

No psychological risk in children next-born after stillbirth

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There is no evidence that children next-born after stillbirth are clinically at risk compared to children of non-bereaved mothers, according to a study published today in *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*. However, the study did find evidence of less optimal mother-child interaction.

Stillbirth can be a major psychological trauma to parents. Anecdotal accounts have suggested that children born subsequent to stillbirth of a sibling may be psychologically vulnerable. This study is the first systematically conducted case-control follow-up to examine this question and assessed first-time mothers from pregnancy until the children were aged six to eight years. At the time of the follow-up, there were 52 mothers in the study whose previous pregnancy had ended in stillbirth (the index group), and 51 who had not experienced stillbirth (the control group).

The researchers found no significant between-group differences in child cognitive or health assessments, or in teacher-rated child difficulties. However, mothers in the index group reported increased child difficulties, in particular peer problems, and there were higher levels of maternal criticism of the child's actions.

"We found that bereaved mothers tended to identify more difficulties with their child than non-bereaved mothers, and that they reported more difficulties in the child than did teachers," said the paper's lead author, Dr. Penelope Turton, of St George's University of London. "Whether

this was because previous loss of a child renders some mothers more sensitive to aspects of their child's behaviour that cause them concern, or whether there is real variation in the child's behaviour is unclear."

Turton continued, "We are continuing to follow this group of mothers and children, and will follow-up again once the children reach adolescence. This type of study is very important in helping midwives, health visitors, and doctors to provide psychological care for both parents after a [stillbirth](#) and in the next pregnancy; while the severity of grief usually diminishes over the first one to two years, some mothers continue to experience more intense or prolonged grief and we need to know what long-term effects this can have."

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

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