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Safety climate assessment in the equine sector – a study of Swedish riding schools and trotting stables

Background and purpose

The equine sector has grown strongly in recent years in Sweden as well as in many European countries. The Swedish equine sector includes a wide variety of activities, e.g. businesses related to breeding, competition, tourism and training, and more non-profit activities such as association-run riding schools and leisure. Work environment issues are a major concern for the sector since it is labor-intensive, and a majority of the work tasks are still performed manually leading to high workloads and physical strain. Furthermore, working with and handling horses is hazardous, and the sector has a relatively high occupational injury rate. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the safety climate at riding schools and trotting stables through the validated Nordic questionnaire on safety climate (NOSACQ-50).

Methods

The questionnaire, consisting of 50 statements across 7 safety climate dimensions, was handed out to employees at 11 workplaces, six riding schools and five trotting stables.

Results and discussion

The results are based on data from 62 employees. The analysis of all the participants’ responses showed that one of the seven dimensions, “workers’ safety priority and risk non-acceptance”, needs to be developed in comparison to the other six. Furthermore, the preliminary results indicate that there are differences in the perceived safety climate dependent on working experience of the employee. Some significant differences were also found between riding schools and trotting stables in the dimension “workers trust in the efficacy of safety systems”.

Conclusions

Understanding the safety climate in the equine sector is a first step to find approaches to enhance safety and in the longer-term increase sustainability in horse-related occupations.

The study is part of two joint projects with the aim to improve the work environment in the Swedish equine sector, funded by AFA Insurance and The Swedish-Norwegian Foundation for Equine Research.

Keywords: equine industry, NOSACQ-50 questionnaire, safety climate assessment, work environment