

Assessment of the impact of a charity training programme on health and welfare of working horses in Lesotho

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Introduction

It is generally assumed that the presence of equine charities in developing countries has a positive effect on the health and welfare of working equids. However, little objective information is available on the impact of equine charity projects in targeted communities, especially using baseline data.

In 2007, an equine charity initiated modular training courses in farriery and saddlery and a nutrition programme in Lesotho.

Aim

The aim of this study was to measure the short term impact of the implemented training courses on the health and welfare of horses and on their owners' equine knowledge and husbandry practices.



Materials and methods

Two surveys were undertaken; one prior to implementation of the first modular training programme and one approximately nine months after its completion. For each survey, around 300 randomly selected horses were clinically examined, their tack was assessed and their owners interviewed to assess knowledge and practice of equine husbandry. Differences between the prevalence or mean value for the findings of the two surveys, as appropriate, were assessed for significance using Chi-squared and t-tests. Selected results are presented below.

Results

	Survey 1	Survey 2	P-value
Clinical examination			
Forefoot shoeing	14%	21%	0.02
Tack-related injuries	58%	75%	<0.001
Pain on spinal palpation	53%	67%	<0.001
Mean Body Condition Score (1-5)	2.5	2.2	<0.001
Low red blood cell count	21%	21%	1.00
Strongyle endoparasite infestation	88%	93%	0.07
Ectoparasites (ticks) found	59%	63%	0.29
Tack examination			
Bridle available	69%	64%	0.20
Saddle available	51%	48%	0.49
Saddle condition “poor”	85%	78%	0.09
Saddle fit “poor”	77%	71%	0.27
Owner questionnaire			
Shoeing “too expensive”	58%	59%	0.94
Horse’s diet “unbalanced”	62%	64%	0.65
“Owner should shoe the horse”	17%	7%	<0.001



Conclusions

Limited short term impact has been achieved; key equine health and welfare issues remain to be addressed. These results and subsequent longer term follow up studies could be used to identify priority areas for future training activities and additional community-based interventions.