

"I could not survive another day"

Abortion due to Hyperemesis Gravidarum; most are not offered the option of antiemetics. An unacceptable failure of care.

BACKGROUND

Hyperemesis Gravidarum (HG) is a severe form of pregnancy sickness. It causes unbearable, protracted physical suffering and has a catastrophic impact on quality of life. It often leads to depression and social isolation and has numerous physical, emotional and social complications.

HG affects around 1-3 % of the pregnant population. As such, it affects tens of thousands of women annually in the UK.

Safe antiemetic treatments exist for HG, but doctors are reluctant to prescribe them due to unfounded fears of teratogenicity and many women struggle to access satisfactory treatment.

Pregnancy Sickness Support (PSS) is a UK national charity which supports women with pregnancy sickness and advocates for their right to treatment. Our previous work has indicated that as many as 10% of HG sufferers have terminated a wanted pregnancy due to the illness.

AIMS

To examine the main drivers for terminations in pregnancies complicated by HG.

To examine what more can be done to improve care for women in this situation and better support their choice.

METHODS

An online survey of self selected participants using Survey Monkey. Survey advertised via social media.

PARTICIPANTS

71 women from the UK who had ended at least one pregnancy in the past 10 years due to hyperemesis gravidarum (HG).

Nine women had had more than one termination due to HG.

"I was vomiting blood... I can remember crying saying I couldn't cope much more to which a nurse replied "well you should count yourself lucky there's people who can't have babies at all".

I wasn't feeling particularly lucky and yes I can conceive but being able to comfortably carry a baby to term dealing with [Hyperemesis Gravidarum] is a different matter"

"Consultant gynae at the hospital I was in said there was nothing wrong with me and that it was all in my mind. Midwife in same hospital shouted at me when I refused breakfast saying "You have a baby to think about!"

"The doctor wouldn't prescribe anything stronger than cyclizine... When I went to the GP to beg for stronger drugs [respondent specifically requested ondansetron] I was shouted at and told to leave."

"My doctor refused to prescribe me anything because it would harm the baby despite me repeatedly saying I didn't want to continue with the pregnancy."

"Every contact with a healthcare professional was difficult and exhausting due to lack of knowledge and understanding."

"[The doctor said] that the medication I was taking will harm my baby and my baby can't consent"

"For a long time I beat myself up for having a termination. It's still hard to accept and get other people to accept I had a termination "just" for sickness... I've since learnt to live with it with the help of my husband telling me I have to remember it was for health reasons. I was only a year over a previous severe hg pregnancy and I don't believe my body could have taken another one so soon"

REFERENCES

1. Dean C and Gadsby R (2013) Severe Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy. *Nursing in Practice* March/April: 45-6
2. Bolin M, Akerud H, Cnattingius S, Stephansson O, Wikstrom AK (2013) Hyperemesis Gravidarum and risks of placental dysfunction disorders: a population-based cohort study. *BJOG*; DOI: 10.1111/1471-0528.12132: 1-7
3. Swallow BL, Lindow SW, Masson EA (2004) Psychological health in early pregnancy: relationship with nausea and vomiting. *J Obstet Gynecol*. 24(1): 28-32.
4. Gadsby R, Barrie-Adshead A (2011) Nausea and vomiting of pregnancy - A literature review. *Pregnancy Sickness Support* [online] <https://www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk/documents/NVP-lit-review.pdf>
5. *Pregnancy Sickness Support* (2013) Survey of women's experiences of hyperemesis gravidarum, Charity report, Unpublished
6. Poursharif B, Korst LM, Macgibbon KW, Fejoz MS, Romero R, Goodwin TM (2007) Elective pregnancy termination in a large cohort of women with hyperemesis gravidarum. *Contraception*. 76(6): 451-5.



Pregnancy
Sickness
Support

bpas
British Pregnancy Advisory Service

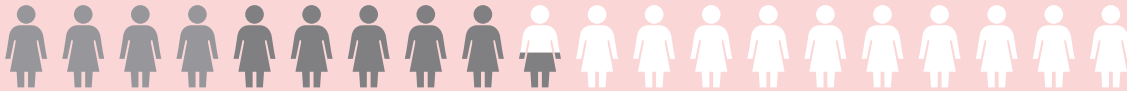
RESULTS



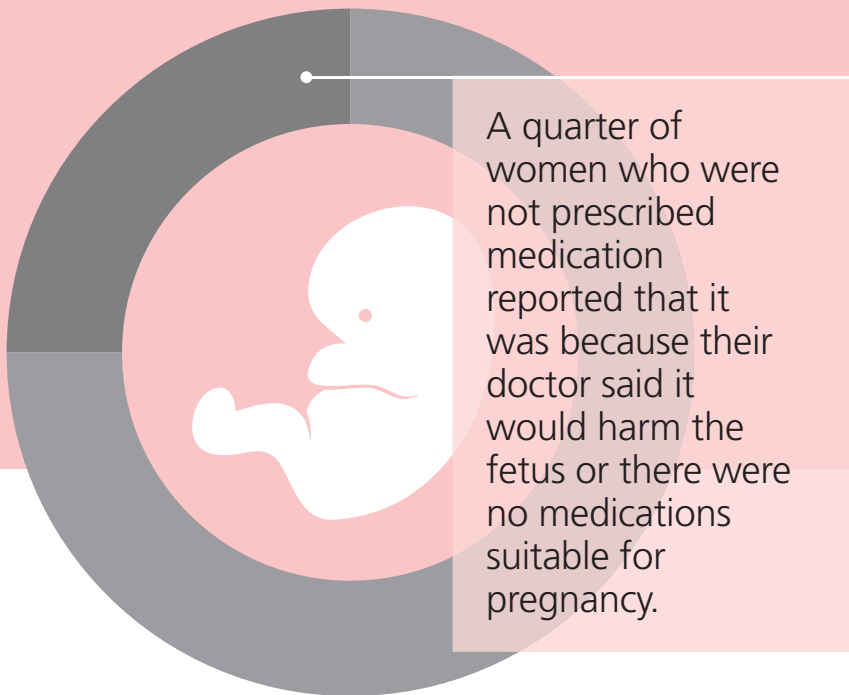
84% of women said that they would have continued the pregnancy were it not for HG. Most said that HG was the only or main reason for not continuing the pregnancy.



95% of women described their symptoms as intolerable.



47% of women did not receive treatment for HG. Of these, **40%** requested treatment but were denied it, and the others did not ask for treatment and were not offered any. Only one in five were prescribed ondansetron and fewer than one in ten were offered steroids.



A quarter of women who were not prescribed medication reported that it was because their doctor said it would harm the fetus or there were no medications suitable for pregnancy.

Complicating factors which drove the decision to terminate were the burden of caring for existing children and fears about losing jobs or loss of earnings.

Women who have terminated due to HG carry a significant burden of guilt, remorse and often anger upon finding out subsequently that treatments are, in fact, available.

CONCLUSION

Women are terminating wanted pregnancies because they are being denied antiemetic treatment. We consider this to be an unacceptable situation and call upon healthcare professionals to offer the full range of antiemetics to women with HG.

The full report can be accessed from www.pregnancysicknesssupport.org.uk

