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Injury Rates in Fly-Fishing: An Analysis of Contributing Factors

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OBJECTIVE
The sport of fly-fishing has experienced significant growth since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is very little literature available to quantify injuries associated with the sport of fly-fishing. Previous injury surveillance studies demonstrated certain casting styles and equipment may lead to upper extremity pain or injury. The purpose of this study was to evaluate factors that can contribute to injuries that occur while participating in the sport of fly-fishing.

STUDY DESIGN
Voluntary survey response study.

METHODS
Participants were recruited via online fly-fishing forums in December 2022. Each participant was given a link to a unique survey that recorded their demographic data, musculoskeletal injury history, fly-fishing experience, specific equipment utilized, casting style, pain after fly-fishing, and patient-reported long-term outcomes.

RESULTS
254 fly-fishers were included and the largest respondent group was 65+ years of age (69.41%), with 94.9% identifying as male. The majority of respondents were retired (57.09%) and cast with their right arm (88.24%). The mean years of fly-fishing averaged 34.07 and the average number of days fly-fishing per year was 53.37. Nearly two-thirds of respondents casted overhead (66.56%) with the overwhelming majority using a thumb-on-top type grip (77.38%). The three most common flies cast were nymphs (36.13%), dry flies (24.93%), and streamers (18.49%). Most cast with a single haul (46.25%). 51.39% reported pain/soreness in their upper extremity with the majority of that pain being in the shoulder (30.58%). When they reported pain the majority (92.86%) resolved within multiple minutes to hours with very few having constant pain (6.35%). 48.82% of respondents reported that they had mild difficulty fly-fishing due to their upper extremity pain. However, of those who reported pain only 44.53% (22.44% of all respondents) have had pain that required them to see a physician or medical provider. Physical therapy was reported rarely (1.18%) with approximately one-fifth of respondents undergoing upper extremity orthopedic surgery (20.87%).

CONCLUSION
This survey found that upper extremity musculoskeletal pain associated with fly-fishing is most commonly found in the shoulder, and is often mild and transient. Despite the fact that approximately half of the respondents experienced this pain/soreness, few injuries sustained during the activity lasted longer than one day or required medical intervention. Casting style, grip type, and fly selection are modifiable factors that may affect injury rates among those who fly-fish.

KEY WORDS: *Fly-Fishing, Fishing, Shoulder Pain, Musculoskeletal Injury, Sports Medicine*