

DOULA UPDATE



Perinatal professionals can help reduce intimate partner violence during pregnancy

Maternal health and intimate partner violence, or IPV, are deeply interconnected issues that require the attention of all perinatal professionals. By recognizing the signs of IPV and understanding its impact on maternal health, doulas can play a crucial role in improving outcomes for women, their unborn babies and their families.

Intimate partner violence encompasses physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse by a current or former partner. It's a significant public health issue, with about 4.4% of mothers in Michigan reporting domestic violence within 12 months prior to pregnancy and 2.9% reporting physical violence during pregnancy, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. However, it's important to note that most domestic violence cases go unreported.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the consequences of IPV during pregnancy can be severe, with adverse effects on maternal and fetal health, including:

- Physical injury and delayed prenatal care
- Pregnancy complications, which can result in increased risk of preterm birth, low birth weight and miscarriage
- Mental health issues, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder

The World Health Organization reports that one in three women worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of an intimate partner. IPV during pregnancy is particularly concerning due to the potential adverse effects on maternal and fetal health.

Doulas can help

As trusted figures, perinatal professionals are often in a unique position to identify IPV. Pregnancy and postpartum visits provide critical opportunities to screen for IPV and connect patients with resources.

Universal screening for IPV during prenatal and postpartum visits is recommended by leading health organizations, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. To help ensure effective screening, perinatal professionals can do the following:

- Ask direct but sensitive questions. For example:

- o Do you feel safe in your current relationship?
- o Has anyone ever hurt you or made you feel afraid?
- Gain training to provide support and referrals
- Maintain an updated list of local resources, including shelters and counseling services

Patients may hesitate to disclose IPV due to fear, shame or lack of trust. Perinatal professionals can address these barriers by ensuring confidentiality, building rapport over time, normalizing IPV discussions as a routine part of care and offering culturally sensitive and language-appropriate services. Even more, perinatal professionals can enhance their response to IPV by accessing professional training and local resources. Organizations such as the National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence and the Michigan Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence offer valuable tools and education to help support perinatal professionals.

Perinatal professionals play a critical role in addressing the connection of maternal health and IPV. By integrating IPV screening and support into maternal care, doulas can help improve the safety and well-being of women and their families. Awareness, training and knowledge are essential to making a difference in the lives of those affected by IPV.

MC3 offers virtual training program for perinatal professionals

Perinatal professionals in Michigan including midwives, doulas, lactation consultants and providers working in OB-GYN perinatal settings are invited to participate in the following MC3 Perinatal virtual training sessions:

- Acute trauma in the perinatal period, Oct. 15, 2025, from noon to 1 p.m.
- Tailored prescribing for perinatal patients with trauma, Nov. 15, 2025, from noon to 1 p.m.

These sessions are free and CEUs are available. To register, go to mc3michigan.org. If you have questions, contact your Blue Cross Complete provider account executive or the Blue Cross Complete Provider Inquiry at 1-888-312-5713.

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