

A study on attitude towards rape myths and survivors of rape amongst college students in Bangalore



Psychology

KEYWORDS : Attitude, Rape myths, survivors of rape, college students

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ABSTRACT

Rape seems to have taken a common form of violence and attitudes have been of central concern in relation to such violence. The aim of this study was to examine the current state of rape myth acceptance, attitude towards rape survivors among college students and the predictors for formation of attitude towards rape survivors. Findings based on the sample size of 275 college students showed that higher the rejection of rape myths, lower will be the unfavorable attitude towards survivors of rape. Regression analysis indicates that the variables 'She asked for it', 'He didn't mean to' and 'She lied' inversely predicts unfavourable attitude towards the rape survivor. Chi-square analysis showed that males are less likely to reject rape myths and have high unfavourable attitude towards rape survivors than females.

INTRODUCTION

An attitude is formed over a period of time and can have a positive or negative impact on one's self, relationships and also the society. Rape seems to have taken a common form of violence and attitudes have been of central concern in relation to such violence. Various reported cases provokes grief and anger but also pity for ignorance. The relationship between blaming the rape survivors and adherence to rape myths is also of note in the adolescent population. Survivors of rape should not be termed as 'rape victims' since that provides an outlook of viewing the rape survivors with a sense of sympathy and misfortune. Additionally, an element of male dominance, the perception of females as sex objects and the negation of acquaintance rape as sexual assault has also been ascertained in our youth. Rape is one of those offences where the rape survivor is blamed also to be the accused. However, there has been relatively little co-ordinated examination of the factors which shape attitudes towards crime against women. And it is important to understand the dynamics of what drives an individual towards developing such attitudes, hence the study.

Rape myth acceptance, a term constructed to define a set of beliefs in rape supported culture, was first investigated by Burt (1980). He defined rape as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape survivors and the offender." Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined rape myth as "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are wildly and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women." Research involving rape myths has found that individuals' acceptance of rape myths and rape-supportive attitudes are correlated with increased sex role stereotyping, stronger adherence to

adversarial sexual beliefs, and greater acceptance of interpersonal violence within relationships (Burt, 1980). Females have been consistently shown to hold more favourable attitudes toward survivors of rape than males, with respect to gender differences (Ward, 1988)

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, the sample consisted of 275 college students, 43.6% (n = 120) were females and 53.4% (n = 155) were males. To assess the attitude levels, the following questionnaires were used.

1. Updated Illinois rape myth acceptance scale : The scale was revised by McMahon & Farmer (2011) with a 5 point Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate greater rejection of rape myths.

2. Attitudes toward Rape Victim Scale (Ward, 1988): It is a 25-item Likert type scale designed to measure favourable versus unfavourable attitudes toward victims of rape. Responses will indicate the levels of agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Higher scores indicate more unfavourable attitudes toward victims of rape.

The participants were explained the nature and purpose of the study. After the informed consent was obtained, the questionnaires were administered.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Correlation between attitude towards rape myths and attitude towards survivors of rape.

Variables	Rape Myth 1	Rape Myth 2	Rape Myth 3	Rape Myth 4	Overall attitude towards rape myths	Attitude towards survivors of rape
Rape Myth 1		0.357**	0.441**	0.275**	0.668**	-0.560**
Rape Myth 2			0.355**	0.261**	0.597**	-0.289**
Rape Myth 3				0.356**	0.710**	-0.465**
Rape Myth 4					0.601**	-0.445**
Overall attitude towards rape myths						-0.583**
Attitude towards survivors of rape						

**p value < 0.01

Table 1 represents the intercorrelation of the study variables. Overall attitude towards rape myths has significant positive relationship with the subfactors and at significance level 0.01. It also reveals that attitude towards survivors of rape has significant negative relationship with Rape myth 1: 'she asked for it' ($r = -.56^{**}$, $p < 0.01$ level) Rape myth 2: 'He didn't mean to' ($r = -.28^{**}$, $p < 0.01$), Rape myth 3: 'It wasn't really rape' ($r = -.46^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and Rape myth 4: 'She lied' ($r = -.44^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and overall attitude of rape myths ($r = -.058^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). The finding implies that higher the rejection of rape myths, lower will be the unfavorable attitude towards survivors of rape.

Table 2: Regression analysis showing relationship between predictor variables: rape myths and the criterion variable: unfavorable attitude towards survivors of rape.

Predictor Variables	β	t	F	R ²	ΔR^2
Rape myth 1: She asked for it	-0.399	7.551**	51.584**	0.433	0.425
Rape myth 2: He didn't mean to	-0.01	0.195			
Rape Myth 3: It wasn't really rape	-0.191	3.528**			
Rape Myth 4: She lied	-0.265	5.308**			

Criterion Variable – Unfavourable attitude towards rape survivors, **p < 0.01

Regression was done to check the predictive model with independent variables as rape myth 1, rape myth 2, rape myth 3 and rape myth 4 and dependent variable as unfavourable attitude towards survivors of rape. Regression analysis indicates that the variables 'She asked for it', 'He didn't mean to' and 'She lied' inversely predicts unfavourable attitude towards the rape survivor. Rejection of the rape myth that "she asked for it" has a significant negative relationship ($\beta = -0.399$, $t = 7.551$, $p < 0.01$) with unfavourable attitude towards rape victim. Similarly for rape myth 3: it wasn't really rape ($\beta = -0.191$, $t = 3.528$, $p < 0.01$) and rape myth 4: she lied ($\beta = -0.265$, $t = 5.308$, $p < 0.01$) also have significant negative relationship with unfavourable attitude towards rape survivor. Hence, higher the rejection of the rape myths 'she asked for it', 'It wasn't really rape' and 'she lied' lower will be the unfavourable attitude towards the rape victim. Rape myth 2: 'He didn't mean to' did not predict the attitude towards the rape survivor. Rape myths allow perpetrators to justify their sexually violent behaviour and allow non-perpetrators to express hostile sexism by excusing perpetrator's behaviour. Rape myths that blame the survivors reinforce men's beliefs that the perpetrator was merely responding to a woman's sexual invitations from her clothing and flirtatious behaviour. Therefore, rape survivors and perpetrators, as well as third parties, are motivated to employ rape myths. One of the earliest studies on this topic found that the best attitudinal predictor of rape myth acceptance was acceptance of interpersonal violence (Burt, 1980).

The overall regression model is identified to be a good fit ($F = 51.584$, $p < 0.01$) for the data. Coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.433$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.425$) indicates that rejection of rape myths 'she asked for it', 'it wasn't really rape' and 'she lied' shares 43.3% variance with the negative attitude towards rape survivor.

Table 3: Frequency of rejection of rape myths and attitude towards rape survivors among college students.

Gender	Rejection of Rape myth 1: She asked for it			p value
	Low	High	Total	
Male	97	58	155	4.958**
Female	59	61	120	
Total	156	119	275	
	Rejection of Rape myth 2: He didn't mean to			
	Low	High	Total	
Male	96	59	155	7.08**
Female	55	65	120	
Total	151	124	275	
	Rejection of Rape myth 3: It wasn't really rape			
	Low	High	Total	
Male	93	62	155	9.49**
Female	49	71	120	
Total	142	133	275	
	Rejection of Rape myth 4 She lied			
	Low	High	Total	
Male	111	44	155	30.57**
Female	46	74	120	
Total	157	118	275	
	Overall Rejection of Rape Myth			
	Low	High	Total	
Male	99	56	155	20.05**
Female	44	76	120	
Total	143	132	275	
	Unfavourable Attitude towards Survivors of Rape			
	Low	High	Total	
Male	64	91	155	18.64**
Female	81	39	120	
T Total	145	130	275	

**p<0.01

Men and women have been shown to differ dramatically in their perceptions of and attitudes toward rape, rapists, and rape victims. Sexism, characterized by negative attitudes toward women, including their social roles and gender roles, has been extensively examined in relation to rape myth acceptance. A number of studies have demonstrated that negative stereotypical attitudes toward, and beliefs about women, are associated with greater rape myth acceptance (Barbara; Schneider, 2005). The analysis also shows that gender has association with attitude towards rape myths, attitude towards rape victims and attitude towards sex offenders. The analysis indicates that gender has a significant association ($\chi^2 = 4.958$, $p < 0.01$) with the rejection of rape myth 1: 'she asked for it'. 49% of males and 52 % of females highly reject the rape myth whereas frequency of males in the sample who are less likely to reject is 97 (62% of the total sample) and females is 59 (39% of the sample). Rape myth 2: 'He didn't mean to' also had significant association ($\chi^2 = 7.08$, $p < 0.01$) with 47% males and 52% highly rejecting the myth. Rape myth 3: 'It wasn't really rape' had significant association ($\chi^2 = 9.49$, $p < 0.01$) with 46% of males and 53% of females showed high rejection of rape myth which means in fact they accept it was true rape. The last rape myth: 'She lied' also showed significant association ($\chi^2 = 30.57$, $p < 0.01$) with 37% of males and 62% of females seem to highly reject the myth whereas 70% of males and 29% of females seem to accept that victims do lie. When it comes to overall rejection of rape myths, females have been consistently shown to hold more favourable attitudes toward survivors of rape than males, with respect to gender differences. Significant association

with gender ($\chi^2=18.64$, $p<0.01$) was found for attitude towards survivors of rape with male subjects were significantly more likely than female subjects to attribute more responsibility to the rape survivors and to view rape as less severe than women.

CONCLUSION:

Rape myths and stereotypical attitudes towards rape survivors continue to exist due to cultural reasons, gender role expectations, acceptance of violence and misinformation about sexual assault that permeate the society. One of the main functions of all these myths is to protect non-victims from feeling vulnerable. If individuals can blame a crime on the survivors of rape, they are indeed finding reasons as to why such violence is not happening to them. Given the findings that younger people are likely to endorse more overall rape myths, sex violence prevention programs may be particularly effective if they start at early adolescence. Eradication of rape myths and false beliefs about rape survivors can take place if the individual and the society are educated.

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