

Specialized communication narratives help couples deal with miscarriage, study finds

October 19 2017

Anywhere from 10 to 25 percent of clinically recognized pregnancies end in loss, according to the American Pregnancy Association, making miscarriage a socially significant health issue. Often, women experience profound grief, guilt and depression straining a committed relationship. A recent University of Missouri study examined how men also have to cope with their partner's miscarriage and how married couples can use "communicated perspective-taking" to cope. The findings could help couples cope with miscarriage while also informing practitioners who treat anxiety and stress.

Communicated perspective-taking (CPT) is communicating to attempt to understand another person's point of view. It is showing your partner that you are attempting to "walk in their shoes" by listening to them, validating their ideas and asking questions to better understand their experience. CPT is similar to empathy, although empathy is attempting to understand and feel another person's feelings—CPT is working to understand another person's thoughts.

"We wanted to examine how both men and women use CPT to make sense of [loss](#) following a [miscarriage](#)," said Haley Horstman, an assistant professor of interpersonal and family communication in the MU College of Arts and Science. "Due to the taboo nature of miscarriage, many individuals struggle with disclosing their feelings and often rely on a spouse for continual support. We studied the ways in which men and women can use CPT to cope with loss and strengthen their relationships."

For the study, 183 married couples that experienced a miscarriage within the last 10 years completed an online survey about miscarriage, communication and coping. Couples were recruited online through pregnancy loss support groups and research networks.

To assess the degree to which [married couples](#) engaged in CPT during their conversations about their miscarriage, participants completed a scale that included measurements such as "my spouse was respectful of me when I talked about my problem."

Findings showed that when wives took their husband's perspective on the miscarriage, husbands benefited from understanding the miscarriage more positively, and both spouses had higher relational satisfaction.

"Similarly, when husbands are imagining their wives' points of view, couples have stronger relationships," Horstman said. "However, wives may feel burdened by taking their husband's perspective after a miscarriage, indicated by less positivity about the miscarriage."

The researchers also found that husbands and wives who were more committed to their role as parents were happier in their marriage overall. On the other hand, those people who were less committed to being parents relied more on their spouse to help them cope with the miscarriage.

"Overall, CPT is a very important aspect in how couples manage the intense loss of a miscarriage together," Horstman said. "Understanding how CPT is used successfully in relationships also can help mental health practitioners adapt and augment their couples counseling services following a miscarriage."

The study, "Communicated Sense-making After Miscarriage: A Dyadic Analysis of Spousal Communicated Perspective-Taking, Well-being, and

Parenting Role Salience," recently was published in *Health Communication*.

More information: Haley Kranstuber Horstman et al. Communicated Sense-making After Miscarriage: A Dyadic Analysis of Spousal Communicated Perspective-Taking, Well-being, and Parenting Role Salience, *Health Communication* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2017.1351852](https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1351852)

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Specialized communication narratives help couples deal with miscarriage, study finds (2017, October 19) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-10-specialized-narratives-couples-miscarriage.html>

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