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## **Interrupting Intimate Partner Violence During Pregnancy With an Effective Screening Program**

Ann Bianchi  
*University of Alabama in Huntsville*

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## Research and Creative Experience for Undergraduate (RCEU) Proposal

### Interrupting Intimate Partner Violence During Pregnancy With an Effective Screening Program

#### **Faculty/Research Mentor**

Dr. Ann Bianchi, Clinical Associate Professor, College of Nursing  
301 Sparkman Dr., Huntsville, Alabama, 35899  
Phone: 824-2465 and email: [ann.bianchi@uah.edu](mailto:ann.bianchi@uah.edu)

#### **Project Summary**

*Overview/Specific Aims.* It is estimated that 324,000 pregnant women experience intimate partner violence each year. The Bureau of Justice reported intimate partners committed fourteen percent of all murders in the United States, which equates to 2,340 deaths with approximately 1,640 femicides (i.e. homicide of women) due to intimate partner violence alone. Research documents intimate partner violence is more likely to escalate during pregnancy and abused pregnant women are more likely to experience all forms of violence. Physical violence during pregnancy is associated with increased risk of antepartum hemorrhage, intrauterine growth restriction, and prenatal death. Intimate partner violence during pregnancy poses health risks not only to the mother but her fetus as well. Birth outcomes among women who experienced intimate partner violence during pregnancy have an increased number of low birth weights and preterm births. It is not uncommon for abused women to have a late entry into prenatal care which may compound the health risk to both mother and fetus.

Literature reports women who participate in a screening program have fewer low birth weight infants compared to women who do not participate in a screening program. One study investigated 300 pregnant women and found that greater than 75% of the women were not screened for intimate partner violence during their pregnancy. Failure to adequately screen all pregnant women during the safety of prenatal visits denies them the opportunity for referrals to supportive agencies and could be detrimental to their health and the health of their child. An effective screening program may help decrease continued abuse beyond the pregnancy. To this end, provisions must be made to ensure that screening programs remain effective and encourage 100% compliance for screening all pregnant women.

This proposed project is one part of a research program that investigates *Intimate Partner Violence During Pregnancy, Mother-Infant Bonding, and Child Functioning*. To better serve women during pregnancy, information is needed about current screening practices so policies and procedures can be developed and clinicians can be afforded the resources needed to not only inquire about abuse during pregnancy but be equipped to respond to each pregnant woman's specific needs. The specific aims of this project is to investigate recommendations from federal agencies, professional organizations, and state reporting requirements, identify reliable and validated instruments used to screen for intimate partner violence, conduct focus groups with clinicians to explore current screening practices and barriers, and develop an effective screening program that serves to increase screening compliance.

## **Student Involvement**

*Student Duties.* The undergraduate student will work with Dr. Bianchi to develop an effective screening program that serves to improve the health and safety of pregnant women. The student will meet with clinicians in a variety of settings, to include hospitals and private OB/GYN clinics to identify current screening practices and barriers to screening. The student will become familiar with federal agencies and professional organization recommendations for screening women for intimate partner violence and state requirements for clinicians reporting abusive situations. The student will conduct a literature review related to intimate partner violence during pregnancy to include identifying reliable and validated instruments used to screen women for abuse. Clinical hours will be provided as the student will meet with local clinicians in a variety of settings. The learning objective of these meetings will be to conduct focus groups to identify current screening practices and barriers to screening.

*Student Qualifications.* The student will be expected to conduct literature searches and navigate federal agency websites to collect and organize information relating to policies and recommendations for screening and identify state reporting laws. The student will be expected to be self-directed and self-motivated. The student will be expected to communicate with clinicians in a professional manner to include being organized and prompt for meetings with clinicians.

*Students Benefits.* The RCEU experience will provide the student with an opportunity to see first hand how a screening program is developed while taking into consideration recommendations from federal agencies and professional organizations, addressing the needs of clinicians in order to promote the health and safety of women who are abused during pregnancy. Other benefits include exploring the ethics of this sensitive topic, conducting focus groups, and synthesizing information that serves to promote a sustainable screening program in a variety of clinical settings.

## **Student Learning Outcomes**

At the completion of this project experience the student will:

1. Synthesize screening recommendations from a variety of sources.
2. Identify current screening practices of clinicians in a variety of clinical settings.
3. Synthesize information collected during focus group meetings.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of effective screening practices.

## **Mentor Supervision and Interaction**

Weekly meetings will be conducted with Dr. Bianchi to review progress and develop plans to move the project forward. Dr. Bianchi will provide leadership and mentorship to assist the student in collecting and organizing information to formulate an effective screening program based on data collected from current screening practices and clinicians during focus groups. Leadership and mentorship will also be provided to assist the student in identifying appropriate venues for dissemination of the student's work. The student selected for this project will have the benefit of making a difference in lives of women abused during pregnancy by working with clinicians to develop an effective and sustainable screening program that encourages 100% compliance.