The Wichita Eagle [Editorials](http://www.kansas.com/opinion/editorials/)

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Domestic violence deaths an unacceptable tragedy



There already have been six domestic violence homicides in Wichita this year.

One domestic violence homicide is an unacceptable tragedy even in populous Wichita. But six already this year, compared with three for all of 2014 and one in 2013?

That’s troubling evidence of a need for more intervention and prevention as well as awareness about a threat to public safety that affects men and women of all ethnicities and income levels.

If “this is a crime of power and control,” as Nashville-based consultant and former Sedgwick County sheriff’s deputy Mark Wynn said in the Sunday Eagle, would-be victims need to be empowered to get out of harm’s way.

Wynn praised Wichita for its shelters for domestic violence victims. But in light of 2015 so far, it’s hard not to worry about whether capacity and resources are up to the demand.

The YMCA Women’s Crisis Center, which has a 22-bed shelter, turned away 680 women and children last year, up from 550 in 2013. And this year Catholic Charities’ 40-room Harbor House has turned away an average of 105 women and children a month, including 140 in July.

It’s of further concern that Harbor House, seeing a dramatic increase in the intensity of the violence faced by women in the community, now finds itself sheltering only the “worst of the worst” cases – those “in imminent danger from their abuser,” as director Joyce Mahoney put it.

As Mahoney noted, more individuals may be seeking shelter because they are more willing and able to try to escape abusive relationships. If so, that’s an improvement over the days when many victims felt they had no options but to stay.

To Catholic Charities’ credit, it anticipates being able to help more children and women who have been victims of domestic violence, as well as homeless families, at its new bridge housing facility called the Mount later this year.

The implementation of body-worn cameras for all Wichita police officers by the end of the year also holds promise in fighting domestic violence. The technology has proved to be a potent eyewitness in such cases around the country, especially when victims are unwilling to testify.

There’s no guarantee the community could have saved the six victims of domestic violence of 2015 so far, of course. And the blame for these crimes belongs to the perpetrators. It should not be too much to expect people to avoid allowing their emotions to escalate to violence, let alone the step of taking someone’s life.

But those individuals whose relationships are at risk of going dangerously wrong need to know how to find help, and not be afraid to seek it. When they do, the providers need to have the funding and ability to offer them safe haven, counseling or other help.

*For the editorial board, Rhonda Holman*

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