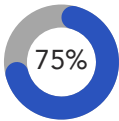


Key Facts: Maternal Mental Health (MMH) Conditions



**1 in 5 Mothers are Impacted
by Mental Health Conditions**

Maternal mental health (MMH) conditions are the **MOST COMMON** complication of pregnancy and birth, affecting 800,000 families each year in the U.S.^{1,2}



**Most Individuals are Untreated,
Increasing Risk of Negative Impacts**

75% of individuals impacted by MMH conditions **REMAIN UNTREATED**, increasing the risk of long-term negative impacts on mothers, babies, and families.⁴



**Certain Individuals are at Increased
Risk for Experiencing MMH Conditions**

High-risk groups include people of color, those impacted by poverty, military service members, and military spouses.^{6,7}



**Mental Health Conditions are the
Leading Cause of Maternal Deaths**

Suicide and overdose are the **LEADING CAUSE** of death for women in the first year following pregnancy.³



**\$14 Billion: The Cost of
Untreated MMH Conditions**

The cost of not treating MMH conditions is \$32,000 per mother-infant pair, or **\$14 BILLION** each year in the U.S.⁵



**It's Not Just Postpartum Depression:
There are a Range of MMH Conditions**

MMH conditions can occur during pregnancy and up to one year following pregnancy. They include depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar illness, psychosis, and substance use disorders.⁸

Terminology	Perinatal Loss	This Fact Sheet uses the term “perinatal loss” to include miscarriage, stillbirth, neonatal and infant death. Parents may also experience grief and loss if they undergo fertility treatments, pursue adoption, or terminate pregnancies for medical reasons.
	Women, mothers, childbearing people, birthing people	MMHLA uses these terms to refer to individuals who are capable of giving birth and not to refer to gender identity, recognizing that not all individuals who give birth identify as women or mothers. We strive to use inclusive terms whenever possible.
	Pregnancy and Baby	Not everyone who experiences perinatal loss equates “pregnancy” with “baby.” MMHLA encourages asking parents how they want to refer to their pregnancy.

Key Facts: Perinatal and Infant Loss

Miscarriage ⁹	Stillbirth ¹⁰	Neonatal and Infant Death ^{11,12}
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of a fetus < 20 weeks gestation 30% of all pregnancies, including 10-15% of recognized pregnancies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of a fetus > 20 weeks gestation 1 in 175 pregnancies (21,000 babies each year in the U.S.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neonatal: before 28 days of life (3.6 per 1,000 births) Infant: before 1st birthday (5.4 per 1,000 births)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Miscarriage is the most common form of pregnancy loss, with almost 30% of pregnancies ending in miscarriage (often before the pregnancy is recognized). Before 12 weeks gestation, most miscarriages are due to chromosomal abnormalities. Maternal health factors such as high blood pressure, obesity, and cigarette smoking may increase the risk of miscarriage. Advanced maternal age increases the risk of miscarriage with risks as high as 74% for women over age 40. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many stillbirths have no known causes. Stillbirth risk factors may include maternal preconception health, access to quality health care, and stress. Certain women are at increased risk, including individuals who are Black or Native American, over age 35, of low socioeconomic status, or experiencing their first pregnancy. Additional risk factors include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of tobacco during pregnancy. Pre-existing medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity. Having a multiples pregnancy, such as triplets or quadruplets. Having had a previous pregnancy loss. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most common causes of neonatal death are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth defects (20% of neonatal deaths). Preterm birth and/or low birth weight (25% of neonatal deaths). Most common causes of infant death are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birth defects or genetic conditions. Preterm birth and/or low birth weight. Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Injury (i.e suffocation). Maternal pregnancy complications. Infant mortality differs by race and ethnic groups, with non-Hispanic Black infants dying at 2.5 times the rate of White infants.

Impact on Black Women²⁰

Black women are **twice as likely to experience miscarriage or stillbirth** as white women due to:

- Maternal preconception health
- Socioeconomic status
- Intergenerational stress and trauma
- Racism and bias in the healthcare system
- Access to quality health care

Quotes from Parents who Experienced Perinatal Loss ^{15, 17, 23}

"An infant's death is the most painful and devastating loss parents can experience."

"I blame myself... I always feel like I could have done something different, or it was my fault."

"Please use my baby's name."

"When you lose a child, you always feel like something is missing."

"My baby's life was short, but it is something to celebrate."

"There was a big hole, a baby-shaped hole that is so much bigger than a baby."

"The image of my life as it was supposed to happen was torn into pieces and thrown in the garbage."

"No one knew how to talk about this, even my family. It's almost taboo."

Perinatal Loss and Maternal Mental Health

- Perinatal loss is most often an **unexpected, traumatic, and life-changing** event that can have profound negative effects on bereaved parents.^{13,14}
- Many bereaved parents are **emotionally devastated and nonfunctional** during the first year following a perinatal loss.¹⁵
- Perinatal loss can cause not only grief and deep anguish, but also **depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders**, often lasting many years.^{13,14,16}
- Parents experience a **wide range of responses** to perinatal loss that are variable, highly individualized, and highly intense. Emotions can include self-blame, guilt, loneliness, emptiness, anger, fear, failure, shame, sadness, and grief.^{14,17}
- Perinatal loss can **challenge an individual's sense of safety, identity, and future**.¹³
- Perinatal loss can **negatively impact future pregnancies**, increasing fear of another loss and impacting prenatal attachment.¹³
- Parents who experience infant loss have **higher rates of mental distress**, poor health, drug and alcohol use, divorce, and problems with their spouse and / or child/ren.^{14,15}
- Parents experience **social consequences**, including stigma, blame, isolation, shunning, loss of social status, disruption in relationships, and financial difficulties, which in turn may worsen mental health outcomes.¹⁸

Supporting Bereaved Parents

The type and level of bereavement care provided by health care professionals can positively or negatively impact parents' immediate state of grief, the recovery process, future pregnancies, and risk of developing long-standing psychopathology.¹⁹

Bereaved parents have four general needs:¹⁵

- To be heard and held.
- To have access to bereavement services.
- To make meaning of their loss.
- To regain a sense of control.

Employers can support bereaved parents by:

- Show compassion; take a caring and interested attitude.
- Provide paid leave following a miscarriage or stillbirth.
- Allow phased return to work, or other accommodations.
- Share information about support available through employee assistance programs, such as professional counseling.
- [Learn more from the Institute of Reproductive Grief Care.](#)

Bereaved parents want others to acknowledge:²²

- Their baby as an irreplaceable individual, including using the baby's name.
- Their parenthood and validate their grief.
- Their traumatic experience and offer the space to talk about it.
- Their need for specialized support.

Impact on Fathers²¹

Men Experience Fatherhood During Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a key initiation of the parent-child relationship. Men begin experiencing fatherhood during pregnancy and start to develop their paternal identities.

Internalize Grief, Gets Overlooked

Some fathers may internalize their grief in order to support, protect, and be strong for their partner. As a result, their grief may be overlooked by family and friends, researchers, healthcare professionals, and clinicians.

Disconnect from Partners

Alternatively, some men disconnect from their partners and isolate, which can lead to deterioration of mental health and increase risk of alcohol and substance use – all of which can negatively impact the relationship with partner or spouse.



Bereaved parents suffer multiple losses: the loss of their baby and the future relationship with their child, loss of self-esteem or self-efficacy related to reproduction, and a loss of trust in the world as they knew it.¹⁸

Reluctance to Seek Professional Help

Traditionally, society has viewed the open expression of a man's emotion as "unmanly," leading to a reluctance to seek professional help when problems arise.

Policies that Address Perinatal Loss and Support Bereaved Parents

Federal Legislation	State Legislation	Local Legislation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Stillbirth Health Improvement and Education (SHINE) for Autumn Act aims to prevent stillbirths through enhanced data collection, analysis, reporting, and research. A key part of the SHINE for Autumn Act is training for perinatal pathologists.²⁴ The Maternal and Child Health Stillbirth Prevention Act would add stillbirth and stillbirth prevention to Title V of the Social Security Act and calls for programs, activities, and research to reduce the incidence of stillbirth.²⁵ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oregon requires employers with 25+ employees to offer up to two weeks of unpaid bereavement leave to eligible employees.²⁶ Illinois requires that employers with 50+ employees provide a maximum of two weeks of unpaid bereavement leave following the death of a child.^{27,28} California requires employers with 5+ employees to provide 5 days of job protected leave for parents who experience miscarriage, failed adoption, or other reproductive losses.³⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Washington, DC provides two weeks of paid leave to city employees who lose a child under the age of 21, including stillbirth.²⁹ Pittsburgh, PA provides city employees and employees' partners with up to three days of leave for miscarriage or other pregnancy loss.²⁹ Portland, OR allows city employees to take up to three days of paid leave after miscarriage or other pregnancy loss.²⁹

Resources for Bereaved Parents



rtzhope.org

Return to Zero: HOPE (RTZ) is a national non-profit organization providing holistic support, resources, and community for all people who have experienced loss during the journey to parenthood.

Support for bereaved parents:

- Guidance for bereaved parents.
- Messages of support from other bereaved parents.
- Virtual support groups and workshops.
- In-person healing retreats.
- Webinars for bereaved parents and for providers.
- Books, journals, and podcasts.
- Resources specifically for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ parents.

Support for providers:

- Provider education and support.
- Perinatal loss print materials in many languages.
- Comprehensive Guide to NICU Bereavement Care.

RTZ also provides:

- Pregnancy and Infant Loss Directory with information about support groups, mental health providers, and other organizations focused on supporting bereaved parents.
- Additional resources such as information about bereavement doulas, grief and healing, photography, and prevention.



Saving babies. Supporting families.

firstcandle.org



nationalshare.org



starlegacyfoundation.org



postpartum.net



stillbirthalliance.org



reproductivegrief.org



missfoundation.org

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