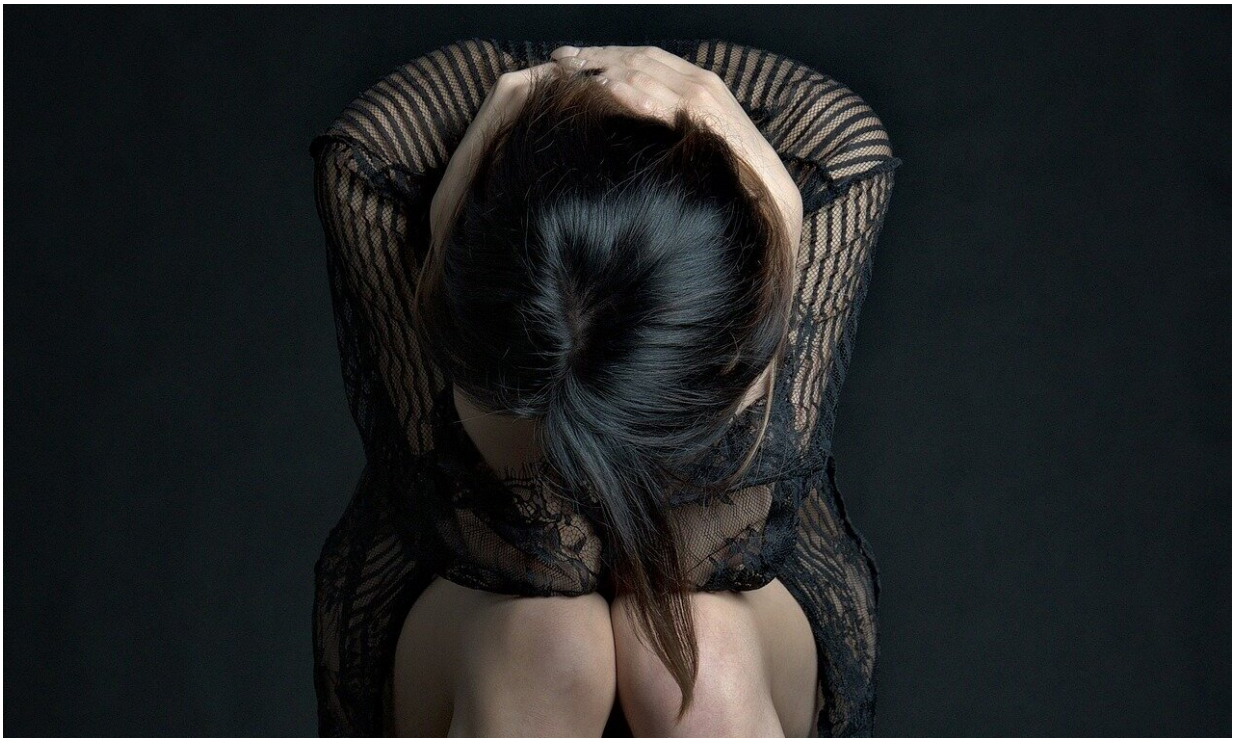


Researchers call for scrutiny of employment leave for early pregnancy endings

October 9 2023, by Alan Williams



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Parents facing an early end to pregnancies can be entitled to differing degrees of paid leave depending on where they live, recently published research has shown.

The study reports that in different countries—and different parts of the

UK—there is currently a range of inconsistent entitlements to paid leave from work in the case of pregnancies which end as a result of miscarriage, abortion, ectopic pregnancies and molar pregnancies.

Those involved in the research said they were surprised by the range of categorizations in laws about [pregnancy](#) and employment, and the complex inclusions and exclusions this creates both between—but also within—legislatures.

And at the start of Baby Loss Awareness Week, they have said their work highlights the need for the scrutiny of any new proposals around employment leave for early pregnancy endings.

Earlier this year, the Government produced a Pregnancy Loss Review which recommended that employers should find ways of supporting people experiencing the end of a pregnancy before 24 weeks.

The new study was not influenced by that work, but the researchers have called on policymakers to carefully assess the consequences of new ideas around leaves for pregnancy endings and to formulate inclusive and fair proposals for change, for example making sure that abortion and termination for fetal anomaly are not forgotten.

[Published in the journal *Gender, Work & Organization*](#), the research was carried out by academics now working at the University of Plymouth, University of Essex, University College London, and the Open University.

The study's lead author, University of Plymouth Research Fellow Dr. Aimee Middlemiss, has spent a number of years examining the experiences of parents whose pregnancies end early and the many and varied challenges they face.

She is also currently working as part of the largest study to date in the world of a model that aims to improve the quality and safety of midwifery care.

"The limited types of employment leave currently available in England and Wales after the early end of a pregnancy are either [sick leave](#), or, in some organizations, forms of bereavement leave. Both of these types of leave make assumptions about the nature of the pregnancy ending and what the experience has involved which may not be suitable."

"'Sick leave' assumes a pregnancy ending without a [live birth](#) to be an illness, and sidelines people who feel a baby was lost. 'Bereavement leave' sidelines the physical needs of the post-pregnant woman, and may exclude some types of pregnancy ending or those who do not feel bereaved," says Middlemiss.

The paper is the latest to result from the Early pregnancy endings and the workplace project, supported by the Open University's Open Societal Challenges Programme, which aims to tackle some of the most important societal challenges of our time through impact-driven research.

Study principal investigator Professor Jo Brewis, at the OU Business School, said, "This research is significant because it is, as far as we are aware, the first to analyze the different inclusions and exclusions generated by laws in England and Wales and around the world regarding paid employment leave and the status of the fetus or baby. We call upon policymakers to carefully evaluate the implications of new proposals regarding employment leave for pregnancy endings."

Dr. Victoria Newton, another member of the team who leads the OU's Reproduction, Sexualities and Sexual Health Research Group, added, "We want to ensure that any new proposals do not lead to stigmatization

around pregnancy endings, and that employees receive equitable and individualized support that is tailored to their needs, regardless of the type of early pregnancy ending experienced."

More information: Aimee Louise Middlemiss et al, Employment leave for early pregnancy endings: A biopolitical reproductive governance analysis in England and Wales, *Gender, Work & Organization* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/gwao.13055](https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13055)

Provided by University of Plymouth

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