

# High School Equestrian Coaches Taking the Reins on Resilience of Young Athletes

Andrea Kotula (akotula@bgsu.edu)  
 Department of Sociology  
 Bowling Green State University

## Purpose of Study

- Understand the coaches' perceptions of how horses help children
- Understand coaches' opinions of the costs and benefits of equine competition
- Understand coaches' management of the risks for children during equine competition

## Literature Review

- Horses promote psychological well-being
  - Bond
  - Nonverbal communication,
  - Self-confidence
  - Leadership
  - Emotional feelings/ mood,
  - Express personality
  - Mental processing
  - Self-reflection
- Horse promote physical health
  - Decrease blood pressure, stress, cholesterol levels
- Coaches can have an influence on psychological and physical health
  - Mentally prepare rider
  - Ensure horse and rider safety
  - Ensure preparation of rider



## Methods

- Qualitative face-to-face phenomenological interviews
- Individually interviewed and audiotaped
- Open, axial, and selective coding of the completed manuscripts

## Sample

- Ohio Interscholastic Horsemanship Association (OIHA) Division 2 Coaches
  - The OIHA is an organization, which promotes continuous growth in programs fostering horsemanship education, sponsors activities to encourage interscholastic participation, and has cooperative adult supervised leadership (advising) for all students in grades 9 through 12 (OIHA, 2015).
- Middle-aged white women
- Volunteers
- Convenience-based

## Summary of Findings

- Horses nurture trust, integrity, respect, and compassion in riders
- Horse sports give high school athletes social and organizational skills
- But horse sports receive little support from faculty, staff, and other classmates
- Coaches perceive falling off as a learning experience
- Coaches are devoted to developing their riders

## Results: Benefits

- “It gives them socialization skills and organizational skills. It humbles them at times. It makes them work together in a group.”
- “It is a team event that is not held at their school. The advantages at least for my team is that they get to participate in a horse activity other than lessons because most of my team does not own their own animals.”
- “They have to learn how to handle conflicts. They have to learn how to accept rejection because they are not always going to be placed. They go out there in a group of 20 kids. The judge might not like them that day. They just have to realize that’s life.”

## Results: Costs

- “The disadvantages are that they don’t get much support from the faculty and staff or other classmates. There is pretty much just OIHA youth at the shows. People don’t come and watch it like they do other sports.”

## Results: Management of Risk

- “There has been a lot of preparation before they get to compete on that animal. If they don’t have the ability to do certain things, we don’t allow them to do that. We let them try new things but not at the risk of a safety issue.”
- “Falling off is something that is going to happen to you if you ride a horse, just like if you ride a bicycle.”
- “Helmets are smart. That is one thing you can never change. If you have an accident and you don’t have a helmet on and you are injured, you are injured. You can’t say oh next time I’ll just change that.”



## Implications

- Coaches are silent about issues dealing with parents
- Coaches are devoted to development of their riders
  - Challenging them
  - Providing them with new opportunities
- Coaches deal with risk by trying to prevent accidents through preparation and safety gear

## Future Research

- Compare my data with Dr. Laura Sanchez’s data on BGSU Equestrian Team
- Interview OIHA riders
  - Understand rider’s perception of how horses help them
  - Understand rider’s opinions of the costs and benefits of equine competition
  - Understand rider’s management of the risks during equine competition
- Interview OIHA parents