



THE MISCARRIAGE ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND



Welcome everybody to our Spring 2022 Newsletter

The newsletter is a space where we can share our stories of loss and find comfort in the knowledge that we are not alone in our grief.

I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue, it is really great that you want to share your stories.

Deirdre Pierce-McDonnell
Chairperson – The Miscarriage Association of Ireland



Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

Telephone: 087 923 9217

www.miscarriage.ie • Email: info@miscarriage.ie

www.facebook.com/miscarriage.ie



Registered Charity No. CHY9738 / 20024420

Committee

Chairperson

Deirdre Pierce McDonnell

Secretary

Jennifer Duggan

Treasurer

David McDonnell

Committee Members:

June O'Toole, Mary Lawson, Niamh Darcy, Lynn Cassidy, Maureen V Ward, Laura O'Sullivan, Carol Conroy, Kirsty Esplin, Niamh Ryan, Emma Walker, Dawn O'Connor.

Welcome

Welcome to the Miscarriage Association of Ireland Newsletter Spring 2022. As 2021 has drawn to a close, and we are now two years into the pandemic, its effects have been deeply felt in every aspect of society. Not least by the women across the island who have had to attend appointments and scans by themselves and their partners waiting nearby in car parks for news. To hear the words “I am sorry, but there is no heartbeat” is a traumatic experience when you have your partner or friend or family member by your side. To not have that someone by your side, and to have to make the phone call to relay the information back is devastating. The pandemic and the necessary restrictions have heightened the sense of loneliness and isolation that can be felt when experiencing the loss of a pregnancy. From speaking with people who have experienced pregnancy loss during the pandemic, what you hear most, is that it was lonely.

The medical staff and the hospitals have done their best to provide care and comfort in these difficult times and we extend gratitude for all they do. It can of course not fill the void, but it is appreciated. Hopefully going forward restrictions will continued to be eased and partners allowed to attend appointments and scans. Over the last two years, due to the restrictions, it has ironically brought the subject of pregnancy loss to the forefront of attention in the media. Many articles have been written and media posts done that have highlighted the profound sense of loss and grief that surrounds baby loss. Pregnancy loss has been a taboo subject for many years, but over the last number of years, the conversation has been prominent online. Slowly but surely the conversation has filtered off line and into the community and into work places. As both women and men talk more openly about their experience of baby loss, it has made companies, sit up and pay attention. It has made them stop and ask – how can we help ?. Lidl have led the way in Ireland by officially extending their compassionate leave to cover pregnancy loss and give 3 days paid leave.

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland have been asked to take part in discussions around the effect of pregnancy loss in the work place by the National Treasury Management Agency, the Central Bank and Aviva. We are delighted to take part in these discussions and believe it is the first stepping stone to companies realizing that pregnancy loss affects so many staff and that it is important to show kindness, empathy and support by providing the space to be able to talk.

A very honest and in depth article about pregnancy loss was written by 3 writers, Ciara McDonnell, Helen O’ Callaghan and Jennifer Stevens from the Irish examiner. Included in the the newsletter is the article in full. We feel the article really covers the array of feelings that arise following pregnancy loss. [\(See pages 12-15\)](#)

In July 2021 The Miscarriage Association of Ireland launched our new look website- we hope that you find the site inviting, easy to navigate and the information helpful. Like many organisations the Miscarriage Association of Ireland have had to adapt to ensure that we can still provide as much support as possible. The Association now provides support group meetings via zoom, in the 3rd week of the month on a Tuesday and a Thursday at 8.30pm. To receive an invite to the meeting you can email info@miscarriage.ie with ZOOM in the subject bar and you will be sent the details on the day of the meeting.

For baby Loss Awareness day on October 15th we remembered our precious babies by taking part in the international wave of light. People took pictures of their candles and mementos and we share them on our Facebook Page. Due to the pandemic we did not feel it was safe to hold our Annual Service of Remembrance this year and have people attend. On Saturday 13th November, the committee held a Service of Remembrance in St Teresa's Church, Donore Avenue, Dublin 8, where we lit candles in memory of all our precious babies. It was a beautiful service of candle light and music. It can be viewed on the website www.donoreavenueparish.ie under the webcam recordings.

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland provides support to women and their families who have been through the trauma of losing a baby in the following ways:

- Via our website www.miscarriage.ie Check the website for details and updates on the following supports:
 - Telephone helpline
 - Support group meetings
- Email- info@miscarriage.ie
- Service of remembrance which takes place on the 2nd Sunday of November annually
- Information book and leaflet - This is available to download on our website or order for free email: info@miscarriage.ie with Information Books in the subject bar
- Book of remembrance - where you can make an entry in memory of your baby. Send an email to info@miscarriage.ie with your Baby's Name, Dates to remember, Remembered by, Special Thoughts.



News

After the success of Síle Seoige's programme *Deireadh Tochta* which aired on TG4 in April, I was asked to take part in an Instagram live interview with her through TG4's Instagram page. It was an absolute pleasure to speak to her and to highlight the services provided by the volunteers at the miscarriage association. Reflecting on the programme, it's incredible how much stigma is still attached to miscarriage in Ireland. It's heartbreaking to think of the countless people who have suffered in silence and felt unsupported and alone during such a huge bereavement. The day after the show aired there was an increase in calls to our support line and there were people who had been suffering the loss for years alone feeling isolated, who finally felt that they had somewhere to go to be heard. We spoke about the various services offered by The Miscarriage Association of Ireland, by way of phone support and what would be physical support groups-turned zoom support groups during the pandemic. We also touched on the harrowing side effects of the pandemic, for example receiving the news of a miscarriage alone due to partners not being allowed to early pregnancy visits and the impact this can have on pregnant people in particular. The main point I wanted people to take from my interview is that you are not alone and it is not your fault. The interview is available on TG4's Instagram page posted in April 2021 and *Deireadh Tochta* is available to watch on TG4 player.

Tara

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland

On the 4th June 2021, Lidl Ireland announced that they will offer three days paid leave to any of their employees who suffer a miscarriage or experience a pregnancy loss. This policy makes Lidl one of the first companies in Ireland to adopt such a policy. Currently paid leave for a pregnancy loss or miscarriage is not a statutory right in Ireland. Prior to their announcement, Lidl contacted the Miscarriage Association to ask us for our advice in relation to their proposed policy. We worked closely with them to create a policy which recognises that a miscarriage is bereavement and families that suffer this loss should be afforded the opportunity to grieve without feeling isolated. This policy also provides for 'strong supports' from managers and colleagues to those who are returning to work after their loss.

The announcement received national media coverage and Denise White-Hughes, Head of Employee Relations at Lidl Ireland and Northern Ireland stated that "the silence around pregnancy loss has forced many to cope with it alone and we want to ensure that we help to lift that silence and offer support for all those who have experienced this loss". Our Chairperson, Deirdre Pierce McDonnell represented the Miscarriage Association of Ireland in the launch of the policy and in press statements she said that Lidl are "identifying the need for this change in policy and the importance of recognising the silently grieving can only be beneficial to us as a society."



We are extremely proud to have collaborated with Lidl on this ground breaking policy and we believe that Lidl are leading the way in tackling the stigma that still exists around pregnancy loss in workplaces in Ireland.

Dawn

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland

Memorial Stones



The Memorial Stone has a very special purpose – it helps to create a place for some quiet reflection, for acknowledgement, for recognition and for exploring deep thoughts of love, gratitude, but also great loss and pain! For many parents, especially those who lost a baby long ago, they do not have anywhere to go, to remember their deceased infant. This can add hugely to their grief. Some parents even get to the stage that they wonder if their baby was real or was it a dreadful nightmare!

Grief takes many stages. It is different for everybody. No two people grieve in the same way. Even mothers and fathers can grieve differently! Sometimes, the journey of grief can take two paces forward and twenty paces backwards! It can seem as though there is no forward movement. There is no straight line for grief and no particular timeframe. Grief for many can go around in circles – it can be a real roller-coaster of emotions.

A lot of parents, during this time of grief look for a purpose, they look for answers, they look for a place to go where they can reflect and a place where they can try to come to an understanding of what has happened. Questions like WHY! WHY! WHY! can be very real and very painful. This baby was so precious, so much wanted and so much loved. Some parents might have a family plot or a newly opened grave where their deceased baby has been placed. But for many, they have no grave, no family plot and no place to go! These feelings, these longings and these needs brought about our Memorial Stone initiative. To date, we have placed approximately 18 Memorial Stones throughout Ireland. If you have a look at our website, you will see some photos and more information on this very meaningful and delicate topic.

The first Memorial Stone was placed in Glasnevin Cemetery in 1989 – one year after the Miscarriage Association of Ireland was founded.

The second was placed in Deans Grange Cemetery on the Southside of Dublin.

The third was placed in the grounds of St. Teresa's Church, Donore Avenue, Dublin 8. This marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Miscarriage Association of Ireland.

The fourth was placed in St. Michael's Cemetery, Athy, Co. Kildare.

The fifth was placed in Redford Cemetery in Greystones, Co. Wicklow.

continued.....

The sixth was placed in the grounds of Our Lady and Saint Joseph Church, Caragh, Naas, Co. Kildare.
 The seventh was placed in Fingal Cemetery, North County Dublin.
 The eight was placed in the grounds of St. MacCullin's Church, Lusk, North County Dublin.
 The ninth was placed in the grounds of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ballymun.
 The tenth was placed in St. Kieran's Cemetery, Kilkenny.
 The eleventh was placed in St. Patrick's Cemetery Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.
 The twelfth was placed in The Church of Ireland Church grounds, Belturbet, Co. Cavan.
 The thirteenth was placed in St. Patrick's Cemetery, Lifford, Co. Donegal.
 The fourteenth was placed in Bohermore Cemetery, Galway City.
 The fifteenth was placed in Rath Cemetery, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
 The sixteenth was placed in Donaghcomper Cemetery, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.
 The seventeenth was placed in Claremorris Cemetery, Co Mayo.
 The eighteenth was placed (or planned to be placed) in Leigue Cemetery, Co. Mayo.
 There is a nineteenth Stone ready to be placed in Co. Cork in the near future.

There are currently on-going enquiries for the placement of more Memorial Stones. These Memorial Stones have a story to tell – one of heartbreak, one of sadness, one of pride and ultimately, one of LOVE. They stand tall and remind us that Love never dies, that these little lives were real, they stood for something, they have a purpose and above all, they are not forgotten. If you know of a suitable location where our next Memorial Stone could be placed, please get in touch and we will explore possibilities together. On behalf of all our beloved children, whose lives though short, were very precious.

June

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland

It has been a busy few months with raising awareness through various media outlets around the impacts and the reality of miscarriage. It is through speaking that the silence will be broken and that the taboo that still exists will start to be lifted.

In April Deireadh Tochta aired on TG4. In the hour long documentary, Síle Seoige spoke to those who have gone through miscarriage to explore the grief, hopes and frustrations that they experience. She also spoke of her own journey and met with medical professionals. The documentary was met with very positive feedback and got many much needed conversations started around miscarriage.

Following on from the Documentary I spoke with Highland Radio in Donegal and Corks 96fm to discuss my own personal journey and spoke of the supports offered through The Miscarriage Association Of Ireland. RSVP magazine also did an in-depth interview with me in which I shared how the loss of our 6 babies through miscarriage on our journey to having a family impacted both myself and my husband. All these interviews and topics on local and national platforms get conversations started and show people that they aren't alone. It allows people to open up about their own experience and it shows them that they aren't alone and that there are supports available.

Jen

the Miscarriage Association of Ireland

Service of Remembrance 2021



For many years our annual service of remembrance has been a source of comfort and hope to those who have attended. A beautiful service of music and light in honour of all our precious babies lost too soon and a place to gather together in reflection.

Due to the ongoing pandemic, the committee of The Miscarriage Association of Ireland decided to hold a closed service in St Therese's Church Donore Avenue Dublin 8 on Saturday 13th November 2021 – 8pm. People were able to view the service on-line via webcam and the recording is still available to view via the parish website, <http://donoreavenueparish.ie/> under Webcam/ recordings. The beautiful music was provided by singer Barbera Galvin – Sheridan accompanied by pianist Maria Geheran. The celebrants were Fr David Corrigan and Rev Cannon.

We remembered all our precious babies lost too soon and a committee member read out a list of babies names to be remembered. Committee members June O Toole, Carol Conroy, Emma Walker and Deirdre Pierce- McDonnell read poems and reflections and lit the candles in remembrance.

The candle light and music were a beautiful tribute as can be seen in the pictures. The souls of our little babies represented by the flickering of the candle light. The following poems were read out at the service.



Poems from Our Remembrance Service



My Precious Child

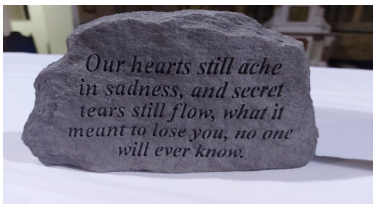
Your open arms reach out to me
Connecting my love with eternity
You are deeply entwined within my heart
Where you belong right from the start.

When the wind blows, when the rain falls
When the sun shines, I know you are
here with me.
Wherever I am, you are too,
For you are part of me and I am part of you.

I miss you, I love you,
You have somehow touched my soul
You are the missing link
That has made me whole.

Keep flying high little one
With open arms through the wind, the rain,
and the sun.
Keep sending your love beams
My open arms will catch them one by one.

by June O'Toole



The Cord

We are connected, My Child and I
by an invisible cord, not seen by the eye.
It's not like the cord that connects us
'till birth, this cord can't be seen by any
on earth.

This cord does it's work right from the start,
it binds us together attached to my heart.
I know that it's there, though no one can see,
the invisible cord from my child to me.

The strength of this cord is hard to describe,
it can't be destroyed, it can't be denied.
It's stronger than any cord, man could create,
it withstands the test, can hold any weight.
And through you are gone, through you
are not here with me. The cord is still there,
but no one can see.

And though you are gone, though you are not
here with me, the cord is still here, but no one
can see.

I am thankful that God connects us this way,
a mother and child, death can't take it away.

Read by Emma Walker

Meditation

"For inner peace, reflect upon the Dove,
The soothing symbol of a mother's love,
We willingly await those wings of hope,
to gently bear us up and help us cope.

With your brief life my world has
wholly changed, my heart, my soul,
my centre re- arranged.
May love immortal bear you safely home,
securely rest in perfect peace, Shalom.

*Read by Deirdre Pierce- McDonnell
Written by John Ward*

Poems / Stories

Tiny Toes I'll Never Count

Tiny toes I'll never count
Your skin I'll never smell
Your eyelashes how long were they?
Time it will not tell

You left this world before you came
And now we are apart
I hope you felt my warmth, my love
The beating of my heart

Now here I am left grieving
For the soul I'll never meet
I'll never get to touch your skin
Or kiss your tiny feet

Your life was only short my love
Before you went away
So save a place in Heaven for me
I'll meet you there, some day

*Forwarded on to the miscarriage
association by Julie,
in memory of Elias x*



I know how to love someone that I
have never seen
I feel her presence although she's never
really been

I feel her warmth, although I've never
held her in my arms
I see her beauty, but only among the stars

She's a beam of light that rushed into
my life.
And suddenly I dreamt of her day and night

Soon after she arrived, she couldn't stay
Although she left, she never went away

It all sounds like madness because
we've never met...
But she's an angel that I'll never forget.

She's my hopes and dreams rolled into one.
On the greyest of days, she brings
brightness like the sun.

She lives deep within my heart
While at the same time, we're worlds apart.

It all sounds like madness....maybe.
But it's the only way to explain what it's
like to be a parent of an angel baby.

Written and sent in by Yvonne Flynn

*Please feel free to send your own stories and poems into our email info@miscarriage.ie
to have them included in our next newsletter, any wishes to remain anonymous
will be respected.*

Support Meetings

Our support meetings have been continuing virtually via Zoom on the third week of each month. We have seen a big increase in demand for support due in no small part to the added isolation during Covid-19. With rising numbers attending the meetings we made the decision to run two meetings a month and continue to do so on the Tuesday and Thursday in the third week at 8:30pm. The meetings run for about an hour and give those joining us a chance to speak of their baby, their loss and their feelings in a safe, non-judgmental space among people who truly 'get it'.

Some people that join our meetings take great comfort in just listening to others stories and knowing they aren't alone. There is great healing to be had in sharing but also in listening to others. We have also had many Dads joining out meetings which is great to see as they also need support and it is encouraging to see that they are comfortable in joining us. There is no pressure put on anyone who joins the meeting to share their story with us but anyone wanting to is more than welcome to do so on the night. A lot of people choose to leave their camera off during the meeting but we do like to see faces when people choose to turn the cameras on. If anyone would like to join in our meeting simply email Zoom to info@miscarriage.ie with the day that you would like to join. We will then email on the link on the day of the meeting.

Phonelines

The Miscarriage Association also operate phonelines. These lines are in operation Monday to Friday, 10am until 12md and 8pm until 10pm. Those on the phones are volunteers with MAI and have personal experience in miscarriage, while this is not a counselling service, the volunteers can provide support to those who wish to avail it.

Please note that if your call isn't answered we can only provide a call back service if you leave a voice message giving us permission to call you back. This is in line with current GDPR guidelines. The numbers to call vary on a monthly basis depending on which volunteer in taking a turn. The current numbers are to be found on the associations website www.miscarriage.ie. Access to our online shop is also through our website.



Gifts and Mementos

- Our logo - the family tree with the fallen leaf representing the baby lost through miscarriage - available as a pin
- Information Book
- Baby Remembrance Blessings
- Bookmarks
- MAI Teddy Bears & Candles
- Cards





Dedications Page

In Memory of Baby Elias Quinn, 26th April 2017

Remembered and loved so much by his mummy and daddy and two sisters.

Pitterpatter Byrne. 14th Jan 2012.

Kenna (24/07/2019), Reverie (13/11/2019), Ocean (05/05/2020) & January (21/01/2021) O'Callaghan.
Cherished by Mummy, Daddy, Roxy & New Baby xx

Baby Finegan, due date 25th February 2022, *remembered by Mammy and Daddy and all your family.*

Baby Fran 6/5/18. Baby Aoibhneasev 26/8/19

Baby Donnelly 10th August 2021, *Remembered by Dad, Mam & Mia*

Erica O'Sullivan. She passed away 12.12.2018 at 12.5 weeks pregnant.
She's remembered by her siblings; Isabel, Louis & Harry.

We would like to remember our baby Bradley who we lost on January 1st 2020
always remembered by Mammy and Daddy Leanne and Paudie xxx

Noah Treacy Nolan. 💙 30/7/2021

Jellybean Kelly, lost 9/12/2019, Lisa and Karl Kelly.

Sleep tight Baby Donovan 11/01/19 missed by Mommy, Daddy, brother's Adam & Jamie xx

Colm Irvine Died 16.08.21. *Remembered by mum & dad dearly. Our hardest goodbye.*

Baby Saoirse McDermott born sleeping on 10th June 2015.

Loved and missed everyday by Mammy and Daddy and Little sister xxx

Baby Esplin, who became mammy's angel in Melbourne on 30/12/2016 x

Baby Alex Harold February 5th 2020 always loved and never forgotten
love mam and dad and your baby brother Conor xx

Rain and Peach 2020 Angela and Seán McKillen

Luca Walsh, 31/12/2020 *remembered by Mammy and Daddy*

Baby Clarke 8th August 2018 *remembered by mammy daddy and little brother Eoghan*

Tangy Mullins, due 19th November 2021, who left us 3rd May 2021 at 11 weeks 3 days.
Always loved and remembered by Mommy, Daddy and Big Brother Dan xxx

In October 2021 the Miscarriage Association was deeply saddened by the passing of our committee member Niamh's beloved husband Jim. Jim played an active role within the association himself and was a marked absence at our remembrance service in November.

Both Jim and Niamh remain in our thoughts xx



Miscarriage in Ireland: "I am so sorry, but your baby has no heartbeat"

You know someone who has had a miscarriage. In fact, you probably know more than one person

by Ciara McDonnell, Helen O'Callaghan, Jennifer Stevens

A friend who has been uploading pictures on Instagram daily since the pandemic started has suddenly gone quiet, because she had one. A colleague you usually share an office with may have cried in the bathroom by the lifts as she realised she was losing her baby. Your mother may have had one and never told you.

In Ireland, 14,000 women experience miscarriage each year. That's between 20 and 25% of all pregnancies. But still, even with an experience that so many women share, there is a silence surrounding it.

There are different reasons for not talking about it. For some it's just too hard, too sad. Others are afraid to let their managers or colleagues know that they're trying, for fear of being sidelined or overlooked.

It can be hard to bring it up in a society that tells you not to mention a pregnancy until 12 weeks – who decided that? The first three months is the time when women need the most support - yet it's the time when we are expected to keep mum. And so, many women grieve alone, in silence and never speak about a beloved baby to anyone but their partner.

Last week fashion and beauty entrepreneur Pippa O'Connor Ormond announced that she is expecting a baby later this year with husband Brian. She followed her announcement with a series of Instagram stories the next day where she detailed her experience of miscarriage the year before.

Visibly emotional as she spoke to the camera, she described her experience and why she thought it was important to share it.

"I still think it's unsaid and to be honest, I don't even know when or if I'd have said it if I wasn't lucky enough to be pregnant again now. I suppose we don't want to show vulnerability and I personally don't want to feel sad. But I know how I thought at the time and how I wanted to hear someone else say 'that happened to me'.

That same week, Síle Seoige, who recently presented a documentary about miscarriage for TG4, announced that she's pregnant and expecting a baby girl. Seoige and her partner experienced two miscarriages last year and she ended the programme saying that she was still trying.

Two days after Síle revealed her good news, Lidl Ireland announced that they were providing paid leave for employees who have experienced or have been directly impacted by early pregnancy loss. The German retailer will offer three days at full pay to all employees, regardless of gender.

It seemed like, for the first time, the entire country was talking about miscarriage.

One of the hardest parts about going through it, say women who have experienced miscarriage, is the loneliness, the hours spent searching Google for experiences like your own. For somebody, somewhere to have felt like you're feeling in those heartbreaking moments.

And so, we asked you to tell us your stories, so that we can share them and provide a place for women like you to find some comfort, to honour the babies that were lost, to share in the grief that so many have and to be the glimmer of hope that someone so desperately needs right now.

These are their stories. These are our stories. This is miscarriage in Ireland.

"I almost know what to expect now when I see those shoulders slump, those eyebrows tense and that staggered, sorrowful sentence about to come from the mouth of the woman holding a machine with my world at her fingertips." Kate Delaney has experienced five miscarriages. She has endured loss while at weddings and at work and has been poked and prodded and tested for every possible outcome in order to give her the ultimate prize. A baby.

"My fifth and final pregnancy hit me the hardest," she says. "I used to think to myself [as I sat in the doctor's waiting room], 'please God give me that. Give me my head stuck in a toilet, my face turned green with nausea. Give me sleepless, uncomfortable nights, backache, constipation, waddling to work, kicks to the ribcage, on the loo non-stop'."

Experiencing multiple loss does not make you an expert, says Kate, but it does make you understand how the grief that comes with miscarriage can change you.

“ Once you see those two blue lines, the baby’s name almost pops into your head immediately. You’ve plans for this baby. To have it ripped away is a very intense loss. ”

"It changes the woman, the man, the laughter, the marriage, family life, extended family life, life with friends, fitness, diet, work. It changes EVERYTHING. Milestones, due dates, birthdays, anniversaries... it's almost impossible to wonder what life would have been like. And the killing thing – there's no one in the world to tell you how lasting these thoughts and feelings will be.

"You can never be a little bit pregnant," says Deirdre Pierce-McDonnell, chairperson of the Miscarriage Association of Ireland. "Once you see those two blue lines, the baby's name almost pops into your head immediately. You've plans for this baby. To have it ripped away is a very intense loss."

Orla O'Connell, clinical midwife specialist in bereavement at CUMH, says some women who experience miscarriage see it as loss of a developing pregnancy, rather than loss of a baby.

"It may be their way of coping with the loss. For many other women, it's a baby boy or girl from the moment they see the positive pregnancy test. They're imagining next Christmas, the first day at school."

O'Connell sees miscarriage as several losses. "They've lost a baby. They've also lost a chance to become a mother. Their whole psyche was set up to receive this baby into the world, to nourish and mother it."

Niamh Laffan has experienced four miscarriages, and it has taken a toll on her mental health. "The worst part is the silent grief," she explains. "You seem fine to everyone, no obvious evidence that you were ever even pregnant."

In 2020, she miscarried at eight weeks, and four days later her father passed away. "Looking back now, I don't actually know how I got through that time. I had this one, very obvious, public loss, with sympathy cards and condolences and support and understanding. And then there was this silent grief. Two very different losses, both equally devastating."

Acknowledging the psychological and emotional impacts of miscarriage, in 2016 the HSE launched National Standards for Bereavement Care for Pregnancy Loss and Perinatal Death. All 19 maternity hospitals nationwide have appointed a bereavement clinical midwife specialist.

The fact that pregnancy and miscarriage happen in women's bodies, some women – on top of their grief – blame themselves, says O'Connell. "Yet, miscarriage is something she couldn't have controlled. But there's a sense of failure: as a woman, mother and partner – a feeling you've let your partner down. So it becomes a loss of identity, as well as grief."

Alice says she blamed herself when she miscarried, even though she knew it wasn't her fault. "Everywhere I looked online said 'it just happens'. And there's no real explanation," she says "I blamed myself in so many ways thinking what I had done wrong and it's heartbreaking. Having this happen adds so much more anxiety for future pregnancies. You're afraid to get happy and excited in case it happens all over again. I hope to never experience that pain and upset again for me and my partner."

One reader says that the lonely and isolated grief she felt in the aftermath of her experience was life changing. Patricia* says, "It took me over three months to feel somewhat back to myself, but the miscarriage is something I still think of every day, multiple times a day."

The emotions that many women feel following a miscarriage are hard to quantify, and harder to explain, she maintains. "You're left with a strange mix of sadness, jealousy at other pregnant friends and colleagues, desperation to become pregnant again before the first due date, and terror that it will happen again."

Pregnant once more, Patricia says that her experiences will not allow her to be hopeful. "My husband and I know better than to be optimistic. Our innocence is gone, and every twinge in my body makes me feel like I will lose the baby again. It's easier to assume it won't work out."

Nora* says that the culture of silence around miscarriage "allows the HSE and the Government to ignore a gaping hole in the health system for support for women and their partners who suffer miscarriages".

She suggests, "it really feels that women should be eternally grateful for getting or being pregnant, that only the baby matters and women are discarded once no longer pregnant. I'm not even sure that women are treated as separate to their baby while pregnant and find this also very disappointing. Women are more than incubators and deserve respect and support and both are gravely lacking in this country."

Last year – investigating psychological impact of early-stage pregnancy loss – scientists at Imperial College London and KU Leuven, Belgium, found one in six women experience long-term post-traumatic stress following miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy.

Celine's daughter was stillborn at 33 weeks in December 2020. "It was the most traumatic experience of our lives," she says. "I don't think we will ever recover from it."

The study found that one month following pregnancy loss, almost one-third of women suffered post-traumatic stress, one in four had moderate-to-severe anxiety, and one in ten had moderate-to-severe depression. Nine months later, almost one in five women had post-traumatic stress, a similar number had moderate-to-severe anxiety, while six percent had moderate-to-severe depression.

Michelle had just emigrated to Dublin with her Irish husband when she had a miscarriage in 2016. "I was navigating life as a newlywed in a new country without a job, away from my family and friends," she says. "I only knew my husband, my in-laws and some of his friends. I went through a miscarriage without my usual support network."

During the first lockdown, Michelle says she "broke". "I thought the depression and anxiety [I was feeling] was brought about by the lockdown but it brought to the surface all the trauma from my previous loss."

O'Connell says the big tragedy is women feel huge loss and emptiness – but without any consoling memories. "They never met or did things with this little person. There's no tangible evidence they ever came into the world – sometimes there's not even a scan."

Laura* feels she can't express the depth of her grief, because it might not be socially acceptable. "All I want to do is scream and shout and cry for my little baby but I feel like no one will even understand that because I was only ten weeks gone."

Niamh Howard-Jones, bereavement support midwife at CUMH, says women can find comfort in acknowledging the reality of their baby, of its short life. "They're consoled by marking that life somehow – planting something in their garden, even doing some little thing around it with their partner."

Deirdre Pierce-McDonnell has seen women attend services of remembrance 20-30 years post-miscarriage. "Within the last year someone wrote, wanting to remember her son on his 21st birthday by making an entry in our book of remembrance."

Some women yearn to become pregnant quite quickly after miscarriage, almost to find some resolution to the grief, says O'Connell. But very often they've lost trust in a healthy pregnancy outcome. "They now know pregnancy doesn't necessarily mean a baby. They don't go into it light-heartedly. They're scared – they've lost confidence."

Maire* is 19 weeks pregnant following three miscarriages - two in the last 12 months. "I'm holding my breath every single day," she says. "Having to go to all my scans alone to date has been nerve-wracking to say the least. I've struggled to look at the screen and only release my breath when I hear 'there's the heartbeat'."

Yet one miscarriage doesn't increase the risk of another. Risk rises slightly after two, and climbs substantially after three consecutive miscarriages. "Ultimately most women go on to have a healthy pregnancy outcome – even after three miscarriages – we see it all the time," says O'Connell.

At present a Health Research Board funded study led by Prof Keelin O'Donoghue, who also leads the UCC/CUMH Pregnancy Loss Research Group (PLRG), is examining recurrent miscarriage service provision and patient experience in Ireland. Further research work is underway with the PLRG on recurrent miscarriage following infertility.

After four miscarriages and several rounds of IVF, Sarah* had given up hope. "I felt my body was done, I wasn't able to do my bit, I was a failure. I just wanted it all to stop."

In October 2020, she fell pregnant naturally and almost immediately began bleeding. "At six weeks it was confirmed the sac was empty, another loss," she says.

"But there was something else on the scan. I was directed to another doctor and a better machine to identify it - at this point I had decided I must have cancer. The screen popped up, the sound came on... and there was a heartbeat... the empty sac had another sac behind it, it had been a twin."

After months of worry and hoping, Sarah will be welcoming her baby in the coming weeks. "It was a rocky 12 weeks but he hung on and he is due next week! It's been the toughest time of my life."

So many of our respondents spoke of experiencing miscarriage during a pandemic. Loneliness and isolation were palpable as readers shared their stories.

Claire's* third miscarriage occurred during the first lockdown in March 2020. "My husband minded our toddler while I went into hospital. It was the loneliest two nights and one day I have ever known."

Many women shared the impact that Covid restrictions have had on their own experience. Rebecca had a miscarriage last March, on Mother's Day.

"We were stopped at a Covid checkpoint while I tried to breathe and wondered why it felt like being in labour. At the front door of the hospital we were told my husband was not allowed in with me and a stranger wheeled me to A&E. I was so scared and so alone."

More still, spoke of the inhumanity of losing a baby while surrounded by mothers and their newborns. Susan* lost twins at ten weeks.

"I will never forget being wheeled down for a D&C, the sound of newborn babies ringing in my ears from the ward which was right beside me as I waited for hours. Or the (rightly) ecstatic new parents walking out with a baby carrier and a shiny pink baby girl balloon. They turned right for the lift to go home as I was wheeled left for the theatre, it still brings tears to my eyes."

The Miscarriage Association of Ireland



Carmichael Centre, North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7

Telephone: 087 923 9217

www.miscarriage.ie • Email: info@miscarriage.ie

www.facebook.com/miscarriage.ie



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