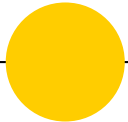


The Power and Control of Pregnancy

Recognizing & Understanding Reproductive Coercion



Meggie Royer
Women's Advocates



A Legacy of Advocacy Since 1974

[Women's Advocates](#) is the first shelter in the nation for women and children fleeing domestic abuse. In 1972 a crisis line for women experiencing domestic violence was created by 11 women in Saint Paul. In 1974, these women began operating an official shelter out of a Victorian home on Grand Avenue, thus beginning the legacy of Women's Advocates.



The beginning

In 2000, a teenage girl comes in for a pregnancy test at a Boston clinic. The doctor asks whether she is on birth control, and whether she wants to be pregnant. The answer to both questions is no.

The doctor discusses various contraceptive options and provides the girl with condoms before she leaves.

Two weeks later, the girl comes back - to the emergency room, after her boyfriend pushes her down the stairs.



The beginning

This was Dr. Elizabeth Miller's experience in 2000, the tipping point that led to her pioneering research in the field of reproductive coercion.

“It was there, staring me in the face, and I totally missed it.”

Before 2000, reproductive coercion was never screened for at clinics. In 2013, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists issued recommendations that all clinics do so.^{[1](#)}



Reproductive coercion

Behavior intended to maintain power and control over an individual's reproductive health and decisions, often within but not limited to an intimate partner context.



Statistics

Race & IPV Connection

15% of female family planning clinic clients with a history of IPV report birth control sabotage²

10.3 million US women have had a partner who tried to get them pregnant when they did not want to, or refused to wear a condom³

25% of callers to the National Domestic Violence Hotline report experiencing reproductive coercion⁴

1 in 5 young women who have experienced IPV have also experienced pregnancy coercion⁵

15% of young women who have experienced IPV have also experienced birth control sabotage⁶

Black (37.1%) and multiracial (29.2%) female family planning clinic clients are disproportionately subjected to reproductive coercion⁷



Forms of reproductive coercion





Birth control sabotage

Behavioral and/or verbal interference with an individual's contraceptive methods in order to force a pregnancy⁸

- “Stealthing” - poking holes in a condom, pretending to remove it from the package, or removing it during sexual intercourse
- Hiding, destroying, or withholding contraception
- Removing body-attached forms of contraceptives such as IUDs, vaginal rings, implants, and patches
- Verbal pressure or coercion aimed at preventing birth control use
- Withholding finances necessary to obtain birth control



Case Study 1: Ian Somerhalder

“We decided that we wanted to have children together, and it was just time. But unbeknownst to poor Nikki, she didn't realize that I was going to go in her purse and take out her birth control. By the way, it was the beginning of the pack, so I had to pop all those suckers out. There was like 25 of them. It is a lot of work, especially after a little bit of sangria.”⁹



Pregnancy pressure/coercion

Threats, pressure, or behavior intended to force an individual to become pregnant, or to continue or terminate a pregnancy¹⁰

- Monitoring menstrual cycles
- Threatening to rape an individual to impregnate them
- Engaging in physical violence to induce a miscarriage
- Threatening to hurt an individual who does not wish to become pregnant
- Threatening to cheat if an individual terminates a pregnancy
- Withholding necessary finances for an abortion or pregnancy care



Case Study 2: Unknown victim

“And I told him right when I found out I was pregnant, I told him, ‘You know, I hate to say this, but I want to have an abortion.’ [He said], ‘No, you’re crazy. How can you say that? You can’t just kill your child!’ And he was just making me feel so guilty until, finally, I was just, like, ‘Okay, then. I’ll keep the baby.’”¹¹



Sexual coercion

Coercive behavior intended to influence an individual's sexual decision-making¹²

- ⦿ Threatening to terminate a relationship if an individual does not have sex with the perpetrator or someone else
- ⦿ Making an individual afraid if they say no to sex
- ⦿ Repeatedly pressuring an individual to have sex
- ⦿ Attempting to get an individual intoxicated to take advantage of them
- ⦿ Intentionally exposing an individual to an STI or threatening to do so



Case Study 3: Aziz Ansari

“I wasn’t really even thinking of that, I didn’t want to be engaged in that with him. But he kept asking, so I said, ‘Next time.’ And he goes, ‘Oh, you mean second date?’ and I go, ‘Oh, yeah, sure,’ and he goes, ‘Well, if I poured you another glass of wine now, would it count as our second date?’^{[13](#)}



Impacts¹⁵

Victims of IPV or reproductive coercion are 62x more likely to have their ovaries removed than non-abused individuals¹⁴

- Unintended pregnancy or abortions or miscarriages
- Isolation, anxiety, depression, PTSD
- STIs and gynecological issues
- Neonatal mortality risk, low birth weight, risk of premature birth
- Homicide (leading cause of mortality for pregnant women)
- Greater likelihood of drug abuse and/or risky sexual behaviors
- Poverty

Men as victims of reproductive coercion?

11.7 million men in the US have had an intimate partner who tried to get pregnant when the man did not want to have a child, or who tried to stop the man from using birth control or refused to wear a condom.^{[15](#)}

“



PP vs. DD

In 2014 in Ontario, PP (male) and DD (female) met through mutual friends and began a sexual relationship. Based on DD's statements, PP believed DD was on birth control and that she did not want a child. After the two had sex numerous times, DD later texted him to say she was pregnant. She gave birth and kept the child. She did not allow PP to see the child.

PP brought a civil action against her for fraudulent misrepresentation, claiming he only consented to sex on the basis that he believed she was on birth control, and she had prevented him from choosing when he would become a father. The case was dismissed.^{[16](#)}



Why do abusers engage in reproductive coercion?

Abusers may engage in reproductive coercion to control a partner's appearance, to trap a victim into a relationship, to avoid responsibility for a child, to maintain power and control, to increase sexual pleasure, to spread STIs, and/or more.



Warning signs¹⁷

- “Losing” birth control patches, pills, rings
- Frequent pregnancy testing or frequent abortions
- Missing or “forgetting” appointments for birth control injections
- Partner always present with victim at OBGYN appointments
- Partner claims condom keeps breaking
- Individual states that partner told them birth control would “make them fat” or undesirable



Intervention strategies

Assessment
and safety
planning

The diagram consists of three overlapping circles arranged horizontally. The leftmost circle is light gray and contains the text 'Assessment and safety planning'. The middle circle is yellow and contains the text 'Alternative forms of contraception'. The rightmost circle is light gray and contains the text 'Warm referrals'. The circles overlap in the center, creating a darker yellow area where all three intersect.

Alternative
forms of
contraception

Warm
referrals



Assessment and safety planning

**Confidential verbal assessment in private location
followed by safety planning - watch the language¹⁸**

Is your partner ok with you using birth control?

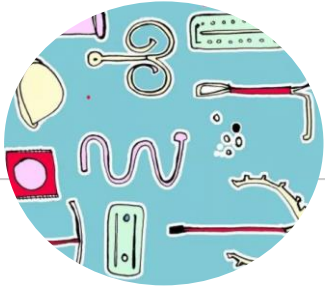
Has your partner ever threatened you because you did not wish to become pregnant?

Has your partner ever refused to wear a condom?

Do your condoms break a lot during sex?

Have you ever had to hide your birth control?

Have you ever been pressured to have an abortion?



Alternative forms of contraception¹⁹

Implanon: Matchstick-sized tube of hormones inserted in upper arm. Effective for 3 years and invisible to the eye, but can be felt by palpation and may stop periods completely.

Depo-Provera: Hormone shot effective for 3 months, but may stop periods completely.

IUD: T-shaped device inserted into the uterus. ParaGuard effective for 12 years; Mirena for 5 years. A string hangs out of the cervical opening, which may increase risk of abuser discovery.

Emergency contraception: A single dose or doses given within 72 hours of unprotected sex to prevent pregnancy. It is not an abortion pill and can be purchased before unprotected sex.



Warm referrals

After a positive disclosure, respond with validation, belief, support, and caring, followed by:[²⁰](#)

What can I do for you next?

Ask permission to share strategies

Encourage victim to meet with an on-site advocate, or
have an advocate come to the clinic

Allow victim to use office phone to speak with an advocate

Schedule a return visit

Ask about victim's safety once pregnancy is diagnosed



Other strategies

Recommend that victim keep emergency contraceptives in a small, thin envelope

Offer to notify a partner(s) anonymously about any STI diagnoses

Discuss how to negotiate condom use with abuser

Provide information on adoption services

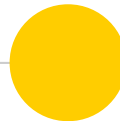
Provide information on where to obtain a safe, legal abortion

Discuss the importance of prenatal care



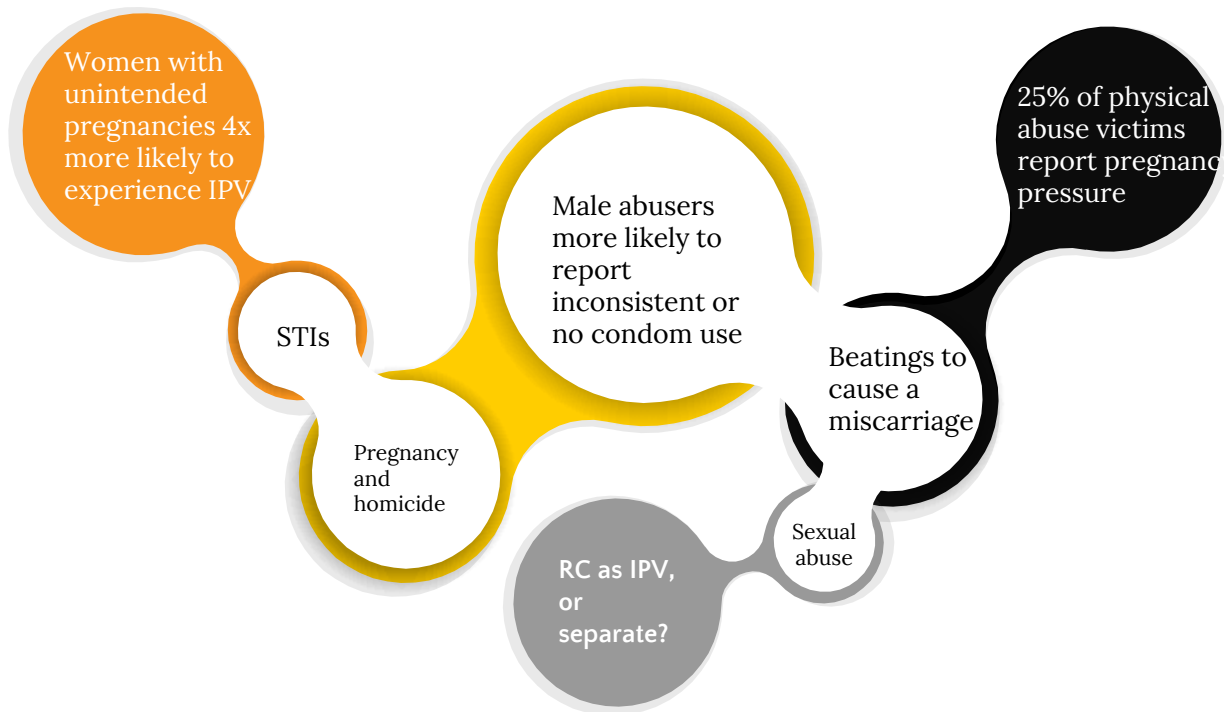
The world's first flushable pregnancy test

Lia's pregnancy test is the same as usual - except it will biodegrade in water, allowing it to be flushed. The cost? \$10. It can be shipped in a thin, small, inconspicuous envelope to an address of the victim's choice. [22](#)





Intersections with domestic violence²³





At one domestic violence shelter in the San Francisco Bay Area...

53 female residents were interviewed. One was only allowed to use birth control because she had already had two girls and her partner did not want another girl. Many of the women's partners wanted to force them to have male children.^{[24](#)}

68

Unplanned pregnancies

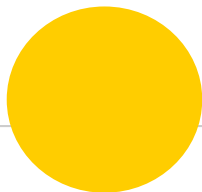
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women told not to use birth control

1

stillbirth due to physical abuse

At the shelter...

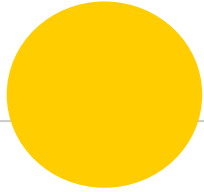


Legislation

Birth control sabotage is not currently against US law, or anywhere else.

Some states have laws guaranteeing that sexual assault victims' requests for their attackers to wear condoms does not equate to consent. And yet, no laws determine that an attacker's failure to comply with the request would revoke prior consent.

However, some legal scholars argue that birth control sabotage could fall under an “intentional, fraudulent misrepresentation tort claim.”^{[25](#)}



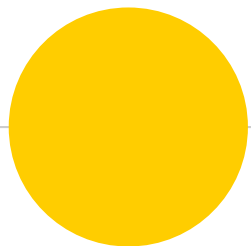
Legislation/Police

Birth control sabotage should be classified as a form of domestic violence, with the allowance of admission of propensity evidence.^{[26](#)}

How could law enforcement help build this evidence?

Collect tampered pills, condoms, rings, IUDs, and any other intentionally damaged contraceptives

Use rape kits for each sabotage claim (may reveal forceful removal of contraceptive or force to make perpetrator withdraw)



Thank you!

Any **questions** ?

You can find me at

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- 651.726.5233



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