

GROOMS MINDS

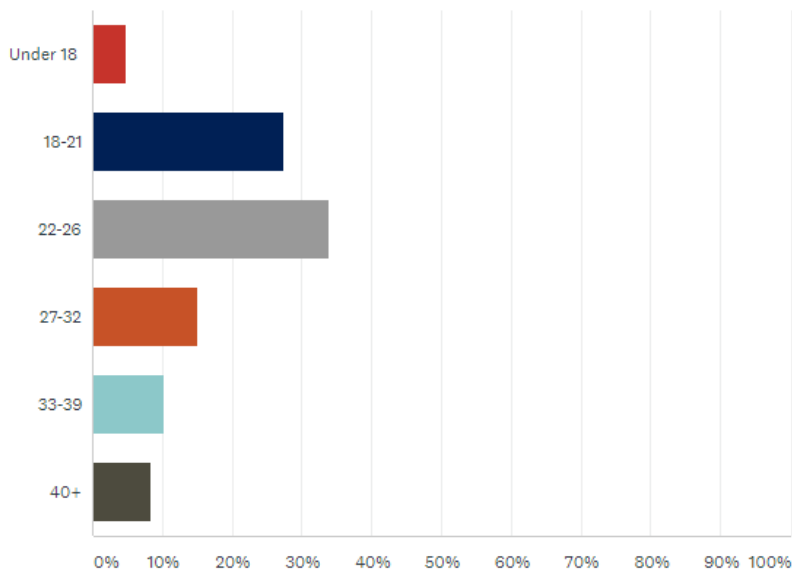
LET'S DO THIS TOGETHER

The result of the Grooms Minds survey carried out by the British Grooms Association (BGA) makes for uncomfortable reading. The research highlights the need for urgent change within the industry, and indeed for the existence of the BGA and Equestrian Employers Association (EEA) within this profession.

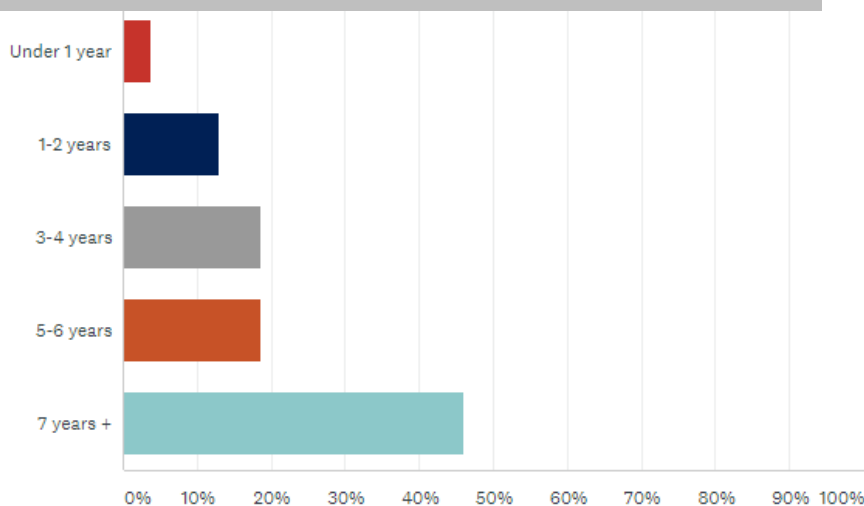
A total of 1315 grooms took part in the survey which consisted of 13 specific questions and provided opportunities for participants to add comments throughout.

The grooms who completed the survey were predominantly under the age of 32 (over 80%) but many had worked in the equine industry for over 5 years (almost 65%) so had considerable experience on which to base their answers.

HOW OLD ARE YOU?

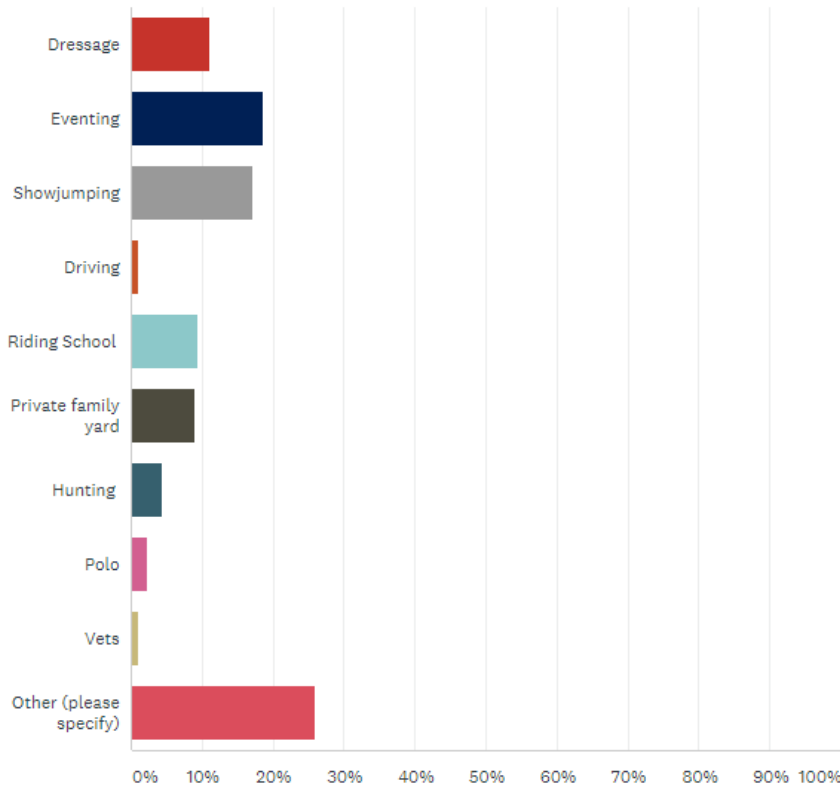


HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED IN EQUINE INDUSTRY?



Respondents came from across the whole of the equine sector, including competition yards, riding schools, charities and private yards.

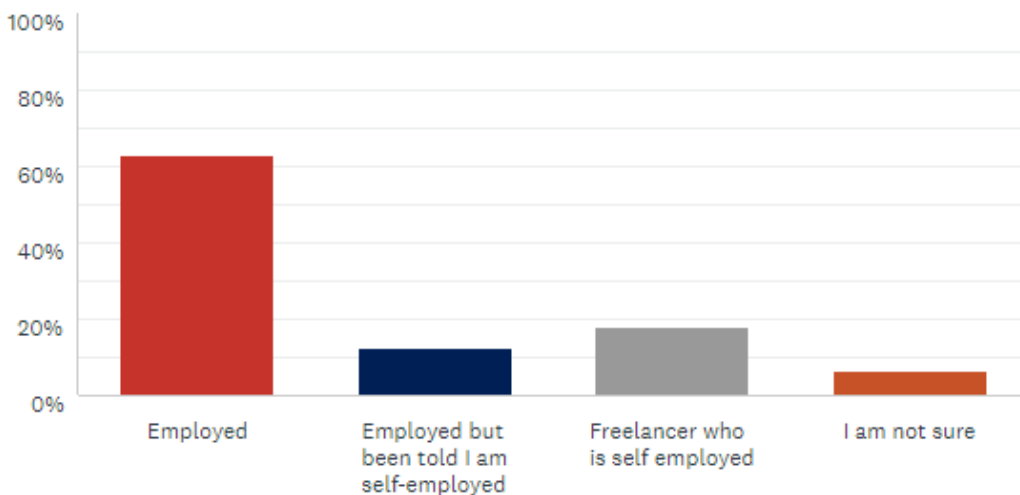
WHAT SECTOR DO YOU WORK IN?



Working with horses is a 'must' for most of those involved, and some grooms reported being extremely happy in their jobs (19%) so **their** employers seem to be getting it right. However, approximately 81% of grooms were unhappy to varying degrees and the conditions under which many are employed leaves a lot to be desired.

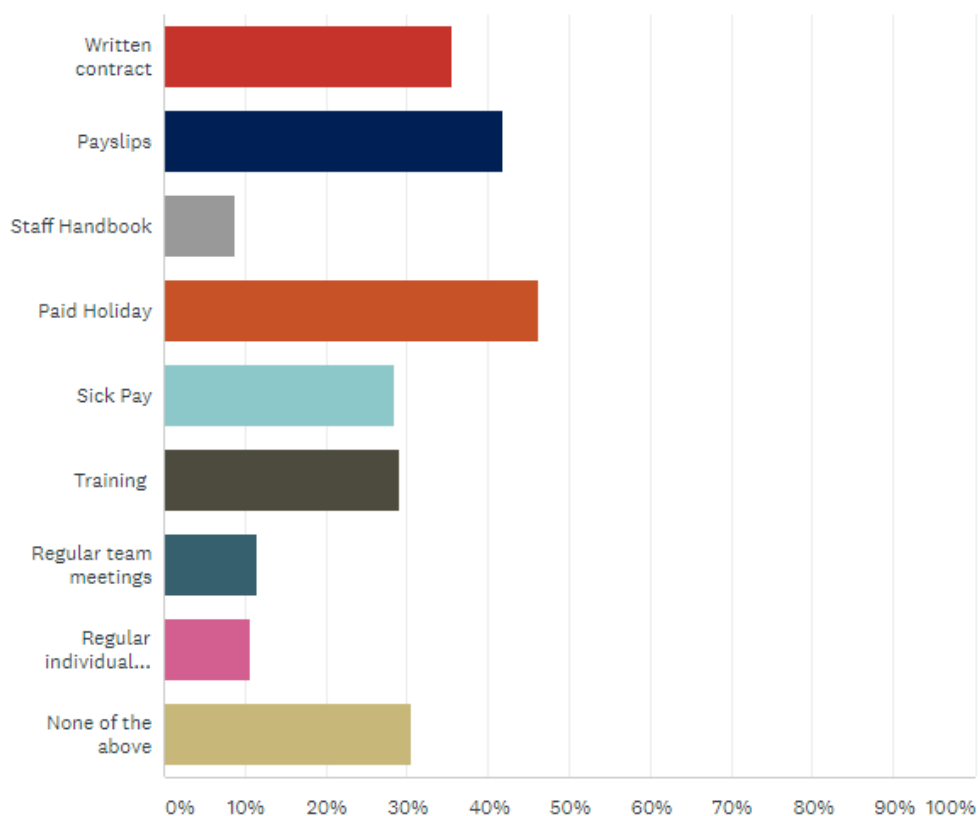
Employment conditions for grooms varied considerably. Just over 60% of grooms were employed, 30% were self-employed (either by self-acknowledged freelance status or a 163 respondents by being told by their employer that that was their employment status, even if they were actually employed).

WHAT IS YOUR EMPLOYMENT STATUS?



Although 60% grooms were classed as employees, only 46% said that they had paid leave entitlement and an even greater concern given the risks associated with working with horses, under 30% were entitled to sick pay. Only 36% had a written contract and just over 40% received payslips. Over 30% reported having no written contract, sick pay, paid leave, payslips, staff handbook, regular meetings or training. All of this once again highlights an industry that is ignoring basic employment rights and legalities.

TICK ALL THE THINGS YOU GET IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE



One of the key points that came from the comments made within the survey was the lack of opportunity for training, career progression and pay increases. This lack of structure within the profession needs addressing if grooms are to get the recognition they deserve, both financially and in terms of recognition for the level of responsibility they take on within their role. At best this is reflected by such comments as:

'There is no room for advancement or pay increase so I am looking for another career'

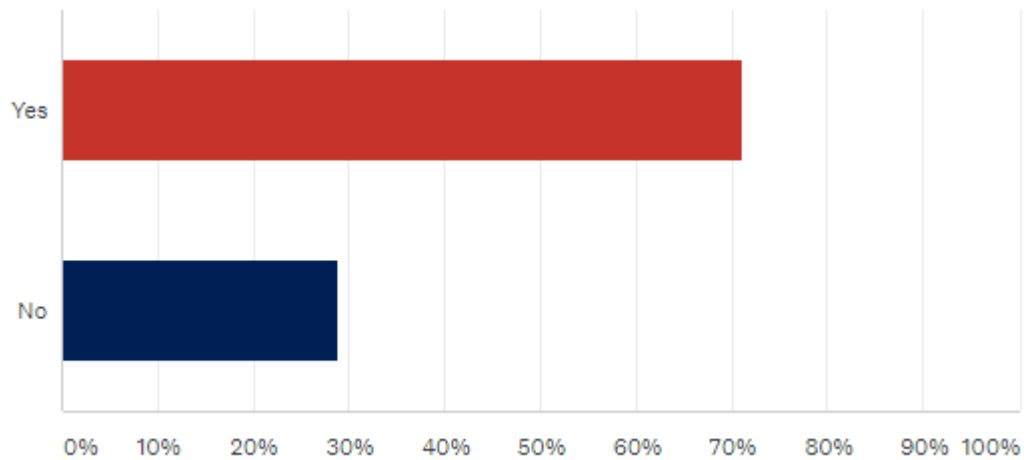
At worst:

'Spoken to badly. Expected to do things above my job role, then told off for doing things wrong. No training, no help, no advice, just getting shouted at all the time.'

The consequences of such experiences are reflected in the responses to the questions about within job stress and the effect that this has on mental well-being.

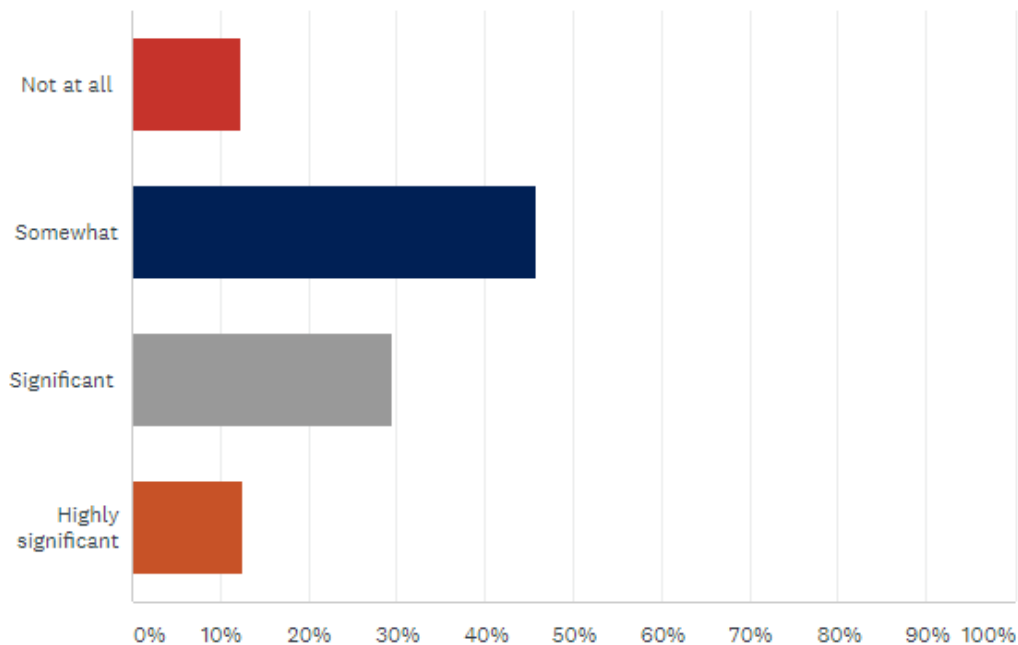
Over **83%** of the grooms reported having suffered from stress and/or mental health problems, a mixture of diagnosed (almost 35%) and undiagnosed (almost 50%) issues.

HAVE YOU SUFFERED FROM STRESS AND/OR MENTAL WELLBEING ISSUES?



Shockingly, only about **12%** did not consider that these problems were linked to their job as a groom in any way.

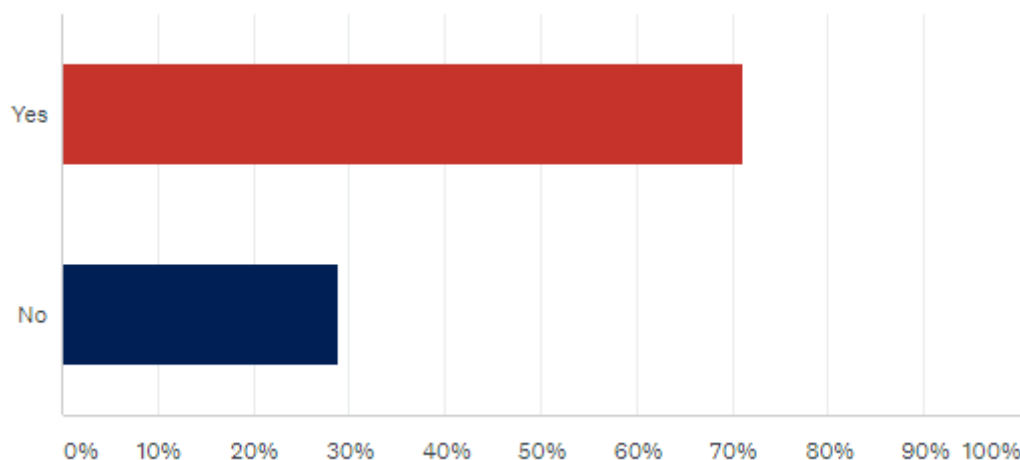
IF YOU ANSWERED "YES" TO EXPERIENCING STRESS AND/OR MENTAL WELLBEING ISSUES, TO WHAT EXTENT HAS WORKING IN THE EQUINE INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTED TO YOUR LOSS OF HEALTH?



Many knew of fellow grooms who had suffered from mental well-being problems (over 65%).

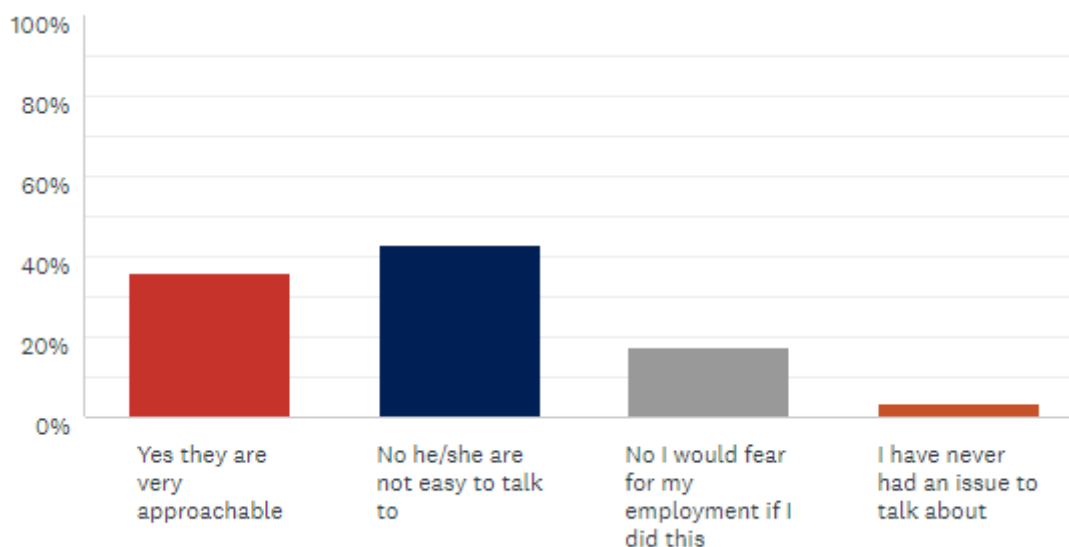
Over **70%** reported having been bullied (including being the recipient of derogatory comments) within the workplace, either by their employer or by fellow workers.

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN BULLIED (FELT YOU HAD TO COMPLY) (DEROGATIVE COMMENTS MADE) BY YOUR EMPLOYER OR A FELLOW MEMBER OF STAFF IN A GROOM'S JOB?



Unsurprisingly, given the comments regarding the way that some grooms are treated by their employers, over 50% stated that they did not feel that they could discuss issues with them.

DO YOU FEEL CONFIDENT AND COMFORTABLE TO TALK TO YOUR BOSS ABOUT ISSUES?



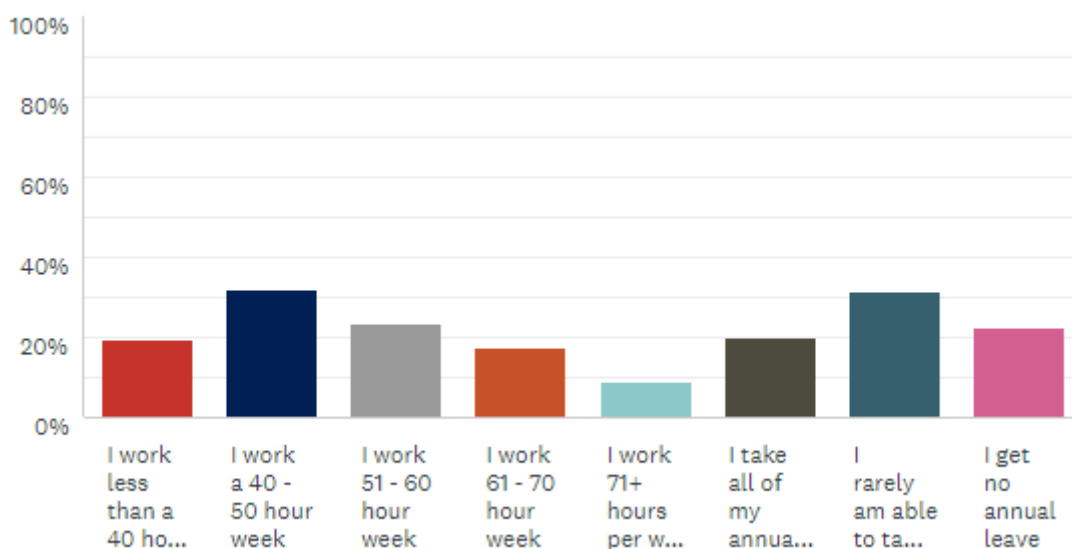
There is clearly a problem within this profession.

Employment legislation is in place to govern employer / employee relations and protect the rights of both parties within the workplace. This does not appear to be working effectively within this industry.

Grooms are very hardworking professionals (over 80% reported working more than 40 hours / week; with almost 30% working more than 60 hours / week), entitled to employment protection and recognition within their roles.

Further analyses of the data from this survey is needed to identify whether certain sectors are most at fault, but the preliminary findings are revealing.

HOW MANY HOURS DO YOU WORK A WEEK (ON AVERAGE) AND DO YOU GET TIME OFF (ANNUAL LEAVE) ? (TICK THE STATEMENTS THAT APPLY TO YOU)

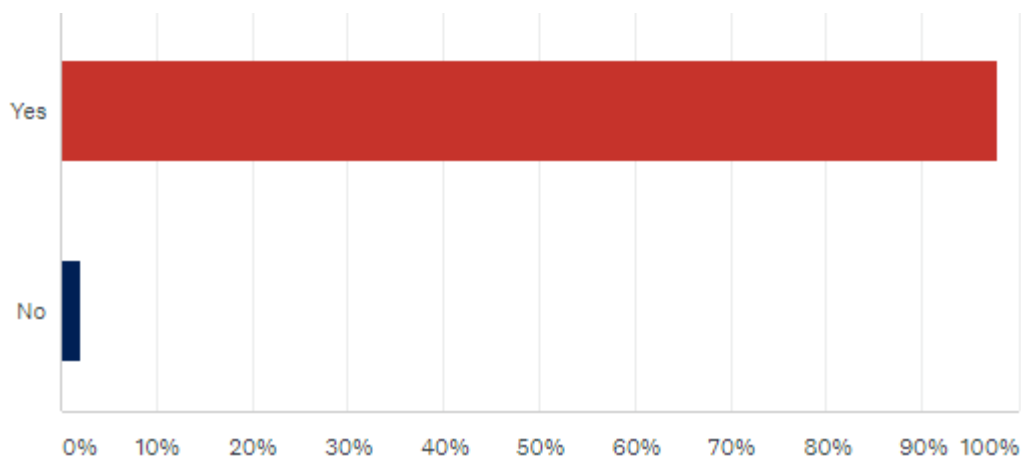


There are some excellent employers out there, but the results of this survey suggest that this is not always the case.

The occurrence of stress and mental well-being issues within this profession is indicative of the need to do better.

So far, we have not found any negative comments in relation to the horses cared for by these professionals and it is for their sake that many put up with unsatisfactory working conditions. This should not be an excuse for some of the shocking practice that this survey has uncovered.

DO YOU THINK MORE SHOULD BE DONE IN THE EQUESTRIAN INDUSTRY TO RAISE AWARENESS OF AND SUPPORT GROOMS WITH THEIR STRESS AND/OR MENTAL HEALTH



ANECDOTAL COMMENTS

Over 400 individual comments were received, these are just a selection:

- I'm stuck in a combination of huge responsibility and lack of money loneliness and feeling my career is going nowhere
- Bullying is rife in the industry
- Training for bosses on mental health awareness and support is required urgently
- You need to reach the employers. They are the ones who think (mostly) that we are something nasty on the bottom of their shoe. There need to be guidelines on how employers handle staff. As it stands it's hard enough to get decent wages, a proper contract or any sort of job security
- I think, especially in the competition world, that the mental AND physical health and welfare of grooms is highly overlooked. While understandable that the riders become stressed, my experience has resulted in having that stress take out on myself and having blame for the horses performance put on myself of they have gone poorly. One such example was that he invoked the pole because his plaits were too tight. I think this is a common occurrence where the riders treat their grooms poorly over the course of a completion as a way to deal with their own stress bit with little regard for the affect this has on the groom.
- In previous jobs I have felt victimised and had nobody to turn to or seek advice from. I am lucky to have found this job but previous jobs have been horrendous and if this survey was out when in those roles my answers would be very different. Private yards and even those BHS approved that offer the training are the worse with discrimination, manipulation and favouritism
- Employers need to be held accountable for working conditions and the lack of suitable pay, rights and rest.
- Yes, at times we get treated as slaves or house elves, and we do this job because we love everything horse related. But bad treatment and sweeping stuff under the rug is not helping us as grooms, not the riders and especially not the horses. When we are happy, they are happy. Same thing for when we are unhappy and/or stressed.
- The industry isn't regulated enough and you emotional blackmail yourself into working long days as you convince yourself it's your responsibility for everything to be done and not your employer
- The extra expected unpaid overtime leading to exhaustion lead me to become thoroughly depressed and affected my ability to also parent my son.
- This email/survey is the first time I have seen anything specific relating to the equestrian industry and mental health
- I think bullying and poor conditions are far too common. The minimum wage is set for a reason!
- It is a very demanding job. Not just physically but mentally too. It takes over your life and you can never really switch off
- Employers should treat employees with more respect, adhere to current regulations which most do not, be given adequate time off due to illness and holidays, employers to have more faith in employees abilities and skills and not put them down
- I love my job as a groom and would have chosen extremely happy as on occasions I am but most of the time I find myself feeling depressed and incompetent due to the behaviours towards myself of one of my riders. On a whole I am happy with my job, I just find it difficult when I have a rider who has taken a dislike to me without reason (personality clash/power hungry) and goes out of her way to make things hard.
- Spoken to badly. Expected to do things above my job role, then told off for doing things wrong. No training, no help, no advice, just getting shouted at all the time.
- My job is very stressful from time to time and my boss does look down on me. The only reason I continue to work as a groom is because of my passion for horses which is sometimes questioned in this line of work.
- I feel that I never do anything right.
- Experienced bullying from the manager.