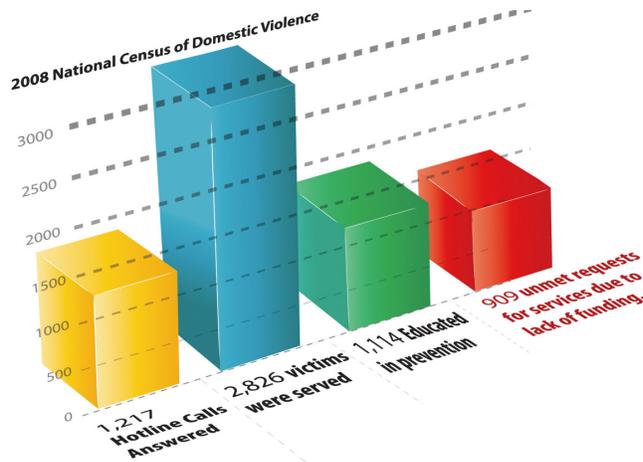


## Recession impacts domestic abuse victims

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With only 158 domestic violence shelter beds available in the Chicagoland area, shelters designated to women and children are filled every night. The lack of available beds often causes people in need of alternative housing to be turned away.



[1]The economic recession has caused a lack of funding among nonprofits that offer services to domestic violence victims and throughout October, which is Domestic Violence Awareness Month, organizations are raising awareness about abuse issues and how the insufficient funding is affecting victims of domestic violence.

"The majority of the time that a survivor of domestic violence is seeking a rest bed from the abuse, she is not going to find any services," said Ana Romero, director of Centralized Training at the Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network. "If you are a man, it is [especially] likely that you won't have any place to go."

The Chicago Metropolitan Battered Women's Network is an organization that provides services to abuse victims and advocates for policy change. This already inadequate service has become even more scarce. Romero said there are only six women and children's shelters that welcome domestic abuse victims in Chicago, which eliminates victim's alternatives when leaving an abusive situation.

"With the state funding cuts and the economy being down, a lot of services have been cut or have totally disappeared," said Kathy Doherty, executive director of Between Friends. "More women are seeking services for themselves and their children, but you have less services out there. We've had some shelters close [because of] the state funding cut and people aren't able to find as much counseling and economic services as they used to be able to find."

Between Friends is a nonprofit organization which helps people with domestic abuse issues. Doherty said that last year the organization helped 9,000 people through its services. However, with a decrease in funding this year, she said it will be more difficult. She also said the Chicago Police Department is responding to about 565 domestic violence-related 911 calls every day, so the need for services is pressing.

"I think the recession makes it much harder [for victims]," Doherty said. "Not only are the resources for women much more nonexistent because of the current economic situation, but on top of that you have someone who is perpetuating the abuse [because they] lose their job or get their salary cut back. In an abusive relationship, when you pile on those additional stressors, it makes for a very explosive environment."

Doherty said the statistics for victims of domestic violence have remained static for many years, but recently the abuse has worsened among the groups of people who are already subjected to regular acts of domestic violence.

"What we are finding is that women are calling in with much more horrific stories than what, unfortunately, they typically have called in with," Doherty said. "They are coming in requesting a lot more services than what we've seen. Although the economy doesn't cause domestic violence, it exacerbates those relationships that already [involve] domestic violence. That's been a real problem."

Jeanne King, a member of the Board of Directors of Partners in Prevention, a domestic violence counseling and advocacy organization, said violence often is the result when the abusers feel like

they are losing control, so if there are financial problems, the violence could escalate.

"Whether the economy is good or bad, the victim is usually financially controlled as well," King said. "This heightens the interaction of dependency between the two parties. With a bad economy, it creates a greater strain. The perpetrator will have a greater sense of uncertainty."

Cory Ryan, the executive director for Connections for Abused Women and their Children, an agency that provides advocacy, counseling and shelter to abuse victims, said they have received 37 percent more hotline calls, which women call for more information about services or counseling, than this time last year. She said the only thing that has changed during the past year is the state of the economy.

"We worked with a woman to get an order of protection against her husband, but when she went back to court to extend the order of protection, she wasn't sure how she and her children were going to survive without the financial support of her husband," Doherty said. "That is often a concern and it's even more of a concern now. She had been laid off from her job and couldn't keep up with the mortgage and utility payments."

Doherty said this is a typical situation of victims because their abuser usually has control of their finances, so financial insecurities make leaving the violent situation even more difficult for the victim.

Ryan said awareness of domestic violence and its consequences are vital to ending the cycle of abuse because it is more likely for someone who lives in a violent home to become an abuser later in life. She said awareness and education is especially vital now because the economic crisis is making the abuse worse.

If you or someone you know is in an abusive relationship or wants to get more information about characteristics of domestic violence relationships, visit [EndDomesticAbuse.org](http://EndDomesticAbuse.org).

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