

Polo: an epidemiological study of the whole

*Innes, C. and Morgan, K.L., University of Liverpool, Musculoskeletal Biology, United Kingdom;
k.l.morgan@liv.ac.uk*

Polo, one of the world's oldest sports, offers an unrivalled opportunity for medical, dental and veterinary scientists to work together in a non-infectious disease arena. Prevention of injuries to these modern day centaurs is neither a veterinary nor medical problem; it is both. A cross sectional study and structured telephone questionnaire were used to collect data on falls, injuries, preseason training and attitudes towards risk from a random sample of 112 UK polo players. Injuries to riders and horses were defined as those requiring a hospital or veterinary visit respectively. Risk factors for falls and pony injuries were estimated using multivariable logistic regression. The median number of falls in the previous season was one (IQR 0-2). 2.5% (90%CI 0.4-5.4) of players fell off 10 or more times. 17.3% (90%CI 10.4-24.2) of riders reported polo related injuries, requiring hospitalization, in the previous season. 48.1% (90%CI 39-57.2) of participants owned at least one horse that sustained a polo related injury requiring veterinary treatment. Overall 10.6% (90%CI 5-16.2) of horses experienced an injury requiring a veterinary examination. Women were at quarter of the risk of falling compared to men (OR 0.27). Players expecting to improve their handicap were eight times at risk of falling compared to players expecting to maintain their handicap (OR 8.36). Players exercising their ponies for a mean of 51.1 (SD 12.2) days prior to the first chukka of the season were less likely to fall than players with ponies exercised for a mean of 43.5 (SD 10.9) days. When adjusted for confounding falls were associated with increased risk of injury (OR 6.57) as was higher self-assessed fitness score (OR 1.68). In contrast, players who used a gym were less likely to be injured (OR 0.14). Wearing wrist protectors also reduced the risk of injury (OR 0.17) (RR 0.32 0.08-1.31 P=0.07). Goggles and face protectors had no effect. This is the first population based study of falls and injuries to horses and riders during the game of polo.