Attitudes of students from south-east and east Asian countries to slaughter and transport of livestock

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Abstract

Attitudes to animals have been extensively studied for people in developed countries, but not for those in developing countries. The attitudes of prospective stakeholders in the livestock sectors in south-east and east Asia towards transport and slaughter were examined by surveying university students studying veterinary medicine and animal science in Malaysia, Thailand, China and Vietnam, with a total of 739 students taking part. Students had greater acceptability of transport than slaughter issues for livestock, and female students found most transport and slaughter issues of greater concern than male students. Veterinary students were more accepting of several issues than animal science students, in particular killing animals that were injured or ill. Religion had a major effect on attitudes. Muslim students found using animals that died naturally for products least acceptable. Compared to them, Hindu students were less accepting of killing injured or ill animals and Buddhist students less accepting of euthanasing healthy pets. Students with more experience of pets were less accepting of both transport and slaughter issues. It is concluded that concern was exhibited by future stakeholders in the SE and E Asian livestock industries for slaughter and, to a lesser extent, transport issues, although attitudes were influenced by their religion, gender and experience of pet-keeping.

Keywords: animal welfare, Asia, attitudes, livestock, slaughter, transport

Introduction

Societal interest and awareness in animal welfare have been increasing over the past decades, with the development and implementation of the Five Freedoms evident in developed countries (Botreau et al 2007; Eurobarometer 2007; European Commission Food [ECF] 2015). Stakeholders’ awareness of and interest to advocate for and implement better husbandry practices have been a focus of research (eg Phillips et al 2012). Many universities have included animal ethics and welfare topics into future stakeholders’ curricula, in particular for veterinary and animal science students, even though there are major variations in what is taught (Broom 2005). Veterinary science and animal science students should have the sensitivity and capacity for analysis of animal ethics issues and may increase their level of concern for animal welfare problems after undergoing animal welfare courses (Hazel et al 2011; Verrinder & Phillips 2014).

These trends have not been confirmed for students in developing countries, some of which have a growing interest in animal welfare. A recent study found that university students in some Asian countries tended to be more accepting of issues of concern in relation to animal welfare than those in some European countries, which could be partially explained by the differences in the socio-economic status of people in Asia (Phillips et al 2010). Attitudes of Asian stakeholders towards animal welfare are particularly relevant to the transport and slaughter of livestock that have been imported from developed countries where there is an awareness of the potential welfare problems for these animals in Asia. For example, there was recently significant concern amongst Australians about the methods of slaughter of Australian cattle in Indonesia (Tiplady et al 2013).

Since the attitudes of stakeholders in the livestock industries in the south-east and east Asian countries are unknown and access to the industries in these countries is limited, we surveyed university students of veterinary medicine and animal science in four SE and E Asian countries, namely China, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam to assess