

Participation Experiences in Recreational Horse Riding for Female Riders with ADHD

Peters, G.; Davies, Emma

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Peters, G & Davies, E
Hartpury University

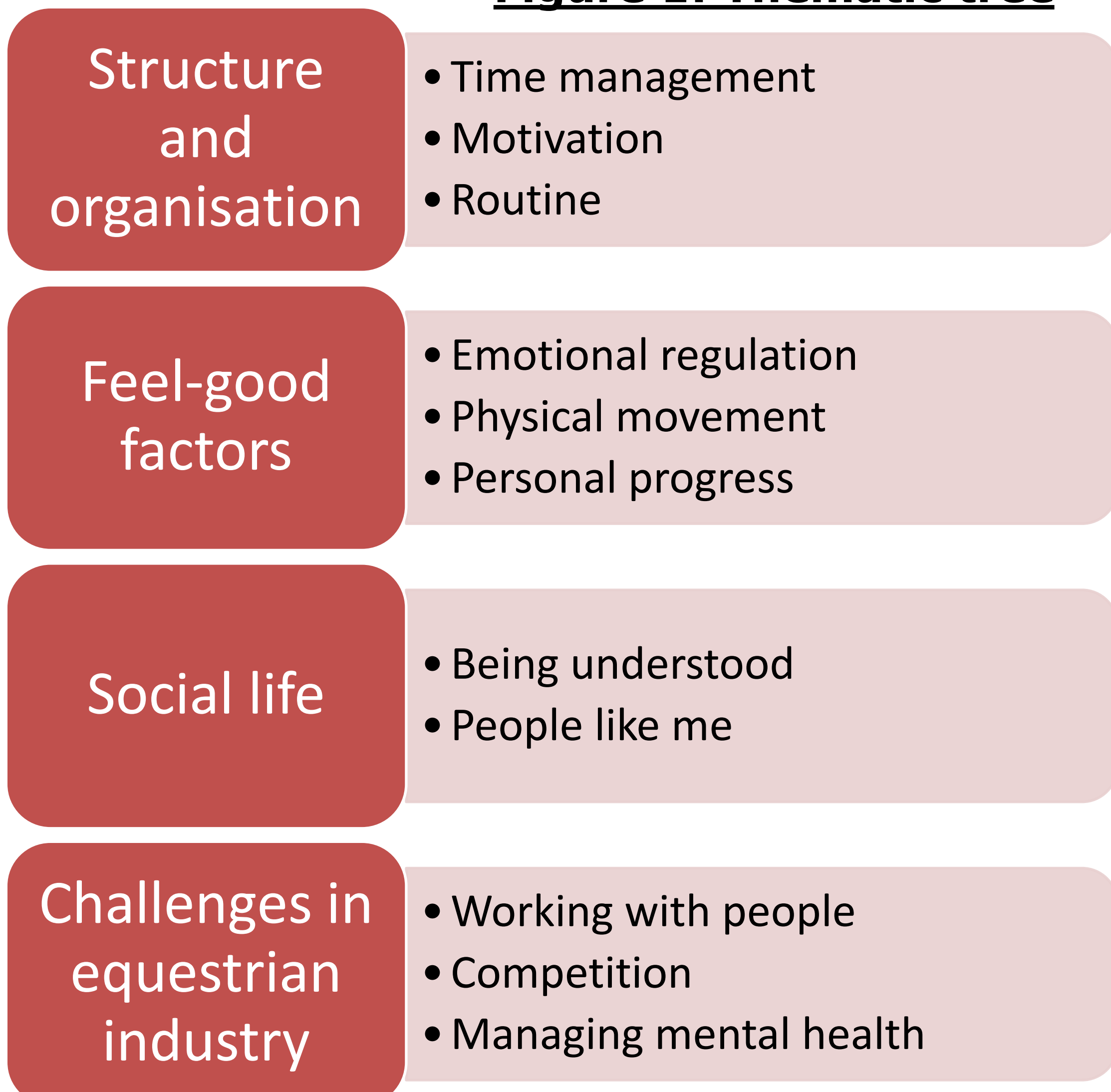
INTRODUCTION:

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a form of neurodivergence which is believed to affect 4.4% to 5.2% of adults, with the higher rates of ADHD among participants in sport (Hoare *et al.*, 2023). Research investigating ADHD is most commonly conducted with male participants (Hinshaw *et al.*, 2022) which has led to females often going undiagnosed due to ADHD symptoms often presenting differently between males and females (Tung *et al.*, 2016). Recreational equestrian sport is a predominantly female activity, therefore female riders who have ADHD are an interesting population to investigate.

This study aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of participation in recreational horse-riding for female individuals with ADHD.

“I feel like I fit in there, I don’t feel like the odd one out”

Figure 1: Thematic tree

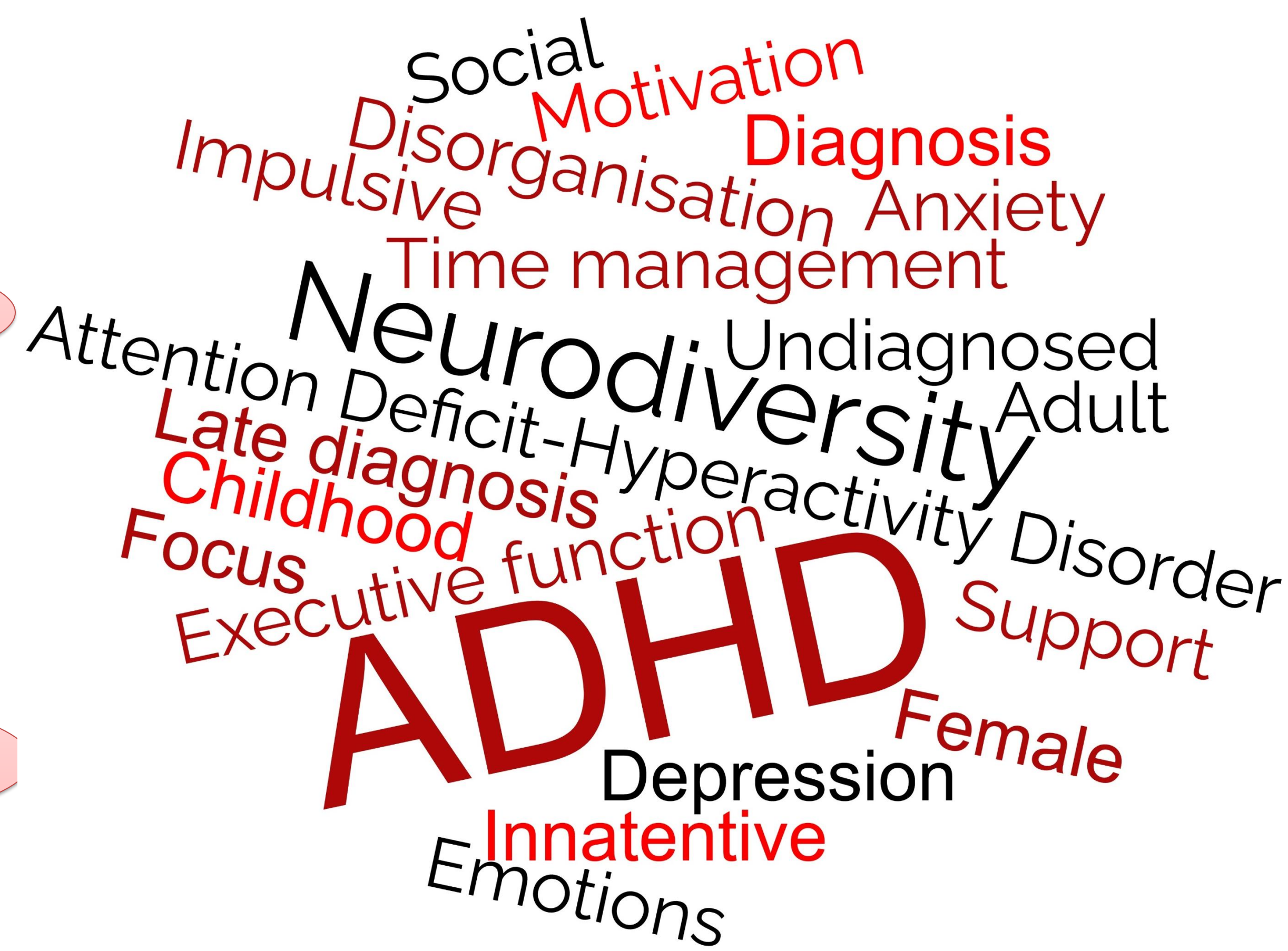


Method:

Online semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 female riders (18-52 years old, mean 25.5±9.4), discussing their experiences as a rider with ADHD (Combined (n=5); Inattentive (n=3); Hyperactive (n=1); Unsure (n=2)). Eight riders had a formal diagnosis and three were self-reported. Participants who were self-reported were required to complete the 'Adult ADHD Self-Report Scale' (ASRS) symptom checklist which indicated they all met the criteria to participate in this study. The interview involved the participants discussing their riding life, ADHD, and the relationship between ADHD and riding life. Thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes regarding the experiences of riders with ADHD outlining some of the benefits and challenges they encounter from participation in equestrian sport. Key themes were: Structure and organisation, Feel-good factors, Social life and Challenges in equestrian industry (Figure 1).

“I find it emotionally regulating because if you're running around being all stressed then they're running around all stressed, then everyone's upset!”

“I’ve just spent all this time thinking I wasn’t very smart, or I was just a difficult child and it nice to finally feel like there wasn’t anything wrong with me!”



DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS:

Individuals with ADHD can experience challenges with time management, motivation and maintaining routines, however recreational horse-riding benefits these individuals by improving their emotion regulation, increases physical movement and personal progress. Horse riding can also improve an individuals social life and sense of understanding of themselves and from other people in the equestrian industry. Barriers for riders with ADHD include working with people, competition and managing their mental health. These findings are beneficial for coaches, employers, and parents of female riders with ADHD, as well as organisations aiming to support people with ADHD, to allow them to understand the effect ADHD has on individuals and allow them to provide appropriate support. This could be provided by ADHD and neurodiversity organisations and ambassadors, by providing information posters, online resources, and educational sessions to help improve knowledge of females with ADHD in sport and recreational horse-riding, and educate coaches, athlete support staff and family members.

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