

Announcements, Information & Resources

WHO Report Recommends Screening for Abuse During Pregnancy

The World Health Organization's (WHO) 2005 Report, *Make Every Mother and Child Count*, examines why eleven million children under age five will die this year, and why 529,000 mothers will die during pregnancy, childbirth, or soon thereafter. One strategy that can make pregnancy safer is to reduce gender-based violence, it says.

Make Every Mother and Child Count proposes building societies that support women who are pregnant by tackling the low status of women, violence against women, and the lack of employment rights for pregnant women. "Gender-based violence or exposure to hazards in the workplace may not be readily recognized by pregnant women as problems that health workers can help to resolve," the report says, "but [they] constitute major and underestimated public health problems."

It notes that unequal power relations between men and women often cause unwanted pregnancy, finding that seven to 48 percent of adolescent girls around the world report that their first sexual experience was forced. Women who have

experienced a sexual assault often fear the pregnancy and delay getting health care.

"Violence against women by a partner is a global public health problem and a human rights violation," says *Make Every Mother and Child Count*. Studies from Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Mexico and Nicaragua have found that 14 to 32 percent of women report having been physically or sexually abused during pregnancy – and the perpetrator is usually their partner. Violence increases risk of premature labor, low birth weight babies, sexually transmitted diseases, depression and other mental health problems.

The World Health Organization recommends screening for abuse to protect women during and after pregnancy. "Health workers must not only be sensitive to the subject, but also need to know how to deal with it," the report says. It recommends that doctors, nurses, midwives and other health care providers be specifically trained to recognize and inquire about intimate partner violence and provide information, care, support and referrals.

Make Every Mother and Child Count is available online at www.who.int/whr/2005/en/index.html