

Analysing the Impact of Observer and Victim Characteristics on Attributions of Blame in Rape Cases: A Literature Review on Rape Victim Blaming

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Abstract

Rape is a heinous crime that has an impact on people and societies all over the world. In Pakistan, it is common for victims to be held accountable for their own sexual assault—a phenomenon known as victim blaming. The objective of this comprehensive review of the literature was to pinpoint and evaluate the elements that lead to victim blaming in Pakistani rape cases. The following keywords were used to conduct research in several databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar: rape, victim blaming, Pakistan. This review included a total of 20 articles that were published between the years of 2010 and 2022. The results showed that victim blaming is a complicated phenomenon affected by social, legal, cultural, and religious aspects. The articles listed a

number of elements that contribute to victim blaming, such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal views, false beliefs about rape, a lack of legal protection, and a lacklustre application of the law. The review comes to the conclusion that rape victim blaming in Pakistan is a complex problem that necessitates a thorough strategy to address its root causes. The study suggests creating public awareness campaigns to inform people about rape and its consequences, updating the legal system to give victims proper protection, and advocating for women's emancipation and gender equality.

Keywords: Rape, Victim Blaming, Pakistan, Gender Stereotypes, Patriarchy, Legal Protection

Introduction

Rape is a horrible crime with terrible consequences for those who survive it. According to OHCHR (2020), rape is a human rights violation and a traumatic event that has an impact on people all over the world. Rape is a common issue in Pakistan that has drawn a lot of attention recently as a result of several high-profile cases. Nonetheless, victim blaming is still a common occurrence in Pakistani society, which makes it more difficult to provide victims with justice and leads to the underreporting of sexual assault cases (Ali et al., 2023). Holding the victim accountable for their own sexual assault is known as victim blaming, which turns the attention from the attacker to the victim (Jaspal, 2017). In many societies, including Pakistan, victim blaming is a detrimental phenomenon that leads to the stigmatisation, exclusion, and accusation of perpetration of the rape. The complex issue of rape victim blaming involves a number of sociocultural, religious, and gender-related factors. To effectively address this issue and assist survivors in their healing process, it is imperative to comprehend the extent and characteristics of victim blaming in Pakistani rape cases (Jaspal, 2017).

There are a lot of factors that contribute to victim blaming. Pakistan has a deeply embedded patriarchal culture that places a strong emphasis on traditional gender roles. This may result in social norms that put pressure on women to adopt particular behaviours, and any deviation from these norms may be met with victimisation (Ali et al., 2011). In Pakistani culture, the idea of family honour holds great importance. Because sexual assault is frequently perceived as damaging the victim's family's reputation, the victim is often held responsible rather than the offender (AlQahtani et al., 2022). In Pakistan, rape carries a significant stigma, and victims may worry about being shunned or accused of embarrassing their families. This worry could deter people from reporting and encourage victim blaming (Kazmi et al., 2023).

Inadequate knowledge about boundaries, consent, and sexual health can fuel victimisation and misconceptions. Ignorance of the dynamics of sexual assault can result in the victim being held accountable for not averting the encounter (Kazmi et al., 2023). The legal system's shortcomings, such as lengthy trials, societal bias, and lack of support for victims, can discourage survivors from reporting. When cases do go to trial, the focus on the victim's behavior rather than the perpetrator's actions can contribute to victim blaming (Lorenz et al., 2019). Victim-blaming attitudes can be strengthened by sensationalised media coverage and the maintenance of negative stereotypes. The victim's personality or actions may be highlighted by the media, drawing attention away from the actual crime (Hamid, 2021).

Interpretations of religious doctrines could be a factor in victimisation. It is possible to use misconceptions or incorrect interpretations of religious texts to support victim-blaming ideologies (Barnett et al., 2018). Internalising blame is a common reaction among victims who fear social judgement. The notion that a woman must stop the assault may have its roots in societal expectations of her conduct (Ullman et al., 2020). This systematic literature review's objective is to evaluate the body of knowledge regarding rape victim blaming in Pakistan. In particular, the goals of this review are to determine the elements that lead to victim blaming,

investigate the effects of victim blaming, and examine potential solutions to deal with this problem. This review seeks to provide a thorough understanding of the phenomenon of rape victim blaming in Pakistan by synthesising the findings of prior research and highlighting areas for additional study and intervention.

Method

A comprehensive search was carried out utilising a combination of keywords associated with rape, victim blaming, and Pakistan in a number of academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. Only English-language articles published between 2000 and 2023 were included in the search. Relevant articles were chosen for full-text review after the articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. A focus on rape victim blaming, empirical research as the basis for the articles' inclusion, publication in peer-reviewed journals, English availability, and (c) publication met the inclusion requirements. Twenty articles in total were chosen for review; any more pertinent articles were found by looking through the articles in their references.

Result

Biases that lead to victim blaming

Just World Theory

The main goal of early research was to provide evidence in favour of the Just World Theory (Lerner & Matthews, 1967), which holds that people believe that everyone in the world is treated fairly and that everyone gets what they deserve (Lambert & Raichle, 2000). People feel in control, in order, and in a state of justice when they blame rape victims because it is assumed that they are to blame for their misfortune (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). It is hypothesised that manipulating just world beliefs as an individual difference variable has a causal effect on victim blaming (Lambert & Raichle, 2000). The rape victim blaming study (Yamawaki, 2009) provides evidence in favour of this theory, whereas other studies (Hammond et al., 2011) either found no evidence at all or evidence in the opposite direction. Contrary to what would be expected if extrapolating

directly from the theory, Kleinke and Meyer (1990) found that women with high just world beliefs tend to view rape victims more favourably and blame them to a lesser extent than those with lower beliefs in a just world.

Attribution errors

Victim blaming is associated with the attribution fallacy, which happens when people overemphasise personal traits and disregard extrinsic considerations when evaluating others. Because of this, victims are held responsible for their bad luck without understanding the underlying circumstances that made them victims in the first place. Because survivors are wrongly held accountable for the crimes committed against them, victim blaming can have a serious negative impact on them. It can cause distress and deter survivors from reporting other instances of victimisation. Victim advocates argue that blaming victims diminishes their position and releases offenders from accountability. It is crucial to understand that no victim is ever at fault for the harm they have experienced, and to focus on the perpetrator's actions rather than the victim (Petherick & Sinnamon, 2013).

Defensive Attribution Hypothesis

Shaver (1970) proposed the Defensive Attribution Hypothesis as an additional explanation for the frequent attribution of blame for the unfortunate circumstances surrounding rape victims. This theory holds that the extent to which observers identify with and perceive themselves as similar to the victim determines the degree of blame. The victim will bear less of the blame as they become more alike. Harrower & Grubb (2008). Fulero and DeLara's (1976) classic study found that female psychology students placed more blame on the victim when they were unlike them and less on them when they were similar to them. This defence mechanism served as a self-protective distortion, shielding the victim from potential future attacks from the observer's side. This occurs as a result of the victim attempting to avoid any blame that may be placed on them in the event that they are victimised in this way, as well as a cognitive reduction in the likelihood of another assault (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Men observers

place greater blame on female victims than do female observers because of their reduced identification with the female victim (Herzog, 2008).

3.1.4 Rape myth acceptance

Misconceptions about the circumstances surrounding sexual attacks are commonly known as "rape myths." Rape myths assert that there is no use of alcohol or drugs during a real rape, that the victim does not know her attacker, and that a male perpetrator and a female victim must both be dressed modestly (Roden, 1991). Lower rape myth acceptance ratings (i.e., a lower propensity to endorse rape myths) were significantly correlated with positive attitudes towards rape victims. Likewise, positive attitudes towards victims of rape were significantly correlated with being female, holding a graduate degree or higher, absolving the victim of responsibility, having previously been sexually victimised, standing by friends who were being raped, and being liberal. Furthermore, it has been found that having been sexually victimised oneself makes one more sympathetic to rape victims and could even influence one to lend support to them (Ali et al., 2023). Males are typically associated with leadership and power, which contributes to gender bias among Pakistani students. They also stated that victims of rape in Pakistan do not receive support from their families; instead, they are usually killed for the supposed honour of maintaining the family's standing in society (Jamshed & Kamal, 2021).

3.2 Characteristics of victim

3.2.1 The age of victim

According to a survey done in a private Facebook group for women only, 70–80% of women reported having been assaulted before turning 10; yet, only 5 percent of them had the guts to tell their elders. Furthermore, the majority of them stated that the perpetrators were either close relatives or family members. I'm not sure how brave one would have to be to question an 8-year-old why her body was so exposed that it couldn't ease the sexual frustration of a 30-year-old (Rizvi, 2021).

3.2.2 Gender of victim

According to one study, participant gender did not differ in terms of acceptance of rape myths, empathy for rape victims, causal attributions, or attitudes toward rape victims (Kazmi et al., 2023). Males are typically associated with leadership and authority, which contributes to the gender discrimination seen among Pakistani students. They further stated that victims of rape in Pakistan do not receive support from their relatives; instead, they are usually killed for the supposed honor of maintaining the family's standing in society (Jamshed & Kamal, 2021). An alternative interpretation of this divergence is that gender is a third variable; men may just be more likely to score higher on measures of hostile sexism, sexual scripts, or rape acceptability, rather than gender directly influencing victim blame (Hayes et al., 2013). Due to traditional perceptions about their power, aggressiveness, and masculinity, male victims are more likely to be blamed for their behavior. This is because observers believe that male victims should be able to defend themselves and fight back (Davies & Rogers, 2006). Conversely, female victims are typically criticized for traits such as being careless or having an excessive amount of trust (Davies & Rogers, 2006).

3.2.3 Resistance

The extent of resistance exhibited by the victim and its influence on attribution of responsibility is another aspect that has been extensively researched. Early research was based on the theory that if the victim exhibits some resistance in the early phases of the attack, there is a lower chance that the victim will actually be raped, and witnesses and juries will view incidents as rapes more fully (De La Torre Laso & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2022). The belief held by observers that women are less capable of defending themselves against male abusers can be explained by the belief that male victims, in particular, were thought to be able to defend themselves against their attackers (Krulowitz & Nash, 1979). When the victim protested vocally as opposed to verbally and physically, participants suggested more severe penalties for the offender (Black & Gold, 2008).

3.2.4 Socioeconomic status of victim

A victim is more likely to be held accountable for their bad luck if they are from a lower socioeconomic status. Elite and upper socioeconomic group populations are especially prone to this bias (Zizumbo-Colunga, 2021). Because of the assumption that low-SES women are promiscuous, they may be held accountable for sexual assault incidents. Compared to high-SES women, survivors of assault with a low socioeconomic level (SES) are more likely to bear the responsibility and be held guilty for the attack. Stereotypes regarding the sexuality of low-SES women are correlated with these sentiments (Spencer, 2016).

3.2.5 Socioeconomic status of perpetrator

Men blamed the bus driver more than the physician. Conversely, women placed greater blame on the victim who was sexually assaulted by the bus driver than on the victim who was sexually assaulted by the doctor (Black & Gold, 2008).

3.3 The traditional and cultural aspects

3.3.1 Culture and victim blaming

According to Cole et al. (2020), men who hold traditional, conservative, and sexist beliefs are more likely to be unfavorable toward rape victims, to have little empathy for them, and to place the blame on the victim. According to Obirefu and Ojedokun (2019), there is a correlation between masculinity and conservative beliefs and negative perceptions of rape victims. Additionally, there is a relationship between higher perpetrator culpability and lower victim culpability. Shahid et al. (2021) discovered that the incidence of rape in Pakistan was 8.4 per 100,000 individuals, necessitating strong judicial action against the perpetrators. In a same vein, Jamshed and Kamal's (2021) research reveals that the majority of Pakistanis hold rape and sexual assault victims more negatively and tend to assign responsibility to them. Relevant literature has also shown the significance of social and cultural factors in having causal consequences towards the acceptability of rape myths and victim blaming (Munir et al. 2021; Rasool & Rasool 2020).

3.3.2 Victim-perpetrator relationship

Feelings of implied permission and shared blame might arise when the victim and the perpetrator are acquainted because the offender might not have known about the victim's rejection (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). Since these underlying theories have not yet received empirical testing and/or validation, there is still opportunity for potential qualitative research to investigate the underlying assumptions for rape blame attributions in greater detail (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). In conclusion, the results demonstrate that the closer and more well-known the victim and the perpetrator are to one another, the more often the victim is held more guilty for the rape.

Conclusion

In cases where the victim and the perpetrator are acquainted, there may be emotions of implied permission and shared blame because the offender may not have known about the victim's rejection (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). The underlying assumptions for rape blame attributions have not yet been empirically tested or validated, hence there is still opportunity for potential qualitative research to investigate these beliefs in further detail (Grubb & Harrower, 2008). In summary, the results demonstrate that the more familiar and close-knit the victim and the perpetrator are, the more often the victim is made to feel guilty for the rape. In rape cases, this belief may result in victim blaming, where the victim is blamed for the offense committed against them. A culture of silence surrounding sexual assault is another effect of patriarchal ideas, which can make it challenging for victims to come forward and demand justice. The articles listed a number of things that lead to victim blaming, such as false beliefs about rape, a lack of legal protection, and a lackluster application of the law. The research comes to the conclusion that rape victim blaming in Pakistan is a complex problem that necessitates a thorough strategy to address its root causes. The report suggests creating public awareness campaigns to inform people about rape and its consequences, updating the legal system to give victims proper protection, and advocating for women's emancipation and gender equality. These actions have the potential to alter public

perceptions of sexual assault and foster a climate in which victims feel comfortable coming forward and demanding redress. To sum up, this examination of the literature offers a thorough grasp of the topic of rape victim blaming in Pakistan. It identifies topics for additional research and intervention by combining the results of earlier studies. It highlights the need for a comprehensive strategy to address this problem, one that includes updating legislative frameworks to adequately protect victims and modifying societal attitudes toward sexual violence through education programs. In the end, fostering women's empowerment and gender equality will be essential to establishing a climate in which victims feel comfortable sharing their stories.

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