

International Slackline Association Accident and Incident Report 2015

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The ISA Slackline Accident and Incident Report (SAIR) form was developed to capture information about rigging mistakes, gear failures, injuries, near-misses, and any other safety incidents related to slacklining. To date (November 2016) the ISA has been able to collect 131 self-attestations for incidents dating as far back as 1999 through the SAIR form.

This analysis will focus on the 69 incidents reported before February 4th, 2016 which describe incidents happening in 2015 and before. Most of these reported incidents occurred in 2015.

Additionally, the last section will discuss other incidents not reported through the SAIR form online. We believe this information is of value to the community and should be easily available.

The SAIR form is intended to gather information about gear failures, rigging mistakes, and other incidents regardless of whether an injury occurred. **It is our hope that with this publication, more gear and rigging incidents which have occurred will be reported and that this information will help to minimize the occurrence of future incidents.**

The SAIR form has been translated into German, French and Portuguese.

SAIR – English – sair.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – German – sairDE.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – French – sairFR.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – Portuguese – sairPR.slacklineinternational.org

www.slacklineinternational.org info@slacklineinternational.org

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Number and Dates of Reports

This analysis focuses on the 69 incidents reported before February 4th, 2016. Most of incidents discussed in the following pages occurred in 2014 and 2015 with no obvious seasonal bias.

Figure 1: Reported Incidents 1999-2015

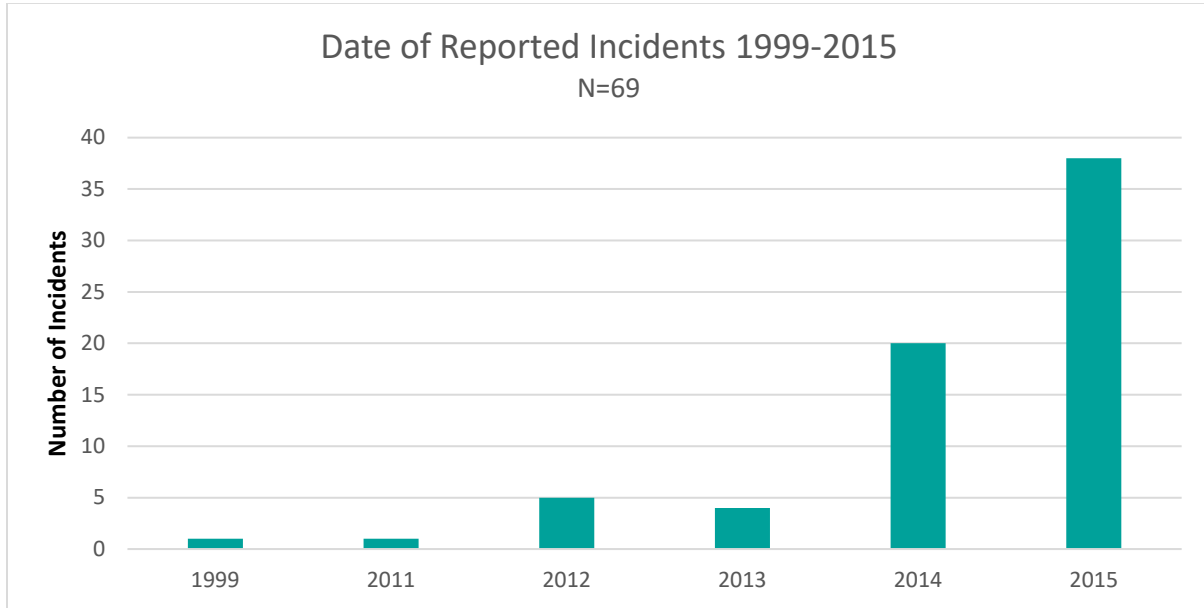
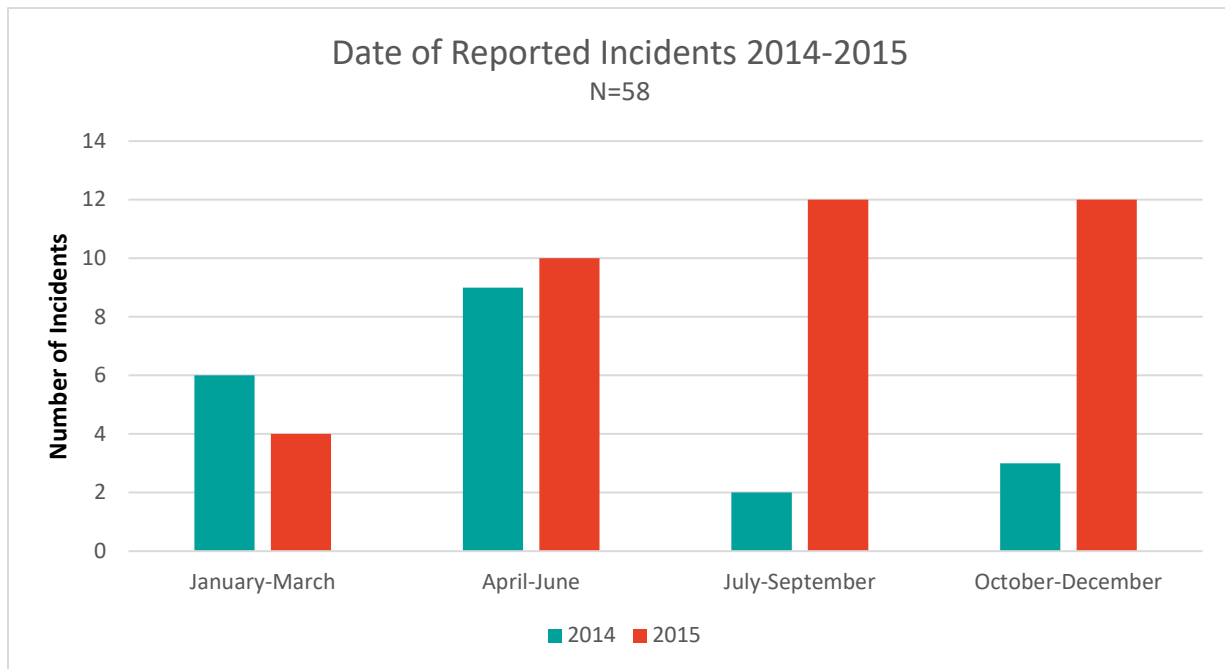


Figure 2: Reported Incidents 2014-2015



Demographics and Location

Age

Average Age: 22.7

Median Age: 21

Mode Age: 20

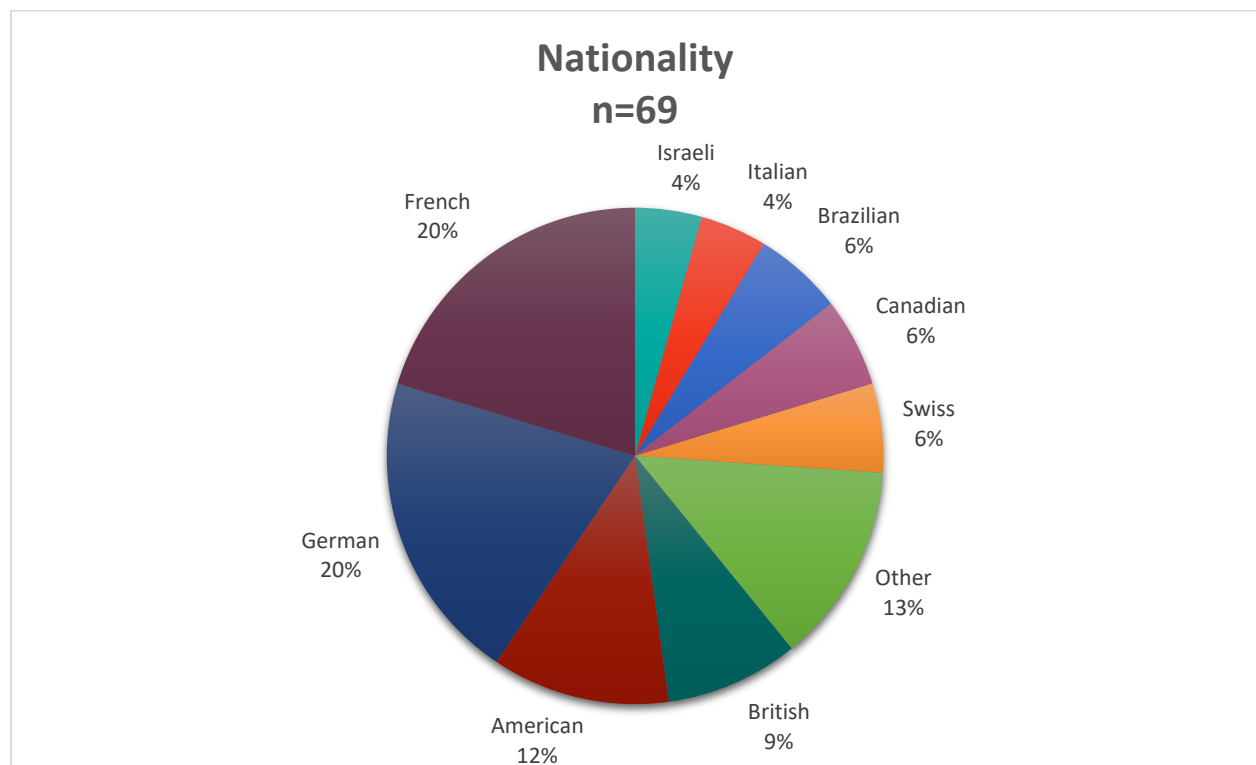
Self-rating skill level and rigging experience

The majority of those who reported incidents self-rated their slacklining skills and rigging experience as intermediate (76% and 57% respectively) followed by experts (19% and 36%), and then beginners (5% and 7%). Similar rating trends were observed in the skill level and rigging experience of the injured person(s): intermediate (64% and 47%), expert (19% and 35%), and beginner (17% and 18%).

Nationality and Location

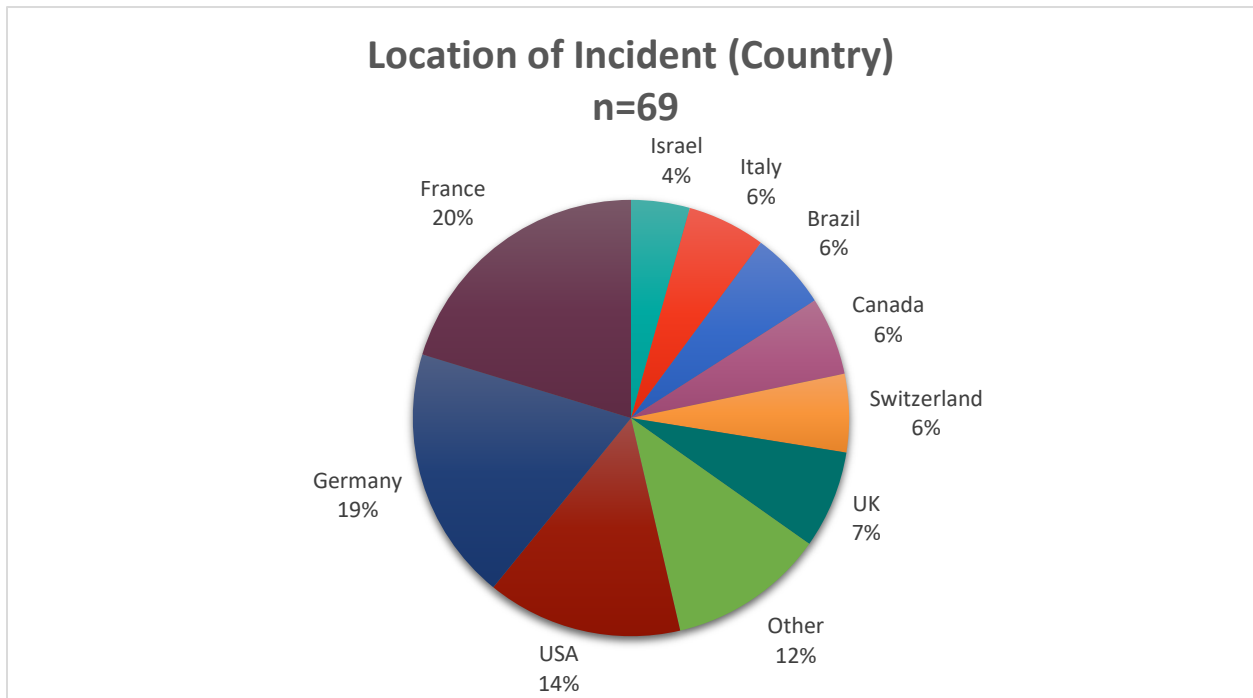
In terms of location and nationality, 20% of reports were submitted by French slackliners and another 20% submitted by Germans. The trends in terms of location closely match the reporter nationality. Both of these countries are known for their large slackline communities and it is possible that this representation in accident reporting is proportionate to the size of the national slackline communities in these locations.

Figure 3: Nationality



Note: *Other* consists of 7 different nationalities

Figure 4: Location of Incident



Note: *Other* consists of at least 7 different countries

Injury and Incident Specifics

The largest category of reported injuries reported are sustained from “falling off the slackline”, whether it be a longline, trickline, or other. Very few incidents were reported through the SAIR in which someone was injured due to gear failure. In fact, upon closer inspection the one incident reported as “injury due to failure and falling off a slackline”, the purple mark in Figure 7, is described in the narrative provided as the person becoming tangled in a leash during a fall on a midline with no description of gear failure. The narratives of many of these reports describe the participant attempting a new trick, learning a new mount, or other progression.

Figure 5: Nature of injury

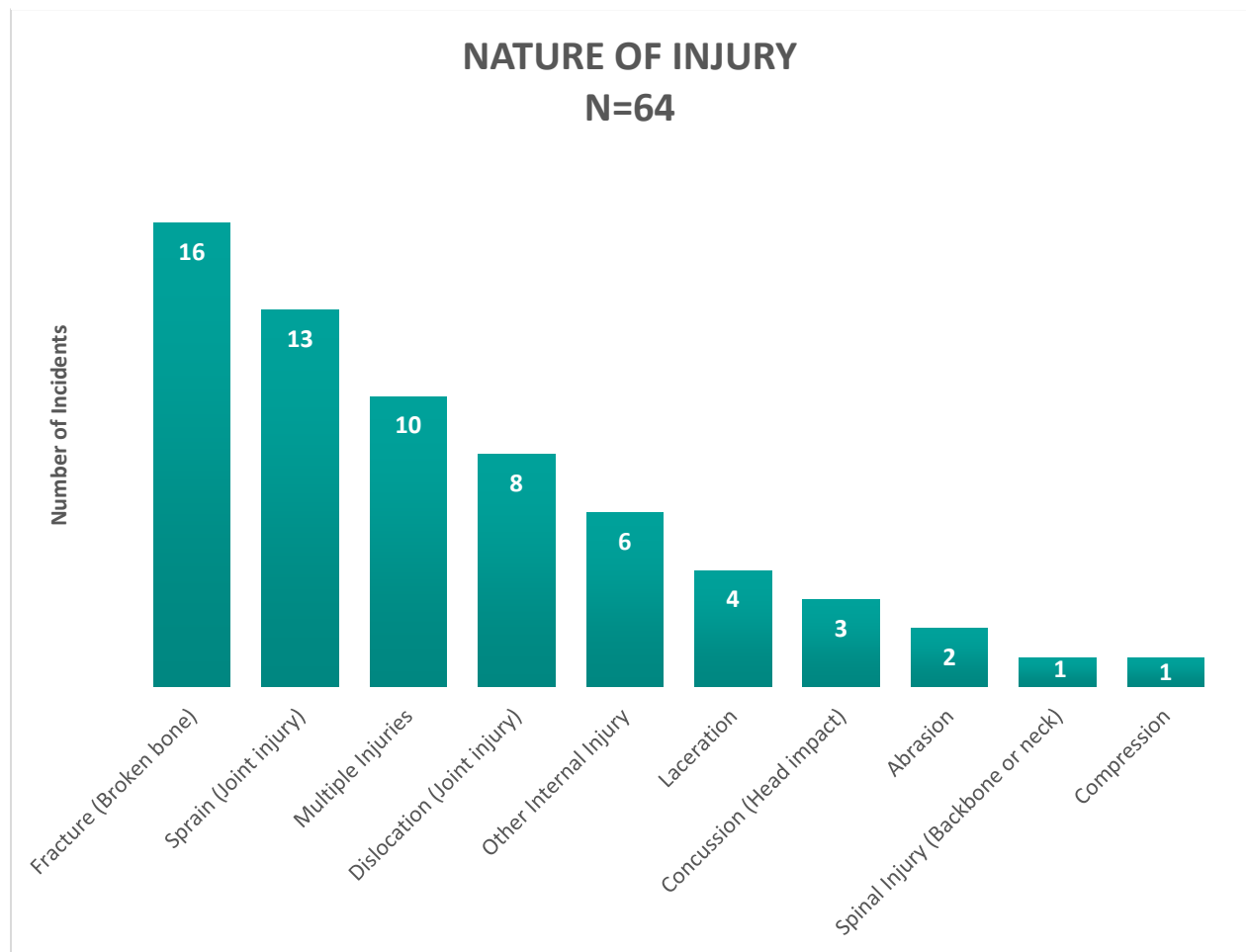
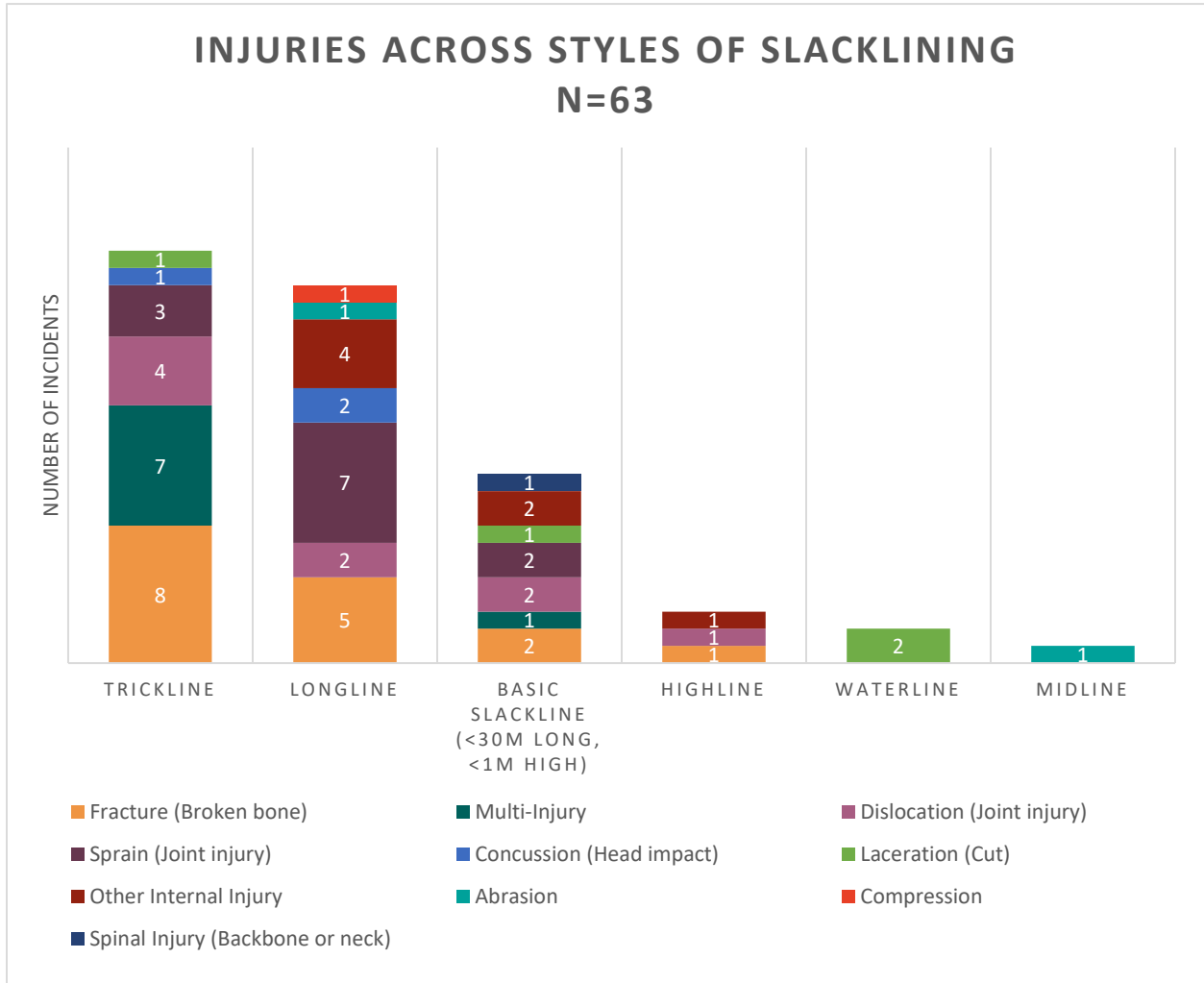
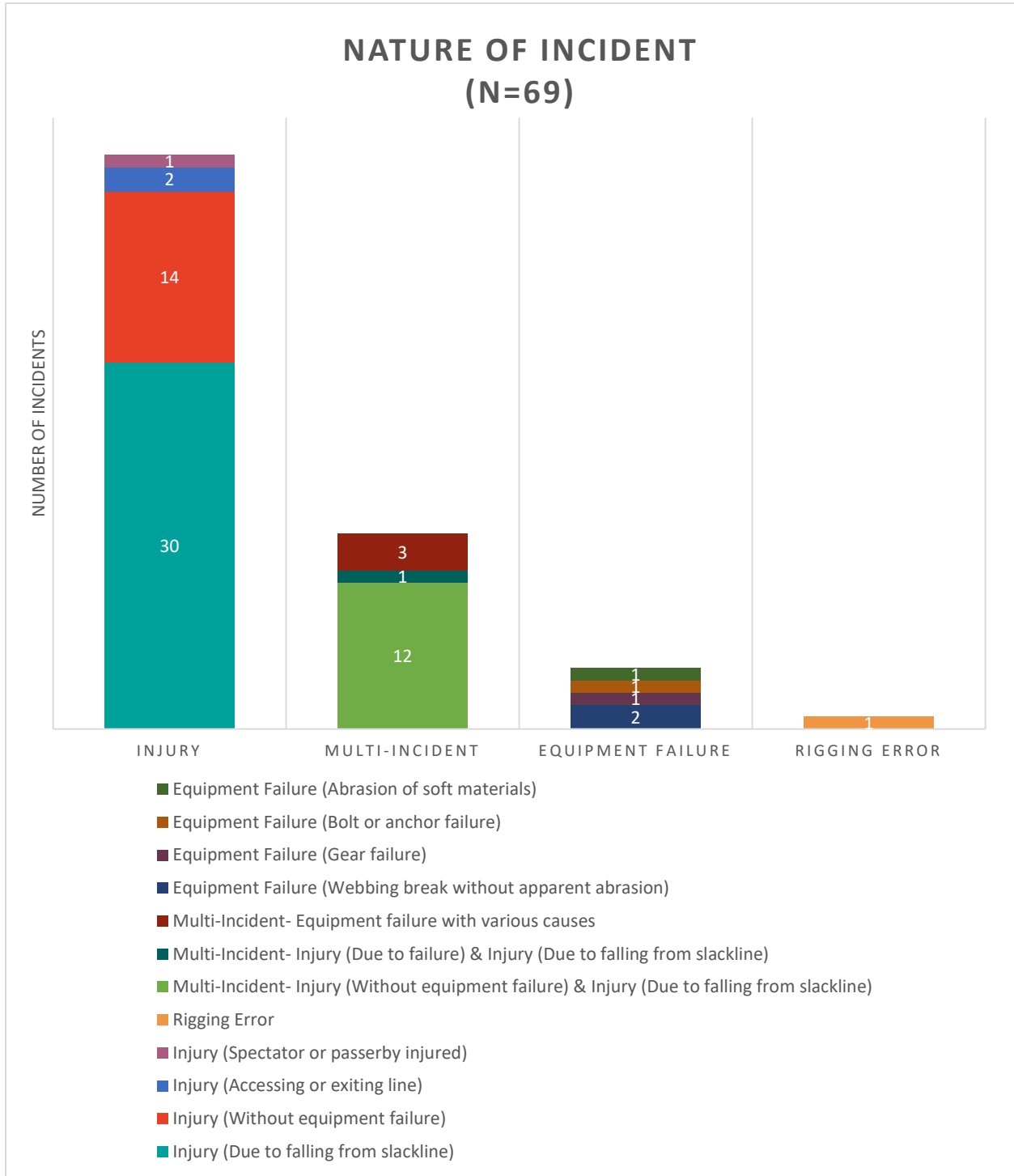


Figure 6: Injuries across styles of slacklining



Note: N=63 instead of 64 because 1 person indicated "all" for style of slacklining.

Figure 7: Nature of Incident



Reported Rigging and Gear Related Incidents

Nine of the 69 SAIR submissions described rigging errors or other line failures and in each case the reporters gave permission for these incidents to be published for the benefit of the community. These reports are summarized here (wording slightly adapted from reports for clarity and grammar):

SAIR-3 – Waterline - 120ft of wet T-18 mkII webbing was single wrapped in an AWL 3.0 with a 6-9 inch tail. While bouncing on the line, it slipped through and the line failed. Nothing broke, no visible damage to webbing or hardware. We now use double wraps on wet webbing.

SAIR-7 – Longline - Tried out different releasable anchors. Got my thumb caught in the sling and was stuck for quite a while before cutting the webbing. I didn't pay full attention, since I felt relatively proficient with the equipment at hand. It is imperative to pay attention at all times.

SAIR-9 – Trickline - A Slackline Industries trickline ratchet kit was rigged indoors to a pair of steel I-beam pillars. It was not my line, and I did not rig it, but I did tie off the ratchet to back it up before I started using the line, as the owner/rigger did not. The only paddings for the pillars were the thin SI tree-pros. After a night of tricking on it, the line abruptly broke underneath me in a buttbounce, being sheared through at the static loop end. This failure is most likely attributable to unsafe rigging- insufficient edge protection.

SAIR-10 – Highline - We rigged a loose 20m highline (linegrip & hangover used to tension, but after a few leashfall the tension was basically 'hand tension'). Mainline was EQB Element threaded with Bounce, linelock was the old version of EQB Canon. Due to a bad threading process, the webbing had 'lost' a couple of mm of width, leaving a visible a small gap between the webbing and the sideplate. I didn't think it could be a problem, but I was wrong. There were a lot of beginners trying that line, and a lot of leashfalls. When we de-rigged all the lines, we saw that the tail of the webbing came out from under the walking webbing, and the line was still up for a miracle. I think it was caused by a combination of the webbing slippage effect and the fact that the webbing could move sideways in the weblock.

SAIR-16 – Highline - The rigging anchors are set far back from the edge of the cliff so it is imperative to protect the line from the rock. We didn't plan ahead for this and just used a blanket we had lying around. It worked great for the first half of the day and there were nearly no whippers taken but on one of the last runs of the day one of our team decided to recheck the set up only to find that the blanket had wiggled out from under the line and the backup rig had been cut half way through. Luckily the person that was currently on the line worked her way to the end of the line gently enough to not tear the back up any further and the danger was avoided. Always remember to check your line numerous times throughout the day to make sure everything is still in check even if you're not taking whippers as the rig does move around quite a bit!

SAIR-38 – Waterline - Natural anchor using slings around a rock feature failed when the slings came out of the natural anchorage on which it was fixed taking the backup with it. The banana arrived with a lot of speed on the top of my head during my catch. So be careful about natural anchors (use an independent backup)!!!

SAIR-60 – Trickline - We rigged a trickline with pulleys and a weblock. After tensioning, I went to the middle of the line to see if it was tight enough. I touched the webbing and heard a cracking sound. I took a quick step back at the same time as the webbing broke. I had no time to warn my friend at the anchor. At the same moment, he was checking the pulley system. The webbing broke at the end just after the webbing anchor so the pulley and weblock stayed attached to the tree.

Context – Slackline Development, Demographics, Growth

Timeline

1970s – Slacklining begins in Yosemite, California, USA

1983 – First highline, rigged in California by Scott Balcom and Chris Carpenter

2006 – First European Highline Festival organized by Heinz Zak

2006-2007 – Highlining begins to grow in Europe; slacklines appear in U.S. parks/universities.

2007 – First appearance of trickline competitions

2010 – Number of highliners in the U.S. estimated at around 200 to 300.

2011 – SlackChat, popular Facebook group created (February)

2014 – SlackChat, popular Facebook group reaches 4,000 members (June)

2016 – SlackChat, popular Facebook group reaches 9,000 members (June)

2016 – SlackChat, popular Facebook group reaches 10,000 members (September)

2016 – Slacklining on Facebook has 42,351 Likes, some slackline companies have 20,000-60,000 Likes

2016 – ISA Demographic survey reached 21,470 people on Facebook, 1463 responses

2016 – More than 50 slackline focused festivals being held around the world this year

History and numbers gathered from conversations with early members of the community as well as from the ISA survey data and Facebook analytics data. Based on these numbers, we estimate the current number of active slackliners to be between 10,000-30,000 people worldwide.¹

ISA Demographics Survey

In a separate publication, we will be reporting general information on the demographics of the slackline community gathered through a survey with more than 1,400 respondents. To provide context to the accident and incident reports, some of this information is discussed below.

A total of 1,463 people responded to the ISA demographics survey posted in January, 2016. From this data, we have evaluated the number of respondents who reported that they practice each discipline (lowline, longline, highline, trickline, etc.) “Always”, “Often”, or “Sometimes”. These categorizations, provide a simple metric for estimating the number of practitioners of a particular slackline discipline.

DISCIPLINE	% OF RESPONDENTS TO DEMOGRAPHICS SURVEY
LOWLINING	74.3%
LONGLINING	75.4%
TRICKLINING	17.8%
WATERLINING	43.0%
HIGHLINING	39.7%

¹ Estimate based on size of various Facebook groups, number of followers on major slackline brands’ social media accounts, festival attendance, equipment sales, and demographics survey information. This estimate represents people who actively slackline. If considering all slackline sales, retired slackliners, this number would be higher.

It should be noted that these numbers may not necessarily reflect the slackline community as a whole. The audience of the International Slackline Association Demographics survey likely leans towards longlining and highlining. This is due to the origins of the ISA, which was founded at the Turkish Highline Carnival, and to the continued representation of the ISA at various longline and highline festivals. However, when considering the SAIR reports discussed in the following pages, it is worth noting these numbers. In particular, given the percentage of people reporting trickline participation in the demographics survey, the number of trickline related incidents/injuries reported through the SAIR form is disproportionately high (34.7% of injuries involved tricklines when 17.8% of audience self-reported as trickliners). Comparatively, the number of injuries sustained while highlining is strikingly disproportionately low (4.7% of injuries with 39.7% of audience self-reported as highliners).

Discussion

There are always risks with any physical activity. That the predominant cause of injury in slacklining is reported as being due to falling from the slackline indicates that gear related injuries are uncommon and that incidents rarely relate to equipment or rigging quality. Rigging errors and gear failures are known to have happened, though few have been reported to the SAIR as of February 2015 when this data was compiled.

Other Known Incidents – Informal Reports

In addition to the incidents reported through the SAIR forms, many other incidents including highline failures, other gear failures, highline leash incidents, near-failures, various injuries and non-injury incidents have been verbally reported to board members of the ISA. Many of these will be reported in more detail in future publications, however a highlighted overview of incidents from 2015 and before are provided below, sorted by slackline discipline, to initiate awareness and bring valuable knowledge of these events to the slacklining community.

Highline Incidents

No deaths from highlining have been reported through the SAIR and only one death due to highlining has been recorded (Slovenia, 2011). This incident was a result of a carabiner being used in place of leash rings. A report, in German, can be found online.²

The ISA has recorded approximately 20 incidents in which the mainline, backup, and/or anchor of a highline failed. These incidents have been verbally reported or posted publicly on social media. In all but 3 cases, the backup system prevented a complete failure. These partial failures include 3 times in which a boulder used as an anchor shifted, 2 trad anchor failures, 4 bolt failures, 5 instances of abrasion severing the webbing or anchor, one instance of a broken homemade weblock, and one instance in which the webbing slipped completely through the weblock. In the case of one midline (30m long, 7m high), abrasion to the main line resulted in a ground fall when the backup did not engage. One mainline failure during tensioning of a midline resulted in a ground fall with minor injury to the rigger who was attached to the anchor that failed (old metal on a bridge structure).

The ISA is also aware of three complete midline/highline failures, none of which resulted in serious injury or death. In one case, during a demo at a sports expo a line pulley was being used to traverse when the highliner rotated multiple times under the line, twisting the pulley against the webbing and cutting both the main and backup webbing against the sideplates of the pulley. The participant landed

² <http://www.katlein.de/media/dokumente/slackline/Karabiner%20in%20Highlines.pdf>

on mats 8 meters below. The second instance was the result of an insufficient boulder anchor in which the main and backup were affixed to the same boulder on a highline that was approximately 30m long and 30m high. While the highliner was sitting in his harness taping the line, the boulder slid off the edge. The highliner held on to the webbing and swung across the gap where he impacted the canyon wall on the other side and came to a stop near to the ground with relatively minor injuries. The third instance involved a long highline (>500m) which was damaged in an electrical storm.³

Known rigging errors and other factors which have not lead to a line failure have included quicklinks deformed when not locked appropriately, hangers detaching from bolts, quicklinks damaged by movement on climbing hangers, misthreaded weblocks, and unstable anchors.

Two instances have been verbally reported of a highliner who fell from a ledge while rigging, sustaining non-fatal injuries. In one of these cases, the metal structure used for both a personal and highline anchor failed while tensioning. Informal reports also include multiple instances where a highliner was injured during a leash fall near the anchor due to swinging back into the cliff face. Two fatal fall incidents are described in a later section.

Additionally, the ISA has recorded 13 verbal reports in relation to the leash and harness. These include: knots not followed through or tied through only the lower harness loop or through the non-load-bearing partitioning strap, harness not doubled back, and one case of a leash attached to a gear loop. In one instance, the highliner fell 15-20' to the ground below the short tree-anchored midline, suffering only superficial injuries. In another incident, the highliner tied in only to the lower loop of his harness and neglected to finish his figure 8 tie-in knot. During a leash fall, the knot loaded only the lower half of his harness, pulling the waist belt loose from the auto-double-back fixture resulting in the highliner hanging upside down with his harness around his knees on a partially tied figure 8 knot. In light of these incidents, the ISA published the [Buddy Check Advisory \(Oct 2015\)](#).

Lastly, one incident has been reported in which a highline leash was severely damaged by a line pulley traverse device when the leash was allowed to remain looped over the top of the line while traversing.

See the previously published [Highline Injury Report – Catch and Leashfall Incidents \(Jan 2016\)](#) for further discussion.

Current trends in highlining and longlining involve looser lines, lower tension, and softpointed lines (tensioning system not used or removed after tensioning). This trend partially alleviates concerns with high tensions yet makes slippage and twisting of the webbing in the weblock more likely: [Webbing slippage in low-tension highlines \(2015\)](#).

Trickline Incidents

An informal collection of slackline injury data gathered by slackliner Chris Wagers in 2014 briefly documents another 28 trickline injuries (55% of 51 total reports) with details comparable to the data presented above.

In 2015, a trickliner was injured when a prototype weblock broke and struck him in the face during practice sessions of a trickline competition. This is the first known instance of a gear failure causing such an injury during an event. It is one of very few instances of gear failure directly causing an injury in all reported incidents (SAIR or informal reports). Also in 2015, numerous informal reports were made

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZAmoZvZMqE>

describing injuries sustained at trickline competitions in which the padding under the line was 3" thick compressed wrestling mat. These injuries included a broken arm (both ulna and radius), fractured vertebrae, concussion, and joint injuries in separate incidents. In multiple instances, the injured slackliner suggested improved pads would have minimized or prevented the injury.

Outside of competitions, incidents reported include a variety of "falling from the slackline" injuries and multiple cases of webbing breaks often related to damage from improper loading in the ratchet and girth hitch failures. Most modern trickline ratchet kits include stronger ratchets, tree slings, and shackles, which eliminate the concern of failure from girth hitch abrasion. Additionally, some kits include a backup cord, and backing up tricklines has become a standard practice in the trickline community.

Waterline Incidents

During the summer of 2015 before the SAIR form was available online, the International Slackline Association received multiple informal reports of ear drum injuries due to falling from a waterline. If the slackliner impacts the water flat across the ear, ear drum damage, loss of consciousness, and disorientation have been reported. A safety advisory on this topic was published in 2015: [Eardrum puncture risk while waterlining](#) (Available in [English](#), [German](#), [French](#), [Dutch](#)).

Longline Incidents

Like tricklining, most informal reports of longline incidents consist of "falling from the slackline" injuries. A small number of incidents known are primarily the result of high tensions and/or insufficient rigging knowledge and none have been reported in which serious injury resulted.

Tensioning incidents involving line grab devices (prusik knots, LineGrip, etc.) have been reported. In one instance, a non-rated prussik cord broke under approximately 6kN of tension while being used to detension a 40m longline. No injury was reported and no metal was attached to the webbing that was unexpectedly released. A similar incident occurred when the prusik cord was severed at the attachment point to the bucket of a LineGrip. Other incidents include slippage of the webbing through LineGrips and similar devices. In these few reports, high tensions and/or in high heat were likely a factor and the device user guides recommend protecting against heat and not leaving the line grab device in the system after tensioning.

The International Slackline Association has recently published a [Longline Recommendations](#) guide which can be found on the [ISA website Publications page](#) with other useful resources.

Other Slackline Related Incidents

Three incidents are known in which a bicyclist rode into a slackline causing severe injury and in one case, death (described in the following section). Of the other two, one incident occurred in California, the other in British Columbia. Additionally, a variety of minor encounters with pedestrians and cyclists walking or biking into slacklines in public lands have been discussed in community forums.

It is a known issue among the community that curious spectators will often approach a slackline in an unintentionally unsafe manner: reaching across a slackline while someone is walking, setting a camera on the line to take a photo, touching the rigging, or otherwise interacting with the line. No specific incidents or injuries have been reported through the SAIR, however.

These occurrences have led to an increased tendency for slackliners to mark slacklines with 'wind dampeners', pieces of webbing hanging from the line to aid in visibility. In the case of long lines, it is also

common to longline with companions present to watch for any potential issues and to actively engage spectators.

Fatalities in Slacklining

The SAIR online submission form recorded no fatalities across all disciplines of slacklining and, as mentioned above, only a single death has been reported from highlining to date which was caused by inappropriate use of equipment (Slovenia, 2011).¹

Other incidents reported to the ISA or publicly recorded in social media and news outlets describe four other deaths related to slacklining. A bicyclist was killed when he failed to notice a slackline strung between trees in a grassy area off the path on a university campus and biked into the line at high speed (Utah USA, 2013).⁴ A broken ratchet strap resulted in the death of a slackliner during tensioning of a trickline when the girth hitch failed and a ratchet struck the individual in the face. This incident was likely compounded by a previous facial injury (Brazil, 2014).^{5,6} A bystander was killed when a light post was used as an anchor and pulled over by the tension of a trickline (Brazil, 2014).⁷ One person died waterlining (Oregon USA, 2014) when pulled out to sea at high tide.⁸

Additionally, there are two verbal reports of slackliners who were killed due to falls sustained while accessing or retreating from an exposed highline anchor (Hong Kong, 2015 and Switzerland, 2015). In the first incident, the highliner was scrambling on approximately class 4 terrain alone to reach an anchor and begin rigging. The cause of his fall is unknown as he was alone at the time while two other members of the team approached the other anchor. In the second incident, the highliner had climbed to an anchor at night and apparently fell while attempting to down-climb.

It should be noted that only one of these incidents described in this section describes a fatality caused by the act of slacklining itself. The two cases in Brazil highlight the importance of safe rigging and the ability to evaluate anchors and estimate forces. In the case of the waterline incident in Oregon, any activity involving tides and ocean waters carries an increased risk which should be taken into account. The incident in Utah involving a bicyclist highlights the importance of environmental awareness in any aspect of slacklining.

Conclusions

This report is the first major collection and analysis of slacklining injury data of which we are aware. Few institutions collect and analyze massive data sets regarding sport injuries and those that do have little to no reports of slacklining.

The National Electronic Injury Surveillance System (NEISS) developed by the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission is a national sample of injuries collected from emergency room visits in U.S. hospitals. In the 2015 NEISS data set of nearly 360,000 cases, only 1 case was noted to have involved a slackline. In that case, a 12 year-old male fell off a slackline at camp and landed on his right arm,

⁴ <http://upr.org/post/usu-student-dies-after-hitting-slackline-bike>

⁵ <http://globoesporte.globo.com/ac/noticia/2014/10/jovem-de-23-anos-morre-em-acidente-com-equipamento-de-slackline.html>

⁶ <http://globoesporte.globo.com/ac/noticia/2014/11/so-ouvi-o-barulho-diz-namorada-de-jovem-morto-com-catraca-de-slackline.html>

⁷ <http://globoesporte.globo.com/rj/serra-lagos-norte/noticia/2014/03/acidente-em-slackline-mata-menina-de-10-anos-na-regiao-dos-lagos-do-rio.html>

⁸ <http://www.kptv.com/story/25435449/body-found-on-beach-identified-as-portland-man-swept-into-ocean>

fracturing his wrist. By comparison 11,134 injuries occurred while playing football (American), 6,881 in soccer, 144 in yoga, and 6 in rock climbing.^{9, 10, 11} As the sport grows, greater awareness and collections must be promoted amongst institutions internationally so that further analysis and recommendations can be made to maintain and improve safety in slacklining.

Current estimates place the active slackline population at between 10,000-30,000 people ('active' being people who slackline regularly and are involved in the larger slackline community). When including people who occasionally slackline, slackline in climbing gyms without becoming more involved in the sport, own slacklines without using them often, or have slacklined in the past, this number could be as high as 300,000 – 500,000 people. When considering the low number of incidents found in context with other sports, slacklining appears to be relatively safe. The primary mode of injury in slacklining is falling whereas other sports, particularly team contact sports, have multiple modes of injury to be considered.

This may be due in part to the apprenticeship model of learning that was adopted early in the sport's development, especially in the highlining discipline. For many years, highliners learned to rig and walk primarily with mentorship from experienced highliners, helping to rig many highlines with guidance before setting out on their own. Longlining was often seen as training for highlining, and was taught in a similar fashion. The apprenticeship model provides experienced instruction allowing students to acquire best practices and progress safely to more challenging lines.

Tricklining is an exception within the slackline disciplines in this sense in that rigging is often learned from product manuals and videos online with minimal understanding of the forces involved. Additionally, the participant is consistently making contact with the webbing in a variety of positions and with dynamic motions. This provides alternative modes of injury due to incorrect body positioning, errors in judgement, and less predictable falls. The increased force on a trickline and trickline anchors, as compared to other slackline disciplines, also influences injury and incident potential.

Summary

Representatives of the International Slackline Association have been actively gathering information about slackline injuries and incidents while attending slackline gatherings worldwide. SAIR submissions have also been requested through the ISA's demographics survey and on various social media channels.

This document describes a total of 69 SAIR submissions and 35 informal reports of rigging errors, gear failure, and leash errors for a total of about 100 known incidents from 2009-2015. Many of these incidents can be at least partially attributed to a lack of safe rigging knowledge as the sport developed.

This is not a complete data set as it relies on participants self-reporting. However, given the degree of connectivity within the slackline community, it is uncommon for major incidents to remain unknown and unreported.

The majority of reports in this data set focused on injuries. The SAIR form is intended to gather information about gear failures, rigging mistakes, and other incidents regardless of whether an injury

⁹ Due to low numbers reported for yoga, climbing, and slackline injuries and the smaller active communities involved, it is difficult to directly compare relative safety of these sports with football.

¹⁰ <https://origin.prod.cpsc.gov/s3fs-public/2015%20Neiss%20data%20highlights.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.cpsc.gov/cgibin/NEISSQuery/home.aspx>

occurred. **It is our hope that with this publication, more gear and rigging incidents will be reported in the future.**

Take home points

- Falling from slackline is the most common event leading to an injury
- Fractures (broken bones) are the most common injury overall
- Tricklining and Longlining have the highest rates of incident reporting / injuries
- Highlining incident/injury report rate is strikingly low (4.7% of reports cited highline injuries)

The data discussed in this report demonstrates a relatively low rate of injuries and incidents in slacklining. This report was compiled in order to increase awareness both of safety and the need to report slackline injuries and incidents to assist in the development of the sport.

As the community grows, augmented by social media, the need for data analysis and educational resources increases in order to maintain the relative safety within the various disciplines of slacklining. It is for this reason publications such as the [Webbing Slippage Warning](#), [Buddy Check Advisory](#), [Longline Recommendations](#) documents, and more are prepared and distributed by the International Slackline Association. These documents and more can be found on [the Publications page of the ISA website](#).

Submission and publication of SAIR reports serve to educate the community, providing case studies from which to learn, and will hopefully reduce future incidents. The ISA is especially interested in ‘near miss’ reports, incidents in which a rigging error or other factor caused failure or nearly caused a failure regardless of whether an injury occurred or not.

Please take a few minutes to report any incidents at sair.slacklineinternational.org or on the translated forms listed below.

Limitations of this study

The report form was previously available only in English which may hinder reporting for those with limited English ability.

The SAIR form has since been translated into French and Portuguese.

SAIR – English – sair.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – Germany – sairDE.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – French – sairFR.slacklineinternational.org

SAIR – Portuguese – sairPR.slacklineinternational.org

All reports are self-attestations that were recruited via email, in person, and online postings (ie. Facebook-SlackChat) and thus may not reflect the true population.

Novelties

First major aggregation of international data regarding slacklining injuries and incidents