

# Religious participation may help women cope with miscarriage

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Participating in organized religion may help women cope with miscarriages, says a new study from Ball State University.

"Miscarriage, Religious Participation, and Mental Health," a multiyear study by Richard Petts, a sociologist at Ball State, examines the influence of [miscarriage](#) on mental health and the impact of religious participation.

"Religious participation seems to provide some protection against initially lower levels of mental health for women who experience a miscarriage," Petts said. "The study found that among women who experience a miscarriage, those who attend religious services frequently have significantly better mental health than those who attend less frequently.

"Specifically, [religious participation](#) is more likely to enhance [mental health](#) among women who experience a miscarriage—either a miscarriage alone or a miscarriage and live birth—than among women who do not miscarry. Religious participation may provide much needed social support to women who miscarry, as social support and resources for dealing with miscarriages are often limited. Attending [religious services](#) frequently may also expose women to teachings and messages on how to find meaning in loss, which may serve as a useful coping mechanism."

Petts' research is in an area that's drawn little attention. Findings in the limited literature on religion and pregnancy loss have been mixed.

"Miscarriage is a relatively common experience, with some estimates suggesting that 25 percent of pregnancies may end in miscarriage within the first six weeks, and recent evidence suggests that 12 to 13 percent of [women](#) report experiencing a miscarriage in their lifetime," Petts said. "Despite the prevalence of miscarriage, [pregnancy loss](#) remains a socially taboo topic that is not commonly discussed as these losses are often minimized, attributed to fate and not treated the same as other death."

Data for this study came from the [National Longitudinal Study of Youth 1997 \(NLSY97\)](#), which contains a nationally representative sample of about 9,000 youths. Youths were first interviewed in 1997 and continue to be reinterviewed annually or biannually (data through 2013 was used

for this study). A final sample size of 3,646 females was used for this study.

The results were published in the March 2018 issue of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

**More information:** Richard J. Petts. Miscarriage, Religious Participation, and Mental Health, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2018). [DOI: 10.1111/jssr.12500](https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12500)

Provided by Ball State University

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