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Woman Dies 2 Days after Being Shot; Husband Faces Charge of First-Degree Murder

By Javier Erik Olvera, Rocky Mountain News

An Aurora woman, allegedly shot by her husband shortly after police left their house, died late Tuesday after undergoing surgery to preserve her organs for possible transplants.

In a brief statement Wednesday, 48-year-old Lorraine Johnson's family asked for privacy as they mourn "the death of our beloved mother and grandmother."

Eddie Johnson, 45, faces a first-degree murder charge in connection with the Sunday-evening shooting that has prompted police officials to review the decisions by officers to leave after the initial call.

A preliminary analysis shows the two officers, whose names weren't released, followed procedures when they defused the argument and left the house, said Aurora Interim Police Chief Terry Jones.

"The officers did not have probable cause to make an arrest at that time because there was no physical altercation," said Jones.

It's unclear whether 911 dispatchers informed the two officers that there had been 19 other calls – which varied from troubled teenagers to two calls for domestic violence – from the South Ironton Street house since 1999.

Jones said there's no way for dispatchers to immediately know such information unless an address has been flagged as a "hazard" – something that he added is rare in most domestic violence calls.

Dispatchers, Jones said, would have had to manually check to determine if there had been any other calls for help from the address.

"I find that to be very troubling," said Randy Saucedo, of the Colorado Coalition Against Domestic Violence. "Given the history at this address, a higher level of intervention should have occurred."

Saucedo said most cities across the state have a dispatch system where repeated calls from an address pop up so police are aware of what they may be up against before they arrive.

Such systems also give police officers information that can be useful when they talk to domestic violence victims and their alleged attackers, Saucedo said.

For example, officers should have known there was a gun in the Johnson house and could have asked the woman if she wanted them to remove it for a short time given her husband's history, Saucedo said.

On Sept. 7, 2003, Aurora police documented Lorraine Johnson's injuries after arresting Eddie Johnson on suspicion of assault and battery charges.

Lorraine Johnson said her husband hit her repeatedly in the head and face for standing in front of a closet where he stored a 9 mm handgun, a police report says.

Three months later, in Aurora Municipal Court, domestic violence charges were dropped and assault charges against Eddie Johnson were dismissed.

The court also ordered that the gun, a Beretta 9 mm, be handed over to Eddie Johnson's attorney so he could sell it and give the money back to his client.

Aurora Deputy City Attorney George Zierk said the case was handled in municipal court instead of county court because it didn't involve serious bodily injury – such as broken bones – to justify a felony charge.

Police said a different gun was used in the shooting Sunday, which was committed about an hour after Lorraine Johnson's 6:20 p.m. call to 911 to report an argument with her husband.

The officers went to the house, talked to the couple for at least 30 minutes and then left without making an arrest because there were no signs of abuse, Jones said.

About 7:20 p.m., the same officers responded to the scene – this time with Lorraine Johnson lying in her front yard with a gunshot in the head.

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