More research needed on availability of support services for victims of violence in Canada

What is this research about?
Over the past several decades, the victims and survivors of violent crimes have become more aware of the resources and support services available to them. These resources may be offered by the government, community programs, and/or not-for-profit groups. Despite the growing number and type of support services available, little research has been done to identify what resources are available, where they are located, and whom they are serving. There are several reasons many victims/survivors of violence may not be able to use these resources: support services may not be located in their community, may be difficult to travel to, or may have a waiting list. For the government to make effective public policy decisions, it is important that they have information on the existing state of victims’ resources, as well as where more support services are needed.

Keywords:
Crime, violence, victim services, spousal homicide, domestic violence, resource availability, women’s shelters, crisis hotlines

What did the researchers do?
The author reviewed two areas of research related to services for victims/survivors of violence. First, the author discussed the link between domestic violence resources and the rates of intimate-partner homicide. Second, the author looked at whether resources for victims/survivors of violence were distributed fairly among different regions. Finally, the author discussed the challenges involved in identifying and measuring all of the resources for victims/survivors.

How can you use this research?
Government organizations can use this research to create social programs and public policy that will better support the victims/survivors of violence. Victims’ rights and violence against women advocates can use this research to understand what types of resources for the victims/survivors of violence are most needed, and also which types of victims are most in need of resources.
What did the researchers find?
Research in Canada, the US and the UK showed that as the amount of domestic violence resources for victims increased, the risk of being killed by an intimate partner remained roughly equal for women but declined a great deal for men. This research also found that some resources might actually increase the risk for women, possibly due to violence carried out as “punishment” for seeking help if appropriate safety resources were not also available. Research on the availability of victims’ resources in the UK found that access to support varied by region; although few communities had sufficient support services, some areas were noticeably underserved. Challenges involved in studying these resources include: defining what counts as a resource for victims, deciding how to measure the availability of different services, and finding data that accurately reflect the whole set of services available.

What you need to know:
While domestic violence resources may help prevent intimate partner murders, most communities lack sufficient support services, and some areas are particularly underserved. To make good policy decisions, governments need information on what services exist, where they are located, and what people they are serving.

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