

## **Factors That Affect Rape Myths Acceptance in the United Kingdom.**

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### **Introduction**

The matter of rape and how rape is perceived has been discussed multiple times in scientific papers and has been explored in a variety of ways, while campaigns continuously attempt to raise awareness about the devastation that such victimisation leaves to victims and their families. Still, due to cultural variations and many other factors, in some countries rape is considered as a serious crime and in other countries the blame is often shifted to the victim.

In 1980 Martha Burt stressed that rape myths are prejudiced, stereotyped, or inaccurate views about rape, rape victims, and perpetrators. Burt further highlighted those beliefs such as, women ask for it and rapists are sex-starved, demented, or both. Such widespread perceptions of rape are based on assumptions that have been proved to have little or no factual validity. Later, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) emphasised that such perceptions serve only to excuse male sexual violence towards women. Thus, emphasising the manipulative intricacy of a process that is normally beyond the comprehension of most people, but is a constant cause of aggravation for sexual harassment victims.

Several studies have found that men support more traditional attitudes than women, with others arguing that attitudes toward gender roles are incorporated into individuals' behaviours and attitudes, as well as how they perceive others (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Black & McCloskey, 2013). As a result, when both genders retain more conventional attitudes, they are more inclined to blame the victim and assign less culpability to the attacker.

Unfortunately, it has been observed that, attitudes toward rape victims are closely connected to how males see women and class them within society. For example, communities with strong sex-role preconceptions are more inclined to blame the victim, even attributing complete culpability to them (Park et al., 2004). Such misconceptions have led many researchers to examine the factors behind those beliefs, to raise awareness and fight the perception that rape can be justified under the right circumstances. Similar scientific projects have proven a link between views on conventional sex roles and acceptance of rape myths (RMA) (Oh, & Neville, 2004).

Particularly, the role of gender and RMA have been researched by utilising the the Illinois RMA Scale (IRMAS). When the scale was tested with 475 Norwegian participants, it was shown that men were more prone than women to believe in rape myths and were far more inclined to blame the victim rather than the offender (Bendixen, Henriksen, & Nstdahl, 2014). Consequently, signifying the impact of gender on RMA.

### **Aim**

The severe consequences that rape victims suffer and the prevalent misconceptions surrounding rape, led to this project. The aim of this research was to investigate how attitudes toward women, attitudes toward rape victims, and gender influence acceptance of rape myths in the United Kingdom.

## Methodology

The recruited sample consisted of 305 participants from the United Kingdom, with a mean age of 24.51 (SD=8.90) and range between 18 to 76, (217 - 71.15% - female, 84 - 27.54% - male, 4 - 1.31% - other). Participants were recruited after continuous advertisement of the project on the social media and completed the ethically approved online survey on the platform Qualtrics.

The utilised measurement tools included the Attitudes towards Women (ATW), with 25 items. A high score suggests a pro-feminist, egalitarian attitude, whereas a low score shows a conventional, conservative viewpoint (Delevi, & Bugay, 2013). The Attitudes towards Rape Victims scale (ATRV), which was developed by Ward in 1988, and includes the concept of accountability. Higher scores suggest more unfavourable attitudes toward rape victims (Boakye, 2009). And lastly, the IRMAS, which consists of 22 items grouped into four subscales. Those being: include (1) She asked for it; (2) He did not mean to; (3) It was not really rape; and (4) She lied. Higher scores indicate a rejection of RMA. Gender was the final examined factor.

## Results

Following data collection, statistical analysis was performed to examine relationships between the Illinois Scale and the other included factors. The linear regression model's results were significant,  $F(12,278) = 46.10$ ,  $p.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.67$ , showing that ATW total and ATRV explain roughly 67% of the variation in Illinois Total.  $B = 0.15$ ,  $t(278) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .050$ , ATW total significantly predicted Illinois Total. Suggesting that an increase in the ATW score, will result in an increase of the total score in IRMAS. Whereas, ATRV total predicted Illinois Total substantially,  $B = -0.66$ ,  $t(278) = -13.05$ ,  $p.001$ , suggesting that a one-unit rise in ATRV total reduces the value of Illinois total by 0.66 units on average. The regression model's findings are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Results for Linear Regression with Attitudes Towards Women Total, Attitudes Towards Rape Victims Total predicting Illinois Total.

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	98.73	10.60	[77.87, 119.59]	0.00	9.32	< .001
Attitudes Towards Women Total	0.15	0.08	[0.00, 0.30]	0.11	1.97	.050
Attitudes Towards Rape Victims Total	-0.66	0.05	[-0.76, -0.56]	-	-	< .001

Further examination with a linear regression, indicated that the model was once more significant,  $F(1,303) = 28.95$ ,  $p.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.09$ , showing that gender accounts for about 9% of the variation in Illinois Total. In other words, being a female, strongly predicts the Illinois Total score,  $B = 8.62$ ,  $t(303) = 5.38$ ,  $p.001$ . Based on this data, shifting from the male to female category, increases the mean value of Illinois total by 8.62 units on average.

Following, a series of t-tests for gender were performed, and the findings were significant for several variables. The subscales of the IRMA, such as "She asked for it" ( $t(305) = -4.78$ ,  $p.001$ ), "He did not mean to" ( $t(305) = -2.76$ ,  $p = .006$ ), "It was not really rape" ( $t(305) = -4.53$ ,  $p.001$ ), "She Lied" ( $t(305) = -4.90$ ,  $p.001$ ), and "Illinois Total" ( $t(305) = -5.06$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

## Discussion

With a sample from the United Kingdom, this study tested the RMA against three factors. Significant findings were discovered, notably in the assertions affecting views toward women (She asked for it; He did not mean to; It was not really rape; She lied; and Illinois Total). Furthermore, this study found that an increase in the Illinois score (rejection of rape myths) resulted in an increase in the ATW score (i.e., Feminist beliefs). This suggests that individuals who hold more feminist beliefs, such as gender equality and contemporary families, are more likely to reject rape myths than those who hold more patriarchal beliefs. Several studies have also found that people who accept RMA, are more prone to harbour unfavourable attitudes about victims. Such findings indicate the need for more campaigns to increase awareness about the severe consequences that rape victims suffer, while educating society about rape myths could save victims from the stigma and repeated abuse post rape.

The following ATW claims also showed significant results: “She asked for it”, “He did not mean to”, “It was not really rape”, “She lied”, and the “Illinois Total”. Indicating that a rise in the Illinois score results in a drop in the ATRS (supportive of rape victims). This suggests that those who support rape victims and blame the perpetrator, are more likely to reject rape myths beliefs, than persons who blame the victim. Earlier studies (Mason, Riger & Foley, 2004) discovered that high RMA scores indicate victim blame rather than culpability for the attacker. As a result, the importance of public awareness and education on such misguided beliefs is emphasised. Such a shift in perceptions and attitudes is critical to prevent further harassment of sexual assault survivors. According to the current research, a higher score in the Illinois scale (rejection of rape myths) results to a decrease in ATRS (supportive of rape victims). This conclusion is consistent with previous studies.

The literature also shows that, as compared to women, males tend to blame the victims, exonerate the offenders, and report greater degrees of sexism and rape myths (Davies, Smith & Rogers, 2009). Similarly, the findings of this study revealed that males accepted more rape myths than females. This suggests that men in the United Kingdom are more likely than women to believe rape myths. Such results stress the need for further education on the matter of rape and more support for rape victims. The results also suggest that even in a society where progressivism is prevalent, rape myths are still prevalent; consequently, implying that even a society where equality is encouraged and broadly supported, rape myths are deeply embedded.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to add to the limited cross-cultural body of information about RMA and to analyse three factors that may impact the acceptability of rape myths in the United Kingdom. Several previous studies have found that believing in myths about rape and sexual violence is often connected with certain attitudes about sexual violence and exploitation in contemporary culture. Because this study was exploratory in nature and only gives a snapshot of the complex field of sexual crime beliefs and attitudes, future research should build on this field and further examine RMA with a larger and more inclusive sample. While the authorities should try and increase awareness to prevent victims from being harassed further.

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