

Domestic violence and abuse in pregnancy is more common than you think.

For women in abusive relationships, pregnancy can bring with it a heightened risk of abuse. In particular, unplanned pregnancies.

Learn how to spot the signs that a patient in your care may be experiencing domestic abuse.

The indicators of domestic abuse, relevant to maternity care:¹

- Late booking and/or poor or non attendance at antenatal clinics.
- Repeat attendance at antenatal clinics, the General Practitioners (GP) surgery or Emergency Departments (ED) for minor injuries or trivial or non existent complaints.
- Unexplained admissions.
- Non compliance with treatment regimens/early self discharge from hospital.
- Repeat presentation with depression, anxiety, self-harm and psychosomatic symptoms.
- Injuries that are untended and of several different ages, especially to the neck, head, breasts, abdomen and genitals.
- Minimisation of signs of abuse on the body.
- Sexually transmitted diseases and frequent vaginal or urinary tract infections and pelvic pain.

¹ Reference: G Lewis. Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health. Saving Mothers' Lives: reviewing maternal deaths to make motherhood safer, 2003–2005. Seventh Report on Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths in the United Kingdom. 2007; CEMACH: London.

Poor obstetric history:

- Repeated miscarriage or terminations of pregnancy
- Stillbirth, or preterm labour
- Preterm birth, intrauterine growth restriction / low birth weight
- Unplanned pregnancy.
- The constant presence of the partner at examinations, who may be domineering, answer all the questions for her and be unwilling to leave the room.
- The woman appears evasive or reluctant to speak or disagree in front of her partner.
- A partner insisting on acting as the translator for a pregnant woman for whom English is not their first language

If you suspect a woman may be experiencing domestic abuse, or if a woman discloses domestic abuse to you, **please refer to the hospital's Medical Social Work Team.**

Listen to what she has to say.

Believe her if she says she is experiencing abuse.

Support and **empower** her on her journey to safety.

If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, you can call the Women's Aid 24 hour National Freephone Helpline on **1800 341 900** Or use the Instant Message Support Service on **www.womensaid.ie** (open mornings and evenings, 7 days a week).

Working in partnership to listen, believe, support and empower women experiencing domestic abuse.

