

Ambivalent Sexism towards Women and Acceptance of Rape Myths among University Students

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DOI: [10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i02.007](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i02.007)

| Received: 29.01.2021 | Accepted: 16.02.2021 | Published: 27.02.2021

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Abstract

Victims of rape sometimes suffer from being blamed for their assault. The present study aimed to investigate whether hostile sexism, benevolent sexism influence acceptance of rape myths. The sample comprised of 240 university students recruited from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Demographic information sheet, Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) [24], Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) [13] and scales were used for assessment. Results from Bivariate Correlation analysis showed that, Hostile sexism and subscales of benevolent sexist beliefs are positively correlated with rape myths. Subscales of Ambivalent Sexism (Hostile sexism, Paternalism, Heterosexuality and Gender differentiation) positively predicted subscales of Rape myths acceptance (she asked for it, it wasn't really rape, he didn't mean to and she lied). Results further showed that males had higher acceptance with Rape Myths and Ambivalent Sexism. Findings from the present study suggest that there is need to tackle negative stereotypes about rape victims and Interventions should focus more on the education on what rape and sexual assault are and what the health and legal consequences entail.

Keywords: Ambivalent Sexism Rape Myths University Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Rape is serious crime that frequently occurs all over the world. For example, According to Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, there are 320 completed rapes and 350 gang rapes were reported in Pakistan in 2004 [1]. Around the world, it is estimated that approximately 85,000 women are victims of rape, and more than 400,000 are victims of harassment every year [2, 3]. The prevalence of this crime is particularly higher adults and students, with out of four women in US [4], and one out of seven women experience sexual assault during their university period in the UK [5]. There is need to focus on rape, because it has not only severe short and long-term psychological, social and economic effects on the victims, but as a sexual stigma it also it is one of the crime in which the victims are victimized by society.

There are many misperceptions about rape and rape victims due to violent, sexual, and personal nature of rape. These misperceptions can be defined as rape myths, these widely held myths are generally negative and stereotypical beliefs about assault, victims and perpetrators [6, 7]. These false beliefs play an important

role in defending male sexual aggression against women and rape victims. Rape myths are held by many individuals within society and indicate that victims are lying, imply a rape did not occur, or that the rapist was motivated [8]. Some beliefs suggest that the perpetrator was unable to control sexual desires or victim deserved to be raped due to their behavior, appearance and dressing [9-11].

Several factors influence rape myth such as stereotypical attitude toward women [12]. One construct is ambivalent sexism that describes ambivalent prejudice against women [13]. The two dimensions of sexism are hostile and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is antipathy and hostility towards women who are authoritative, women who are independent, and women who disrespect the honor of men. On the other hand, benevolent sexist attitude reflects negative reaction towards women who do not perform their conventional roles [14, 13].

Several studies have investigated the relationship between sexism and beliefs about victims of sexual abuse and violence, men's inclination to rape [15], justifying the behaviors of perpetrators and

blaming the victims [16, 17], rationalization of sexual violence against married women violence [18], and beliefs about domestic violence and blaming the victim [19]. Number studies have also found Gender differences in traditional attitudes toward women, sexism and false rape beliefs [20-22]. There is limited information about the relationship between these constructs among university student sample in Pakistan.

Research showed that the beliefs of individuals who engage in sexual behavior, such as rape are different from those who avoid such behaviors. There are some factors such as victim blaming, sex role attitudes and relationship skills contribute to an individual's rape supportive attitudes [23]. The purpose of this research is to examine sexist attitudes and rape myths among University students and how they are contributing in the prevalence of rape in Pakistan.

METHOD

A quantitative study with correlation research design was conducted on students to identify effects of ambivalent sexism on rape myth acceptance.

Sample

Data was collected from 240 university students recruited from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan. The average age of the participants was 21 years. Both males (n = 188) and females (n =122) were included in the sample. The average monthly family income of the participants was 68,000. Majority of the participants were recruited from Bachelors and Master Programs accounting for 58% and 29% of the sample. Of the participants 62% were belonged to urban areas and 37% were from rural areas living in hostels and most of the participants reported Nuclear family system.

Table-1: Socio Demographic Characteristics of the Patients (N=147)

Variables	f %	M	SD
Age		21.21	14.09
Monthly Family Income (PKR)		68133.33	53211.10
Gender			
Men	118(49.2)		
Women	122(50.8)		
Education			
BS (hons.)	140(58.3)		
Masters	70(29.2)		
M.phill	30(12.5)		
Family background			
Rural	91(37.9)		
Urban	149(62.1)		
Family system			
Nuclear	138(57.5)		
Joint	102(42.5)		

Assessment Measures

Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. To assess rape myths Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, Short Form (IRMA-SF) was used developed by Payne et al. [24]. The scale consists of 22 items with 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, high scores indicate more rejection of rape myths. The 4 subscales of the instrument investigate attitude towards female rape victim, such as "she asked for it", "it wasn't really rape", "He didn't mean to" and "she lied". The cronbach alpha of present study was .81.

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) Glick and Fiske's [13]. To measure two types of sexist attitude toward women; hostile sexism and benevolent sexism Ambivalent sexism Inventory was used. The scale consists of 35 items with 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Higher scores indicate more sexist attitudes. The scale has total

number of four subscales Hostile sexism and benevolent sexism has three subscales such as Protective Paternalism (women should be protected by men because they are weaker), Gender Differentiation (women are unable to govern social institutions) and Heterosexual Intimacy (women sexually attract men to have dominance over men). The coefficient alpha of the scale was. 85.

RESULTS

Results were calculated through IBM SPSS Statistics 21. Bivariate correlation analysis was conducted to identify relationship among all variables. Results showed that Protective paternalism, heterosexual intimacy, gender differentiation and hostile sexism are positively correlated with subscales of rape myth acceptance (she asked for it, it wasn't a rape, he didn't mean to, she lied). (Table 2)

Table-2: Bivariate Correlation analysis between subscales of ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance (N=240)

Sr#	Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Protective Paternalism	.64**	.74**	.64**	.57**	.56**	.63**	.60**
2	Heterosexual Intimacy	-	.64**	.59**	.56**	.62**	.58**	.52**
3	Gender differentiation	-	-	.74**	.69**	.59**	.73**	.59**
4	Hostile sexism	-	-	-	.60**	.56**	.60**	.58**
5	She asked for it	-	-	-	-	.62**	.59**	.51**
6	It wasn't a rape	-	-	-	-	-	.54**	.46**
7	He didn't mean to	-	-	-	-	-	-	.56**
8	She lied	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Multiple Regressions analysis

Four regression analyses were conducted to find of predictors of rape myths. In first analysis rape myth (“She asked for it”) was regressed on subscales of benevolent sexism and hostile sexism. Model explained 59% variance in rape myth, with heterosexual intimacy, gender differentiation and hostile sexism positively predicted the myth “she asked for it”. In the second regression analysis, model explained 61% variance in

rape myth, with heterosexual intimacy and gender differentiation positively predicted myth (“it wasn’t really rape”). In the third and fourth regression analysis, model explained 55% and 66% variance, with heterosexual intimacy and hostile sexism positively predicted myth “he didn’t mean to”) and protective paternalism and hostile sexism positive predicted myth (“she lied”) (Table 3).

Table-3: Regression Analysis for the subscales of rape myth acceptance (N=240).

	She asked for it			It wasn't really rape			He didn't mean to			She lied		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	B	B	SE	B	B	SE	β
Constant	4.076	.934		4.694	.945		-2.203	1.629		1.965	1.520	
Protective Paternalism	.07	.10	.05	.17	.10	.12	.34	.18	.13	.57	.16	.26***
Heterosexual Intimacy	.26	.10	.16**	.53	.10	.34***	.39	.18	.13*	.30	.17	.12
Gender differentiation	.22	.09	.15*	.23	.09	.17**	.18	.16	.07	.49	.15	.23***
Hostile sexism	.18	.03	.43***	.06	.03	.15	.38	.05	.50***	.08	.05	.14
R ²			.59			.61			.55			.66
ΔR ²			.31***			.47***			.37***			.44***
F change			62.48			52.05			78.85			49.96

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Independent Sample t test

Independent sample t-test was conducted on subscales of ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance. Results showed that males had higher level

of hostile and sexism and benevolent sexism and higher acceptance with rape myths (she asked for it, it wasn’t really rape, he didn’t mean to and she lied) as compare to females

Table-4: Comparison of ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance among males and females (N=240)

Variables	Male (118)		Female (122)		t (238)	Sig	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Protective paternalism	11.86	3.91	10.74	3.61	2.30	.022	.160	2.076
Heterosexual intimacy	12.41	3.40	11.04	3.10	3.25	.001	.538	2.193
Hostile sexism	9.55	4.07	30.36	11.20	3.73	.000	2.890	9.337
Gender sexism	9.55	4.07	7.81	3.59	3.49	.001	.754	2.707
She asked for it	16.50	5.70	15.29	5.09	1.72	.086	-.169	2.579
It wasn't really rape	18.11	5.67	15.88	4.56	3.36	.001	.926	3.540
He didn't mean to	22.65	11.10	19.32	8.72	2.58	.010	.788	5.860
She lied	20.38	8.76	18.22	7.59	2.04	.042	.076	4.244

DISCUSSION

The study mainly aimed to investigate the role of sexist attitude in supporting rape myths towards

women among University students. Findings from the study suggest positive correlation between benevolent sexism and hostile sexism and rape myths acceptance.

These results are consistent with previous literature that used ambivalent sexism and rape supportive beliefs [25, 14, 26].

The study also examined which type of sexist belief is associated with particular rape myth. Findings of the study revealed that Hostile sexism and the sub factors of ambivalent sexism such as heterosexual intimacy and gender differentiation are positively associated with the rape myth “she asked for it”. People who believe women are weak and incomplete without the love of men and only men are able to work outside home and women should stay at home also perceive that women make themselves venerable for rape by violating these sex roles. Heterosexual intimacy and gender differentiation were also associated with another rape myth “it was not really rape”. Acceptance of this myth promote stereotype that when women do job outside home and participate in social activities they cannot claim to be victim. In examining components of benevolent sexism, previous studies found positive association of gender differentiation and hostile sexism with overall rape myths acceptance. Previous literature that investigated the relationship between ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance also showed positive relationship between benevolent, hostile sexism and rape myth [27, 15, 23, 28, 17, 29, 25]. However heterosexual intimacy toward women was not related to rape myths [26]. The differences of findings may be due to the measurement of rape myths because each components of benevolent sexism has unique relationship with four types of rape myths, when they are measured as unitary construct the overall relationship will be obscured.

In the present study hostile sexism strongly predicted the rape myth “he didn’t mean to”, this reflects that men do not intend to rape they are provoked by women to have sex with them. The same myth also supported by heterosexual intimacy this reflects men’s resentment to vulnerability that they are dependent on subordinate group and link their sexual motivation to genuine desire for intimacy. Hostile sexism and protective paternalism positively predicted rape myth “she lied”. This suggests men only try to protect women while, women misinterpret their intentions and always exaggerate the scenario [27, 28, 26].

Present study also showed different level of hostile and benevolent sexist beliefs and rape myths among males and females. Overall, men scored higher on subscales of both ambivalent sexism and rape myth acceptance than women. Various studies showed that men ascribe more rape myths than women [30, 14, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 21]. Although, other studies failed to find differences in males and females on rape myths and ambivalent sexism [36-38]. The result of present study reflect that, in our patriarchal culture men are considered to be dominant,

authoritative, and aggressive, they are also are expected to be the protector and provider while women are considered to be submissive, and reluctant. There are some limitations of the study such as sample of the study is restricted to the students and adults. There is need to use more representative sample across developmental lifespan. Although, sexual violence is more prevalent in women [39], Ambivalence toward men and attitude toward men who also experience assault and violence were ignored in this study. Future investigation should evaluate this topic from perspective of both males and females as rape myths works differently across genders. For future research and practice there is need to explore a wider range of variables and use of qualitative research to better understand traditional gender roles and how people perceive aspects of rape, how rape myths worked and victims are blamed, traditional gender roles. Such data may help in construction of culturally appropriate rape myths and sexist beliefs questionnaires.

Findings from the study suggest that people who misinterpret traditional gender roles are more likely to adhere with rape myths and have negative views about victims of rape and rapist. It is suggested that, there should be educational and rape prevention programs that can eliminate negative attitude and beliefs about rape victims, gender roles and sexuality. There is need to train professionals to deal more sensitively with victims to overcome worst psychological outcomes and ensure positive recovery.

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