

The Stuart News

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Domestic violence incidents increase

■ Poor economy blamed for jump in attacks

By Peter Franceschini
Sun Sentinel

Advocates with the three state-certified domestic violence centers in Broward and Palm Beach counties say demand for their services — emergency shelter beds, counseling services and crisis hotline calls — is up for the second year in a row.

And, advocates say, they are seeing a disturbing uptick in the viciousness of some attacks.

“Not only are there more people coming for services, but the incidents that are occurring are more violent and more lethal, and that is disturbing,” said Mary Riedel, president of Women in Distress of Broward County.

The year-over-year numbers, advocates say, point to more domestic abuse incidents taking place during stress-

ful economic times, even if they don't always involve a call to police or an arrest. The domestic homicide rates in Broward and Palm Beach — among the top five in the state in recent years — reflect the far extreme of the violence.

Tough financial times and the resulting stresses on families may be the most significant contributing factor. Job losses, reduced income, falling behind on rent or mortgage payments, credit card bills piling up; money problems easily translate into anxiety, frustration and even rage.

At one shelter in southern Palm Beach County, Aid to Victims of Domestic Abuse, there was a 37 percent jump in the number of people seeking an emergency place to stay, from 276 people to 379. And there was a 56 percent increase in people who received counseling and other services.

“In our shelters, we are seeing a tremendous increase,” said Pam O'Brien, the shelter's president.