

Case study: Intimate partner violence [resident version]

PHN RESIDENCY FOR NEW GRADUATES

Objectives

1. Describe key assessment data to collect in suspected cases of intimate partner violence.
2. Determine the public health nurse's legal responsibility in reporting intimate partner violence.
3. Discuss the health determinants and factors that increase risk for intimate partner violence.
4. Provide examples of communication techniques to encourage trust and communication between the client and the health care provider.
5. Discuss safety interventions for clients experiencing intimate partner violence.
6. Determine appropriate referral resources for families experiencing intimate partner violence.
7. Describe the potential benefits of evidence-based practice in public health.

Case study

Angela is a 25-year-old woman who lives with her mother in a small home. She currently works in the accounting office at a nearby elementary school.

Angela is seeing Sam, a mechanic from a nearby town. He is attentive and interested in being part of Angela's life. After three months of dating, Sam moved in with Angela and her mother (to the delight of Angela's friends and family). Angela became pregnant and is a bit nervous about how they will afford their growing family, but she is happy to have a baby with Sam. Sam seemed indifferent to the pregnancy at first but now showers Angela with care and presents.

One night Angela arrived home late from work; Sam was angry. As she walked in the house, he yelled "Where the hell have you been?! I come home early one day and you're out with God-knows-who doing whatever you please when you're supposed to be here when I get home. Who were you with?!" Angela tried to explain, but Sam's anger scared her, and she wanted to resolve the conflict as quickly as possible. Sam stormed out the door and drove off. An hour later, he returned and apologized to Angela. He told her, "I don't know why I got so angry—it's just been a bad day at work. And you know I don't really like that friend of yours very much. I'm sorry, honey."

Two months later, when Angela was four months pregnant, another argument occurred. Angela and Sam began yelling at one another and Sam pushed Angela, knocking her backwards into the table and onto the floor. Angela was stunned and hurt. Her hip was bruised, and her finger felt broken. Sam saw Angela may have been hurt and was alarmed. He apologized many times, told Angela he loves her, and suggested they keep this secret. Because Angela is embarrassed, she agrees.

The public health nurse (PHN) who will be following Angela through the pregnancy sees her for the first visit the following day. The PHN notices the bruises and that Angela is favoring her finger. The PHN asks Angela about the injuries, and she states she tripped and fell.

1. What behaviors might Angela display that could indicate she is experiencing intimate partner violence?

Angela's pregnancy is unremarkable for the next couple of months and Sam and Angela decide to move to an apartment, away from her mother. Sam seems happy with the pregnancy; however, Sam hits Angela three different times when they have disagreements. Angela usually becomes quiet and attempts to restore peace. She has become increasingly anxious and is unusually quiet during PHN visits.

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The PHN continues to visit the family and observes Angela's behavior change. She has also heard from Angela's mother about Sam's temper. Angela continues to deny she is being hurt or feels unsafe in her home; however, the PHN suspects Angela is experiencing intimate partner violence.

2. Considering the determinants of health for this family (biology, individual behavior, health services, social factors, and policies), what are the risk factors for experiencing intimate partner violence?

3. What types of assessment tools does your agency use to assess for physical violence?

Over the next couple of months, the PHN continues to see Angela for pregnancy follow-up. She is now eight months pregnant. Angela has had to cancel three appointments because Sam now refuses to let the PHN in the home without him present. At the last visit, the PHN arrived at the door, and Angela told her Sam was out with friends and she was unable to let her in.

4. How might the PHN respond to Angela?

During the last trimester of her pregnancy, Sam's abuse escalates in frequency and severity. On several occasions, Angela threatens to leave Sam. He responds at first by laughing and telling Angela she could never make it on her own, but then he begins to threaten to kill Angela if she tries to leave.

The PHN notices Angela's change in behavior. Sam continues to be present at all the visits. The PHN's suspicion of intimate partner violence are growing stronger. The PHN reports this situation to their supervisor.

5. Which statement below best describes the PHN's legal reporting obligation in the state of Minnesota?¹ Choose the best answer:

A. The PHN has no legal obligation to report if they suspect Angela's behavior is related to the physical abuse, but may choose to do so to protect her welfare.

B. The PHN is legally obligated to report if they suspect Angela's behavior is related to physical abuse.

C. The PHN has no legal obligation to report.

D. The PHN has a legal obligation to report if Angela tells them she is being physically abused by Sam.

During the time the PHN has seen Angela, she has presented with a broken finger, a displaced shoulder, an injured foot, and a laceration on her arm. Because Sam has always been present for the visits, the PHN is unsure of the true nature of the injuries. Today, Angela calls the PHN to come for a prenatal visit, as soon as possible. The PHN arrives and Sam is not present.

6. Which of the following assessment questions is most important for the PHN to ask Angela?

A. "Angela, you have had several injuries these last few months. When I see injuries like these, I become concerned that someone is hurting you. Are you in a relationship with someone who is hurting you?"

B. "Angela, you have had several injuries these last few months. When I see injuries like these, it becomes clear to me that Sam is abusing you. What keeps you in your relationship with Sam during all these years of abuse?"

C. "Angela, you have had several injuries these last few months. When I see injuries like these, I know that it's the best thing for you to leave Sam. How can I convince you that this is what you need to do?"

D. "Angela, you have had several injuries these last few months. When I see injuries like these, it

¹ If you are ever unsure about whether you should report a situation, call your local social service agency and a social worker will help you decide if you should make a report. For more information on mandated reporting for health care professionals, review [Domestic Abuse Laws in Minnesota](#) from the Minnesota House Research Department.

makes me concerned that you are doing things to provoke this abuse. What do you do to make Sam angry?"

- 7. Angela reports Sam has been physically abusing her, but she is not yet willing to leave. What might the PHN discuss with her at this point?**
 - A. Convince Angela to leave Sam immediately.**
 - B. Help Angela develop a personal safety plan.**
 - C. Determine why no one intervened with this family earlier.**
 - D. Meet with Angela and Sam together to try to resolve the conflict in their relationship.**

- 8. What are the elements of a safety plan?²**

A week after the PHN's visit, Angela calls and informs the PHN Sam hurt her again and has threatened to kill her if she leaves. When the PHN asks Angela if she's okay, she says she is fine and just needs to get herself together. She says she will be home at noon and asks the PHN to visit.

- 9. What precautions can the PHN take to ensure their own safety?**
- 10. Find your agency policy on safety during home visiting and discuss this policy with your preceptor.**

The PHN determines it will be safe to visit Angela in her home. When the PHN arrives, Angela states she is afraid, and they decide to call the police.

- 11. What legal responsibility does the police officer have when responding to this call?**
 - A. Unless Angela wants to file charges, the officer is not required to write up the case as an intimate partner violence incident.**
 - B. The officer cannot arrest Sam unless he observes the violent incident himself.**
 - C. The officer's legal responsibility is to make sure Angela is okay.**

- 12. What resources might the PHN refer Angela to at this time?**

- 13. Review the 2016 article *Therapeutic Interventions in Intimate Partner Violence: An Overview* (Condino, V., Tanzilli, A., Speranza, A.M., Lingardi, V.). Is this a valid article to use in your public health practice? Why or why not? How might this article impact your practice as a public health nurse?**

Concepts covered

Mandated reporting, assessment, vulnerable adult, referral resources, non-judgmental care, safety planning, trauma-informed care, evidence-based practice

Additional resources

1. FindLaw. (2018). *Mandatory Reporting of Domestic Violence*. Online: <https://www.findlaw.com/family/domestic-violence/mandatory-reporting-of-domestic-violence.html>.
2. National Domestic Violence Hotline. Victims of Crime Act (VOCA). Online: <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/victims-of-crime-act-voca/>.
3. Minnesota Department of Health. (2016). Sample: Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Screening Algorithm (Decision Tree) for Family Home Visiting. Online: <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/communities/fhv/ipvscreeningalgorithm.pdf>.

² See [Create a Safety Plan](#) from the National Domestic Violence Hotline for further information.

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