

## Connecting domestic abuse and abortion

After North Carolina police found a 23-year-old pregnant woman dead in a park, they charged the father of their unborn child with her murder. Family members said the woman's refusal to have an abortion sparked the violence.



MARY  
MCCLUSKY

This heartbreaking story is just one example of the connection between domestic abuse and abortion. Studies show that pregnancy often escalates violence between intimate partners, which can lead to miscarriage, or even the death of both mother and child. Many women are coerced or forced into an abortion by their abusers.

For a woman who has suffered violence,

abortion adds further layers of trauma from which to heal. Fathers are affected, too. One of the symptoms of post-abortion trauma can be anger or even rage. Those facilitating post-abortion healing ministry with men in prison say there is often a strong connection between involvement in a previous abortion and their other violent offenses.

Recently, the Guttmacher Institute, a research organization founded by abortion provider Planned Parenthood, released an analysis saying that victims of intimate partner violence need the full range of "reproductive health services," their term for contraception and abortion. What the Guttmacher Institute won't say is what so many post-abortive women share: that abortion is often not even the woman's choice, and coerced abortions happen more

often than is commonly known.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recognized this victimization of women, citing forced abortion as one example of domestic violence in their statement "When I Call For Help." Originally released in 1992 after a series of focus groups with women, the statement was reaffirmed in 2002.

"When I Call for Help" inspired more than 350 clergy and laypeople from across the country to gather in 2016 in Washington for the first-ever Domestic Violence Symposium. Sponsored by Catholics for Family Peace and CUA's National Catholic School of Social Sciences, event cosponsors included the National Council of Catholic Women, several offices of the USCCB, Catholic Charities USA, and Catholic Charities.

The gathering's theme, "Hope, Help, and

Healing: A Catholic Response to Domestic Abuse and Violence," explored new ways for clergy, diocesan Catholic Charities, Family Life, Respect Life, and Project Rachel Ministries to work together to offer help, encourage healing, and promote forgiveness.

Let us pray that all victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse or coerced abortion may learn that they were made in God's image, created to love and be loved. Let us work to build awareness of the relationship between domestic abuse and abortion, find ways to prevent both, and offer hope in Christ to those who suffer.

*[McClusky is assistant director for Project Rachel Ministry Development at the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.]*