Each year, billions of dollars go to fund animal experiments, much of it through United States-taxpayer supported funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The unsuspecting public is led to believe that these experiments are necessary to promote human health and well-being. Indeed, the mission of NIH is to “to extend healthy life and reduce the burdens of illness and disability.”

But under close scrutiny, this claim does not hold up. Federally-funded animal experiments continue year after year, examining the same questions, at huge cost, creating “animal models” for diseases and conditions that are uniquely human, like smoking and alcoholism.

The American public should be outraged by this inhumane and fraudulent use of animal life. For this reason, IDA has created the “Outragies Awards”, to highlight the bogus use of animals in cruel, repetitive and wasteful research.

Awarded to the “Top Ten Most Outrageous Animal Experiments,” the Outragies, based on publications released in 2012, highlight stupid, cruel and truly outrageous research, like tormenting baby rats to study “child abuse”, giving hallucinogenic drugs to monkeys to create an animal model of schizophrenia, and hanging mice upside down by their tails to study depression.

Tragically, there are hundreds of animal experiments that are outrageous and these Top Ten simply exemplify some of the worst. These experiments—the cream of the crop —show that your tax dollars and animals’ lives are unjustifiably wasted on research that adds nothing to medical progress and does not promote human health.

The Outragies: Awarded to the Top Ten Most Outrageous Experiments on Animals for 2012

1. Most Outrageously Cruel

Born to be killed: Newborn monkeys cut up for vision experiments

Scientists at four institutions, including the University of Houston, College of Optometry, Vanderbilt University, and the National Institute of Mental Health, used newborn monkeys in grisly, invasive research, allegedly to study how vision develops in primates.

Tiny monkeys, some as young as two weeks old, were subjected to brain surgery during which electrodes were implanted. Next, each monkey was tracheostomized and placed in a head frame to undergo extensive electrode recording trials lasting 2 to 4 days.
Amazingly, the researchers report that they used Propofol, a short-acting anesthetic, for these marathon procedures. Finally after days of electrode testing, the babies were killed so their brains could be cut out and studied.

Their findings, which they described as “not surprising” were that many of the neural pathways they observed functioning were the same as those that have already been traced in adult monkeys. They weren’t surprised by this because they noted that baby monkeys already have “functional vision at birth.” So all that suffering and waste of life yielded no new knowledge or advancements in this field.

If that’s not infuriating enough, they boast that the results of this research on baby monkeys duplicates previous studies done on cats and monkeys, and still worse that their results “dovetail nicely” with information from observational studies on human neonates.

This experiment, funded by the National Eye Institute at $734,000. for just 2012, contained not one single word about how this research will help humans or, more specifically, children. But the grant abstract, which has been chugging along since 1989 and sucking up millions of dollars, claims that these studies will help in the treatment of amblyopia, a childhood disorder characterized by fuzzy vision, which is highly treatable with early detection.

Dr. Stephen Kaufman, a board-certified ophthalmologist in practice for 22 years, reviewed this experiment at IDA’s request and concluded, “I have seen no evidence that any of this research has assisted the management of amblyopia (‘lazy eye’) in humans. Human clinical investigations have guided the management of this condition.”

So we have a suggestion for NIH: Why not put the money into early detection for children who could be helped and leave the animals alone?


2. Most Outrageously Senseless

Cats deafened and turned into experimental equipment

The winner in the category for Most Outrageously Senseless went to researchers at the esteemed institutions of Harvard Medical School, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston.

Highly invasive hearing experiments were conducted on 15 young cats, purporting to improve
hearing aids and cochlear implants for human use. Cochlear implants are used to help hearing-impaired individuals perceive sound. Developed over the last 30 years, largely through human research, they are helpful to many people, but still need refinement.

Cats were made deaf using high doses of drugs known to damage the nerves involved with hearing. Some cats used in the experiments were naturally deaf. The researchers report that some of the cats had already been used in a prior experiment.

After the deafening procedures, cats had surgery to install cochlear implants and then were put through lengthy electrophysiological testing trials. They did not describe how long the testing trials lasted, other than to state that they administered steroids every four hours to minimize brain swelling.

Experimenting on cats to purportedly enhance the performance of cochlear implants for humans is cruel and unjustified. The response in an auditory neuron in an anesthetized cat is a limited view of the full picture of human hearing physiology. Hearing is a conscious phenomenon. Tracking the way neuron fires in an anesthetized cat is outdated and inhumane.

Lawrence A. Hansen, MD, Professor in the Departments of Neurosciences and Pathology at University of California, San Diego, School of Medicine, wrote about this research: "There is no justification for deliberately deafening cats to experiment with cochlear implants when directly applicable clinically based investigations with such devices are already being done with humans. The cruelty inflicted upon the cats used in these experiments is sufficiently severe and callous to disconcert all but the most hard-hearted. These cat deafening experiments are an especially sad example of basic scientists draining funding away from human-based research which is far more likely to improve human health."

More productive research into improving cochlear implants is carried out through human clinical research, utilizing CAT scans, computer modeling, and psychophysical studies which measure the relationship between physical stimuli and perception, all done non-invasively on people who can benefit from the research.

Ironically, the principal investigator also uses psychophysics in his work, but he’s also been cutting up cats for this line of research since at least 1996. Funded by the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, the research received $443,000 in 2012.


3. Most Outrageously Depraved

Mice with sense of smell wiped out are anxious

Inspired by their ability to damage the sense of smell through genetic tampering, a team of eight researchers at Columbia University and their collaborators conducted a study on male mice with an impaired sense of smell, suggesting that this might help treat anxiety in people. Their efforts earn them our Most Outrageously Depraved award for subjecting these poor mice to a range of tests that imposed “inescapable stress,” including hanging them upside down by their tails.
with adhesive tape for six minutes to see how long they would struggle before giving up.

Other tests included painful foot shocks, 24 hours of food-deprivation, and the infamous simulated drowning test where mice are put into a basin of water with no way out and no means of rest to see how long they try to swim before giving up. (Note - only the researchers know this is simulated - the mice really do think they might drown.) When all these trials were finished the mice were killed to study their brains.

The National Institute of Mental Health supported this absurd study, which opens by stating that “anxiety disorders are characterized by persistent fear in the absence of immediate threat,” and then proceeded to bombarding these poor mice with all kinds of immediate threats. The American public paid almost $400,000 in 2012 for this study which refers to scores of prior studies that demonstrated how damaging the sense of smell in animals increased their anxiety.

The grant supporting this junk science is an “R37” category which NIH claims is awarded to “investigators whose research competence and productivity are distinctly superior and who are highly likely to continue to perform in an outstanding manner.” Yikes. We’d hate to see what the inferior “investigators” are doing.


4. Most Outrageously Heartless

Baby rats tormented to study “child abuse”

The award for Most Outrageously Heartless goes to four scientists at New York University Emotional Brain Institute who teamed up to abuse baby rats. Literally. They set out to mimic “child abuse,” but ended up subjecting infant rats to something more like the torture chambers at Abu Ghraib.

Baby rats received painful electric shocks while being exposed to the scent of peppermint for five days in a row. Because they were so young, the scientists hypothesized that the baby rats somehow substituted the peppermint odor for the smell of their mother, and thus perceived the shocks as coming from her.

Another group of baby rats was abused by removing most of the nesting material from their mothers. This frustrated them so much that they were not able to properly care for their babies; they handled them roughly, stepped on them, and nursed them less so they went hungry. The
experimenters report that this group of babies cried more frequently than the control group who stayed with mothers in proper nests.

Weeks later, these groups of abused baby rats were subjected to the “forced swim test,” where they are put into basins of water with no platform for resting to see how long they struggle to swim before they give up and float helplessly. Psychologists use this simulated drowning scenario as a standard test, allegedly to study “depression” in animals.

Some of the rats had electrodes implanted in their brain to infuse the drug *muscimol*, the active agent in psychedelic mushrooms, directly into the brain, before being subjected to another round of the “forced swim test.” The scientists claim that the muscimol “turned off” the emotional response, thereby reversing the depression, since rats who received the drug struggled longer to swim than those who didn’t.

Although the researchers claimed that the muscimol blocked the “depression-like” floating behavior, it is difficult to imagine what goes on in the mind of a rat given a psychedelic drug. It is likely terrifying.

All of the rats were killed, and their brains dissected. The researchers concluded that the rat experiment provided a good model for what is already “well characterized” through human clinical studies, namely “early-life abuse constitutes a major risk factor for the development of psychopathologies, including depression.”

Did we really need to torment rats to tell us this? This experiment was funded by a whopping $2.6 million, starting in 2009, from the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders combined.


5. Most Outrageously Absurd

**Broken homes don’t lead to drinking in prairie voles**

The Most Outrageously Absurd Award goes to a group of researchers at Emory University, Oregon Health & Science University and Quinnipiac University, who wanted to examine whether prairie voles who are raised by one parent would be more apt to drink alcohol than those raised by both parents.

This is a question that scientists have had difficulty answering based on human studies, yet they decided to see if they could answer it using prairie voles.

Why did they think this? Because prairie voles have a strong family structure that includes rearing of young by both parents. In fact, prairie voles mate for life and join in the raising of future
generations.

In this study, the fathers were removed before birth and the pups were raised only by the mothers. The researchers found no differences in the offspring’s tendency to drink alcohol, whether they were raised by a single parent or both parents.

They also compared whether the voles would be more likely to drink “socially” by placing the drinking apparatus nearer or farther from an adjacent mesh cage with another vole. Researchers claim their results showed a preference for “social” drinking.

Another experiment compared the tendency to drink alcohol between prairie voles and meadow voles, which concluded that meadow voles drank less.

At the end of the experiment all voles were injected with ethanol, gassed with carbon dioxide and decapitated. The only justification they offer for this extreme measure was to analyze their blood ethanol level. It seems they never considered simply drawing their blood.

This experiment was supported in part by funding from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, for a grant that will run from 2011 to 2016, receiving over $270,000 for 2012 alone. Other funding was contributed by the National Institute of Mental Health and the National Center for Research Resources. The total cost of this experiment examining voles to answer a question we have been unable to answer from human studies is impossible to determine. The stupidity of it, however, is easy to determine.


6. Most Outrageously Repetitive

Fright Nights at University of Wisconsin: 25 years of terrifying monkeys

The runaway winner of our Most Outrageously Repetitive award is a team of researchers at the Health Emotions Research Institute at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Ned H. Kalin and his colleagues have been reporting on their use of rats and monkeys to study the neurobiology of fear since 1988. There is no evidence that any of the experiments have helped anyone but the scientists.

In a recent paper, they report on another 24 monkeys they frightened and killed, purportedly to study neurological components of childhood anxiety. Young male rhesus monkeys, ranging in age from 9 months to 4 years, were placed alone in a test cage and then a “human intruder” would enter the room and sit there for 30 minutes. After this episode, monkeys were
anesthetized to have their blood drawn. Monkey behavior during the intruder episode is briefly described “freezing for at least 3 seconds, and tense body posture,” among others.

Testing trials continued at intervals over 18 months, during which the monkeys were subjected to more blood draws and PET scans. Then they were killed to study their brains.

Unfortunately for children born with an anxious temperament, this latest study on the brains of frightened monkeys will have absolutely no affect on their life trajectory or help them if they develop a mental illness.

Long-term research tracing the life course of children with an anxious temperament has discovered that about two-thirds of them will develop symptoms of anxiety and depression. Researchers who study and work with children focus on a child's environment, including parenting, child care, and peer relationships in their effort to develop prevention and intervention programs.

The research on the biology of fear in animals at the University of Wisconsin, Madison has cost taxpayers over $5 million in just the past ten years. Over the past 25 years, they have frightened rats and monkeys with electric shocks, live and rubber snakes, intimidating strangers, and burned away various parts of their brains with acid and electro-cautery to see what effect it would have on their fear.

This colossal waste of tax dollars and the profound suffering heaped upon these animals makes this lab's work a real standout in this category.


7. Most Outrageously Inexcusable

Nicotine damages lungs of baby mice

The Most Outrageously Inexcusable category goes to a team of researchers at seven institutions who exposed pregnant and newborn mice to nicotine so they could study the effects on their lungs. Mice were surgically implanted with “mini-pumps” to expose them to nicotine. Some were forced to drink it when it was added to their water source.

After the exposure period, baby mice were anesthetized and tracheotomized to analyze their lungs. Then they were killed. The results showed that the newborn mice had impaired
lung function.

The researchers claim that even though the link between maternal smoking and impaired lung function in children is “incontrovertible,” this experiment demonstrates more precisely how that happens. Researchers claim that although we know that cigarette smoking causes lung damage in offspring, the exact mechanisms are “poorly understood.”

This is another way of saying that we can keep studying this same issue *ad nauseum* because we can never know everything there is to know.

But here is what we do know. Animal “models” of tobacco and nicotine exposure have not helped to understand smoking in people. Animal studies have provided conflicting results when applied to humans, even failing to consistently replicate what we already know from human studies, such as the link between low birth weight and smoking during pregnancy. We know that smoking is harmful to everyone, and that it damages the unborn child. We know that human use of tobacco is a complex condition, affected by a range of factors including peer pressure, socio-economic status, level of education, drug and alcohol use, and the presence of other behavioral problems such as anxiety or depression. At the end of the day, animal experiments have not helped to address the problem of smoking. That’s why we think it’s Outrageously Inexcusable that taxpayers funded a grant for this experiment on mice to the tune of $2.4 million from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute.

Imagine how many people could be helped if the millions of dollars that fund cruel nicotine experiments on animals would instead be used to provide support for people who smoke, with programs that are proven to be effective.


8. Most Outrageously Superfluous (Best Tax-Payer-Funded Vacation)

**Monkeys pumped with PCP to study “schizophrenia”**

Our Most Outrageously Superfluous award goes to a team of eight scientists from Yale University, UCLA, and pharmaceutical giants Merck and Pfizer. Their research was conducted on the Caribbean island of St. Kitts where wild caught monkeys are captured and used at the St. Kitts Biomedical Research Foundation.

These researchers conducted a totally redundant study that attempts to show that the drug asenapine can diminish the cognitive effects of PCP, a hallucinogenic recreational drug also known as “angel dust.”
PCP was administered to the monkeys for two weeks, purportedly to mimic the cognitive impairments seen in schizophrenia, and then asenapine was administered for four weeks to reverse the effects of the PCP. But asenapine had already been identified as a drug of treatment for schizophrenia in people and was well into human clinical trials before this monkey research started. So what was the justification for this research?

Adolescent monkeys were trained to perform an object retrieval task. They were then injected with PCP at 15 to 30 times the common human recreational dose. Researchers claim that “no distressful effects of PCP were observed at the dosage used in this study.” Which begs the question: exactly how does one know what a monkey experiences on a hallucinogenic drug? And PCP is almost never injected; it is almost always smoked, further negating any correlation between the monkeys’ PCP experience and that of people.

Object retrieval trials continued throughout the study to evaluate cognition and motor skills. The monkeys were then killed, and their brains analyzed.

The researchers concluded that their results support "the potential for asenapine to reduce cognitive impairment in patients with schizophrenia." But schizophrenia is merely a name for a concert of possible symptoms. Diagnosis in humans is based on interviews with the patient and family members; the scientists report no interviews with the monkeys.

Why would scientists need to travel 3,600 miles to experiment on monkeys when the U.S. government already provides them with very large monkey colonies throughout the country? Maybe they just wanted a taxpayer-funded vacation on an island paradise.

Multiple grants supported this research, from the National Institute of Mental Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse, and National Center for Research Resources. One NIMH grant alone provided more than $525,000 in 2011 for this study.

In addition to federal funding, researchers disclose in their “Conflicts of interest” statement that this was an industry-sponsored project. The two principal investigators received grant funding from Pfizer and Merck. One is a consultant to Pfizer.


9. Most Outrageously Asinine

Psychologists strive for breakthroughs by studying sexual preference in hamsters
Our Most Outrageously Asinine award goes to researchers at Cornell University for their study of the sexual inclination of hamsters to mate with a “foreign” hamster.

Psychologists studied the sexual habits of Turkish as compared to Syrian hamsters. The object was to see whether female Turkish hamsters would readily mate with male Syrian hamsters. They explain that they had studied the Syrian hamsters in a prior experiment. Since this line of research started in 1998, it has given them lots of time to create all sorts of comparisons.

First they exposed the racially different hamsters to each other for eight days in adjacent cages with a mesh barrier, so they could see and smell each other. Next they placed them in a cage together for five minutes and observed whether the female was “sexually receptive” to the male. They then repeated the five minute pairing of the same female Turkish hamster with a male Turkish hamster who she had not seen before.

They compared the two pairings and concluded that female Turkish hamsters were more likely to copulate with a “foreign” hamster than female Syrian hamsters.

One of the essential questions they surmounted was whether the female Turkish hamsters would “learn” to avoid a foreign mate. The conclusion is that they don’t, but apparently Syrian hamsters do.

All this came at a cost of approximately $300,000 annually from a federal grant bestowed by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). The entire grant, which began in 1998, has cost over $2.3 million.

NIMH’s mission statement claims it is “paving the way for prevention, recovery and cure” of mental illness by fostering “innovative thinking and novel scientific perspectives. In this way, breakthroughs in science can become breakthroughs for all people with mental illness.”

Clearly, we have a long way to go if money continues to be sunk into this kind of asinine research.


10. Most Outrageously Pointless

Stressed rats drink more than non-stressed rats
In an expensive study of the obvious, psychologists at the Graduate Center for the City University of New York designed an experiment to see what effect stress would have on rats who drink alcohol. Of course, rats don’t drink, so first they had to get them used to drinking by mixing alcohol in their water. Though the researchers acknowledge that “alcoholics in treatment claim that life stressors are the leading cause of continued drinking or relapse,” they somehow justified spending taxpayer money to study whether stressed rats would drink more than non-stressed rats.

These great minds, who take the award for Most Outrageously Pointless, decided that complex life stressors in humans could be studied in rats by putting them into a restraint chamber. Rats were restrained one hour each day, for ten days in a clear cylindrical tube that prevented them from moving.

The results showed that the stressed rats “drank” more alcohol than the non-stressed group. The researchers also appeared to be unclear about the voluminous literature confirming the adverse effect of alcohol on human memory. So they put the groups of rats through memory tests and discovered that the drinking, stressed rats performed better! No wonder these scientists are confused; they’re relying on animal experiments to study human behavior.

They also claim that their findings couldn’t be clarified because they were unable to run blood alcohol levels on the rats. This was because they lost the blood samples when the freezer broke. But take heart, because the researchers assure us that “future studies will measure BAC [blood alcohol level] to determine if rats undergoing stress have an altered BAC.”

Sadly for the rats and for the public that funds these experiments, we know there will be future studies. Why stop, when you have a gravy train grant that has been going since 2000 and brought in $1.4 million to the university in 2012 alone?

This experiment was funded in part by a grant from the National Institute for General Medical Sciences claiming “…this program will educate and train the next generation of scientists who engage in research to benefit public health.” A lofty goal, if there really was some public health benefit.

What You Can Do

Please help IDA in speaking out about the millions of dollars that fund this sort of outrageously wasteful and terribly cruel research on animals. It’s time to put a stop to it. The US economy is in crisis, making this even more urgent to address.

Click here to contact your US Senators and Congressperson [link to new point-and-click letter]. Ask for much stricter oversight for granting money to animal research. Insist that all NIH-funded experiments comply with its stated mission "to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce the burdens of illness and disability."

You can also call your elected officials. Find their phone numbers at http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml, or call the US Capitol Switchboard: 202-224-3121.