

Mini Review

To what extent do men support violence against women? The aftermath of the kitty genovese's murder

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It is common knowledge that men are much more violent and murderous than women. When one hears of cases of murders and criminal violence around the world, women hardly come to mind as perpetrators but men. Men kill both familiar and unfamiliar persons in different settings unlike women that most often kill known persons and mostly in domestic settings. Violent men target both their fellow men and women too. Just like violence in general, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is more often perpetrated by men against women. GBV is defined as “a form of violence targeting a person based on the gender of an individual”. Both men and women are affected by GBV and homicide resulting from it in some cases. Women’s position as the predominant victims of GBV may partly explain why GBV is commonly referred to as “violence against women” in many academic and organizational literature.

Key words: Men, gender, homicide, women

INTRODUCTION

Intimate partners are most often the perpetrators of GBV than strangers World Health Organization, 2017. Men are known to kill women, including children at a greater rate than women kill men in the home (Serran et al., 2004). Fifty-seven percent of murdered women in England and Wales (1995–2000) died in the hands of their husbands, boyfriends or lovers, either current or former ones Brookman, 2005. Less than 8 percent of the murders were attributed to the women’s friends, acquaintances or other members of the family. More recently, the Crime Survey for England and Wales estimated that 7.7 percent of women (1.3 million) compared to 4.4 percent of men (716,000) were victims of any type of abuse in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2017). For domestic abuse, 26 percent of women were victimized compared to 14 percent of men since the age of 16 which is equivalent to ‘an estimated 4.3 million female victims and 2.2 million male victims’ (Ibid.). Domestic violence by intimate partners, however, may go unreported (Mittal et al., 2020, Huecker et al., 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The above statistics demonstrate the extent to which women suffer in the hands of men. Women live in fear of men

in situations when they feel that a man can take advantage of their position as the weaker gender. Women’s vulnerability to men with respect to sexual violence and murder and men’s willingness to perpetrate these crimes have created a kind of “cold war” between both genders that debates on incidents involving rape and/or murder of a woman by a man are sometimes over generalized to men. The aftermath of the violent murder of Catherine (popularly known as Kitty) Genovese in New York in 1964 by Winston Moseley laid bare this suspicion. This incident generated “an avalanche of academic studies, investigations, films, books, even a theatrical production and a musical” (The New York Times, 2016). The story “has been told and retold” and has appeared in “news accounts, editorials, best-selling books and graphic novels, popular songs, movies, and theatrical productions, as well as in textbooks and academic articles” since it was originally published in 1964 (Gallo, 2014).

The original report by the New York Times in 1964 falsely claimed that 38 people witnessed the Genovese incident but failed to act. It has been recently recognized by the same New York Times 2016 that “the portrayal of 38 witnesses as fully aware and unresponsive was erroneous” and that all other claims in the original article about witnesses and their perceptions were “grossly exaggerated”. There were no 38 witnessed but only a few witnesses and most of them acted according

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to their capacities. The recent recognition of the errors in the original publication suggests that those who contributed to the numerous debates on this issue were simply reacting to a false claim made by a journalist who was probably desperate to sell the news (Agazue et al., 2021).

Gender was repeatedly emphasized as part of the reasons for non-intervention, that is men were claimed to have failed to intervene due to the gender of the victim as a woman Cherry, 1995. This will be discussed in the later paragraphs. This assumption and other related events seemed to have instilled more fear of men into women. Some women who aspired for independent life lived in fear of what could happen to them as a result of the misrepresentations of the Genovese incident. Gallo 2014 was one of the women who lived in such fear as she later acknowledged in her work. The lies and the exaggerations of the incident in the original reports by The New York Times in 1964 were instrumental in this panic (Agazue et al., 2021).

A Genovese's neighbor reportedly failed to take the incident seriously just because he thought the incident was simply a "lover's quarrel" (Cherry, 1995, The New York Times, 2016). The neighbor probably behaved according to the mindset at the time that is domestic violence not generating much reaction from neighbors which is still the case today although not at the same level (Agazue, 2021). Nevertheless, a quarrel and a brutal attack are totally different types of events. It might not sound so logical to say that a neighbor would ignore a brutal attack of a woman just because people are not keen to wade into family matters. Often, people may ignore quarrels and even minor assaults in some cases but more likely to take action, such as trying to physically separate the parties involved and/or calling the police or a backup when they deem the matter to be serious Agazue, 2021. Thus, the neighbor who reportedly ignored the Genovese incident by thinking it was a "lover's quarrel" might have acted otherwise if he had known that it was a brutal attack and not just a quarrel. Therefore, it is not fair to judge such a person as lacking in empathy or supporting violence against a woman for not intervening in an act whose nature and seriousness he was unaware (Ibid.).

Cherry's 1995 view that bystanders failed to intervene due to the gender of Genovese as a woman may seem credible when considering the high level of sexual assaults and homicide experienced by females in the hands of males and also the fact that Genovese was purely a victim of such violence by a man (Winston Moseley) who later confessed that he was looking for "any girl" to violate and kill. However, the idea that men commit sexual violence against women and also kill them does not seem sufficient to understanding why 38 witnesses would watch a brutal attack on a woman and refused to save the woman assuming there were 38 witnesses and that they were all men (Agazue, 2021). It cannot be said that the majority of men in the society commit these acts or would support them to the extent that they would watch such brutal attack and failed to intervene simply because of the genders involved (Ibid).

The aftermath of Genovese's murder offers an insight into the level of suspicion of men as supportive of violence against women and their acclaimed unwillingness to act in GBV incidents. Although these people reacted to a false news report, the belief in itself that as many as 38 people would watch such

brutal attack and deliberately failed to act assuming they had all it would take to act, goes against known gender relations across histories and cultures. It particularly challenges the "chivalry factor". The chivalry factor refers to how the criminal justice authorities are often lenient on female suspects. Police may ignore potential suspects for being females, judges may acquit them, give them fewer sentences or community sentences compared to males who committed similar offenses who are most often handed custodial sentences. However, the opposite is often the case for females who commit serious offenses as well as reoffenders who are often punished harsher in line with the "evil women hypothesis".

Chivalry also comes in the form of male criminals caught by the law enforcement officers failing to implicate women who planned the crimes with them or who instigated such crimes (Simon, 1975). Further, the victims and witnesses of female crimes may not have an interest in exposing the perpetrators in an act of chivalry (Moulds, 1978). Although women can be found among the criminal justice authorities in many secular societies at present, men remain predominant and continue to display the chivalrous behaviors.

The existence of chivalry is not to deny that women have suffered tremendously in the hands of men across cultures, rather it is to acknowledge that men, on average, would not endorse serious harms on a woman simply for being a woman. Whilst the statistics on GBV above (ONS, 2017) have demonstrated the extent of female victimization in the hands of men, when one considers the number of men in the population against such figures, it becomes clearer that only a smaller number of men in society are violent towards women. For example, the population of males in England and Wales was approximately 29 million (29,021,253) in 2017 ONS, 2018 and although this figure also included children and those too old to commit domestic violence, the number of the perpetrators of domestic violence remains too low even after subtracting the number of children and those too old to commit violence. What this suggests is that the vast majority of men do not commit violence against women. However, incidences of domestic violence perpetrated by men may be higher in cultures where controlling women in such manner may be seen as acceptable or as proof that the perpetrator is man enough.

Nevertheless, the chivalrous behaviors witnessed around the world stand as evidence that in most cases, men do tend to help or favor women. During armed conflicts or wars, men often volunteer to take the risks and sometimes dying in whilst every effort is made to protect women although an increasing number of women are joining armed forces around the world. However, when rape is used as an instrument of war, women are more often targeted by men. Again, it can be argued that the rapists and those committing sexual assaults against women during war represent a fraction of men in society. Men were also the "architects" of patriarchal institutions that promoted the subjugation of women across histories. Subjugation, however, may not necessarily encourage GBV in the absence of other factors promoting GBV. It can be argued that not all men who would encourage subjugation would encourage violence against women. This assumption is due to the belief that subjugation may allow men to be in control and to receive more

respect from women and this cannot be equated to violence.

The above chivalrous practices that had existed in many societies across histories may well challenge the assumption that men receive gratification in seeing a woman violated as claimed in some academic literature (Borofsky et al., 1971). Whilst attributing the acclaimed non-intervention of the bystanders in the Genevise incident to the gender of the victim as a woman and the perpetrator as a man, Cherry F 1995 referred to Borofsky et al. 1971 research report to support the idea that men are unlikely to help a woman under an attack by a man. However, more recent reports indicate that women are more likely than men to receive help during violent emergencies (Agazue, 2021, Fischer et al., 2011). More men also pledged to intervene in emergencies in a self-report survey Brewster et al., 2016. However, one should also consider that men have stronger muscles than women and also braver than women when violence is concerned. Thus, more willingness by men to intervene or their greater involvement in actual intervention may not necessarily serve as evidence of them being more empathic than women.

Recent incidents in bystander intervention in emergencies suggest that women stand greater chances of being rescued from a violent man than a man could be rescued from a violent woman Agazue, 2021 for analysis. Male victims of violent women are unlikely to be believed and even if people could see it, they may ignore the male victim or laugh at him (Ibid.). The reasons for such reactions require empirical investigation. However, Agazue 2021 has suggested that it is possible that bystanders consider male victims as having stronger muscles to save themselves from their female aggressors. The problem, however, comes when the man tries to defend himself and eventually labeled a perpetrator of GBV as people may be quick to judge the man as the perpetrator as opposed to a victim engaging in self-defense. Whilst males on average have stronger muscles than women, this is not always the case. It may depend on the parties involved in the violence as it is obvious that some women are physically stronger than their male partners or other men they may pick on. Even a man with a stronger muscle than his female aggressor may feel weak at times for some reasons, such as sickness or intoxication.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, whilst women remain the predominant victims of GBV in the hands of men, the offense is usually committed by a smaller number of men in society. Although men had been at the heart of institutions encouraging female subjugation, it is unlikely that most men would encourage GBV simply because they support the subjugation of the latter. Men are at the heart of the institutions that have promoted chivalry around the world and have equally protected women in situations demanding that the latter be protected.

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