



Comparative Evaluations of Abnormal Behaviour, Panting, Lamb Mortality and Fleece Cleanliness in Kenguri Sheep under Intensive and Extensive Rearing Systems, Yadgir District, India

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JSRR/2024/v30i31882

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/113512>

Original Research Article

Received: 13/12/2023
Accepted: 17/02/2024
Published: 21/02/2024

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ABSTRACT

The important welfare issues of Kenguri sheep faced during group welfare assessment were analyzed during the study.

Total of 20 each intensive and extensive Kenguri sheep farms having the herd size ranging from 35 to 300 and 25 to 1480, respectively were cited for group welfare assessment in Yadgir (i.e., Northern Eastern dry agro-climatic zone) district of Karnataka state, India.

Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Kawadimatti, Yadgir, UAS, Raichur. Here each selected herd raised up in both intensive and extensive rearing systems was assessed for 20 minutes, during the months of January and February of the year 2022.

The group level welfare indicators such as abnormal behaviour (stereotypy), panting, lamb mortality and fleece cleanliness were evaluated as per Animal Welfare Indicators assessment protocol for sheep. The overall first group level welfare assessment was significant in between the intensive and extensive rearing systems.

The comparative welfare study among total of 40 sheep farms revealed that, the stereotypy observed was 4.88 and 1.24%, panting was 1.71 and 3.66%, mild heat stress was 2.18 and 6.49%, lamb mortality was 30.06 and 26.47% in lambs born alive and 0.89 and 2.03%, in lambs born dead. Losses upto weaning was 3.40 and 4.45% and minimum ewes mated was 45.73 and 42.48%. Minimum lambs reared was 30.48 and 26.52%; Fleece cleanliness was very wet that is 2.19 and 3.47%, and filthiness is 0.14 and 1.11% of animals in both intensive and extensive rearing systems, respectively.

This study may boost the quality of animal assessment for getting better value-added products under the frame work of welfare status in farming community in the future.

Keywords: Abnormal behaviour; animal welfare indicators; panting; fleece cleanliness; lamb mortality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Animal welfare has recently gained importance, not only in developed nations but also in developing nations like India, where land and labour are easily available to produce agricultural products affordably.

Along with improved health and production, better animal welfare practices have also increased the trading market opportunities. India ranked third in the sheep population in the world, with 74.26 million sheep [1].

The total percentage of sheep has increased during 2019 census compared to last census 2012 by 14.13% [2, 3].

In southern India in the state of Karnataka, the total population of Kenguri sheep is 6.7 lakhs, according to recent report [4]. The nutritional value of mutton has increased due to globalization and it is now necessary to improve the sheep's mutton quality in order to meet the growing demand [5].

Since, consumers desire high quality livestock products obtained from good welfare accustomed production systems and they are willing to pay fairly for those products. Therefore,

evaluating the welfare of animals is a key area for improving economic productivity.

Animal welfare includes Animal husbandry, behavior, management techniques, and health. It is evident that the precise and reliable assessment of the key attributes is crucial for all aspects of animal welfare [6].

Prior to the development of management-based indicators by Mullan et al [7], on-farm welfare assessments primarily focused on evaluating farm resources (such as housing and feed), also known as resource-based indicators, or those that evaluated farmer policies and management techniques, also known as policy-based indicators [8,9].

A "natural life" for sheep is possible with the help of large-scale sheep farming practices. Sheep have a great deal of independence and control over their behaviors, including grazing, exploring, ruminating, social contact and a maternal instinct [10].

These characteristics of extensive systems are related to those found in the "five freedoms" - freedom to express typical behaviors - which is one of the three conceptual frameworks used to evaluate animal health [11].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Sheep Farm Visits

Total 40 sheep farms including both intensive and extensive rearing systems, with total sample size ranging from 25 to 1480 were selected based on their availability in Yadgir district of Karnataka, the average annual rainfall ranges from 640 to 810 mm [12].

In order to prevent heat stress on the animals, all the sheep were examined at cooler times of the day (either in the morning or in the evening) when the farms were visited. This information was communicated to the sheep farmers via phone prior to the visits.

All the data was gathered and entered into the Annexure forms according to the Animal Welfare Indicators (AWIN) welfare evaluation of sheep [3].

2.2 Assessment Protocol

Each herd was observed individually by live visit of assessor to the farms and spared about 20 minutes to evaluate each of the four first level group welfare indicators- abnormal behaviour (stereotypy), panting, lamb mortality and fleece cleanliness as defined by Lauber et al [14]. The detailed assessment criteria are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1. Assessment of first level group welfare indicators of sheep

| Welfare indicators | Assessment criteria |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Abnormal behaviour (stereotypy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The flock is watched uninterruptedly for 20 minutes. ➤ The number of animals that exhibit stereotypical behavior, such as repetitive pacing or circling while taking the same path back and forth or around the pen, repeatedly cocking the head back over the shoulders and gazing upward, or repeatedly pulling, biting, or plucking the wool from another ewe's back. ➤ Record the total number of animals showing stereotypy in the observed sub-group. |
| Panting | <p>Scored on a 3-point scale-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Normal respiration- The pace of breathing is normal (around 20 inhalations in a minute), and it takes place with the closed mouth. 2. Mild heat stress- The rate of respiration is more than 30 respirations per minute but lower than 40, and breathing is done with the mouth closed. Panting is not tallied for this condition. 3. Panting- The pace of breathing is more than 40 breathing per minute. and it happens while the mouth is open. |
| Lamb mortality | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lambing records available- Record: a) number of lambs born alive, b) number of lambs born dead, and c) losses due to weaning. 2. Minimal records available- Keep track of the following information: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The number of ewes that mated with a breeding ram during the recent breeding season; b) The number of lambs raised (including all lambs produced: those sold for finishing, sold as store lambs, sold for breeding and maintained on the farm). |

| Welfare indicators | Assessment criteria |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fleece cleanliness | Scored on a 5-point scale- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Score 0- Clean and dry. Fleece shows no sign of dirt or contamination. 2. Score 1- Due to the weather at the moment, dry or just a little damp. A little dirt or filth on the body was caused by handling the animals that day or by their pens. 3. Score 2- Very damp or wet. Coat contaminated by mud or dung from field or hill. 4. Score 3- Very wet. Very heavily soiled with mud or dung. 5. Score 4- Animal is filthy, extremely wet, and covered with mud or faeces, which may be on the belly, flanks, legs, back, and face. |

Dwyer et al [13]

2.3 Statistical Analysis

The results were analyzed from the statistical tools such as Mean (average), standard deviation, Chi-square test (P-value) by using IBM SPSS version 16.0 software.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Abnormal Behaviour

The mean percentage occurrence of stereotypic behaviour was more in intensive rearing system (4.88 ± 0.69) compared to extensive rearing system (1.24 ± 0.21), as the oral (licking, chewing) and locomotor (butting, weaving, wool biting) behaviours are commonly noticed in intensive system (Table 2). These findings are aligned with the results of Pedernera-Romano et al [15].

3.2 Panting

The occurrence of heat stress behaviour was more in extensive system (6.49 ± 0.77 %) of rearing when compared to intensive system of rearing (2.18 ± 0.55 %). Similarly, the incidence of panting was more in extensive rearing system (3.66 ± 0.53 %) than in intensive rearing system (1.71 ± 0.30 %) (Table 2).

The testimony on reliability of panting as a heat stress indicator, but the incidence of panting was too low for analysis.

The occurrence of Panting in sheep may also be due to psychological stress and hyperthermia, therefore this measure is only specific for heat stress when tested in undisturbed animals, but it can be an indicator of distress in other situations.

The similar findings were reported by Phythian et al [16,17].

3.3 Lamb Mortality

The percentages of lambs born alive (30.06 ± 1.63), minimum ewes mated (45.73 ± 4.14) and lambs reared (30.48 ± 1.58) were more in intensive rearing system, so the lamb survival rate was better in intensive rearing system.

In contrary, the percentages of lambs born dead (2.03 ± 0.54) and losses due to weaning (4.45 ± 0.09) were more in extensive system of rearing (Table 2). Accurate farm record keeping is required to assess lamb mortality.

Many farms fail to keep track of lamb mortality. However, even rudimentary farm records can be used to estimate lamb productivity and they do not distinguish between different causes of mortality, these outcomes are in line with the reports of Stubbsj en et al [18].

3.4 Fleece Cleanliness

The sheep exhibited more dirtiness, might be due to frequent accessibility to pond water, leading to more wetness (3.47 ± 0.48 and 2.19 ± 0.35 %) and filthiness (1.11 ± 0.25 and 0.14 ± 0.08 %) reared under extensive and intensive rearing systems, respectively in Table 2.

Evaluating the cleanliness of housed sheep's coats and the hygiene of their lying areas, but did not report on the relationships between the two, these results are in agreement with outcomes of Stubbsj en et al [18].

Table 2. First level group welfare indicators assessment of Kenguri sheep both in intensive and extensive rearing systems

| S No | Particulars | Intensive (n=20) | Extensive (n=20) | (P-value) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Abnormal behaviour | | | | |
| 1 | Stereotypy (% of animals) | 4.88±0.69 ^a | 1.24 ± 0.21 ^b | 0.005 |
| Panting | | | | |
| 1 | Mild heat stress (% of animals) | 2.18 ± 0.55 ^a | 6.49±0.77 ^b | 0.007 |
| 2 | Panting (% of animals) | 1.71±0.30 ^a | 3.66±0.53 ^b | 0.006 |
| Lamb mortality | | | | |
| 1 | Lambs born alive (% of animals) | 30.06±1.63 ^a | 26.47±2.27 ^b | 0.025 |
| 2 | Lambs born dead (% of animals) | 0.89±0.15 ^a | 2.03±0.54 ^b | 0.045 |
| 3 | Losses to weaning (% of animals) | 3.40±0.18 ^a | 4.45±0.09 ^b | 0.034 |
| 4 | Minimum ewes mated (% of animals) | 45.73±4.14 ^a | 42.48±4.68 ^b | 0.026 |
| 5 | Minimum lambs reared (% of animals) | 30.48±1.58 ^a | 26.52±2.27 ^b | 0.015 |
| Fleece cleanliness | | | | |
| 1 | Very wet (% of animals) | 2.19±0.35 ^a | 3.47±0.48 ^b | 0.011 |
| 2 | Filthy (% of animals) | 0.14±0.08 ^a | 1.11±0.25 ^b | 0.000 |

Mean values with different superscripts (a, b) within the row differ significantly ($P < 0.05$)

4. CONCLUSION

By comparing the results of the current study with the intensive farming, we may draw the conclusion that the general welfare of sheep raised in extensive farming needs to be enhanced. The poor managerial practices result in prevalence of welfare issues and these issues are more common in sheep farms that are extensively managed.

In addition to disease outbreaks, sheep loss can occasionally be attributed to predation in ranges next to forest areas, where they are extensively grazed. Good management practices can overcome the overall welfare risks identified during the study.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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ANNEXURE

• **Background Information**

Assessor Name:

| Particulars | Intensive (n=20) | Extensive (n=20) |
|---------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Farm owner name | | |
| Type of herd | | |
| Herd location | | |
| No. of sheep in the herd | | |
| Total time of observation | | |
| Weather condition | | |
| Date | | |
| Place | | |

• **First Level Group Welfare Assessment Recording Sheet**

| Particulars | Intensive (n=20) | Extensive (n=20) |
|------------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Abnormal behaviour | | |
| Stereotypy (% of animals) | | |
| Panting | | |
| Normal respiration (% of animals) | | |
| Mild heat stress (% of animals) | | |
| Panting (% of animals) | | |
| Lamb mortality | | |
| a) Lambing records available | | |
| • Lambs born alive (% of animals) | | |
| • Lambs born dead (% of animals) | | |
| • Losses to weaning (% of animals) | | |
| b) Minimal records available | | |
| • Minimum ewes mated (% of animals) | | |
| • Minimum lambs reared (% of animals) | | |
| Fleece cleanliness | | |
| Clean and dry (% of animals) | | |
| Dry or just a little damp (% of animals) | | |
| Very damp/wet (% of animals) | | |
| Very wet (% of animals) | | |
| Filthy (% of animals) | | |

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Peer-review history:
 The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
<https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/113512>