

Perceiving Victimhood: Compassion for Survivor and Acceptance of Myths of Men Rape Across Pakistani Men and Women

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Abstract

Male rape is often overlooked, especially in a misogynistic society like Pakistan where victims are frequently evaluated through the lens of rape myths. This study aims to examine the relationship between compassion for victims and male rape myth acceptance across both genders in Pakistan. It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between study variables, and gender would moderate this relationship. In a cross-sectional research design, a sample of 120 adults was recruited through non-probability convenient sampling. To collect data, Male Rape Myth Scale (MRMS; Melanson, 1998) and Rape-Victim Empathy Scale (REMV; Smith and Frieze, 2003) were used. According to the results, acceptance of male rape was inversely related to compassion for victims. However, gender did not act as a moderator. The results of this study can be applied in various fields of psychology, such as forensic psychology, social psychology, sociology, and gender studies.

Keywords: Male Rape Myth Acceptance, Compassion for Victims, Gender, Pakistani Men and Women.

Introduction

Defining rape myth acceptance is in itself a complex task, as it covers a variety of attitudes and beliefs that can contribute to sexual violence victimization and male dominance (Bode et al., 2024). adopted a holistic approach in structuring the underlying themes that personify these myths, through gathering common features of the mass media portrayals of rape and rape cases, both within legal statutes and academic research (O'Connor, 2021).

The term "empathy" is attributed to social psychologist Titchener in 1909, the process of expressing compassion and remorse goes back much further (O'Connor & McMahon, 2022). Empathy can be considered a fundamental element of being human. It can be divided into two key aspects: cognitive empathy, an understanding of another's emotions, and affective empathy, an actual feeling of the other's emotions (Klement et al., 2022). An understanding of how understanding other people's feelings and motivations has special relevance for males and issues of gender (Kennedy et al., 2024). Males being stoic and not experiencing emotions, especially empathy and sympathy while being constantly earmarked for criticism if this is found to be lacking, is a recurrent theme. Therefore, males may find gendered decision-making and the possibility of their emotions being absent from social scenarios both challenging and at odds with displaying acknowledged suitable behaviors.

Male rape myths are generally defined by the inappropriate application of rape stereotypes. Although it is readily accepted that no male behavior should be related to rape, there have been relatively equal numbers of

conservatives and liberals who have raised the profile of masculinity and rape to the level of potentially explaining certain aspects of male violence. Concerns that masculinity may be a conduit for gender nonconformity and aggression are not without some foundation. Therefore, we need to understand myth acceptance and from where it may originate to break a potentially damaging cycle. Furthermore, if male rape myths are associated with decreased empathy, this investigation may have potential to inform a range of interventions such as focused education and empowerment therapy (Hunter et al., 2023).

The present research aims to examine gender differences in how victim empathy and a series of variables related to negative appraisals of male rape victims are associated with hostile and benevolent male rape myth acceptance. The research builds on previous studies investigating the relationships between dispositional empathy and factors related to rape myth acceptance in identifying the significant associations of the five subscales of victim empathy with hostile and benevolent male rape myth acceptance (Mann & Barnett, 2012). Thus, the present research also explores the complexity of how empathy and dissimilar varieties of rape myth acceptance are associated. Sexist attitudes, person-related factors (empathy and role of emotions), and anti-egalitarian attitudes are significant predictors for victim and perpetrator blame and social tolerance of rape and sexual assault (Yu et al., 2023). However, the mixed findings regarding how empathy is related to differing variations of rape myth acceptance, implicit associating patterns, and explicit sentence completion directions may have contributed to the varied conclusions made regarding the associations between dispositional empathy and rape myth acceptance.

Literary Review

A study in Pakistan with 416 participants found that grandiose narcissism, primary psychopathy, and acceptance of rape myths were positively correlated with attitudes toward rape victims. Both psychopathic traits and narcissism were linked to endorsing rape myths, highlighting their influence on perceptions of sexual assault survivors in Pakistani society (Kazmi et al., 2023).

A study in China explored gender, rape myth acceptance, and attributions for rape among 1,011 participants who were surveyed online. Findings suggested that blame on rape victims and perpetrators is negatively associated with rape myth acceptance and emphasizes the impact of gender role attitudes on perceptions of rape (Li & Zheng, 2022).

The purpose of the study is to investigate how rape myths, rape empathy, and causal attributions shape views toward rape victims. Purposive sampling was used to obtain 573 participants for the sample. The findings showed a strong correlation between views toward rape victims, acceptance, victim empathy, and rape myths (Kazmi et al., 2023).

The study aimed to find prevalent myths about rape among Vietnamese university students, both male and female, and investigate the gender differences in these beliefs. Results showed that compared to female participants, males supported misconceptions about men's insatiable sexual desire being the main reason for rape (Bergenfeld et al., 2020).

The study's objective was to investigate the prevalence of sexual double standards and rape myths in Pakistani society. There were 500 university students in the sample. Compared to their female peers, male students showed a greater belief in rape myths (Jamshed & Kamal, 2019).

A study on heterosexual college males in the US explored empathy, narcissism, and rape myth acceptance with 74 participants recruited via email within a university setting. Findings showed empathy negatively correlated, while narcissism positively correlated, with acceptance of rape myths (Long & Herr, 2022).

Another study investigates how Gender-based harassment, closeness to perpetrators, and empathy focus affect the moral justification and dehumanization of harassment. In an experimental design, 345 participants were recruited. The results show that closeness and empathy toward perpetrators increase leniency and moral justification and reduce dehumanization. These findings emphasize how these positive factors can unintentionally foster tolerance toward gender harassment (Borges-Castells et al., 2024).

The study aimed to compare the empathy levels of 55 pairs of children across genders by analyzing whether girls or boys show greater concern for a minor injury involving a classmate of the same gender. The findings showed that female bystanders showed much higher empathy as they exhibited supportive actions more frequently than male bystanders (Benenson et al., 2021).

Using a sample of 3,966 university students, the study aimed to investigate the links between rape myth acceptance, gender-specific system justification (GSJ), and bystander intention to intervene in sexual violence situations. The findings show that men are more likely than women to accept rape myths in general (Martini & De Piccoli, 2020).

This research aimed to investigate how male rape myth beliefs are influenced by socio-demographics and victim empathy. There were 303 adult UK participants in the sample. The findings showed that, in comparison to women, men supported more myths about male rape (Willmott & Widanaralalage, 2024).

The study evaluated the effects of a rape education program on teenagers' perceptions of rape myths, victim empathy, and hazardous conduct. 228 adolescents were participating in the study. According to the findings, people with rape myths exhibit less empathy (Ogunfowokan et al., 2021).

A sample of 92 pre-service teachers (PSTs) participated in the study, which aimed to understand how PSTs perceived blame and responsibility for youth-produced sexual images. The findings show a negative correlation between reduced acceptance of rape myths and higher levels of empathy (Sciacca et al., 2021).

This study assessed how modern rape myths influence the blaming of victims and perpetrators. With 375 participants from Chile, results show that believing in gender system justification is linked to blaming the victim and is influenced by rape myths. Rape myths also mediate how people blame the aggressor (Murray et al., 2023).

This study examined rape myth acceptance among 699 participants from the United States, South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria. The findings were that men were more likely than women to accept rape myths. Nigerians were most likely, and Americans least likely, to accept rape myths. South Africans were less likely than Ghanaians to believe that female victims "asked for it" or that male perpetrators "didn't mean to." Nigerian women were more likely than men to support certain myths (Fakunmoju et al., 2020).

Rationale

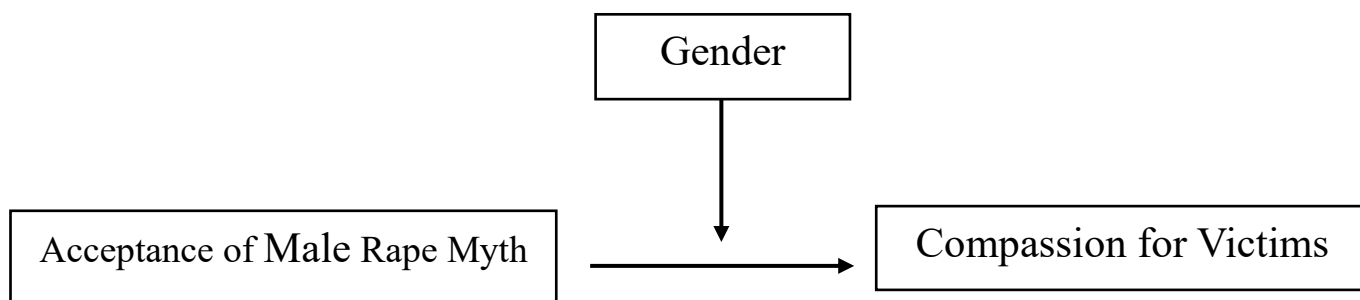
The phenomenon of male rape, while a global concern, remains a significantly understudied area, particularly in societies characterized by strong gender roles, such as Pakistan. At least 77 girls and 79 boys were raped or sexually assaulted in the first half of 2018, according to police reports, but none of the suspects had been imprisoned at the time of writing and all had been released on bail (Pakistan., 2019; Riaz., 2021). The majority of studies on rape myths primarily focus on women (Willmott & Widanaralalage, 2024), leaving male rape myths underexplored despite their prevalence. While men do experience sexual violence, these incidents are frequently underreported, often due to the myths associated with male victims.

Existing literature predominantly focuses on female victims and the acceptance of rape myths against women, neglecting the experiences and perceptions surrounding male rape victims. Even when compassion for victims is considered, it's usually concerning rape myths in general, not specifically male rape myths. Moreover, gender has been introduced as a moderating variable. In many previous studies, gender has been considered merely as a demographic variable rather than as a potential moderator or predictor. This research aims to address this critical gap by examining the attitudes and beliefs of Pakistani men and women toward male rape survivors.

Objectives and Hypotheses

This study intends to investigate the relationship between acceptance of male rape myths and compassion for victims, examining how gender moderates this relationship. It was hypothesized that gender will positively influence compassion for victims, with a stronger association for those who identify as female. However, it was also hypothesized a negative relationship between gender and acceptance of male rape myths, suggesting that men are more likely to accept these myths. Additionally, there will be a negative relationship between acceptance of male rape myths and compassion for victims, suggesting that higher acceptance of these myths correlates with lower compassion for victims.

Proposed Hypothetical Model



Methodology

Research Design and Sampling Strategy

The current research project utilized a correlational cross-sectional design. A sample of 120 university students from the University of Management and Technology was recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. The study included both male and female students who were enrolled as regular students. Students with any physical or mental disabilities were excluded from the study.

Assessment Measures

The Male Rape Myth Scale (MRMS; Melanson, 1998) is a 22-item scale designed to measure attitudes related to myths and stereotypes about male rape victims. Permission was obtained from the concerned author. The MRMS is conceptualized as a one-dimensional tool, with all 22 items contributing to a single factor representing beliefs about male rape myths. Two items (1 and 6) are reverse-scored. Responses are recorded on a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies "Strongly Disagree" and 6 signifies "Strongly Agree." Total scores on the scale range from 22 to 132, with higher scores reflecting a greater endorsement of male rape myths. The scale demonstrates excellent internal reliability, with a coefficient alpha of 0.90.

The Rape-Victim Empathy Scale (REMV), developed by Smith and Frieze in 2003, evaluates participants' feelings towards rape victims. Permission was obtained from the concerned author. This scale comprises 18 items with an overall reliability of $\alpha = .92$. It measures empathy in two distinct phases: during the rape ($\alpha = .87$) and after the rape ($\alpha = .90$). Participants originally responded to each item using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater empathy. Items 14, 15, and 16 were reverse-scored.

Procedure of Data Collection

Data was collected through online mode. For this purpose, a Google form was created. Several important considerations were taken into account while designing the form, including preventing the use of the same email address more than once to submit responses, disallowing the submission of incomplete responses, and including a consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire. This consent form provided participants with a brief overview of the study's purpose and obtained their informed consent to participate voluntarily. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 10 minutes and participants were thanked upon completion of the survey.

Ethical Considerations

Before utilizing the scales related to the study variables, permission was obtained from the original authors of these scales. Approval for data collection was also secured from the relevant institutional authorities. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of their participation and provided their consent before filling out the response sheet. They were also informed that they could withdraw their information at any time without any consequences. The confidentiality of participants' information was assured throughout the study.

Results

The following chapter covers the results of the study. Descriptive statistics were calculated. Correlation analysis was run to assess the relationship between the study variables. ANCOVA was run to examine the effect of rape myth acceptance of victim empathy controlling for gender.

Section I: Descriptive statics of Study variable

This section covers the tabular and graphical representation of study variables, including mean and standard deviation frequency along with range.

Table 1

Descriptive statics of study variables (N = 120)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	Skewness	Kurtosis
Compassion towards victim	64.43	12.18	42 – 93	.76	.25	-.64
Male Rape Myth Acceptance	75.97	18.05	50 – 107	.79	-.11	-1.43

Table 2

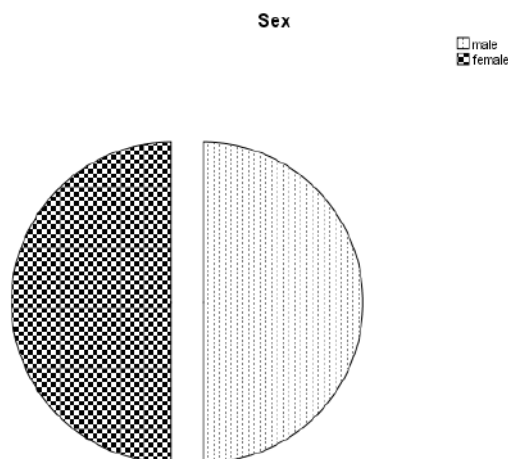
Mean Comparison across gender (N = 120)

Sex	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	61.43	60	12.36
Female	67.43	60	11.31
Total	64.43	120	12.17

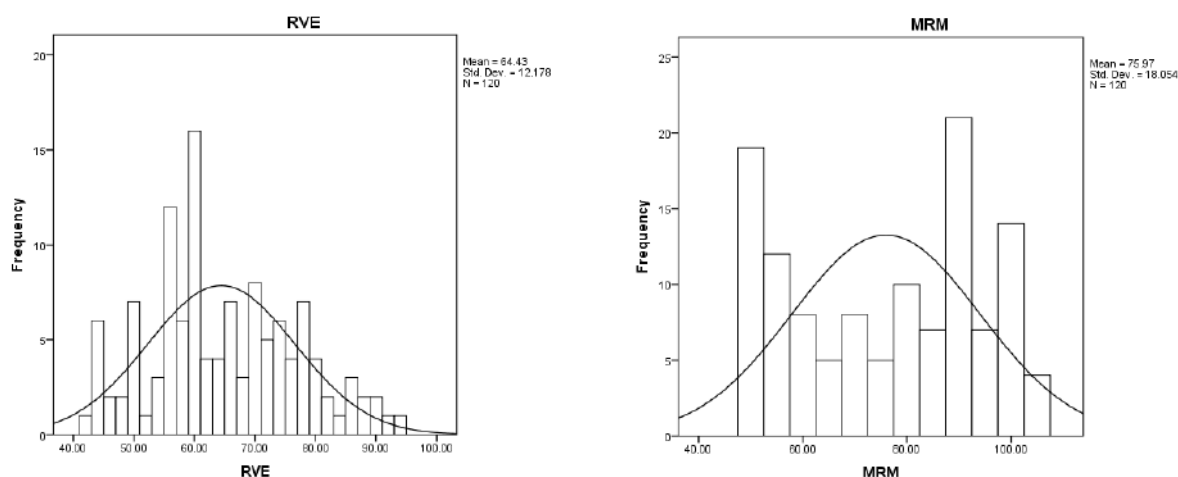
Descriptive statistics were employed to evaluate the mean and standard deviation of the study variables. Results indicated that data on victim empathy and Male Rape Myth Acceptance was constantly distributed alpha reliability was greater than .07. Data was also normally distributed. There were 50% male and 50% female in data set.

Graphical Representation

Pie chart of a categorical variable



Normality Histograms



Section II: Main analysis

Correlational analysis

A correlational analysis was run to evaluate the relationship between the compassion for survivor and acceptance of Myths of men Rape across Pakistani men and women.

Table 3

Correlation between study variables (N = 120)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
Gender	.50	.50	-	.25**	-.47**
Compassion towards victim	64.43	12.18		-	-.56**
Male Rape Myth Acceptance	.50	.50			-

It was hypothesized that there would be a relationship between study variables. Results indicated that females had more compassion towards victim while male had more male rape myth acceptance. Results also indicated that less compassion towards victim leads to more male rape myth acceptance.

Moderation Analysis

Moderation analysis was run to evaluate the relationship between the compassion for survivor and acceptance of Myths of men Rape across Pakistani men and women.

Table 4

Moderation analysis for study variables (N = 120)

Predictor	<i>B</i>	95% <i>C.I</i>		<i>SE</i>	β	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
		<i>UL</i>	<i>LL</i>				
Step I						.06**	.06**
(Constant)	61.43***	58.40	64.46	1.53			
Sex	6.00**	1.71	10.28	2.16	.24		
Step II						.31***	.25***
(Constant)	93.79***	83.62	103.95	5.13			
Sex	-.51	-4.69	3.66	2.11	-.02		
Male Rape Myth Acceptance	-.38***	-.49	-.26	.05	-.56		
Step III						.32***	.01***
(Constant)	98.09***	84.33	111.84	6.94			
Sex	-.45	-4.64	3.72	2.11	-.01		
Male Rape Myth Acceptance	-.43***	-.59	-.27	.08	-.64		
Interaction	.10	-.12	.34	.11	.10		

Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis was run to find the moderating role of gender in male rape myth acceptance and compassion towards victim. Assumptions of multicollinearity were checked by tolerance value that was within the acceptable range that is above .2 indicating no multicollinearity in variables. For independence of observation the Durbin-Watson value (Durbin-Watson = 1.22) was noted that was in the acceptable range of 1-3. In Step 1, model was significant and the R^2 value explained 6% variance of model of gender predicting compassion towards victim $F(1,118) = 7.69, p > .01$. Findings revealed female had more compassion towards victim. In step 2, the model explained 26% variance $F(2,117) = 26.4811.41, p < .00$. Result indicated that more acceptance to myth leads to less compassion towards victim. In step 3, moderation was evaluated the model was significant and explained 1% variance with $F(3,116) = 17.92, p < .00$. Results indicated gender was not moderating between male rape myth acceptance and compassion towards victim.

Discussion

This study aims to investigate compassion for male rape victims relates to acceptance of male rape myths among both Pakistani men and women, with a focus on the role of gender as a moderator. It aims to understand attitudes toward male rape survivors in Pakistan, a country with strong patriarchal norms and traditional gender roles that shape how people view masculinity, victimhood, and sexual violence. That's why these rigid norms and values are considered as leading causes for representing men as strong and can't be raped. Even in the news reports, cases of gender-based violence have been reported frequently. But the rape of a male remains a stigmatized and underreported issue in Pakistan, despite increasing awareness.

The study results revealed that male rape myth acceptance is negatively and significantly related to compassion for victims. These results are also supported by existing literature. One research study on male rape myth acceptance and compassion for victims revealed a negative relationship between study variables (Sciacca et al., 2021), It means that a high score on the Male Rape Myth Scale is associated with a lower score on the Rape-Victim Empathy Scale because being empathetic towards the victim allows a person to understand the victim's situation better, thus reducing the likelihood of applying rape myths when evaluating the victim.

It was further hypothesized that gender would moderate between compassion and acceptance of the male rape myth. Findings were inconsistent with the literature (Yousaf et al., 2024) results indicated that the relationship between compassion towards victims and male rape myth acceptance was not affected by gender. The reason for divination is both males and females were encountering similar social dynamics and views regarding male rape that develop a consistent level of compassion and acceptance with reference to Pakistani culture moreover similar levels of educated people were incorporated in a study that indicated graduated level participants had the same level of exposure and insight regarding myth which create a same level of perception across gender.

Limitations

The study was limited in terms of using translated assessment measure moreover it is suggested to develop culturally appropriate tools of male rape myth to gain deeper level of understanding. Study was limited in

terms of cross-sectional design longitudinal studies are suggested to gain insight about development of believe of myth at every level of age in Pakistani culture. The study would significantly implicated in the assessment of factor of rape myth that would aid in structure the policies in shaping the overall believes about rape myth in new generation.

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