

Supplementary Table 2. Identified barriers influencing female athletes return-to-sport postpartum.

| CATEGORY | IDENTIFIED BARRIERS |
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| INDIVIDUAL | |
| Physiological | |
| Pregnancy and childbirth-related | Mastitis; ³⁹ rectus abdominal separation; ³⁷ pelvic organ prolapse; ¹⁵ muscle weakness; ^{39 40} pain/discomfort; ^{40 41} lack of/no energy; ^{13 49} fatigue; ^{15 38} increased body weight and shape; ^{15 41 42} lack of stamina; ³⁹ out of shape; ^{40 43} declined physical ability; ^{15 40 41} declined performance; ⁴² urinary incontinence; ⁴⁰ haemorrhoids ⁴⁰ |
| Sport-related | Reduction in lactation; ^{15 37 39} interruption in lactation; ³⁹ injury; ^{15 42 43} (e.g., stress fractures; ¹⁵ problems with sacroiliac joint; ¹⁵ strained abs) ¹⁵ |
| Psychological | |
| Psychological | Postpartum depression/low moods ^{15 44} |
| Behavioral | |
| Sleep | Lack of sleep ^{15 42 45} |
| Financial | |
| Cost | Increased financial expenses needed to raise a child; ⁶ cost of childcare ^{13 15} |
| Attitudinal | |
| Stereotypes | Good mother identity; ^{12 13 16} (includes need to balance sport with motherhood; ⁴⁴ need to compromise own time; ⁴⁷ and need to sacrifice own trainings); ¹² pregnancy and childbirth equals end of career ⁵² |
| Perceptions and emotions | Feelings of guilt/selfishness; ^{12 16 43 46 47} feelings of uncertainty about return; ^{13 15 41 43 48} lack of confidence; ¹³ stress; ³⁸ self-criticism/doubt about being a good mother; ^{16 41} reduced identity with being an athlete; ⁴⁸ concerns about breastfeeding affecting health, training, and performance; ⁴⁵ aging body (“too old”); ⁴¹ loss of ‘competitive edge’; ⁴³ pressure to return sooner (due to financial need/funding requirement); ^{15 50} changed priority (i.e., sport no longer important); ^{41 48 49} incapability of partner to look after children; ⁴⁷ selection bias (i.e., perceiving sport organisations to ‘not select’ athletes who are mothers) ¹³ |
| Situational | |
| Travel | Travel away from family; ^{12, 37} logistical challenges, stress and cost associated traveling with family ⁴³ |

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| Time | Increased need and time for injury prevention training; ⁴⁵ not having time and space to commit to family and sport; ^{13 43} time spent away from child/ren; ³⁷ lack of time for training; ⁴⁹ scheduling breastfeeding between training and competitions ^{15 45} |
| Childcare | Need for childcare support; ^{15 16 49} childcare availability ^{15 16} |
| Communication | |
| Breastfeeding | Limited access to information about sport and breastfeeding ⁴⁵ |
| INTERPERSONAL | |
| Attitudinal | |
| Stereotypes | Good mother ideology (e.g., it must be the mother who looks after the child; ⁴⁶ motherhood should be ‘top priority’); ⁴³ motherhood equals retirement/is an appropriate time to retire; ^{37 41 43} running postpartum could damage body ⁴⁴ |
| Perceptions and emotions | Partner concern for injury; ³⁷ judgements about athletes over-using parents for childcare ³⁷ |
| Situational | |
| Domestic duties | Increased tensions with partner ⁴¹ |
| Career | Partner’s career ⁴³ / work schedule ⁴⁷ |
| Social Support | |
| Childcare | Not having family support with childcare ⁴¹ |
| Communication | |
| Breastfeeding | Limited physician knowledge about sport and breastfeeding ⁴⁵ |
| ORGANISATIONAL | |
| Attitudinal | |
| Stereotypes | Motherhood and sport incompatible; ¹² pregnancy/motherhood equals retirement; ^{13 14 41 43} athletes not capable of returning to same level postpartum; ⁴¹ misogyny regarding the postpartum body (e.g., still too fat) ⁵⁰ |
| Expectations | Expectations from teammates to commit to sport over child; ^{15 47} pressure from teammates, sponsors, and sport organisation to return-to-sport sooner ^{15 43} |
| Communication | |

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| Training and accommodation | Limited knowledge on how to accommodate athletes postpartum; ⁴³ overtraining (due to poor coach knowledge and awareness) ⁴³ |
| Policy | |
| Contracts | Reduced access to support services; ¹⁴ financially penalized for pregnancy; ^{14 50} (inc. ambiguous clauses that allowed no/reduced remittance); ¹⁴ lack of provisions to financially protect athletes if/when pregnant (e.g., maternity leave); ¹⁴ no security for female athletes to return postpartum ¹⁴ |
| Funding | Inequitable funding models (e.g., pregnancy consolidated in injury policy); ¹⁴ removal of athlete status and financial support (due to pregnancy); ⁴¹ funding not available during pregnancy ¹³ |
| Childcare | Lack of discretionary time to see or be with family; ¹³ lack of suitable childcare and child accommodations; ^{13 15 51} resistance to modify policies or make exceptions to accommodate athletes and their families; ^{13 43} no financial support for childcare; ⁵¹ funding not applicable for childcare purposes; ¹³ (inc. family travel); ⁴³ inconsistencies in funding available (e.g., childcare funding only available during Olympic years) ¹⁵ |
| Re-qualification | Lack of re-qualification policy for athletes postpartum ¹⁵ |