

Declines of spousal homicide in Canada linked to trends in education, employment and divorce rates

What is this research about?

The rate of spousal homicide in North America has been declining over the past several decades. Several different social factors have been suggested as possible explanations for this trend. One theory is that increasing gender equality (the rates of males and female employment and education are now more equal than in the past) has made it easier for women to leave abusive relationships. Another theory is that the decline in homicide rates is linked to changes in the structure of relationships: fewer couples are choosing to get married and those that do are waiting until they are older, while more unmarried couples are living together long-term. A third theory is that the increased availability of domestic violence resources, such as women's shelters and crisis hotlines, has helped prevent spousal homicide. Some research on these theories has been done in the United States, but it is not known if the same factors are responsible for the decline of these crimes in Canada.

What did the researchers do?

Data on spousal homicide rates were taken from Statistics Canada's annual Homicide Survey, which has collected details on all homicide cases in Canada for the period 1974 to 2001. Information on social trends was taken from the Census and Labor Force Survey and other government statistics. To measure gender equality, the researchers looked at education and employment rates in both males and females. To understand trends in relationship structures, the researchers examined marriage rates, divorce rates, age at first marriage, and age at first child. Information on domestic violence resources was not available.

How can you use this research?

Government organizations can use this research to understand how social programs that support education and equality in employment can help prevent spousal homicide.

Domestic violence advocates can use this research to better lobby the government for programs and policies to help address the problem of spousal homicide.

What did the researchers find?

Between 1976 and 2001, the rate of female spousal homicide in Canada decreased by 51%, while the rate of male spousal homicide decreased by 55%. Employment equality and the divorce rate were most closely tied to the female spousal homicide rate, with greater employment equality and lower divorce rates linked to declines in murders of female partners. A lower divorce rate was also linked to decreases in the male spousal homicide rate. Higher rates of male education were related to fewer murders of male partners, while employment equality was not as important.

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http://csahs.uoguelph.ca/pps/Clear_Research

What you need to know:

In Canada, a smaller male-female employment gap was tied to fewer female spousal homicides, while higher rates of male education were associated with fewer male spousal homicides. For both males and females, a lower divorce rate was linked to a lower spousal homicide rate.

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