



ANIMAL WELL-BEING

Factors Affecting Perceptions of Animal Welfare in Developing Countries

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Considering animal welfare in the context of developing countries.

Animal welfare concerns the state of an animal relative to the environment in which it lives (Broom, 1991; OIE, 2017). Whether that environment is a farm, home, or shelter, the goal is to ensure that the animal is physically healthy, can live a reasonably natural life, and is free from suffering (Fraser et al, 1997).

The concept of animal welfare has taken root in many industrialized countries. Advanced economic development, increased ethical concerns surrounding animal farming and food production, and increased attention to animal rights have prompted many developed nations to take actions intended to safeguard animal welfare (Fraser, 2008). These countries have, for example, established regulations as a way of

improving animal welfare, particularly in the production, transport, and slaughter of farm animals (e.g. Caporale et al., 2005). Scientific research intended to address and improve animal quality of life has also increased, especially in response to public concerns about intensive production systems (CAST, 2018; Grandin, 2015; Mench, 2008).

Although many animal welfare studies focus on developed countries, growing evidence indicates that the topic is also an emerging concern in developing nations. Comparatively, there are fewer studies concerning animal welfare in developing nations. The applicability of using the approaches of developed nations to improve animal welfare in developing nations should be considered; however, consideration should also be paid to the factors that influence animal welfare concerns, such as economics, culture and religion.

Economics

Developing countries often face challenges that developed nations do not, such as limited resources and technology, higher costs of living, different political priorities and food insecurity (Karesh, 1995). These factors alone greatly limit focusing on animal welfare concerns.

In regions such as Africa and Asia, in which agriculture and animal farming contribute significantly to the economy, animals are often viewed primarily in relation to their benefit to human well-being (McCrindle, 1998). This perception can limit improvements to animal welfare, unless these improvements also increase economic benefits to people (Fraser, 2008).



Many developing countries lack the resources to provide high standards of care for animals, particularly production animals. In Africa and Asia, for example, most animals are transported on foot to market or slaughterhouses due to a lack of specialized trucks and poor road conditions (Rahman et al., 2005). Animals may walk for days without enough rest, water or food, all of which may decrease their welfare. The manner in which animals are handled and slaughtered in some developing nations can also be cause for concern (Rahman, 2004; Masiga and Munyua, 2005). Some developing countries extensively use traditional farming systems reliant on animal power (e.g. horses, donkeys, camels) to plough land and transport goods, with such animals often receiving limited water, food, rest, or even being subjected to physical abuse (Ramaswamy, 1994).

Although the aforementioned examples cannot be generalized to all developing countries, they reflect underlying economic struggles that can present

challenges to the topic of animal welfare. Despite these challenges, some developing nations have begun to pay more attention to improving animal welfare, especially in regard to commercial trade in the beef and poultry industries. For example, there is evidence of changing practices and systems being implemented in countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia in response to the animal welfare standards set forth by the World Organization for Animal Health (Bowles et al, 2005).

This suggests that the creation of strict animal-welfare policies may help to improve legislative protection and management of animals, while also creating more awareness about animal welfare. While compliance with such standards of welfare can be costly, the countries impacted may benefit from economic growth on a national level through increased trade of high-welfare products (Bowles et al., 2005). Those crafting such policies, however, must be consistent with, and considerate of, the needs of farmers and consumers in developing nations, particularly if they are already economically or politically disadvantaged.

Culture

The role that culture plays in attitudes towards animals cannot be underestimated, particularly in developing countries. Longstanding cultural beliefs and values may promote attitudes and support behaviors toward animals that contrast with those that predominate in developed countries as a result of changing times and globalization (Serpell, 2004).

Animals gain significance through their association with culturally defining rituals. In Spain, for example, bulls are held in high regard because of their vital role in the Spanish bullfight, a tradition that is considered highly



important to that society (Maria et al., 2017). In Africa and some parts of Asia, livestock are a major sign and source of wealth, and are still used for a bride's price or dowry during marriage ceremonies (Bawa, 2015; Maitra, 2007), or as a source of conflict via cattle raids between ethnic groups (Gray et al., 2003). Livestock are also used for a variety of purposes, further explaining their complex role in, and value to, society. In some African rural communities, livestock provide food through meat, milk and blood (Masiga and Munyua, 2005). Their hides are used for bedding and shoes, and their hair and wool are used to make clothing, bedding and other accessories (Masiga and Munyua, 2005). Other livestock products such as dung and urine are also used to plaster traditional houses and to produce medicine, respectively (Masiga and Munyua, 2005).

The use and cultural significance of animals may influence a developing nation's perceptions of animals, which may impact how they are handled and treated. The quality of such human-animal interactions, governed by people's perceptions, ultimately determine the level of care provided to animals, with negative or inhumane handling leading to decreased welfare and productivity by increasing stress and fear in animals (Hemsworth, 2003).

Religion

In both developed and developing nations, religious affiliations, values, and beliefs affect views on a range of social issues, including how people believe animals should be treated (Deemer and Lobao, 2011). The idea that cows are sacred among the Hindus of India (Agoramoorthy et al., 2012), and that pigs are considered unclean in Islamic cultures (Eliasi and Dwyer, 2002) provide examples of long-held religious beliefs that impact how animals are perceived.

Two aspects of religion shown to affect people's attitudes include religiosity (defined as the degree of commitment to one's faith) and denomination (Hand and Van Liere, 1984; Heleski et al, 2006). There may exist the assumption that those who identify as "deeply religious" care more deeply about animals than those who are not. However, research has shown a decreasing concern for animal welfare as tendencies to strongly uphold religious values increase (Deemer and Lobao, 2011; Serpell, 2004). One study, for example, showed that some denominations of Christianity that adhere to the Bible more strictly actually seemed to display less support for animal rights (Videras, 2006). This could be



partly due to preoccupation with human concerns over animal-welfare issues as seen in the New Testament of the Bible (Phillips, 2009), and a utilitarian view of animals as being primarily a source of food and livelihood. Higher religiosity has also been shown to be associated with lower concern for farm animal welfare among disciplines that work predominantly with animals, such as animal science and veterinary faculty (e.g. Heleski et al. 2006), reflecting the influence of religiosity on perceptions of animals.

Wide variation also exists in the influence of religious denominations on concern for animal welfare. For example, a survey of residents of Clark County in Ohio revealed that Catholics (84%) were significantly more supportive of animal rights than Protestants (77%), and those with no religious affiliation (89%) were most supportive of animal rights (Nibert, 1994). A survey on students in the Islamic country of Iran showed a low concern for animal welfare, presumably because any level of concern would be largely based on the Islamic scriptures (Quran), but not recognized as an important public matter (Izmirli et al, 2010).

As shown by these examples, religious beliefs may play a profound role in mediating the attitudes of people toward animals and their welfare, while also intersecting with regional and cultural norms or values.

Conclusion

Many variables can influence general attitudes toward animal welfare in developing nations, particularly economic status; cultural norms; and religious denominations, values, or beliefs. Diversity in these dimensions around the world complicates the creation of any consensus opinions concerning animal welfare

and its global relevance. Individual perceptions of animal welfare may also be difficult to change. However, there is a need for increased research and dialogue about the influence of economic, cultural, and religious factors on animal-welfare opinions in developing countries.

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