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With the stable as a workplace – about attractive, healthy and sustainable employments in the Swedish equine sector

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Background and purpose
The equine sector has grown strongly in recent years in Sweden as well as in many European countries. The 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 Swedish Work Environment Authority has also reported a lack of knowledge in the systematic work environment management and risk assessments as well as shortcomings regarding working conditions in the Swedish equine sector. The study is part of two larger research projects where the purpose is to, in close collaboration with the equine sector, implement methods and practices for systematic work environment management.

The purpose of this study is to gain in-depth knowledge about the occupational characteristics of the Swedish equine sector and to identify strategies that are important for the work to be considered attractive and sustainable over time. The study focuses on the employee perspective.

Design/methodology/approach
The study had a mixed-methods design using questionnaires, interviews, and non-participatory observations but also conversations with key persons, and written material. Various statistical analyses were performed to obtain quantitative data and an abductive applied thematic analysis was applied for the qualitative data. The findings were combined at the interpretation level.
**Results**
The preliminary and yet unpublished results indicate that the occupational characteristics which provide and sustain work attractiveness, are the love of and care for horses, stimulating and meaningful work tasks, and workplace relations. Barriers to healthy and sustainable work seem to be inconvenient working hours, work-leisure time imbalance, and high physical workload, but also old facilities with lack of mechanization, and inadequate equipment. The occupational culture and limitations in resources within the sector may slow down changes.

**Discussion with practical implications**
The work in the Swedish horse sector offers satisfaction, attraction, and meaningfulness, but at the same time, it may be physically demanding and stressful to the extent that it challenges the ability to remain in the occupation. The analysis of the data is ongoing, and more detailed results will be presented and discussed.

**Conclusions.**
Understanding the working conditions in the equine sector is an important step to find approaches to enhance health and safety and in the longer-term increase sustainability in horse-related occupations.

**Keywords.** Equine sector, occupational health and safety, sustainable employments, work environment management, working conditions