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## Official: Domestic violence resources drying up; victims are going unhelped

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Two-hundred and forty-two domestic violence victims in Pennsylvania found themselves without any help, due to a lack of funds and personnel, just one more effect of the nation's current economic crisis.

That number — as well as 8,927 unmet requests nationwide — was discovered during a single day census study of the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV).

This single day study took place on Sept. 17, before the current economic crisis.

With a worsening economy, the number of Pennsylvanians needing help is likely to rise, said Peg Dierkers, executive director of the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV). Though an empty bank account and unemployment don't cause domestic violence, the added stressful circumstances may exacerbate and escalate situations where domestic violence is already a factor, Dierkers

said in a prepared statement.

Domestic violence programs and shelters are being affected by a trio of economic factors, cuts in federal funding, increased demands for services and decreased private donations as so many Americans lose their jobs or see a downturn in their personal finances, according to the NNEDV.

During the study, many programs reported a lack of resources. With a lack of funds, there is a lack of services to victims.

"The current reality of our nation's economy has severely affected domestic violence programs and shelters, forcing draconian cuts in services and staff lay-offs at a time when more victims are coming forward for assistance. For the first time in decades, many shelters may have to close their doors by years' end," said Sue Else, president of the NNEDV.

Due to funds being cut, many shelters are lacking in personnel. Though lay-offs have not occurred at Susquehanna Valley Women's in Transition (SVWIT), several key positions have yet to be filled after vacancies.

Those positions are related to drug and alcohol counseling and legal advocacy. It is always a struggle at SVWIT and the organization relies on donations and the generosity of the public, said Kim Rogers, Northumberland County child advocate.

More people are looking for and needing services, said DiAnn Baxley, CEO of SVWIT. During the months of October and December, SVWIT was forced to refer women to other shelters because they were at capacity, Baxley said. There is an increase in legal needs with more and more protection from abuse requests.

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Baxley said many sister programs are feeling the same crunch. Although funds have not yet been cut, Baxley said it is only a matter of time.

#### 'Snap shot' study

Sixty-one Pennsylvania programs participated in the census that captures a "snapshot of domestic violence in America." Nationwide 60,000 people were assisted by domestic violence programs on that single day in September.

In a single day, one person called a domestic violence hotline every two minutes in Pennsylvania.

Also in one day, 1,132 people found refuge and safety in an emergency shelter. Another 1,344 individuals were seeking legal representation for protection from abuse and other family law matters.

On that day a woman sought protection from her ex-husband who had been released on parole after being in jail for nine years. When asked by a judge if she was still afraid, she replied, "The only reason I am here is because his gun jammed."

On that day the staff from a domestic violence program attended the funeral of a woman who had been killed by her husband.

On that day a woman decided to stay with her abuser because her only other choice was to be homeless.

#### 'Fear' of the numbers

Since the census, the number of services being requested has risen, said Judy Yupcavage, director of communications for the PCADV.

Though Yupcavage was reluctant to say the organization predicts the number to continue to rise, she said, "we fear it." There are no additional monies from the state and federal levels for this increasing need for service, Yupcavage said, and the programs are always looking for stable and reliable funding.

Funding cuts in the past few years have had significant impact on programs' ability to meet victims' needs, the survey said.

The Victims of Crime Act (VOCA), a federal grant program funded entirely by fines and penalties paid by offenders and does not include any taxpayer dollars, has been capped by congress. VOCA grants are key funding sources for programs that directly assist victims, the NNEDV reported. Across the country, thousands of community programs rely on VOCA funding to serve more than four million victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes. In the last year, the VOCA cap has been cut by \$35 million; therefore, VOCA assistance grants are \$107 million less than they were two years ago.

PCADV will continue to push for a one-time lift of the VOCA fund to \$1 billion. The money in the account exceeds \$2 billion. Having the one-time release of funds would allow programs to get back on their feet and rehire lost staff.

"There is plenty there and the need is enormous. The need is urgent," Yupcavage said.

Seventy-eight percent of identified domestic violence programs in the United States and Territories, or 1,553 out of 2,000 programs, participated in the census.

Other census results from those participating include:

60,799 victims were served in one day.

30,433 domestic violence victims found refuge in emergency shelters.

30,366 adults and children received non-residential assistance and services, including counseling, legal advocacy and children's support groups.

21,683 hotline calls were answered. More than 14 calls every minute.

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8,927 unmet service requests in one day. More than 50 percent of those needed emergency housing.

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