

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PERCEPTION OF ETHICS AND WELFARE OF THE ELITE COMPETITION HORSE

S. van Dijk

A. Gego

I. Wolframm

EAAP 2009

Barcelona, Spain

University of Applied Sciences



**VAN HALL
LARENSTEIN**
PART OF WAGENINGEN UR

HORSE NETWORK WORKSHOP



EQUESTRIAN SPORTS

“The essential joy of being with horses is that it brings us in contact with the rare elements of grace, beauty, spirit, and fire.”

Sharon Ralls Lemon

Very true! For people....



MODERN TOPSPORT...

"was to exhaust everything possible ... I had the attitude that anything that will not be detected is allowed ... I can do what I like as long as I don't get found out."



"What I give or not give to my horses only concerns me, the owner and my stable crew."



ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

What we do is acceptable if we think there is a valid reason – a changing concept!

“Philosophical ethics”: “The question is not, Can they reason? Nor can they talk, but can they suffer”
Bentham, 1789

“Animal science ethics”: “animals, too, have natures... the pigness of the pig, the cowness of the cow... - which are as essential to their well-being as speech and assembly are to us” Rollin, 1993

EQUINE TELOS?





WHAT WE DID...

1. Investigate current welfare/living conditions of elite competition horses
2. Devised questionnaire based on common welfare issues addressed by the literature
3. Asked the opinion of visitors, riders, veterinarians and officials at top international events (N=74)

RESULTS

Welfare defined “as absence of pain or suffering” and
“possibility to behave naturally in a
natural environment” (visitors)

Physical health check
and horse’s reaction as
most important
measure of equine
welfare

Mean scores for elite
competition horses
rated as highest by
competitors



CONCLUSIONS

Unanimous welfare definition by all key stakeholders

Practice of training and competition paints a different picture – questionable training methods, doping, medication, unsuitable management

Yet stakeholders rate current welfare as good...



THE FUTURE...

“If you do something bad long enough
it starts to feel right”

Obvious discrepancy
between theory and practice

Governing bodies need to develop
appropriate regulatory frameworks

