

## **Discipline. Is this the most influential factor on body image in female riders?**

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## INTRODUCTION:

Research available for female athlete's body image perceptions within equine sport is limited. It has previously been found that the majority of female riders considered a smaller body image as 'ideal' with the majority identifying themselves as larger than this 'ideal'.

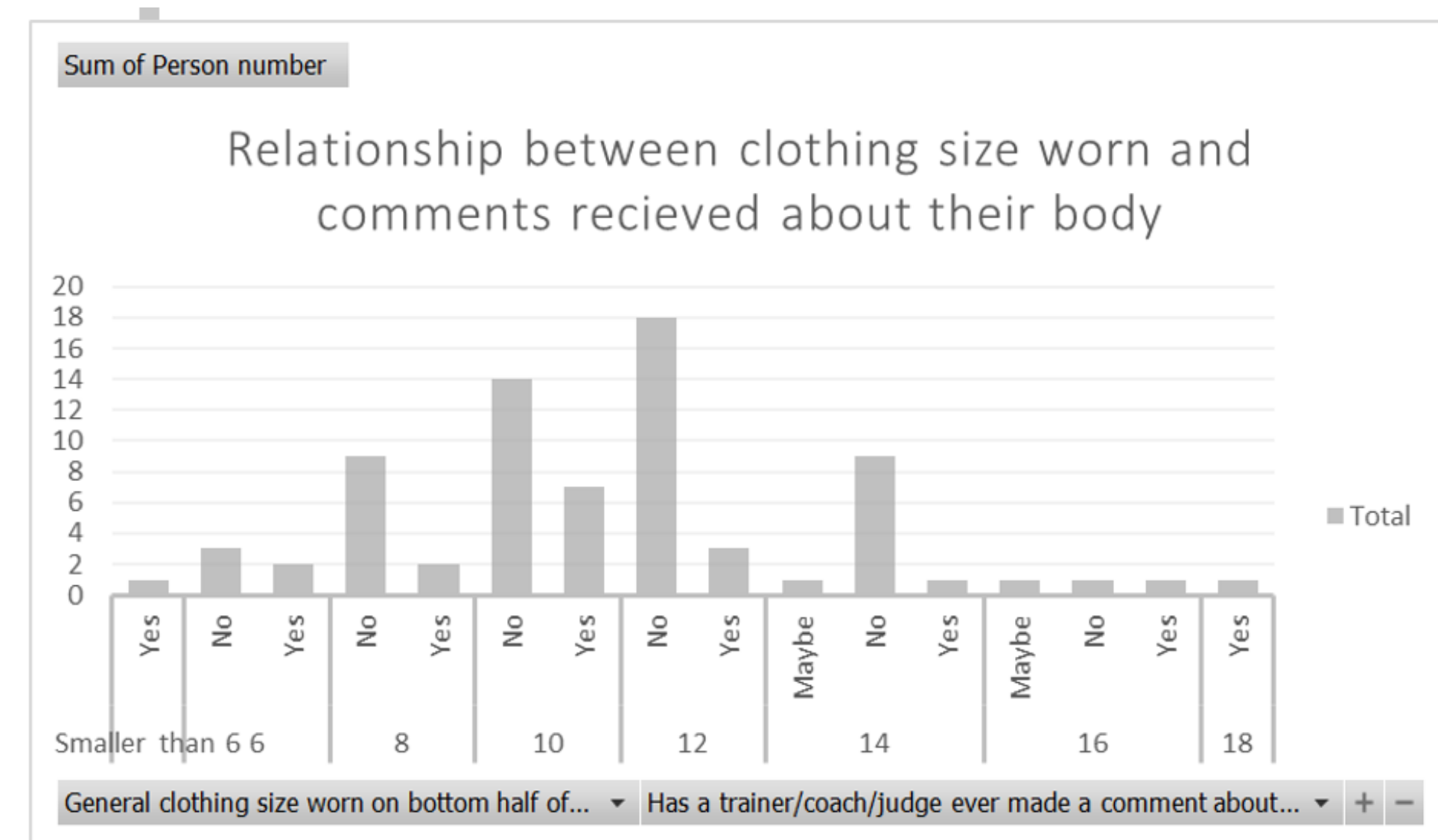
This study aimed to investigate and identify whether there was a present relationship between discipline and body image perception, which has not been widely explored at this time.

**METHOD** Following institutional ethical approval, a 25 question survey, created in Microsoft Forms, was distributed across the social media platform Facebook. Inclusion criteria was limited to over 18s, participating in an equine discipline at any level in order to collect reliable data.

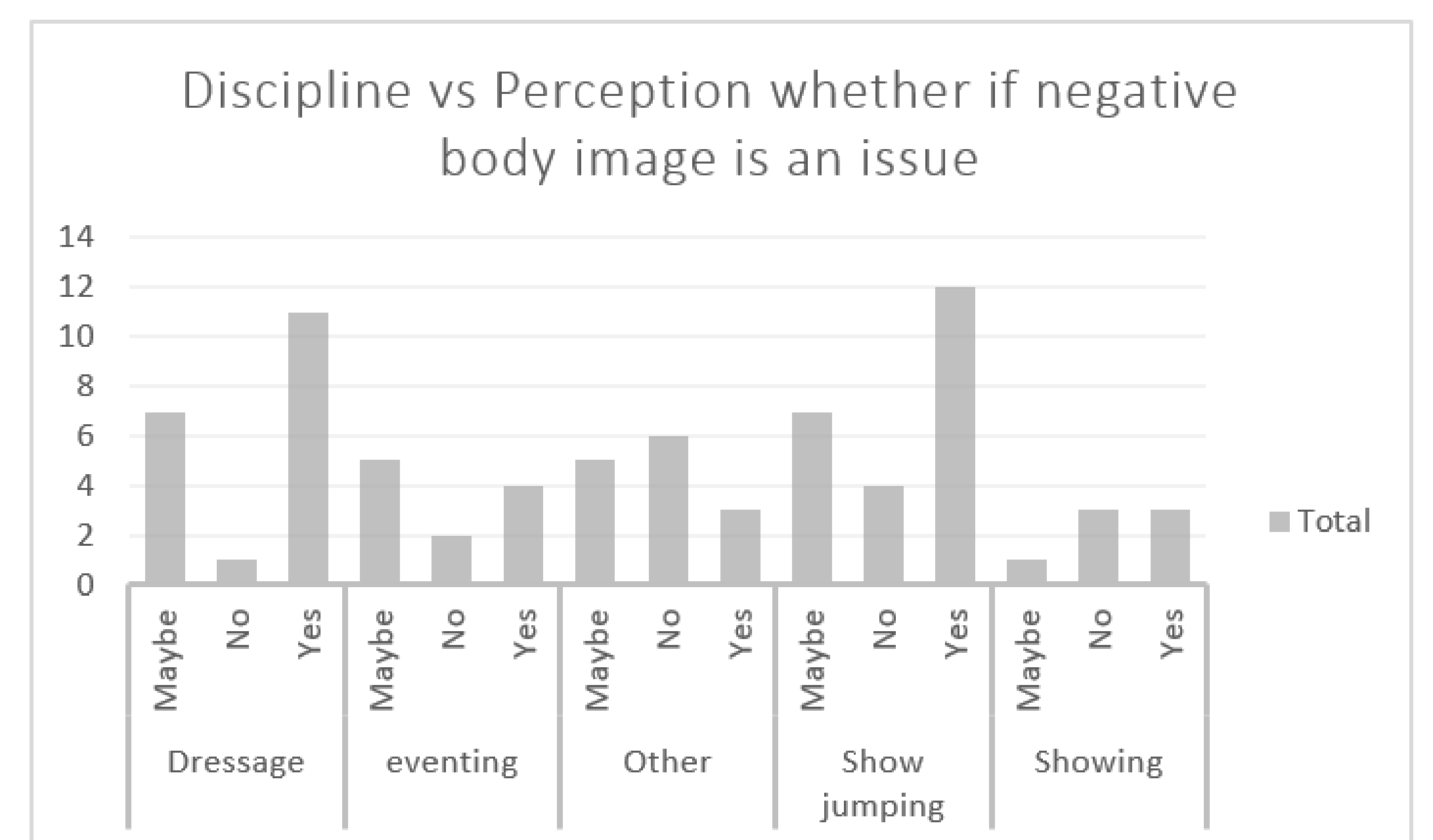
Pearsons' Chi-squared ( $\chi^2$ ) were used to test associations between participant responses and discipline for closed questions. Thematic analysis was utilised for qualitative responses following the six-step model.

**RESULTS:** In total, 19 respondents participated in dressage, 23 in showjumping, 10 in eventing, 7 in showing and 12 in other disciplines.

There was a significant relationship between discipline and riders' belief that negative body image is a concern ( $\chi^2= 15.582$   $p = 0.048$ ).



There was a significant association between general clothing size and whether comments have been made on participants body by coaches and judges ( $\chi^2= 32.603$   $p= 0.001$ ).



Main themes of 'body image', 'weight and diet', 'emotional and mental impact' and 'industry perceptions' were identified within the thematic analysis.

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:** Factors such as body size, judgement of others, weight and diet as well as emotional impact contributed towards the perceived body image perception.

It was identified that subjectively judged disciplines such as dressage and showing had an increased negative perception upon body image. Suggesting that riders in which their aesthetics are under direct scrutiny have an increased negative perception on their own body image. Negative body image was still identified in disciplines judged objectively, but mainly only showjumping.

It was found that other peoples perceptions have a large impact on riders' mental wellbeing, due to pressure to conform to a perceived stereotype. Larger riders were thought to be judged more negatively due to body size and reported a higher amount of negative comments regarding body image. Weight and diet were highly influential on muscle strength and can impair athletic performance as well as increase levels of body satisfaction.

## REFERENCES:

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