

Abstract

Background: Miscarriage has been reported to pose not only physical but also psychological distress in women. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of women suffer from psychiatric morbidity after miscarriage. Previous studies reported that 10-12% of Chinese women in Hong Kong developed a depressive disorder six weeks following miscarriage. However, there is little local data concerning the longer-term psychiatric consequences of miscarriage.

Aim: The aim of this study is to examine the pattern of psychiatric morbidity up to three months following miscarriage and to identify the risk factors of post-miscarriage depressive disorder among Chinese women in Hong Kong.

Study design: This is a longitudinal cohort study of a group of subjects who miscarried. They were interviewed immediately after miscarriage to collect medical, psychiatric and sociodemographic data. Three months later, 161 subjects (89%) were assessed by a 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I Disorders (SCID) as screening and diagnostic instruments, respectively. The prevalence of psychiatric symptoms and disorders were measured, and risk factors of post-miscarriage depression were identified.

Results: Nearly one half of the studied subjects (47%) showed a significant level of psychiatric symptoms immediately after miscarriage, and 23% of the subjects had symptoms three months later. Three months after miscarriage, 16 subjects (10%) met the DSM-IV criteria for depressive disorder, two subjects (1.2%) were diagnosed with anxiety disorder not otherwise specified (NOS), and another two subjects each suffered obsessive compulsive disorder (0.6%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (0.6%) respectively. Risk factors of post-miscarriage depression included younger age, history of infertility and past history of depression.

Conclusions: Miscarriage is a relatively common occurrence. Post-miscarriage psychiatric disorder occurs in approximately 12% of women, with depressive disorder being the most common diagnosis. Given the local annual figure of more than 7,000 first trimester miscarriages, about 900 local women (the equivalent of three new cases per day) suffer post-miscarriage psychiatric disorder each year. This estimate of the local service needs may prompt general hospitals in Hong Kong to take a more proactive approach in screening for post-miscarriage psychiatric disorders, particularly depression. The risk factors identified in this study may also provide criteria to select more susceptible cases for psychological follow-up care in busy clinics.