

Domestic Violence

...and reproductive health¹

Violence against women is a health care problem of epidemic proportions and one that uniquely impacts women of reproductive age. Young women aged 16-24 are particularly at risk.² In addition to the immediate trauma caused by abuse, violence contributes to a number of chronic health problems, including depression, alcohol and substance abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS.³ Abuse often limits the ability of women to manage their reproductive health, and abuse during pregnancy has long-lasting effects for women, the developing fetus and newborns. Reproductive health care providers are well positioned to help victims of intimate partner violence by asking about abuse and offering support before the abuse becomes life threatening.

Prevalence:

- Each year, about 324,000 – or one in 12 pregnant women in this country – are battered by their intimate partners.^{4,5} That makes abuse more common for pregnant women than gestational diabetes or preeclampsia – conditions for which pregnant women are routinely screened. However, few physicians screen pregnant patients for abuse.⁶
- Pregnant and recently pregnant women are more likely to be victims of homicide than to die of any other cause,^{vii} and a significant proportion of all female homicide victims are killed by their intimate partners.⁷
- Young mothers are particularly vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence, with one study finding that 26 percent of new mothers between the ages of 13 and 17 experienced such violence in the three months after the birth of their child.⁸

Consequences:

- Women who have been sexually abused are more likely to have had their partner stop them from using contraception and to have a partner refuse to use a condom to prevent disease.⁹
- Many young women who are victims of domestic violence experience birth control sabotage by their abusive partners. One study of 474 low-income adolescent mothers found that 66 percent of abused women had experienced birth control sabotage, versus 34 percent of non-abused women.¹⁰
- Pregnant women who are abused by their partners have a higher risk for tobacco, alcohol and illicit drug use, depression and suicide attempts, all of which have negative effects on the developing fetus.¹¹
- Women who experience violence are three times more likely to have a gynecological problem than non-abused women. These problems include chronic pelvic pain, vaginal bleeding, vaginal infection, painful menstruation, sexual dysfunction, fibroids, pelvic inflammatory disease, painful intercourse, urinary tract infection, and infertility.¹²

¹ From: "The Facts on Reproductive Health and Violence Against Women", Family Violence Prevention Fund, www.endabuse.org

Identification:

- Reproductive health providers are in a unique position to screen for domestic and sexual violence; approximately 74 percent of reproductive age U.S. women receive at least one reproductive health care service annually.¹³
- Forty-seven percent of intimate partner homicide and attempted homicide victims were seen by health care professionals in the year prior to their deaths,¹⁵ yet less than half of reproductive health care providers routinely screen for domestic violence or sexual assault.¹⁶
- A recent study in Massachusetts found that 44 percent of victims of domestic violence talked to someone about the abuse; 37 percent of those women talked to their health care provider.¹⁷ Additionally, in different studies of abuse survivors, 70 to 81 percent of the patients studied reported that they would like their health care providers to ask them privately about domestic violence.^{18,19}
- Recent clinical studies have proven the effectiveness of a two minute screening for early detection of abuse of pregnant women.²⁰ Additional longitudinal studies have tested a 10 minute intervention that was proven highly effective in increasing the safety of pregnant abused women.²¹
- A 1999 study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* found that only 10 percent of primary care physicians routinely screen for intimate partner violence during new patient visits and nine percent routinely screen during periodic checkups.²²

² Rennison, Callie Marie and Sarah Welchans. 2003. *Intimate Partner Violence 1993-2001*. U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved January 9, 2004. <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/ipv01.htm>.

³ Coker, A., Smith, P., Bethea, L., King, M., McKeown, R. 2000. "Physical Health Consequences of Physical and Psychological Intimate Partner Violence." *Archives of Family Medicine*. 9.

⁴ Gazmararian JA; et al. 2000. "Violence and Reproductive Health; Current Knowledge and Future Research Directions." *Maternal and Child Health Journal*. 4(2):79-84.

⁵ Parsons, L., et.al. "Violence Against Women and Reproductive Health: Toward Defining a Role for Reproductive Health Care Services". *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pg. 135. 2000.

⁶ Parsons, L., et.al. "Violence Against Women and Reproductive Health: Toward Defining a Role for Reproductive Health Care Services". *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pg. 135. 2000.

⁷ Horon, I., & Cheng, D. 2001. "Enhanced Surveillance for Pregnancy-Associated Mortality - Maryland, 1993 -1998." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. 285(11)

⁸ Frye, V. 2001. "Examining Homicide's Contribution to Pregnancy-Associated Deaths." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. 285(11),

⁹ Allen Guttmacher Institute. 1999. "Nearly 10% of Teenage Mothers Experience Violence While Pregnant." *Family Planning Perspectives*. 31(2): 106+.

¹⁰ "Violence Against Women: Effects on Reproductive Health", *Outlook*, Volume 20, No. 1, September 2002. Available at http://www.path.org/files/EO2L20_1.pdf.

¹¹ Domestic Violence and Birth Control Sabotage: A Report from the Teen Parent Project. 2000. Center for Impact Research. Chicago, IL. Available at <http://www.impactresearch.org/documents/dvandbirthcontrol.pdf>

¹² McFarlane, J. et. al. 1996. "Physical Abuse, Smoking and Substance Abuse During Pregnancy: Prevalence, Interrelationships and Effects on Birthweight." *Journal of Obstetrical Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing*. 25: 313-320.

¹³ "Violence Against Women: Effects on Reproductive Health", *Outlook*, Volume 20, No. 1, September 2002. Available at http://www.path.org/files/EOL20_1.pdf.

¹⁴ Frost, Jennifer. 2001. "Public or Private Providers? Women's Use of Reproductive Health Care Services." *Family Planning Perspectives*. 33(1).

¹⁵ Campbell, J. C., et al. "Risk Factors for Intimate Partner Femicide". Paper presented at American Public Health Association. Boston, MA. November 14, 2000.

¹⁶ Parsons, L., et.al. "Violence Against Women and Reproductive Health: Toward Defining a Role for Reproductive Health Care Services". *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pg. 135. 2000.

¹⁷ The Dorchester Community Roundtable Coordinated Community Response to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence. 2003. RMC Research Corporation. Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

¹⁸ Caralis P, Musialowski R. 1997. "Women's Experiences with Domestic Violence and Their Attitudes and Expectations Regarding Medical Care of Abuse Victims." *South Medical Journal*. 90:1075-1080.

¹⁹ McCauley J, Yurk R, Jenckes M, Ford D. 1998. "Inside 'Pandora's Box': Abused Women's Experiences with Clinicians and Health Services." *Archives of Internal Medicine*. 13:549-555.

²⁰ Soeken, K., et. al. 1998. "The Abuse Assessment Screen. A Clinical Instrument to Measure Frequency, Severity and Perpetrator of Abuse Against Women." *Beyond Diagnosis: Intervention Strategies for Battered Women and Their Children*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

²¹ McFarlane, J., et.al. 1998. "Safety Behaviors of Abused Women Following an Intervention Program offered During Pregnancy." *Journal of Obstetrical, Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing*,

²² Rodriguez, M., Bauer, H., McLoughlin, E., Grumbach, K. 1999. "Screening and Intervention for Intimate Partner Abuse: Practices and Attitudes of Primary Care Physicians." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. 282(5).