



The National Campaign
to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy

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Domestic, Sexual Violence Can Harm Women's Reproductive Health

Heath and Violence Experts Brief Congressional Staff

WASHINGTON, DC – Violence prevention and health experts came together here today to brief Members of Congress and congressional staff about the ways domestic and sexual violence can harm women's reproductive and sexual health. They also discussed how to integrate violence prevention into reproductive health education and how funding the health programs in the *Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)* can help identify and aid victims of abuse, which in turn will improve women's reproductive health outcomes.

Violence against women is associated with a host of negative reproductive health outcomes: more sexually transmitted infections (STIs), higher rates of unintended pregnancy, limited utilization of prenatal care, and poor birth outcomes. According to a study by Harvard University, one in three teenage girls abused by a boyfriend becomes pregnant, and one in three teens tested for STIs and HIV/AIDS have experienced domestic violence. Experts said that these statistics must change.

The briefing featured: Jay Silverman, Ph.D., Harvard University School of Public Health; Andrea Kane, National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy; Tricia Bent-Goodley, Ph.D., LICSW, Howard University School of Social Work; and Bonnie J. Dattel, M.D., American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). It was sponsored by the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF), National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, and American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and co-sponsored by Representatives Lois Capps (D-CA), Michael Castle (R-DE) and Joseph Crowley (D-NY).

“The intersection of sexual violence and reproductive health has been largely unexplored, but it's time for that to change,” FVPF Public Policy Director Kiersten Stewart said. “Too many women, while dating or in relationships, experience rape, sexual coercion or have partners who prevent them from using protection. We can help them by funding the prevention and health programs in the *Violence Against Women Act*, training doctors to assess patients for abuse, and making sure that women are able to access the reproductive health services they need.” Stewart moderated the briefing.

“At a time when teen births are on the rise and unplanned pregnancy among young adults is stalled at a high level, it is more important than ever to focus on critical connections between these issues and domestic and sexual violence,” said National Campaign to Prevent Teen and

Unplanned Pregnancy Policy and Partnerships Senior Director Andrea Kane. “There is a need for innovative approaches to help teens and young adults have healthier and more respectful relationships, to equip parents to talk to their sons and daughters about the importance of such relationships, and to ensure that women get effective methods of contraception to prevent pregnancy if they are in an unhealthy or violent relationship.”

“The time during a woman’s pregnancy is one of the most important opportunities for ob-gyns to help prevent violence and abuse. Studies show that incidences of abuse actually increase during pregnancy, and a woman’s ob-gyn is often the only person she’ll confide in,” said ACOG Fellow Bonnie Dattel, MD. “Two very important parts of VAWA that will directly help ob-gyns and other physicians care for abuse victims are the Training of Health Professionals Program and the Public Health Responses Program and we encourage Congress to fund them.”

In September, the FVPF launched the ***KnowMoreSayMore*** initiative to start a dialogue about how sexual and domestic violence impact reproductive health and the high rates of reproductive coercion that many teens and young women face. It examines the reproductive health consequences of sexual coercion and violence, which include unintended pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, miscarriage, infertility, coerced abortion, and a range of other serious health issues. Its website, at www.KnowMoreSayMore.org, features stories from women who have experienced violence and coercion.

Research conducted for the initiative by Child Trends finds that some 18 percent of women age 18 to 24 report having experienced forced sexual intercourse at least once in their lives. Child Trends used data from the 2002 National Survey of Family Growth for the analysis, basing estimates of forced sexual intercourse on a sample of 1,833 females aged 18 to 24.

The full Child Trends brief is available at <http://www.knowmoresaymore.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/08/child-trends-forced-sexual-intercourse-fact-sheet.pdf>. For information on Child Trends, visit www.childtrends.org.

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The Family Violence Prevention Fund works to end violence against women and children around the world, because every person has the right to live free of violence. For more information, visit www.endabuse.org.