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Human-animal relationships in the Norwegian dairy goat industry: attitudes and empathy towards goats (Part I)

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Abstract

The quality of human-animal relationships in the livestock industries has been increasingly recognised as an important determinant of animal welfare. Attitudes and empathy are multi-dimensional traits that may be associated with the stockpersons' behaviour. The aim of this study was to determine the dimensionality of the goat-oriented attitudes and empathy of stockpeople in the Norwegian dairy goat industry. We also explored how empathic and attitudinal dimensions are interrelated, and how the demographic background variables may predict empathy and attitudes. A total of 260 dairy goat farmers participated in the study, by the means of either postal or internet-based questionnaire formats. Multi-item rating scales were developed specifically for the assessment of attitudes and empathy towards goats, and Principal Component Factor Analysis was conducted to determine the dimensionality of the farmers' goat-oriented attitudes and empathy. Subsequently, linear and ordinal regression analyses were performed to explore the interrelationships. The analyses revealed dimensions of empathy that can be recognised from studies of human-oriented empathy, and attitude dimensions that can be interpreted similarly as dimensions described in studies from other livestock industries. Our results show that different dimensions of attitudes and empathy were associated with different demographic variables, and that each empathy dimension was associated with a different attitude factor.

Keywords: animal welfare, attitudes, dairy goats, demographics, empathy, human-animal relationships