

The relationships between attitudes, personal characteristics and behaviour of stockpeople on dairy goat farms

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Abstract

*The aim of this study was to investigate the human-animal relationship on dairy goat farms, in particular associations between stockpeople's attitudes towards goats (*Capra hircus*) and actual behaviour when handling goats and making decisions. Data were collected on 45 Austrian and German dairy goat farms. Attitude questionnaires of 119 stockpeople (58 female, 61 male) were analysed and 14 attitude components were extracted by five Principal Component Analyses (PCA) regarding general attitudes about goats and human-animal relationship, behavioural attitudes about specific human-goat interactions and interactions during milking, and affective attitudes. To investigate associations between stockpeople's attitudes and their subsequent behaviour, we calculated linear and logistic regression analysis on their behaviour during milking ($n = 53$ milkers) and on management decisions ($n = 45$ farms). Several attitude components were predictors of behaviour during milking. The attitude 'Needs of goats' was included in all models: the higher stockpeople scored on 'Needs of goats', the more positive interactions they showed and the less likely they were to use negative interactions. Gender influenced five attitude components: females showing greater agreement than males on positive general and affective attitudes, eg 'Needs of goats.' Regarding management, the more strongly decision-makers disagreed on using negative interactions during milking, the better was their farm's housing and management. To conclude, these results highlight the importance of the stockpeople's attitudes, not only for the interactions with their animals, but also for their decisions related to management and housing. Our results indicate opportunities for improvement of animal welfare by training specifically targeting stockpeople's attitudes.*

Keywords: *animal welfare, goats, human-animal relationship, milker behaviour, small ruminants, stockmanship*