

Abortion and Violence Against Pregnant Women
Martha Shuping, M.D.
July 15, 2019

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) occurs so frequently during pregnancy, that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends screening for violence “at the first prenatal visit, at least once per trimester, and at the postpartum checkup” (American College, 2013).

IPV and seeking abortion: “The prevalence of IPV was nearly three times greater for women seeking an abortion compared with women who were continuing their pregnancies” (American College, 2013, citing Bourassa & Berube, 2007).

Reproductive coercion is a form of IPV in which the male partner uses threats and coercion to enforce his decision regarding the pregnancy outcome (Miller and Silverman, 2010). This can include **“forcing a female partner to terminate a pregnancy when she does not want to, or injuring a female partner in a way that may cause a miscarriage”** (American College, 2013).

An example of reproductive coercion: Valarie Luckenbuhl was repeatedly beaten by her partner, Timothy Kindle, who admitted he was trying to terminate the pregnancy. The unborn child died at 22-24 weeks gestation. Kindle was charged with felony assault (McRann, 2012).

Homicide is a leading cause of death during pregnancy (American College, 2013; Chang et al., 2005; Cheng & Horon, 2010; Horon, 2005; Horon & Cheng, 2001). In the majority of cases, the murderer is the woman’s intimate partner (American College, 2013; Cheng & Horon, 2001).

Examples of Intimate Partner Homicide (a result of reproductive coercion):

Niasha Delain was stabbed to death on Oct. 25, 2008, the day her son Aidan was due to be born. The child’s father, Derrick Redd, was convicted of the murder. He told police he was angry with Delain because she refused to have an abortion. (Pereira, 2011; Zambito, 2012).

Tiffany Gillespie was killed, along with her unborn child, by Aaron Fitzpatrick. He killed her because of the pregnancy and was convicted of first-degree murder of Gillespie, and third-degree murder of the unborn child (Associated Press, 2015; Gregg, 2012).

“Death records alone identify only a fraction” of these homicides during pregnancy (Horon, 2005). Poor data collection methods lead to underreporting (Horon & Cheng, 2005, 2011).

A systematic review of 74 studies from all over the world, with meta-analysis, confirmed that intimate partner violence is associated with abortion, and even more strongly associated with repeat abortion (Hall et al., 2014). **“Women seeking a third abortion were more than 2.5 as likely to have a history of...violence than women having their first abortion.”** The editors stated: **“Overall, the researchers' findings support the concept that violence can lead to pregnancy and to subsequent termination of pregnancy, and that there may be a repetitive cycle of abuse and pregnancy.”**

Though some women are pressured to abort, others have abortions without telling their partner (Coyle, 2016). But, since repeat abortions are even more highly associated with IPV, the abortion does not solve the problem, but perpetuates it. In the U.S., about half of all abortions are repeat abortions (Cohen, 2007); this is similar in many countries. Screening for violence and coercion during pregnancy and offering resources helps women stop the violence without feeling that she must end of the pregnancy. Hall et al. (2014) stated that **women are rarely screened for violence during pregnancy, but that women say they would welcome this.**

REFERENCES:

American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Committee on Underserved Women. (2013). *ACOG committee opinion: Reproductive and sexual coercion*. Committee Opinion (Number 554). Washington, DC: American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. Retrieved from <http://www.acog.org/Resources-And-Publications/Committee-Opinions/Committee-on-Health-Care-for-Underserved-Women/Reproductive-and-Sexual-Coercion>

Associated Press (2015, Aug. 15). Man gets life in murders of pregnant woman, unborn child in South Philly. *NBC Philadelphia*. Retrieved from <http://www.nbcphiladelphia.com/news/local/Shooting-Death-Pregnant-Girlfriend-Philadelphia-Aaron-Fitzpatrick-Tiffany-Gillespie-321957182.html>

Bourassa, D., & Berube, J. (2007). The prevalence of intimate partner violence among women and teenagers seeking abortion compared with those continuing pregnancy. *Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology Canada*, 29, 415–23.

Chang, J., Berg, C.J., Saltzman, L.E., & Herndon, J. (2005). Homicide: A leading cause of injury deaths among pregnant and postpartum women in the United States, 2991-1999. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(3), 471-477.

Cheng, D., & Horon, I.L. (2010). Intimate-partner homicide among pregnant and post-partum women. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 115(6), 1181-1186. doi: 10.1097/AOG.0b013e3181de0194 .

Cohen, S.A. (2007). Repeat abortion, repeat unintended pregnancy, repeated and misguided government policies. *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 10(2).

Coyle, C. (2016). Intimate partner violence. In R. MacNair (Ed.), *Peace Psychology Perspectives on Abortion* (pp. 9-15). Kansas City, MO: Feminism and Nonviolence Studies Association.

Gregg, C. (2012, Feb. 16). Police: Teen Arrested in Shooting Death of Pregnant Girlfriend in South Philadelphia. *CBS, Philly*. Retrieved from <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/02/16/police-pregnant-woman-killed-in-south-philadelphia/>

Hall, M., Chappell, L.C., Parnell, B.L., Seed, P.T., Bewley, S. (2014). Associations between Intimate Partner Violence and Termination of Pregnancy: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *PLOS Medicine*. doi: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001581 Retrieved from <http://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001581>

Horon I.L. (2005). Underreporting of maternal deaths on death certificates and the magnitude of the problem of maternal mortality. *Am J Public Health*, 95(3), 478–482. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1449205/>

Horon, I.L., & Cheng, D. (2001). Enhanced surveillance for pregnancy-associated mortality – Maryland, 1993-1993. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 285(11), 1455-1459. doi:10.1001/jama.285.11.1455 .

Horon, I.L., & Cheng, D. (2005). Underreporting of pregnancy associated deaths. *American Journal of Public Health*, 95(11), 1879. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2005.072017> .

Horon, I.L., & Cheng, D. (2011). Effectiveness of pregnancy check boxes on death certificates in identifying pregnancy-associated mortality. *Public Health Reports*, 126(2), 195-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003335491112600210>

McRann, C. (2012, Feb. 22). Man accused of beating girlfriend, causing abortion. *Douglas Budget*. Retrieved from http://www.douglas-budget.com/news/article_8136399c-5d69-11e1-9183-0019bb2963f4.html

Miller, E. & Silverman, J.G. (2010). Reproductive coercion and partner violence: Implications for clinical assessment of unintended pregnancy. *Expert review of Obstetrics & Gynecology* 5(5), 511-515.

Pereira, I. (2011, Nov. 9) Father killed unborn son and girlfriend. *Times Ledger*. Retrieved from http://www.timesledger.com/stories/2011/45/southzoneparkstabconviction_jt_2011_11_10_q.html

Zambito, T. (2012, Jan. 5). Ex-con Derrick Redd gets 25 years to life for slaying pregnant girlfriend Niasha Delain. *New York Daily News*. Retrieved from <https://www.nydailynews.com/news/crime/ex-con-derrick-redd-25-years-life-slaying-pregnant-girlfriend-niasha-delain-article-1.1001352>