

EXAMPLE Abstract Template

UNDERSTANDING WHIP USE IN RIDERS IN SPORTS HORSE DISCIPLINES

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Abstract:

Equestrianism is subject to increasing public scrutiny with non-equine stakeholders questioning if traditional practices such as whip use are ethical and necessary. Evaluation of whip use in racing has resulted in regulatory changes to protect racehorse welfare. However high profile examples of inappropriate whip use in non-racing disciplines have turned the spotlight on how wider equine disciplines protect horse welfare. This study aimed to create a preliminary evidence base for how horse-riders use whips. Participation was voluntary via an online survey, available on equine-related facebook pages, which asked riders a) if, b) how and c) why they did/did not use a whip, to establish if potential issue with whip abuse existed in horse sports and recreational riding. 3463 riders responded; the majority were female (96%, n=3325), 46% (n=1593) held equine qualifications, and 96% (n=3311) considered themselves experienced riders. Most riders regularly rode with a whip (60%; n=2047), 12% (n=412) sometimes did and 28% (n=966) never carried a whip. Respondents were asked to rate agreement (Strongly agree (5) – strongly disagree (1)) for 12 statements related to how the whip could be used and the response of the horse to whip use. Riders regularly riding with a whip recorded significantly different opinions on whip use compared to riders who sometimes rode with a whip and those that never carried a whip (Kruskal wallis: $P < 0.0001$, post-hoc Mann Whitney U: $P < 0.01$), but agreed whip use does not boost rider confidence and that only experienced riders should use whips ($P > 0.05$). Thematic analysis identified riders predominately carry whips to reinforce the aids or as an *emergency aid*, whilst respondents who didn't use whips believed training negated their use, due to horse sensitivity or whip use was not ethical. Respondents felt whips should only be used when absolutely necessary for education and reinforcement, and not as punishment, due to rider frustration/anger or to cause pain, although only 30% (n=1036) believed whips caused pain. Most riders advocated tighter whip regulation in competition, commenting: *good riders do not need a whip, professionals regularly abuse horses in public and better training/education is needed*. Interestingly, 21% (n=727) of respondents believed public perception of horse sports will lead to a future whip ban. These results suggest mixed practice and knowledge exists regarding whip use in horse riders. Further work is required to understand how to better educate riders and to ensure equestrianism operates under a social license that promotes equine welfare.

Lay person's message:

Whip use in horse sports outside of racing is receiving more attention as the general public increasingly question if traditional equestrian practices are ethical and necessary. This survey found most horse riders regularly ride with a whip and use them to reinforce the aids and in emergency situations. Riders who don't use whips believe good training reduces the need to carry them. Generally, riders felt whips should not be used in anger or as punishment, and better rider education is needed on how to train horses and stricter whip regulation is needed in equestrianism to protect horse welfare.

Keywords: social license, ethical equitation, training, horse sports, rider education, equine welfare