

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	The experience of miscarriage: an interpretative phenomenological analysis.
AUTHORS	Meaney, Sarah; Corcoran, Paul; Spillane, Niamh; O'Donoghue, Keelin

VERSION 1 - REVIEW

REVIEWER	Denise Côté-Arsenault, PhD, RNC, FNAP, FAAN University of North Carolina Greensboro United States
REVIEW RETURNED	19-Apr-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>The experience of miscarriage: an interpretative phenomenological analysis</p> <p>The topic of the miscarriage experience is an important one and phenomenology is an appropriate approach to studying this. A strength of this study is the inclusion of both women and men; couples were participants in the study reported here.</p> <p>The abstract should report the themes that emerged from the analysis, rather than a summary of findings.</p> <p>Introduction: The review of literature implies that very few studies have been done describing the experience of miscarriage. This statement is made after the presentation of a short review that includes older studies, but not the work of pioneers such as Kristen Swanson, nor recent work from many researchers including Wright, Limbo and others.</p> <p>Miscarriage needs to be defined here. There is no universal definition therefore the one used by these Irish researchers is necessary.</p> <p>The purpose of the study is stated loosely, "to explore the experiences of people who have experienced miscarriage." However, the themes indicate that questions were asked about future pregnancies and the experience of pregnancy after loss. It is hinted that the purpose was more prescribed than stated.</p> <p>Methods: The rationale for use of phenomenology should be strengthened. Explain why it will provide new knowledge about the research topic. There are many key elements of the study that are lacking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation• Provide some sample interview questions. It is stated that
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	<p>they were semi-structured so further description is needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State in the text that ethics board approval was received. (Seen at the end, p. 16, but it is important to know while reading the methods.) • In analysis the authors that the themes were clustered in hierarchical order. This is an unusual approach in phenomenology and warrants further explanation. What was the basis of the hierarchy? [One thought is that perhaps the themes were chronological, which is a different concept.] <p>Findings: A description of the sample is needed. This could be in the text or in a table. Should include age, gender, race/ethnicity, with other characteristics such as education, income, etc. Also need pregnancy history, number of pregnancies, living children, all pregnancy losses (gestational age of). How long ago did these losses occur?</p> <p>Obstetrical history is very important because all of the quotes provided were from parents who had at least two miscarriages, and some mention other children. Knowing this history is essential to one's ability to judge the findings and draw conclusions. Who were the participants? What was their past experience? Was this a first miscarriage for anyone? The science of perinatal loss indicates that the number of losses impacts the response.</p> <p>P. 6 As stated, one researcher did the initial analysis and then shared it with the co-authors. Did all researchers read the transcripts thoroughly? Then what was their role in analysis?</p> <p>It is helpful to know that the primary author's background is health sociology.</p> <p>Themes: the themes are interesting and revealing. It seems that the 1st two themes are illustrated with fewer quotes; left me wondering if saturation was met in each theme. Theme 1's quotes are both from fathers. Suggest adding a quote from a mother.</p> <p>The theme, Support and coping, was half about pregnancy after loss. That topic does not really fit under the theme title.</p> <p>Trustworthiness of the study and its findings need more attention in this manuscript. What was done to insure its rigor?</p> <p>Conclusions: This study does bring to light some new ideas, such as the suggestion that there be increased investigation of the underlying causes of miscarriage.</p> <p>P. 12 lines 262-268: There is much evidence that parents who have other children value future children even more because of their experience of loving their children, and are no less distressed after miscarriage than those with no other children. This paragraph suggests that perhaps parents with other children receive less attention from nursing staff. Suggest revision of this paragraph after reviewing more recent studies.</p> <p>The finding that both men and women are deeply affected by miscarriage confirms what others have found, although with differences in responses. Discussion of these findings, contrasted</p>
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	<p>with the findings of others (albeit older studies) is well done.</p> <p>Agree with the thought that perhaps the results of this study are biased due to its base in an early pregnancy loss clinic. However, new details are brought to light. The impact of the care provided on the parent experiences is critically important.</p>
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REVIEWER	Alice D. Domar, Ph.D Boston IVF USA
REVIEW RETURNED	27-Apr-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>Although this is an incredibly important topic, on a woefully unaddressed issue, I don't feel that this manuscript brings enough new information to be accepted for publication.</p> <p>The sample size is very small (16), which is not mentioned in the abstract, and the sample used is not representative of the population as a whole because these participants had access to a pregnancy loss clinic, which is rare. Thus, their experiences are likely to be different from the average pregnancy loss patient.</p> <p>It is unclear why they stopped recruiting after 16 participants were recruited. It is stated that "data saturation was met" but why 16?</p> <p>The authors also need to clarify the lower paragraph on page 12- do women who already have at least one child experience less distress after a loss?</p> <p>The themes presented in the Results and Discussion have been discovered in previous publications.</p>
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VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1:

C: The abstract should report the themes that emerged from the analysis, rather than a summary of findings.

R: We have updated the results section of the abstract with the themes rather than a summary of the results.

Reviewer 1:

C: The review of literature implies that very few studies have been done describing the experience of miscarriage. This statement is made after the presentation of a short review that includes older studies, but not the work of pioneers such as Kristen Swanson, nor recent work from many researchers including Wright, Limbo and others.

R: We thank the reviewer and now refer to a number of additional studies throughout the introduction and discussion which we believe have improved our manuscript.

Reviewer 1:

C: Miscarriage needs to be defined here. There is no universal definition therefore the one used by these Irish researchers is necessary.

R: We have now included a definition of miscarriage in the methods section of the manuscript

Reviewer 1:

C: The purpose of the study is stated loosely, "to explore the experiences of people who have experienced miscarriage." However, the themes indicate that questions were asked about future

pregnancies and the experience of pregnancy after loss. It is hinted that the purpose was more prescribed than stated.

R: We have updated the manuscript to give more detail in relation to the purpose of the study.

Reviewer 1:

C: Methods: The rationale for use of phenomenology should be strengthened. Explain why it will provide new knowledge about the research topic. There are many key elements of the study that are lacking:

- State the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation
- Provide some sample interview questions. It is stated that they were semi-structured so further description is needed.
- State in the text that ethics board approval was received. (Seen at the end, p. 16, but it is important to know while reading the methods.)
- In analysis the authors that the themes were clustered in hierarchical order. This is an unusual approach in phenomenology and warrants further explanation. What was the basis of the hierarchy? [One thought is that perhaps the themes were chronological, which is a different concept.] We thank the reviewer for their observations and have included more information in relation to IPA.

R: We have updated the manuscript to include inclusion and exclusion criteria. We have updated the manuscript to provide some examples of the questions asked.

A statement in relation to ethical approval is in the second paragraph in of the methods section on page 5.

In the analysis, when we referred to the themes being clustered hierarchically we meant subordinate themes and superordinate themes. We appreciate that this may be confusing and have updated the analysis section to clarify this point.

Reviewer 1:

C: A description of the sample is needed. This could be in the text or in a table. Should include age, gender, race/ethnicity, with other characteristics such as education, income, etc. Also need pregnancy history, number of pregnancies, living children, all pregnancy losses (gestational age of). How long ago did these losses occur? Obstetrical history is very important because all of the quotes provided were from parents who had at least two miscarriages, and some mention other children. Knowing this history is essential to one's ability to judge the findings and draw conclusions. Who were the participants? What was their past experience? Was this a first miscarriage for anyone? The science of perinatal loss indicates that the number of losses impacts the response.

R: We have included a table to provide additional information in relation to the study participants

Reviewer 1:

C: P. 6 As stated, one researcher did the initial analysis and then shared it with the co-authors. Did all researchers read the transcripts thoroughly? Then what was their role in analysis? It is helpful to know that the primary author's background is health sociology.

R: The co-authors had differing roles throughout the analysis. NS (a research midwife) observed a number of the interviews and read through a selection of the transcripts. The primary author completed the analysis and this was presented to NS as well as the remaining authors (a consultant obstetrician and an epidemiologist) for review and to agree the final themes.

Reviewer 1:

C: Themes: the themes are interesting and revealing. It seems that the 1st two themes are illustrated

with fewer quotes; left me wondering if saturation was met in each theme. Theme 1's quotes are both from fathers. Suggest adding a quote from a mother.

R: We have included additional quotes into the first two themes including themes, all of which are from mothers.

Reviewer 1:

C: The theme, Support and coping, was half about pregnancy after loss. That topic does not really fit under the theme title.

R: Although some of this theme is related to subsequent pregnancies these participants indicated how they would the staff in these services as knowledgeable and supportive. It is for this reason we felt that it was appropriate to place this topic under the theme of support and coping

Reviewer 1:

C: P. 12 lines 262-268: There is much evidence that parents who have other children value future children even more because of their experience of loving their children, and are no less distressed after miscarriage than those with no other children. This paragraph suggests that perhaps parents with other children receive less attention from nursing staff. Suggest revision of this paragraph after reviewing more recent studies.

R: We agree with the reviewer's observation and comment here. The paragraph was not meant to support the statements that parents would be less distressed. We have therefore updated this paragraph.

Reviewer 2:

C: The sample size is very small (16), which is not mentioned in the abstract, and the sample used is not representative of the population as a whole because these participants had access to a pregnancy loss clinic, which is rare. Thus, their experiences are likely to be different from the average pregnancy loss patient.

It is unclear why they stopped recruiting after 16 participants were recruited. It is stated that "data saturation was met" but why 16?

R: Given the research objective of the study it was believed that employing a qualitative methodology would be most appropriate. The aim of qualitative studies is to allow for a depth of understanding that would not be achievable using quantitative methods. Given this, sample sizes are consistently smaller than quantitative studies. This study utilised a phenomenological approach in line with the methods detailed by Smith et al. who outline that previous published studies illustrate that samples as small as three or four can provide researchers with invaluable information in relation to psycho-social phenomena. This study recruited a much larger sample of 16 as we aimed to include both male and female perspectives of miscarriage

Reviewer 2:

C: The authors also need to clarify the lower paragraph on page 12- do women who already have at least one child experience less distress after a loss?

R: In line with the response to reviewers 1 comment, this is not what was meant by the authors. We have edited the paragraph accordingly.

Reviewer 2:

C: The themes presented in the Results and Discussion have been discovered in previous publications.

R: We feel that the value of our study is that our findings build on the current body of knowledge by providing additional insight into previously published quantitative findings.

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Denise Côté-Arsenault, PhD, RN, FNAP, FAAN Professor and Chair (Family & Community Nursing) University of North Carolina Greensboro School of Nursing; USA
REVIEW RETURNED	12-Jun-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>While there have been significant improvements made to this paper a few issues remain and others have come to light.</p> <p>Abstract The objective here remains the same as the first submission. Revise to match text p. 5 lines 95-96. Setting: Add "Ireland" here. Conclusions: First sentence should reflect the new knowledge gained from this study. The current first sentence does not reflect the priority.</p> <p>Introduction P. 4 Line 83. Currently states that the experience of miscarriage can negatively impact parents' wellbeing. Please elaborate on what is meant by "wellbeing." Be specific. P. 4 Line 87. Begin new paragraph by referring to the previous one. For example, "By contrast, an interventional study in the US..." Next sentence, rather than "This study" refer to the researchers "Swanson and colleagues" (Rationale: No study finds anything, it is the researchers who do the finding.) P. 4. Line 92. The sentence, "Of those which do they are" is not clear and needs revision. Perhaps you could say, "Of these, most focused on..."</p> <p>Method P. 5 Line 102. After "interpretative phenomenological analysis" add (IPA) to indicate the abbreviation that will be used in the following paragraphs. P. 6 Line 131. First sentence should be revised to "Recruitment continued until data saturation was met." Again, do not personify a study. P. 7 Line 139. Add range of minutes of interviews, in addition to the mean. Table 1 is very effective in providing key information about the sample, however, two additional characteristics are needed: length of time since last loss, and note the individuals who are couples. Participant 1 & 2 share all characteristics except gender so they are clearly a couple, but the other three couples are not obvious. P. 8 Lines 156-163. Put these sentences in past tense because you are reporting the analysis process that you used (in the past). Line 162 should be "analyses" (plural)</p> <p>Findings Written well throughout, with additional quotes. P. 14 Line 247. Revise sentence to "When women had a choice, most chose to have some form of medical intervention." (Best not to begin a sentence with a clause.) Support and caring. The high levels of anxiety participants experienced in pregnancy after perinatal loss is consistent with the literature. [Could add to Discussion; citing Côté-Arsenault, D. (2007). Threat appraisal, coping, and emotions in pregnancy after perinatal loss. Nursing Research, 56, 108-116. Côté-Arsenault, D. & O'Leary, J. (2016). Understanding the Experience of Pregnancy Subsequent to Perinatal Loss. In B. Black, P. Wright, & R. Limbo (Eds.) Perinatal and Pediatric Bereavement in Nursing and Other Health Professions (pp. 159-181) New York, NY: Springer Publishing.]</p>
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	<p>Discussion</p> <p>P. 17 Lines 298-300. Consider moving the statement “There is a need for improved...pregnancies.” Down further in this section. This statement does not reflect your primary findings.</p> <p>p. 17 Lines 302-304. Suggest that you start the paragraph with “Findings from this study support what has been reported by others, that there is a need for increased awareness in relation to the frequent occurrence of miscarriage. [state what you key finding is, next]</p> <p>P. 18 Line 319. Rewrite this sentence. Do not begin a sentence with a clause (i.e. “Focusing on commitments” needs to come later in the sentence. Start with your main point.)</p> <p>p. 18 Line 333. Begin sentence with “It has been documented that men and women...”</p> <p>p. 20 Line 358. Add the word “further” before the word “ developed.</p> <p>P. 20 Line 364. Add to this sentence: “as they had not experienced the requisite three recurrent miscarriages.”</p> <p>p. 20 Lines 369-371. The last sentence of the paragraph needs to be reworded. It is not clear what the women expressed dissatisfaction with. (perhaps “in the rule”?)</p> <p>References</p> <p>Much more complete with this revised submission.</p>
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REVIEWER	Alice D Domar Boston IVF, USA
REVIEW RETURNED	27-May-2016

GENERAL COMMENTS	There still needs to be the limitations of the study addressed. This is a small sample of a group who had multiple losses who were seen in a center which is specialized in pregnancy loss. This is not at all typical of individuals who have had a loss. The findings may or may not be generalizable.
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VERSION 2 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1:

Abstract: The objective here remains the same as the first submission. Revise to match text p. 5 lines 95-96.

Response: We have updated the objective to be the same as the text on page 5.

Reviewer 1:

Abstract: Setting: Add “Ireland” here.

Response: We have added Ireland to the setting

Reviewer 1:

Abstract: Conclusions: First sentence should reflect the new knowledge gained from this study. The current first sentence does not reflect the priority.

We have updated the conclusion of the abstract.

Reviewer 1:

Introduction: P. 4 Line 83. Currently states that the experience of miscarriage can negatively impact parents’ wellbeing. Please elaborate on what is meant by “wellbeing.” Be specific.

Response: Here we refer to psychological wellbeing of men and women and have updated the

sentence accordingly

Reviewer 1:

Introduction: P. 4 Line 87. Begin new paragraph by referring to the previous one. For example, "By contrast, an interventional study in the US..." Next sentence, rather than "This study" refer to the researchers "Swanson and colleagues" (Rationale: No study finds anything, it is the researchers who do the finding.)

Response: We thank the reviewer for their observation and have updated the manuscript accordingly

Reviewer 1:

Introduction: P. 4. Line 92. The sentence, "Of those which do they are" is not clear and needs revision. Perhaps you could say, "Of these, most focused on..."

Response: We agree with the reviewer and have updated the manuscript as suggested

Reviewer 1:

Method: P. 5 Line 102. After "interpretative phenomenological analysis" add (IPA) to indicate the abbreviation that will be used in the following paragraphs.

Response: We have included the abbreviation to line 102

Reviewer 1:

Method: P. 6 Line 131. First sentence should be revised to "Recruitment continued until data saturation was met." Again, do not personify a study.

Response: We have rewritten the sentence in relation to recruitment.

Reviewer 1:

Method: P. 7 Line 139. Add range of minutes of interviews, in addition to the mean.

Response: We have updated the methods section to include the range of minutes.

Reviewer 1:

Method: Table 1 is very effective in providing key information about the sample, however, two additional characteristics are needed: length of time since last loss, and note the individuals who are couples. Participant 1 & 2 share all characteristics except gender so they are clearly a couple, but the other three couples are not obvious.

Response: We have updated the table to highlight which participants were couples. We have also included the time since their most recent miscarriage

Reviewer 1:

Method: P. 8 Lines 156-163. Put these sentences in past tense because you are reporting the analysis process that you used (in the past).

Response: We have updated this paragraph so that it is now in the past tense.

Reviewer 1:

Method: Line 162 should be "analyses" (plural) Response: We have corrected the typographical error

Reviewer 1:

Results: P. 14 Line 247. Revise sentence to "When women had a choice, most chose to have some form of medical intervention." (Best not to begin a sentence with a clause.)

Response: We thank the reviewer for their observation and have updated the manuscript accordingly

Reviewer 1:

Results: Support and caring. The high levels of anxiety participants experienced in pregnancy after perinatal loss is consistent with the literature. [Could add to Discussion; citing Côté-Arsenault, D.

(2007). Threat appraisal, coping, and emotions in pregnancy after perinatal loss. *Nursing Research*, 56, 108-116.

Côté-Arsenault, D. & O'Leary, J. (2016). Understanding the Experience of Pregnancy Subsequent to Perinatal Loss. In B. Black, P. Wright, & R. Limbo (Eds.) *Perinatal and Pediatric Bereavement in Nursing and Other Health Professions* (pp. 159-181) New York, NY: Springer Publishing.]

Response: We have updated the discussion including reference to the literature suggested.

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: P. 17 Lines 298-300. Consider moving the statement "There is a need for improved...pregnancies." Down further in this section. This statement does not reflect your primary findings.

Response: We have moved the sentence to the end of that paragraph

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: p. 17 Lines 302-304. Suggest that you start the paragraph with "Findings from this study support what has been reported by others, that there is a need for increased awareness in relation to the frequent occurrence of miscarriage. [state what you key finding is, next Response: We agree with the reviewer and have updated the manuscript as suggested

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: Do not begin a sentence with a clause (i.e. "Focusing on commitments" needs to come later in the sentence. Start with your main point.)

Response: We have restructured the sentence as suggested.

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: p. 18 Line 333. Begin sentence with "It has been documented that men and women..."

Response: We have now begun the sentence as suggested by the reviewer.

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: p. 20 Line 358. Add the word "further" before the word " developed. Response: We have added the word further to the sentence.

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: P. 20 Line 364. Add to this sentence: "as they had not experienced the requisite three recurrent miscarriages."

Response: We have added "the requisite three consecutive miscarriages" to the sentence.

Reviewer 1:

Discussion: p. 20 Lines 369-371. The last sentence of the paragraph needs to be reworded. It is not clear what the women expressed dissatisfaction with. (perhaps "in the rule"?)

Response: We have updated the sentence to illustrate that their dissatisfaction is related to their ineligibility for investigations

Reviewer 2:

There still needs to be the limitations of the study addressed. This is a small sample of a group who had multiple losses who were seen in a center which is specialized in pregnancy loss. This is not at all typical of individuals who have had a loss. The findings may or may not be generalizable.

Response: We have augmented the limitations section of the manuscript to the address the issue of generalizability.