

Owner perceptions of working equid health and disease in Ethiopia: Participatory Situation Analysis (PSA).

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Aims/Background: The aim of this study was to use participatory approaches to identify and prioritise the diseases and health concerns of working equids in Ethiopia. Ethiopia has the largest population of working horses, mules and donkeys in Africa and the second largest population in the world behind China. These working equids suffer from low productivity as a result of prevalent parasitic and infectious diseases, and diseases associated with poor management practices.

Methods: Over a 2 month period (February/March 2008) a Participatory Situation Analysis (PSA) was conducted in the Amhara and Oromia regions of Ethiopia. Sixteen sites were selected in a range of agro-ecological zones (8 urban towns with predominantly cart horse owners and 8 rural villages with predominantly donkey owners). Sites were classed as exposed (previously exposed to an equine veterinary NGO or equine education programme) and non-exposed (those with no previous exposure). At each site, a PSA was carried out with 2 groups of 5 people, in total 160 participants were involved throughout this study. Using a locally trained animal health worker as a facilitator and translator a number of different participatory approaches were used in the PSA. Open discussion, ranking and matrix ranking were used to gather information from groups of owners regarding their knowledge on the health issues and diseases that affected their equids. Owners' perceptions on prevalence, morbidity and mortality of the volunteered diseases and the clinical signs that owners attributed to each disease were obtained. Owners also provided information regarding the socio-economic impact of these diseases and health concerns.

Results: Forty separate disease "entities" were described by horse and donkey owners. Donkey owners ranked nasal discharge, coughing, Sarcoidosis and wounds as the most common diseases of their animals. Horse owners ranked Epizootic Lymphangitis (EL), colic and a musculoskeletal entity to be the most common. Work impact scores (WIS) were created to interpret the impact of the various conditions on the owners' horse/donkeys ability to work. The average WIS varied between horse and donkey owners. Conditions that horse owners perceive to afflict their animals have a greater impact on working ability compared to the conditions that donkey owners perceive to affect their animals.

Conclusions: Results from this PSA has lead to increased knowledge regarding owner perceptions of the significant health and disease concerns that affect working equids. The information gathered during this PSA will be triangulated with other data sources, such as published literature and clinical records, to inform decisions regarding the targeting of diseases and health concerns. This is of benefit to veterinarians, government and NGO's in identifying areas requiring the education of equid owners and also those requiring further research.

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