Domestic abuse in pregnancy

Why has this leaflet been produced?

- For most women, pregnancy is a time of happiness and anticipation, but that isn’t the case for every pregnant woman. Unfortunately, for many women pregnancy can be the beginning of an abusive or violent time in their lives.
- Research tells us that about 33% of domestic abuse starts during pregnancy and where there’s been previous domestic abuse in a relationship, it often escalates during pregnancy.
- This leaflet has been produced by the maternity team at Dorset County Hospital to give pregnant women in their care guidance and information about where to look for help and support should this be needed during the pregnancy.

What is domestic abuse?

Domestic abuse is defined as any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual (including rape)
- financial
- emotional

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

Examples of behaviours that would fit this definition are threatening to report you to social services as a bad mother, harassment (in person or
by texting), destroying your property, harming your pets, humiliating degrading you in front of friends, belittling you or constantly criticising you. In summary, domestic abuse is about one person having power and control over the other and it doesn’t always involve physical abuse or violence.

**How can domestic abuse affect my pregnancy?**

Domestic abuse against pregnant women can have immediate and lasting effects. Apart from immediate injury to mother and baby from physical violence, other things can happen too. Many women who are abused during pregnancy will continue unhealthy habits due to stress such as smoking, drug abuse and poor diet. These can affect the unborn baby. The abuser may prevent you from receiving proper antenatal or postnatal care which can be detrimental to both you and your baby.

**Getting Help**

Domestic abuse is not uncommon and sadly, happens to many women during their lifetime. If you are being abused by your partner or someone close to you, be reassured that you are not alone. You are also not to blame and if you seek help you won’t be forced into a course of action against your will.

Most importantly, help is available. Here are some suggestions:

- Talk to your midwife. She has received appropriate training and will be able to support you to get help. She will also be able to see you on your own, without your partner so that you can talk about your concerns

- Talk to the You First integrated domestic abuse service. This is a free and confidential service which works across Dorset to support all victims of domestic abuse. **0800 032 5204.**

- Contact the National 24 Hour domestic abuse helpline. **0808 2000 247**

- Or visit [www.dorsetforyou.com/dvahelp](http://www.dorsetforyou.com/dvahelp)

- If you are in immediate danger always call the police on 999.