

Written by: WRAP Staff

The month of May includes National Police Week and National EMS Week. WRAP (WoMen's Rural Advocacy Programs, Inc.) would like to recognize and thank all Law Enforcement and Emergency Medical Service Responders! The jobs of those in law enforcement and EMS are never easy and can be extremely dangerous. The roles of both law enforcement and EMS can be scary and unsafe, especially when responding to a domestic violence call.

Many people often think of what can happen to the victim during a domestic violence call, and there is a significant threat of danger to the victim, but there is also a threat of danger to any responding agency including police officers and EMS. Domestic violence calls are much different than any other type of 911 call. The deep-rooted difficulties of domestic violence situations, especially recurring ones, can be stressful for those responding.

Experts in the field of domestic violence who work with first responders, report that it is common for suspects and victims to attempt to attack each other during the call or investigation, usually when they hear what the other is telling the first responders. If law enforcement officers find cause for an arrest, there is undoubtedly a risk of harm when attempting to take the suspect into custody.

Domestic violence calls are further atypical because victims often attack officers upon seeing their loved ones being taken into custody. People often ask, why would a victim come to the defense of their abuser? In a lot of cases, victims "defend" their abusers, but it is not really a defense of them or their behavior. It is often nothing more than a survival technique. "If I admit how bad it is, my partner will become angry, if my partner becomes angry, they will beat me or threaten to hurt someone that I love, therefore, it's safer to deny what's happening and defend." When it gets to a certain point in the relationship, this type of response can be a reflex.

Beyond the physical risks of leaving an abusive situation, there are countless other reasons why people may "defend" their abuser and/or stay in their relationships. Fear, normalized abuse, shame, intimidation, low self-esteem, lack of resources, immigration status, cultural or religious beliefs, children and/or love may play a part in why someone may feel they need to stay in an unsafe or violent relationship.

There is a threat for first responders to be attacked, yelled at, or harmed when they respond to any call, but that threat increases when responding to a domestic violence call. Law enforcement and EMS must take extreme precautions when responding to a domestic call. Like most of the calls that first responders get called to, they often do not know if there are any weapons involved.

We have seen the dangers of this in Minnesota, most recently with Pope County Deputy Josh Owen. He was shot and killed on his 44th birthday, April 15th, while responding to a domestic violence call. His story shows how dangerous these types of calls can be to responding agencies and that this type of violence can happen anywhere.

Domestic violence does not only affect the victim but friends, family, and the community. Domestic violence causes a ripple effect and although we do not always see the outward effects of domestic violence they still occur. Domestic violence happens even in rural and small-town areas. Domestic violence takes place in all communities, in all areas, states, and countries.

To learn more about domestic violence, feel free to reach out to WRAP and ask about volunteer opportunities or invite a WRAP staff person to come and speak to community groups or organizations.

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No matter the circumstances, survivors deserve to be supported in their decision-making and empowered to reclaim control over their own lives. If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, there are resources available to just talk to through viable options. WRAP offers free and confidential services to those that live in Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, and Yellow Medicine Counties and can be reached at 800-639-2350. For those that live outside of that service area, please call Day One for Minnesota resources at 866-223-1111 or the national hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233).