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# DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ABUSED WOMEN WHO KILLED VS ABUSED WOMEN WHO DIDN'T KILL

## Abstract

Abuse against women is devastating and can have long lasting adverse effects for the rest of their lives. We cannot even begin to fathom the trauma and pain they had to endure and due to this, such women develop unconventional coping mechanisms. Therefore, psychologically their mind set is very different from the mindset of a person who has not experienced abuse and violence. The thing with abuse and violence is that it is a never ending cycle. Most of the times, abusers were abused themselves during childhood or exposed to such acts and they retaliate by taking it out on others. Now women are always less violent than men, but out of all the millions of women who gets abused there are a few maybe, hundreds who cannot cope and snap by attacking their abusers and end up killing them. Now this does not happen always and such scenarios can be avoided if such women got the help and protection they needed. So this research paper will focus on the link between prior victimization and women who killed their abusers. And also take a look at the differences between the abused women who have killed their abusers and the abused women who didn't. I believe understanding the differences and identifying what could be done to end the vicious cycle of abuse can go a long way towards creating a much more safer and happier world for women and society as a whole, as women are one of the most important pillars of our society

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### WHAT IS ABUSE AND VICTIMIZATION

We, humans refer to ourselves as 'Homo Sapiens', meaning 'wise man'. Why do you think we call ourselves that? What is it that sets us and our civilized societies different from those of all other animals and the jungle? The answer to this is simple, it is our humanity and the capacity to feel and care for others. We have laws, rules and regulations because we believe all life is equally important, sacred, and deserves equal rights and same level of respect. We have come a long way, gone were the days female gender was considered lesser. Gender equality is now one of the cornerstones of modern civilization.

But even with our stringent laws, rules and regulations, there are millions of people who give into their more animalistic urges and abandon their humanity by committing atrocious acts which cause harm to other humans. Such people have no qualms about hurting another human being, be it a stranger, family or loved one. Sadly women end up being victims abuse the most frequently. Female gender ends up being easier targets for abuse, because physically they are weaker and they are highly emotional, which abusers use to manipulate them and keep them suffering in silence. In the past, abuse was a taboo topic. Things are different now, abuse is no longer a hushed-up topic. But sadly still there are millions of people being abused every single day. And out of all that a large number of abuse cases involve women.

Most women don't experience it just once or twice. It's an endless cycle they have to confront right from childhood. A lot of times, abuse starts at home. Imagine what a sad state it is to be in, to face such cruelty in your own home, where you are supposed to feel safest at?. The girl usually will look to escape from it at school, but such acts happening in school are equally common now. Later as the girl grows up to be women, she may find herself even having to battle it in the work place. And then finally, the worst of it they experience at the hands of their better half, their life partner. So as you can see for millions of women out there, there is no escape from this horror. The physical, sexual, psychological or even emotional abuse they have to endure shapes their life very negatively. They are unable to get over what they experienced and spend almost their entire lives being identified just as a victim. They are unable to trust anyone. And sometimes these victimized women cannot handle it and they end up violently lashing out, pouring out all the bent up depression, hatred and anger at their abusers and killing the abuser

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Now this is a deeply subjective matter and with a lot to consider. An abused women will never be in the right mind set, she would undoubtedly be so psychologically damaged that they are incapable of making any rational decision. And is a loss of the life of a cruel, messed up abuser so bad? I mean one can argue that society is a lot safer without people who endanger others life right? But ultimately, we do not have the right to play god, to decide who gets to live or not, no matter how evil and despicable a person is. Abusers should be brought forward for justice and it should be proved to the world, what they did and then only should they punished.

Out of all the millions of documented cases of abused women only a handful of those women end up killing their abusers. A study was conducted to research this by Grant, B. & Curry, G. D (1993). They adopted two separate methods, first was normal interviewing methods for two groups. One group consisted of women who were imprisoned for killing their abusers while the other were abused by someone, but had not killed their abusers. But they did not find any significant differences between the two groups from the information they obtained

For the second method they used a probability theory; the chi-squared test. This, test like the first did not show any significant differences between the two group of people tested. However, they showed that there were huge differences in the race and age between the two groups of people. In summary, there was a larger number of women who were 35 years and older who killed their abusers and most of the women who killed were African Americans. Therefore, most of the people in the shelters who did not kill their abusers were younger and predominantly white.

Now, what does the results of the above study tell us? In short older women and black women are more prone to kill their abusers. Now this is not me being racist or being biased based on age. We actually have to look a lot more deeper to get a better understanding of above results. Now let us first look at the age factor, a women who is older and killed her own abuser probably suffered abuse for a much longer time. She probably has been dealing with abuse for years and psychologically she is very much unstable due to years of chronic abuse, depression and maybe even self loathing. Physically she may have been harmed so badly to the point she might have developed a violent coping mechanism herself whereby she responds with violence too. And she may either not have gotten any help or have any form of support system.

As for the race factor, African Americans are less educated than the white. This has been proven by statistics. Less education means the women are not first of all even properly aware of abuse and abusive behavior and patterns.

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In fact they might actually consider violent behavior to be an accepted norm because of what they have been constantly exposed to and they actually do not know any other way to respond. Also without proper education and awareness, these abused women are not aware of the proper channels to approach, how to report abuse and how to get help. They would not know what measure of protection the law offers them and they are actually guaranteed help and support. Women need to be aware of the above factors. Then only they will have the courage to come forward and report their case and seek protection.

So, what we can conclude here is that it is very important for the abused women to be educated and made aware of their own rights. They need to know their life is considered precious and anyone who endangers it in any way is punishable by law. They also need to know there are people out there who can help them and provide them support. Especially the older she gets, the more the trauma intensifies and the need for support and care grows. We need to make sure women know and understand this, that there are safe shelters, support groups and hotlines out there. And the very first step towards ending abuse is to say no to suffering in silence and taking a brave step forward by reporting and letting the authorities know what you are going through. This is the only way we can end this ugly cycle which just breeds misery and help them to change from being just mere victims to strong, happy individuals.

## MOTIVE BEHIND THEIR ACTS

It is very important to look at and identify the motive of the women in cases they kill their abusers. Did they approach the abusers themselves? Or did the abusers approach them? How long has it been since the woman was abused? Or was the woman still being abused by him? Was it self defense? These are just a few out of the many questions you have to ask in cases like this.

According to the findings in a study conducted by Philips, H. (2013) and another by Browne, A (1987) is based on the hypothesis's that most women who kill their abusers do so out of self defense and most of such homicides occur at their homes. So if we are to go by this theory it is basically saying, most abused women who were still being abused and they ended up killing their intimate partner out of self defense.

This holds true I believe for the most cases we hear about. Most women who are in abusive relationships are either too scared to leave or being forced to stay because they are being threatened. Especially by being severely abused physically as well as being mentally tortured. Physical torture is easy to identify, it usually leave scars and marks that are visible. Psychological abuse is more harder to identify and more complex to understand. Psychological

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abuse can come in many forms. It can be humiliation, confinement, isolation, intimidation or basically any kind of behavior that belittles the identity and dignity of a person.

Now another point to note is physically women are not as strong as man. So physical abuse can cause them severe harm and add to the emotional pain they are expressing. And women are also very emotional beings, they react very strongly and when they are being abused we cannot even begin to think what is going in their minds. Their mind can be in fight or flight mode. And if they see no opening to escape in order to save their lives out of instinct they may react and commit an act to save their lives and in the process killing their abusers. Most of the time it is not even done intentionally and they only realize what they have done after it is over.

## HOW SOCIETY JUDGES ABUSED WOMEN WHO KILL THEIR ABUSERS

Study conducted by Braden-Maguire, J, Sigal. , & Perrino, C. S. (2005) made some startling revelations. First and foremost being that in our society there seems to be the belief that Emotional or Psychological abuse is lesser than physical abuse. This is a Dangerous sort of thinking, mainly because there is no way we can measure abuse in any way. But the findings of the study actually showed that people believed that emotionally abused women who killed their abusers were more guilty of murder. And also that women's act of violence towards abuser is justified based on the level of physical abuse they have endured.

Such kind of thinking should not be encouraged. This is because only a person who has experienced what those women are going through can actually even begin to understand their pain. Pain and pain tolerance is a personal thing and differs in each person. We each have totally different breaking points. And we have to understand, we may never know the full story of such women so we should not judge them so quickly and discard or say what they went through was not torture or bad enough. The last thing they need is people judging them

## ARE WOMEN BECOMING MORE VIOLENT WITH TIME

By nature, women are actually very gentle, peace loving and have the very admirable capacity to even forgive. But in recent years there seems to be a trend where women are exhibiting more violent behavior than in the past. In fact a study conducted by Putkonen, H., Weizmann-henelius, G., Lindberg, N., Rovamo, T., & Hakkenen, H. (2008) in Finland showed clear statistical findings that group of women examined from 1982- 1992

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were less violent than the group of women examined from 1993-2005. And alcohol was singled out as a major factor, fueling violence.

So why is it that women are becoming more violent with time? It probably stems from our society as a whole. We live in a highly digitalized world, where media has so much influence on our lives, actions and choices. We aspire to reach ideals that are glamorized by the media. Take a look at what we see and hear on televisions, and the books that we read. Often time abusive behavior and patterns are sensationalized. Abusive relationships are portrayed in such a way that it often seems to be glorified and exemplified. The youth of this generation are being unconsciously wired to respond to violence with equal or more in some cases more brutal forms of violence. This could be what is the driving factor in increased violence in women too. They are constantly exposed to media sources which show abusive behavior as a norm, and worse of all the portrayal that women should stay in such relationships and that they can then change their abusers and get them to reform or some other hopelessly idealistic views. But sadly this is real life, not a storybook or movie and things rarely work out, most of the time abusers are far too damaged that they have absolutely no good inside them. And these battered women, what they need is help for themselves, to save their lives and to get out. But alas! The media makes mind be re-programmed to accept these nonsensical views so all it results is women getting more damaged and losing touch with reality and their own humanity and succumbing to violence too.

## WHY THEY DID NOT SEEK HELP

The biggest hurdle in solving the abuse cases is that often times women do not come forward and report the case. They suffer in silence. So it is very important to look for the reason why they do not seek the help they deserve. The most obvious reason is fear for their life and because of threats and intimidation. Men are not just physically stronger, when they are angry they tend to use harsh force and may harm women with weapons. A study set in California by Soreson, S. B & Weibe, D. J (2004) conducted a study to research the impact of women's on battered women's life. Particular emphasis was given to guns which can easily be procured even without permits now a days. Another reason could be to protect their children. They fear their children maybe the next target. And lastly lack of trust in authorities and the judicial system.

## UNDERSTANDING THEIR MINDFRAMES

The most important thing when dealing with women like this is first acknowledging that they are not stone hearted, cold blooded killers. They are victims. And we have to take into account all the circumstances. We have to analyze how it came to them killing

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another human even if that human being was the one who abused them and ruined their lives irreparably. It is crucial to find out what happened on the scene. Did they approach their abusers because they were so enraged at what the abuser did and do it for revenge? Or was it an act of self defense when the abuser approached them.

No matter the degree of abuse, it is a deep violation. It is an act that is degrades and diminishes the respect of a person and has psychological impacts that we cannot even evaluate and confirm completely. We must understand that these are women who are so deeply shrouded in fear that they may even fear lights. They are always on alert and the only thing they are expecting is threats. They see threats everywhere. They do not even feel safe in their own skin. They are not in the right mindset to make any rational decisions. Most commonly victims are also so depressed and drowning in sorrows that they are suicidal or likely to cause their own self harm; self abuse. They see the world as a very cruel, unfair place out to get them at every turn. We need to be understanding of all this, and give them the respect that every single person deserves and not judge them as just mere killers; but as victims of a really cruel circumstance.

## WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP

These women need a lot of help to even have a relatively normal life. The very first step would be giving them counselling and therapy. And getting a full checkup done to get a clear understanding of the level of physical and emotional abuse they have endured. Instead of being kept in isolation, they should be introduced into support groups. So they can meet other survivors, people who suffered just like them and know that they are not alone. They should be introduced to the brave women, who suffered like them but managed to rise above it all and move forward with their life.

There should be more awareness programs and maybe even rehabilitation to integrate them into society. They need to be taught how to look at themselves other than as victims, that they can be useful to the society in some way. There should be a way to reach out to their families, educate them too and explain how important it is for these women to have the love, care and support of their families. They need to know that they are loved. That their life means something and is worth it. And that it is not all their fault, but that they too have to be responsible. And most importantly, they need to be made to understand that what they experienced, they should not wish upon another person. Revenge can never get you true happiness and satisfaction. Only justice can.

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