



Religious slaughter: Evaluation of current practices in selected countries

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 December 2012

Received in revised form 11 July 2013

Accepted 12 July 2013

Keywords:

Slaughter

Halal

Kosher

Shechita

Animal

Welfare

ABSTRACT

As part of the project “Religious slaughter (DIALREL): improving knowledge and expertise through dialogue and debate on issues of welfare, legislation and socio-economic aspects”, this paper discusses an evaluation of current practices during Halal and Shechita slaughter in cattle, sheep, goats and poultry. During religious slaughter, animals are killed with and without stunning by a transverse incision across the neck that is cutting the skin, muscles (brachiocephalic, sternocephalic, sternohyoid, and sternothyroid), trachea, esophagus, carotid arteries, jugular veins and the major, superficial and deep nerves of the cervical plexus. In this report, the restraint methods, stunning, neck cutting, exsanguination, slaughter techniques and postcut handling in the abattoir were assessed for religious slaughter. Information about the procedures used during religious slaughter in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, Turkey and Australia was collected by means of spot visits to abattoirs. To standardize the information gathered during the spot visits three guidelines were designed, one for each species, and translated into the national languages of the countries involved. The document included questions on the handling and restraint methods (stunning, neck cutting/exsanguination/slaughter techniques and postcut handling performed under religious practices) and for pain and distress of the animal during the restraint, neck cutting and induction to death in each abattoir. Results showed differences in the time from restraining to stun and to cut in the neck cutting procedures and in the time from cut to death.

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1. Introduction

Religious slaughter is carried out legally in the European Union in licensed slaughterhouses by authorized slaughter-men of the Jewish and Islamic faiths. Other animals to be slaughtered must be stunned to cause immediate loss of consciousness until death is caused by bleeding. For reasons of depopulation, animals can be killed outright, using the specified methods set out in the EU legislation (Anonymous, 1993, 2009). However, there are special provisions made for slaughter for religious purposes. The legal requirement for stunning does not apply to the slaughter of animals by the Jewish method, by a Jew, licensed by the authority and duly licensed by a Rabbinical Commission, or by the Muslim method, by a Muslim licensed by an appropriate, recognized, religious authority. Nevertheless, the law does require religious

slaughter to be carried out without the infliction of unnecessary suffering (Anonymous, 1993, 2009).

The Council Directive 93/119/EC of 22nd December 1993 on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing applies to the movement, lairaging, restraint, stunning, slaughter and killing of animals bred and kept for the production of meat, skin, fur or other products and to methods of killing animals for the purpose of disease control (Anonymous, 1993, 2009). The new EU Regulation 1099/2009 introduces new arrangements for slaughter licenses from 1st January 2013 (Anonymous, 2009). The new regulation includes the following definitions: “slaughterhouse: any establishment used for slaughtering terrestrial animals which falls within the scope of Regulation (EC) No. 853/2004; restraint: the application to an animal of any procedure designed to restrict its movements sparing any avoidable pain, fear or agitation in order to facilitate effective stunning and killing; stunning: any intentionally induced process which causes loss of consciousness and sensibility without pain, including any process resulting in instantaneous death; killing: any intentionally induced process which causes the death of an animal, slaughtering: the killing of animals intended for human consumption, competent authority: the central authority of a

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Table 1
Number of questionnaires received per country, slaughter practice and species.

Country	Total	Slaughter practice		Species for Halal (and Kosher)		
		Halal	Kosher	Cattle	Small ruminants	Poultry
BE	56	56	0	42	14	0
DE	30	30	0	15	9	6 ^a
IT	29 ^b	25	3	9 (1)	12 (1)	4 (1)
NL	2	2	0	0	2	0
ES	42	39	3	17 (2)	18	4 (1)
UK	15	14	1	3 (1)	7	4
AU	2	1	1	1 (1)	1 (1)	0
TR	141	141	0	90	45	6

^a The 6 questionnaires represent 12 plants, as some of the questionnaires covered companies with more than one plant.

^b One questionnaire was sent back with no data for reasons of privacy.

Member State competent to ensure compliance with the requirements of this Regulation or any other authority to which that central authority has delegated that competence” (Anonymous, 2009). Regarding this delegation of authority, the religious authority in the EU Member States, on whose behalf slaughter is carried out, shall be competent for the application and monitoring of the special provisions, which apply to slaughter according to certain religious requirements. As regards said provisions, the religious authority shall operate under the responsibility of the official EU member state veterinarian, as defined in the Regulations 1099/2009 (Anonymous, 2009). According to Annex 1 of the cited Regulation 1099/2009, the stunning of farm animals prior to slaughtering can be performed using the following methods: mechanical methods (penetrative captive bolt device, non-penetrative captive bolt device, firearm with free projectile, cervical dislocation, percussive blow to the head), electrical methods (head-only electrical stunning, head-to-body electrical stunning, electrical water bath) and gas methods (carbon dioxide at high concentration, carbon dioxide in two phases, carbon dioxide associated with inert gases, inert gases). Stunning must not be carried out unless it is possible to bleed the animals immediately afterwards. Stunning before slaughter is therefore a statutory requirement in Europe and is done to induce unconsciousness in animals, so that slaughter causes no anxiety, pain, suffering or distress.

In the majority of the countries of the European Union, religious slaughter is exempt from stunning (Cenci-Goga et al., 2010). For the Jewish and Muslim communities, the animals are required to be alive, healthy and have suffered no injury at the time of slaughter. To meet these requirements, slaughter without stunning is done in licensed slaughterhouses or, occasionally, during religious festivals on communal grounds. It should be noted that some local Islamic authorities accept a stunning method, provided it does not kill the animals based on their interpretations of the religious requirements.

In an attempt to study the incidence and to assess the different practices of religious slaughter of cattle, small ruminants (sheep and goats) and poultry, data was collected by means of a survey based on spot check visits to abattoirs in the EU, Turkey and Australia.

Table 2
Slaughterhouses selected for the spot visits. In brackets, the number of observed animals per plant.

Country	Cattle				Sheep				Poultry				
	Halal		Kosher		Halal		Kosher		Halal	Kosher			
	No stun	Electr	Pre cut penetr	Pre cut nonpenetr	No stun	No stun	Electr	Pre cut nonpenetr	No stun	Electr	Gas	No stun	
BE	2 (37, 67)				1 (18)								
DE	1 (82)				1 (90)				3 (30, 26, 28)		2 (60, 30)		1 (50)
IT	2 (30, 14)				1 (79)						1 (114)		1 (70)
NL	1 (10)												
ES	2 (30, 30)		1 (30)		1 (18)								
UK	1 (16)				1 (31)		1 (31)		2 (30, 30)				
AU	1 (30)		1 (40)										
TR	2 (30, 30)								2 (30, 30)				

2. Materials and methods

Information about the procedures used during religious slaughter in Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, Turkey and Australia was collected by means of spot visits to abattoirs. The data was collected by the DIALREL partner from each country. A questionnaire was completed before the spot visit to gather data on the number of animals slaughtered, restraining methods and stunning method, when applicable (Cenci-Goga et al., 2013).

In each country, the abattoirs were selected using simple random sampling from a list of premise-identification numbers to ensure a representative sample of plants from the completed questionnaires. Within each selected plant, slaughtered animals were sampled by systematic, random selection. Between 10 and 114 animals were selected per abattoir, approximately proportional to the total number of slaughtered animals (Tables 1 and 2).

To standardize the information gathered during the spot visits, three guidelines were designed, one for each species, and translated into the national languages of the countries involved. The document was divided into two parts. The first part of the document gathered information about the handling and restraint methods, stunning, neck cutting/exsanguination/slaughter techniques and postcut handling, carried out during religious slaughter in each abattoir. One important point was the quality of bleeding: an animal was considered to be bleeding well when, after neck cutting, both carotid arteries and both jugular veins were completely sectioned, a strong blood flow could be seen and there was no obstruction due to a retraction of the vessels' walls. The second part of the document was designed to assess the signs of pain and distress of the animal during restraint, neck cutting and induction to death. In this second part, a minimum of 10 animals per abattoir were assessed. If the abattoir slaughtered during both Halal and Shechita, two different questionnaires were filled in for each slaughter practice. The questionnaire can be found under Annex 1. All auditors, at least two per unit, were trained according to a specific work package of the project. In short, data collection in each country for the assessment of animal welfare was based on the same methodology and protocol. The training sessions included: i) a discussion on the results from the questionnaires and the definition of the sample of slaughterhouses visited; ii) a discussion of the protocol used for spot-visits and a training session including a visit to the abattoir to ensure reliability and repeatability between experts; and iii) an explanation of the protocol for the meetings with religious authorities. A visit was organized to a slaughterhouse during religious slaughter without stunning to assess the protocol on the field, followed by a discussion to finalize the standardization of the different protocols and data collection.

2.1. Data collection in the different countries during Halal and Shechita slaughter

Table 2 shows the choice of slaughterhouses, selected using simple random sampling from a list of premise-identification numbers to ensure a representative sample of plants from the completed questionnaires.

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