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The Old School, Brewhouse Hill, Wheathampstead,
Hertfordshire AL4 8AN, UK
www.ufaw.org.uk

Animal Welfare 2018, 27: 47-54
ISSN 0962-7286
doi: 10.7120/09627286.27.1.047

The relationship between working horse welfare and their owners' socio-economic status

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Abstract

The relationship between the socio-economic status of working equine owners and the welfare status of their animals is yet to be documented. The aim of this study was to provide an approach to understanding socio-economic status, quality of life and working aspects of working horse owners, in order to establish their social vulnerability index and to determine how these measures correlate with the welfare state of their horses. Seventy-two owners and their urban working horses (n = 122) were studied. Owners' socio-economic and educational status was established together with their quality of life perception and multi-dimensional poverty index. The animal welfare index was constructed using animal-based measures. Whilst over 90% of owners were considered vulnerable, only 28.3% of horses were classified as being in a poor welfare state (eg presence of lesions and morphology not adequate for draught type). There were no significant correlations between owners' factors and the animal welfare index. We conclude, therefore, that social vulnerability of owners does not necessarily imply that their animals will be in a poor welfare state.

Keywords: animal welfare, livelihood, poverty, quality of life, socio-economic status, working horse