



Body image disturbance in equestrian athletes

Are equestrian athletes susceptible for eating disorders or body image distortion?

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As all equestrians know, not only the horse, but also the rider will be evaluated when riding in competition.

In many sports where aesthetics are important, psychological problems occur because of the high pressure this brings along.

The prevalence of psychological problems such as eating disorders and body image distortions in equestrians has not been examined before.

Women are generally more self-aware than men. It is unclear whether athletes and non-athletes differ in the opinion on their appearances.

In the existing literature, a link can be found between tasks (such as appearances or the nature of physical activity) and contextual pressures (coaches, bullies, judges) to fit the expectations of a person regarding his/ her physical appearance.

In this study 138 horse-riding (English riding



and Western riding) students from 7 universities throughout the United States were included. One-third rode Western, the others rode English.

The researchers aimed to calculate the risk for eating disorders for the total sample (based on their age and their riding discipline). Besides this, they wanted to compare the demographic information, BMI, surveys and academic state. The BMI and surveys were used to classify people at risk vs. not at risk for disordered eating.

As mentioned earlier, in other studies, a link was found to exist between aesthetic performance sports and psychological problems.

Participating in an environment in which aesthetics are important may place pressure on female athletes. Regarding physical appearance, the risk prevalence in this study was similar to other sports.

This article states that equestrian athletes should be screened for being at risk for eating disorders. Education programs on weight management, body image and disordered eating may be helpful for them.

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