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

Nicolaa Jane Francis, Stuart Attwood and Jessica Berry

Hadlow College, Tonbridge, Kent, TN11 0AL

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, 2013). 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 (Staats 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 form 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

In line 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 (Jenison 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 spreadsheets for analysis and inclusion within this study. Chi squared goodness of fit statistical analysis was 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.

Discussion


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 Rasanei (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-modeling.

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 Cerroti et al (2007), Bixey-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 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 requirements. 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 increased 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.

Results

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

Figure 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 (8%) were the next most common activities. This may be why Hi Viz was reported as the most common Other piece of safety equipment worn in this study.

References