During the 1997–1998 hockey season, a cohort of female recreational ice hockey players was followed prospectively to determine the nature and extent of injuries (for details of this study see Dryden, Francescutti, Rowe, Spence, & Voaklander, 2000a, pp. 140–149; Dryden, Francescutti, Rowe, Spence, & Voaklander, 2000b, pp. 1378–1383).

As a follow-up to this study, the researchers contacted all players injured during the season to assess the impact of their injuries on their participation in sports or physical activities and on their desire to continue to play hockey.

Methods
Participants in this research were recruited from the two women's ice hockey leagues operating in the greater Edmonton (Alberta, Canada) area. Researchers collected baseline measurements for all participants at the start of the 1997–1998 hockey season, and collected injury data prospectively throughout the season (Dryden et al., 2000a; Dryden et al., 2000b).

Researchers telephoned all players who sustained an injury six months after the date of the injury (or the date of the last injury if there was more than one during the season). A structured questionnaire determined if the injury required players to alter the type or intensity of their sports or physical activities, social activities, or work activities. The questionnaire also asked if the possibility of a hockey injury was a barrier to the women's continued participation in the sport. Finally, players were asked if they intended to continue playing hockey, and, if not, for what reason. One of the authors (D. M. Dryden) administered the questionnaire.

Results
During the 1997–1998 hockey season, 102 players sustained 125 injuries. Most injuries were minor—82 per cent of injuries resulted in an absence from hockey of fewer than eight days. Sprain/strain and contusion were the injury diagnoses most often reported (82.4 per cent). The lower and upper extremities were the injury sites most commonly reported (58.4 per cent).

Of the 102 players who were injured, 86 (84.3 per cent) responded to the follow-up questionnaire. Those who did not respond either had moved leaving no forwarding address (five players) or did not return phone calls after five attempts (11 players).

The mean age of those who responded was 22.9 ±8.0, with ages ranging between 11 and 41 years. The participants were fairly experienced hockey players—48.8 per cent reported more than five years of playing hockey.

Nine players (97.1 per cent) rated their hockey skills as average to excellent compared with the hockey skills of players on other teams. Non-respondents were older than the respondents, with a mean age of 26.5 ±8.9 (p = 0.11).

Nine players (10.5 per cent) reported that as a result of their injuries they had altered the type or intensity of sports or physical activities in which they participated. Three (3.5 per cent) reported changing the type of social activities, and two (2.3 per cent) reported altering some job activities. Seventy-six players (88.4 per cent) indicated that they intended to continue to play hockey.

Of the 10 players who would not continue to play hockey, two (20 per cent) cited injury as their reason for quitting hockey. The remainder left hockey because of time factors, inconvenient scheduling, or costs. On average, the players who quit hockey had 2.7 years of hockey experience, compared with 7.3 years for those who continued with the game. The difference was statistically significant (p = 0.02).

On a 10-point scale, players were asked to assess how much the possibility of getting injured acted as a barrier to continuing to play. Sixty-nine players (80.2 per cent) rated injuries either as no barrier or a low barrier (0–3 on the scale), while 17 (19.7 per cent) ranked injuries as a moderate to high barrier (4–10).

Discussion
The growth of organized women’s ice hockey over the last decade has provided a new alternative for women who want to increase their level of physical activity by participating in a team sport. Our previous research showed that women’s recreational ice hockey is a relatively safe sport (Dryden et al., 2000a; Dryden et al., 2000b). The current study shows that both injury and the fear of injury do not appear to be major barriers to participation in women’s recreational ice hockey. For most players, the risk of injury was not sufficient to keep them from playing. Respondents pointed to the importance of consistent refereeing, protective equipment, and proper physical conditioning as reasons they believed that the game was safe to play.


References