



ACTIVE BYSTANDER INTERVENTION IN COERCIVE CONTROL INDUCED SUICIDE

CASE STUDY AND REPORT



ABSTRACT

This case study explores the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of Kellie Sutton, a 30-year-old mother of three, who succumbed to the coercive and controlling behavior of her partner, Steven Gane.

The study underscores the critical role played by an active bystander who, upon learning of Ms. Sutton's death, courageously contacted the police, setting off a chain of events that exposed the extent of her partner's abuse. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of bystander intervention in preventing such devastating outcomes and the need for legal measures to curb coercive control.



INTRODUCTION

On August 23, 2017, the perpetrator battered and verbally abused Kellie so badly that she attempted suicide. She died on August 26, 2017. Upon her death, the perpetrator played the role of the grieving partner and no one suspected foul play.

However, that changed when a male friend called the police and reported that the perpetrator had admitted to battering Kellie a few weeks before and callously ridiculed her death. The perpetrator was subsequently found guilty of inciting Kellie to suicide through coercive control, and was sentenced to four years and three months in prison.

The Judge told him, "Your behavior drove Kellie Sutton to hang herself that morning. You beat her and ground her down and broke her spirit."



THE PROBLEM

Coercive control in intimate or family relationships is a pattern of acts used by one person to subjugate another. Exposure to this malevolent behavior has a substantial and sometimes catastrophic impact on the victim's mental and physical health.

After just five months of enduring the perpetrator's regime of coercive control, he maliciously encouraged Kellie to end her own life, which she did.

This case serves as a warning to both those who may be experiencing coercive control and those around them who may not recognize indications that abuse taking is place.



THE SOLUTION

The UK Coercive Control law came into force in 2015, criminalizing the destructive pattern of behavior that preys upon up to 1 out of 3 women and 1 out of 6 men.

The law serves as a means of holding perpetrators accountable for their actions and it provides legal protection for victim-survivors of coercive and control.

However, for the law to be effective, active bystanders play an important role as this extreme kind of abuse usually takes place behind closed doors and victim-survivors may not understand what is happening to them until it is too late.



BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

The critical moment in the Kellie Sutton case occurred a week after her death when her partner's friend contacted the police. He shared chilling statements made by the perpetrator, including an admission of severely battering Kellie and a callous joke about her death.

The friend's decision to report these revelations spurred the police to initiate a comprehensive investigation. By taking action, the friend made it possible for the police and Kellie's family to find out the truth about what had happened to her so that they could seek justice and hold the perpetrator to account.



CONCLUSION + RECOMMENDATIONS

The case of Kellie Sutton highlights the severity of coercive control and the need for awareness and education on this dangerous pattern of behavior. It also emphasizes the need for bystanders to actively recognize and support people who may be vulnerable to manipulation and abuse, as well as hold perpetrators to account for their actions.

Recommendations for future action include: continuing education on coercive control and its signs for the general public, promoting coercive control legislation, and provision of holistic support victim-survivors of coercive control.



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