A Content Analysis Of Media Portrayals Of Women Who Murder Their Abuser

Introduction: There is very little research on victims who kill their abusers in the U.S. Often, they are seen as criminals, not victims/survivors. Often experiences leading to this crime is nuanced and complicated. It is important to look at all aspects that lead abused women to kill their abuser to inform policies and interventions.

Background:

- Laws and policies for victims of abuse who kill their abuser vary state by state (Penal Reform Int'l 2016)
- Impact of interpersonal violence (complex PTSD, diseases, death) (Pemberton & Loeb 2020)
- Women seek help due to increased abuse but may face barriers (Femi-Ajao et al., 2020)
- Battered Woman Syndrome is a psychological state women obtain from being abused for a long period (Sorrentino et al., 2019)

Implications:

- Stigma towards women who kill their abusers
- In these cases, media portrays women as criminals and not victims
- There isn't enough education and awareness of domestic violence and IPV
- In these cases, there were gaps in help from law enforcement

National Domestic Violence Hotline:

800-799-7233

Text START to 88788

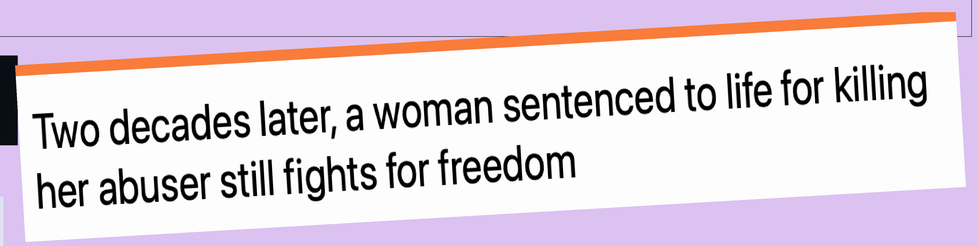
CT Hotlines & Services

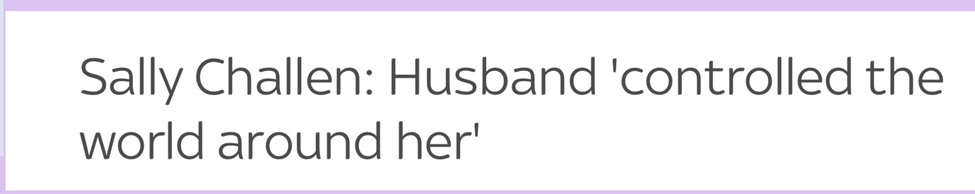
Methodology:

- I did a comprehensive internet search of abused women who kill their abusers and selected 6 cases to focus on. I then did individual internet searches on each women to find multiple articles for each case. I did a thematic analysis where I coded each article to develop themes.

Results:

- Some main themes I identified were:
- Help-seeking behaviors: "... tried to seek help from a third party ..." (Parrish 1999). "Lavetta tried to find ways to escape the situation, but her resources were limited" (Burke 2021).
- Victim blaming in trials: "... said Wilkens was 'crying rape' and was no victim at all" (Harlow 2021).
- Serious On-going Abuse: "Then he raped her at gunpoint" (Harlow 2021). "... threatened to sodomize her" (Harlow 2021). "... forced her to undress and eat dog food in front of their four daughters" (Burke & Gray News Staff 2021).
- Gaslighting: " 'He had a mantra ... he would say, 'You're going mad, Sally. You're making it all up. You're going mad.'" (Lomas & Burgess 2019).
- Police failed to help victims: "We wish she could have gotten real help all those times she called the police, but they failed her" (April Wilkens Blog n.d.).





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