Battered Women’s Syndrome

An issue which has received much attention in the realm of domestic violence -- and particularly in situations where women kill their abusers -- is battered women’s syndrome (BWS), which is a subcategory of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Dr. Lenore E.A. Walker, Ed.D., battered women’s syndrome is:

“A group of usually transient psychological symptoms that are frequently observed in a particular recognizable pattern in women who report having been physically, sexually, and/or seriously psychologically abused by their male domestic partners.”

Development of Battered Women’s Syndrome

BWS develops as a battering relationship unfolds. This is typically a three-stage process that includes: 1) small incidents of verbal and minor physical abuse that begin infrequently but increase in frequency; 2) actual acute battering that often causes serious injury needing medical attention; and 3) a cycle where the abuser is contrite to the abused and ultimately teaches the abused to be submissive and passive toward further abuse.

Recognizing Battered Women’s Syndrome

A woman displaying symptoms of BWS may be apathetic toward subjects or activities for which she used to be enthusiastic, she may become involved in drug or alcohol abuse, and she may also experience completely different attitudes and emotions toward her spouse than she did before the abuse began. The importance in knowing about BWS lies in recognizing predictable, psychological effects caused by domestic violence.

Battered Women’s Syndrome and the Law

BWS is now recognized in legislation by many states and is considered when defending battered wives who kill their spouses. BWS is not used as a defense but more as an indication of the defendant’s state of mind or as a mitigating circumstance. A reasonable fear of imminent danger (especially used in self-defense) can be proven using BWS.
FindLaw.com empowers people with trusted, timely and intelligent legal information

Blogs – FindLaw Blogs present timely news that has real-life implications, deliver important information and discuss law-related entertainment.

FindLaw Answers – A vibrant, interactive online community where everyday people can ask legal questions and get real-time answers from legal professionals and others with similar experiences.

News & Newsletters – Updated throughout the day and night and covering a wide range of legal topics, FindLaw.com’s News page presents current legal news, keeping people informed and educated.

Find a Lawyer – An easy-to-search database of more than one million lawyers and law firms. It provides detailed information, enabling people to contact a qualified lawyer when they are ready.

Do-It-Yourself Forms & Contracts – FindLaw.com provides accurate legal documents for common legal matters. Choose from a library of easy-to-use, low-cost, accurate legal forms for everyday legal issues.

FindLaw Video – On FindLaw.com, you’ll find an online directory of more than 1,500 short videos dedicated exclusively to legal topics and attorney and law firm profiles.

Connect With Us

FindLaw.com has an entire social media team dedicated to providing our users with as many options as possible to join, participate in, and learn from the FindLaw community. Some of the social key channels are the following:

FindLaw for Consumers on Facebook
Making the law easy to access with interactive legal updates aimed at starting conversations, informing followers of their legal rights and providing a forum for questions and resources

@FindLawConsumer on Twitter
Tweeting interesting, entertaining and informative legal news everyday

Copyright © 2013 FindLaw, a Thomson Reuters business. All rights reserved. The information contained in this article is for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. The use and distribution of this article is subject to the Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license, which can be viewed at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/. You must attribute the article by providing the title of the article, FindLaw copyright notice and link to the original work. You may not use the article for commercial purposes and you may not alter or transform this article in any way.