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## **Human-animal relationships at sheep and cattle abattoirs**

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### **Abstract**

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*There are accumulating international data in a number of livestock industries that show that a negative attitude by stockpeople towards interacting with pigs, dairy cattle and poultry is correlated with increased levels of fear and stress in farm animals and in turn reduced animal productivity. While most of this research has been on-farm, one study has shown similar attitude-behaviour correlations in a pig abattoir. The major aim of this research was to examine the stockperson attitude-behaviour at sheep and cattle abattoirs. Twenty-two Australian abattoirs participated in the collection of stockperson attitudes and behaviour (81 stockpeople — 35 cattle stockpeople and 46 sheep stockpeople; six abattoirs slaughtering cattle, six slaughtering sheep and ten slaughtering both cattle and sheep). Several significant correlations between stockperson attitudes and behaviour were detected. In particular, the perceived pressures imposed by perceived lack of control over their actions, perceived time constraints, perceived effect of poor facilities and inappropriate beliefs about arousing livestock were all associated with frequent use of forceful handling behaviours by the stockperson. These results were similar to observations in pig abattoirs that have been reported previously. These relationships at cattle and sheep abattoirs indicate that there may be an opportunity to improve stockperson behaviour and consequently reduce stress in sheep and cattle at abattoirs by targeting attitudes (and behaviour) for improvement, with appropriate educational and training material in a way that is similar to the uses of such training with livestock species in farm settings.*

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, attitudes, cattle handling, sheep, slaughter, stockperson