



Reproductive Health and Pregnancy

WHY IT MATTERS

Reproductive health and pregnancy intersects with domestic violence victims in unique and alarming ways. Intimate partner violence can limit or prevent women from being able to manage their reproductive health and can expose victims to serious sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies. Batterers will often control the victim's access to birth control and contraceptive use. When violence is present during a pregnancy, in addition to the immediate trauma to the victim, the abuse can have a negative, long-lasting effect on the mother's health, the developing fetus and the newborn. Given these facts, it becomes crucial for health care providers to take an active role in screening for abuse.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Researchers estimate that 8% of the female population are subjected to physical violence during their pregnancy.²
- Up to 70% of women who are abused before pregnancy continue to be abused throughout their pregnancy.³
- Physical violence tends to intensify after the abuser learns of the pregnancy.⁴
- Pregnant women who are abused by their partners have a higher risk for alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use, depression, and suicide attempts during the pregnancy.⁵
- Although clinical studies have proven the effectiveness of abuse screening by doctors, only 10% of doctors screen for abuse during new-patient visits and 9% screen for abuse during periodic checkups.¹
- Up to 50% of adolescent mothers experience intimate partner violence before, during, or just after their pregnancy.¹

EFFECTS ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

- Studies show that physically and sexually violent experiences increase a woman's risk of HIV and STD transmission, the exacerbation of chronic health problems, and negative birth outcomes.³
- Abused women are twice as likely to delay prenatal care.³
- Several studies have found significant associations between abuse during pregnancy and low birth weights, miscarriages, preterm labor, and cesarean delivery.³
- Abused women are more likely than other women to be forced to engage in behaviors that increase their risk of being exposed to STDs.³
- Women experiencing abuse during or just prior to pregnancy are 60% more likely to have high-blood pressure, vaginal bleeding, severe nausea, kidney or urinary tract infections, and hospitalization during pregnancy as compared to non-abused women.¹
- Children born to abused mothers are 30% more likely than other children to require intensive care upon birth and 17% more likely to be born underweight.¹

HOMICIDE AND PREGNANCY

- Homicide is a leading cause of death among pregnant women.⁵
- Pregnant homicide victims are most commonly killed early in their pregnancy; one study estimates that 77% were killed during the first trimester.⁶
- Most homicides of pregnant women were committed with a firearm.⁷
- Pregnant teens between 15 and 19 years of age are more at risk for homicide than any other age group.⁷

UNINTENDED PREGNANCIES³

- Unintended pregnancies may result directly from sexual abuse or from the woman's inability to negotiate contraceptive use with her abuser.
- Women with unintended pregnancies are up to four times more likely to experience physical violence as compared to women with planned pregnancies.
- Two out of three mothers who experience domestic violence at the hands of their partners experienced birth control sabotaged by a partner.
- Among women who are physically abused during their pregnancy, 70% had not intended on becoming pregnant.

TEEN PREGNANCIES

- One out of four women between the ages of 12 to 18 have been physically or sexually abused, or have been forced to have intercourse with someone they know.³
- Studies show that adolescents with a history of abuse are at a greater risk for becoming pregnant as teenagers.⁸
- Female adolescents who are sexually abused are three times more likely to have an unintended pregnancy.⁹
- Teens who are pregnant are at an increased risk of experiencing domestic violence.¹
- Teens with a history of sexual abuse are most likely to never or rarely use condoms or birth control.⁸
- Studies show a correlation between witnessing intimate partner violence and experiencing other forms of abuse to having sex at a very early age.⁸
- As many as two-thirds of adolescents who become pregnant have been sexually or physically abused at some time in their lives.¹

MORE INFORMATION ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND PREGNANCY

Family Violence Prevention Fund at
www.endabuse.org

Planned Parenthood at
www.plannedparenthood.org

The Guttmacher Institute at www.guttmacher.org

Women's Health Center at www.fwhc.org

IF YOU NEED HELP

For more information or if you need help, call:
National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE
National Sexual Assault Hotline at 1-800-656-HOPE

SOURCES

¹ Family Violence Prevention Fund. (2007) *The Facts on Reproductive Health and Violence Against Women*.

² Gazmararian J., et al. (1996) "Prevalence of Violence Against Pregnant Women." *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 275(24).

³ Moore, M. (1999). "Reproductive Health and Intimate Partner Violence." *Family Planning Perspective*. 21(6).

⁴ Hayes, H.R., and Emshoff, J.G. (1993) "Substance Abuse and Family Violence." *Issues in Children's and Families' Lives*. 7: 281-310.

⁵ Family Violence Prevention Fund. (2007) *The Facts on Health Care and Domestic Violence*.

⁶ Krulewitch, C., et al. (2001) "Hidden From View: Violent Deaths Among Pregnant Women in the District of Columbia, 1988-1996." *Journal of Midwifery and Women's Health*. 46:7.

⁷ Change, J., et al. (2005). "Homicide: A leading cause of injury deaths among pregnant and postpartum women in the United States, 1991-1999." *American Journal of Public Health*. 95:3.

⁸ The National Campaign To Prevent Teen Pregnancy (2007). *What It Matters: Teen Pregnancy and Violence*.

⁹ Center for Impact Research. (2007) *Domestic Violence and Birth Control Sabotage: A Report From the Teen Parent Project*.

For more information please see our website at www.ncadv.org.

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



The Public Policy Office of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) is a national leader in the effort to create and influence Federal legislation that positively affects the lives of domestic violence victims and children. We work closely with advocates at the local, state and national level to identify the issues facing domestic violence victims, their children and the people who serve them and to develop a legislative agenda to address these issues. NCADV welcomes you to join us in our effort to end domestic violence.