Pregnancy following rape

Introduction
A number of SECASA’S clients are mothers of children following rape or are children born following the rape of their birth mother.

SECASA offers support for women who have become pregnant following child sexual assault or adult rape. SECASA receives a number of requests for counselling and support from both girls and women who have found themselves in this position. The stated age of conception ranges from teenage years to early twenties, the youngest being twelve years of age.

A number of women who were themselves conceived from rape, have discovered that their biological father was in fact their uncle, grandfather or a stranger. Up until the mid 1970’s young birth mothers were encouraged by social workers and religious organisations to have their babies put up for adoption. From the 1980’s women have been given more options to decide about the future of their pregnancy following a sexual assault, which may include termination of the pregnancy or support to keep their child.

The gestation period of pregnancy for many women is a time of celebration of their changing body and hopes for the future. For other women who find themselves pregnant following a sexual assault they may feel overwhelmed. For these women reclaiming power and control over their life through information and support is of paramount concern.

Emotional impact
For many women the emotional and psychological impact of rape creates Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and symptoms are often exacerbated when the victim/survivor gives birth. Pregnancy following rape is more likely to lead to inner conflicts for women about deciding whether to keep the child or not. Long term effects may include depression, as many women may blame themselves, and experience feelings of shame and guilt that can then project onto their growing child.

Grief issues surrounding pregnancy following rape may arise in relation to the women’s decision about whether to keep her child or to have a termination.

With the support of family and friends, many women are able to overcome the psychological and emotional trauma and maintain a healthy relationship with their child.

Keeping the child
Over the past decade, silence surrounding sexual assault has continued to be broken. Society's attitudes are now more well informed about the complex nature of the abuse of power in sexual assault and are offering support via non-offending family networks and counselling.

Services available to young girls, women and their non-offending family members and friends include:

- Parenting payment benefits;
- Prenatal classes by experienced midwives;
- Support from counsellors at CASA’S and community health centres;
- Legal Services;
- Twenty-four hour, seven days a week emergency counselling and medical support.

Terminations
In the event of pregnancy resulting from a rape, advice can be obtained via your own general practitioner or doctor attached to a CASA medical service.

Counselling is strongly recommended before a termination, after a termination and at subsequent anniversary times.

Other Supports
Relinquishing mothers: Pro Choice has provided some support for women in the past. Women can actively become involved in their campaigning.

Survivors groups: SECASA regularly runs survivors groups and is interested in facilitating groups for women who have become pregnant following rape and or for their children. For more information contact SECASA.