Battered Women’s Syndrome

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What is Battered Women's Syndrome?

- “Repeated episodes of assault on a woman by the person whom she lives with or whom she has a relationship with, often resulting in serious physical and psychological damage to the woman”
- Learned helplessness
  - It's their fault
Diagnosis

- Subcategory of PTSD
- Symptoms
  - Intrusive flashbacks of trauma
  - High anxiety/hyperarousal
  - Avoidance behavior/emotional numbing
  - Body image distortion
  - Issues with sexual intimacy
Profile of the Abused

- Came from abusive background
- Used relationship as an escape from abuse at home
- Uniformed response to violence
  - agitation/anxiety
  - Fearful of unavoidable doom
  - Extreme vigilance
  - Always tense; trouble sleeping
  - Passive and unable to act during/after abuse
  - Hopeless and despairing
When is it used in court?

- Used as a defense in cases of the murder of a woman’s spouse to reduce the sentence (aka mitigation)
- Increasingly admissible in current years (39 states)
- Works similarly to the insanity defense
- Meant to educate jury on the reality of domestic violence
- Doesn’t exclude woman on man violence and same sex violence in a relationship
- Also used as a testimony for men involving child abuse
Legal Critiques

- Using this defense makes the women look like irrational sufferers of a mental disorder, unable to decipher right from wrong
  - This creates gender hierarchy
- Fails because it holds men and women to different standards and implies women are unable to govern themselves the same way men can
- Justification vs excuse
Bibliography


