

INJURIES IN GREYHOUND RACING: NUMBER OF STARTERS

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Introduction

As with children falling in playgrounds [1-5] and trampolines [6], long-bone and neck [7] fractures can occur in racing greyhounds caused usually by collisions and falls [8,9]. The number of injuries occurring on the first turn of an ovoid track is largely due to the congestion. The hypothesis discussed herein is that reducing the congestion will result in a decrease in the injury rate in greyhound racing. The variable explored in this study is the number of greyhounds in a race. Australia has races with 8 starters, whereas in England and Ireland races have 6 starters.

Methods

Over a two-year period from June 2018 to July 2020, race injury data were recorded from all 13 greyhound tracks in Victoria, Australia. Even though races are usually conducted with 8 greyhounds, there were races with fewer greyhounds due to low numbers of dogs being nominated and/or one or more dog being scratched. The injury rates were recorded and compared for 6 and 8 dog races on the same track and varying race distances. The hypothesis was having more space between greyhounds during a race would reduce the congestion, especially while the greyhounds negotiate their way around the first turn, and this reduced congestion would result in fewer serious injuries. All race injuries were assessed by professional on-track veterinary surgeons. The injuries were categorised by the stand-down (or incapacitation) period given to the greyhound, ranging from 0 - 90 days. Major 1 were greyhounds given a stand-down of between 28 and 42 days, Major 2 were greyhounds given more than 42 days stand-down and Catastrophic injuries were fatal (see Figure 1).

Results and Discussion

In total 3,445 races with 6 starters, examining 20,670 greyhounds and 16,051 races with 8 starters, examining 128,408 greyhounds were observed. All injury data was normalised per 1,000 starters for each venue and racing distance. Figure 1 shows the normalised number of injured greyhounds per 1,000 starters for all 6 and 8 dog races for Victoria, Australia. Figure 1 shows that there were significantly lower number of injured greyhounds in 8 dog races compared to races with 6 greyhounds. The results showed that 8 dog races have a statistically significant lower number of greyhounds with Major injuries compared to 6 dog races. The 6 dog races recorded 394 Major 2 injuries compared to only 246 Major 2 injuries in 8 dog races. However, both 6 and 8 dog races showed similar numbers of Catastrophic injuries on a normalised basis.

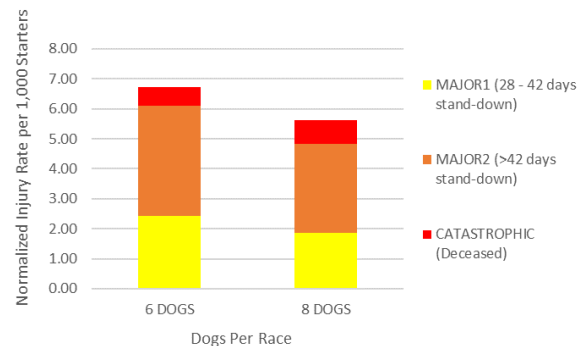


Figure 1: Comparison of normalised injury rates for all 6 and 8 dog races from June 2018 to July 2020 in Victoria, Australia.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data showed that having 8 dogs per race resulted in a lower number of greyhounds sustaining Major injuries than having 6 dog races. However, having either 6 or 8 dog races did not significantly affect the number of fatalities observed. These results are counter-intuitive, as it was expected that having fewer greyhounds in a race would reduce congestion and result in a lower number of injured greyhounds. It is recommended that more research be undertaken to understand why there are more Major injuries in 6 dog races compared to 8 dog races.

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