

# Prince Harry thinks stress caused Meghan's miscarriage, but what does science say?

The Duke of Sussex packed a painful punch with his claim on the Netflix documentary – one that many women will relate to

By Rosa Silverman  
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Was Harry, like so many couples who have suffered one, casting around for a cause which could never be proven?

“I believe my wife [suffered a miscarriage](#) because of what the Mail did.” Of the various assertions made in the course of Netflix’s six-hour Harry & Meghan documentary, this one from Prince Harry packed a particular punch. Referring to the baby he and his wife, the Duchess of Sussex, lost in July 2020, he suggested the stress caused by her court battle with Associated Newspapers, over the publication in the Mail on Sunday of [a letter she wrote to her father](#) Thomas Markle, could be to blame.

“I watched the whole thing,” he said, in the final episode of the documentary. “Now, do we absolutely know that the miscarriage was caused by that? Of course we don’t. But bearing in mind the stress that that caused, the lack of sleep and the timing of the pregnancy, how many weeks in she was, I can say from what I saw that that miscarriage was created by what they were trying to do to her.”

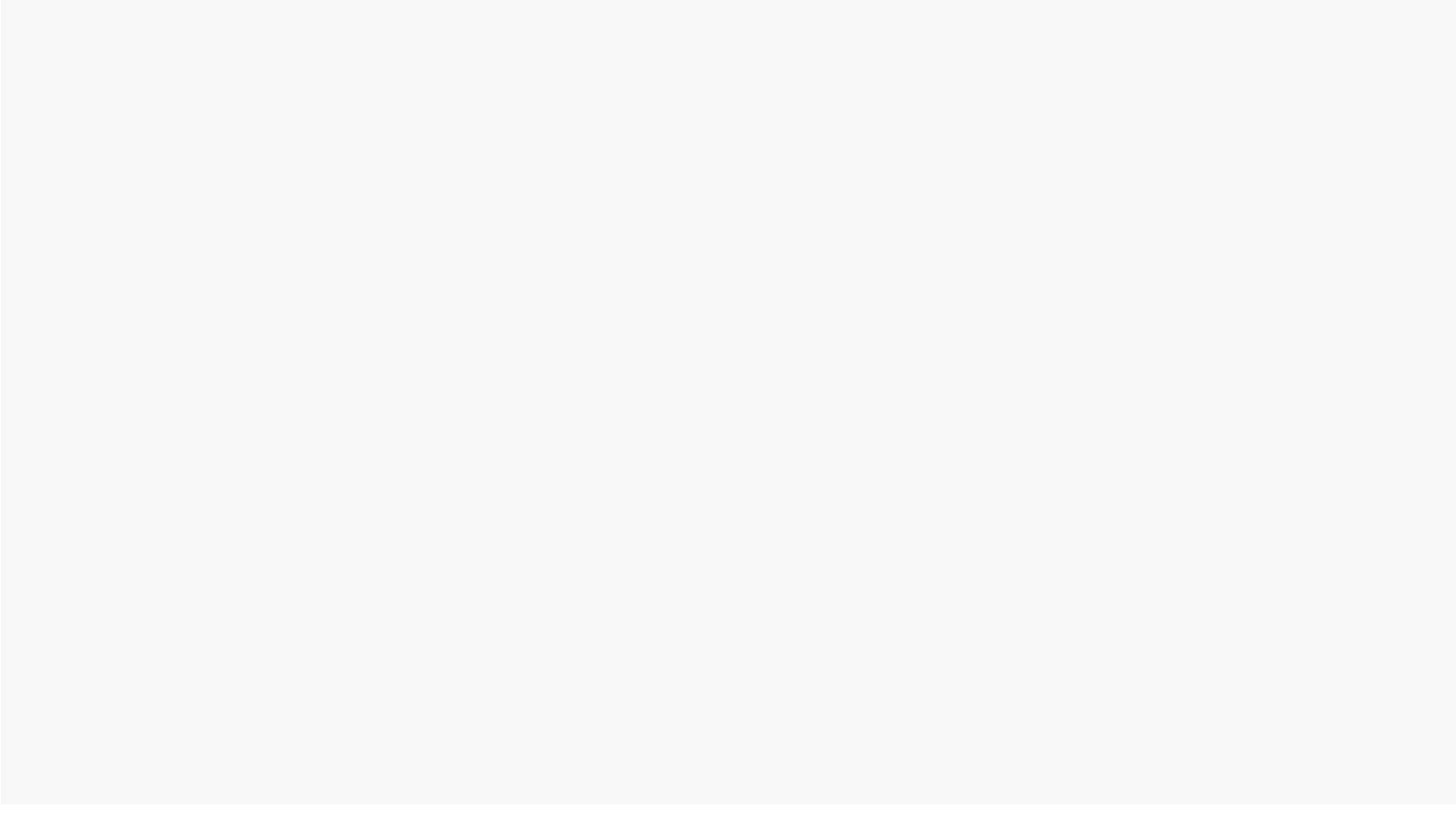
But can stress really cause a miscarriage? Or was Harry, like so many couples who have suffered one, casting around for a cause which could never be proven?

The NHS clearly states that an increased risk of miscarriage is not linked to “your emotional state during pregnancy, such as being stressed or depressed”. Baby loss charity Tommy’s says the same: “It’s natural to get a bit stressed in pregnancy and being concerned about whether anxiety or stress affects your baby is understandable. But stress is not linked to an increased risk of miscarriage.”

Yet there is evidence linking stress and miscarriage, with several studies indicating an association. In 2017, researchers at Zhejiang University in China, University College London and others published a meta-analysis on whether “maternal psychological stress and recent life events” were associated with an increased risk of miscarriage. Their results, they said, supported the belief that it was. More research into the relationship was needed, they concluded.

Yet Ruth Bender Atik, national director of the Miscarriage Association, warns against confusing association with causation. “You absolutely can find evidence that links stress and miscarriage, but finding an association isn’t the same as finding cause,” she says.

“So even if [Meghan is] in a very stressful situation and she has a miscarriage, it doesn’t make a causal link. You’ll always find bits of research that say ‘yes, there’s definitely a link between stress and miscarriage’, and there is, but you can’t know which way round that link occurred.”



In the final episode, Harry suggested the stress caused by Meghan’s court battle with Associated Newspapers could be to blame for her miscarriage | CREDIT: Netflix

It is common, though, for a woman to wonder if her miscarriage was caused by something she did, or by something that happened to her; something external, that is, which may have been avoidable. For the most part, the truth will be there was nothing she could have done – though risk factors do include smoking, drinking alcohol and using drugs while pregnant. Age can also have an influence, with miscarriage more common in older mothers: in women under 30, one in 10 pregnancies end in miscarriage, according to NHS figures. In women aged 35 to 39, that figure is up to two in 10. According to Tommy’s, an estimated one in four pregnancies end in loss during pregnancy or birth in the UK.

“The impact of stress on the risk of miscarriage, or recurrent pregnancy loss is unclear,” states 2017 guidance by the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology’s Early Pregnancy Guideline Development Group.

“Of course Harry is looking for some reason why this happened,” says Bender Atik. She points out that the Duchess would also likely have been highly anxious during her pregnancy with Lilibet, the couple’s daughter who was conceived after the miscarriage. “Most people, when they’re pregnant after a miscarriage, are anxious,” she says. “If [Harry and Meghan] were asking me I’d say: ‘I can really understand why you think that [the stress of the battle with the newspaper might be to blame], and it must have been really difficult having that level of stress and distress during pregnancy. But there isn’t any evidence stress causes miscarriage.’”

Neena Modi, professor of neonatal medicine at Imperial College London, agrees it’s not possible to say if stress can be to blame.


“The issue of whether maternal stress can ‘cause’ miscarriage is unclear,” she says. “There is certainly an association between psychological stress and miscarriage, but association should not be conflated with causation. The number of people carrying an umbrella is strongly associated with the likelihood of rain; however people carrying an umbrella do not cause rain. Unrecognised factors might be responsible for both stress and miscarriage.”

As for whether stress might affect a pregnancy in other ways, the mechanisms by which this could happen are also not fully understood. “There is emerging evidence that stress seems to involve changes in the environment in utero, which may then alter key processes in the baby’s development with long-term consequences,” says consultant obstetrician Professor Hassan Shehata, medical director of the Centre for Reproductive Immunology and Pregnancy. “I think we need more robust studies looking into this.”

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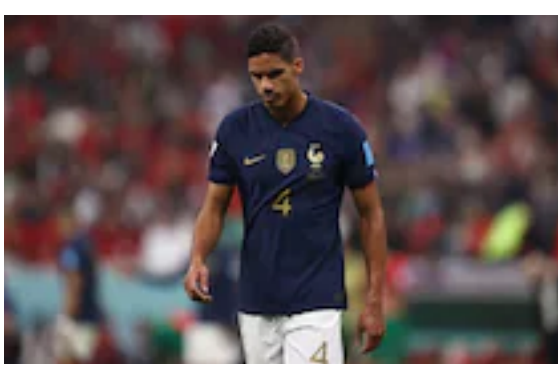
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