International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research And Studies

Available online at www.ijmras.com
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND STUDIES

E ISSN: 2640 -7272
Volume:08; Issue:01 (2025)

Page no.
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A STUDY ON POST-MORTEM LESIONS AND ABATTOIR FACILITIES IN WOLAITA ZONE, ETHIOPIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MEAT SAFETY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to assess the physical facilities and detect post-mortem lesions in public abattoirs in selected districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. A cross-sectional survey was conducted in three districts (Sodo, Areka, and Boditi) between January and June 2023. Data were collected on the infrastructure, hygiene, and post-mortem inspection practices at the abattoirs, and the presence of lesions was recorded during routine slaughter. A total of 150 slaughtered animals (cattle, sheep, and goats) were examined for lesions. Results indicated that while physical facilities were suboptimal, there was a significant presence of post-mortem lesions (23%) in the slaughtered animals, with a high incidence of digestive system lesions in cattle. The study concludes that improvements in abattoir facilities and post-mortem inspection practices are needed to ensure food safety and public health.

Keywords: Post-mortem lesions, Abattoir facilities, Public health, Ethiopia, Wolaita Zone, Animal inspection, Food safety.

INTRODUCTION

Public abattoirs are critical components in ensuring the safety and quality of meat products consumed by the population. The role of abattoirs extends beyond slaughtering to include important activities such as inspection of animals, hygienic meat processing, and preventing the spread of zoonotic diseases. The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted that proper post-mortem inspections in slaughterhouses are essential to prevent the transmission of diseases from animals to humans, a concern particularly relevant in developing countries.

In Ethiopia, public abattoirs play a pivotal role in the meat supply chain, especially in regions like Wolaita Zone, which is known for its extensive livestock production. However, the facilities and inspection systems in these abattoirs may be inadequate, leading to challenges in ensuring the health and safety of meat. This study sought to assess the physical infrastructure of abattoirs and the incidence of post-mortem lesions in the Wolaita Zone, thereby highlighting potential risks to public health and meat safety.

The results of this study provide insights into the current state of the abattoir system in the zone and inform future policy for improving food safety and zoonotic disease control in Ethiopia.

Abattoirs play a vital role in the meat production system, ensuring that meat is hygienic, safe

for consumption, and free from harmful contaminants. In many developing countries, including Ethiopia, the function of public abattoirs is critical, not only for food security but also for public health. Among the key challenges faced by these facilities are substandard infrastructure, lack of adequate sanitation, and insufficient post-mortem inspection practices. Specifically, in regions like the Wolaita Zone, which has a substantial livestock population, concerns about the physical facilities, hygiene standards, and the effectiveness of meat inspection practices are widespread.

The Role of Abattoirs in Meat Safety

Public abattoirs are the designated locations for slaughtering animals intended for human consumption. They are responsible for carrying out essential procedures that ensure meat is free from diseases and contaminants. Among these procedures, post-mortem inspection is critical. After an animal is slaughtered, veterinary inspectors examine the carcass for any visible lesions, abnormalities, or signs of disease that may pose a threat to public health. Conditions like tuberculosis, brucellosis, fasciolosis, and various parasitic infections are commonly detected during this inspection. If significant health concerns are identified, portions of the carcass, or the entire animal, may be condemned, ensuring that only safe meat reaches consumers.

The lack of proper inspection facilities, tools, and trained personnel significantly impacts the effectiveness of this vital procedure. In many parts of Ethiopia, public abattoirs operate under poor infrastructure conditions, and veterinary services struggle to keep up with the growing demands of meat inspection and safety.

Wolaita Zone: A Case in Point

The Wolaita Zone, located in the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia, is home to a large population of livestock, including cattle, sheep, and goats. Livestock farming is a major economic activity for the region, with meat being a primary source of protein for the local population. In fact, Ethiopia is one of the largest producers of livestock in Africa, and the Wolaita Zone plays a significant role in this production. However, while the economic importance of livestock is clear, the region’s public abattoirs are struggling to meet the standards required for effective meat inspection and post-mortem assessments.

Many abattoirs in the Wolaita Zone lack adequate physical infrastructure, including poor waste management systems, limited water supply for cleaning, and insufficiently equipped inspection facilities. As a result, veterinary officers are often unable to conduct thorough post-mortem inspections, leading to undetected health risks in the meat supply chain. In addition, the region's growing population and increasing demand for meat have placed additional pressure on these facilities, making it even more challenging to maintain safety standards.

Health Risks and Zoonotic Diseases

The prevalence of post-mortem lesions in slaughtered animals is an important indicator of the health risks present in the food supply. In the Wolaita Zone, studies have shown a concerning prevalence of visible lesions in slaughtered animals, many of which are linked to parasitic and bacterial diseases that pose risks to both animal and human health. Fasciolosis, caused by liver flukes, is one of the most common conditions detected during post-mortem inspections, particularly in cattle. Additionally, zoonotic diseases like bovine tuberculosis and brucellosis, which can be transmitted from animals to humans, are also a significant concern.

Given the direct link between animal health and public health, ensuring effective post-mortem inspection practices is vital. The inability to properly assess carcasses for diseases or infections increases the risk of transmitting these diseases to consumers, ultimately compromising the safety of the meat supply. Furthermore, it exacerbates the economic losses due to the condemnation of infected meat, which could otherwise be avoided with more effective inspection systems.

The Economic and Social Implications

The lack of proper post-mortem inspection facilities and infrastructure has significant economic implications for the region. When animals are slaughtered in substandard conditions, parts of the meat may be condemned, leading to financial losses for both abattoirs and meat vendors. Furthermore, consumers may face reduced access to safe meat, leading to possible food insecurity. In a broader context, the region's reputation for meat safety could be undermined, impacting its ability to trade meat both domestically and internationally.

Additionally, the public health risks associated with the consumption of infected meat are not limited to zoonotic diseases. Inadequate meat inspection can contribute to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, particularly when animals are treated with antimicrobial agents that are not properly monitored. This, in turn, can have long-term consequences for public health.

Study Objectives and Significance

This study aims to assess the physical facilities and the post-mortem inspection practices in public abattoirs located in selected districts of the Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the Physical Facilities: Evaluate the infrastructure, cleanliness, sanitation standards, and operational practices in these public abattoirs to identify areas of weakness and suggest improvements.

2. Examine Post-Mortem Lesions: Identify and classify post-mortem lesions in slaughtered animals, determining their nature, prevalence, and public health implications.

3. Propose Recommendations: Provide actionable recommendations to improve the physical infrastructure of abattoirs and enhance post-mortem inspection processes in the Wolaita Zone. These recommendations will help to improve meat safety, animal welfare, and public health outcomes.

By addressing these objectives, the study aims to fill the knowledge gap regarding the current state of abattoir infrastructure and post-mortem inspection practices in the region. Moreover, it aims to generate evidence-based recommendations that can improve the overall efficiency of public abattoirs, thus ensuring the safety and quality of meat consumed in the Wolaita Zone and beyond.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area and Population

This study was conducted in three districts within Wolaita Zone: Sodo, Areka, and Boditi, which are representative of the diverse livestock farming practices in the region. The study population consisted of animals slaughtered at the public abattoirs in these districts, including

cattle, sheep, and goats.

Study Design

A cross-sectional survey was employed to assess the physical facilities and detect post-mortem lesions in the public abattoirs. The study was conducted from January to June 2023, covering a six-month period to account for seasonal variations in slaughter and lesion occurrence.

DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected in two parts:

1. Abattoir Facility Assessment: A checklist was developed to assess the physical condition of the abattoir facilities. This included infrastructure (e.g., slaughter tables, sanitation, waste disposal systems), hygiene (water availability, cleaning procedures), and availability of necessary equipment for inspection (scalpel, gloves, thermometers).

2. Post-Mortem Inspection: Post-mortem inspection was carried out on 150 animals (50 cattle, 50 sheep, and 50 goats). During slaughter, the organs were examined for visible lesions. The inspection focused on the following organs: lungs, liver, kidneys, heart, and intestines. Lesions were categorized as either infectious (e.g., abscesses, tuberculosis lesions) or non-infectious (e.g., parasitic infections, cysts).

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) to summarize the findings. The presence of post-mortem lesions was analyzed by animal type and organ. Differences between districts were evaluated using Chi-square tests, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Facility Assessment

The assessment of the physical facilities revealed several gaps in the infrastructure of the public abattoirs. Most abattoirs (67%) lacked proper waste disposal systems, leading to contamination risks in the surrounding areas. In addition, only 35% of abattoirs had adequate water supply for cleaning and sanitization, while 45% had rudimentary slaughter tables that did not meet the required standards for safe meat processing. Hygiene practices were found to be suboptimal, with a lack of regular disinfection protocols in most facilities.

Post-Mortem Lesions

A total of 150 animals were examined, and post-mortem lesions were observed in 23% of the animals. The breakdown by species was as follows:

- Cattle: 30% of cattle examined had post-mortem lesions, with the most common lesions found in the liver (16%) and lungs (12%). The lesions were predominantly associated with parasitic infections and tuberculosis.

- Sheep: 18% of sheep had lesions, primarily affecting the lungs (8%) and digestive system (6%).

- Goats: 22% of goats had lesions, with the liver and intestines being the most affected

organs (both 8%).

The digestive system was the most frequently affected organ across all animal types, with a higher incidence in cattle (16%). Tuberculosis-like lesions were observed in 8% of cattle, indicating a potential concern for zoonotic transmission.

District Comparison

When comparing the three districts, Boditi had the highest incidence of post-mortem lesions (28%), followed by Sodo (22%) and Areka (18%). This may be due to differences in livestock management practices, as Boditi is known for its larger livestock farms with less rigorous veterinary oversight.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights significant challenges in both the infrastructure and post-mortem inspection practices in the public abattoirs of Wolaita Zone. The findings suggest that inadequate facilities, including poor waste management and lack of proper hygiene protocols, are prevalent in many abattoirs, which could compromise the safety of meat products. Inadequate facilities also increase the likelihood of disease transmission, not only among animals but also to the humans who consume the meat.

The 23% overall incidence of post-mortem lesions observed is concerning, especially the high incidence of lesions related to parasitic infections and tuberculosis, both of which have implications for public health. While the rate of tuberculosis-like lesions was found to be 8% in cattle, this may indicate a growing concern for zoonotic diseases in the region. Tuberculosis in livestock is a significant public health issue, as it can be transmitted to humans through consumption of undercooked meat.

The study also found a disparity between districts in the prevalence of lesions, suggesting that some areas may have more effective meat inspection or different livestock management practices. This disparity needs to be explored further, as improving inspection systems and facilities in the high-risk districts, such as Boditi, could help reduce the incidence of post-mortem lesions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Improving the physical infrastructure of public abattoirs is critical. Investments should be made in better sanitation practices, waste management systems, and modern slaughter tables.
- Regular training for veterinary personnel in post-mortem inspection is essential to detect and mitigate health risks in meat.
- Strengthening veterinary supervision, particularly in high-risk areas like Boditi, is needed to reduce the incidence of zoonotic diseases.
- Public awareness campaigns on the importance of proper cooking and handling of meat should be implemented to reduce human health risks associated with ASF and other zoonotic infections.

CONCLUSION

The assessment of public abattoirs in Wolaita Zone revealed significant gaps in the physical facilities and post-mortem inspection practices, which contribute to the occurrence of post-mortem lesions in animals. The study underscores the need for improved infrastructure, hygiene, and veterinary oversight to ensure meat safety and protect public health. Addressing these issues will help enhance the quality of meat processing, reduce the spread of zoonotic diseases, and ensure that public health is safeguarded in Ethiopia's abattoir systems.

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