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**24 Hour Statewide
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**Domestic Violence and Pregnancy:
Do You
know the connections?**



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Domestic Violence and Pregnancy

Pregnant and recently pregnant women are more likely to be victims of homicide than to die of any other cause¹ and a significant proportion of all female homicide victims are killed by their intimate partners.²

The leading cause of death among pregnant women is homicide.³

As many as 324,000 women each year experience Intimate Partner Violence during their pregnancy (Gazmararian et al. 2000).⁴

One in six pregnant women reported physical or sexual abuse during pregnancy. Sixty percent of these women said the abuse was recurrent.⁵

Assaults resulted in more pregnancy complications than motor vehicle accidents or falls, the two other major causes of trauma during pregnancy.⁶

In a study published in 2005, women age 20 years or younger and African American women were at highest risk of pregnancy-associated homicide. More than half the victims of these homicides were killed with firearms.⁷

The abuse of pregnant women crosses all socioeconomic and cultural lines.⁸

In a study of 724 adolescent mothers between the ages of 12-18, one of every eight pregnant adolescents reported having been physically assaulted by the father of her baby during the preceding 12 months. Of these, 40 percent also reported experiencing violence at the hands of a family member or relative.⁹

Battering During Pregnancy

Abuse often begins or escalates during pregnancy and may result in pregnancy loss, preterm labor, lowbirth-weight, fetal injury and fetal death.⁸

Repeated physical abuse can result in fetal fractures, maternal and fetal hemorrhage, rupture of the uterus, liver or spleen, premature separation of the placenta or premature delivery.^{10,11}

Pregnant women in battering relationships have an increased risk of low birth weight.^{12,13} In addition, battered pregnant women are more likely than non-battered women to report drug and alcohol use during the pregnancy.^{10,13}

Access to prenatal care may be hindered by the batterer. Women abused during pregnancy tend to enter prenatal care later.^{5,8,13,14}

Domestic abuse was identified as a major health issue for pregnant women: a Yale study revealed that abused women were 15 times more likely to suffer a miscarriage. Abused pregnant women are at increased risk of miscarriage, infection, preterm labor, placental abruption and low-birth-weight babies.¹⁴

Other physical effects of violence during pregnancy include: insufficient weight gain; vaginal/cervical/ kidney infections; vaginal bleedings; abdominal trauma; exacerbation of chronic illness; complication during labor; ruptured membranes; uterine infections; fetal bruising, fractures and hematomas; death.¹⁵

Information

Pregnant battered women, like all victims of domestic violence, need concrete information including:

- ♥ Legal rights
- ♥ Legal protections
- ♥ Protective domestic violence services
- ♥ Safety planning
- ♥ Available options

This information is best provided by the domestic violence program in your county or a Domestic Violence Specialist in your community.

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