

Building a profile of riders in riding schools in the U.K.

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Publication date:
2024

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Citation for published version (APA):

Edmund, M., Williams, J. M., & Greening, L. (2024). *Building a profile of riders in riding schools in the U.K.*. Poster session presented at 13th Alltech-Hartpury Student Conference, Gloucester, United Kingdom.



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INTRODUCTION:

Riding schools are crucial in introducing individuals to the equine industry, shaping their future interactions with horses. To safeguard the welfare of riding school horses/ponies, and novice riders' safety, staff ensure they are suitably mounted. However, limited research exists on human/horse demographics in riding school populations (Nyberg et al., 2023). This retrospective cohort study analysed characteristics from UK-based riding schools from 2019 to 2023 (n=308,698), using data from EC Pro, an equestrian centre software. Designed to enable effective business management with online booking and integrated horse care, yard, and staff management systems EC Pro records riding clients' details which must be updated biannually (EC Pro, 2024).

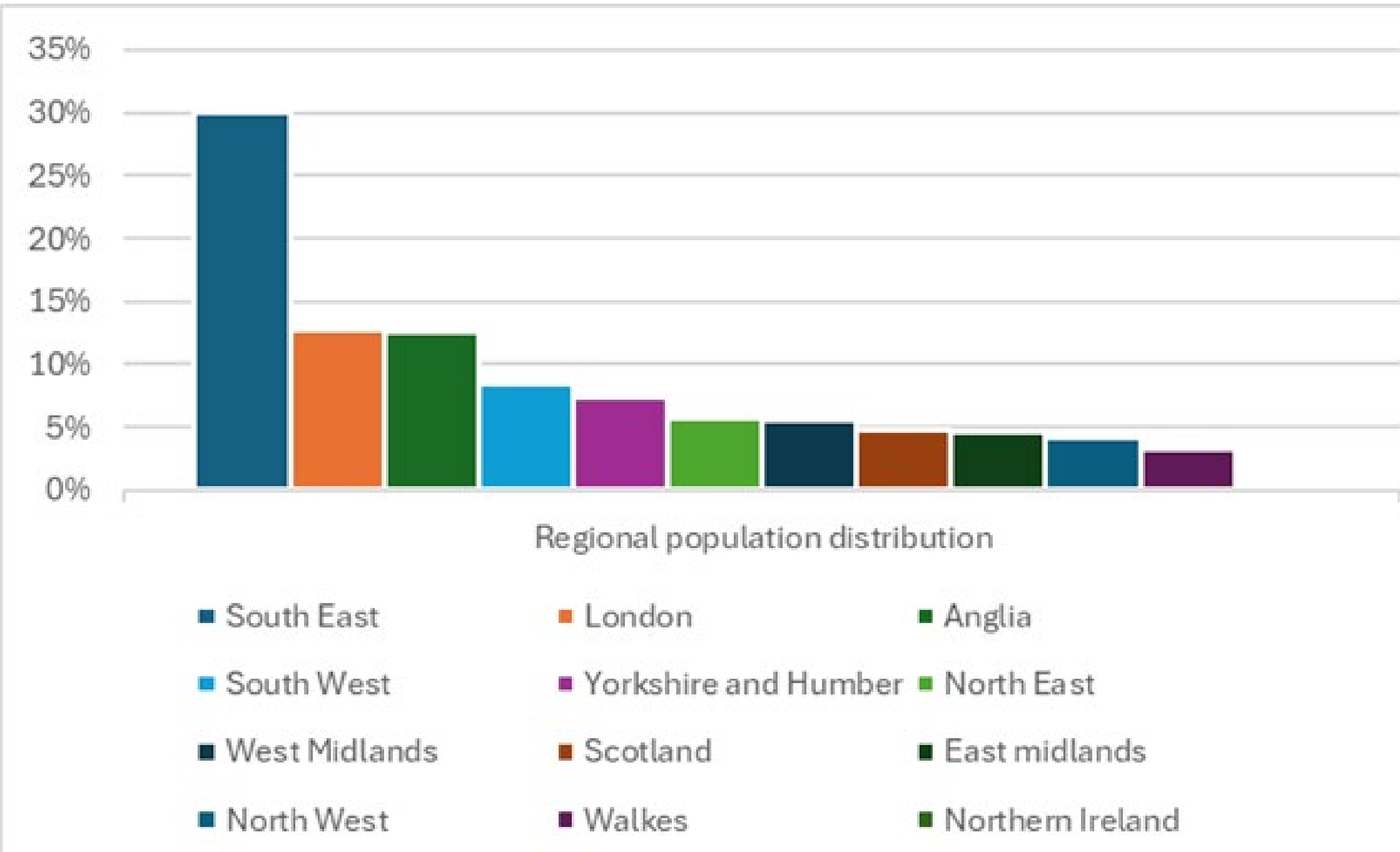
METHOD:

Before analysis, EC Pro anonymised all data. The software requires riders to self-report demographic details for horse management (EC Pro, 2024). This study analysed registered riders' age, self-reported height, weight, and geographical region. Data included the nine English regions, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. Rider body mass index (BMI) was calculated using height (m) and weight (kg). Descriptive analysis reported the mean (\pm standard deviation) variables. Chi-square analyses examined regional differences (significance: $p < 0.05$).

RESULTS:

Mean rider age: 21 \pm 9.2 years. Mean height: 1.46 \pm 0.94m. Mean weight: 47.8 \pm 52.3kg. Mean BMI: 21.0 \pm 23.3. Rider BMI classification: underweight (BMI: $<$ 18.5) 38.2%, healthy (BMI:18.5-24.9) 41.5%, overweight (BMI:25-29.9) 13.8%, obese (BMI: $>$ 30) 7.5%. Regional population distribution (shown in Figure 1) along with differences for variables ($P < 0.05$) possibly reflect socio-economic characteristics.

Figure 1: Bar Chart of the regional population distribution of UK riders attending riding schools.



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

Utilising software like EC Pro aids in researching rider, horse, workload/type, and environmental factors, providing objective data for analysis. This informs optimal conditions for welfare and ensures suitably mounted combinations. With equestrianism under increased public scrutiny, objective evidence is crucial for obtaining a social license to operate, emphasising the importance of evidence-based practices in horse and rider interactions to safeguard equine welfare.

Recommended horse-rider weight ratio varies (10%, 15%, 20% of horse weight), aligning with most riding school riders' self-reported weights (Domino et al., 2022). However, limitations include a lack of recorded horse demographic information, rider sex, and potential inaccuracies in self-reporting. It is recommended to use these data, along with onsite rider measurements, to accurately assess riders for riding school horses/ponies, enhancing understanding of rider and horse demographics crucial for welfare, suitably mounting strategies, and resource allocation (Domino et al., 2022).

APPLICATION TO INDUSTRY:

This research offers immediate applications for riding schools in the UK. Utilising software like EC Pro provides objective data on rider demographics, horse workload, and environmental factors. This data informs evidence-based practices, enhancing equine welfare and rider safety. Additionally, accurate assessment of riders using our findings enhances understanding of horse-rider dynamics, aiding in resource allocation and welfare management. In summary, our findings support the implementation of technology-driven, evidence-based practices to optimise conditions for both horses and riders in riding school environments.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I extend my gratitude to EC Pro for their collaboration and data contribution, which was integral to this research. Special thanks to all individuals at EC Pro.

