

Victim had backed off violence complaint

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Joyce Hoskins told parole officers Nov. 9 that she no longer wanted Gradie Rhodes barred from contacting her despite having called Wilmington police a day earlier about a domestic disturbance involving him.

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Less than a month later, the 47-year old Hoskins was fatally shot at her apartment at 1002 Grace St. That same morning, Sunday, Rhodes turned himself in to authorities and was charged with first-degree murder. He's being held at the New Hanover County jail without the possibility of bail.

If Hoskins had proceeded with the domestic violence complaint, Rhodes might have been back in prison and Hoskins might still be alive, officials with the N.C. Division of Community Corrections said.

But domestic violence advocates say women often have been threatened by their abusers and are afraid of repercussions, which prevents them from continuing to pursue legal remedies.

Hoskins had tried to file for domestic violence protective orders against Rhodes twice and had reported domestic disturbances to the police. She didn't go to the hearings, or trials, and the protective orders were dismissed.

"Our office is in a very difficult position," said Robert Lee Guy, division director. "Had she followed through, then that would have given us a lot stiffer violations to report to the parole commission."

Rhodes was paroled in March after serving more than 16 years in prison for second-

degree murder. He was convicted of shooting his ex-girlfriend and mother of his 2-year-old son in 1989.

Guy said parole is taken seriously and supervising officers are doing their best to keep an eye on offenders.

At the time of Hoskins's slaying, "Rhodes was employed, in treatment programs and not residing with the victim, at least not according to our knowledge," he said.

Hoskins and Rhodes have a 29-year-old daughter and a 24-year-old son together. Although their children say they were married a few years ago, no records back that up.

Rhodes had been placed under house arrest in May because he missed curfews and a couple of meetings with parole officers. He also left the county without permission and got a speeding ticket.

In June, while still under house arrest, Rhodes threatened to harm Hoskins, Guy said. Thanks to an electronic anklet, which monitored Rhodes' schedule and whereabouts via a computer system, he was arrested within 45 minutes, Guy said.

"At this point, we considered sending him back to prison," Guy said. But Rhodes continued under house arrest, with additional sanctions placed on him after a hearing on June 29 and July 13 with the parole commission, he said. Those sanctions required Rhodes to attend a domestic violence offender program and not to have contact with Hoskins.

"We could have put him back in jail based on what we had then," Guy said. "But the fact that her domestic violence protective order was dismissed weakened the case. It's a vicious cycle with domestic violence that I wish we knew how to break."

Marie Brodie, a training coordinator with the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence, said Hoskins' behavior wasn't unusual.

"Women are not absent from court hearings because they are wishy-washy, really in love or masochists," she said. "They don't show up in court because they are terrified, they are threatened and they think things are going to get worse for them."

Brodie said Hoskins' failure to show up for her hearings should have been a red flag.

"Parole officers are overloaded and overwhelmed," she said. "It wasn't just the parole officers' responsibility to keep her alive. When a victim backs off, it's not a sign for us, parole officers, courts, domestic violence programs, the minister, the neighbor, everyone, to back off; it's a sign to move in."

Domestic violence is not only about bruises and broken bones, but also about power and control, Brodie said.

Susan Katzenelson, executive director of the N.C. Sentencing and Policy Advisory

Commission, said repeat offenses are rare with people convicted of murder. When it does happen, the incidents typically are linked to drugs, organized crime and domestic violence, she said.

Rhodes was convicted of second-degree murder before 1994, when structured sentencing went into effect. Offenders now have to serve 85 percent of their time, while Rhodes had to serve only about 30 percent of his 50-year sentence.

Brodie said her office did not have statistics, but she was aware of several domestic violence-related murders committed by the same offender.

“When a person is released from prison, we need to look back at a homicide and think about what we can do differently,” she said. “Being locked up behind bars stops them from committing those acts, but it doesn’t change their behavior. In all cases involving domestic violence, there is a high risk for repeat crime.”

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