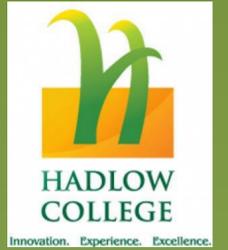




Is peer pressure the greatest influence on the use of safety equipment by junior riders

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Introduction

Horse riding is a dangerous sport and all those that participate accept that at some point they may be injured in some way. The best way to reduce the occurrences of injury is to implement prevention strategies. (BETA, 2014)

In 2011 there were 4 fatalities and 24 serious injuries amongst the 133 reported horse rider casualties on public highways of the UK (DfT, 2012). This reduced in 2012 according to figures published by the British Horse Society (BHS, 2014) who reported two fatalities and 12 severe rider injuries.

The most easily influenced group of society is the 'junior' population. Those under 25 years of age are constantly looking to parents teachers and their peers for examples of acceptable behaviour, morals and ethics (Stautz and Cooper, 2014)

The use of riding hats in the UK is only covered by The Highway Code and The Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Act 1990, which both state that those under 14 years of age must wear the correct standard of safety hat and that it must be fastened correctly when riding horses on the road.

The study aimed to discover whether or not the use of safety equipment by junior riders is influenced by peer pressure.

Materials and Method

Inline with studies in to the influences of cycle helmet use, this study used a questionnaire, which was publicised to a wide audience of junior riders and their parent / guardians for completion. Quantitative and qualitative questions were used to enable the responder to give an honest account of their considerations when selecting safety equipment to use for horse riding activities (Joinson *et al*, 2007)

The researcher attempted to contact as many organisations, riding clubs and online groups that had relevant membership groups and requested assistance promoting completion of the survey

Data was exported to excel spread sheets for analysis and inclusion within this study. Chi Squared goodness of fit statistical analysis is used to measure the results of questions regarding the considerations when selecting riding hats and body protectors, in order to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

Results

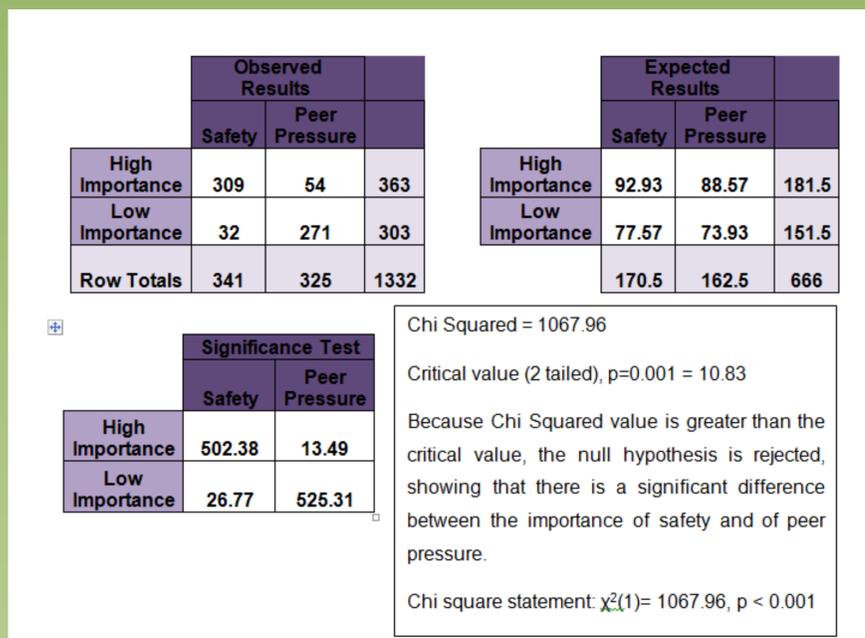


Figure 1: Chi Squared results for questions relating to peer pressure.

Fig 2: Answers were collated and the first activity stated was measured. Hacking is by far the most popular activity (68%). Jumping (13%), Dressage (5%), Eventing (5%) and Lessons (3%) were the next most common answers.

This may be why Hi Viz was reported as the most common Other piece of safety equipment worn in this study.



Discussion

Griffen *et al* (2002) states: "The prevention of death from a horse-related injury is synonymous with the prevention of head injury"

The findings of this study show that peer pressure is not the biggest influence on the use of either a riding hat or a body protector, but other papers disagree with these findings. For example, Fleming *et al* (2001) was able to report that peer pressure was a large influence on the use of riding hats among the 14-17 years age group, whilst Thompson *et al* (2002) and Lajunen and Rasanen (2001) and Fuentes *et al* (2010) all commented that the rate of wear was directly influenced by the helmet – wearing behaviours of peers and role-modelling adults.

99% of respondents in this study own a riding hat for use in everyday riding. Of those that participate in competition, 32% reported owning at least one more hat solely for competition use, despite the rates of use quoted in other studies being lower. (Fleming *et al*, 2001, Cuenca *et al* 2009, Evans *et al*, 2009 and Worley, 2010).

The number who had their hat fitted by a professional was 78%. Using poorly fitted riding hats will decrease effectiveness and may even increase injury (Farrington *et al* 2012). Other studies agree on the importance of having safety equipment fitted to ensure maximum effectiveness and Ceroni *et al* (2007), Bixby-Hammet (1992) and Shafu (1998) all point out that injury prevention is dependant not only on the use of PPE but also that it must fit and be secured correctly in order to be effective. It is encouraging that the rate of professional fitting quoted by respondents in this study was so high.

55% of respondents reported that they use a body protector for everyday riding. The rates varied from 17% who always wore one to 20% sometimes and 18% rarely, but this is a significant increase on the rates reported by Cuenca *et al* (2009).

Injury prevention was the most important reason given for wearing a body protector, followed by competition rules. As opposed to being influenced by peer pressure, the main reason for not wearing a body protector was given by 65% as comfort and the most important factor given for selecting a riding hat or body protector was its safety standard.

Research in to the use of protective equipment by military, police and emergency services by black *et al* (2005) can be related to the use of body protectors by equestrians: the same influences exist and comfort and efficiency are linked psychologically in the user.

Only 59% of those that used body protector stated that their body protector had been fitted by a qualified fitter. The reasons for this have only been recorded and further analysis of the free text answers given may provide more definitive reasoning, although preliminary collation seems to point towards a high level of second hand purchase being the reason for a lower rate of professional fitting.

If professional fitting became more common, usage rates of body protectors may increase due to increase comfort for the wearer.

As previously mentioned, further development of materials and functional design is essential; lighter materials may also prevent equestrian body protector wearers from suffering the ill effects associated with wearing body armour by the New Zealand police (Dempsey *et al*, 2013)

When asked to give details of any other safety equipment that the respondent used regularly when riding, the top three answers were Hi Viz, Gloves and Boots. This result may be linked to the high number of respondents reporting hacking as their main equestrian activity.

Conclusions

Peer pressure does not rate highly as an influence on use of PPE in this study, but its influence should not be ignored and indeed, brands will continue to attempt to exploit this as a method of encouraging purchase through sponsorship and advertising of their products.

Manufacturers should take note however of the importance of safety standards to junior riders and their parent / guardians and continue to push forward the improvement of these standards.

The wearers comfort is also of significant importance and links to the correct fitting of equipment and its effective ness as mentioned by Horsfall *et al* (2005).

The equine industry needs to consider the implications of reducing death and serious injury amongst those involved in riding horses and legislation to mandate the use of minimum standard riding hats, body protectors, boots etc. needs to be addressed.

Legislation may also benefit the whole equine industry by altering the social norms of practice when riding and handling horses.

It is encouraging to be able to report the use of Hi Viz amongst junior riders and this too should be considered for legislation at a minimum for those who ride on public highways, in line with the use of lights and reflectors by cyclists in the UK.

Future studies should approach not only riders, but owners / managers of livery yards and riding schools and also the parents / guardians to ascertain whether they have witnessed junior riders riding without riding hats, body protectors or boots etc.; the frequency and the steps taken to address the issue if any.

Linked to the already published research on death and serious injury prevention in the equine industry, future research may be able to influence the government on future legislation.

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