

## One in eight women abused while pregnant

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A DUBLIN Maternity Hospital is to start asking all pregnant women in its care if they are victims of domestic abuse.

The Rotunda Hospital will enact its new policy at the start of the year after surveys revealed the extent of the problem.

The last study at the hospital found one in eight women attending for care was suffering from some form of domestic abuse while pregnant.

Now the question will be added to the list of standard queries every maternity patient is asked when she attends the hospital.

In a 2004 survey, researchers found that of 478 women attending both public and private clinics at the hospital, one in eight were suffering abuse.

This included physical, emotional and verbal abuse.

With 200 births per day in Ireland, that means that 25 new mothers daily could be abuse victims.

An early survey carried out in 2000 had similar results.

Women's Aid, which is supporting the Rotunda's decision, has also expressed concern about the level of abuse during pregnancy.

The organisation said some women reported an escalation of violence during this time and following the birth.

A spokeswoman said: "We hear from women who are beaten and raped while they are pregnant, often resulting in miscarriage.

### **BEATEN**

"We hear from women who are forbidden to breast feed their child, who are raped following child birth and women who are beaten while holding their baby.

"Pregnancy does not offer protection to domestic violence. In fact, international research has found that 25pc of women who experience domestic violence are physically assaulted for the first time during pregnancy."

The decision to make an abuse query part of its standard questions comes after years of research into the subject by the Rotunda.

All hospital staff are to be trained how to respond when an expectant mother reveals abuse.

However, many women are expected to lie about their home situation.

A hospital spokeswoman accepted that the question might not result in a flood of information.

But the hope is that for those who do not tell the truth, it may create awareness and lead to further contact later on.

She said the physical violence was evident in cuts, bruises, bleeding or even broken bones. But 12pc were suffering from verbal abuse that took the form of threats that caused fear.

"Men need to be told by someone, maybe a family member that their behaviour is not acceptable", the spokesperson added.