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## Parenting in the paralympic pathway: Roles, obstacles and rewards

### [Abstract]

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## **Parenting in the Paralympic Pathway: roles, obstacles and rewards**

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Research into the role of parenting in mainstream sport environments is well developed but little attention has been focused upon parents with young impaired athletes under their charge. Parents are often a silent workforce in enabling the engagement of young people in competitive sport. In the case of young athletes with impairments who have Paralympic aspirations, parenting brings with it added complexity, both practically and psychologically (Russel, 2003), and thus it is necessary to understand the experiences of this group of parents so appropriate support mechanisms can be developed. Therefore, this research asked, “how do parents of young elite athletes with impairments facilitate their child’s engagement in competitive sport?”. Within this, routes into sport for these young people, and to the benefits and challenges influencing parents’ experience of youth disability sport are explored.

This research employed an in-depth phenomenological thematic analysis of interviews with ten parents of elite youth athletes with impairments. Parents were recruited if their child engaged in competitive disability sport at a national or international level and were 25 years of age or under. The analysis indicated parents of young athletes with impairments share values relating to equality and inclusion, and that social exclusion in mainstream environments directed these young people toward sport. Parents discussed the complex and multifarious roles they undertook to support their child’s sport engagement, indicating a number of challenges including limited local disability-specific sport opportunity and funding difficulties. They also highlighted key benefits for the child (e.g. ‘fitting in’ and independence) as well as for them (e.g. parental support, worrying less). Findings are discussed in relation to existing literature, and key recommendations in relation to policy and practice are made.