

VETERINARY STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON ANIMAL WELFARE ANIMAL RIGHTS AND VEGANISM INFLUENCE THEIR CONSUMER PREFERENCES FOR PURCHASING ANIMAL PRODUCTS

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Abstract

In the last decades the concern of animal welfare has grown seriously among the consumers, thus changing their preferences on the use of products as food, clothes and other goods of animal origin. The aim of this research was to establish the preferences of native and foreign veterinary students in Bulgaria for purchasing products of animal origin, influenced by their perceptions on animal welfare strategy, animal rights movement and vegan position.

An anonymous written questionnaire was distributed among students at the two veterinary faculties established in the country. The respondents who took part in the survey were undergraduates from both the Bulgarian (BG n = 131) and English-language programme in veterinary medicine (EN n = 78), distributed by gender (BG female 77.86%, male 22.14%; EN female 62.34%, male 37.66%) and study year from the first to the fifth course. Data obtained were statistically processed (Statistica for Windows Software), subjected to frequency distribution, correlation analysis and t-test for independent variables. Values of $p < 0.05$ were considered significant.

Results showed that the majority of the respondents fully supported the internationally regulated Animal Welfare strategy - 97.71% of the Bulgarian and 100% of the English-speaking students. Meanwhile 83.21% of the native and 80.77% of the foreign undergraduates were well informed and shared the view that animals have rights to live free from human exploitation. Opposing against all kinds of products of animal origin appeared to be 17.56 % of the Bulgarian and 25.64% of the English speaking respondents. The study found that the professional knowledge influenced to some extent the students preferences as consumers, as 32.82% of the undergraduates in the Bulgarian programme and 24.37% in the English-language programme were willing to buy products derived under high standards of animal welfare, with another 13.74% of them (BG), respectively 11.54% (EN) being ready to pay higher prices for such animal-friendly products. Greater concern on the wellbeing of production animals was declared by 21.37% of the native and 10.26% of the foreign veterinary students, who preferred to buy products of animal origin under extensive breeding systems and organic farming.

The survey showed that the welfare of non-human animals was of a high concern both to the native and foreign respondents. Regarding their awareness on animal rights and main freedoms veterinary undergraduates were willing to buy food and goods of animal origin under high welfare production standards.

Key words: *Animal rights, Veganism, Production animals, Food from animal origin, Ethics.*