



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XXIX No. 50

December 1981



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: Kiyu, A. (1981). The Dogs and Their Possible Influence on Health of the Longhouse People of the Seventh Division of Sarawak. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXIX (50): 97-100

THE DOGS AND THEIR POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON HEALTH OF THE LONGHOUSE PEOPLE OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION OF SARAWAK

Dr. Andrew Kiyu MBBS (Mai)
(Medical Department, Sarawak.)

INTRODUCTION

The dogs are so much a part of longhouse life in the Seventh Division that in some longhouses, like Long Jaik in Belaga District, dogs outnumber people. Harrison (1965), noted that in Punan Busang, with a population of 109 Punans from 33 families, there were 153 dogs. Thus the dogs have a considerable influence on the health of the people, not only by helping in the hunting of wild animals, but also by their consumption of whatever limited food there was available. They also serve as reservoirs of several zoonotic diseases that can potentially spread to man.

The writer's aim here is to increase the awareness of the health workers of these possible influences of the dogson the health of man and thereby, hopefully stimulate an interest in this direction.

THE DOGS AND THEIR POSSIBLE INFLUENCE ON HEALTH OF THE LONGHOUSE PEOPLE OF THE SEVENTH DIVISION OF SARAWAK

by

Dr. Andrew Kiyu MBBS (Mal)
(Medical Department, Sarawak.)

Introduction:

The dogs are so much a part of longhouse life in the Seventh Division that in some longhouses, like Long Jaik in Belaga District, dogs outnumber people. Harrison (1965), noted that in Punan Busang, with a population of 109 Punans from 33 families, there were 153 dogs. Thus the dogs have a considerable influence on the health of the people, not only by helping in the hunting of wild animals, but also by their consumption of whatever limited food there was available. They also serve as reservoirs of several zoonotic diseases that can potentially spread to man.

The writer's aim here is to increase the awareness of the health workers of these possible influences of the dogs on the health of man and thereby, hopefully stimulate an interest in this direction.

Background:

To the uninitiated, the dogs appear to be mongrels and are generally of small size. Harrison (1965) described them as "curly-tailed pye dogs, which show at least superficially, close affinity with the Basenji breed. This curly-tailed pye is widely distributed in Thailand and elsewhere in South East Asia. Though it has been in Borneo for a long time, the dog material excavated at Niah Caves and in Sirih Cave near Kuching – 300 miles apart – is not of this larger breed but a smaller 'Palustris' type related to the stone-age dog of Japan.....".

They have also been described as "curs..... small in size and tawny in colour..... known to the scientific world by the specific name of 'Canis rutilans' (Roth, 1968).

Useful influence of the dogs on health

Dogs serve as pets to both the old and the young. The Punans, for example, literally love their dogs and some families have "special dog platforms or beds, nicely made, between one to four feet off the ground, well inside the warm shelter of their huts" (Harrison, 1965). It is on these platforms that the dogs sleep. Some longhouse people also consider that the dogs "were like children; ate and slept together with men in the same longhouse and that if a man should kill a dog, he would go mad" (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

The positive influence of dogs as pets, on the health of the people should not be underestimated. In modern societies, for example, where traditional family structures are eroded by the high demands of such societies pets are proving to be of increasing value for the psychological welfare of western man (Jacobs, 1979).