Seminar at Newman to offer tools on how to respond to domestic violence

BY STAN FINGER - THE WICHITA EAGLE - 01/25/2015 11:44 AM

More than 200 law enforcement officers and victim advocates from central Kansas will converge Tuesday on Wichita to learn how to more effectively respond to family violence.

Mark Wynn, a former Sedgwick County sheriff’s deputy who has become a nationally known speaker on domestic violence, will be the keynote speaker at a daylong conference hosted by StepStone at Newman University.

“When you stand back in law enforcement and you look at most of the crime committed in society, it’s committed against women,” said Wynn, who left Wichita for Nashville, where he spent more than 20 years on the force.

Whether it’s human trafficking, sexual assaults or domestic violence, he said, women are most commonly the victims. Often, the abuse isn’t evident to the naked eye.

“It’s not always the black eye you see on the Lifetime Channel,” said Dung Kimble, program director at StepStone. “It’s a lot more about power and control.”

The wounds from verbal abuse, the daily putdowns and chronic criticism, “you carry them with you your whole, entire life,” she said.

StepStone, a nonprofit, provides counseling and shelter for up to two years to women and children, who are victims of abuse.

Front-line officers from more than 10 law enforcement agencies from around central Kansas will learn effective on-scene investigation techniques, Kimble said. That includes listening for terms or words that indicate someone is exerting control or manipulation over another person.

Law enforcement officers and victim advocates will learn about the importance of collaboration and the results of recent studies on how domestic violence affects families.

“A lot of it is inter-generational violence,” said Wynn, the keynote speaker. “It’s not about alcohol or stress or mental illness. It’s a choice. You choose to do it.”

Authorities have long held that calls concerning domestic violence are among the most dangerous any law enforcement officer handles because of their unpredictability and the fact that abusers are lashing out at the person eliminating their target.

Abusers who commit violence against law enforcement officers “are people who are still fighting ... to be oppressive,” Wynn said.

The results of numerous recent studies may prompt a change in how the court system handles families embroiled in domestic violence, Wynn said.

“The exposure to the violence in the family has some lifelong impacts on children – right down to the brain development of children five to six months old,” he said.

As grim as much of what he’ll discuss Tuesday is, Wynn said, he’ll bring some promising news, too.

“There’s some transformation happening with police departments around the country,” he said. “Law enforcement has changed more than any other profession that deals with these crimes over the past 15 to 20 years.”

While studies have shown only about 17 percent of all sexual assaults are reported, Wynn said, when officers in Salem, Ore., began asking victims of domestic violence if they had been the victim of sexual assault as well, the answer was “yes” 70 percent of the time.

Victims advocates “have known this forever,” he said. “Along with violence in families, sexual assault is pretty high.”

Several cities that have focused on early intervention and assistance in domestic violence cases have seen homicides from domestic violence drop significantly.

“It takes focus,” Wynn said. “You’ve got to change priorities.

“I’m excited about it.”

For ages, he said, there was a saying in law enforcement circles that homicide was the only crime you can’t prevent.

“That’s being proved wrong now,” he said.

The conference for law enforcement officers is made possible by a $10,000 grant from Verizon Wireless.

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