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1 Equine welfare in England and Wales: An exploration
2 of stakeholders' understanding through the use of in
3 depth interviews

4 Running title: Equine stakeholders' understanding of
5 welfare

6

7

ABSTRACT

8 Investigating how those responsible for the day to day care of animals understand the concept
9 of animal welfare is an important step in the process of animal welfare improvement. For
10 example, exploring how equine stakeholders talk about equine welfare may offer insight into
11 how they interpret and utilise communications about welfare and how this may have an
12 impact on the actual welfare of horses. In-depth interviews with 31 equine stakeholders in
13 England and Wales were used to explore their perceptions and understanding of welfare. It
14 was found that they understood the concept of welfare in four distinct ways. Firstly, welfare
15 was understood in terms of the provision of resources, for example food and water.
16 Secondly, a “horse-centred” understanding of welfare was articulated which included the
17 horses’ mental state and linked to natural behaviour. Thirdly, the word welfare had negative
18 connotations and for some good welfare was achieved through the avoidance of negative
19 states. There was a tendency for interviewees to distance themselves from examples of
20 “poor” welfare. Finally, interviewees discussed incidents that occurred in their own familiar
21 contexts but suggested that these were not welfare problems or sought to justify or downplay
22 them. There was little acknowledgement or reference to definitions of welfare as used by
23 welfare scientists and incorporated into welfare legislation and codes of practice. There was
24 evidence that the ways in which equine stakeholders understood the concept of welfare may
25 have been acting as a barrier to the alleviation of some commonly occurring equine welfare
26 problems. Consequently, there is a need for strategies aimed at improving equine welfare to
27 consider stakeholder constructs of welfare and the ways in which these are generated and
28 acted upon.

29 Keywords: defining welfare; equine stakeholder; horse; interview; qualitative

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31

32

INTRODUCTION

33 The study of welfare as a scientific discipline can be traced back to the 1960s and has
34 developed in parallel with increased public concern for animal welfare. As part of this
35 development, welfare scientists have put forward a number of definitions of welfare offering
36 insight into how the concept is understood by them. Historically welfare has been seen as a
37 single dimensional concept of physiological functioning (for example, McGlone, 1993) or
38 affective states (for example Duncan, 1993 or Spruijt, Van Den Bos & Pijlman, 2001).

39 Fraser, Weary, Pajor & Milligan (1997) suggest that welfare is a multi-dimensional concept
40 concerned with three interrelated components of basic health and functioning, affective state
41 and natural living, and it is now largely accepted amongst welfare scientists that welfare
42 encompasses all of these components. Using these understandings of welfare as a basis for
43 research, welfare scientists have provided insight into the welfare needs of animals and risk
44 factors for compromised welfare.

45 Estimates suggest that there are at least one million horses and ponies in Great Britain
46 (Boden, Parkin, Yates, Mellor & Koa, 2012), the majority of which are kept for sport and
47 leisure purposes (Boden, Parkin, Yates, Mellor & Koa, 2013). The growth of the equine
48 industry has been coupled with increased concern that the welfare of many horses in Britain
49 may be suboptimal (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA),
50 Redwings, Blue Cross, World Horse Welfare, Horse World and British Horse Society (BHS),
51 2012 & 2013).

52 The welfare of all domesticated animals, including horses, is ultimately determined by those
53 responsible for their day to day care and in recent years there has been growing
54 acknowledgement that the study of individual and societal attitudes and behaviours

55 associated with animal welfare should be incorporated into animal welfare research. As
56 Tuytens, Vanhonacker, Van Poucke and Verbeke (2010) state, “A better understanding of
57 [the] differences in opinion about what constitutes the concept of animal welfare may be
58 beneficial for facilitating public debate and improving communication between
59 [stakeholders]” (p. 112). As such, exploring equine stakeholder perceptions and attitudes in
60 relation to equine welfare and welfare related practices may offer insight into the ways in
61 which scientific and layperson knowledge about welfare is generated and transmitted and the
62 possible implications for animal welfare. Further to this, Heleski and Anthony (2012) argue
63 that stakeholder perceptions should both stimulate and inform ethical assessments of
64 practices which impact on equine welfare.

65 A number of studies have explored equine stakeholder perceptions of the welfare of horses.
66 Collins et al., (2010) investigated equine stakeholders’ perceptions of the consequences
67 associated with potentially welfare compromising practices as a means of identifying welfare
68 problems in Ireland. Albright, Mohammed, Heleski, Wickens and Houpt (2009) and Litva,
69 Robinson and Archer (2010) explored owner perceptions and experiences of windsucking
70 and/or crib-biting behaviour in horses. Both these papers discuss the welfare implications
71 that these perceptions may have for horses exhibiting these behaviours. Visser and Van
72 Wijk-Jansen (2012) investigated the way in which horse enthusiasts gather information about
73 equine welfare, their emotional involvement with horses and their attitudes, knowledge and
74 daily practices in relation to equine welfare to suggest ways in which welfare improving
75 strategies may be targeted. However, Hemsworth, Jongman and Coleman (2015) point to an
76 absence of substantive research into the relationship between horse owner attitudes and
77 equine welfare.

78 The way in which those entrusted with the day to day care of animals understand the concept
79 of welfare has implications for animal welfare and welfare improvement (Kauppinen, Vainio,
80 Valdros, Rita & Vesala 2010). As such, exploring how equine stakeholders' understand the
81 term 'equine welfare', the welfare needs of horses and their perceptions of the current welfare
82 status of horses may inform our understanding of the way in which horses are cared for. It
83 may also facilitate the development of strategies to improve welfare by providing information
84 about how and why equine welfare may be compromised, some of the barriers to, and
85 possible means of improvement. Heleski and Anthony (2012) suggest that the ethical and
86 moral positions held by those responsible for the day to day care of horses and the value
87 stakeholders' place on different types of welfare assessment, for example how much they
88 value biological functioning, affective states, and considerations of naturalness, will impact
89 on individual assessments of welfare related practices. In line with this, Visser and Van
90 Wijk-Jansen (2012) explored Danish horse enthusiasts' perceptions of the requirements
91 important for ensuring welfare as a means of enhancing equine welfare through education. To
92 date, no research has directly examined how British equine stakeholders perceive and
93 understand the concept of equine welfare.

94 Welfare scientists are increasingly integrating methodological approaches used by social
95 scientists such as in-depth interviews, into their research as a way of exploring human
96 attitudes and behaviour in relation to animal welfare. Horseman, Roe, Huxley, Bell, Mason
97 and Whay (2014) used in-depth interview techniques to explore the process of treating lame
98 dairy cows from the farmers' perspective whilst Roe, Buller and Bull (2011) carried out an
99 ethnographic study of farm animal welfare assessment to explore farmer and assessor
100 perceptions of the process. As Lund, Coleman, Gunnarsson, Appleby and Karkinen (2007)
101 argue "Where human and animal interactions occur, [...] the social sciences should be part of
102 the collaborative effort" (p.47).

103 Through collaboration it has been possible to gain new insights into on-the-ground welfare
104 challenges and their possible solutions, insights which have not always been possible through
105 the use of traditional scientific and lab-based research techniques. For example, Horseman et
106 al., (2014) found, through open discussions with farmers about lameness, that the language
107 used by dairy farmers to talk about lameness revealed specific perceptions of lameness and
108 the value they placed on prompt treatment. In -depth interviews lend themselves to exploring
109 the subtleties of how stakeholders understand the concept of welfare and the language they
110 use to discuss related issues and practices.

111 By employing a qualitative social science method, specifically in-depth interviews (Coffey &
112 Atkinson, 1996), this paper aims to provide an analysis of how equine stakeholders articulate
113 their understanding of equine welfare. In-depth interviews are particularly useful as
114 foundation research where little is known about a subject area. Kauppinen et al., (2010) used
115 in-depth interviews as a way of focusing subsequent research on the relevant issues
116 surrounding farmers' attitudes to improving animal welfare and they found that, by utilising
117 in -depth interviews as a preliminary step, themes were disclosed which had not emerged
118 from previous quantitative studies. As such in- depth interviews provide opportunities for
119 new understandings of a topic to emerge and in the current study the authors aimed, through a
120 line of open-questioning, to explore the range of perceptions of welfare held by interviewees
121 without constraining the research with their own understandings.

122 The equine industry is diverse with horses and ponies being “employed” in a variety of
123 activities. The ways in which people are involved in the equine industry is equally wide
124 ranging. As a reflection of the diversity of the equine industry, this research consulted a
125 broad cross-section of equine stakeholders to explore the range of perceptions held.

126

127

MATERIALS AND METHODS

128 The methods described below, including recruitment approaches, the process for gaining
129 consent and the interviews were all carried out in accordance with University of Bristol
130 ethical approval guidance and ethical approval was sought and granted by the University of
131 Bristol's ethics committee before commencement.

132 *Recruitment and contact*

133 Participants were recruited across a range of activities in which horses are involved. Using
134 population data reported by Boden et al., (2013) a list of the most prevalent equine activities
135 in Great Britain was established. These were identified as: leisure/pleasure, racing, eventing,
136 dressage, show jumping, showing, hunting, riding lessons, endurance, driving and polo. A
137 second list consisting of the different roles that equine stakeholders could have was also
138 created based on the authors' knowledge of the equine industry. The roles recognised were:
139 rider, owner, groom, trainer, vet, farrier, breeder, yard owner/manager, complimentary
140 therapist, dealer, transporter, abattoir worker/knackerman, charity worker and law enforcer.
141 A grid was created based on these lists and used to inform recruitment to ensure that a broad
142 cross section of stakeholders were interviewed. The aim was to cover all of the principal
143 forms of horse activity and all of the different roles identified but not every combination.

144 Initial recruitment was opportunistic and mainly conducted by telephone utilising existing
145 networks known to the first author and others involved in the project. This was accompanied
146 by a snow-balling technique where interviewees were recruited by means of informal contact
147 between them. Successfully recruited interviewees were asked to nominate others known to
148 them who might similarly be eligible (Association for Qualitative Research, 2014). These
149 'nominations' were followed up where the individual identified was involved in an activity
150 and/or a role not already represented within the sample. Recruitment continued until all of

151 the identified activities and roles were represented within the sample. The recruitment
152 method adopted could not be said to provide a statistically representative sample from each of
153 these identified roles and activity types and biases may have been introduced, for example
154 through geographical clustering of the interviewees. As such the findings may not be
155 generalizable across the equine stakeholder population. However, the purpose of the study
156 was to explore the range of perceptions held and the recruitment methods provided
157 interviewees that covered a broad cross section of the equine industry whilst also offering a
158 sample that reflected the broader bias towards horses being kept for leisure purposes within
159 the equine population (Hotchkiss, Reid & Christley, 2007, Boden et al., 2013).

160 On initial contact with potential recruits the first author introduced themselves and the aims
161 of the research and asked if the respondent would be willing to be interviewed in-depth about
162 their own perceptions of equine welfare as part of the study. Where recruitment was
163 successful verbal permission to audio record the interviews was sought and a time and date
164 was arranged for the face to face interview.

165

166 *Interviews*

167 A semi-structured approach was employed: key areas for discussion were decided prior to the
168 interviews based on predefined areas of interest determined by the research team. The areas
169 for discussion, which formed the basis of the interview structure in every interview were: 1)
170 How 'equine welfare' is defined when a direct question is asked, 2) exploration of what
171 horses need to ensure their welfare, 3) exploration of what may result in a horse having poor
172 welfare, 4) exploration of examples of poor welfare witnessed by the interviewees. Around
173 these four areas for discussion, the specifics of the questions and topics of conversation were
174 largely driven by the interviewees and their responses, to facilitate open discussion. A pilot
175 interview was conducted with a leisure horse owner to ensure the questions stimulated
176 conversation around the topics of interest. Interviewee feedback was sought and the
177 interviewer asked whether the interviewee had felt that the line of questioning was acceptable
178 to them. From the pilot interview it was determined that the interview structure was fit for
179 purpose and that no changes were required. No further piloting was conducted.

180 The interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours, depending on the depth of
181 responses given by the interviewees, and were conducted face to face in a variety of locations
182 including participants' homes, equine yards and places of work. All of the interviews were
183 conducted by the first author to ensure consistency. Before the interviews began interviewees
184 were reminded of the purpose of the study, asked to confirm that they consented to the
185 interview and to the audio recording and then signed a consent form in accordance with
186 University of Bristol ethical approval guidance. At the start of the interview participants
187 were asked to talk about their prior and present involvement with horses to provide a context
188 for the discussion and to put the interviewees at ease. The interviewer then began asking
189 questions around the four areas described above.

190 *Analysis*

191 The interview recordings were transcribed *verbatim* and underwent thematic analysis by the
192 first author to identify recurrent and common responses, consensus and variance within and
193 between the interviewees. Analysis focused on identifying themes relating to the different
194 ways in which welfare was understood by the interviewees. Having identified the themes,
195 hard copies of the transcripts were coded by hand to identify passages that related to the
196 individual themes (see Gomm, 2008 for explanation of thematic analysis). A sample of the
197 transcripts were analysed independently by two of the co-authors (HB and HRW) to allow for
198 cross validation. HB had experience conducting and analysing qualitative research whilst HB
199 and HRW were familiar with purpose of the study. In addition, neither were considered
200 overly familiar with the British equine industry and were therefore best placed to guard
201 against biases held by the first author impacting on the reporting of the findings.

202

203 *Responses*

204 A total of 31 stakeholders (hereafter referred to as interviewees) were interviewed. The
205 sample size of 31 ensured coverage across all of the identified activities and roles but not
206 every possible combination. Table I gives a description of each of the interviewees,
207 including the role(s) that they fulfilled and activities that they were engaged in at the time of
208 the interview. Additional background information about the interviewees is also provided to
209 demonstrate that they had knowledge and experience beyond the role(s) for which they were
210 selected for participation in this study.

211 Other demographic information, for example the age and gender of the interviewees, is not
212 referred to as these data were either not collected or not incorporated into the reported

213 analysis. It should be noted that gender and age disparity amongst horse owners has been
214 reported in a number of studies. For example, Hockenhull and Creighton (2013a) and Boden
215 et al., (2013) reported that 97% and 95.2% of their survey respondents respectively were
216 female. The British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) National Equestrian Survey (2015)
217 found that 74% of the horse riding population in Britain was female. Hockenhull and
218 Creighton (2013a) reported a mean horse owner age of 34 whilst Boden et al., (2013)
219 reported that 51.6% of their respondents were under 45. Despite these reported disparities
220 consideration of gender and other demographic factors in relation to the findings was beyond
221 the scope of this current research.

[Table One about here]

222

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

223 In the following sections quotes from the interviews are used to explore the different ways in
224 which the interviewees understood the concept of welfare, how the different ways of
225 understanding may have developed and to discuss the implications these may have for equine
226 welfare. Following accepted practices for this type of research, the results and discussion are
227 presented together (Brennan & Emerson, 2005) to allow the findings to be directly discussed
228 and contextualised.

229

230 Defining welfare - responses to the direct question ‘What does the term ‘equine welfare’
231 mean to you?’

232 As a starting point for discussions about welfare, interviewees were asked the direct question
233 “What does the term ‘equine welfare’ mean to you?” It is interesting to note that only one
234 interviewee defined equine welfare using terminology directly drawn from scientific
235 definitions of welfare, namely the Five Freedoms, saying:

236 “[welfare] means freedom for water, food, expression of their natural behaviours and
237 shelter.....” (Welfare centre groom).

238 Whilst a further two interviewees made reference to the Five Freedoms and a small number
239 of interviewees used terminology demonstrating familiarity with British animal welfare
240 legislation, for example using terms such as “unnecessary suffering”, these did not form part
241 of their formal definitions of welfare. Instead many interviewees used phrases such as “how
242 we look after them”, “that all their needs are met” and “stable management” to describe what
243 the term equine welfare meant to them.

244 The Five Freedoms (Farm Animal Welfare Council, 1993) was created by welfare scientists
245 as a framework for assessing welfare and derivatives of this framework have been
246 incorporated into British animal welfare legislation. For example, the Animal Welfare Act
247 2006 and supporting codes of practice for companion and farm animal species describe the
248 five ‘needs’ of animals which are derived from the Five Freedoms (See, for example,
249 Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), 2013a). The codes of
250 practice act as a practical guide to animal caregivers, outlining how to comply with welfare
251 legislation and pay attention to the welfare of animals in their care (DEFRA, 2013b).

252 The definitions provided by the interviewees in this current study suggest that stakeholders’
253 do not base their direct understandings of the term ‘welfare’ on communications derived from
254 scientific definitions of welfare, for example the welfare legislation and codes of practice,
255 and as such other influences may inform their understandings of welfare.

256

257 Wider Understandings of ‘Welfare’

258 Through analysis of the broader conversations about welfare four themes were identified that
259 represented perceptions across all of the interviewees, relating to the ways in which the
260 interviewees understood welfare (see Table 2). These four different ways of understanding
261 welfare were rarely mutually exclusive and interviewees frequently both defined and
262 discussed welfare as combinations of these.

263 [Table 2 about here]

264

265 *Welfare as meeting needs through provision*

266 By far the most common way in which welfare was understood, was as the provision of needs
267 and for all of the interviewees good welfare was equated, at least in part, to providing for the
268 horse’s needs. As one interviewee said when asked what the term equine welfare meant to
269 them:

270 “it brings to mind straight away, are they being looked after properly in terms of
271 enough food, enough water, fresh air, exercise” (Show jumping trainer).

272 Poor welfare was most often associated with inadequate provision through the use of phrases
273 such as “lack of” and words such as “neglect” and “abandonment” but in some instances poor
274 welfare was also linked to over provision, particularly in relation to food:

275 “[the horses] are as fat as houses and they’re killed with kindness.....people think that
276 food’s a way of showing their love for them when really it tips the balance and you
277 then end up with problems because they’re over fed” (Livery yard owner).

278 A resource based understanding of welfare is long established amongst welfare scientists and
279 until recent years measuring resources has been the focus of welfare assessments (Veissier,
280 Butterworth, Bock & Roe, 2008). Furthermore, research has shown that farmers also view
281 resources including food, water and environment as important elements of welfare (see for
282 example Vanhonacker, Verbeke, Van Poucke & Tuytens, 2008). The interviewees, like
283 many welfare scientists and farmers, found this understanding of welfare easy to understand
284 and uncontentious.

285 Whilst most of the interviewees demonstrated a degree of certainty and consensus around the
286 importance of some resources, for example food and water, there was uncertainty and a lack
287 of consensus regarding other needs a horse may or may not have. Some made no reference to
288 “additional” needs and one interviewee stated:

289 “The horse needs very basic things. It needs somebody to feed it, to water it, to check
290 its shoes, to check its feet, to check its teeth, end of story” (Field officer 2).

291 For this interviewee ensuring welfare was not “rocket science” as it could be ensured by
292 meeting these basic needs. Further to this, any “extras”, as the interviewee described them,
293 may result in the horse being “no happier”. This was a minority view and most of the
294 interviewees outlined additional needs and felt that these could give added value to a horse’s
295 life. In the extract below, one interviewee discusses what they believe to be “essential”
296 welfare needs and then “other” welfare needs:

297 “[Real essentials] would be your food and water, maybe shelter as well I suppose.
298 And I suppose the next level down from that would be an enriched environment so
299 your herd, your space, your interaction, that sort of thing. And then I think the lowest
300 level would be the things like rugs, nice saddles, physio appointments, the icing on
301 the cake” (McTimoney chiropractic practitioner).

302 In recent years, welfare scientists have begun to discuss good welfare beyond the prevention
303 of negative welfare states, as reflected in the Farm Animal Welfare Council's welfare scale
304 that states that quality of life can range from a life not worth living (poor welfare) to a life
305 worth living (neutral welfare) to a good life (good welfare) (Farm Animal Welfare Council,
306 2009). The findings from this current study suggest that equine stakeholders, along with
307 most welfare scientists, see welfare on a spectrum and associate particular resources with
308 different levels of welfare.

309 Despite many agreeing that additional needs existed, there were sometimes conflicting views
310 expressed about what these additional needs may be, and how important they were. For
311 example, the following two quotes show how two interviewees disagreed about whether
312 horses required or benefitted from access to pasture:

313 "So my horses, from my point of view, go out as much as they can do because it's
314 really important for their brain and physically to go out and let off steam and all that
315 kind of thing" (Dressage trainer).

316 "I think the stabled 24 hours a day, seven days a week works really well for most
317 horses" (Point to Point rider).

318 There are many schools of thought about horse care and management, and both the consensus
319 and diversity expressed by those interviewed as part of this study is reflected and echoed in
320 the horse care literature. The British Horse Society (BHS), one of the key organisations
321 responsible for educating those owning and working with horses in Great Britain, publish a
322 series of horse care manuals including the BHS Book of the Natural Horse (BHS, 2008a) and
323 the BHS Complete Manual of Horse and Stable Management (BHS, 2008b). Whilst both
324 these publications share some basic common principles, for example stating the importance
325 of food, water and shelter, they also advocate different approaches to some aspects of horse

326 care and emphasise different needs, for example each placing different emphasis on pasture
327 access as a welfare need. Hockenull and Creighton (2013b) found that books/magazines
328 were the most frequently used information source for UK leisure horse owners across topics
329 of horse behaviour, health, stable care and training. As such engagement with the horse care
330 literature may be one way in which differing views about welfare are developed and
331 reinforced.

332 Those responsible for the day to day care of horses appear to appreciate that ensuring welfare
333 involves, at least in part, meeting needs through provision of resources and there is a level of
334 agreement over what some of those resources are. There may be limited benefit in focusing
335 welfare improving strategies on these areas of consensus. Yeates and Main (2008) argue that
336 positive welfare, considering an animals' likes, wants and happiness, can be assessed in part
337 through evaluation of the resources that are valued by an animal. As such, there could be
338 benefit in encouraging equine caregivers to provide resources to horses which may promote
339 positive welfare states i.e. resources that promote welfare states that go beyond neutral states
340 associated with the avoidance of negatives. Evidence from this current study suggests that
341 stakeholders may have differing views about what these resources may be, and their relative
342 importance so it will be important to ensure that stakeholders receive consistent messages in
343 this area.

344

345 *Welfare as "horse-centered"*

346 Most of interviewees articulated, what the authors have called a "horse-centered"
347 understanding of equine welfare. The emotional experience of the horse emerged as an
348 important component of welfare and words such as "happy", "chilled", "suffering",
349 "stressed" were often used in relation to good and poor welfare. For some, the emotional

350 well-being of the horse was seen as integral to welfare. For others, it was a separate, albeit
351 related, concept. Most, however, appeared to intuitively feel that horses experienced
352 emotions although some found this aspect of welfare hard to articulate:

353 “All of these things [for example their happiness] are things which are perhaps quite
354 hard to define” (Point to point rider).

355 Many interviewees made a link between the emotional well-being of the horse to the
356 provision of “natural” needs, for example access to pasture and social contact:

357 “well generally I think you want a horse to have as much natural time outside as is
358 physically possible....I think generally you want them to experience being outside,
359 with other horses, enjoying the fresh air and enjoying grass because that’s what a
360 horse is all about” (Leisure horse owner 1).

361 As with this leisure horse owner many other interviewees identified particular welfare needs,
362 including pasture access and social contact, based on their understanding of the “natural”
363 horse, and believed that a positive mental state could be achieved by meeting those needs,
364 conversely seeing that a negative mental state may occur when these needs were not met.

365 Many welfare scientists see affective states as an important component of welfare and a
366 body of research has developed which seeks to understand these in non-verbal species, for
367 example via physiological markers, behavioural indicators (see Fraser 2008 for review) and
368 the manipulation and measurement of cognitive processes (see Boissy et al., 2007 for
369 review). Current research suggests that equine welfare, in particular the horses’ emotional
370 well-being, may be compromised where horses are kept in environments which don’t meet
371 their “natural” needs. Chaplin and Gretgnix (2010) found that horses were significantly
372 more active when released from their stables compared to baseline paddock behaviour

373 whilst Christensen, Ladewig, Sondergaard and Malmkvist (2002) found that singly stabled
374 stallions responded to social deprivation by significantly increasing their levels of social
375 grooming and play behaviour when subsequently allowed to freely interact with other
376 horses. These observed rebound behaviours suggest that horses are highly motivated to be
377 active and have social contact, suggesting that freedom of movement, for example via
378 pasture access, and social contact are important for the emotional well-being of the horse.
379 Despite this research, the role of naturalness in supporting good welfare is not clear cut.
380 For example 'naturalness' may include death via predation and therefore animals living in
381 natural environments may experience severe pain. Broom (2011) therefore argues that
382 whilst a natural environment may not provide optimal welfare the environment in which
383 domestic animals live must meet the needs which have resulted from their "nature" in order
384 to ensure good welfare. Despite welfare scientists largely agreeing that natural needs are an
385 important component of welfare, fully understanding the specific role of "naturalness" in
386 relation to affective states remains challenging. Considering this lack of a clear cut link
387 between the concept of 'naturalness' and welfare it is not surprising that the interviewees in
388 this study also found this aspect of welfare hard to articulate, despite intuitively seeing it as
389 important.

390 The majority of those responsible for the day to day care of horses may understand the
391 importance of considering affective states in the promotion of welfare. Where scientific
392 knowledge exists, efforts should be made to promote positive emotional states in horses, for
393 example through encouraging caregivers to ensure the 'natural' needs of horses in their care
394 are met.

395 *Welfare as a negative term*

396 For the majority of interviewees, the terminology of welfare had overarching negative rather
397 than positive connotations. Words such as “suffering” “neglect” “cruelty” “abuse” and
398 “abandonment” were often used by the interviewees in conversations about welfare and for a
399 small number of interviewees their notion of welfare revolved around the avoidance of
400 negatives and was discussed in the following ways:

401 “[the] avoidance of discomfort or pain” (Welfare centre groom).

402 “I just think anything to do with horses, you might not agree with me, I might not
403 agree with you, but as long as that horse isn’t suffering as a result then that’s fine”
404 (Senior welfare charity worker).

405 “Poor” welfare was frequently discussed in terms of situations where non-compliance with
406 the welfare legislation was suggested, perhaps explaining the negative associations the
407 interviewees had with the concept of welfare. When asked to give examples of poor welfare
408 they had seen, many turned, at least in the first instance to examples where welfare charities
409 had been involved to enforce welfare legislation. For example, when asked “can you give
410 examples of poor welfare you have seen first-hand?” one interviewee responded:

411 “At the vets I’ve seen, you know we’ve had RSPCA cases bought in and stuff so you
412 see the really malnourished....and we get them because they’ve collapsed in the field
413 basically and they’ll be very, very ribby and full of worms....” (Owner of a retired
414 horse).

415 Furthermore, some interviewees stated that they could not give examples of poor welfare they
416 had seen first-hand as they had not witnessed situations where the welfare charities had been
417 involved.

418 In Great Britain equine stakeholders receive few communications that directly utilise the term
419 “welfare” but one of the ways they are exposed to the concept of “welfare” is through the
420 context of the work of equine welfare charities and related publicity. Serpell (2004)
421 discusses how public perceptions of welfare may be influenced by “cultural attitude
422 modifiers” including the media, while Jones (1997) states that mass communication can
423 sometimes present superficial coverage or exaggerate extreme positions which in turn may
424 result in a narrow view of “welfare”. Graphic images of extreme examples of horse neglect,
425 abuse and suffering are often used in communication between equine welfare charities and
426 stakeholders, in particular via television documentaries and appeals. The findings from this
427 current research suggest that these representations may be influencing the way in which
428 equine stakeholders understand “welfare” as evidenced by the way in which the interviewees
429 directly link the word “welfare” to examples of welfare cases that the welfare charities had
430 been involved in.

431 Perhaps because of these negative associations, for the majority of the interviewees “poor”
432 welfare was seen as a problem for other people and their horses, in particular horses owned
433 by or cared for by people that were in some way different to themselves:

434 “I think a lot of people don’t bother feeding. You see fields full of ponies turned out,
435 and they’re looking awfully skinny, not being fed enough. You don’t see that a lot
436 round here” (Leisure horse owner 2).

437 The phrase “round here” is significant, as it suggests a sense of separation and distance from
438 examples of poor welfare which may be observed. Examples of poor welfare were often
439 associated with disciplines or areas of horse use that differed from those the interviewees
440 were directly involved with, or with “other” geographical areas both within and outside Great
441 Britain. Bandura (1999) discusses advantageous comparison as a means of moral

442 disengagement, whereby people emphasis the “wrongdoings” of others to make their own
443 conduct look better. Such mechanisms may result in equine stakeholders passing the blame
444 for poor welfare on to ‘others’ whilst absolving themselves from responsibility. It has been
445 suggested that moral disengagement may result in violence towards animals (Vollum,
446 Buffington-Vollum and Longmire, 2004) and may also be a mechanism that allows
447 consumers to disconnect themselves from the ‘mass abuse’ that occurs within the farming
448 industry (Mitchell. 2011) . As such moral disengagement may be an important psychological
449 mechanism to consider in relation to practices associated with equine welfare and the moral
450 disengagement framework was recently used by Voigt, Russel, Hiney, Richardson, Borrón
451 and Brady, 2015) to explore the factors influencing the inhumane treatment of show horses.

452 It is important to consider the negative associations that stakeholders have with the word
453 “welfare” in communications with stakeholders as use of the word may result in defensive
454 attitudes. Where stakeholders want to distance themselves from the term they may not seek
455 out, access or utilise information that pertains to “welfare” and using alternative language
456 may be beneficial. Negative associations with the word ‘welfare’ may be resulting in
457 disproportionate emphasis being placed on some welfare problems, for example those
458 associated with minority groups. As discussed further in the next section, objective welfare
459 assessment may be needed to ensure an accurate view of the current welfare status of horses
460 in Great Britain.

461

462 *“Welfare” in my own context*

463 Whilst many of the examples of poor welfare provided by the interviewees were of contexts
464 that the interviewees felt personally removed from they nevertheless frequently discuss

465 scenarios that they witnessed in their own contexts. In the extract below, the horse owner
466 that kept their horses at home, explains how one of their horses was injured:

467 “If we hadn’t have turned him out on his own it [the horse getting injured] wouldn’t
468 have happened. But these sort of things do happen [...], it doesn’t matter how careful
469 you are, they are horses, they’re animals and you can’t avoid sometimes [...] we had
470 the vet, got looked after, back to normal, absolutely fine” (Leisure horse owner 2).

471 It could be argued that the horses’ welfare, in this situation, had been compromised as it had
472 been injured. However, for this interviewee the above scenario did not represent a welfare
473 problem, not least because they had taken positive action by getting veterinary advice after
474 the incident. The phrase “these sort of things do happen” suggests that the interviewee
475 viewed the incident as inevitable and even acceptable, possibly because these types of
476 incident were, in their experience, common. Many of the interviewees defined ‘good
477 welfare’ in relation to their social context and one leisure horse owner stated that it was
478 “quite difficult” to talk about any welfare problems they had seen first-hand:

479 “because I mix in the circles I do, and most people I’m around are people like me,
480 who are of the same kind of ilk [type of person], we all tend to look after our horses in
481 a similar manner” (Leisure horse owner 1).

482 For this interviewee good welfare appeared to be largely defined by what they and those
483 around them did, perhaps suggesting that to be “normal” was also to be acceptable.

484 Another interviewee suggested that not only were some potential welfare problems
485 commonplace and seen “day in day out”, they were also, perhaps because of the frequency,
486 not perceived to be welfare problems by many:

487 “.....from a professional point of view I see things day in day out that concern me
488 which I would call animal welfare but your typical owner might not..”(Rehabilitation
489 yard owner).

490 This interviewee went on to discuss problems they saw regularly including horses being
491 transported for long periods of time without rest and stress responses in horses exhibited by
492 horses when being ridden. Burn (2014) discusses how some welfare problems may become
493 accepted or normalised when they are highly prevalent in a given population and Bandura
494 (1999) states that people may act more cruelly when they consider there to be group
495 responsibility for their actions than when they hold themselves personally accountable for
496 their actions. Birke, Hockenull and Creighton (2010) discuss how ideas about what is good
497 for the horse are socially generated amongst leisure horse owners and that doing as other
498 horse owners do is an important cultural feature of the leisure horse sector. As such, common
499 welfare compromising practices may become acceptable as large groups of people engage in
500 them.

501 The difficulties associated with ensuring all aspects of welfare may be one reason why
502 management practices that compromise one or more aspect of welfare become common place
503 and normalised even though they may only partially meet the welfare needs of the horse.
504 Some of the problems associated with ensuring aspects of welfare were discussed by the
505 interviewees. For example, one interviewee talked about the importance of pasture access and
506 then said:

507 “I’ve said all this but mine have been kept in 24-7 for quite a while because of the
508 weather....I would love to turn them out but it’s the worry that they will injure
509 themselves with the packing [of snow]” (Dressage trainer).

510 As this quote suggests knowledge of the practices that promote good welfare may not always
511 result in them being implemented. Visser et al., (2011) report similar findings and suggest
512 that this may be a result of horse owners having conceptual knowledge (“knowing that”) but
513 not procedural knowledge (“knowing how...”). The current study suggests practical
514 constraints associated with ensuring optimal welfare may also be a factor and Bandura (1999)
515 discusses how people may blame their circumstances to exonerate themselves from
516 responsibility for their actions. As such, perceptions of the practical constraints associated
517 with ensuring optimal welfare may act as a barrier to welfare improvement.

518 Finally, in the current study, some interviewees used language to down play the significance
519 of potential welfare compromises that they witnessed. Here the carriage driver describes
520 something which they saw frequently at competitions and training events:

521 “[the horse] is backing off because [the tack] doesn’t fit and you’ve got this drop
522 noseband on when you shouldn’t have, it can’t breathe and it’s welfare in a ...in a soft
523 form, does that make sense?”

524 The phrase “welfare in a ...in a soft form” shows how this interviewee differentiated this
525 example, something they reported seeing frequently in a familiar setting, from other welfare
526 problems which they were more distanced from and euphemistic labelling has been
527 highlighted by Bandura (1999) as another means by which moral disengagement may
528 manifest itself.

529 The findings from this current study suggest that equine stakeholders acknowledge that some
530 compromises in “welfare”, as welfare scientists might understand them, do occur in their own
531 familiar settings. For example, they acknowledge that domestic horses may experience pain
532 and injury or be kept in suboptimal environments. However, failures to ensure “welfare”
533 may be seen as morally unacceptable due to the negative associations with the term and

534 moral disengagement may be one way in which equine stakeholders avoid a sense of
535 conflicting values that results from this. If the profile of the equine population is considered
536 it can be suggested that welfare problems affecting minority groups of horses may have been
537 over emphasised whilst potential problems affecting larger sectors, for example the leisure
538 horse sector, may have been over looked, down played or normalised.

539 There is a need to objectively and holistically evaluate the welfare of horses kept in all
540 contexts to ensure that welfare problems are recognised across the sectors and that practices
541 are not overlooked because they are common and/or seen by a large proportion of the
542 industry to be acceptable. Further inter-disciplinary research into the processes by which
543 welfare related practices are generated and perpetuated is likely to be necessary to fully
544 understand and overcome some of the psychological factors that act as barriers to the
545 recognition and alleviation of some equine welfare problems.

546

547

548 CONCLUSIONS

549 In- depth discussion with stakeholders about equine welfare in England and Wales gave a
550 unique insight into the different ways that welfare is understood by them and their first-hand
551 experience of how welfare is ensured. As such, this research provides an important
552 foundation for future work, for example to explore how psychological factors and
553 demographic factors including age, gender and role within the industry impact on perceptions
554 of equine welfare and associated practices.

555 In many ways the stakeholders interviewed had an understanding of welfare that was not too
556 dissimilar to definitions provided by welfare scientists, for example acknowledging

557 components of health and physiology, naturalness and affective state similar to that proposed
558 by Fraser et al., (1997). They emphasised resources in relation to ensuring welfare, as has
559 been historically the case with welfare scientists, but also discussed the emotional wellbeing
560 of the horse. Despite these similarities there was little evidence that this had resulted from a
561 direct knowledge of scientific definitions of welfare. The current research offers some
562 insight into the complex processes by which stakeholders construct and act upon concepts of
563 ‘good’ and ‘poor’ welfare. Greater depth of research into these processes and means of
564 influencing them is needed to facilitate the development of strategies that are likely to result
565 in an improvement in equine welfare. It may not be necessary for equine stakeholders to
566 access scientific definitions of welfare for welfare improvement to occur. However, findings
567 from scientific research into equine welfare should be incorporated into any welfare-
568 improving strategies and do need to be effectively communicated to stakeholders. By
569 utilising the evidence base there is a much greater chance that, where implemented, welfare
570 improvement approaches will lead to benefits to the horse.

571 There was a tendency for interviewees to associate welfare problems with contexts and
572 management methods that were perceived to be different from those they were familiar with.
573 In contrast they under-recognised or down played the significance of “welfare” compromises
574 seen within their own or familiar contexts. When considering equine welfare improvement it
575 is important to take an objective approach to ensure that all welfare issues are identified and
576 that research does not focus on minority welfare problems whilst overlooking welfare
577 problems that are commonplace, but not always labelled as welfare problems.

578 One of the ways in which equine stakeholders appear to have received strong messages about
579 welfare is through publicity from the welfare charities which may lead to narrow perceptions
580 of welfare as something negative and problematic through graphic images of welfare cases,
581 for example, on popular television programmes. As such, careful consideration needs to be

582 paid when communicating with stakeholders about “welfare” and there is a need for
583 stakeholders to receive clear and consistent messages, based on welfare science, relating to
584 the welfare needs of horses. There is also a need to think about the language used when
585 communicating with equine stakeholders about welfare as the term has negative associations
586 that may be distancing individuals who do not see the “welfare” literature as relevant to them.

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722

1 **Table One - Description of each interviewee as used in the results and discussion section to**
 2 **identify the source of quotes used, activity (s) each interviewee was involved in and role (s) they**
 3 **fulfilled at the time of the interview and other background information.**

Description of interviewee	Activity (s) they were involved in	Role (s) they fulfilled	Other background information
Leisure horse owner 1	Leisure/pleasure Riding lessons	Rider, owner	Pony owner as a child. Bought the horse owned at time of interview, which was kept on a livery yard, after having a break from horses.
Leisure horse owner 2	Leisure/pleasure Riding lessons	Rider, owner	Kept their horse and children's ponies on their own land at home. Held an industry recognised riding and training qualification.
Leisure horse loaner	Leisure/pleasure Riding lessons	Rider	Loaned a horse for their child. The horse was kept on a livery yard.
Livery yard¹ owner	Leisure/pleasure	Yard owner/manager groom	Ran a livery yard for leisure/pleasure horses and riders. Had been a horse owner throughout life. Studied equine business management.
Semi feral pony owner	Leisure/pleasure	Rider, owner	Family had owned ponies on the New Forest for many generations. Bred New Forest ponies and produced them for sale.
Traveller	Leisure/pleasure Driving	Rider, owner, breeder	Member of the travelling community. Bred and trained horses for carriage driving. Horse owner throughout life.
Owner of a retired horse	Leisure/pleasure	Owner	Had been a horse owner throughout life and bred two foals from their retired horse which they brought on and still owned and rode.
Driving coach	Leisure/pleasure Driving	Trainer	Competitive driver and trainer of drivers and driving horses. Had previously represented Great Britain in driving competitions. Also a horse owner at time of interview.
Senior welfare charity worker	Wide Range ²	Charity worker	Worked in a large equine welfare charity. Had been a horse owner throughout life. Studied equine related subjects at university.
Welfare charity centre manager	Wide Range	Charity worker, yard owner/manager	Previous involvement with equine rehabilitation, equine veterinary nursing and had run a livery yard. Horse owner throughout life.
Welfare charity groom	Wide Range	Charity worker, groom	Had previously worked in a riding school.
Field officer 1	Wide Range	Charity worker	Studied equine management at college and had industry recognised riding and teaching qualifications. Experience working in riding schools, on breeding yards and hunting yards. Horse owner throughout life.
Field officer 2	Wide Range	Charity worker	Had previously worked in the mounted police force. Horse owner throughout life.
Trading standards officer	Wide Range	Law enforcer	Previous experience working on an equine welfare research project. Horse owner throughout life.

¹ A livery yard is an establishment where horse owners pay a fee to house their horses, often also paying for their horses to be looked after some or all of the time.

² These interviewees were involved with horses that were engaged in a wide range of the activities identified.

Knackerman³	Wide Range	Knackerman	Owned their own horses and bred horses on a small scale.
Abattoir owner	Wide Range	Abattoir owner, transporter	Long term involvement in the meat export business.
Dressage trainer and rider	Dressage Leisure/pleasure Riding lesson	Trainer, rider	Had previously competed in Show Jumping and bought and sold dressage horses internationally.
Show jumping trainer	Show jumping Leisure/pleasure Riding lessons	Trainer, rider	British Show jumping qualified coach. Also bred and produced show jumping horses. Horse owner for most of their lives.
Freelance instructor and groom	Leisure/pleasure Riding lessons	Trainer, groom	Worked mainly with leisure/pleasure horses and riders. Held industry recognised riding and teaching qualifications. Ran a riding school for seven years before going freelance.
Race trainer	Racing	Trainer, rider, yard owner/manager	Represented Britain as a young showjumper and then moved into evening before getting their trainers license.
Endurance rider	Endurance	Trainer, rider	Previously competed in eventing and dressage to a high level. Had been a member of the British endurance team. Owned a riding school.
Point to point⁴ rider	Leisure/pleasure Racing Hunting	Trainer, rider	Previously competed in eventing. Regularly hunted and had been a horse owner throughout life.
Polo player	Polo	Trainer, rider	Ran a polo yard with their partner who competed internationally. Involved with breeding polo ponies. Also evented. Horse owner throughout life.
Show pony owner	Showing	Trainer, rider, breeder, dealer	Horse owner throughout life.
Farrier 1	Wide Range	Farrier	Mainly worked with leisure horses. Had been a horse owner throughout life
Farrier 2	Wide Range	Farrier	Worked mainly with leisure horses and had a particular interest in remedial farriery. Trained and rode race horses and schooled young horses when younger.
Equine podiatrist⁵	Wide Range	Complimentary therapist	Horse owner throughout life.
Vet 1	Wide Range	Vet	Worked primarily with leisure horses. Owned horses throughout life and, at the time of the interview, had a horse on loan to hunt.
Vet 2	Wide Range	Vet	Worked primarily with leisure horses. Horse owner for much of their life. At time of interview had several horses kept on their own land
Rehabilitation yard owner	Wide Range	Trainer, rider, complimentary therapist	Worked with post-operative horses, horses coming back into work after injury and horses with behaviour problems. Competed at dressage. Had previously groomed with the British dressage team and ran their own livery yard.
McTimoney⁶ chiropractic practitioner	Wide Range	Complimentary therapist	Had previously worked as a groom before training as a chiropractor. Horse owner throughout life.

4 _____

³ A knackerman is someone who kills and disposes of horses that cannot enter the human food chain.

⁴ Point to Point is a form of amateur jump horseracing.

⁵ Provides a service trimming horses' feet

⁶ McTimoney is a specific chiropractic treatment method

Table 2- Four themes relating to the interviewees understanding of welfare with a brief description of each theme

Theme	Description
Welfare as meeting needs	For many interviewees the term welfare was associated strongly with the meeting of needs and the provision of resources, for example food, water and shelter.
Welfare as “horse centred”	This definition related specifically to how the horse experienced its world and its emotional well-being. Within this definition there were strong links to “natural needs” and how these impacted on the horses’ emotional experience of life.
Welfare as a negative term	For many, welfare was seen as a negative term and good welfare was seen to relate to the avoidance of negative states. As such, poor welfare was associated with “other” peoples’ horses and horses kept in contexts which were less familiar to the interviewees.
“Welfare” in my own context	Many interviewees discussed things which they saw in settings similar to their own which could be interpreted as welfare problems. However, the interviewees themselves did not always see these as welfare problems or down played their significance.