

**Action Research Project: Assessing Library Resource Literacy
for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence**

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Assessing Library Resource Literacy for Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence

Libraries are not neutral spaces. Both the Project READY curriculum and a look at the news regarding book censorship or the defunding of public libraries will communicate this fact. Modern libraries are spaces that respond to the needs of community members; they are community-centered and user-focused (Fisher & Fulton, 2022; Wiegand, 2015) . This approach involves understanding the needs of users and community members.

Libraries have inherent features that make them a valuable resource for the large portion of our population who are survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). These community members benefit from access to information, safe spaces, digital resources, privacy policies, and community-building programs. Many keys to the prevention of IPV and supporting this population are available through the library.

The following research query was formed: Is the library part of local resource literacy for survivors? Where and how is this information made known?

A survey of IPV-focused literature and resources nationally, digitally, and locally was conducted. Information obtained led to thesis that resource literacy for survivors regarding the library is not evident. Data was collected to support analysis through an email interview with local survivor support organization representative. Analysis of this data shows resource literacy has been established, and further work can be implemented to increase and expand resource literacy.

Literature

The Centers for Disease Control provides concrete information to legitimize this study: more than one in three women experience IPV (CDC, 2026).¹ They identify that IPV "has a profound impact on

¹ More than 1 in 6 men experience IPV, according to the CDC. Among men, nearly 1 in 23 experienced contact sexual violence (4.4%), about 1 in 7 experienced physical violence (13.7%), and almost 1 in 24 were stalked (4.2%)

life-long health, opportunity, and well-being" (2026). On average, three to four women are killed each day by their partner or husband (CVAN, 2026). The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Women confirm the global nature of this issue which has no socio-economic or geographic exceptions (2026; 2025). However, being Black, Hispanic, young, and in poverty makes women more likely to be attacked (Westbrook, 2008). In a comprehensive report released in 2025 by WHO and UN partners, evidence teaches us that violence against women has perpetually been an "under-addressed human rights issue" (WHO). In North Carolina in 2025, there were 85 homicides due to IPV, with the highest numbers in Wake, Guilford, and Mecklenburg counties (NCCADV, 2026). These are simply the most populous counties; IPV is "common" (CDC, 2026). The lifetime cost of IPV-related consequences in the US is \$3.6 trillion, with costs stemming from health conditions, lost productivity, and criminal justice proceedings (CDC, 2025). The long-term, far-reaching effects on the health of our societies is real, and support for affected members of the population is vital.

It is important here to clarify that IPV is often called Domestic Violence (DV), and terminology amongst survivor support organizations is sometimes used interchangeably and carries the same connotation. IPV is defined by offenses that encompass multiple types of abuse: physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual; these offenses may be technological in nature and involve coercive control (Office on Violence Against Women, 2025). For the purposes of this paper, IPV is the term used to reference this definition of violence perpetrated upon the population. There are many resources available to educate people about how abuse transpires, how it cycles, and how it is defined. This information is of critical importance for survivors in their process of removing themselves from violent situations and thriving after violent experiences.

Resource literacy is defined as "the ability to understand the form, format, location and methods for accessing information resources" (Murad, 2025). Resource literacy is of utmost importance to a survivor of IPV attempting to find safety and establish stability. Residual effects of the trauma incurred

from IPV can also affect one's ability to navigate resources, including the library (Westbrook, 2008). To further investigate local resource literacy for survivors, methods were created to answer the action research query: Is the library part of local resource literacy for survivors? Where and how is this information made known?

Methods

For the purposes of this project, major entities were first assessed for resource literacy. At the federal level, the Centers for Disease Control provides awareness and resource literacy regarding IPV. At the North Carolina state level, the NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCCADV) and the NC Department of Administration (NCDA) provide specific county information regarding contacts and resources. In Cabarrus County, NC, Cabarrus Victims Assistance Network (CVAN) is identified as the local domestic violence program. A meeting was then scheduled between the student researcher and instructor through Teams, which provided opportunity for planning and strategizing. Finally, a data tool was developed and implemented.

1. Resource Literacy Assessment: CDC, NCCADV, CVAN, NCDA

- **CDC:**

An initial, federal understanding of IPV resource literacy was formed through the CDC's "Stacks" Public Health Publications collection. An article by Dills et al summarizes prevention and change models. A bulleted list of 15 general groups and organizations identified as agents which may be united for change is included, and the library falls within such mentions as "government" and "community organizations", but the library is not readily identified. This article highlights the importance of communication and awareness regarding this "big" issue. Risk factors for perpetuation include poverty and societal norms; the library can be a measure to weaken these factors through the library's free access and educational information. The library can be part of this prevention and solution by becoming a visible support- both to survivors *and* the entire community.

- **NCCADV, CVAN**

At the state level, the website for the North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence has a page entitled "Get Help". This includes an interactive map of NC by county. A click on Cabarrus County reveals contact information for CVAN, the Cabarrus Victims Assistance Network. This is the local domestic violence program for safety, shelter, and support for women and their children. There are many types of information available, and the information is comprehensive, including community resources, safety planning, technology safety, 24-hour help, and statistics. The library is not mentioned or included as a potential resource for information access on their website.

Also available through NCCADV is a database of Community Resource Guides with NC seals by county. For Cabarrus County, this comprehensive list (last modified in 2020) includes an annotated list of over 60 county resources that support survivors; the public library is not included.

- **NCDA:**

The NC Department of Administration also provides an interactive map of North Carolina by county that generates links to local resources for survivors. Like NCCADV, there is a great deal of helpful information, but the library is not a linked resource within any of the resource literacy identified and provided.

2. Meeting with Instructor:

After identifying this gap in visibility and potentially in resource literacy, a meeting was scheduled with this student researcher's professor to discuss actionable research. In collaboration, a plan for moving forward included confirming the gap through an email interview with CVAN. Potential analysis and recommendations could be made with data points from this interview.

3. Data Tool:

A personal communication email interview was composed in letter format with questions attached. This was sent to the Contact listed on CVAN's website (see Appendix). Questions posed and the

resulting answers in reply are listed in the table below. Questions were derived to identify the needs of survivors, how those needs are met by the library, and their status regarding library resource literacy.

A reply with answers was received the same day. The Contact was assured anonymity through confidentiality to ensure minimal risk in this study. In reply, The Contact expressed gratitude for the focus upon IPV and was open to further dialogue.

Table: Results of Personal Communication Email Interview (CVAN)

Question	Answer
1. Does CVAN identify the public library as a resource for survivors of IPV/DV?	"Yes, we are fortunate that our local library is a resource in several ways. At their request, our local library has our information (notably, our business card as that is a discreet way for anyone to get our information - our 24-hour hotline and services); The local library occasionally has resource fairs on site and we make sure they have additional handouts from us; Our staff Advocates share the local library as a free resource to our community."
2. Alongside financial means, what are some of the most common needs of survivors?	"For those who are battered, there are many needs to be addressed. Battering affects the totality of someone's life. Abuse falls in 4 categories- emotional; physical, sexual, and financial. First, women need to be believed, and they need space to talk about what has happened and to not be judged. And, from there, the understanding that decisions are hers to make. After that, support includes financial, as well as access to resources in her community; and emotional and practical support through the process of what happens next. And what happens next depends. Is she leaving or staying the area, are their children involved/questions of custody; other legal considerations such as a civil order of protection. Just to name a few. There are just some of the questions that we, as the local domestic violence program help her to process."
3. Would CVAN be interested in information about how the public library can be a resource for survivors?	"Yes we would, thank you (smile emoji)"

Findings: Interpretation of Data & Analysis

1. Resource Literacy

The public library is a part of resource literacy IPV survivors supported by CVAN in Cabarrus County.

- a) The public library did request information from CVAN to facilitate resource literacy.
- b) Request was met by provision of the organization's business card with their 24hr hotline and services listed.
- c) If the library engages in resource fairs, and CVAN provides additional handouts for these events.
- d) The CVAN staff Advocates share the fact that the library is a local, free resource with survivors

2. Needs of Survivors

Some of the most common needs of survivors include, but are not limited to:

- a) Validation
- b) Space to talk
- c) Judgement-free interactions
- d) A sense of their independence in decision-making
- e) Financial support
- f) Access to resources in their community
- g) Emotional support
- h) Practical support information (i.e. housing, relocation)
- i) Legal Considerations (including protection orders, custody issues)

3. Actionable Items

- a) There is interest in enhancing resource literacy regarding the library.
- b) The affirmative response to this query provides an understanding that development of resource literacy is both desirable and possible.

4. Analysis

Combining the cited literature about IPV with this data provides evidence that much of our population needs safe spaces to access information (digitally and in print) and can benefit from community resources and community-building experiences. Information needs are numerous; they include legal proceedings, protection orders, understanding cycles of violence, and financial security. Many of these needs are met through the library: survivors can access computers, hotlines, books, articles, and forms in a safe, private space. Survivors can engage in offered programming to build a sense of community for themselves and their families.

Based on the findings, a more expansive list of the way the library supports survivors was derived. The need for a judgement-free environment is met by library protocols in the ALA Code of Ethics and the training librarians receive regarding reference interviews. Validation and a sense of independence in decision-making can be supported through information that educates or empowers a survivor through access. Practical access to digital information regarding legal considerations is supported by the library's free computer and internet access. Community resources are known to reference librarians and programming supports connection and community-building. Space to talk could be fostered in community events or groups, and further resources are discoverable through the library.

To that end, a LibGuide available on any library's site is an excellent source of concise, yet comprehensive resources available remotely. Examples of such guides are available from [Canton](#) and [Wake](#) Public Libraries. This student researcher is currently in process creating such a guide for a separate assignment which could be utilized by the library and linked to survivor sites. Survivor-focused digital curations or infographics about the library as a resource (including locations, how to get a library card, available information) could also be helpful additions to any survivor support sites.

Conclusion

This project confirms the legitimacy of the library as resource for survivors and community wellness. This research found that general resource literacy has been identified by the library for the local IPV county program. This research also confirms the opportunity for increased visibility of the library as a resource.

The literature review provided a stance on prevention of IPV, which involves community information about healthy relationships. CDC publications teach strategy based on community support and connectedness, as well as creating safer environments (Dills et al, 2019). As community-focused, user-focused organizations grounded in providing access to information in a safe public environment, the library is most definitely a resource in this progression to support basic human rights. One established method the public library could utilize to support our youth and adult communities in terms of prevention can be curations or displays which convey materials about healthy relationships, whether fiction or non-fiction based.

Recommendations for future work would be the inclusion of the library on community and organizational resource lists. This would involve contacting the organizations about visibility and inclusion. Follow-up with CVAN would include sharing of analysis and increasing resource literacy visibility on their website as part of future actionable tasks. This visibility is important as seekers of information may not meet with an Advocate at a shelter or program and receive resource literacy verbally or in print; the case may be that any information needs are filled solely by an online search for resources.

To address a revised approach to this project, it can be noted that an attempt to gain additional data was made via email to an IPV program in Pitt County. No response was received from this query. A legal professional who works with survivors was also contacted to obtain more data; the response was positive, but the reply was received too late to incorporate in this project. To revise the methods section,

data would have been retrieved from more than one source to provide a more extensive analysis. Future queries could be directed to library staff, county programs, legal professionals, and counseling services. Keeping queries limited to professional support members supports study with minimal risk to survivors. However, in a professional study with IRB training and approval, the lived experience of survivors could be incorporated into future study to more accurately address this issue.

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Appendix

From: Mary Pierce MSPERCE@uncg.edu
Subject: Graduate Student Research
Date: March 16, 2026 at 12:52 PM
To: info@cvan.org

Dear CVAN,

My name is Mary Pierce. I am a graduate student in the Master of Library and Information Science program at UNC-Greensboro, and I live in Kannapolis.

I am currently working on assignments focused on how the library is a resource for survivors of Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence. I am working to identify how the library meets some of the general needs of this population in our community.

My goal is to analyze what the library offers and what types of survivor needs can be met through the library. In doing this work, I am hoping that I can ask you for some general information to assist me in creating information that would be helpful and useful for survivors.

The work I am compiling is not for a publishable paper, and no names will be utilized. My assignment will be submitted to one instructor for a foundational library science course. Upon completion, I could share the results of my analysis with you which may in turn support your organization and help survivors.

I have included three short questions below. I would be very grateful for any answers or information you could offer me in response. My assignment will be submitted on April 13th.

If you would prefer to speak on the phone or in person, please do not hesitate to contact me, as I would love to be available to you in any capacity that best accommodates your schedule and needs.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely,
Mary Pierce
(910) 620-0361

1. Does CVAN identify the public library as a resource for survivors of IPV/DV?
2. Alongside financial means, what are some of the most common needs of survivors?
3. Would CVAN be interested in information about how the public library can be a resource for survivors?

From: CVAN info@cvan.org
Subject: RE: Graduate Student Research
Date: March 16, 2026 at 2:11 PM
To: Mary Pierce MSPERCE@uncg.edu

You don't often get email from cvan@cvan.org. [Learn why this is important](#)
Hi Mary,

We appreciate you focusing resources for Domestic Violence and the utilization of a Public Library as a viable resource.

1. Does CVAN identify the public library as a resource for survivors of IPV/DV?

Yes, we are fortunate that our local library is a resource in several ways. At their request, our local library has our information (notably, our business card as that is a discreet way for anyone to get our information - our 24-hour hotline and our services). The local library occasionally has resource fairs on site and we make sure they have additional handouts from us. Our staff Advocates share the local library as a free resource to our community.

2. Alongside financial means, what are some of the most common needs of survivors?

For those who are battered, there are many needs to be addressed. Battering affects the totality of someone's life. Abuse falls in 4 categories – emotional, physical, sexual and financial. First, women need to be believed, and they need space to talk about what has happened and not to be judged. And, from there, the understanding that decisions are hers to make. After that, support includes the financial, as well as access to resources in her community; and emotional and practical support through the process of what happens next. And what happens next depends. Is she leaving or staying the area, are their children involved/questions of custody; other legal considerations such a civil order of protection. Just to name a few. These are just some of the questions that we, as the local domestic violence program help her to process.

3. Would CVAN be interested in information about how the public library can be a resource for survivors?

Yes we would, thank you! 🙏

Best of luck in your project and let me know if you have other questions.

CVAN
www.cvan.org

From: 'Mary Pierce' via Info <info@cvan.org>
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2026 12:52 PM
To: info@cvan.org
Subject: Graduate Student Research

Dear CVAN,

My name is Mary Pierce. I am a graduate student in the Master of Library and Information Science program at UNC-Greensboro, and I live in Kannapolis.