



Preventing Domestic Violence

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THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW - DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND PREGNANT WOMEN

- Domestic abuse is now widely recognised as an increased risk factor for maternal death with 14% of women whose deaths were included in a recent Confidential Enquiry into Maternal Deaths having disclosed that they were in an abusive relationship (Lewis, 2007).
- Research has suggested that pregnancy is a time when domestic abuse can start or worsen and abuse during this time poses risks to the health of the unborn baby as well as the woman. Between 10 and 37.5% of all pregnant young women report experiencing some form of abuse during their pregnancy.
- Young women who experience abuse during pregnancy have been found to be more likely to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco, have a baby born prematurely or underweight and experience higher rates of postnatal and neonatal complications than those who do not.
- In addition, studies have identified reduced maternal attachment when women are experiencing domestic violence with potential long-term negative consequences for children.
- Many studies have examined the characteristics of women experiencing domestic abuse in pregnancy in order to identify potential risk factors. As is the case outside of pregnancy, it has been found that women of all cultures, races, classes and ages are affected.
- Abused young mothers have been found to be at significantly increased risk of experiencing depression, social isolation and homelessness all of which may impact upon their mothering ability. Domestic violence in the context of young motherhood may therefore be particularly detrimental to the health and wellbeing of young mothers and their children.
- Young mothers experiencing relationship abuse may be prevented from disclosing abuse and seeking help due to a fear of stereotypical and stigmatising attitudes.
- There is a particular relationship between coercive sex, sexual abuse and adolescent pregnancy. In the Caribbean with high levels of coerced sex and, teenage pregnancy, this is an important issue.
- Pregnancy may reduce a women's options for escaping domestic violence. There are increased family and community pressures to remain with the father of the child irrespective of DV and greater dependence on the man (economic and social) which may affect the resources a woman has to leave.
- Recent policy developments in some countries have recognised these risks and as a result routine questioning of pregnant women about domestic abuse is now advocated.

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