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Inadvertent Slaughter of Female Goats and Foetal Wastages at Rumuokoro Abattoir in Port Harcourt, Rivers State

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Abstract

The study investigated inadvertent slaughter of pregnant goats in a Port Harcourt abattoir. Daily visits were made to Rumuokoro abattoir early enough to witness the slaughter process and collect essential data personally for a period of one month. From the results, a total of 1041 goats were slaughtered, out of which 564 (54.18%) were males and 477 (45.82%) were females. Of the 477 (45.82%) does slaughtered, 202 (42.35%) were pregnant and 269 (56.39%) does were found non-gravid. On the average, the highest number of the trade goats was slaughtered in week three of the study duration and more females slaughtered were found to be pregnant in the 3rd week. In conclusion, lack of public awareness on early pregnancy detection and improved ante-mortem pregnancy screening were some of the underlying problems identified in this study.

Keywords: Inadvertent, slaughter, pregnant goats, Rumuokoro abattoir

Introduction

An abattoir is a special facility designed and licensed for receiving, holding, slaughtering, and inspecting meat animals and meat products before release to public (Alonge, 2005). Ruminant animals, dominate the population of meat animals slaughtered in abattoirs in southern Nigeria (Ogunyemi, 1982). Meat products from these food animals supply the greater amount of animal protein in these areas (Fayemi and Muchenje, 2013), although a lot of people derive their protein largely from vegetable sources (Mba, 1983). Goat is one of the farm species that play very important roles in food production systems in the countries that are still developing and this is up to 96% of the world's goat population (Paul, 2011; Fayemi and Muchenje, 2013). They have good adaptation to many different ecological regions, and are kept for varied reasons.

The tradition of slaughtering of farm animals has been an old practice in different parts of the world. The practice of slaughtering different breeds of livestock has been sustained (Okoli *et al.*, 2006 and Paul, 2011), with pregnant animals being slaughtered for meat still on increase in many countries (Aberle *et al.*, 2001; Warriss, 2008). Paul (2011) and Fayemi and Muchenje (2013) observed that the issue of animal slaughter in abattoirs and slaughter slabs has revealed that not only the normal non-breeding animals are slaughtered for meat but the breeding gravid and suckling animals. Gregory and Grandin (2007) also observed that these animals are either killed for daily meals or occasionally for rituals, religious festivals, ceremonies, drug formulations, disease control or to meet immediate financial needs. The issue of economic recession experienced in Nigeria since the 1980's has led to serious setbacks in the quality and quantity of animal protein in the diet of Nigerians (Paul, 2011; Fayemi and Muchenje, 2013).

The indiscriminate slaughter of pregnant animals is one of the evil activities that farmers have employed against their production activities. According to Cadmus and Adesokan (2009), this activity has resulted to a lot of wastages of pregnant animals and unborn offspring in Sub-Sahara Africa. Okoh (1986) reported that pregnancy wastages through slaughter of gravid dams ranged from 3.7 –13.65 % for sheep and 13 - 40 % for goats. Also the study of slaughter-mediated pregnancy wastage in abattoirs from January 1998 to December 2009 in the Sahel region of Nigeria showed an incidence of 22.78 % in sheep and 17.88 % in goats (Paul, 2011). In that study, higher frequencies of pregnancy wastage occurred during March–May of each year. Okoh (1980) recorded a prevalence rate of 16.59 % foetal wastage in goats in Zaria. In breeding does, a prevalent rate of 25 % pregnancy wastage was reported by Dumas (1980). But there is relative dearth of information on the inadvertent slaughter of pregnant goats in Port Harcourt abattoir to ascertain the rate of losses due to such practices.

The study is aimed to determine the scope and economic loss of inadvertent slaughter of pregnant goats in Port Harcourt abattoir.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted at Rumuokoro abattoir Port Harcourt, a city located in the south-south region (Niger Delta) of Nigeria; a rain-forest belt with a warm and humid climate recording daily maximum temperature ranging from 20-33°C and within latitude 7° 00" and 7° 53" E and longitude 4° 35" respectively. The experiment spanned one month. A daily visit was made to Rumuokoro abattoir early enough to witness the slaughter process and collect essential data personally for one month. Data collected namely the total number of trade goats slaughtered, the number of males and females slaughtered and the number of pregnant does slaughtered daily were subjected to statistical analysis using simple percentage frequency and the population mean.

Results and Discussion

The results of the ratio of male and female goats slaughtered with the percent foetal wastages at Rumuokoro Abattoir in Port Harcourt during the study period, are presented in Table 1. During the four-week study period, a total of 1041 goats were slaughtered at Rumuokoro abattoir, out of which 564(54.18%) were males and 477(45.82%) were females. Out of the 477 (45.82%) does slaughtered, 202 (42.35%) were pregnant and 269 (56.39) females were found non-gravid. On the average, the highest number of the trade goats was slaughtered in week three of the study duration and more females slaughtered were found to be pregnant in the 3rd week.

Table 1: Total number of male and female goats slaughtered with percent foetal wastages at Rumuokoro abattoir in Port Harcourt

Week	Goats slaughtered	Male goats slaughtered		Female goats slaughtered		Pregnant goats slaughtered		Non-Pregnant goats slaughtered	
		No slaughtered	%	No slaughtered	%	No slaughtered	%	No slaughtered	%
1	234	131	55.98	103	44.02	47	45.63	56	54.37
2	246	130	52.85	116	47.15	46	39.65	70	60.35
3	285	155	54.39	130	45.61	63	48.46	67	51.54
4	276	148	53.62	128	46.38	52	40.63	76	59.37
Total	1041	564	54.18	477	45.82	202	42.35	269	56.39

The inadvertent slaughter of breeding and pregnant goats in Nigeria results in wastage of unborn offspring and loss of reproductively active dams (Paul, 2011; Fayemi and Muchenje, 2013; Cadmus and Adesokan, 2009). The results from this study suggest that the slaughtering of pregnant does is very much in place in Port Harcourt Abattoir. Out of a total 1,041 goats slaughtered, 477 (45.82%) were females of which 202 were pregnant. Therefore, proper ante-mortem examination could have saved the lives of 202 (42.35%) fetuses. This percentage foetal loss in goats in this study is rather too high compared to what was reported in Minna (5.8%) (Alemede, 2004), Bauchi (4.8%) (Du-Sai *et al*, 2005) and Sokoto (16.5%) (Umar *et al*, 2006), respectively. This could suggest that more ignorance exists amongst stake-holders in Port Harcourt Abattoir on the pregnancy status of female goats or the implications of the slaughter of pregnant does than in other parts of the country mentioned above.

According to Addass *et al.* (2010); Paul (2011); Fayemi and Muchenje (2013) the embryonic and foetal wastages due to this practice consequently questions the thoroughness of *ante-mortem* examination of meat animals and the reason/s for converting pregnant animals to beef, mutton, chevon, pork, offal and other meat types. This is one of the consequences of the collusion between meat inspectors and butchers who in a bid to evade taxes and defraud government of revenue abandon actual meat inspection (Aniebo *et al*, 2009). It also challenges the ethical evidence supporting the act of slaughtering pregnant animals in situations where there is no law supporting the practice. Also as reported by Nwakpu and Osakwe (2007); Ademola (2010); Cadmus and Adesokan (2010) this is the key reason responsible for protein deficiency in major parts of African countries and a possible constraint to future livestock populations in the continent.

Financial loss due to slaughter of pregnant goats with wastage of up to 202 fetuses out of 1,041 total goats slaughtered in a month is actually too much. Another important factor that may contribute to the increased slaughter of pregnant goats in Port Harcourt abattoir could be the poor enforcement of existing livestock legislation. Three important policy objectives are emphasized in Nigeria's livestock sector: to increase domestic animal protein production so as to attain national self-sufficiency in meat production; to increase farmers' income

in order to raise their standards of living; and to cut down on meat imports in order to conserve scarce foreign currency (Fayemi and Muchenje, 2013; Paul 2011)

Paul (2011) reported that in most cases, meat consumers are ignorant or denied the right to know the physiological state of the livestock that is converted to meat which they eat. Several studies have been focused on: animal right (Galvin and Herzog, 1992), protection of animal welfare standards (Botreau *et al.*, 2007; Thornber, 2010), conservation of animals' genetic resources (Woolliams *et al.*, 2007); pre-slaughter stress responsiveness (Terlouw *et al.*, 2008; Muchenje *et al.*, 2009), abattoir and slaughter surveillance (Addass *et al.*, 2010), animal slaughter and meat quality (Hoffman *et al.*, 2009). But little attention is paid on the need to educate livestock producers on the need to know the physiological state of the animals before sale and slaughter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, lack of public awareness on early pregnancy detection and improved ante-mortem pregnancy screening are some of the underlying problems. We recommend that authorities should take stringent measures to prevent the slaughter of pregnant animals. Farmers and butchers should accordingly be educated on the implication of these findings

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