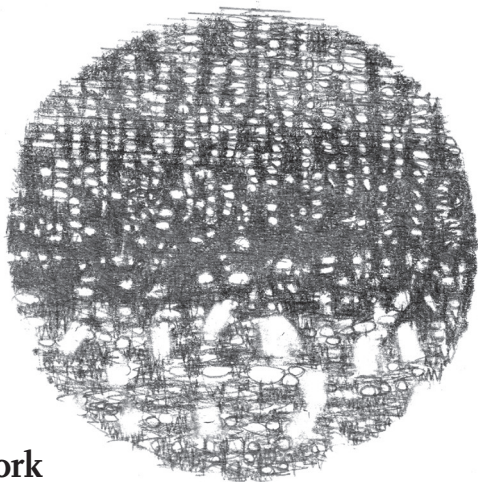
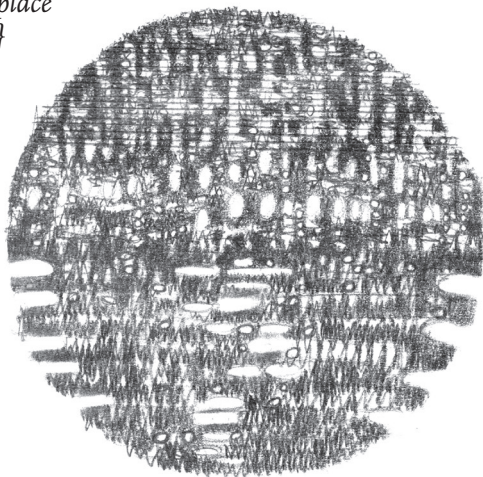


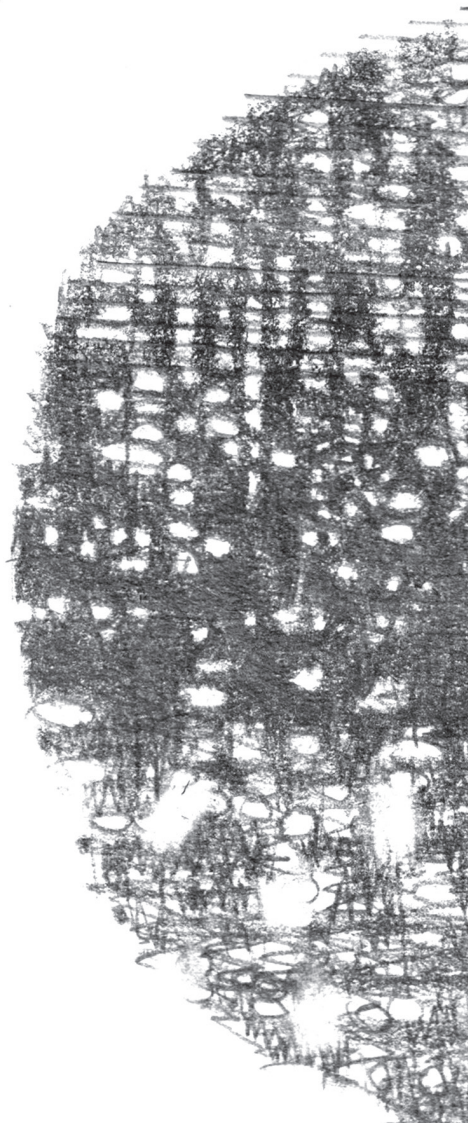


Words at Work

*Experiences of pregnancy
loss in the workplace
{up to 23 weeks}*



Pregnancy Loss
Research Group



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Foreword

We have gathered these words to illuminate pregnancy loss at work. Each text is a direct quotation from a person with experience of pregnancy loss who participated in the PLACES Project.

Funded by the (then) Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, this project explored how to better support people in the workplace who experience the loss of a pregnancy under 24 weeks. These texts are from among 913 responses. You can read more about PLACES on our website at www.ucc.ie/pregnancyloss.

We are very grateful to every person who generously shared their experiences with us. By communicating findings from this project in many and varied ways, we hope that we are both holding space for people's experiences and working towards social and political change for more compassionate and supportive workplaces.

It made me think

It made me think,
if I'm talking to a group of twenty women
on a call,
four of these women would have had a
miscarriage
at some point,
and that's a big number,
and nobody has talked about it.
It's so bizarre.

Un "just"

I would have liked the fact that
I carried my baby to sixteen weeks
to be acknowledged
with paid bereavement leave
and some form of maternity leave.

I gave birth to my baby.
I held him.
I carried him home and buried him.
I felt that all of that should have been
acknowledged
as more than "just" a miscarriage.

It's strange

It's strange but I would like just a button
to press,

to notify people of what had happened.

No paperwork to fill, and no emails to
send.

I would have loved to just press a button
and disappear.

Where's your cert?

It's a funny thing to ask somebody

when they're in the middle

of an extremely traumatic event --

"That's fine to be off, but where's your cert?"

Unable to work

Grief, shock, devastation,
hoping for support,
unable to work.

I just kept going

For me,
when I lost the third one,
early,
at about 6 or 7 weeks,
I told myself that didn't matter you know
because it was only 5, 6, 7 weeks,
whatever it was.
I kept working.
I didn't want to talk about it.
I just kept going.

Comparisons

She had a stillbirth at 20 weeks or something,
or 18 weeks maybe,
and she had the benefit
of bringing that baby home.
We all attended her house
and we had him blessed.

She named him.

She got his handprints
and all of these things.

And she buried him in with her parents.

And she goes to his grave every year
and puts pictures on Facebook.

I mean...

And straight away she was like 'ah right, yeah,'
and then started talking about her loss
and how mine was not at all in comparison.
And I felt absolutely sick.

The mask

I broke down,
and then people knew.
I was very embarrassed.
But I do mask it.
I go in
and I mask.

It's confusing

I didn't really know how to react to it, you know
I was obviously in the hospital
when it happened.
I was really, really upset,

and after that
it was a confusing kind of time.

And then I felt a bit guilty as well,
because
it was my wife ultimately that was pregnant
and not me.

Overwhelming

The impact
and the feeling of guilt
and shame
and worry about work
was overwhelming,
when really all of my concentration
should have been on grieving
and processing,
and it wasn't.

Shift work

I worked in a hospital,
and it was April/May 2020.
The miscarriage started after midnight
while I was midway through a 16-hour shift.
I was working alone,
so, I couldn't just leave.

I had to carry on working,
and was just glad
that all the PPE
hid my tears.

A good reputation

I had a good reputation prior to all that.

I wasn't that long in the role.

I was seen as an experienced senior,
potentially more senior, you know
as in, one to watch...

Then,
over the space of those couple of years,
I was out two weeks,
and then I was out three weeks,
and then I was out four weeks,
and then I was out another four or five weeks.
I just felt --

Wow.

I felt the lack of engagement from senior
management.

There wasn't the same coming to me about things.

There wasn't the same chats or...

I don't know.

I felt, you know, instinctively or intrinsically,

I just felt I wasn't viewed in the same manner.

I'll see you on Monday

I had the surgery on the Wednesday,
and in the phone call, my boss said,
“Ah don't worry, you don't have to come in for the
rest of the week...
... I'll see you on Monday”.
And that kind of sucked.

I'd never gone through surgery or anything before.
I've never been to the hospital for any reason,
other than I think there's something wrong,
and there wasn't you know.
So it was already a really traumatic time for me,
and then my boss says,
“Yeah, I'll see you on Monday”.

An audience

I saw the way a pregnancy loss became public
knowledge
for others within my workplace.
I didn't want that.

I was in shock that I was pregnant,
as I had been told previously
it was virtually impossible to become pregnant,

so I wanted to deal with all myself
without an audience.

Putting on a smile

Physically tired.
Emotionally not well.
Having to put on a smile
for 28 pupils
and try to be a good teacher
while grieving.

I went back too soon
and ended up taking a month off
two months later.

Readjusting

Readjusting my life plan,
I had been looking ahead
towards maternity leave,
mapping out my future.

Going back to work
meant accepting
that path is gone.

The baby room

I work in a baby room
in a creche.
It was very emotionally hard
going into work
to look after other people's babies
when I'd just lost mine.

Pointless

It was hard to care
about anything
when my baby died.
Everything
felt a bit pointless.

Awkward

People
were so awkward.
The same people
that had congratulated me
just avoided me
and ignored it completely,
which really hurt.

Invisible suffering

The invisible suffering of miscarriage,
and the shame and failure that you feel,
in addition to the immediate loss and sadness,
made the recovery worse.

I felt listened to
and understood
when people shared their experience,

but I felt silenced
and belittled
when people said,
“It’s really common to miscarry”,
“Sure, 1 in 4 pregnancies end in miscarriage, it
could happen to anyone”
“You just need to keep trying”.

The reason shouldn't matter

I feel they should get leave too.
No one knows their reasons...
but even the reason shouldn't matter.

No one goes out and gets pregnant
and terminates it
for the craic.
It's not an easy choice.

Yeah, it's medical.
Your body has been through a trauma.
I feel like your body
needs time to heal from that trauma.

It doesn't matter
what reasoning was behind the trauma,
who decided on the trauma.
Your body feels it all the same
regardless.

So, I feel like
the laws should be there
regardless.

Small talk

Trying to engage
in small talk
with people
and chatting
about trivial things.

Due date

Most of the girls I worked with
were so caring
and always done what they could
to make me smile,
and then
on what would have been my little girl's due date,
they got me a bunch of flowers,
and it meant the world to me.

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www.ucc.ie/pregnancyloss

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For more information and details of pregnancy loss support
organisations: www.pregnancyandinfantloss.ie

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About Lucy O'Donnell

Lucy's practice centres drawing as a conceptual and material mode of thinking and articulating. She is concerned with translating experiences utilizing feminist trajectories in explorations of the body, health and fertility. Social, political and phenomenological reflections filter through both her writing and studio practice. Recent projects acknowledge drawing as open-ended, playing with ideas of becoming and 'failure', where writings, performances and works on paper deal with pregnancy without birth, the maternal figure, and her body as an unstable sabotaging dwelling.

