

Finnish female veterinary meat inspectors - managing in the working environment

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SUMMARY: A questionnaire was mailed to all Finnish veterinary meat inspectors. According to the results both female and male veterinary meat inspectors of Finland had occasional hygiene-related disagreements with the management of the slaughterhouse. According to female respondents the hygiene-related legislation was inadequate. Women experienced more stress because of their work than men, and their working environment as less safe. In addition women less often than men felt that they had sufficient knowledge and capability to influence hygiene practices. The differences in opinions between the female and male veterinary meat inspectors can be partly explained by higher level of education of the latter. The longer working periods of the male inspectors may also contribute to their greater sense of professional competence.

INTRODUCTION: The trend of women more and more often entering the working world earlier mostly occupied by men is worldwide. In Finland one of the fields in which this course of development has been most common is veterinary medicine. According to CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE OF FINLAND (1988 and 1989) the number of new female veterinary students has been about 85 %. Since the majority of new veterinarians and veterinary students in Finland are women it can be expected that similarly the majority of veterinary meat inspectors in the near future will be women. According to Finnish meat inspection legislation, veterinary meat inspectors also have responsibility for the general hygiene of the slaughterhouse. The food and slaughterhouse industry in Finland has not so far been occupied by women as veterinary medicine has. The percentage of female students at the Department of Meat Technology of Helsinki University has varied from 29 to 40% in recent years (CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE OF FINLAND, 1988 and 1989). The female veterinary meat inspectors have a working environment dominated by men. In this situation it is necessary to ascertain whether female veterinary inspectors feel they are able to perform their job at the slaughterhouses. The purpose of this study was to clarify how female and the male veterinary meat inspectors of Finland manage the task of hygienic control of the slaughterhouses and whether there are any differences between women and men.

MATERIALS and METHODS: A questionnaire was mailed to all Finnish veterinary inspectors. Out of 50 inspectors of red meat, 41 (84%) responded. Among the respondents were 18 men, 22 women and one whose gender remained unknown. The questionnaires were sent to the veterinary meat inspectors in May of 1990. A pilot survey was carried out before this. The respondents in the pilot survey were four veterinarians, of whom one worked in a poultry slaughterhouse and three had earlier worked as veterinary inspectors of red meat.

Most of the questions were provided with fixed-answer alternatives, but the respondents also had the possibility of commenting or answering directly. Most of the alternatives ranged from one to five, one standing for "very much", two "a great deal", three "some", four "hardly any" and five "not at all". Most of the results are shown as percentages. Some means on the above scale are also shown. The responses were analyzed with the SPSS- Program (Statistical Procedures for Scientific Studies, SPSS). The significant differences of the means were tested by Student's t-test (SPSS).

RESULTS and DISCUSSION: The female veterinary respondents were significantly ($p < 0.05$) younger than the male respondents; 59 % were under 40, and many of the women, (45%) had graduated after 1980. Of the men 11% were under 40 and 6% had graduated after 1980. The high number of women who have graduated since 1980 means that after some years the majority of meat inspectors of Finland are obviously going to be women trained during this or the previous decade. We believe that because of this difference in education women may have stricter opinions regarding hygiene standards than men.

Men had more post graduate degrees in food hygiene (72%) and they more often had a specialization degree in meat processing and meat hygiene (23%) than women. Of the women, 59% had a post graduate degree in food hygiene and 14% had a specialization degree in meat processing and meat hygiene. The differences concerning post graduate degrees were not significant. Scientific publishing activity was equal among women and men (23%). Non-scientific publishing was significantly ($p < 0.05$) more common among the men (50%) than among the women (23%).

Out of 41 respondents, 32 (78%) had also had a previous job as meat inspectors at a slaughterhouse. Of these 32, 18 were female inspectors, 13 male inspectors and one's gender could not be determined. The career development of these veterinary inspectors was different between men and women. Men had changed positions or tasks more often than women. The previous job had been similar to the present one among the majority of women (61%), and among 44% of men. None of the above differences was statistically significant. The duration of the previous job had been significantly longer ($p < 0.05$) among men than among women. 57 % of the men and 24 % of women had worked for more than three years.

The present job was more often permanent among men than among women (Table 1). 82% of women and 95% of men had a permanent job. Women more often had a full time job than men. The duration of the present employment was longer among men. 78% of men and 55% of women had worked in the same place for more than three years. These differences concerning the present job were not significant between women and men.

Table 1. Present position and its duration of Finnish veterinary meat inspectors by sex

n ^a	The present position				Duration	
	Permanent	Temporary	Full time	Part time	< 3 years	> 3 years
Women 22	82% ^b (18) ^a	18% (4)	95% (21)	5% (1)	45% (10)	55% (12)
Men 18	95% (17)	0% (0)	89% (16)	11% (2)	22% (4)	78% (14)
All 41	88% (36)	10% (4)	90% (37)	10% (4)	37% (15)	63% (26)

^a Number of respondents.

^b Percentage of respondents.

Women reported significantly more stress because of their work (3.1) than men (3.8) ($p < 0.05$). The safety of the working place was considered inadequate (3.4) by women, and satisfactory (2.9) by men. This difference in opinions was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) (Table 2).

Table 2. Stress and safety of the work environment experienced by Finnish veterinary meat inspectors by sex

	n ^a	Stress	Safety
Women	22	3.1 ± 0.9 ^b	3.4 ± 0.6 ^c
Men	18	3.8 ± 1.2	2.9 ± 0.7
All	41	3.4 ± 1.1	3.2 ± 0.7

^a Number of respondents.

^b Mean ± standard deviation on a scale 1 = very much, 2 = a lot, 3 = some, 4 = very little, 5 = not at all.

^c Mean ± standard deviation on a scale 1 = very well, 2 = well, 3 = enough, 4 = very little, 5 = not at all safe.

Table 3. Hygiene-related knowledge and capability to influence on slaughterhouse hygiene experienced by Finnish veterinary meat inspectors by sex

	n ^a	Knowledge	Capability
Women	22	2.3 ± 0.6 ^b	3.2 ± 0.7 ^b
Men	18	1.6 ± 0.5	2.6 ± 0.6
All	41	2.0 ± 0.7	3.0 ± 0.7

^a Number of respondents

^b Mean ± standard deviation on a scale 1 = very much, 2 = a great deal of, 3 = satisfactorily, 4 = some, 5 = hardly any

Table 3 shows the extent to which the meat inspectors themselves felt they had the necessary knowledge and the ability to influence the hygiene of the slaughterhouse. Females considered their knowledge concerning hygiene lesser (2.3) than males (1.6). Women also found their ability to influence hygiene (3.2) less than men (2.7). Both the above differences are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4 shows how often respondents had hygiene-related disagreements with the management of the slaughterhouse. Both women (3.3) and (3.1) men had some disagreements with the management. Disagreements with the health authorities occurred more rarely.

Table 4. Disagreements by Finnish veterinary inspectors with management and with the authorities, by sex

Disagreements	Women (22) ^a	Men (18)	All (41)
With management	3.3 ± 0.9 (20)	3.1 ± 1.1 (18)	3.2 ± 1.0 (39)
With authorities	3.9 ± 1.0 (22)	3.8 ± 1.0 (18)	3.9 ± 1.0 (41)

^a Number of respondents.

^b Mean ± standard deviation on a scale 1 = always, 2 = often, 3 = occasionally, 4 = seldom, 5 = never

Table 5. Attempts to settle disagreements with management by consultations with different authorities and the help obtained by them according to Finnish veterinary inspectors by sex

Authority	Women (22) ^a	Men (18)	All (41)
Municipal consultations	4.0± 1.1 ^b (20)	4.0± 0.9 (16)	4.0± 1.0 (37)
help	3.4± 1.0 (14)	3.1± 1.3 (11)	3.3± 1.2 (26)
Administrative district consultations	3.5± 1.1 (20)	3.7± 1.0 (16)	3.6± 1.0 (37)
help	3.0± 1.1 (14)	2.8± 1.1 (13)	2.9± 1.1 (28)
Governmental consultations	3.0± 0.8 (20)	3.0± 1.0 (16)	2.9± 1.0 (37)
help	2.8± 1.1 (17)	2.1± 1.1 (16)	2.4± 1.2 (34)

^a Number of respondents.

^b Mean ± standard deviation on a scale 1= always, 2= often, 3= occasionally, 4= seldom, 5= never

The consultation with the government health authorities about disagreements with the management was the most common form of action. The results do not reveal significant differences between men and women in their attitudes towards health authorities or the slaughterhouse management (Table 5). The veterinary inspectors were asked to compare the knowledge and the capability of authorities to influence the hygiene of the slaughterhouses. According to the responses they found the highest authority to also have the most knowledge and hygiene influence.

Women reported inadequate regulations concerning hygiene (3.6) significantly more often than men (2.9) ($p < 0.05$). According to all the respondents the regulations concerning hygiene supported the work of the meat inspectors considerably. Both women and men considered their work to be important.

The greatest difference between men and women was found in their attitude towards their own capabilities and resources. Both knowledge of hygiene and possibilities of influencing slaughterhouse hygiene were considered greater among men than among women. Women also reported more stress because of their work than men. This may be explained by the difference in the post-graduate training. Because of their more extensive post-degree education, men may feel themselves to be experts. Women would like to have more regulations to support their work, because they do not consider themselves to be sufficiently authoritative. However, we can ask the question whether this also reflects to the traditional cultural roles of men and women.

CONCLUSIONS: Finnish male veterinary inspectors had more extensive post-graduate education than female veterinary inspectors. Men felt they had more capability and knowledge concerning hygiene than women. Women experienced greater work-related stress and thus felt their working place to be less safe than men did.

REFERENCES: CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE OF FINLAND (1988): Education and research. N:o 16. Helsinki. 28 pages.
CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE OF FINLAND (1989): Education and research. N:o 20. Helsinki. 25 pages.