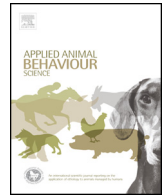




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# Rider impacts on equitation

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### ABSTRACT

Equestrianism is popular worldwide, with millions of horses and riders participating in competitive horse sports and non-competitive leisure riding. Riders have a duty of care or responsibility for their horses and should aim to optimise their health and welfare. Despite this, limited research has explored the effectiveness and impact of equitation practice, equine management and training techniques on equine performance and welfare. The International Society for Equitation Science promotes enhanced equine welfare through an objective and evidence based approach to equine management and training, via education and research. This review explores the impact of the rider on equitation practice and how rider education could inform equine management and training regimens to promote health, welfare and performance. The experience of the rider will influence their riding capabilities, decision-making and their horse's ridden performance. Matching the personality and experience of horses and riders can create a positive partnership. Riding is a physical activity; therefore rider fitness can also influence the horse's performance and physical capacity. An unbalanced rider will not be able to give clear and consistent aids to the horse therefore affecting their behaviour when ridden. The horse will have to adapt their locomotion to account for the moving weight of the unbalanced rider which increases the physiological demands of exercise. Psychological influences can also change the way a rider interacts with their horse. Therefore the informed rider will ensure they are physically and psychologically prepared to ride. Decision making is a key part of rider responsibility. Riders, owners and keepers of horses will determine training and management regimens, which should be designed to support the workload expected of the horse. Similarly, riders should be capable of identifying potential risks of injury and be able to recognise pain and the physical representation of injury in the horse. Such knowledge should then be applied to adapt management and exercise regimes accordingly. To safeguard the horse, the responsible rider needs to be educated and informed, to make them aware of the impact of decisions they make, on their equine partner. Further research within equitation science is required to build an evidence base to support the development of educated and responsible riders. The horse–rider relationship is complex. The inability of the horse to verbalise its emotions and pain places significant responsibility on the rider to ensure that the animal's health and welfare is optimised through informed management and riding. The responsible rider should exert a positive impact upon the horse and the partnership, applying scientific principles when training and managing their horse to promote health, welfare and performance to achieve a positive horse–rider relationship.

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## 1. Introduction

Riders, owners and trainers are responsible for the horses they manage. Their duty of care encompasses general management of the horse, for example nutrition, housing, allowing... expression of normal behaviour and maintaining their health and welfare. Within worldwide recreational equine populations, a substantial propor-

tion of the welfare problems reported are linked to unintentional neglect due to owner or rider ignorance (Hemsworth et al., 2015). Clear industry guidelines exist for explicit aspects of management such as feeding protocols and stable size, but are limited within equitation, where accepted training regimes are predominately based on historic and anecdotal practices rather than informed by research (Ely et al., 2010; McGreevy and McLean, 2007; McLean and McGreevy, 2010; Van Weeren and Back, 2014). Riding manuals and qualifications are often structured to deliver the mechanics of how to control the horse or how to execute set movements, with the primary aim being to develop rider skill but with relatively

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**Table 1**  
 Horse and rider impacts on the horse-rider partnership.

Horse and rider relationship			
<i>Rider factors:</i>			
Status	Economic Job Qualifications Professional Competitive Amateur Experienced Para-rider Novice Leisure National International Young rider	Resources	Quality Arenas Turnout Equipment Coach Transport Access Time
Experience	Training Environment: peers Self-belief ± impact of current horses ± impact of previous horses Quality Traditional Modern Qualifications Industry Riding school only Validation K&U: riding K&U: management	Psychological factors	Age Peer pressure Past experience Economic pressure Selection pressure Success pressure Context: hack vs. school vs. road vs. competition Environment Horse Mood Emotion External influences
Skill	Independence Empathy Balance Control Context: riding school vs. road vs. competition Handling Management Ridden Personal judgement Coach Confidence Peer influence Horse influence Experience Ability level Age Success record	Level/training	Quantity Access Quality Regularity 'fit for purpose' Horse focus Rider focus Partnership focus 1 horse Multiple horses Access to schoolmaster/quality horses Stage of training Training resources and environment
Injury	Age Existing Impact of injury: psychological and physical Compensation Coping strategies Balance Ridden influence Management influence	Ambition/goals	Short term Long term Level External pressure: family, peers, coach, owner Clarity Realism Viability Economics
Equine partner	Horse/s Match Prior experience Previous horses Focus: behaviour vs. talent Aware of strengths and weaknesses	Support network	Coach Family Friends Yard peers Competition peers SelectorsParaprofessionals: vet, physiotherapist, farrier
Economic status	Professional Leisure Success linked to income Shortcuts to success Producer Goals: short vs. long term Management Veterinary support Access to resources and professionals	Physicality	Age Health status Injury status 'fit for purpose' Hack vs. compete vs. level Fitness Security Balance Weight
Personality	Extrovert, Introvert, Ambition, Emotional, Conscientious, Open to ideas		Worrier, Anxious, Nervous, Confidence, Strategic
<i>Horse factors:</i>			
Rider	Competency Experience Skill Empathy Style Balance Aids	Status/experience	Schoolmaster Novice Experienced Inexperienced Bombproof Good to... Sound

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