

Abnormal behaviour and posture amongst horses transported long distances across the EU for slaughter*Hannah Westen**World Horse Welfare, United Kingdom; hannahwesten@worldhorsecelfare.org*

Welfare problems in horses transported long distances across the EU for slaughter have been well documented by NGOs. Over the past decades evidence suggests that the incidence of severe injuries and disease has reduced considerably on the main route across Europe. However, field observations undertaken at rest stops have, for many years, recorded behavioural and postural abnormalities amongst these horses, posing significant challenges with regards to welfare assessment. Although the literature suggests that many of these behaviours or postures are indicative of pain, discomfort or stress (e.g. weight-shifting, pointing), there are others as yet unrecognised in the scientific literature, whose relevance or value as animal-based welfare measures are not known. Where behaviours or postures have been identified as being indicative of a problem, assessment is largely subjective. Development of tools such as the facial grimace scale for horses (HGS), have helped lend a degree of objectivity to assessments, allowing collection of quantitative data, but the reliability of such tools in different pain scenarios, particularly chronic pain, is still under investigation. Determination of aetiological factors and subsequent steps to mitigate is complicated not only by a lack of understanding of the behaviours and postures observed but also by the high degree of heterogeneity seen in the sample population and transport conditions. Furthermore, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of personnel working in the trade are likely to be influenced by previous experiences, which may be particularly relevant when considering the relative subtlety of some behavioural or postural indicators when compared to more overt welfare problems, such as broken limbs, seen more commonly in the past. Further multi-disciplinary research is required to identify, describe and quantify relevant behavioural and postural indicators, ascertain potential causes or contributing factors and devise feasible solutions that will lead to widespread welfare improvements.