

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 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 and support women experiencing domestic abuse.

