

Living

EQ-1989- SC County

Assaults against women triple

By CANDACE ATKINS
STAFF WRITER

WOMEN'S CRISIS Support staff members have seen some of the ugliest results of the Oct. 17 earthquake. In the weeks following the disaster, their telephones rang off the hook with reports of sexual abuse.

"For two months after, the number of sexual assaults tripled in this county," Sarah Lively, the organization's executive director, said. "We're absolutely certain this was directly tied to the earthquake."

The utter lack of control over

doors, particularly at night.

That warning has been underscored recently by two local murders in two weeks — on Dec. 21, Elaine Jaquez was strangled, allegedly by her common-law husband, and on New Year's Eve, Joan Marie Cross was beaten to death, allegedly by her husband.

"These homicides are unprecedented locally," Lively said. "It's outrageous."

Lively said sexual assault reports to Women's Crisis Support have tapered off slightly, but seem to have been replaced by reports of physical battering.

There have been sharp increases in sexual assaults, including stranger rape, gang rape, adolescent rape and acquaintance rape. Local women, Lively said, should be aware of the danger.

life events, Lively said, can spur people to try negative ways to assert their power. Men, she said, may bully or abuse women and children just because women and children are smaller and perceived as less powerful. The stress of the holidays, a notorious time for increased violence, has added to an already volatile situation for local women.

There have been sharp increases in sexual assaults, including stranger rape, gang rape, adolescent rape and acquaintance rape. Local women, Lively said, should be aware of the danger. Women's Crisis Support has issued a public announcement cautioning women that violence against local females has hit an all-time high, and they should be especially careful when alone out-

The population at the crisis safe house has increased, she said:

"Some of our cases are more serious or severe (than before the earthquake)," she said. "There have been more severe beatings."

There also seems to be increased chemical abuse associated with violence, Lively said. Her agency's drug and alcohol abuse program has had an increase in clients, and chemical abuse has played a part in a number of violent cases.

But there may be a positive side, Lively said. More women have taken out restraining orders against abusive men, she said, and staff members believe that women have recognized and reported abuse more since the earthquake. Even though the number of assaults has increased, staff members at



Diane Varni

Sara Lively, of Women's Crisis Support.

Women's Crisis Support think women are also more willing to report it.

Lively said this trend could be women attempting to regain some control over their lives in response to the October disaster. She sees the increased recognition of battering as a good sign in the midst of what she calls "a dreadful situation."

"But I'm not breathing a sigh of relief," Lively said. "We estimate for every one rape reported, 10 go unreported."

Women's Crisis Support operates a crisis line 24 hours a day at 728-2295. Fenix Family Alcoholism Services, in cooperation with Women's Crisis Support, also has a hot line at 722-4532.