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## **The day-to-day management of UK leisure horses and the prevalence of owner-reported stable-related and handling behaviour problems**

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### **Abstract**

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While concerns regarding the day-to-day management of domestic horses have been raised in relation to behaviour problems and welfare, most published studies have focused on the management of performance horses and less is known about the routine management of leisure horses and the prevalence of behavioural problems within this population. The objective of this study was to generate data on the day-to-day management of UK leisure horses and to quantify the prevalence of stable/stall-related and handling behaviour problems. A self-administered internet survey was used to collect individual horse-level data from a convenience sample of leisure horse owners. The survey was online for a year and respondents were asked to report on their routine over the previous week to minimise recall bias. The survey covered the horses' stable and turn-out routine and environments, including opportunities for social contact with other horses. Respondents were also asked to rate the frequency their horse displayed 20 stable-related and handling behaviour problems. Data on 1,850 individual horses were collected. Stable-related and handling behaviour problems were displayed by 82% of horses sampled. The findings suggest a trend towards year-round stabling. The restriction in turn-out opportunities may have welfare costs for the horses involved. The high prevalence of stable-related and handling problems, including stereotypies, is a concern.

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**Keywords:** animal welfare, behaviour problems, horse, husbandry, management, survey