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A PRELIMINARY STUDY INTO ELITE EVENT RIDERS WHO COMPETE WITH PAIN

V. Lewis^{1*}, K. Baldwin¹ and L. Dumbell¹

¹Performance in Equestrian Sport Research Group, Hartpury University Centre, Hartpury College, Gloucestershire, GL19 3BE, UK

*Corresponding author: victoria.lewis@hartpury.ac.uk

Horse riding by nature creates a high risk situation and is considered more dangerous than motorcycling, car racing, skiing, football and rugby. Previous studies have reported riders experiencing limited range of motion, postural defects, asymmetry and altered spinal mechanics following traumatic accidents and yet continuing to ride. These may also develop into long term chronic pain issues which may limit the career length of riders. This study aimed to determine the prevalence of event riders competing with pain, and their perceptions of the pain's impact on their performance. A closed answer, self-completion questionnaire was distributed to competitors at the Hartpury FEI Three-Day Event. 24 of the 31 participants (77%) were competing with pain, with 33% experiencing pain during riding and 96% experiencing pain after riding. Pain was predominantly situated in the lower and upper back, shoulders and neck. 71% of the riders with pain felt that their performance was negatively affected through fatigue, decreased range of motion, asymmetry, anxiety and irritability. No statistically significant correlations were found between age and pain ($r_{31}=0.08$, $P > 0.05$); number of years riding and pain ($r_{31}=0.18$, $p>0.05$); pain and number of horses ridden per day ($r_{31}=0.147$, $p>0.05$). The majority of event riders competed with pain and they believed this affects their performance. Pain is known to impair decision making and mental processing and as such in a complex, multi-stage and high-risk sport such as eventing this is likely to place the health and safety of both horse and rider at increased risk.

Keywords: *rider; pain; eventing; chronic; performance.*