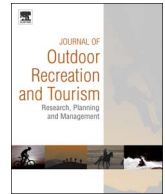




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Research Note

Preventing horse-related injuries by watching out for other humans



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ABSTRACT

The more one rides or handles horses, the more likely one is to have a horse-related injury. These injuries are caused by many factors, including those generated by other riders, handlers or spectators. An analysis of 266 cases of injured equestrians showed that 16% of those injuries were caused by other humans. A panel of horse riding safety experts felt 63% were preventable, and the injured individuals themselves felt 51% were preventable. The study findings suggest that increased awareness of the role others play in causing horse-related injuries and increased education about common people-caused injuries could reduce the number of horse-riding and handling injuries, and medical visits to physicians, emergency rooms, and hospitalizations.

Management implications: Horse riding organizations and businesses such as guest ranches, horse parks, and training centers, which bring many individuals together with various levels of equine experience, should include an orientation to horse safety, especially noting the role of other humans in causing injuries, that explains how to avoid some of the most common accidents.

1. Introduction

Horse-riding and handling injuries occur to even the most safety-conscious and experienced equestrians. Indeed, Mayberry, Pearson, Wiger, Diggs, and Mullins (2007) report in a study of 679 equestrians that 81% had experienced at least one horse riding injury in their lifetime and that 21% had experienced a severe injury requiring surgery, hospitalization, or rehabilitation. The percentage with a serious injury rose to 37% for those who were professional equestrians/instructors. A review of the medical and equestrian literature shows 38–64% of horse-related injuries are preventable according to studies of injured riders (Ball, Ball, Mulloy, Datta, & Kirkpatrick, 2009; Ekberg, Timpka, Ramel, & Valter, 2011; Huhnke, Hubert, & Harp, 1997; Newton & Nielson, 2005). While none of these studies indicated that other riders or persons were responsible for the injury, riders regularly hear of injuries caused by another rider or person. Despite anecdotal claims suggesting their occurrence, there appears to be a gap in the literature detailing the frequency, nature, and outcomes of another rider or person involved in riding accidents.

A broader examination of the sports and recreation literature regarding accidents or injuries reveals that “other human involvement” has

been studied and identified as a cause of accident or injury. An assessment by Rome et al. (2014) determined that 93 out of 202 (46%) bicycle accidents involved another person. Motorists caused 45% of the other-person injuries, 41% were caused by other bicyclists, and 14% were caused by pedestrians. The assessment did not find any significant differences in severity of injuries by cause. Two general studies in which sports/recreation and play activities were included reported the role of other people as a cause of accidents. Hemenway and Solnick (2011) surveyed youth in grades 9 through 12 in Boston public schools and asked if they had caused an unintentional injury to someone else in the past year. Seventeen percent said they had. The second, a study of Swedish day care center injuries (Sellstrom, Breberg, & Chang, 1994), determined that 13% of injuries to children were caused by other children. Data was not collected on whether the injury was intentional or not. These studies show that other humans do generate unintentional injuries although none addressed recommendations for reducing injuries from other humans.

In this research, we use data collected by SaddleUp SAFELY, a University of Kentucky initiative supported by 40 other equine-related organizations, to document and investigate the potential role other people or riders play in equestrian riding accidents. The State of

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Kentucky's role in the equine industry and sport is well known. In the reported research, we attempt to make a substantive contribution to the equestrian and safety literature. Specifically, our empirical exploration of the frequency, nature, and outcomes of another rider or person involved in riding accidents may bring awareness to a yet undocumented risk factor of horse-related injuries. It is our hope that increased awareness may aid those within the equestrian and safety communities in reducing the risks of future “other human” involved riding accidents.

2. Methods

SaddleUp SAFELY, a coalition of more than 40 medical and horse organizations, was launched in 2009 to raise awareness of horse-related injuries, reduce the frequency and severity of horse-related injuries, and encourage injured riders to return to the sport. SaddleUp SAFELY also established the website SaddleUpSAFELY.org to provide and promote horse riding and handling safety information for equestrians and other industry stakeholders. In an attempt to better understand and prevent horse-related injury, SaddleUpSAFELY.org offers a form where individuals who have had an injury or accident can report detailed information regarding the nature and circumstances surrounding their horse-related injuries. To better understand if and where increased educational efforts should be focused, an analysis of these injured rider forms was conducted. Analysis of this data allows us to study equestrian injuries and answer the question of what role do other humans play in causing horse-related injuries.

The SaddleUpSAFELY.org injury form allows respondents to explain how the horse-related injury occurred, what area(s) of the body were injured and how badly, and if they were hospitalized and/or went to the emergency room, saw a doctor or other medical professional, missed school or work, or lost employment. Further, respondents were asked to provide a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding their injury, as well as advice for how others might avoid a similar injury in the future. Additional information, such as horse-related experience (e.g., ride occasionally to ride weekly or more often; whether they raise or keep horses; how they rate their horse riding experience - advanced, professional, intermediate, beginner, novice; whether they compete at an amateur or professional level; or if they earn their living working with horses) was also collected.

The website with the injury form was launched in October 2009. By November 2012, 342 individuals filled out the injury/safety tip form. Of the 342 visitors, 42 provided safety tips only and 36 of the injury forms had insufficient data, resulting in 264 individual responses. Because one individual submitted two injuries on a form, a total of 265 cases were available for analysis.

The forms were jointly reviewed, discussed and quantitatively coded by a team of four equestrian experts associated with the Kentucky 4-H Horse Program, The U.S. Pony Clubs, the Certified Horsemanship Association, and the University of Kentucky Ag Equine Programs. [Appendix A](#) provides a complete list of the coded causes of injury.

The causes of the injuries generated by other humans were further analyzed and grouped into categories. [Fig. 1](#) provides examples of

Didn't use equipment correctly

Bit was too tight and horse started bucking before friend's uncle could walk around to fix the bit.

I let someone else tack up the horse and failed to check it before we took off. The rear girth strap slipped and touched his scrotum and he kicked both hind legs catapulting me over his head.

Handler/others using poor judgment

Parents had just bought horse but didn't have saddle yet. Daughter wanted to ride so they let her. Daughter fell off.

Friend was holding horse's bridle while I mounted. He pulled down on the reigns causing the horse to rear up.

Public's poor understanding of horse behavior

We were trail riding near a park and a man under the influence thought it would be funny to throw a Frisbee at our horses. My horse spooked and took off.

Van approached us from behind. I was on side of road and van started honking which caused horse to look back and it stumbled.

Misleading information

Sold unsafe horse – horse was drugged when we bought him.

My husband and I adopted a rescued horse for the first time. The rescue organization told us the horse could walk, trot, canter, side pass, pen gate and negotiate trail obstacles. After trotting 10 seconds he bolted. We found out later the horse had bolted with its previous trainers and had a history of bolting.

Poor riding behavior/etiquette

My horse was cut off by another horse and rider which caused my horse to trip.

Careless rider's horse bumped injured rider's horse outside gate causing injured rider's horse to fall.

Fig. 1. Examples of Other Human Injury Causes by Category.

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