

Victims told to reach out

Kelly Robinson

POLICE, counsellors and the government are preparing for a surge in domestic violence during the Christmas holidays and are urging victims to reach out for help.

The number of people affected by domestic violence spikes every holiday season due to factors such as alcohol and unresolved family issues.

Last year, the number of reported domestic violence cases across NSW rose by more than 200 incidents from November to December.

In November 2009, there were about 2279 reports of domestic violence-related assault, while in December it jumped to 2454 reports and again in January to 2592.

Relationship counsellor Christine Bennett, who works out of Mona Vale and Mosman, said emotions often ran high over Christmas.

"People get together when they'd normally be at work and there is more opportunity for those emotions to run over and more opportunity for things to go wrong," she said. "Christmas also brings with it a lot of unresolved family issues."

Ms Bennett said alcohol was

another contributing factor.

"It certainly fuels the fire," she said. "Alcohol tends to wipe out the capacity of the frontal lobe and causes people to act irrationally."

NSW Community Services Minister Linda Burney urged victims to reach out for help.

"The combination of alcohol, family tensions and financial worries can trigger a rise in abuse at this time," she said. "I urge women facing violence at home to not suffer in silence this Christmas."

NSW Police Minister Michael Daley said police domestic violence liaison officers, were preparing for a spike in calls over the Christmas-New Year period.

"By reporting to police, victims can gain protection through apprehended violence orders and remain safely in their own homes, if this is an option," he said. "Domestic violence is a crime which often occurs behind closed doors. It is not, and will never be, tolerated in NSW."

The NSW Community Services domestic violence help line is 1800 65 64 63 and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.