other concerned organizations to accomplish this difficult task, and put an end to bear farming and trade in Vietnam.

EDUCATION FOR NATURE – VIETNAM

Education for Nature-Vietnam (ENV) was established in 2000 as Vietnam's first non-governmental organization focused on the conservation of nature and protection of the environment. Our mission is to foster greater understanding amongst the Vietnamese public about environmental issues of local, national and global significance, ranging from the protection of endangered wildlife and natural ecosystems to climate change. We employ creative and innovative strategies to influence attitudes and mobilize Vietnamese citizens to live in balance with the natural world and to take action to protect Vietnam's precious environment.

ENV specializes in four major program areas that collectively form ENV's integrated and strategic approach toward achievement of our mission. These include:

- Reducing demand and consumption for wildlife products
- Strengthening and supporting law enforcement in dealing with wildlife crimes
- Mobilizing public support and participation in efforts to stop the illegal wildlife trade
- Strengthening legislation and advocating effective government policy in addressing the illegal trade

ENV wishes to thank the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) for supporting this important study.



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