

Restraining order requests rise

Mara Stine
Oregon Daily Emerald

A local woman was thrown five feet before her husband grabbed her hair, forcing her head back, and held a knife to her throat.

"He let my head go and held the knife to my chin and then to my right cheekbone and said he would kill me," she wrote in her request for a restraining order against him.

This is one of the many stories of domestic violence that unfolds as people try to get the court's help in keeping an abusive person out of their lives.

Some consider restraining orders to be rare, a last resort to stop abuse, but Lane County civil court records show that requests for restraining orders made during the first three months of this year have more than tripled since the same three-month period four years ago.

From January to March of 1991, 122 requests were made, compared to 415 made from January to March of this year, according to statistics compiled by the Oregon Department of Justice.

The statistics, however, do not document whether domestic violence is increasing, or if it is

merely being reported more often. Gates said abuse is increasing because more abusers are frustrated and feel out of control due to a struggling economy and high unemployment rates.

"These feelings are taken out violently on those smaller than them, usually women and children," he said.

Jennifer Beach, assistant director for Womenspace in Eugene, agreed with Gates that abuse is increasing.

"Those who are using our crisis line and shelter are reporting more serious physical violence than in the past," she said.

In our society, she said, men are taught to be violent. She cited an old English law that allowed men to beat their wives as long as the stick used was not thicker than the abuser's thumb.

Gates said women are becoming more aware of available resources and are more willing to use them than in the past.

"Women are talking about domestic violence and support services more because they are finally being told it's not their fault," Gates said.

People are also learning that it's not just poor, black women who are abused, Beach said, citing the Nicole Brown murder in June 1994 as an example. Her ex-

husband, O.J. Simpson, is on trial for the crime.

"This case more than anything has increased awareness," Beach said, explaining that mainstream America has realized that if an upper-class woman with money and options can be stuck in a cycle of domestic violence, it can happen to anyone.

The murder also served as a rude awakening for local battered women, she said.

Beach said the crisis line, which before the murder received approximately seven calls a day, was suddenly bombarded with 30 after it.

"A large number of people called, scared out of their minds that they would end up dead," she said, adding that the murder set a trend for abusers who started telling their victims "I'll do you like Simpson" or "You think what Nicole got was bad?"

She said crisis line calls have since decreased but not to the level received before the Simpson case.

In addition, a second shelter was opened for three months after the murder to meet the increased demand for services.

Beach also said the center received another boost in service demands during the first week of O.J. Simpson's trial.

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