

## Emotional Experiences of Mothers After Miscarriage

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Miscarriage is a painful experience that can have a profound emotional impact on mothers. According to the 2022 Central Java Provincial Health Profile, there were approximately 98 cases of miscarriage in the region, with 210 cases occurring in Tegal City. Of these, 8 cases were recorded at Tegal Barat Public Health Center between January and October 2022. This study aims to describe the emotional experiences of mothers after miscarriage. **Method:** The research employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with six mothers who had experienced miscarriage as the main informants, and two supporting informants, namely a midwife and a healthcare worker at Tegal Barat Public Health Center. **Results:** The results showed that mothers after miscarriage experienced a range of emotional reactions, including feelings of sadness and loss (100% of informants), guilt and self-blame (83%), anxiety about future pregnancies (67%), and loneliness due to lack of social support (50%). Support from family and healthcare workers played an important role in the mothers' emotional recovery process. However, limited access to information and counseling services remained an obstacle that prolonged the recovery process. **Conclusion:** This study highlights the importance of integrated psychosocial support for mothers after miscarriage, through empathetic counseling and continuous education to help them recover emotionally and mentally.

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## INTRODUCTION

Miscarriage is an obstetric event that has significant physical and psychological impacts on mothers. According to WHO data, an estimated 10–15% of pregnancies end in miscarriage, and this rate is even higher in developing countries, including Indonesia. Based on data from the 2020 Intercensal Population Survey (SUPAS), Indonesia's maternal mortality rate (MMR) remains high, at 230 per 100,000 live births, with a portion of these

cases linked to pregnancy complications, including miscarriage (Bayuana et al., 2023). In Central Java Province, a total of 980 miscarriage cases were recorded in 2022, with 210 cases occurring in Tegal City. Within the working area of the Tegal Barat Community Health Center alone, 68 miscarriage cases were reported between January and October 2022 (Anggita Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023).

Miscarriage not only results in the physical loss of the fetus but also creates deep emotional distress for the mother. Feelings of sadness, disappointment, anger, guilt, and fear are common emotional reactions. Previous studies have shown that mothers who experience miscarriage are at risk of developing psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially if they do not receive adequate support (Sofia et al., 2019). Several factors that worsen the emotional condition of mothers after miscarriage include lack of social support, social stigma, limited access to counseling services, and insufficient understanding of the medical condition they are experiencing (S. Susanti et al., 2020).

Preliminary interviews with midwives at the Tegal Barat Community Health Center revealed that most mothers who experienced miscarriage were emotionally devastated, with some even developing a fear of becoming pregnant again. About 75% reported feeling unprepared to face the reality of their loss, and more than half admitted they had never received formal counseling or emotional support from healthcare professionals. This indicates that the psychosocial aspects of miscarriage have yet to receive adequate attention in primary healthcare services.

This study aims to describe the emotional experiences of mothers after miscarriage using a phenomenological approach. The findings are expected to provide an in-depth understanding of the psychological dynamics experienced by mothers and serve as a foundation for developing more responsive and sustainable psychosocial support services.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Miscarriage is the loss of a pregnancy before the gestational age reaches 20 weeks and is a traumatic experience for most women. Common emotional reactions following a miscarriage include profound sadness, feelings of guilt, anxiety, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Research by (Nenti Herlina, 2016) shows that mothers after miscarriage experience significant emotional distress, especially in the first few weeks following the event. The sense of loss involves not only the fetus but also hopes, dreams, and the identity of becoming a mother.

Psychological and social factors play a crucial role in the adaptation process after miscarriage. According to (Novia Rini et al., 2020), emotional support from partners, family, and healthcare providers greatly influences a mother's psychological recovery. Mothers who do not receive adequate support tend to struggle in accepting the reality of their loss and are at risk of developing long-term psychological disorders, such as depression. Another study by (Dwikanthi et al., 2020) shows that post-miscarriage experiences are greatly influenced by a mother's understanding of the causes of miscarriage. Mothers who have sufficient information about their medical condition tend to be more mentally prepared and better able to cope with feelings of guilt or self-blame. In contrast, uncertainty and lack of information often worsen the anxiety and stress they experience.

In addition, cultural and religious aspects also shape how mothers respond to miscarriage (E. Susanti et al., 2021) state that some mothers perceive miscarriage as a test or destiny, which can help them accept the loss more calmly. However, quite a few feel that

the loss diminishes their self-worth as a woman or wife, particularly in societies that place a strong emphasis on women's reproductive roles.

From these various studies, it is clear that the emotional experiences of mothers after miscarriage are highly complex and multidimensional. A holistic approach including counseling and psychosocial interventions is needed to help mothers navigate the grieving process in a healthy way. Therefore, this study aims to explore the emotional experiences of mothers after miscarriage using a phenomenological approach, providing a comprehensive picture and serving as a foundation for designing appropriate support interventions.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method, aiming to explore in depth the emotional experiences of mothers after experiencing miscarriage. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it can capture the subjective meaning of the feelings and experiences perceived by mothers following the loss of pregnancy. The research was conducted in the working area of the Tegal Barat Community Health Center, focusing on Tegal Barat Sub-district, Tegal Barat District, Tegal City, Central Java Province.

Primary informants were selected purposively based on inclusion criteria: mothers who had experienced miscarriage within the past year, were willing to be interviewed, and were able to verbally express their experiences. The study involved six primary informants (mothers) and two supporting informants a midwife from the Tegal Barat Community Health Center and a reproductive health counsellor to provide additional contextual information.

This study focused on understanding the emotional experiences of mothers after miscarriage by examining several key aspects. Initial emotional reactions typically include feelings of loss, sadness, disappointment, anger, guilt, and fear of becoming pregnant again. These conditions may develop into psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress. This understanding refers to Kübler-Ross's Stages of Grief theory, which explains the stages of mourning, as well as Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which emphasizes maternal attachment to the fetus as the foundation of profound feelings of loss.

In addition, the study explored how mothers perceived the loss whether as a test, destiny, or an experience that affected their identity as women or prospective mothers taking into account the cultural and religious factors underlying these perceptions. The process of adjustment or coping strategies used by the mothers was also examined, such as through prayer, seeking medical information, sharing stories, or conversely, withdrawing from social interaction. Social support from partners, families, friends, and healthcare providers was analyzed due to its significant impact on emotional recovery. The lack of formal counseling from healthcare providers in primary care settings can worsen a mother's psychological state, while adequate support can accelerate acceptance.

Ultimately, this study aimed to describe the mothers' long-term emotional adaptation, including changes in attitudes toward future pregnancies, the acceptance process, and the role of ongoing support in building mental readiness. Using a phenomenological approach, this research was expected to explore deeply the subjective meaning of mothers' post-miscarriage experiences, thus providing a basis for developing more targeted psychosocial support interventions.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews guided by a semi-structured protocol, conducted face-to-face by the principal investigator, who also served as the interviewer. Each interview lasted between 30–60 minutes, depending on the participant's comfort level. Interviews were carried out at mutually agreed locations, mostly in the

participants' homes, in a calm and private setting without the presence of others, to maintain confidentiality and ensure the participants' comfort in sharing their emotional experiences. During the interviews, the researcher also observed nonverbal expressions, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice, to capture emotional dimensions not expressed verbally. Additionally, supporting documents, such as medical records or healthcare visit histories, were reviewed to enrich the understanding of each participant's post-miscarriage context

Data were analyzed using a phenomenological method with a thematic approach, following the steps of data transcription, repeated reading, open coding, theme identification, and narrative development. Theme identification was carried out with reference to Kübler-Ross's Stages of Grief theory and Bowlby's Attachment Theory, allowing themes such as denial, anger, depression, acceptance, and emotional attachment to be traced from the early coding process. This analysis aimed to uncover the deeper meaning of mothers' emotional experiences after miscarriage. Triangulation was performed using multiple data sources (primary and supporting informants) and methods (interviews, observations, and document reviews) to enhance the validity and credibility of the study findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data reduction process from the in-depth interviews, several main themes were identified that describe the experiences of informants after experiencing miscarriage. The data were analyzed through coding, categorization, and theme extraction, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data Reduction Process Leading to Themes

| Quote from Informant                                                                                                                        | Main Code                             | Category                               | Main Theme                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| "After the miscarriage, I felt very disappointed and anxious. I was afraid that I might not be able to get pregnant again..." (Informant A) | Anxiety, fear                         | Emotional reactions after miscarriage  | Psychological and Health Impacts     |
| "Even though people around me said 'it's just a miscarriage', I felt a tremendous loss..." (B)                                              | Deep loss                             | Feelings of loss after miscarriage     | Feelings of Loss and Trauma          |
| "I always felt anxious and scared... I panicked right away..." (C)                                                                          | Anxiety during a subsequent pregnancy | Recurrent anxiety in later pregnancies | Anxiety and Stress after Miscarriage |
| "I didn't know what caused my miscarriage..." (D)                                                                                           | Lack of knowledge, confusion          | Lack of information and education      | Lack of Knowledge about Miscarriage  |
| "My husband kept reminding me to stay strong..." (E)                                                                                        | emotional support from husband        | Family social support                  | Social and Family Support            |

### Emotional Experiences of Pregnant Women Who Have Miscarried: Psychological and Health Impacts after Miscarriage

Miscarriage is a deeply emotional and potentially traumatic experience for pregnant women. Based on interviews with women who have experienced miscarriage, many described profound emotional impacts. This experience often involves anxiety, stress, and a strong sense of loss. Most mothers perceive miscarriage as a traumatic event that changes the way they view pregnancy and their future as mothers.

One of the main informants who had experienced miscarriage described her feelings in these words:

*"After the miscarriage, I felt very disappointed and anxious. I was afraid that I might not be able to get pregnant again. Every time there was even a slight problem with the pregnancy, I became immediately worried. It felt as if everything had fallen apart and I couldn't fix it."* (Main informant A)

The anxiety experienced by mothers after miscarriage is completely understandable. Even mothers who have previously given birth often feel anxious about the possibility of another miscarriage. These feelings create ongoing anxiety that frequently persists during subsequent pregnancies. Although a new pregnancy may begin with renewed hope, the shadow of a past miscarriage often lingers, bringing with it a deep sense of uncertainty.

Research by (Rahayu & Wahyuni, 2020) showed that mothers who experienced miscarriage often suffer from persistent anxiety disorders, even during subsequent pregnancies. This anxiety is related to fears of recurrent miscarriage and profound feelings of loss. This indicates that the trauma of miscarriage not only affects the mother's mental health at the time of the event but can also carry over into later pregnancies, influencing how mothers manage their anxiety and stress.

In addition, research by (Rizni et al., 2023) revealed that post-miscarriage anxiety can increase the risk of other mental health problems, such as depression and post-traumatic stress. This further emphasizes the importance of emotional support and clear information from healthcare professionals so that mothers can face pregnancy after miscarriage with greater calm and better mental preparedness.

### Feelings of Loss and Psychological Trauma

For many mothers, miscarriage is a loss that is not only physical but also emotional and psychological. Losing a fetus that was meant to become part of their family causes deep pain. Some mothers even describe miscarriage as an "invisible loss," because many people around them may not realize how difficult the emotional recovery process truly is.

One mother interviewed stated:

*"Even though people around me said, 'it's just a miscarriage,' I felt a tremendous loss. I felt as if I had lost a part of myself, and that feeling cannot be explained in words. It was such a deep sense of loss."* (Main informant B)

This sense of loss often brings profound psychological trauma. Some mothers reported feelings of helplessness, confusion, and regret after miscarriage. Guilt also emerged in some mothers, who felt as though they had done something wrong, even though many miscarriages are caused by factors beyond the mother's control, such as chromosomal abnormalities or other medical conditions.

According to research by (Sulitiani et al., 2024), mothers who experience miscarriage often feel that they have lost something extremely valuable, which can lead to long-lasting psychological trauma. The loss of the fetus brings deep sorrow that is often not understood by those around the mother, worsening feelings of isolation and loneliness. In addition, research by (Suhartini et al., 2023) shows that guilt and regret are common reactions experienced by many mothers after miscarriage, even though the causes are often beyond their control.

This research underscores the importance of adequate emotional support and understanding from the surrounding environment to help mothers cope with post-

miscarriage psychological trauma. Healthcare professionals and families can play a major role in reducing feelings of guilt and providing support for emotional recovery.

### **Anxiety and Stress after Miscarriage**

Anxiety and stress after miscarriage can last much longer than expected. Some mothers reported experiencing long-term stress, which led to sleep disturbances, anxiety disorders, and physical tension. For example, one informant described persistent anxiety following miscarriage:

*"Every time I became pregnant again, I always felt anxious and afraid. I worried whether my pregnancy would last or not. Every time there was even slight bleeding or other signs, I immediately panicked and feared that the miscarriage would happen again." (Main informant C)*

Research by Kementerian Kesehatan et al (2022) shows that mothers who experience miscarriage tend to be more vulnerable to stress and anxiety. This can affect both their physical and mental condition, and may increase the risk of complications in subsequent pregnancies. This persistent anxiety can also affect the mother's overall quality of life, leaving them feeling pressured as they go about their daily lives.

### **Lack of Knowledge about the Causes and Prevention of Miscarriage**

One issue frequently expressed by mothers who have experienced miscarriage is the lack of understanding regarding its causes and how to prevent it. Many mothers feel confused and report that they were not given sufficient explanation by healthcare providers about what actually happened, or about preventive steps they could take for future pregnancies. One mother explained:

*"I didn't know what caused my miscarriage. The doctor didn't clearly explain what happened, and I felt I wasn't given enough information to know what to do to prevent it from happening again." (Main informant D)*

This lack of knowledge creates additional anxiety, especially as mothers prepare for another pregnancy. Many blame themselves, even though most miscarriages are actually caused by genetic factors or chromosomal abnormalities that cannot be directly prevented (Asmarani et al., 2024).

Several studies support these findings. For example, research by (Cabrera-Lafuente et al., 2022) found that nearly 50% of women who experienced miscarriage did not receive sufficient information from healthcare providers. In fact, 41% of respondents in the study believed that stress or physical activity were the main causes of miscarriage, even though neither has been scientifically proven as a direct cause. This lack of understanding not only leads to unnecessary feelings of guilt but also creates emotional barriers to recovery and planning for future pregnancies.

Furthermore, findings from (Sianturi, 2019) state that effective communication between healthcare providers and mothers who have experienced miscarriage can improve the mother's psychological condition and increase their confidence in facing subsequent pregnancies. Empathetic, evidence-based education also helps reduce stigma and myths about miscarriage that are still widely believed in society.

Therefore, it is essential for healthcare providers, particularly midwives and doctors, to provide clear, open, and evidence-based information to mothers who have experienced miscarriage. This education should include explanations of the most common causes such as chromosomal abnormalities, infections, and hormonal disorder as well as

preventive efforts tailored to each mother's condition. Providing space for mothers to ask questions, express concerns, and receive emotional support is also an important part of a holistic recovery process.

### **The Role of Healthcare Providers in Reducing Post-Miscarriage Anxiety**

The role of healthcare providers is crucial in providing emotional support to mothers who have experienced miscarriage. Medical professionals must be able to deliver clear and accurate information about the mother's medical condition, as well as offer psychological support to help mothers manage their anxiety. One health worker explained:

*"We try to always provide clear explanations to mothers who have just experienced miscarriage. We help them understand what can be done to protect future pregnancies and provide emotional support to reduce their anxiety."* (Health Worker, S)

For mothers who become pregnant after a miscarriage, understanding the possible risks of miscarriage and ways to maintain their health is very important. In addition, the psychological support offered by healthcare providers greatly helps prevent excessive anxiety and improves the likelihood of a healthy future pregnancy.

A study by (Mika Damayanti et al., 2023) showed that a lack of supportive and sensitive communication from healthcare providers after miscarriage can worsen the emotional trauma experienced by mothers. Conversely, when healthcare professionals demonstrate empathy and openness in communication, mothers feel more accepted and not blamed, which significantly contributes to their psychological recovery.

Healthcare providers especially midwives, nurses, and doctors play a strategic role in conveying information about miscarriage risks, possible medical causes, and promotive and preventive steps for future pregnancies. Research by (Rahmawati & Wulandari, 2019) emphasized the importance of post-miscarriage counseling to help mothers and their partners understand the event, reduce anxiety, and strengthen their readiness to plan for a healthy pregnancy.

Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach that combines medical and psychological aspects has been proven effective. Research by (Maulana et al., 2022) showed that psychosocial interventions involving emotional counseling and informational support can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression after miscarriage. Therefore, it is highly recommended that healthcare providers be trained in trauma-informed care to better understand mothers' experiences and provide more appropriate responses.

With consistent education, emotional support, and open communication, healthcare providers can serve as the front line in mothers' recovery after miscarriage. This role is not only important for mothers' mental health but also directly affects the success of future pregnancies and mothers' overall quality of life (Ganho-Ávila et al., 2023).

### **Social Support: The Role of Husbands and Families in Emotional Recovery**

In addition to medical support, social support is also essential for mothers who have just experienced miscarriage. Husbands and families play a key role in helping mothers cope with deep anxiety and sadness. Several mothers expressed that support from their partners was highly meaningful in the recovery process after miscarriage. One mother said:

*"My husband always reminded me to stay strong and not give up. He kept encouraging me and gave me hope that we could have another child."* (Main informant E)

Support from husbands in the form of presence, attention, and words of encouragement greatly contributes to mothers' emotional stability. Research by (Dwikanthi et al., 2020) in the *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, & Neonatal Nursing* states that women who receive strong emotional support from their partners have lower levels of depression and anxiety after miscarriage. Consistent support from partners also helps build mothers' confidence to try for another pregnancy.

Beyond partners, support from other family members such as parents, siblings, or in-laws also plays an important role. A study by (Setiawan et al., 2020) found that validation of the loss experience by the social environment significantly helps the recovery process for women who experience miscarriage. In contrast, the absence of support or negative comments from the environment can worsen feelings of guilt, loneliness, and stress.

Without adequate support, mothers may feel isolated and struggle alone during recovery. This condition can increase the risk of mental health disorders such as postpartum depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therefore, it is important for partners and families to be involved in the recovery process, not only physically, but also emotionally and psychologically.

Social support should also be directed and strengthened by healthcare providers. Educating husbands and families about the importance of empathy, emotional reinforcement, and active involvement in supporting mothers can be part of a comprehensive post-miscarriage intervention.

With increased awareness of the importance of social support, it is hoped that mothers who experience miscarriage will not only receive good medical care but also feel emotionally supported. This will greatly help prepare mothers to welcome a new pregnancy with a greater sense of calm, strength, and optimism.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the interviews and observations of pregnant women who experienced miscarriage, it can be concluded that their emotional experiences were strongly influenced by deep psychological trauma resulting from the loss of the fetus. Miscarriage triggers anxiety, stress, and profound feelings of loss, which often affect the mother's physical and mental condition. This anxiety may persist long after the miscarriage, especially when the mother becomes pregnant again, accompanied by worry about the possibility of a recurrent miscarriage.

Many mothers feel confused and anxious due to a lack of clear information about the causes of miscarriage and the preventive steps that can be taken. This lack of education regarding the causes, prevention, and management after miscarriage is one of the factors that worsens the mother's psychological condition. Therefore, the role of healthcare providers is crucial in providing adequate education, emotional support, and ensuring that mothers feel more prepared to face future pregnancies.

Psychological support provided by healthcare professionals can help reduce the anxiety and stress experienced by mothers, as well as provide a sense of security in continuing future pregnancies. With increased knowledge and understanding of miscarriage and how to cope with it, pregnant women can feel more prepared and calmer in undergoing subsequent pregnancies, which in turn can improve the health of both mother and fetus.

Therefore, it is essential for healthcare professionals to provide clear information and the necessary support so that mothers who have experienced miscarriage can better manage their emotions and concerns, as well as experience healthy and safe pregnancies in the future.



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