

Rape Myths and Public Belief in Victim Allegations

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Rape is one of the most violent crimes in the world that affects not only the victim but society at various levels. Unfortunately, it is also one of the most underreported and under-prosecuted crimes in the world. Statistics show that rapists are less likely to go to jail than criminals of any other kind of crime. (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2016). According to The United States Department of Justice, the definition of rape is studied in two phases. In 2011, Uniform Crime Reports defined rape as “carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will.” (Justice.gov, 2017) This definition, however, was very narrow and outdated, which needed a revision and amendment in its scope and explanation. According to the new definition, rape is “penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim.” (Justice.gov, 2017) The new definition suggests that rape is irrespective of the gender of the victim and rapist. However, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) found the new definition to become an obstacle in challenging punishing individuals who commit crimes related to the different variations now being labeled as rape.

Even though the definition of rape was revised, the crime was still underreported. The National Institute of Justice suggests that rape myths and rape cultures were the reasons that further encouraged pardoning the offenders of their role in the assault and indicated that the victim instigated the attack. Thus, the definition broadened the possibility and chances of manipulation in favor of the offender.

Various myths related to abuse are identified with the incident, rapists, and the victims. According to a study, the myths are categorized into three parts: accusing the woman, excusing the man and justifications for acquaintance rape. (Johnson, Kuck and Schander, 1997)

Rape culture, on the other hand, is a sociological concept that describes rape as a normalized concept in the society due to the attitudes of the society about the gender and sexuality.

According to Hayes, Abbott and Cook (2016), rape myths and rape culture are either consciously or unconsciously prevalent in those who would be regarded as members of the elite communities, for example, white, heterosexual, wealthy males. (Hayes, Abbot & Cook, 2016) According to the literature, it is apparent that the phenomenon of Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA) and rape culture influence society’s perception of a rape victim, usually resulting in blaming the victim of the assault.

This paper will address the effects of RMA and rape culture on prosecution and reporting of assaults. As a result of prevalent RMA and rape culture, prosecution and reporting of abuse are the lowest of all the great crimes because the perception of the victim influences the likelihood that their allegations

will be believed. According to Chapleau and Oswald (2013), members of a dominant culture may often use stereotypes of the victims to defend and acquit the offenders. (Chapleau and Oswald, 2013) The literature suggests that, while it may appear differently, research shows that most individuals oppose social equality and therefore are more prone to accept circulating myths about rape victims and stereotypes. Similarly, it is supported that these claims suggest that gender, occupation, culture, and rape myth acceptance affect society's attitude toward rape victims and their allegations. (Duff & Tostevin, 2015)

The documented studies that are currently available have unveiled the extent of the problem and indicated it has only worsened with time as many victims still haven't received justice, and many offenders go unpunished and remain free to offend again.

In a study by Greeson and Campbell (2014), the importance of the sexual assault response teams (SARTs) is highlighted. SARTs are collaborative, multidisciplinary groups nationwide, made up of stakeholders who advocate against RMA and rape culture. The SARTs are made up of police officers, prosecutors, rape victim advocates, and forensic/medical examiners who are in place to investigate all claims and allegations of abuse. (Greeson & Campbell, 2014) Unfortunately, SARTs are met with public resistance and mistrust from victims due to claims that certain factors, including culture, race, and socioeconomic status, might invalidate their claims and question their reliability. While Greeson and Campbell suggest that adding more SART members might assist in attaining the truth about reported rapes more effectively. (Greeson & Campbell, 2014)

After studying the literature, I found a discrepancy in the society and its educational level and awareness about rape and related factors, which I will address more in this paper.

Purpose Of Study

The research hypothesis I aim to study is to either prove or disprove that society's perception of an alleged rape victim will determine whether or not the victims' allegations are viewed as credible and whether or not the normalization of rape culture and RMA influence the legitimacy of the claims. To do this, I will distribute anonymous surveys randomly among college students. I will ask the sample population to describe their views on rape and what influences the likelihood of believing a victim's story if they were a member of a jury in a rape case by using the Illinois Rape Myth Inventory (IRMA) and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI).

For the legitimacy of the results in this study, I will maintain the secrecy of the participants by keeping them anonymous so that they can answer honestly within his or her natural setting. Furthermore, those who have had a tragic experience with this phenomenon can choose and dictate his or her level of participation without feeling pressured.

This method of collecting data will provide an epistemological explanation of the worldview of each participant and how culture, experiences, and knowledge have shaped perceptions about defining

rape (Creswell, 2014). The information that will be collected will provide evidence that the alternative hypothesis is correct and the null hypothesis is false.

Variables

An independent variable is a variable the researcher has control over, what he can choose and manipulate, but in some cases, this control is not possible as the variable is fixed. On the other hand, the dependent variable is the condition that is measured during the experiment and is affected by the research, too. It depends on and responds to the independent variable.

In this study, the independent variables studied are factors like culture, race, gender, socioeconomic status and aspects related to it, while the dependent variables are RMA and society's attitude towards rape victims (Hayes, Abbott, & Cook, 2016).

Significance

The gap that this research will focus on is the awareness of RMA and its prevalence in society, which affects it negatively. This is a unique research study because, while the concept of RMA is investigated, few studies examine how degrees of RMA will influence society's perception of the victim and whether or not their allegations of rape are legitimate if it was reported. The results of this study will bring consciousness to the focus of subsequent education required to bring about social change. Gender equality and its awareness continue to progress, as it is a fundamental human right; the components of RMA show that gender and social inequalities, in some forms, are very much still present in society (Gender Equality, n.d.).

Unfortunately, the continuous rhetoric embedded in cultural and societal dialogue is propaganda, which endorses rape culture and is an exact contradiction to federal law (Mackey, 2015). This dissonance between the federal legislation and majority public belief stems from decades of female subordination and male dominance in society. Promoting accurate information, empowering women, and educating the public on the dangers of rape culture and rape myth acceptance provides a rationale for the significance of the study. This contribution to social change will bring about a revolution in the thought process of the present and upcoming generations. (Trammell, 2016).

Background

Various articles and studies in the past explain the relationship between sexual assault, stereotypes surrounding the concept of rape, rape myths and the consequent negative perceptions towards the rape victims.

In 2013, research carried out by Chapleau and Oswald theorized that although an attitude prevails

that society is moving towards equality, in reality, the majority is against equality and may rely on rape myth acceptance and stereotyping to maintain social dominance. (Chapleau & Oswald, 2013) Similarly, it is stated that there are gender differences in the acknowledgment of rape myths acceptance, which is mainly attributed to the incident of rape being underreported by a female victim. Thus suggesting an inequality in the justice system for women. (Duff & Tostvin, 2015)

Moreover, a study dedicated to exposing how media continues to contribute to RMA in Western cultures suggested that commercials that objectify women also give a false impression that most women welcome this objectification. Unfortunately, many women also feel that being used as a tool is a societal norm and what makes them desirable to men. As the saying goes, "sex sells," therefore, as noted in this study, women's sexuality has become a standard tool used by consumers to bring about business. (Vance, Sutter, Perrin & Heesacker, 2015)

Moreover, in the exploration of the relationship between characteristics of psychopathy and sexual coercion, it was reported that due to social and cognitive impairments, men suffering from symptoms of psychopathy are more likely to commit sexual violence. The authors claim that RMA is a crucial link to the commission of rape and psychopathy. (Debowska, Boduszek, Dhingra & Kola, 2015)

Furthermore, McMahon (2011) and Greeson and Campbell (2014) have written articles discussing potential solutions to bringing awareness to this problem and exploring possible resources that can be implemented to help deal with it. These articles provide some ideas for taking action toward social change.

Furthermore, statistical information on the number of rapes reported compared to the number of violations that are successfully prosecuted provides evidence that this is a problem that needs to be addressed. (Spoon & Tellis, 2012)

Frameworks

In the literature on this topic to date, the conceptual framework that is most appropriate is RMA. The RMA conceptual framework states that the victim is to be blamed for their rape, disbelief in the allegations of abuse, excuses are made for the behaviors of the rapist, and it expresses discrimination in the types of women that can be raped (Bohner et al., 2009). The concept of rape myths is a phenomenon that can be measured by different tools, including the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA) and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI). Both the IRMA and ASI are self-reporting surveys that have been tested for validity and reliability. The IRMA is a 22- item Likert scale and the ASI. Also, a 22-item scale will help to understand views on sexism and sexual inequality (Crippen, 2015). RMA is the potential reason for the ever-widening "justice gap" that has plagued victims who report claims of rape. Researchers also suggest that the following concepts and theories essentially develop into RMA: ambivalent sexism, just world beliefs, and sex role beliefs contribute to the problem. (Bohner, Eyssel, Pina, Siebler & Viki, 2009)

Ambivalent sexism is a concept that states that women are weaker than men and are required to be subservient to men. Just world beliefs are a theory that states that an individual's behavior influences the consequences that they face as a result. Finally, sex role is a theory that states that there is a biological difference between men and women; this difference is in gender, physics, and superiority. These concepts suggest that victim blaming is rooted in the belief that there is a societal inequality between men and women, which may vary from culture to culture (Crippen, 2015). These concepts and theories are factors that contribute to rape culture and the victim's claims of rape not being believed.

Research Questions & Hypothesis

The quantitative study will set out to answer the following research questions (Trochim, 2016):

RQ1: Based on results from the self-reporting scales, are significant differences evident between RMA, the perception of the victim, and the belief of the rape claims of a woman?

H₀1- There is no significant relationship between RMA, society's perception of the victim and the knowledge of their allegation of assault.

H_a1- There is a significant association between RMA, society's perception of a victim and the view of their charge of rape.

RQ2: Do women victims feel even more victimized in society?

H₀2- Yes, women feel more victimized and blamed.

H_a2- No, no evidence supports women are accused and victimized more after a rape incident.

RQ3: Is there a difference between the number of reports of rape and actual rape incidents?

H₀3- Yes, the number of reports was lower than the actual rape incidents.

H_a3- There was no difference between the two.

Nature Of Study

The character of this study will be quantitative, which is a research design where the researcher tests the hypothesis by examining the relationship between the variables by using various instruments to measure the data. (Creswell, 2014)

A quantitative study will help to understand how common RMA is and to what extent RMA exists among college students. A quantitative method of research will be best because the ultimate goal of

this research study is to compare the data obtained systematically and, as a result, be able to make generalized statements regarding the particular population. In choosing to conduct an unbiased study, the researcher is not looking to find an explanation for RMA but instead to understand if varying differences in members of the population influence RMA or the lack thereof (FAQ1, 2010). Understanding this phenomenon and the relationship between the independent variables (IV) and the dependent variable (DV), the researcher can determine which demographic will require the most education and other interventions invoking the most social change.

Furthermore, for the purpose of the research, there will be a correlational study to explore the relationship between the independent variables: culture, race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. and RMA, the dependent variable.

In correlation, there can be two types of relationships: positive correlation and negative correlation. A positive correlation is when one variable increases, the other variable also increases and vice versa. A negative correlation is when one variable increases, the other variable decreases, and vice versa.

To measure this relationship, I will use self-reporting surveys such as the IRMA and the ASI (Crippen, 2015). Using the results from either of these studies, I can collect quantitative data that will help determine how prevalent RMA is among college students.

Sample Of Study

The objective is to collect data from a sample population that represents diverse races, cultures, religions, socioeconomic standards, and education levels in the United States. For the sake of expediency and cost effectiveness a population sample is needed that is easily and conveniently accessible to me.

For the study, the subjects will be college students, and to gain access to them, I will tap into the resources of a colleague and also a doctoral student. Fortunately, my colleague is a professor of psychology to about 300 students, and with the approval of the institutional review boards (IRB) of both Walden University and the university where he teaches, he has agreed to grant me access to his students, making this school my sample frame. The students taking a psychology course taught by my friend and colleague will make up the sample that I will use for my research (Sampling Terminology, 2006).

While the chosen sample will not be the random selection that was initially preferred, there should be enough diversity in a university setting to be able to identify the relationship between some different variables and RMA (Sampling Terminology, 2006). Surveys will be administered to the students who would like to participate in the study. Then, once the results are collected, they will be compared. At this time, there are not inclusionary or exclusionary factors that have been identified because the sample should parallel as close to a general population as possible. This will be purely voluntary, which will allow people who have had bad experiences with RMA to opt not to participate.

Moreover, with the help of law enforcement agencies, I will get in touch with a few rape victims and interview them regarding the awful experience and the negativities that surround it.

Sources Of Data

For my dissertation, I plan to use a primary data collection method. The primary data will be collected directly from the participants. This method will be through collecting surveys from anonymous members in a university setting. Although I hope to collect the data anonymously, because the population I would like to use consists of students I will need the consultation of the IRB (Walden University, n.d.).

According to the IRB ethical guidelines, students are a vulnerable population because they may feel that they are coerced to participate in a research study to get class credit. After consulting with the IRB of Walden University, it was recommended that I also see the IRB of PSU for instruction on how to obtain approval to have members of their student body participate in my research study. It was also suggested that I download a worksheet online consisting of a checklist to follow to ensure compliance with all ethical codes (Walden University, n.d.).

Secondary data is the use of relevant data that is already collected by other researchers and agencies. These available sources can be published data, annual reports of companies, government reports, and statistics, library sources, etc. For this research, the secondary data sources will be collected from the law enforcement agencies and media reports regarding the rape incidents.

Limitations

The topic of the research is sensitive and controversial, which means that people interpret it differently. Thus, the results and responses of the subjects solely represent their point of view and opinions about rape and the victim. The responses will also be influenced by religious beliefs, culture, and traditions. Thus, the reliability and generalization of the results are questioned.

Secondly, due to the sensitivity of the nature of the research topic, the data collection and the data's authenticity are also questioned.

Interviewing questions and collecting primary data from them is a crucial part of the research. It is feared that the victims would not be comfortable answering the questions, and some might even shy away from being interviewed.

Another limitation of the study is the question of ethics. According to many people, interviewing victims and studying the topic is insensitive and disrespectful to the feelings of victims, affecters, their families, etc.

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