

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

# Position Paper

**ISSUE:** Domestic violence (DV), sometimes known as intimate partner violence, refers to any kind of abuse directed at one household member by another and affects 20-30% of women in the United States. The abuse can be physical, emotional, psychological or sexual. While DV has profound implications for the health status of all women, the risk for DV to begin or exacerbate increases significantly during pregnancy. Particularly troubling is the fact that the risk for DV appears to be highest among pregnant adolescents, a group already facing unique physical and emotional challenges.

**BACKGROUND:** Research indicates that a significant source of ill-health and injury for women is domestic violence. Women who are abused by an intimate partner or family member are more likely to experience unintended pregnancy, delayed entry into prenatal care, and poor pregnancy outcome. They are more likely to suffer from mental illness such as depression, have higher rates of STDs including HIV and are at greater risk for substance abuse. Additionally, the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse is estimated to range from 30-60%, adding further danger to the postnatal period.

Of great concern is that domestic violence during pregnancy is quite common. In fact, *research suggests that domestic violence impacts pregnancy more often than any other physiological complication of pregnancy.*

**STRATEGY:** In an effort to better identify and find help for victims of domestic violence, NPA supports the following:

1. All providers of perinatal care should utilize screening tools to identify women who may be victims of domestic violence.
2. All women should be screened for domestic violence at the time of routine gynecologic care.
3. All pregnant women should be screened for domestic violence at least once per trimester and whenever behavioral indicators or physical complaints suggest.
4. All healthcare providers should familiarize themselves with local or regional domestic violence crisis centers and hotlines, and be prepared to expedite referrals when indicated.

NPA remains committed to increasing awareness, identifying those at risk, and seeking strategies to reduce or eliminate domestic violence.

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