

# Domestic abuse in pregnancy

... as common as  
gestational diabetes,  
and almost as common  
as pre-eclampsia<sup>1</sup>

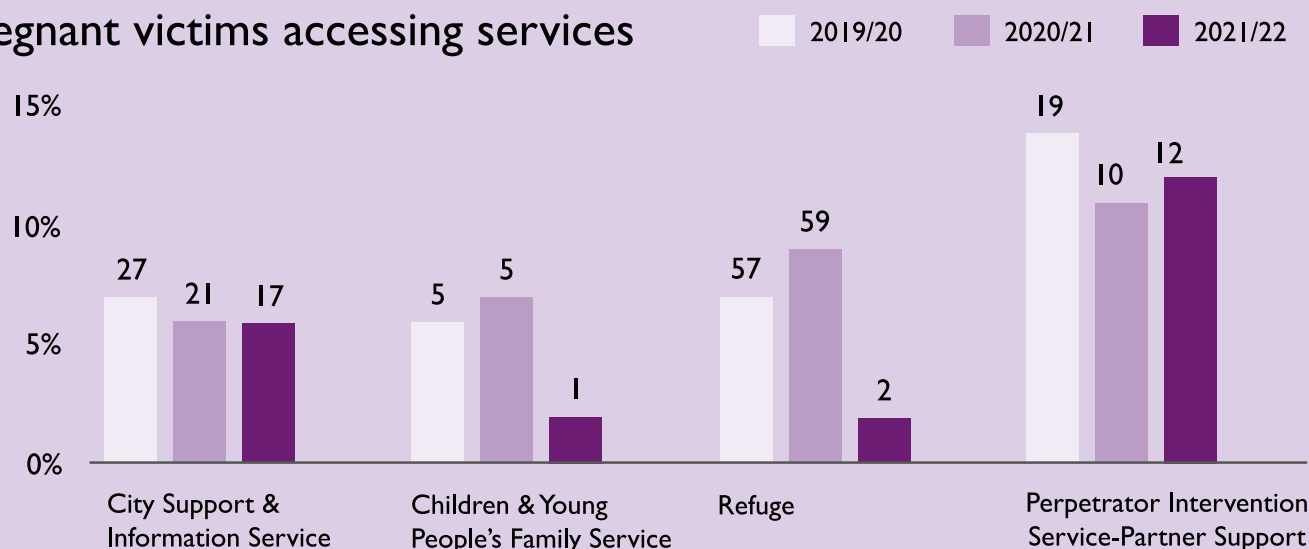


# Leicester Domestic Abuse Services data 2019-2022

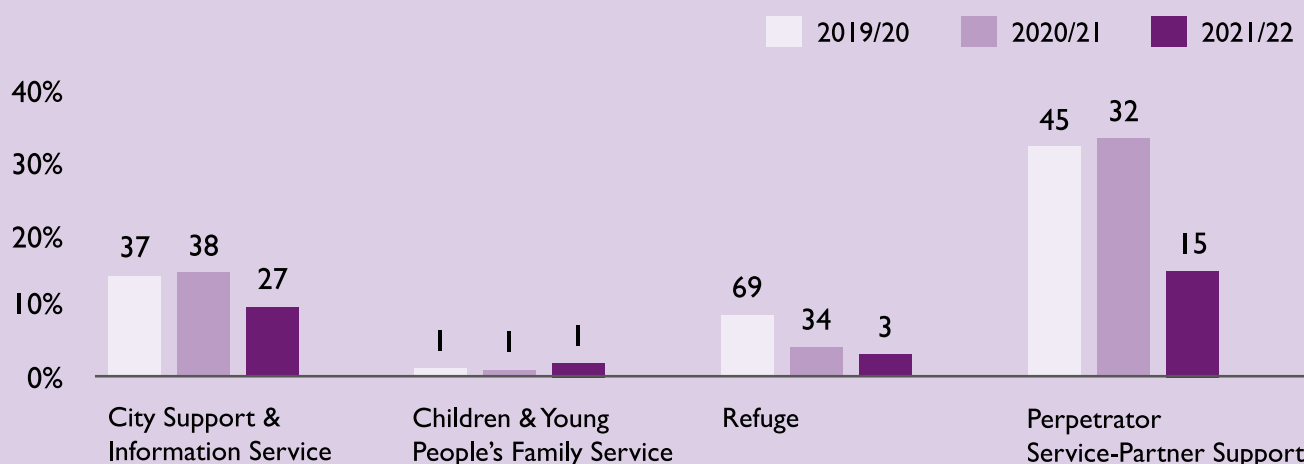
Local data suggests that there should be more women who have given birth in the last 12 months accessing specialist support for domestic abuse.

This information pack is to help all of us have more conversations about the risks of domestic abuse in pregnancy. It contains key findings from data provided by our specialist domestic abuse services, University Hospitals Leicester and national and international research.

## Pregnant victims accessing services



## Victims who have had a baby in the last 12 months



## Between April 2019 and March 2022:

**6%** of all **victim-survivors** accessing the City Support & Information Service were **pregnant**.

**13%** of those accessing the **Perpetrator Intervention Service** had a **pregnant partner or family member**

**8%** accessing **Refuge Services** were **pregnant**

**5%** accessing the **Children & Young Persons Family Service** were **pregnant**.

# Pregnant victim-survivor demographics 2019-2022

## Leicester Support & Information Service



### Age

A higher percentage of those aged 16-18 (five of the nine) accessing the specialist domestic abuse services were pregnant, which might indicate a higher risk for this age group



### Ethnicity

No difference in pregnant victims accessing services from either a White British or British Minority Ethnic background – both **7%**



**Length of time** victims had experienced abuse was **shorter** for pregnant clients (4.8 years compared to 6.3 years) which might reflect abuse starting or escalating in pregnancy



Pregnant women were more likely to experience **high severity of abuse**

## University Hospitals Leicestershire (UHL) data for 12 months 2020-21

**Pregnant women who have reported previous domestic abuse**

**275**

**Pregnant women known to currently be experiencing domestic abuse**

**223**

**Pregnant women where an incident of domestic abuse has been reported**

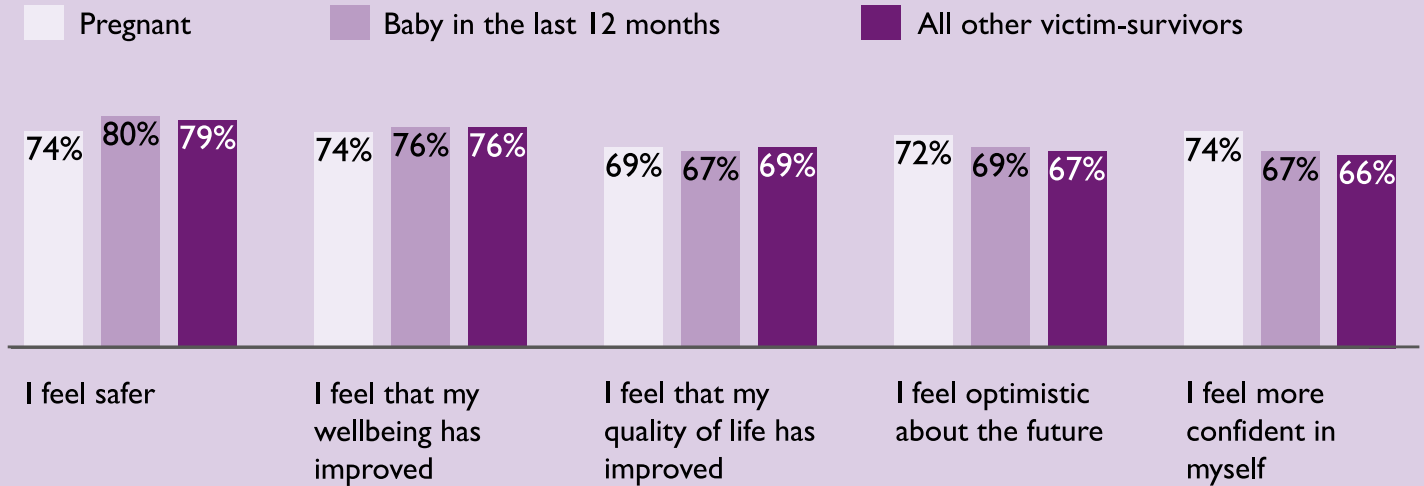
**54**

**Domestic abuse specialist support services are not seeing these levels of demand ... Is there unmet need?**

# Outcomes

## Insights data April 2019 - March 2022

Specialist support exit survey responses from victim-survivors.



There are some small variations across the groups – pregnant victims are slightly less likely to feel safer or feel that their health and wellbeing has improved, but they are **more optimistic about the future and feel more confident after intervention**



Victims who had a baby in the last 12 months had similar outcomes to those that were pregnant, and **in most cases had slightly better outcomes** compared to all other victims

Services poorly publicised, had to search a lot. Should be embedded in maternity care

Being six months pregnant I wasn't able to make decisions about leaving as I felt unsafe and trapped ... I spoke to my midwife who referred me to Women's Aid

**Local helpline for domestic abuse specialist support services**

**0808 80 200 28**

Weekdays 8am to 8pm  
Weekends and bank holidays 10am to 4pm  
Freeva (Free from Violence & Abuse)

# National and international research

## Pregnancy and maternity key numbers



### One in eight

women have been abused during pregnancy  
(National Social Inclusion Office, Ireland, 2012)

In 2021, **152** women told Women's Aid that they were abused while pregnant and **41** women suffered a **miscarriage** because of the abuse  
(Women's Aid Annual Impact Report, 2021)

**30%**

of domestic abuse begins during pregnancy  
(Why Mothers Die, England and Wales, 2001)

**40-60%**

of women experiencing abuse are abused during pregnancy  
(SafeLives 2016)

## Prevalence rates of domestic violence

**11-28%**

of pregnant women reported experiencing

**PHYSICAL ASSAULT**

during pregnancy

**36%**

of pregnant women reported experiencing **PSYCHOLOGICAL OR VERBAL ABUSE**

by an intimate partner during pregnancy

**20%**

of pregnant women reported experiencing **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

by an intimate partner during pregnancy

(based on a graphic from Case Western University, USA, research study 2019)<sup>ii</sup>

‘Pregnancy obviously offers no protection against domestic abuse’<sup>iii</sup>

# Potential effects of domestic abuse on the mother and the child



Problem substance use



Pregnancy loss



Delayed access to maternity services



Premature labour and birth



Low birth weight



Perinatal mental ill health

## 82%

of health visitors reported an increase in domestic violence and abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic



(Institute of Health Visiting Survey December 2020)

**8%** of women who died during or up to a year after pregnancy in the UK in 2017-2019 were at severe and multiple disadvantage

(MBRRACE UK 2022)<sup>vi</sup>



Women exposed to intimate partner violence are

**16%** more likely to have a low-birth-weight baby<sup>iv</sup>

## Repeated exposure

to violence changes the brain, affecting a child's ability to develop attachments, focus in school, self-soothe, etc

(Alliance for HOPE International)



## First 1001 Days Movement

'The first 1001 days, from pregnancy, are a crucial time to safeguard and nurture babies' development. Domestic abuse during this period increases the risks of poor birth outcomes for mothers and babies and has an impact on long term life chances'

Children were present in

## more than a third of non-fatal strangulation

offences analysed by the Crown Prosecution Service

(Crown Prosecution Service, 2022)<sup>vii</sup>

## 50,000 children

aged 0-5, including 8,300 babies under one, were living in households where all three of domestic abuse, alcohol or drug dependency and severe mental ill-health were present

(Crying Shame, Children's Commissioner 2018)

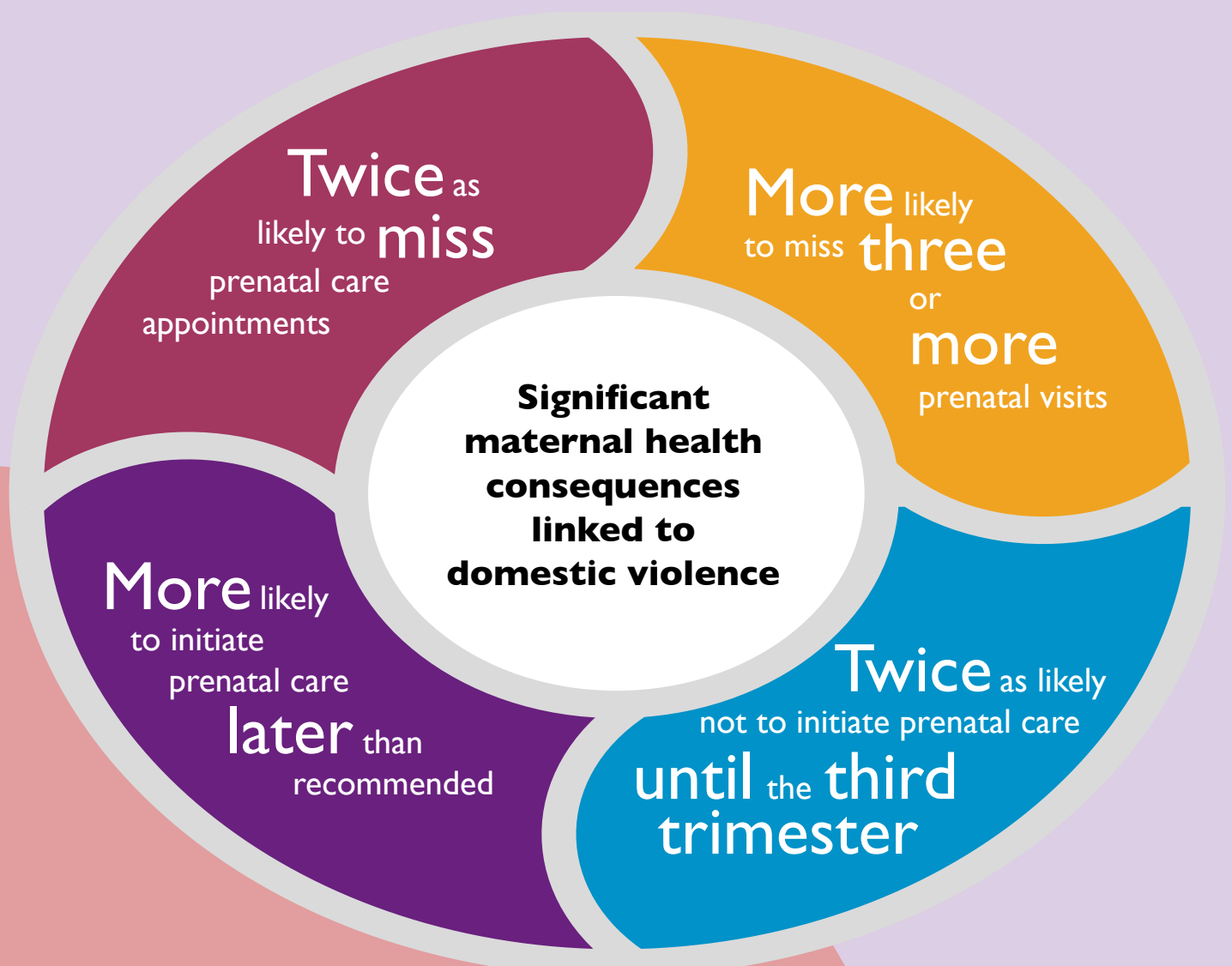
Domestic abuse can disrupt babies' neurodevelopment. This can affect the cognitive functioning and emotional regulation of children, shaping

## behavioural & emotional outcomes

(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007)

# We need to

- ✓ Know the prevalence
- ✓ Make it easier to raise the subject
- ✓ Know the risks
- ✓ Advertise specialist domestic abuse services (for both those who are harming others, and adult and child victim-survivors)
- ✓ Support staff to identify domestic abuse and respond appropriately through training, team meetings, procedure documents
- ✓ Make it easier for those who need it to get help



# Useful resources for practitioners

Domestic abuse procedures manual from Leicester and the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children's Partnerships ([proceduresonline.com](http://proceduresonline.com))

Controlling My Birth Control (BBC Radio 4 - File on 4, [bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00154bp](http://bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00154bp))

Supporting women and babies after domestic abuse toolkit for domestic abuse specialists ([womensaid.org.uk](http://womensaid.org.uk))

Case for Change briefing on strengthening the Domestic Abuse Bill to meet the safeguarding and early development needs of babies, including unborn babies, and empower parents to break the cycle ([forbabysake.org.uk](http://forbabysake.org.uk))

Intimate Partner Violence and Pregnancy: Nationwide Analysis of Injury Patterns and Risk Factors (National Library of Medicine [nih.gov](http://nih.gov))

Safer Beginnings films and Emotional Safety Plan tool to improve maternal and birth outcomes ([forbabysake.org.uk](http://forbabysake.org.uk))

First Impressions: Exposure to Violence and a Child's Developing Brain ([familyjusticecenter.org](http://familyjusticecenter.org))

Power and abuse tactics wheel - image download ([theduluthmodel.org](http://theduluthmodel.org))

**For copies of posters and other resources connected to this subject please contact [DSVTeam@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:DSVTeam@leicester.gov.uk) or visit [leicester.gov.uk/domesticabuse](http://leicester.gov.uk/domesticabuse)**

<sup>i</sup> Parsons, L., Goodwin, M.M., and Peterson, R. "Violence Against Women and Reproductive Health: Toward Defining a Role for Reproductive Health Care Services". *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, Vol.4, No. 2. Pg135

<sup>ii</sup> Case Western University <https://case.edu/socialwork/traumacenter/resources/research-briefs/prenatal-exposure-domestic-violence>

<sup>iii</sup> Finnbogadóttir, H., Dykes, A.K. Increasing prevalence and incidence of domestic violence during the pregnancy and one and a half year postpartum, as well as risk factors: - a longitudinal cohort study in Southern Sweden. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 16, 327 (2016). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-016-1122-6>

<sup>iv</sup> Berhanie, E., Gebregziabher, D., Berihu, H. et al. Intimate partner violence during pregnancy and adverse birth outcomes: a case-control study. *Reprod Health* 16, 22 (2019). <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-019-0670-4>

<sup>v</sup> Parent Infant Foundation <https://parentinfantfoundation.org.uk/1001-days/>

<sup>vi</sup> MBRRACE-UK: Mothers and Babies Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK Reports | MBRRACE-UK | NPEU ([ox.ac.uk](http://ox.ac.uk))

<sup>vii</sup> The Crown Prosecution Service, December 2022 Children are often present during non-fatal strangulation, CPS analysis shows | The Crown Prosecution Service Case Western University <https://case.edu/socialwork/traumacenter/resources/research-briefs/prenatal-exposure-domestic-violence>

<sup>viii</sup> Case Western University <https://case.edu/socialwork/traumacenter/resources/research-briefs/prenatal-exposure-domestic-violence>

