

Consensus Statement: **Family Violence**

The New Zealand College of Midwives considers abuse against women and children is unacceptable and should be eliminated within all societies. During pregnancy family violence should be considered a risk factor that leads to adverse health outcomes ¹.

Family Violence / domestic abuse is defined as “Physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, including but not limited to intimidation, harassment, damaged property, threats of physical, sexual or psychological abuse, financial or economic abuse” ². It occurs during domestic relationships which are defined as those with a spouse or partner, family or household member, or a close personal relationship ².

Children are psychologically abused when they see, hear or are aware of family violence ².

Rationale:

- “Gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation including those resulting from cultural prejudices are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and must be eliminated ³ (World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993).”
- Midwives work in partnership with women during pregnancy and the post partum and are therefore well positioned to screen for family violence ⁴⁻⁶.

Practice Notes:

Midwives:

- require ongoing support to address the issue of abuse against women and children within the national family violence strategy/framework ⁴
- understand the effect of abuse against pregnant women and children and in particular in relation to the impact on the woman’s sexual and reproductive health and the well being and development of children ^{1, 2, 5, 7, 8}
- after participating in appropriate education, midwives routinely ask all pregnant women about family violence / abuse as part of a comprehensive health assessment, including routinely asking about child abuse when abuse is disclosed or concerns are present ⁴
- acknowledge the woman has the right to define choice of action/referral or support except when there are safety concerns about her or her baby/ children, or the risk to their safety is serious ^{4, 5, 9}
- are familiar and work with local referral agencies that provide support, counselling and emergency services for women experiencing abuse ^{3, 4}
- can provide information resources to pregnant women on local emergency support services ^{3, 4}
- do not support routine mandatory referral when abuse has been disclosed but undertake to balance the provision of ongoing maternity care for the woman with the need for referral if there are care and protection issues for her and/or the baby/ other children ^{4, 9, 10}.

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Ratification:

This statement was ratified at the NZCOM AGM on 30 July 2015
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The purpose of New Zealand College of Midwives Consensus Statements is to provide women, midwives and the maternity services with the profession's position on any given situation. The guidelines are designed to educate and support best practice. All position statements are regularly reviewed and updated in line with evidence-based practice.