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Domestic-disturbance calls are the deadliest for officers

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It can be one of the most dangerous parts of a police officer's job.

Handling domestic-violence calls, where heated emotions and unpredictability often dominate, can quickly become dangerous and deadly.

"These men are dangerous and angry, and their objective is to maintain control of their victims," said Darlene Greene, executive director of the Grand Prairie-based Ina Mae Greene Foundation, which works to help domestic-violence victims. "They don't care who gets hurt. They don't care who they kill -- wives, children, police officers. Their objective is to maintain control. If they feel like they are losing control ... anyone around is in danger."

Late Tuesday, Arlington police officer Jillian Michelle Smith went to an apartment complex to gather information from Kimberly Deshay Carter, who wanted to report an assault by her ex-boyfriend, Barnes Samuel Nettles.

As Smith gathered the information, Nettles returned to the apartment, ultimately killing Smith -- as she protected an 11-year-old from shots he fired -- as well as Carter and himself.

Last year, more officers nationwide were shot while answering domestic-disturbance calls than any other type of call, according to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund.

"Responding to domestic-disturbance calls proved to be particularly dangerous for America's law enforcement officers," the 2009 report said.

This year, before Tuesday's shooting, five officers were killed when responding to domestic-violence calls, down from 12 last year, according to the report.

"Domestic-violence calls are extremely dangerous," said Tod Burke, a former Maryland police officer and criminal justice professor at Radford University in Virginia. "You're entering someone else's territory ... and there's heated emotions."

That's why officers are traditionally trained in what could happen before they enter the situation.

Many police departments, including Fort Worth and Dallas, normally send two officers to respond to domestic-violence calls, although the lead officer may have the discretion to call off the second officer if the situation seems calm, officers said.

In Dallas, "typically, when the suspect is believed to be around, it's a two-officer call," said Lt. C.L. Williams, a Dallas police spokesman. "If it's stable, and it looks like he's gone, many agencies will make it a one-person call."

The Arlington shooting "may cause a lot of police administrators ... to reconsider just allowing one officer on a call," he said.

In the Arlington case, officers were told that Carter wanted to make a police report about an assault. If an active domestic-violence incident had been going on, more than one officer would have been sent, Arlington police spokeswoman Tiara Richard said.

"This turned into a horrible situation," Burke said.

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