

Assessment of Donkey (*Equus asinus*) Welfare at Slaughter in Ghana

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SUMMARY

In the Upper East region of Ghana, a study examined donkey slaughter methods and the backgrounds and attitudes of slaughter operatives through structured questionnaires.

Researchers observed 134 donkeys at five slaughter points, assessing animal-based indicators before and during slaughter. Methods included blunt force trauma (using a wooden pole or a metal hammer) or non-stun ventral neck incision. The time to loss of consciousness was measured, along with behavioural and brainstem signs of sensibility and consciousness.

Before slaughter, negative human-animal interactions were common, with donkeys struck several times and handled roughly. Animals struck with wooden poles were five times more likely to be ineffectively stunned and took longer to lose consciousness than those hit with metal hammers. The average time for loss of corneal reflex was also longer for animals struck with a wooden pole compared to those struck with a hammer. Donkeys slaughtered by ventral neck incision showed corneal reflexes for an average time of 1.5 minutes.

Fifteen abattoir workers were interviewed. On average, they had worked in their roles for 14 years. Most had started as children, learning from older family members or colleagues, without formal training. Many reported injuries while working, ranging from cuts and kicks to bone chips. They expressed concerns about safety, mentioning the use of blunt knives and the strength of some donkeys, especially males. They suggested that risks could be reduced through the use of personal protective equipment, sharper knives, or machinery to assist with the process.

The study revealed serious issues in the slaughter of donkeys in this region. It showed that the methods used often caused unnecessary suffering, with rough handling before slaughter and long times to loss of consciousness when using ventral neck incision or ineffective blunt force trauma. The study also highlighted risks to the health and safety of the workers involved.

Case study impacts

- Improving slaughter effectiveness would mitigate risks to both animals and humans as well as the environment.
- Improving training for operators would enhance effectiveness, reduce human injuries and improve animal welfare.

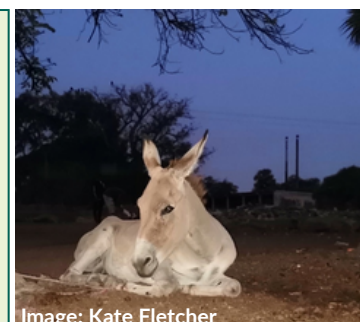


Image: Kate Fletcher



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One Welfare Pillars

ANIMAL WELFARE



Training for abattoir personnel to ensure more effective slaughter and reduced time to loss of consciousness can improve animal welfare and reduce suffering and distress

HUMAN WELLBEING



Improved training and access to appropriate resources and tools for abattoir personnel can reduce injury risk, improve conditions and work satisfaction

ENVIRONMENT



Physical

- Better equipment and facilities can help improve the welfare of donkeys, reduce safety risks and improve working conditions

Social environment

- Better training, working conditions and animal welfare can improve the relationship between humans and donkeys improving the working environment
- Improving biosecurity and abattoir conditions can reduce the impact on the environment

Multidisciplinary relevant areas

Public health; meat production; animal welfare; human safety; animal behaviour; social research; biosecurity

References / Source

- Fletcher, K., Limon, G., Agongo, E., Akunzule, A., Essel, G., Padalino, B., Grist, A., & Gibson, T. J. (2024). Assessment of Donkey (*Equus asinus*) Welfare at Slaughter in Ghana. *Animals*, 14(24), 3673. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ani14243673>

