Introduction

Subsequent Pregnancy/Child

- Memories of Past Experiences Influence How We Perceive the Present
- It’s about grief management, because being pregnant again is the biggest reminder of the greatest loss a mother will ever experience.
- Perinatal period revives earlier experiences, especially unresolved emotional issues
Developmental Tasks of Subsequent Pregnancy

- Working with the fear of another abnormal pregnancy
- Avoiding attachment for fear of future loss
- Moving past the unwillingness to give up grieving out of loyalty to the baby who died.
- Grieving the loss of the self that is parent
- Attaching to the unborn child separately from the child who died
  (O'Leary & Thorwick, 1994)

Study Background

- Perinatal loss is the biggest complication of pregnancy
- Stillbirth is one of the greatest challenges in reproductive health
- Over 2.6 million babies die each year before birth
- Stillbirth remains ‘invisible’ in terms of global policy focus
  - Millennium Development Goals
  - Sustainable Development Goals
- Impact of stillbirth is profound
- Majority of women will proceed to a subsequent pregnancy after loss, often within a very short timeframe.

Research Question

- Women do not get pregnant in a vacuum.
- Men’s voices are underrepresented in the literature.
- How do couples make a decision to get pregnant again?
- What are the experiences of women and men?
Fathers: Catapulted into Fatherhood

- Unprepared
- Frustrated, helpless, anxious
- Often feel alone as health care focuses on mom and baby
- None were debriefed after resuscitation
- Staff felt unable to support due to lack of resources

Harvey, ME (2012) Being there: A qualitative interview study with fathers present during the resuscitation of their baby at delivery. Archives of Diseases in Childhood Fetal & Neonatal Ed.

Men’s Themes

- Recognition
- Preoccupation
- Stoicism
- Support


What is a pregnancy after loss like for couples, as a dyad?
Methodology

- Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis - want to discover the experiences from the couples perspective.
- Purposeful sample of women and their partners, in the pregnancy immediately following stillbirth.
- 8 heterosexual couples agreed to participate
- In-depth interviews with the couples together at a place and time of their choosing, in the late second or third trimester of pregnancy.
- Ethical considerations

Findings

- Two superordinate themes identified:
  - Journey of loss
  - Hoping for a born alive baby
Journey of loss

- Unexpected death of a baby
- Grieving the deceased baby

Hoping for a born alive baby

- Differentiating between the deceased and the new babies
- Trying to conceive
- Cautiously hoping
- Revisiting the past to give birth to a born alive baby

What Helps?

- Recognize there is a missing baby and talk about this baby as the sibling
- Acknowledge fear
- Help with breastfeeding
- If they go home without the baby because of prematurity PLEASE talk about this
- Accept “unusual” bonding responses. Some parents can feel numb I see him but I don’t feel him
- Help with visitors.
Summary of Research to Practice

- Caution: Giving false reassurance that “everything will be ok this time” is not helpful
- Parents do not want to be seen as crazy or overzealous
- Fathers need to be acknowledged
- Attachment issues are normal but crucial that they be addressed into the postpartum period