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Women**Readers on the pain of miscarriage: 'In my head I was already a mum and then suddenly I wasn't'**

According to a new study, a third of women experience PTSD after losing a baby in early pregnancy. Guardian readers describe their experiences



▲ 'I spent a lot of time crying,' says one reader. Photograph: Getty Images (posed by model)

Guardian readers

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Eleanor, 34, Northamptonshire

I had three miscarriages in 2018, all under 12 weeks. I became very anxious to the point that it was impacting every area of my life. It affected my sleep and I had very negative thoughts. I spent a lot of time crying and kept having flashbacks to the third, most traumatic miscarriage, particularly when I was trying to sleep or relax. I had such severe bleeding that I was rushed to hospital in an ambulance. My family struggled to

understand the impact it had on me. Only one friend, who had also had a miscarriage, seemed to get it. The professionals who dealt with me when I was admitted were clearly ill-equipped to cope with any mental health implications, which was not their fault. It was only when I self-referred for cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) months later that I was able to get the support I needed.

Nicole, 33, London

I found out I had an ectopic pregnancy four months before my wedding day. They had to operate to terminate the pregnancy and I lost a fallopian tube. I think it is difficult for people to understand what it means to lose a pregnancy early on. Terms such as a “bundle of cells” and “not a viable pregnancy” are often used to downplay what it means to lose a pregnancy. My heart breaks every time I think of it and what it meant to be pregnant. While it was a “bundle of cells” to doctors and “not a viable pregnancy”, it was a dream to me to be pregnant. It will always break my heart in a way only other women in my situation will understand.

Anonymous

I have suffered from PTSD symptoms since having six first-trimester miscarriages. This has included vivid flashbacks, nightmares, insomnia, panic attacks and depression. Triggers include menstrual bleeding and the smell or sight of blood. I did not receive any mental health support at the time. I have had to seek out private CBT and EMDR (eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing) therapy to deal with the symptoms. Friends and family haven't really known what to say and had little understanding of the trauma I was suffering. It has affected every aspect of my life. Thankfully, I have two healthy children, but the pregnancy, immediately following the miscarriages, was very stressful.

Bibi, 40, Austria

After miscarrying at 14 weeks I had to wait a week for the foetus to be expelled naturally. I remember taking at least five long showers a day, sometimes even more, because I felt so disgusting. Afterwards, I began having nightmares and kept asking myself if I was being punished somehow, because I had avoided being pregnant for so long. Everyone kept telling me that it was OK and I would get pregnant again, like: “Who cares if you lost your child? There will be others.” It didn't matter if my kid was technically not a human being but just a lump of cells - it was my kid, and it was gone.

Since then I no longer want to even think about getting pregnant again. Luckily, my husband (not the father of my miscarried child, we divorced a year after this event) is also child-free, but I grieve the loss of my kid every single day.

Anonymous

Five months on, I still haven't really come to terms with miscarrying at 12 weeks. I have only just told my mum and my therapist. My relationship broke down because of what happened and I am extremely isolated because my friends are at a loss as to how to support me. There isn't much literature or specialised help available. It doesn't seem to be a thing that anyone speaks about.

I had no
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my life upside down. I was excited at the thought of having a child; it was unplanned, but not a bad thing. I was happy to adapt my lifestyle and

have the conversation with my partner that I would like to keep the child. There would never be a “perfect” time for a baby, so why not now? Unfortunately, I started getting abdominal pains and they got worse. The pain was akin to bad period pain, but sharper. I was told this could happen in early pregnancy. Then came the bleeding and the black-out inducing pain. Finally, I had to admit something was wrong.

My therapist thinks it is clear that I have PTSD from the scenario, which I am trying my best to process. Couple that with feeling as if my body failed me and feeling at fault, and it really has resulted in a life-changing level of trauma.

At this point, it seems uncertain if I will ever fully process or move on from what happened. I feel for my partner who also went through it too; we both lost so much during this time. I think we both have a lot of regrets, but neither of us knew how to voice our feelings without fear of hurting the other. We eventually drifted apart and split up, doubling our loss.

Kat, 32, Stockton-on-Tees

My partner and I are grieving for something we never had. I experience waves of extreme sadness and disappointment almost daily and I have had to leave rooms if someone is there with a baby out of fear that I become upset. We had no aftercare or support after the miscarriage and relied on websites such as [Tommy's](#) in order to understand what was happening.

After my miscarriage, I received a 12-week ultrasound letter, a phone call from the midwife to book another appointment and an invitation to book a cervical smear (that I couldn't have because you need to wait 12 weeks after pregnancy). Each one of these pushed me backwards to a place of upset and confusion. We have sent an official complaint to our local hospital. We can only hope they make changes for other women who go through this.

Liz, 35, Shoreham-by-Sea

We have been trying for a baby for seven years and I have had six miscarriages in that time - all before 11 weeks. It has had a massive impact on my mental health and that of my husband. It's like being on a constant rollercoaster. There are days when we feel positive, but also days when we feel the future is bleak.

With some of the miscarriages, I had severe anxiety after surgery. It was almost as if I had postnatal depression but without a baby. It would take

almost as if I had postnatal depression but without a baby. It would take me more than an hour and a half to leave the house - I would stand in my hallway with my coat on just gearing myself up.

It has been a long journey for me and my husband. His anxiety and depression came later, as he was so focused on supporting me. We have a lot of help from both of our families. However, mental health support was almost nonexistent. There were times when everything felt very dark and bleak.

We are now receiving treatment at a genetics fertility clinic in Spain and are hopeful that we will be able to have a baby of our own this year. The loss that we have experienced will never leave us, and we both believe that this could have been reduced if we had been supported more by the NHS.

Anonymous

I think it was the well-meaning advice people gave me when I was recovering from my miscarriage that hurt the most: "At least you know you can get pregnant" and "My friend had seven miscarriages ..." (as if it's a competition?). I didn't need any of that. I just needed someone to tell me they were sorry for my loss. I might not have met that child, but in my head I was already a mum and then suddenly I wasn't. I felt such a failure.

I have been on antidepressants ever since. When I became pregnant for the second time, at the end of 2017, I couldn't relax and enjoy it. Instead of being happy when I felt my bump kick and move, I was terrified the baby was dying. I still struggle with anxiety. As I went into my third trimester and my anxiety about the pregnancy went through the roof, I was convinced I had damaged her, but my baby was born happy and healthy.

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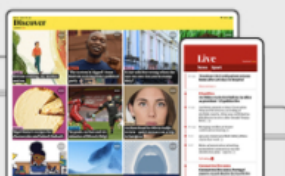
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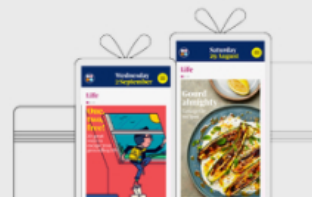
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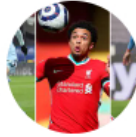
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