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| **Officer Safety Corner: Officer Safety in Domestic Violence Responses** |
| *By Mark Wynn, Nashville, Tennessee, Police Department, Lieutenant (Retired) and National and International Law Enforcement Trainer and Consultant on Violence Against Women and Faculty for IACP’s National Law Enforcement Leadership Initiative on Violence Against Women*Patrolman Robert T. Frazier was shot and killed on April 30, 1875, while attempting to arrest Joe Reed for assaulting his wife. He was the first officer killed in the line of duty from the Nashville Police Department; unfortunately, he would not be the last. While investigating this domestic violence call, Officer Frazier told Reed he was being sent to the workhouse. Reed refused to go and pulled a small pistol from his pocket. He shot Patrolman Frazier, killing him. Reed fled the scene, but was arrested several minutes later.[1](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#1)Since that time, over 138 years later, have law enforcement leaders done enough to educate young officers in understanding the connection between domestic violence and officers’ personal safety?Personal experience and studies show that most domestic violence homicides occur while victims are attempting to leave or after they have left an abusive relationship. Additionally, of those victims, 76 percent of femicide cases involved at least one episode of stalking within 12 months prior to the murder and 85 percent of attempted femicide cases involved one episode of stalking within that same period.[2](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#2)All law enforcement officers have felt extraordinary frustration responding to domestic violence calls when an individual does not leave an abusive relationship. Officers give their best advice, but don’t always understand that leaving is often the most dangerous time for the victim and the officer. Leaving is not an event; it is a complex process.Sadly, losing friends who are killed responding to domestic violence calls can help officers focus on what is essential to survival and can aid in recognizing the safety gaps for victims and officers. With increasing frequency, it’s not just a single officer, but multiple officers who are killed. In Birmingham, Alabama, three were killed; Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, three more; in Pleasanton and Odessa, Texas, six total fellow officers were gunned down. All of these officers were responding to domestic violence calls. Most often the weapon of choice is the high-power, high-capacity rifle which can defeat normalpatrol armor.Clearly, not all domestic violence calls result in harm to the responding officer, so the question that must be asked is what happens just before that critical break point, *before* a victim is harmed and an officer is killed responding to a domestic violence call? An understanding of a typical sequence of events when responding to such a call can help answer this question. An officer picks up the call from dispatch, who relays that this is the sixth call from the same address that month. The frustrated officer confirms that she or he is very familiar with this family, and if no cars are available, the officer will “take care of it” him or herself. As the officer moves headlong into a potentially deadly situation, has she or he examined why there have been so many calls at this home and, more importantly, has the victim or the officer considered that the frequency of calls may indicate an escalation in the violence? As an Arizona officer related, “I should have called for backup and not approached the offender alone; I thought I knew him. I’d been there many times before, so I lowered my guard and that’s when he stabbed me.”Case analysis reveals that domestic violence offenders use more force when they believe they are losing control. If the responding officer is not taking this fact into consideration, the officer is at an increased level of danger.Predictions based on tested and reliable danger assessment protocols can be critical for the first responder. What is known about domestic violence offenders is that they will actively pose a threat to responding officers and fight to defend what they often believe they are entitled to do and how they are entitled to behave. In many cases, perpetrators have been raised in a culture of male privilege that has shaped their values and beliefs, creating a mind-set of ownership of a loved one and a lack of personal accountability.Evidence of this active resistance was in full view on February 24, 2005, when David Hernandez Arroyo, Sr., opened fire on his ex-wife and son in front of the Smith County Courthouse in Tyler, Texas. Arroyo then engaged police and court officers in a shootout over a custody issue. Are officers trained to understand this type of deadly behavior? If not, then there is more to be done in keeping them and the communities they protect safe. There are several steps that can be taken to strengthen support of victims and officers.Strong collaborations and regular communication with domestic and sexual violence advocates can help assess the danger posed by perpetrators. Smart policing requires that the adversarial relationship that often exists between the advocacy and police communities must end. Experience demonstrates that many of the difficulties seen across the United States with the advocate-police relationship develop from a lack of understanding of the difficulties in the work each other does. Mending and maintaining this connection is the immediate responsibility of agency and organization leadership. Many advocates have walked in the shoes of the victim. They have kept victims alive for decades with and without police assistance. They deserve respect and have much to teach law enforcement agencies and officers.A great example of what the advocacy community can teach law enforcement can be found in the “Power and Control Wheel.”[3](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#3) The Power and Control Wheel was created in 1984 by staff at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth, Minnesota, and it has since been validated worldwide. It was designed to illustrate the tactics perpetrators use against victims. It has been discovered that the Power and Control Wheel also teaches us tactics that an offender uses to manipulate and control responding officers. The perpetrator will often use threats with the victim to control a situation. Law enforcement officers often encounter the same tactics, including coercion and intimidation. Perpetrators will minimize, deny, or blame the victim for the violence that occurred when police arrive on scene as they would with the victim to shift accountability. Isolation is used to keep the victim from the officers, the same way the victim is kept from family, friends, or other support. Police officers have also witnessed children being forced to make false statements or hold back information about what has occurred. And, unfortunately, officers often face resistance, are assaulted, and are killed when responding to domestic violence calls. The experience of an officer can have striking similarities to the experience of the victim. Officers need to be trained on these behaviors and realities in order to best approach and respond to each situation.There are many examples of efforts to increase officer and victim safety throughout the United States. Three agencies, in particular, have implemented effective tactics: South Portland, Portland, and Westbrook Police Departments in Maine.[4](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#4) These agencies have collaborated with Family Crisis Services to create the Enhanced Police Intervention Collaboration (EPIC). Officers and advocates work together by visiting with the victim days after the arrest to assist the victim through the court system and conduct risk assessments to ensure continued support and protection. This is a force multiplier every agency in the United States should consider. An additional promising practice can be found in the Salem Police Department (Oregon) where the leaders have instituted a first responder’s domestic violence checklist.[5](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#5) This checklist includes risk assessment, questions regarding the occurrence of strangulation, and “Before You Leave the Scene” reminders that include investigative tips and interviewing information.Visionary leaders understand officers will rise to the level of their training. In order for first responders to meet the task, they must receive continued meaningful, comprehensive, and effective training throughout their careers. A great training curriculum has been used for many years at the Tennessee Law Enforcement Academy in Donelson, Tennessee.[6](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#6) Each year it offers a POST-certified 40-hour training course on Domestic and Sexual Assault Intervention.

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| Police leaders who are looking to strengthen their agency’s response to violence against women crimes and improve officer safety can contact the IACP to receive more information about these programs or visit:[www.theiacp.org/VAWLeadership](http://www.theiacp.org/VAWLeadership). |

The national standard of responding to a domestic violence call has changed since the 1970s.[7](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#7) In those years, officers were taught to respond, mediate, send the offender away, and leave as soon as possible—without making a report. Today’s progressive agencies are assessing lethality, danger, and risk of the victims of domestic violence by employing methods such as the Lethality Assessment Program (LAP) and the Ontario Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (ODARA).[8](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#8) LAP is currently being used throughout the state of Maryland, and officers in Maine in the next year will be trained in and use ODARA statewide. These tested methods have saved the lives of victims and likely officers as well. This is intelligence-led policing, and it is the future for first responders.[9](http://www.policechiefmagazine.org/magazine/index.cfm?fuseaction=display&article_id=3200&issue_id=122013#9)The profession’s response to domestic violence transformed in the 1980s as the IACP helped police chiefs write, implement, and evaluate the first real departmental domestic violence policies. That transformation continues today with the IACP’s National Law Enforcement Leadership Institute on Violence Against Women and the National Law Enforcement First-Line Supervisor Training on Violence Against Women. These two programs employ experienced leaders and thinkers in the field of violence against women prevention and address critical and complex issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, and officer-involved domestic violence. Law enforcement leaders must ask themselves “Is my concern for the safety of domestic violence victims and for my officers fully reflected in my agency’s policies and practices?” and “Does the work of my officers reflect these standards?” Changing the culture to ensure officer and victim safety is a great way to honor Robert T. Frazier and many others who have made the ultimate sacrifice. ♦**Notes:**1ODMP, “Officer Down Memorial Page,” Patrolman Robert T. Frazier, <http://www.odmp.org/officer/17925-patrolman-robert-t-frazier> (accessed November 14, 2013).2Patricia Tjaden and Nancy Thoenne, *Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence, and Consequences of Violence Against Women: Findings From the National Violence Against Women Survey* (U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice November 2000),[https://](https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf)[www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/183781.pdf) (accessed November 14, 2013); Allie Gasgreen, “The Seriousness of Stalking,” Inside Higher Ed. October 8, 2012, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/10/08/stalking-campuses-major-issue-expert-says-clery-event> (accessed November 14, 2013).3Domestic Abuse Intervention Program, “Power and Control Wheel,” <http://www.theduluthmodel.org/pdf/PowerandControl.pdf> (accessed November 14, 2013).4South Portland Police Department, South Portland, Maine, “Family Crisis Services,”[www.familycrisis.org](http://www.familycrisis.org/) (accessed November 14, 2013). For more information, contact jen\_s@familycrsis.org or call (207) 712-8476.5Salem, Oregon, Police Department “Domestic Violence Checklist,” <http://www.markwynn.com/resources/report-forms>. Once you get the reports form page it is listed with others.6“Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Interdiction,” used at the Tennessee Law Enforcement Academy, <http://www.markwynn.com/resources/lesson-plans> (accessed November 14, 2013).7“Police Officer Safety at Domestic Disturbances–1970s – Tips and Tricks to Remain Safe,” YouTube video, 20:37, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EZUgpGUfTF8> (accessed November 14, 2013). This video describes how officers should approach a house and remain safe during domestic violence episodes in the 1970s. The mishandling of domestic disturbance calls accounted for 20 percent of all police fatalities at that time. The important steps of the who, what, where, when, and how of any complaint show why it's important to get the facts, so the officer answering the call can exercise caution, yet deal with the victim with compassionate authority.8“Lethality Assessment for First Responders,” Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, <http://mnadv.org/lethality> (accessed November 14, 2013); The Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment (ODARA), a procedure to predict future wife assaults, was developed by the Ontario Provincial Police and the Ontario Ministry of Health and can be accessed via this link [http://www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org/) (accessed November 14, 2013).9IACP Training Key #653, “Domestic Violence Risk Assessment,” purchasing information is available at <http://www.theiacp.org/tabid/452/Default.aspx> (accessed November 14, 2013).Please cite as:Mark Wynn, “Officer Safety in Domestic Violence Responses,” Officer Safety Corner, *The Police Chief* 80 (December 2013): 10–11. |