

## **BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN HALAL SLAUGHTER AND ANIMAL WELFARE**

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**Abstract – The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceived tension between halal meat production requirements and animal welfare concerns. An open access survey was sent online to a variety of Muslim groups. Fifty usable completed surveys were collected and the data trends were examined. The small sample size used in this survey means that conclusions are meant to be used as preliminary. The general trend among respondents was that they had an increasing awareness of both halal production and animal welfare. Respondents who were more insistent that their meat be slaughtered as halal also tended to have an increased desire for better animal welfare. In conclusion, it seems very feasible that improvements in animal welfare can come from within the halal meat industry with increased education and training given popular opinion among Muslims.**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Halal food production is growing rapidly globally (1). The reasons for rapid industry growth are two-fold: there is a rapidly expanding Muslim population which inherently produces a larger market, and this also creates a consumer base with the buying power to demand products that more closely meet their desires. This second trend is most noticeable in countries with a growing Muslim minority. No longer do Muslims feel that they should have to choose between procuring live animals for their own slaughter versus sacrificing their religious standards to buy store bought meat. As with any rapidly growing industry, problems have arisen with rapid expansion (2). The halal food industry has become a tangled web of overlapping and conflicting standards that are difficult for both consumers and producers to navigate. Some countries such as Malaysia have government mandates standards for halal labeling, while others countries have left it up to private certification bodies to implement

standards. While the diverse and non-hierarchical nature of Islam has made the creation of a single standard for halal difficult, global scholarly meetings have tried to reach agreements on key issues (3). One result of the struggle to obtain a global agreement on what it means for processes and products to be halal is that what it means to be halal in spirit has been often left out of the equation (4). This struggle has left room for some beyond the Muslim community to suggest that in the pursuit of religiously correct meat, Muslims have been unwilling to pursue improved animal welfare. It is the hypothesis of this paper that Muslims do not see themselves as having to choose religion over animal welfare but tend to think of the issues separate but positively correlated.

### **II. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The data for this paper come from an internet survey of American Muslims of a variety of ages, races, and geographic locations conducted between March 14th and March 28th, 2014. The surveys were filled out anonymously via a SurveyMonkey© link that was sent out to a number of Muslim-oriented interest groups identified via Facebook and Email list serves. All responses were kept anonymous. Of the 50 respondents, 48 individuals self-identified as Muslim while the remaining two did not answer the question. Two surveys were eliminated from the results because they refused to give permission for the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) to use the survey results. No specific demographic information was collected about the respondents. All questions were single answer multiple choice. The following is a list of questions that was asked and the order in which they were asked.

1. Do you consider yourself to be a Muslim?

2. May the Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America make use of your survey responses?
3. Which of the following choices best describes your meat type and source?
4. How often do you eat meat?
5. What is your biggest concern when buying meat?
6. In the last 5 years has your awareness of your Halal meat source changed?
7. In the last 5 years has your awareness of animal welfare changed?
8. Will you eat meat at a restaurant that does not serve specifically Halal meat?
9. Do you know if the meat you eat comes from animals that were stunned before slaughter?
10. What do you believe about Halal meat and animal welfare?

Respondents who did not respond to question two or responded negatively to question one or two were considered useable and thus not included in the results. This paper's goal is to examine the viewpoint of self-identified Muslims and permission to use responses was necessary given how the surveys were conducted. After the above surveys were removed 50 remained.

There was no statistical significance calculated as this survey was intended to be preliminary and to be used primarily to gage the general level of engagement of the Muslim community with regards to animal welfare. No percentage responding calculation was possible because the total number of people who received the survey could not be determined.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the survey reported here have been selected as most relevant to the goals of this paper. The most important finding of the survey was that 61% of respondents are more concerned about animal welfare today than they were 5 years ago. This is much higher than the 48% that are more concerned about their halal meat source than they were five years ago. Figures 1 and 2 show the respondents changes in

the perception of animal welfare and halal meat source.

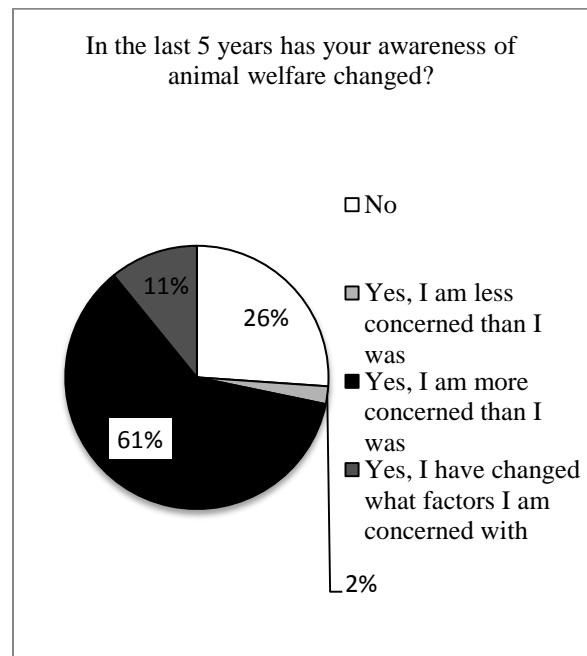


Figure 1. Question #7

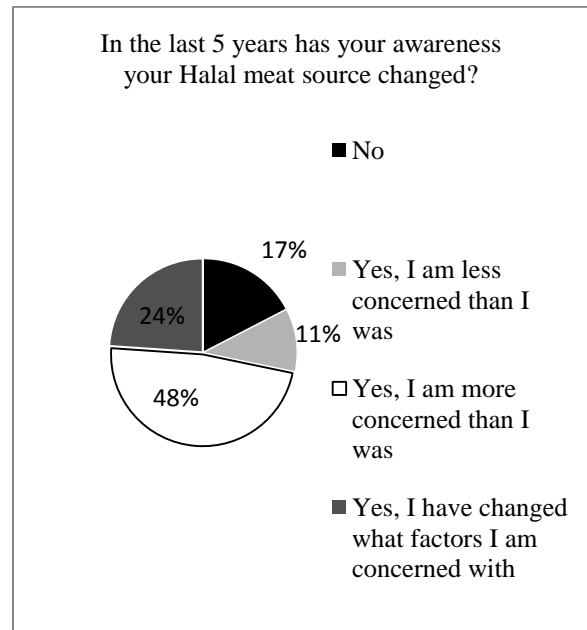


Figure 2. Question #6

Of the respondents that had increased concern as to their meat source, 71% had increased concerns about animal welfare as shown in Figure 3. This is compared to 61% of the general

survey population. Indicating that persons who are more concerned about their meat meeting Halal standard are also more concerned about improving animal welfare.

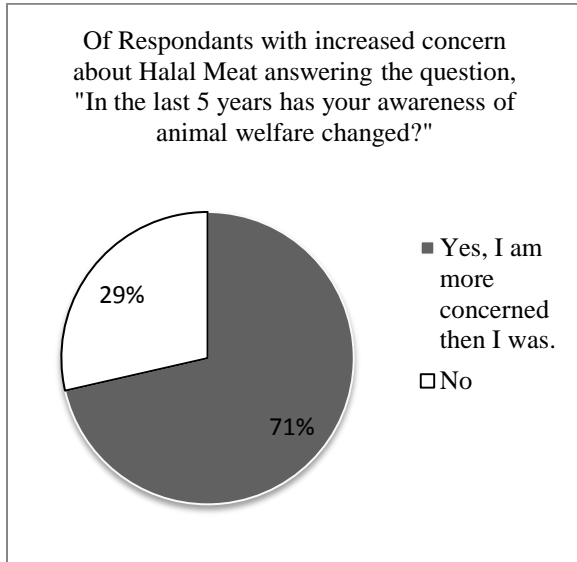


Figure 3. Comparison of increased halal concern with animal welfare.

Of the survey population, only 2% of respondents felt that conventionally slaughter animals have better welfare then halal slaughter animals. The majority, 67%, felt that halal slaughtered animals have better welfare. This data is meant only to examine consumer perception and not as a statement of IFANCA's belief of the current state of animal welfare. The majority of the respondents did not necessarily know much about either the halal or secular slaughter industry but, as such, they are an important marker of consumer perception.

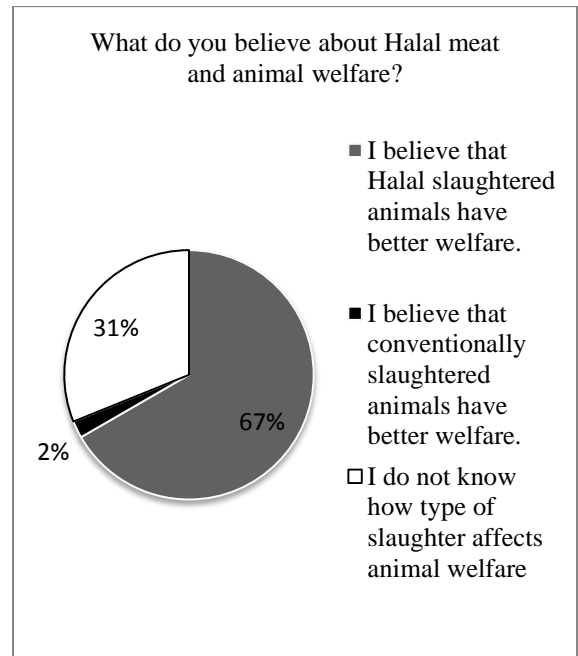


Figure 4. Question #10

The remainder of the questions in the survey was designed to distract from the main purpose of the survey, i.e., to try to prevent biased responses by those who choose to take the survey, especially as desire to give the "correct" answer.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This paper suggests a need for a change of focus within the halal meat production industry with regards to animal welfare. Recently there has been a focus by some individuals and groups outside the industry on pointing out what is wrong with the welfare of animals within the halal slaughter industry. While the focus within the industry has been on defending current practices. The beliefs of American Muslims included in this survey suggest that the community does support better animal welfare. It should be possible through scientifically-based research, education and cooperative efforts to improve the animal welfare of halal slaughter. With good faith, this should be able to occur without antagonism or legislation as the interest in improved animal welfare seems to meet the desires of both the halal meat industry and of the Muslim consumer population. This parallels the

current improvements in animal welfare being made throughout animal agriculture in the United States and the world. This can be done if continued improvements in science based-animal welfare are made a priority within the halal meat industry. There is also a need for further research into what constitutes good animal welfare for halal slaughter and what the best means to provide science based animal welfare training to the consuming public. More importantly there needs to be more focus on the slaughter system as a whole rather than just on the moment of slaughter.

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