

The effect of discipline and competition level on rider anxiety in equestrian

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Publication date:
2024

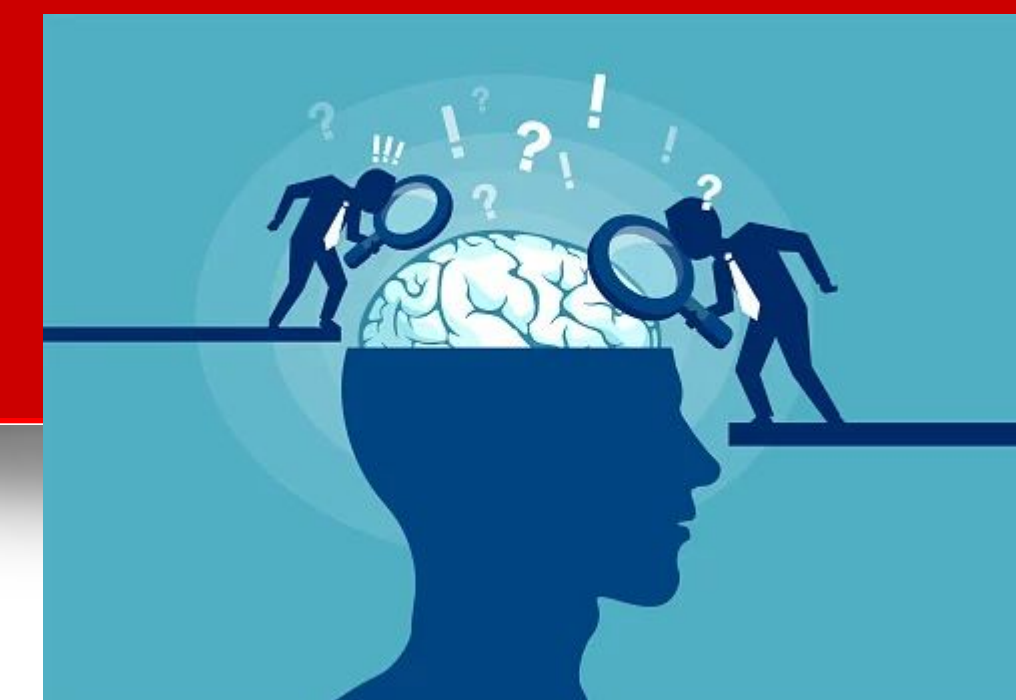
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Citation for published version (APA):

Buffery, J., & Davies, E. (2024). *The effect of discipline and competition level on rider anxiety in equestrian*. Poster session presented at 13th Alltech-Hartpury Student Conference, Gloucester, United Kingdom.



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INTRODUCTION:

Anxiety is a common challenge for athletes in all sports and is especially important in equestrian sports which requires a harmonious partnership between horse and rider combination (Bridgeman, 2009). Understanding various anxiety types is crucial for riders, trainers, and professionals in the equestrian industry as anxiety must be maintained and utilised to maximise performance potential. The aim of this study was therefore to identify the effect of discipline and competition level on rider anxiety.

METHOD:

An online retrospective survey was completed by **159 horse riders** of any discipline and competition level, identifying anxiety experiences and coping strategies at competition, and demographics. Participants were also asked to reflect on prior competitions from the previous 12 months when completing the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory (CSAI-2), measuring cognitive and somatic anxiety (CA, SA) and self-confidence (SC) (scored: 9 (low) to 36 (high)). Following assumption testing, Kruskal-Wallis tests compared competition regularity and discipline for SA, CA, and SC, whilst Mann-Whitney U tests compared anxiety between unaffiliated and affiliated riders.

RESULTS:

- Riders had moderate to high cognitive ($\bar{x} = 27$) and somatic anxiety ($\bar{x} = 25$), and lower self-confidence ($\bar{x} = 17$).

- Results revealed significant differences in somatic anxiety ($H(7) = 18.20$ ($p=0.01$) and self-confidence ($H(7) = 20.02$, ($p=0.01$) between participants competing at different intervals of regularity.

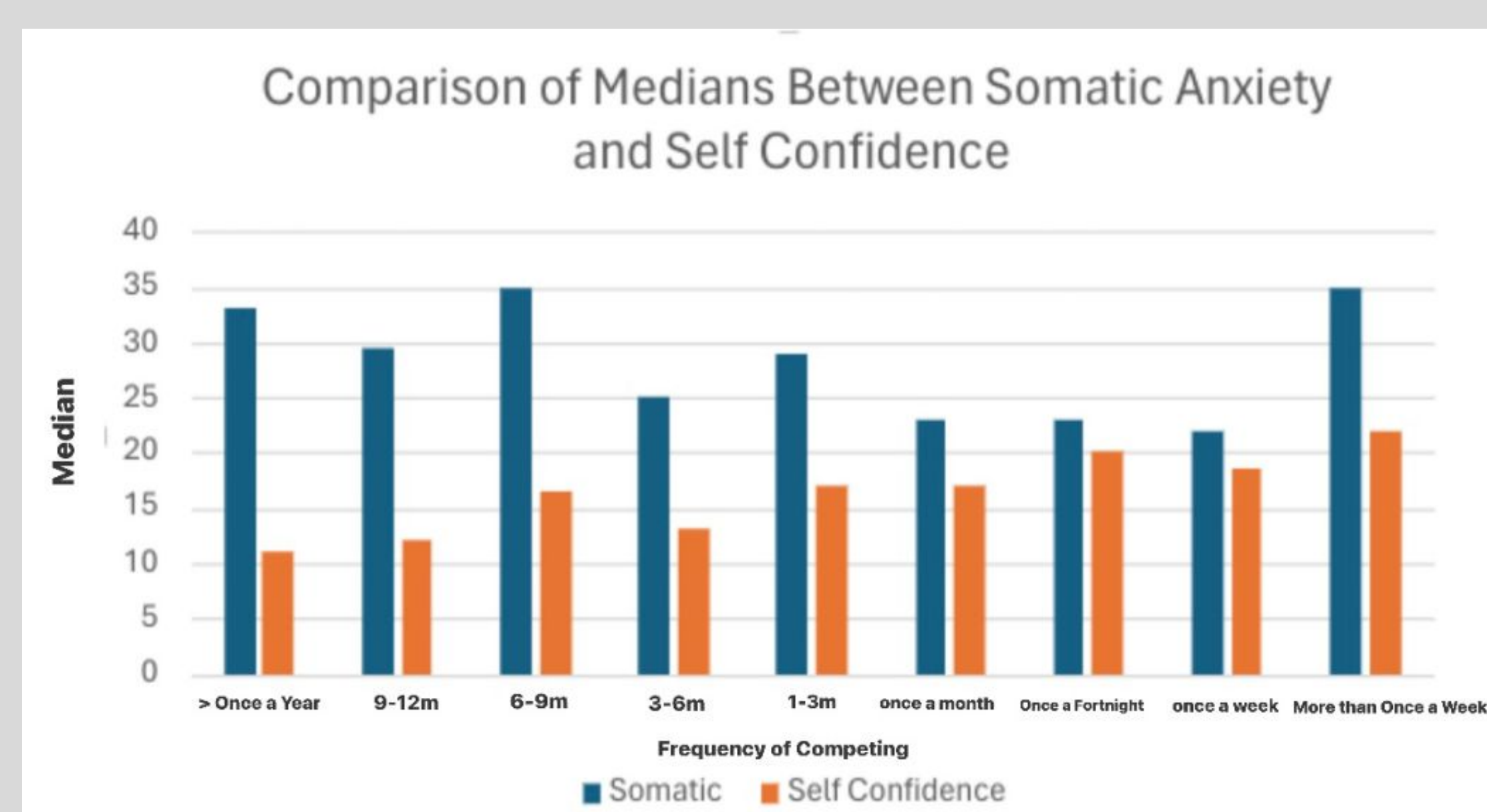
- Cognitive Anxiety ($H(4) = 10.584$, $p= 0.03$) and Self Confidence ($H(4) = 13.11$, $p= 0.011$) were significantly different between competition disciplines, with **dressage riders reporting the highest self-confidence** (median = 17), and **cognitive anxiety** (median = 31).

- Riders competing in **Dressage and ShowJumping had the highest levels of somatic anxiety** with a CSAI-2 score of 27. Riders competing in **Eventing had the lowest somatic anxiety** CSAI-2 score (21).

- **Unaffiliated riders had higher somatic anxiety** ($H(1) = 4.97$, $p=0.03$) (median = 27) and **lower self-confidence** ($H(1) = 6.70$, $p = 0.01$) (median = 15) than affiliated riders (SA median = 23.5; SC median = 17).

- Respondents reported utilising various coping strategies, including herbal remedies, breathing exercises, time management, music, professional help in the form of a sports psychologist, distractions, and dietary adjustments. However, **80 participants did not utilise any management techniques before competing.**

	CSAI - 2 Score	Standard Dev.
Cognitive Anxiety	27	5.914787789
Somatic Anxiety	25	7.001762604
Self Confidence	17	4.936287004



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

Findings suggest that rider anxiety is influenced by characteristics such as competition regularity, discipline, and level of competition. Those competing more regularly may have lower levels of anxiety due to the constant exposure to the competitive environment however high-stake competitions and the desire to qualify for championships may affect this. Disciplines demand different aspects from all riders and therefore it is likely that anxiety would differ as a result. Level of competition also has an effect due to differing experiences, personal goals, and competitive demands. Anxiety interventions are successful in other sports and coaches should aim to improve the education and management of competition-induced anxiety in horse riders.

REFERENCES:

Bridgeman, D.J., 2009. The working relationship between horse and rider during training and competition for equestrian sports (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Queensland).