



School of Social Sciences

Department of Social and Organizational Psychology

Child Sexual Abuse Myths: the role of individual and socio-cognitive variables

Inês da Costa Nunes Mesquita Chim

Dissertation submitted as partial requirement for the conferral of Master in Community Psychology, Protection of Children and Youth at Risk

Supervisor:
Doctor Eunice Magalhães, Integrated Researcher
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Resumo

A disseminação de mitos sobre violência sexual legitima o seu exercício, traduzindo-se em potenciais consequências individuais/sociais negativas (e.g., maior culpabilização da vítima e menor dos agressores; impacto negativo para as decisões judiciais). Neste estudo pretendemos traduzir e adaptar a Escala de Mitos sobre o Abuso Sexual (CSAMS) no contexto português e explorar o papel moderador do sexo na relação entre sexismo e mitos sobre o abuso sexual. Participaram 423 adultos (66.2% sexo feminino), tendo preenchido um questionário sociodemográfico, o Inventário de Sexismo Ambivalente e a CSAMS.

Os resultados de validade e fidelidade da CSAMS mostraram a adequabilidade do modelo original de três fatores: Difusão de Culpa ($\alpha=.81$), Estereótipos Restritivos ($\alpha=.73$) e Negação do Abuso ($\alpha=.64$). O modelo de moderação não se revelou estatisticamente significativo, porém, identificou-se um conjunto de padrões específicos em função do sexo: para as mulheres, maiores níveis de Sexismo Benévolo predizem maiores níveis de Difusão de Culpa e de Estereótipos Restritivos e maiores níveis de Sexismo Hostil predizem maiores níveis de Estereótipos Restritivos. Para os homens, apenas o Sexismo Hostil foi preditor dos mitos. Foram encontradas diferenças de sexo estatisticamente significativas na relação entre Sexismo Hostil e a Negação do Abuso ($zscore=-2.016, p=.044$).

Os resultados sugerem indicadores adequados de validade e fidelidade da escala. Atitudes sexistas predizem significativamente a disseminação dos mitos, sendo necessária evidência adicional acerca do papel do sexo nestas relações. Serão identificadas implicações para a prática e para a investigação baseadas na evidência obtida.

Palavras-chave: Abuso sexual; Mitos sobre o abuso sexual; Sexismo.

Abstract

Sexual violence myths dissemination legitimizes violent behaviors with potential negative individual and social consequences (e.g., higher levels of victim blame and reduced levels of offender blame, negative influence on judicial decisions). In this study, we aim to translate and adapt the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS) to the Portuguese context and to explore the moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and child sexual abuse myths. A total of 423 adults (66.2% female) filled out a sociodemographic questionnaire, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and the CSAMS.

The CSAMS validity and reliability results showed the appropriateness of the original three-factor model: Blame Diffusion ($\alpha=.81$), Restrictive Stereotypes ($\alpha=.73$) and Denial of Abusiveness ($\alpha=.64$). The moderation model was not statistically significant; however, specific patterns were identified by sex: for women, higher levels of Benevolent Sexism predicted higher levels of Blame Diffusion and Restrictive Stereotypes and higher levels of Hostile Sexism predicted higher levels of Restrictive Stereotypes. For men, only Hostile Sexism was a predictor of myths. Statistically significant sex differences were found in the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Denial of Abusiveness ($zscore = 2.016, p = .044$).

The results showed appropriate validity and reliability evidence. Sexist attitudes significantly predict myth dissemination, and additional evidence is needed about the role of sex in these relationships. Implications for practice and for evidence-based research will be identified.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse; Myths about sexual abuse; Sexism.

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1. Introduction

Previous research has consistently shown that sexual abuse myth acceptance (during adulthood and childhood) legitimizes sexual violence (Bohner, Siebler & Schmelcher, 2006; Yapp & Quayle, 2018), also affecting judicial decision-making processes (Dinos, Burrowes, Hammond, & Cunliffe, 2014; Grubb & Turner, 2012) and impacting the victim's well-being (Greeson, Campbell & Fehler-Cabral, 2016). As such, rigorous evaluation processes of social beliefs and representations, using reliable and valid measures, are needed. In addition, previous studies have also shown that sexism is positively associated with sexual abuse myth acceptance (Cromer & Freyd, 2007) and that some individual differences may occur. Actually, sex differences on myth acceptance suggest that men tend to outscore women in sexual abuse myth acceptance (Collings, 2003; Collings, Lindblom, Madu, & Park, 2009).

However, if these associations have been described across the last decades, further evidence is needed on the role of sexist attitudes on child sexual abuse myth acceptance, together with valid and reliable measures of child sexual abuse myths in the Portuguese context. Actually, this need comes from the evidence focused on sexual abuse short (e.g., fear, mistrust, shame, etc.) and long term consequences (e.g., higher tendency to suffer from mental health problems, such as depression and suicidal ideation) (López et al., 1995; Dube et al., 2005) as well as from the particular children's vulnerability. For these reasons, this study aims to a) provide psychometric evidence of the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (Collings, 1997) in the Portuguese context, and b) to explore the role of individual and socio-cognitive variables (i.e., respondents' sex and sexism) in the dissemination and acceptance of child sexual abuse myths. Specifically, we aim to test the moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and child sexual abuse myth acceptance. Achieving these objectives allows a) the development of cross-cultural studies; b) systematic research on this topic in the Portuguese context that might inform public policies focused on preventing secondary victimization; c) further opportunities for professionals training that might contribute to the deconstruction of myths and beliefs.

2. Legal and Social Framework

The World Health Organization (1999) defined child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person” (p. 15-16). Sexual abusive behaviors may include physical touch (e.g., genital touch, intercourse) or practices without physical contact (e.g., exposure to pornography, exhibitionism) (Putnam, 2003). The Convention of the Rights of the Child on the article 19th also highlights the need of child’s protection against “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” (UNICEF, n.d., p. 13). Sexual abuse is also viewed as a danger experience according to the Portuguese law for child protection (Law on the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger [Lei de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo (LPCJP)]; Law no. 147/99 of September 1st), article 3rd, point 2, item b: “[The child] Suffers physical or psychological maltreatment or is a victim of sexual abuse”.

In Portugal, the Penal Code (2017) distinguishes between crimes against sexual freedom (articles 163rd to 170th) and crimes against sexual self-determination (articles 171st to 178th). Crimes against sexual freedom are based on the assumption that individuals are mature enough to consent the sexual act but that for some reason are unable to provide it or are forced to participate in the sexual act, which includes the following crimes: (1) sexual coercion (article 163rd); (2) rape (article 164th); (3) sexual abuse of a person incapable of resistance (article 165th); (4) sexual abuse of a hospitalized person (article 166th); (5) sexual fraud (article 167th); (6) not consented artificial procreation (article 168th); and (7) sexual harassment (article 170th). The punishment for these crimes significantly varies with maximum sentence of 10 years in prison (Decree-Law no.59/2007 of September 4th). One of the crimes against sexual self-determination includes child sexual abuse (article 171st), and it is committed against children under the age of 14 that are, from a developmental point of view, unable to provide an informed consent. Indeed, an informed consent is “the result of a voluntary decision by an autonomous and capable person” (Sousa, Araújo & Matos, 2015, p. 9),

being a decision that involves an information and deliberation process in which the individual is aware of the nature, consequences and risks of an action, treatment or experience (Sousa et al., 2015). In addition, crimes against sexual self-determination also include (2) sexual abuse of dependent minors (article 172nd); (3) sexual acts with adolescents (article 173rd); (4) recourse to child prostitution (article 174th); (5) pimping of minors (article 175th); (6) child pornography (article 176th); (7) grooming of minors for sexual purposes (article 176th A), and also the aggravation of the referred crimes (article 177th) and the complaint's procedures (article 178th). The punishment of these crimes also varies and may include prison sentences up to 10 years (Decree-Law no. 59/2007 of September 4th). Even though the Portuguese law distinguishes between sexual abuse of children and sexual acts with adolescents, in this thesis we refer to child sexual abuse as sexual abuse of young people under 18 years.

Despite the high variability in sexual abuse prevalence data, a meta-analysis, using studies with samples of adult victims, suggests that between 8% and 31% of girls and between 3% and 17% of boys are sexually abused (Barth et al., 2013). Even though sexual abuse appears to be the less prevalent form of child maltreatment, there has been an enormous research investment on this topic. This may be related with the perceived negative impact of sexual abuse as well as with less difficulties to define sexually abusive behaviors compared to other forms of maltreatment (e.g., emotional abuse) (Stoltenborgh et al., 2014). The literature also states that child sexual abuse occurs mainly in family context, the offender is usually a close figure of the child and/or a caregiver (Arcari, 2016; Habigzang et al., 2005; Snyder, 2000; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015) and most perpetrators are men (Glaser & Wiseman, 2000; Habigzang et al., 2005). While most cases occur in the family context, abuse perpetuated by family members is associated with negative social reactions to abuse disclosures, especially during childhood (Ullman, 2007) and victims are perceived as less honest (Davies & Rogers, 2009). The abuse risk is higher between 5 and 12 years of age, with 1 in 5 children being sexually abused regardless of their culture, ethnicity, social class or gender (Arcari, 2016; Maria & Ornelas, 2010). However, literature has shown that girls are at greater risk of being sexually abused (Barth et al., 2013; Figueiredo et al., 2001; Finkelhor, 1994; Habigzang et al., 2005; Martins & Jorge, 2010; Snyder, 2000). Finkelhor and colleagues (2014) found that, by the end of their childhood (17 years old), 1 in 4 girls have experienced a form of sexual abuse compared to 1 in 20 boys. As such, girls report more complaints about sexual abuse than boys (Stoltenborgh et al.,

2011) and are more likely to receive positive social reactions when the abuse is disclosed (Ullman & Filipas, 2005). Regarding the perpetrators' abusive behaviors, studies included in the meta-analysis by Barth and colleagues (2013) reported that there is a greater prevalence of abusive behaviors without physical contact and a lower prevalence of abusive behaviors with physical contact and forced intercourse. In addition, the meta-analysis carried out by Pereda and colleagues (2009) found that, in terms of geographical area, the African continent shows the highest prevalence of sexual abuse, namely Morocco, Tanzania and South Africa. Europe is the continent with the lowest prevalence in several countries.

Looking at the Portuguese context, the Law on the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger [Lei de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Perigo (LPCJP)] (Law no. 147/99 of September 1st) aims to “promote the rights and protect children and young people in danger, in order to guarantee their well-being and integral development” (article 1st of the LPCJP). The Child Protective Services (CPS) [Comissões de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens (CPCJ)] develop their intervention in the Portuguese context, based on this law and are responsible for the promotion of “the rights of children and young people and prevent or stop situations that may affect their safety, health, training, education or integral development” (article 12th of the LPCJP), namely, child sexual abuse.

According to official reports, in 2018 there were 734 child sexual abuse reports to CPS (333 of them were confirmed). Comparing the data across time, from 2013 to 2017, there was a significant decrease of about 33% of child sexual abuse confirmed cases by the Portuguese CPS (532 in 2013 versus 356 in 2017) (CNPDPCCJ, 2018). Reports also show a higher incidence of female victims (corresponding to nearly 80%) and in the age group between 11 to 14 years old (CNPDPCCJ, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019). Given that sexual abuse is a crime under the Portuguese law¹, when the CPS receives a report of sexual abuse, it is mandatory to communicate it to the Court (under the protocol established with the Attorney General's Office; CNPDPCJ, 2017). Particularly, when there is a suspicion that the child was abused by one of their parents/caregivers (i.e., the person who must consent to the CPS intervention), the process must be sent to the Court. This procedure aims to protect the victims and to ensure that the process will

¹ Articles 172nd and 173rd of the Penal Code

be rapidly solved. Also, if the CPS' intervention is seen as unfitting or not working for the victim's benefit, CPS shall refer the case to Court (article 11th of the LPCJP).

Despite these legal and social efforts to protect child sexual abuse victims, as well as the significant research on this topic across decades, there are still some difficulties in the social recognition of these abusive practices. External dynamics and social beliefs reinforce the invisibility of this phenomenon, and the secrecy associated with the abusive experience. Actually, the Secret Syndrome, where the child keeps the abuse a secret sometimes for years due to intimidation done by the offender and feelings of shame and fear, is well-described in the literature (Furniss, 1993; Habigzang et al., 2005) together with the negative impact of family, social and institutional responses to the disclosure (e.g., people blaming the child) (Finkelhor & Browne, 1985), which suggests the need to explore the social nature of this topic. As such, a set of myths and beliefs may foster this negative impact, reinforcing the victim's blame and preventing adequate social responses to their needs. For this reason, this thesis aims to explore child sexual abuse myths and its predictions.

3. Conceptual and Empirical Framework

3.1. Child Sexual Abuse Myths (CSAM): from conceptualization to its social and scientific relevance

Sexual violence myths can be conceptualized as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217) and are widely accepted in society (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Jenkins, 2017; McGee et al., 2011). Regarding child sexual abuse, Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) suggest that these myths “deny or justify the sexual exploitation of children” (p. 637). In line with this conceptualization, Collings (1997) proposes a three-factor structure of child sexual abuse myths: (1) Blame Diffusion which involves beliefs related to the idea that other people besides the offender (i.e., the child, the non-abusive parent, homosexuals) are guilty or partly guilty for the abusive experience (e.g., “Children who do not report ongoing sexual abuse must want the sexual contact to continue”); (2) Denial of Abusiveness which includes beliefs that seek to minimize the abusive dimension of child sexual abuse, highlighting the child's consent (e.g., “Sexual contact between an adult and a child, which is wanted by the child and which is physically pleasurable for the child cannot really be described as being ‘abusive’”); and (3) Restrictive Stereotypes which involves beliefs that deny the reality of most abusive cases, denying or

minimizing its negative consequences (e.g., “Child sexual abuse takes place mainly in poor, disorganized, unstable families”) (Collings, 1997). Furthermore, these stereotypes may include inadequate beliefs about the relationship between the victim and the offender and the social and demographic context of the abuse (e.g., “Most children are sexually abused by strangers or by men who are not well known to the child”) (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010).

The systematic study of these myths is important as they legitimize sexual aggression and violence (Bohner et al., 2006; Yapp & Quayle, 2018), contributing to higher levels of victim blame (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Sleath & Bull, 2010) and lower levels of offender blame (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). We also know that victim blaming processes can lead to negative effects, both in the victim’s adjustment and in the judicial decision-making process. Given that there is scarce evidence on child sexual abuse myths, the current literature review will benefit from an integration of findings obtained on rape myths studies to provide a rigorous rationale to our study. Dinos and colleagues (2014) revealed that juries, in the American judicial system, who presented stereotypical attitudes about rape were more likely to consider the defendant as innocent. Also, myths and beliefs disseminated by professionals in the justice system (e.g., police officers) can lead to a negative impact on the victim’s well-being (e.g., negative emotions, feelings of disrepute within the system) (Greeson et al., 2016).

The dissemination and acceptance of sexual violence myths have also a significant impact on decision-making by different justice agents, namely, police and prosecutors (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Klettke, Hallford and Mellor (2016), when studying perceptions of credibility of victim testimonies, found that men, when compared to women, agreed more strongly that accusations of sexual abuse turn out to be false and female respondents agreed more strongly that female victims would be competent witnesses when recollecting their sexual assault experience. Additionally, rape myths tend to be more disseminated and reinforced by male participants (Krahé, Temkin, Bieneck, & Berger, 2008). Rape survivors have also reported that when disclosing the sexual abuse to formal support agencies and professionals (e.g., police officers, medical staff or counselors), they often received non-warmly responses, being openly blamed for the assault, which reveals low levels of empathy from these professionals (Ahrens, 2006). Also, rape myth acceptance tends to be associated with greater perceptions of lower defendant liability and higher victim blame, which is particularly evident when the relationship between the victim and the defendant is

closer (i.e., stranger Vs. acquaintance without a sexual relationship Vs. ex-sexual partners) (Krahé et al., 2008). Specifically on child sexual abuse, Korkman and colleagues (2014), using a sample of Finnish judges with ten or more years of experience, found that although the judges believed and agreed with rightful information (e.g., most commonly, perpetrators are male; 31% of the judges correctly chose a familiar non-relative as a typical perpetrator) they also assessed information incorrectly (e.g., the child's biological parent being a typical perpetrator of child sexual abuse when about 1 in 40 cases are incestuous) and held false beliefs regarding suggestibility and suggestive techniques (e.g., more than 40% of the judges believed that when trying to get a child to convey real events suggestive techniques are fitting). The authors concluded that the "judge's experience may have led to a biased perception of their expertise rather than to more accurate knowledge" (Korkman et al., 2014, p. 502). As such, considering the relevance of this evidence for assessment, intervention and decision-making processes and the potential negative implications for the victims' protection, valid and reliable instruments are needed in order to test models that allow us to explain the dissemination of child sexual abuse myths.

3.2. Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS): Validity and Reliability Evidence

As previously stated, the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS) was developed by Collings (1997) based on literature, including literature on rape myths. However, despite the common myths, rape and child sexual abuse are different (namely in terms of specificities related to the context) and CSAM is a multidimensional construct (Collings, 1997). As such, using rape myths instruments to assess CSAM would not provide a comprehensive picture of this phenomenon (Collings, 1997).

Regarding the scale's fidelity and validity, the full scale scored a .764 *Cronbach* Alpha, which shows an acceptable internal consistency (Collings, 1997). In order to assess its convergent and discriminant validity the author compared the CSAMS to other scales concerning intimate violence: the *Rape Myth Acceptance Scale* (RMAS; Burt, 1980) and the *Jackson Incest Blame Scale* (JIBS; Jackson & Ferguson, 1983). Results showed a positive and significant correlation with scores of the RMAS in all factors of the CSAMS. All three factors were also positively and significantly correlated with scores on the 'Victim Blame' factor of the JIBS and were also negatively and

significantly correlated with the scores on the 'Offender Blame' factor of the JIBS. The factor 'Restrictive Stereotypes' of the CSAMS was also significantly and positively correlated with scores on the 'Situational Blame' factor of the JIBS. These results show that the CSAMS has acceptable levels of convergent and discriminant validity.

To assess the cross-cultural validity of the CSAMS, Collings and colleagues (2009) focused on examining social attitudes towards sexual abuse using a sample of adolescents and young adults in three countries: South Africa, South Korea and Sweden. The results showed that the CSAMS kept its acceptable values of internal consistency in all cultural groups and the multidimensional nature of the attitudes toward child sexual abuse was also found (Collings et al., 2009). Additionally, participant's scores showed expectable sex differences (i.e., men scored higher levels in all subscales and in the overall scale compared to women).

Lastly, specific cultural differences were found between groups. For instance, the construct of "Social Responsibility" was dominant in South Koreans, while for South Africans and Swedish perceptions of responsibility were not social but rather individual or dispositional (Collings et al., 2009). Results also showed that Swedish respondents scored lower levels of myth acceptance and the score tends to decrease as the level of education of respondents increases. South Africans scored a medium level of acceptance compared to Swedish and South Korean respondents, and the level of acceptance tends to increase as the level of education also increases. Lastly, South Koreans had the highest scores of child sexual abuse myth acceptance, and, for this sample, these scores were not associated with education (Collings et al., 2009). The authors pointed out that those differences might be because East Asians have a tendency to emphasize social and situational explanatory variables and "Westerns" tend to emphasize dispositional explanations (Collings et al., 2009). Thus, considering these cultural specificities, and the importance of contextual variables to child sexual abuse, valid and reliable measures are needed (e.g., in different contexts, namely, in Portugal) that may allow us to develop cross-cultural studies.

3.3. Child Sexual Abuse Myths: The Role of Individual and Socio-cognitive Factors

3.3.1. Sex Differences on Sexual Abuse Myths

Research shows that myth acceptance and dissemination seem to vary according to respondents' sex. That is, men tend to outscore women on myth acceptance and, consequently, score higher levels of victim blame and tolerance towards sexual harassment (Aosved & Long, 2006; Canan et al., 2016; Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012; Hinck & Thomas, 1999; Johnson, Kuck & Schander, 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; McGee et al., 2011; McMahon, 2010; Monson et al., 2000; Russell & Hand, 2017; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sleath & Bull, 2010; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Xenos & Smith, 2001), further devaluing the experience of sexual victimization (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) propose that these differences, namely in rape myth acceptance, may be explained theoretically by hostility toward women, especially by men. Internalized cultural beliefs about masculinity (e.g., being heterosexual and strong, being a part of the majority group) may also have a role in these sex differences (Aosved & Long, 2006). This means that individuals who internalize these beliefs may also report higher levels of sexual violence myths.

Also, the individual perceptions about abusive experiences (e.g., on rape context) should be considered given that higher levels of rape myth acceptance lead to a more restrictive definition of rape (Burt & Albin, 1981). This process may explain why men, more than women, tend to perceive their behavior as non-coercive (Hinck & Thomas, 1999). Gender roles may also be considered in this context. Men tend to identify themselves more with the offender than with the victim, given that he/she occupies the powerful position in the interaction, regardless the offender's sex. Thus, they are more likely to assign higher levels of victim blame (Gerber, Cronin & Steigman, 2004; Johnson et al., 1997). On the other hand, women tend to identify themselves more with the victim and, therefore, tend to attribute lower levels of victim blame in order to protect their role as a potential victim (Gerber et al., 2004). Nevertheless, there is still evidence, contextually specific, that seems to contradict most of these results. Abeid and colleagues (2015) found that, in a rural community in Tanzania, men scored lower on myth acceptance. Women, on the other hand, further justified and supported myths about sexual violence in adulthood (Abeid et al., 2015).

These results are consistent with studies regarding domestic violence conducted in Uganda and in Sub-Saharan Africa where women showed higher levels of validation and acceptance of wife beating than men (Koenig et al., 2003; Rani, Bonu & Diop-Sidibe, 2004). This difference may be associated with contextual factors such as reduced levels of women's empowerment in these cultural contexts, as well as their lower levels of education and occupation status, poverty and rural residency (Abeid et al., 2015).

Similarly, in the context of child sexual abuse, generally, female perpetrators are less blamed (Almeida, 2003), especially when the victim is male (Broussard, Wagner & Kazelskis, 1991). Further, females tend to describe adult-child interactions as more abusive and having a more negative impact on the child (Broussard et al., 1991). They also attribute more guilt to the perpetrator and therefore tend to give more credibility to children's abuse disclosures (Alcantara, Shortway & Prempeh, 2019; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Davies & Rogers, 2009). On the other hand, males tend to score higher on child sexual abuse myths (Collings, 2003; Collings et al., 2009) and therefore assign greater responsibility/blame to the victim (Back & Lips, 1998; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). All this evidence is crucial to understand myth acceptance, given that these myths and negative beliefs may be detrimental in this process of sexual abuse disclosure and have a real impact in victims' life (i.e., lack of victims' credibility and honesty) (Alaggia & Millington, 2008).

In sum, the literature has consistently shown sex differences regarding myth acceptance for both rape (e.g., Aosved & Long, 2006; Canan et al., 2016; Chapleau et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2012) and child sexual abuse (Collings, 2003; Collings et al., 2009), with men outscoring women. However, besides individual variables, socio-cognitive dimensions, such as sexism beliefs, should also be accounted for myths acceptance.

3.3.2. Sexism and Sexual Abuse Myths

The dissemination of myths and victim blame attribution processes are described in the literature as potentially explained by socio-cognitive dimensions, one of them being sexist attitudes and behaviors (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Attitudes and behaviors that discriminate individuals based on their biological sex are theoretically described as sexism (Matlin, 2012). Glick and Fiske (1996) distinguish two types of sexism: *Hostile*

and *Benevolent*. Hostile Sexism is described as “the most blatant expression of prejudice against women” (Allport, 1994, quoted by Formiga et al., 2002, p. 105), involving “beliefs and practices of people who consider women inferior to men, reflecting antipathy and intolerance in relation to their role as a figure of power and decision” (Formiga et al., 2002, p. 106). On the other hand, Benevolent Sexism is more complex and subtle (Magalhães et al., 2007), being an apparently non-prejudiced attitude, but showing the paternalistic meaning, describing the woman as a fragile person, who, in parallel, can also complement the man (Formiga et al., 2002). It is also “an affectionate or chivalrous expression of male dominance” (Becker & Wright, 2011, p. 63).

Theoretically, both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism are composed by three shared components: (1) Paternalism; (2) Gender Differentiation; and (3) Heterosexuality (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Formiga et al., 2002; Magalhães et al., 2007). Paternalism suggests that the relationship between a man and a woman assumes the same characteristics as the relationship between a father and a child, either by its dominant role (related to Hostile Sexism) or by its affective role (related to Benevolent Sexism) (Formiga et al., 2002). Gender Differentiation, in the case of Hostile Sexism, refers to the notion that only male individuals have the necessary characteristics and capacities to perform certain functions and tasks, namely power positions (Formiga et al., 2002). In the case of Benevolent Sexism, this differentiation manifests itself through positive traits of women that are complementary to men (Formiga et al., 2002). As for Heterosexuality, in the case of Hostile Sexism, it is related to the notion that women are men’s sexual object (Formiga et al., 2002; Magalhães et al., 2007). In terms of Benevolent Sexism, Heterosexuality refers to the assumption that women cannot be totally happy without a partner (Formiga et al., 2002; Magalhães et al., 2007).

In their research, Glick and Fiske (1996) found that Hostile Sexism is associated with higher levels of sexual violence myth acceptance. On the other hand, there are studies that suggest an interaction between sexist attitudes and offender characteristics, as higher levels of Benevolent Sexism are associated with higher levels of secondary victimization (i.e., victim behaviors are perceived as inappropriate), when the offender is a victim’s acquaintance (Abrams et al., 2003). Regarding child sexual abuse, Cromer and Freyd (2007) found that participants with higher levels of sexism (Benevolent and Hostile) have more unrealistic beliefs/attitudes towards a sexually abusive experience (e.g., lower probability of considering that a 9-year-old child is forced into a sexual

relationship with an adult). In addition, the authors also found that higher levels of Hostile Sexism are associated with less credibility given to a sexual abuse disclosure (Cromer & Freyd, 2007).

In sum, the literature shows that if on one hand, myths about sexual violence can be explained by sexist attitudes (Abrams et al., 2003; Chapleau et al., 2007, 2008; Russell & Trigg, 2004) and sexism also seems to vary according to the participants' sex (Abeid et al., 2015; Canan et al., 2016; Chapleau et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 1997; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; McMahon, 2010; Monson et al., 2000; Russell & Hand, 2017; Russell & Trigg, 2004; Sleath & Bull, 2010; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014; Xenos & Smith, 2001). As such, additional research about how sexism may predict child sexual abuse myth acceptance is needed as well as about the moderator role of participants' sex in this relationship.

4. Empirical Study

4.1. Research Problems and Objectives

Based on the literature previously described, consistent and inconsistent evidence is described focused on the relationship between individual characteristics and myth acceptance that reinforce the need to study this issue. Likewise, based on the validity evidence of the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS) in different countries (i.e., Sweden, South Africa and South Korea) and, considering that it has not been adapted or validated in the Portuguese context, its adaptation is important in order to be able to develop further research in the Portuguese context as well as cross-cultural studies on these myths.

Research has consistently shown that males score higher on sexual violence myths (both rape and child sexual abuse) and victim blame, assigning less guilt to female sex offenders (e.g., Aosved & Long, 2006; Canan et al., 2016; Russell & Hand, 2017; van der Bruggen & Grubb, 2014) and also attributing more guilt to male victims (Gerber et al., 2004). Similarly, the evidence on the relationship between sexism and myth acceptance is relatively consistent, suggesting that higher levels of sexism (Hostile and Benevolent) predict higher levels of myth dissemination/acceptance (Abrams et al., 2003; Chapleau et al., 2007, 2008; Glick & Fiske, 1996; Russell & Trigg, 2004). If evidence exists on the association between sexist attitudes and myth acceptance, as well as on sex's differences on those constructs in the context of child sexual abuse, the

moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and myth acceptance seems to remain unexplored.

In this sense, this thesis aims to: a) translate, adapt and test the psychometric properties of the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS) in the Portuguese context; and b) explore the moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and child sexual abuse myths.

5. Method

5.1. Participants

The sample includes 423 participants, mostly female (66.2%) aged from 18 to 77 years old ($M_{age} = 29.30$; $SD = 12.258$). Most participants were single (80.9%), 13.2% were married and 5.9% were divorced. In terms of education levels, 53.7% completed higher education courses, 42.1% completed the high school and 3% concluded middle school. Finally, 49.9% of the participants were employed, 43.7% were students and 5% were unemployed.

5.2. Instruments

5.2.1. Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Participants' demographic attributes were assessed with a sociodemographic questionnaire, namely, assessing sex, age, nationality, marital status, together with academic and professional experience.

5.2.2. The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996)

The Portuguese version of this scale was used in this study (Magalhães et al., 2007). This scale consists of 22 items organized in two factors: Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism. Participants were asked to score their level of agreement with different statements using a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree). Adequate internal consistency has been provided in both subscales in the Portuguese context: Hostile Sexism (*Cronbach* alpha = .82) (e.g., “Women are too easily offended”) and Benevolent Sexism (*Cronbach* alpha = .80) (e.g., “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess”) (Magalhães et al., 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Acceptable internal consistency was also found in this study: Hostile Sexism (*Cronbach* alpha = .79) and Benevolent Sexism (*Cronbach* alpha = .77).

5.2.3. Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS; Collings, 1997)

This scale allows to assess attitudes towards child sexual abuse. It is a 15-item self-report scale, organized in three factors: (1) Blame Diffusion (e.g., “Adolescent girls who wear very revealing clothing are asking to be sexually abused”); (2) Denial of Abusiveness (e.g., “Older children, who have a better understanding of sexual matters, have a responsibility to actively resist sexual advances by adults”); and (3) Restrictive Stereotypes (e.g., “Most children are sexually abused by strangers or by man who are not well known to the child”). It is answered using a 5-point scale (1= Strongly Disagree to 5= Strongly Agree) (Collings, 1997; Collings et al., 2009). In terms of internal consistency, the full scale in the original study scored a .764 *Cronbach* Alpha, which means it has an acceptable internal consistency (Collings, 1997).

5.3. Procedures

5.3.1. Translation and Adaptation of CSAMS

Firstly, permission to translate and adapt the scale was requested from the author of the original version. A first translation was made by a researcher and subsequently reviewed by three other independent researchers. Three researchers were included in order to make the process of solving translation differences easier. The translated version was then back translated by a bilingual individual. Finally, the back translated version was compared to the original one, and the Portuguese version was finished.

5.3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

This study is part of a broader project, approved by the Ethical Committee of the Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Lisbon University. The data was collected *online*, through the *Qualtrics* software and disseminated on social networks (e.g., *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *WhatsApp*). This study included a sample of convenience (not probabilistic), and two inclusion criteria were defined: (1) all participants must understand the Portuguese language, both in written and oral forms; and (2) all participants must be 18 years old or above. Participation was voluntary and without financial or any other type of reward. An informed consent was provided to the participants, in which a set of information was given: a) namely information about the researchers in case they had any questions or needed any clarification; b) the study description, what was asked, timeframe and risks regarding the participation; c) it was also specified that the participant could stop answering at any point and choose not to answer; d) it was also stated that the data

collected was anonymous and confidential. After agreeing with these conditions, participants filled out the questionnaires, which took about 10 to 15 minutes.

After data collection, *IBM SPSS® for Windows* (Version 22.0) was used to analyze participants' descriptive statistics, mean differences, correlational analysis and internal consistency. *IBM AMOS® for Windows* (Version 25.0) was used to test the construct validity, through a confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA), and the moderating role of sex on the relationship between sexism and sexual abuse myths, through a multigroup analysis (using *path analysis*). The goodness of fit of the models was assessed through the following criteria: the ratio of the chi-square statistic to the degrees of freedom (χ^2/df) below 2; the comparative fit index (CFI) approaching 1 (Bentler, 1990), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) below .10 (MacCallum et al. 1996; Maroco, 2010).

6. Results

6.1. Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale validity (CSAMS; Collings, 1997)

6.1.1. Descriptive Analysis

Preceding the construct validity analysis, a descriptive analysis of the 15 items was performed in order to analyze symmetry of the items' distribution. The analysis of the absolute values of Skewness allowed the identification of one item (Item 6. "A woman who does not satisfy her partner sexually must bear some of the responsibility if her partner feels frustrated and turns to her children for sexual satisfaction") showing a value greater than 3 (Table 1). This item was removed from further analyses.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics: Means, Standard deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis

Item	n	M	SD	Skew		Kurt	
				Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
1	423	1.44	0.83	2.18	0.12	4.70	0.24
2	422	1.77	1.25	1.41	0.12	0.64	0.24
3	423	2.17	0.93	0.58	0.12	0.01	0.24
4	423	1.36	0.71	2.01	0.12	3.42	0.24
5	423	1.48	0.8	1.92	0.12	3.45	0.24
6	423	1.14	0.50	4.48	0.12	23.47	0.24
7	423	1.86	0.99	0.87	0.12	-0.22	0.24
8	422	1.41	0.75	1.93	0.12	3.42	0.24
9	422	1.51	0.81	1.41	0.12	0.89	0.24
10	423	1.31	0.66	2.40	0.12	6.02	0.24
11	423	1.35	0.74	2.33	0.12	5.51	0.24
12	423	1.49	0.84	1.66	0.12	1.85	0.24
13	423	2.08	1.05	0.47	0.12	-0.99	0.24
14	423	1.26	0.61	2.57	0.12	6.290	0.24
15	422	2.01	1.17	0.84	0.12	-0.45	0.24

6.1.2. Construct Validity

The factorial structure of the Portuguese version of the CSAMS was tested using a CFA (maximum likelihood estimation) and the three-factor model was tested (Model 1). All latent factors were allowed to correlate. The overall fit of the model 1 revealed adequate but not good statistics: $\chi^2(74)= 270.993$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=3.66$; comparative fit index (CFI)=.898; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=.079. As such, based on modification indices, the errors of the items 10-11 (Item 10. “Adolescent girls who wear very revealing clothing are asking to be sexually abused”; Item 11. “Children raised by gay or lesbian couples face a greater risk of being sexually abused than children raised by heterosexual couples”) and 7-13 (Item 7. “Child sexual abuse takes place mainly in poor, disorganized, unstable families”; Item 13. “Child sexual abused is caused by social problems such as unemployment, poverty, and alcohol abuse”) were allowed to correlate. The overall fit of this second model was generally within the range of a good fit: $\chi^2(72)= 171.417$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=2.381$; comparative fit index (CFI)=.949; and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)=.057 (Figure 1).

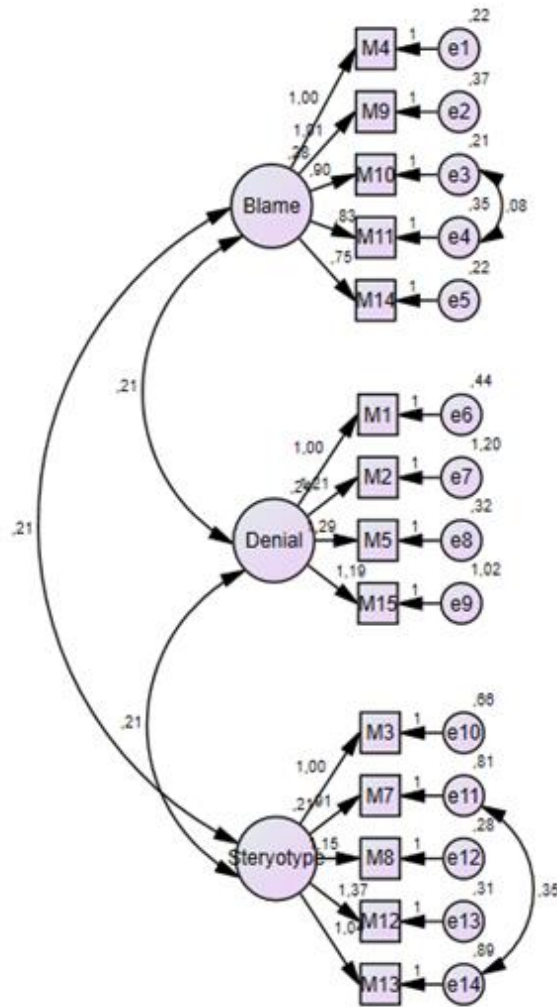


Figure 1. Final model from the confirmatory factor analysis (14 items)

6.1.3. Validity Evidence Based on the Relationship Between Child Sexual Abuse Myths and Other Variables

Correlations among the three factors of child sexual abuse myths and sexism reveals that all subscales were positively and significantly correlated: greater sexist attitudes are associated with greater child sexual abuse myths (Table 2).

Table 2

Simple intercorrelations of study variables, mean and standard deviations

Dimension	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Blame Diffusion	.59***	.61***	.36***	.32***	1.36	0.53
2. Denial of Abusiveness	1	.59***	.27***	.31***	1.68	0.72
3. Restrictive Stereotypes		1	.30***	.31***	1.80	0.63
4. Benevolent Sexism			1	.65***	3.31	0.96
5. Hostile Sexism				1	3.50	0.95

Furthermore, the analyses of sex differences among the myth subscales revealed that men significantly outscored women in all subscales (Table 3).

Table 3

Mean differences based on participants' sex

	Sex	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Blame Diffusion	Female	1.24	.40	-5.971	<.001	.66
	Male	1.60	.66			
Denial of Abusiveness	Female	1.53	.63	-5.578	<.001	.60
	Male	1.96	.80			
Restrictive Stereotypes	Female	1.68	.55	-5.085	<.001	.55
	Male	2.03	.72			
Benevolent Sexism	Female	3.17	.95	-4.352	<.001	.45
	Male	3.59	.92			
Hostile Sexism	Female	3.34	.96	-5.004	<.001	.50
	Male	3.80	.88			

6.1.4. Reliability

Reliability was checked calculating *Cronbach's* Alpha. Results indicated adequate reliability evidence for all factors: Blame Diffusion ($\alpha=.81$), Denial of Abusiveness ($\alpha=.64$) and Restrictive Stereotypes ($\alpha=.73$) (Kline, 2005).

6.2. The Moderating Role of Sex in the Relationship Between Sexism and Sexual Abuse Myths

A first predictive model was tested, based on the relationship between sexism and child sexual abuse myths. Results revealed significant effects between Benevolent Sexism and Blame Diffusion ($\beta = .26$, $p<.001$), Denial of Abusiveness ($\beta = .12$, $p=.045$), Restrictive Stereotypes ($\beta = .16$, $p=.009$), and between Hostile Sexism and Blame Diffusion ($\beta = .15$, $p=.012$), Denial of Abusiveness ($\beta = .23$, $p<.001$), Restrictive Stereotypes ($\beta = .21$, $p<.001$). That is, participants who reported higher levels of Benevolent Sexism also reported higher scores of Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes. In addition, participants who reported higher levels of Hostile Sexism also reported higher levels of Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes.

Second, the moderating role of sex was tested through a multiple group analysis. Results showed a non-significant chi-square difference between the unconstrained and

the constrained models: $\Delta\chi^2(6) = 7.157$ $p = .307$, indicating that the whole model does not vary significantly between women and men. However, an analysis of specific paths across the groups revealed some different patterns. Females' higher levels of Benevolent Sexism predicted higher levels of Blame Diffusion and of Restrictive Stereotypes and higher levels of Hostile Sexism also predicted higher levels of Restrictive Stereotypes. On the other hand, males showing higher levels of Hostile Sexism also revealed higher levels in all factors of the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (i.e., Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes). However, males' Benevolent Sexism did not predict sexual abuse myths (Figure 2; estimates in bold for males). These different patterns can be found in the model (Figure 2), but statistically significant differences between males and females were merely found in the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Denial of Abusiveness ($z_{\text{score}} = -2.016$, $p = .044$). As such, males who reported greater Hostile Sexism also reported greater levels of Denial of Abusiveness; but this was not true for females.

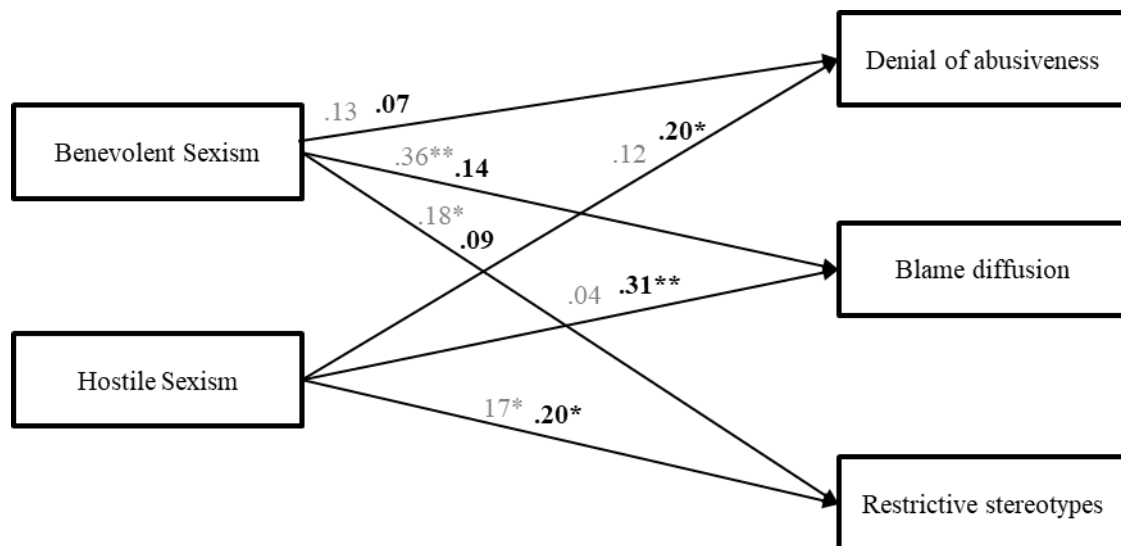


Figure 2. The moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and sexual abuse myths

7. Discussion

This thesis aimed to translate, adapt and test the psychometric properties of the Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (CSAMS) in the Portuguese context. Sexual violence myths legitimize sexual aggression and violence (Bohner et al., 2006; Yapp & Quayle,

2018) and for that reason, careful evaluations are needed in the community, through valid and reliable measures. A first confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess construct validity and the results revealed that the original three factor structure showed acceptable, but not good or excellent fit indices. Based on the analysis of modification indices (Maroco, 2010), a final model was tested correlating two pairs of errors and the results revealed good fit statistics. Although the CFI was not greater than .95 (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003), its acceptance can still be considered given that it was above .90 and close to .95 (Bentler, 1990). This result reinforces the three-factor theoretical model previously described, with a structure composed by 14 items: Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes. As stated, Blame Diffusion involves beliefs related to the idea that other people besides the offender are guilty or partly guilty for the abuse (e.g., “Children who act in a seductive manner must be seen as being at least partly to blame if an adult responds to them in a sexual way”). Denial of Abusiveness includes beliefs that seek to minimize the abusive dimension of child sexual abuse, highlighting the child’s consent (e.g., “Sexual contact between an adult and a child that does not involve force or coercion and that does not involve actual or attempted sexual intercourse is unlike to have serious psychological consequences for the child”). Finally, Restrictive Stereotypes involves beliefs that deny the reality of most abusive cases, seeking to minimize its negative consequences (e.g., “Most children are sexually abused by strangers or by man who are not well known to the child”) (Collings, 1997). As such, this evidence may allow us to contrast results on this topic cross-culturally, given that the three theoretically dimensions were factorially supported in this study.

Convergent validity and reliability of the Portuguese version of the scale were also assessed. Convergent validity (i.e., the relationship with other variables) highlights the trustworthiness of this scale to be applied in the Portuguese context given that all subscales (i.e., Blame Diffusion, Denial of Abusiveness and Restrictive Stereotypes) positively correlated with both Ambivalent Sexism Inventory subscales (i.e., Benevolent Sexism and Hostile Sexism). Furthermore, the results showed that male participants outscored female in all subscales, showing higher levels of sexism and child sexual abuse myth acceptance. This result is consistent with previous evidence that suggests that men scored higher than women on myth acceptance in the context of sexual abusive experiences (Canan et al., 2016; Collings, 2003; Collings et al., 2009; Davies et al., 2012). Sex differences have been reported, with men endorsing more

myths (Canan et al., 2016) and more negativity towards them (Davies et al., 2012). Moreover, regarding sexual abuse, men tend to score higher on myth acceptance (Collings, 2003), which is consistently observed across cultures (i.e., Sweden, South Africa, South Korea) (Collings et al., 2009), and this was the case in the present sample as well. Finally, reliability evidence was achieved with adequate *Cronbach* Alpha coefficients (ranging from .64 to .81). The dimension the Denial of Abusiveness revealed a coefficient lower than .70; however, this is the dimension composed by fewer items. Consistent with the original full scale, which scored .764 (Collings, 1997) and with the Swedish ($\alpha=.86$) and South Korean ($\alpha=.71$) versions (Collings et al., 2009), the Portuguese version also shows good/acceptable reliability values.

Additionally, we aimed to explore the moderating role of sex in the relationship between sexism and child sexual abuse myths. Consistent with previous literature, results showed that higher levels of sexism predicted higher levels of myth acceptance (Abrams et al., 2003; Cromer & Freyd, 2007; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Specifically, participants who scored higher on Sexism (Benevolent and Hostile) also scored higher in all dimensions of the CSAMS. These results are consistent with previous evidence (Aosved & Long, 2006), in which men scored higher on rape myth acceptance and sexism but the moderating role of sex was non-significant. Even though men outscored women in all subscales for both Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and CSAMS, results showed a non-significant difference between men and women considering the whole model. Probably, with a more sex balanced sample significant results might be achieved.

However, when the specific paths across the groups were analyzed, in this study, different patterns were found across sex. For women, higher levels of Benevolent Sexism were associated to higher levels of Blame Diffusion and Restrictive Stereotypes and higher levels of Hostile Sexism were associated to higher levels of Restrictive Stereotypes. For men, only higher levels of Hostile Sexism predicted all CSAMS's dimensions. As stated, Benevolent Sexism predicted more dimensions of the CSAMS for women than for men. According to the literature, this type of sexism might be differently perceived by men and women (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005), and for that reason, it might have a different impact on other attitudes and beliefs (e.g., myths). Benevolent Sexism consists of a more complex and subtle type of sexism (Magalhães et al., 2007), and it may be socially perceived as having benefits for women as a social group. It could be perceived as chivalry that may lead to personal gains and promote the

sense of fairness in the status quo (Connelly & Heesacker, 2012; Napier, Thorisdottir & Jost, 2010). As such, women who endorse Benevolent Sexism may be also more able to agree with a hierarchal organization of social groups, as well as to endorse sexual myths and misconceptions. Our results suggest that, women who endorse both Hostile and Benevolent Sexism may disseminate myths related to Restrictive Stereotypes, and women dissemination of Blame Diffusion myths is merely predicted by Benevolent Sexism. In this sense, the non-culpability of the perpetrator seems to be better explained by those subtle sexist beliefs, and both sexism dimensions predict a stereotyped view of sexual abuse.

On the other hand, Hostile Sexism was the only form of sexism that predicted higher levels of child sexual abuse myth acceptance for men, and of Restrictive Stereotypes for women. These results are consistent with previous literature regarding rape myths where Hostile Sexism was the strongest predictor of rape myth acceptance for both sexes (Chapleau et al., 2007). This type of sexism reflects a pattern of discrimination that reveals a dominance position of one group (i.e., men) against the other (i.e., women) (Formiga et al., 2002). Specifically, in our model, we found statistically significant differences between males and females, with the relationship between Hostile Sexism and Denial of Abusiveness being significant merely for males. That is, males who reported greater Hostile Sexism also reported greater levels of Denial of Abusiveness. This result suggests that this explicit minimization of the role of one group (i.e., women) is associated with greater dismissal of sexual abusive experiences. This is congruent with theoretical and empirical evidence that suggests that men, more than women, endorse the idea of social dominance and inequality of groups (Nosek et al., 2007; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) as well as with previous evidence that suggests that a stereotyped perspective of groups is related to greater victim blame attribution (Chapleau et al., 2007; Russell & Trigg, 2004). Actually, Hostile Sexism may also function as a way to rationalize sexual violence (Abrams et al., 2003), which seems to be a common characteristic of people who tolerate sexual harassment (Russell & Trigg, 2004). In our study, these propositions seem to be more prominent on men than on women, which has important implications for practice and prevention on this topic.

8. Implications for practice and research

The contributions of this thesis to practice and research are two-fold: (1) it provides a valid and reliable measure which allows to evaluate the child sexual abuse myths, from a multidimensional perspective and to contribute to international research in this field; and (2) it provides evidence on how sexual abuse myths are predicted by sexist attitudes as well as how these processes are different for men and women.

Even though society is changing, and women are increasingly occupying more positions of power, one cannot ignore that men still have a predominant role in the system (e.g., police officers, judges, etc.) (Duarte, Oliveira, Fernando & Gomes, 2015; PSP, 2019). Men still hold views that are more sexist and acceptant of child sexual abuse myths, which can affect decision-making and support giving in sexual abuse cases (Dinos et al., 2014; Grubb & Turner, 2012). This may lead to victim's secondary victimization, as sexual violence myth acceptance contributes to higher levels of victim blame, lower levels of alleged victims' credibility (Goodman-Delahunty, Cossins & O'Brien, 2010; Sleath & Bull, 2010) and lower levels of offender blame (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2010; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Sleath & Bull, 2010).

Moreover, our results highlight the urgency to change misconceptions about child sexual abuse, broadly in society, but also specifically in the contexts of child development and in the justice system (Goodman-Delahunty et al., 2010). As previously stated, experiences of disbelief by professionals in the justice system can have a negative impact on the victim's well-being in rape cases (Greeson et al., 2016), which highlights the importance of lifelong learning, as they are not immune to the dissemination of child sexual abuse myths or misinformation. Furthermore, it is also necessary that knowledge obtained from research in this area should be considered in practice, namely in contexts important to the child's development, such as the family, context where most cases of child sexual abuse occur (Arcari, 2016; Collings, 1997; Snyder, 2000; Habigzang et al., 2005; Reitsema & Grietens, 2015) and school. A study by Márquez-Flores, Márquez-Hernández and Granados-Gámez (2016) showed that teachers lack knowledge on the matter of child sexual abuse and that majority does not receive proper training. Training in this matter is important given that teachers are models and significant others for children, playing a central role in their life, which makes them important partners for abuse disclosures and prevention. Finally, our results on sex differences suggest the importance to consider these individual differences on

policies and interventions, providing adequate support to individual needs related to beliefs, myths and attitudes toward specific vulnerable groups. These results showed the importance of continuous education and training for professionals who work with children and adolescents, particularly considering those individual differences. Actually, there is evidence that, for instance, male counselors may hold views and beliefs that may harm the client (Collings, 2003).

Even considering these innovative results and significant implications, limitations should also be identified. In this study, a non-random sample was recruited, and the data was collected only through an online platform. Even though online data collection has its benefits such as low costs, lower time consumption and more flexibility for participants to answer (Lages et al., 2018), the inclusion of participants who do not have access to online platforms would be important in order to have a more diverse sample. In addition, even though efforts were made in this regard, data interpretation must be done carefully given the discrepancy between male (N= 143) and female (N= 280) participants, with female participants representing more than half of the sample (66.2%). Similarly, participants were only asked about their biological sex and not their gender, which should be addressed in the future research. Finally, regarding the scale's validity evidence, future research may include longitudinal designs, enabling to test predictive validity evidence as well as the invariance measurement evidence by sex.

As such, future research should focus on including research designs where different sources of data collection are included, which would also enable access to participants who don't have internet access as well as using strategies regarding balance in terms of the participant's sex (e.g., stop collecting female responses until the number of male participants is balanced/even). Future research should also explore the role of other sociodemographic variables in the Portuguese context such as age of the respondent, which literature shows some inconsistencies (i.e., some studies find that older people have higher levels of myth acceptance and others show the opposite) (Abeid et al., 2015; McGee et al., 2011; Patel, 2009; Xenos & Smith, 2001).

Given that this is a correlational study, future studies should include longitudinal or experimental studies. Empirical designs where other variables such as sex and age of the victim are manipulated could be developed, given that one of the main myths is that boys/men cannot be victims of sexual violence, which leads to less blame attribution to the abuser (Chapleau et al., 2008; Gerber et al., 2004; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994;

Patel, 2009). In addition, older victims are held more responsible for the abuse and are less believed (Back & Lips, 1998; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Waterman & Foss-Goodman, 1984). The offenders' sex should also be further explored, given that the literature shows that female perpetrators are held less accountable and their interaction with male victims is perceived as less unwanted or less abusive (Almeida, 2003; Broussard et al., 1991). Further, research on the role of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator should also be done given that literature shows that when the aggressor is someone close to the victim, more blame is attributed to them (Abrams et al., 2003; Davies & Rogers, 2009; Monson et al., 2010; Sleath & Bull, 2010).

In sum, current results are promising on how child sexual abuse myths acceptance might be explained by individual and socio-cognitive variables, providing also evidence on the adequate psychometric properties of the CSAMS.

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