

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Determinants of Society's Rape Myths Acceptance

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Abstract

This study was planned to determine the acceptance status of rape myths in society and also the factors affecting this situation. The target population of this descriptive cross-sectional study consisted of individuals living in Turkey. Random sampling method was used in sample selection. It was determined that there were 268 individuals who met the research criteria. The research data was collected online via Google form between April 30, 2021, and January 30, 2022. "Personal Information Form" and "Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale - Short form" were used as data collection tools. Descriptive statistical analyses, One-way ANOVA test, student t test and linear regression test were used to analyze the data. The mean age of the participants was 31.023±9.73 years. 42% of the participants were in the 28-37 age range and 59.9% of the participants were female. Gender, employment status, education level, place of residence and income status explained 28.7% of the acceptance of rape myths (p<0.001). It was determined that women accepted rape myths more than men, while the acceptance of rape myths was lower among low-educated participants. Within the scope of this study, it was determined that there are gender differences in the acceptance of rape myths and that the tendency to blame the victim is high. The results of this preliminary study are a reference for other researchers or institutions, and studies with a larger sample group are needed.

Keywords: Rape, Myths, Traditional Roles, Society

Öz

Çalışma; toplumda tecavüz mitlerinin kabul durumunu ve ayrıca bu durumu etkileyen faktörlerin belirlenmesi amacıyla planlanmıştır. Tanımlayıcı kesitsel türdeki çalışmamızın evrenini Türkiye'de yaşamakta olan bireyler oluşturdu. Örneklem seçiminde seçkisiz örnekleme yöntemi kullanıldı. Araştırma kriterlerini karşılayan 268 bireye ulaşıldı. Araştırma verileri 30.04.2021-30.01.2022 tarihleri arasında online ortamda Google form aracılığıyla toplandı. Veri toplama aracı olarak; "Kişisel Bilgi Formu" ve "İllinois Tecavüz Mitlerini Kabul Ölçeği- Kısa formu" kullanıldı. Verilerin analizinde tanımlayıcı istatistiksel analizler, One-way ANOVA, student t testi ve linear regresyon testi kullanıldı. Katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 31.023±9.73 olup, %42'si 28-37 yaş aralığında ve %59.9'u kadın idi. Cinsiyet, çalışma durumu, eğitim düzeyi, yaşanılan yer, gelir durumu tecavüz mitlerini kabulünün %28,7'sini açıklamakta idi (p<0.001). Kadınların erkeklere oranla tecavüz mitlerini daha fazla kabul ettikleri, düşük eğitilmiş katılımcıların tecavüz mitlerini kabulünün daha az olduğu belirlendi. Bu araştırmada, tecavüz mitlerini kabulünde cinsiyet farklılıkları olduğu, mağduru suçlama eğiliminin yüksek olduğu belirlendi. Bu konuda ön hazırlık niteliğindeki çalışma sonuçları başka araştırmacı veya kurumlar için referans niteliğinde olup, daha geniş kapsamlı bir örneklem grubuyla çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tecavüz, Mitler, Traditional Roller, Toplum

Introduction

Sexual violence, a phenomenon that we witness almost every day on television, in the news and on social media, is a violation of human rights that has been ongoing throughout human history. Sexual violence is considered one of the most serious crimes because of the physical and psychological damage that can last a lifetime (Çoklar & Meşe, 2015). In the 2014 revised Turkish Penal Code, sexual violence is among the crimes with different regulations depending on the type of occurrence (TPC 102/1- 102/2, 2014). In our laws, sexual violence (the crime of rape) is defined as the violation of the inviolability of personal bodily integrity by using threats, deceit, force against persons who do not consent or whose consent is not valid and who cannot defend themselves (www.mevzuat.gov.tr,2023)

The reason for this violence, which is accepted as a crime all over the world, has been widely researched and the crime of rape has been tried to be explained with many theories. The common point that most of them converge on is the effect of patriarchal structure. A patriarchal structure is also referred to as a social system that reflects male dominance and where traditional gendered roles are prominent. Godenzi (1989) explained the issue with a similar concept by stating that sexual violence is an expression of unequal power relations and is not an individual but a social and political problem. For this reason, stereotypes, attitudes and perceptions have been developed that in the case of rape, where the victims are usually women and the perpetrators are men, the male dominance system is protected, and that it is fair to blame the victim for those who comply with cultural stereotypes (Muray et al, 2023). Stereotypes may lead to a limited understanding of the concepts of 'real' rape and 'ideal' victim, while the negative effects of rape may lead to underestimation of violence (Yancı & Polat, 2019).

Unfortunately, the person who is most tarnished is the person whose rights are violated and stigmatized due to widely accepted "rape myths" that arise as a result of false beliefs about rape victims. A worldview and false beliefs formed by attitudes, norms, values and traditions rooted in social inequalities that support rape have been

defined in many different categories under the title of "rape myths". Interdisciplinary studies have tried to determine the attitudes and belief systems that are effective in accepting these beliefs. At this point, the concept of rape myths was first used as a concept in the 1970s and discussed as 'sexist myths' and 'male rape myths' (Schwedinger & Schwedinger, 1974; Brownmiller, 1975). Smith (2004) defined rape myths as "a culture in which rape or other forms of sexual violence against women and children are both common and accepted as the norm". Smith (2004) argued that rape myths are a part of rape culture. In current definitions, rape myths are defined as "various concepts that support erroneous beliefs about rape victims and perpetrators" (Fakunmoju et al., 2021).

Different studies have shown that these myths are also widely accepted in our country (Gölge, 1997; Sakallı-Uğurlu et al., 2007; Yılmaz & Oskay, 2019; Karaman, 2022). Men's efforts to justify sexual violence and women's efforts to make it accepted that they are strong is a special function of myths (Çamaş & Mete, 2016; Yılmaz & Oskay, 2022). The victim is directly blamed with myths such as "if a woman wear revealing clothes, drinks alcohol, and the rapist does not have a gun, she wanted it and deserved it". These attitudes lead to stigmatization of women, women's lack of socialization, women's discrediting and women seeing themselves as responsible for the assault (Yancı et al, 2018). If rape myths are associated with a religious dimension (such as good things happen to good people), the belief in a just world comes into play as another factor affecting the legitimization of this crime. (Yancı et al, 2018; Barnett et al., 2018; Ok Çelik, 2019).

Acceptance of rape myths can lead to a process of normalization and pave the way for the continuation of sexual victimization. In addition, the impact of prejudices and false beliefs about rape in society should be explored to understand sexual violence (Eker&Erdener, 2011). In literature studies, the sample generally focused on university students(Boateng et al, 2023;Oureshi et al.,2021; Kamal et al,2010) In this study, it was aimed to reach everyone over the age of 18 and to evaluate the community-based perspective. Therefore, it is important to conduct more research on the predictors of rape myth acceptance. In

addition to the belief in this necessity, this study was planned based on the realization that there are few community-based studies conducted in this sense as a result of literature searches. The aim of our study is to determine the acceptance status of rape myths in society and the factors affecting this status.

Method

This study is a descriptive cross-sectional study and the target population consists of individuals living in Turkey. Random sampling method was used in sample selection. In this method, the basic principle is that individuals and objects are included or excluded from the sample by taking into account certain characteristics instead of giving equal chances to every individual and object to be included in the sample. Another important feature of the random sampling method is that it can be applied in a healthy way as a preliminary preparation for the studies to be repeated. In this framework, the inclusion criteria of the participants in the study were determined as being between the ages of 18-65, agreeing to participate in the study, being able to read and write in Turkish, and having no problems in comprehension capacity. Our sample consisted of 268 individuals who met the research criteria. The research data was collected online via Google form (<https://forms.gle/Wred3TKn4UrpeUFx5>) between April 30, 2021, and January 30, 2022. In this study, the "G. Power-3.1.9.7" program was used. In order to detect an 80% power ($\alpha = .05$, two-tailed), we included a gender group of 105 male and 157 female participants ($N=263$) in an independent samples t-test. The smallest effect size of interest was set to $d = 0.415$ was found.

Data Collection Tools: A two-part questionnaire form was used as a data collection tool. The first part of the questionnaire included the "Personal Information Form", which was prepared by the researcher in line with the relevant literature, and the second part included the "Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale - Short Form".

Personal Information Form: The form included demographic information about the participants (gender, age, education level, occupation, income, having children, place of residence) and the

definition of rape/sexual assault and consisted of a total of 10 questions.

Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale - Short Form: The Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale - Short form was developed by Payne et al. in 1999. Turkish validity and reliability of the form was performed by Çoklar and Meşe in 2015. The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short form, which was developed to determine the views on rape myths and consists of seventeen items, is a 7-point Likert-type scale. The scale items have a ranking system from negative to positive: Scale items are as follows: "1- I strongly disagree, 2- I partially agree, 3- I somewhat agree, 4- I am undecided, 5- I somewhat agree, 6- I partially agree, 7- I completely agree.". A minimum score of 17 and a maximum score of 119 can be obtained from the scale and the higher the score obtained from the scale, the higher the level of acceptance of rape myths. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was determined as .90. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was found to be .917.

Ethical consideration

Sinop University Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee gave the ethical approval for the study (Date: (11.02.2021 Decision No: 2021/2).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS 25 software. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, number, and percentage) and parametric tests were calculated using the data. Variables predicting acceptance of rape myths were evaluated with linear regression analysis. The significance level was accepted as 0.05.

Results

Demographic results: In our research, the average age of the participants was 31.023 ± 9.73 . 42% of the participants were between the ages of 28-37. 59.9% of the participants were female, 54.6% of the participants were married, 42% of the participants were primary or high school graduates, 70.2% of the participants perceived that their monthly

income was equivalent to their expenses, 34.7% of the participants were civil servants and 36.6% of the participants lived in towns and districts. 60.7% of the participants stated that they did not have children and 88.2% of the participants stated that they had never experienced sexual violence. Some socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics characteristics of participants (n=262)

Gender	n	%
Female	157	59,9
Male	105	40,1
Age		
18-27	110	42,0
28-37	86	32,8
38 and above	66	25,2
Education level		
Primary school graduate- High school graduate	48	18,3
Bachelor's degree	179	68,3
Postgraduate	35	13,42
Employment status		
Unemployed	40	15,3
Student	84	32,1
Officer	91	34,7
Worker	21	8,0
Self-employment	26	9,9
Income status		
Income less than expenditure	28	10,7
Income matches expenditure	184	70,2
Income more than expenditure	50	19,1
Place of residence		
Metropolitan	69	26,3
Province	85	32,4
District-town	96	36,6
Village	12	4,6
Marital status		
Married	143	54,6
Single	100	38,2
Divorced	19	7,3
Childbearing status and child's gender		
Yes, a girl	30	11,5
Yes, a boy	32	12,2
Yes, a boy and a girl	41	15,6
No	159	60,7
Experiencing sexual violence		
Yes	31	11,8
No	231	88,2

39,3% of the participants answered the definition of the word rape as "Violation of a person's bodily inviolability without consent". The participants' answers to the definition of rape are shown in Table 2

Table 2: Participants' responses to the meaning of the word "rape"

Definition of "Rape"	N	%
I have no idea; I can't define it.	9	3,4
Disgusting, outrageous behavior, desperation, crime against humanity	50	19,1
Terrible, unforgettable suffering, mental breakdown, criminality	9	3,4
Violation of a person's bodily inviolability without consent	103	39,3
When a person is physically assaulted in a perverted inhuman way	15	5,7
Bullying, dishonor, physical force assault, lack of conscience	44	16,8
Unwanted acceptance	18	6,9
Disappointing for humanity, inhuman	6	2,3
Sexual fling, covert assault	4	1,5
Any act done to a person on the basis of gender, the incapacity of men	2	0,8
Women in revealing clothes attract men	2	0,8

Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

The mean score of the participants on the rape myths scale was 73.97+12.69 (min-max:17-93).

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and the mean scores of the rape myths scale are presented in Table 3. The relationship between the mean rape myths scale score and gender ($t=56.307$, $p=0.001$), educational level ($F=2.181$, $p=0.039$), employment status ($F=7.130$, $p=0.001$), income status ($F=10.307$, $p=0.001$), and place of residence ($F=3.84$, $p=0.010$) was found to be significant. When the effect sizes were examined; the average rape myth acceptance levels of women and men differ slightly (Cohen's $d = 0.091$). The education level ($\eta^2=0.024$) and place where individuals live ($\eta^2=0.045$) varied the average level of acceptance of rape myths at a small level, while it was moderately affected by their profession ($\eta^2=0.107$) and income level ($\eta^2=0.078$) at a medium level.

It was found that being young or being old had no effect on the level of myth acceptance ($F=2.181$, $p=0.115$).

According to gender status, it was determined that female participants had higher rape myth acceptance scores than male participants and those

with higher education level had higher rape myth acceptance scores. In terms of employment status, it was determined that student participants had higher rape myth acceptance. Rape myth acceptance was found to be lower as the income level increased and the transition towards rural areas. No significant difference was found between rape myth acceptance and exposure to sexual violence (t:1.077, p=0.300) (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of Participants' Demographic Characteristics and Rape Myth Acceptance Scale

	X	SD	Test Value	P
Gender				
Female	78,1275	8,41916	t:56,307	p:0,001
Male	66,8990	15,07566		
Age				
18-27	74,9712	12,53923	F:2,181	p:0,115
28-37	71,2976	11,28362		
38 and above	74,6333	14,72685		
Education level (1-2,1-3)				
Primary school graduate-High school graduate	69,1395	13,89858	F:3,30	p:0.039
Bachelor's degree	74,5789	12,42144		
Postgraduate	74,6471	12,14030		η2=0.024
Employment status (1-5 ,2-4,5 3-5)				
Unemployed	76,2432	10,01778	F:7.130	p:0.001
Student	77,3012	8,62884		
Officer	73,0233	13,22384		
Worker	66,8500	20,62516		
Self-employment	64,0909	12,48584		
Income status (1-3;2-3)				
Income less than expenditure	75,7600	9,29731	F:10.307	p:0,001
Income matches expenditure	75,3543	9,68944		
Income more than expenditure	66,3404	20,13355		η2=0.078
Place of residence (1-2;1-3)				
Metropolitan	78,1538	5,97451	F:3,84	p:0.010
Province	72,3875	14,08338		
District-town	71,8791	14,55704		
Village	71,0000	11,36982		
Marital status				
Married	74,3481	12,05789	F:2,870	p:0.059
Single	71,6277	14,35344		
Divorced	78,6316	6,22906		
Childbearing status and child's gender				
Yes, a girl	73,7333	10,59581	F:1.091	p:0.354
Yes, a boy	70,9643	13,15571		

Yes , a boy and a girl	71,5385	17,16153		
No	74,6689	11,72162		
Experiencing sexual violence				
Yes	71,4194	16,54242	t:1.077	p:0.300
No	73,9631	12,14833		

Regression analysis was used to determine the predictive levels of variables predicting acceptance of rape myths (Table 4). Gender, employment status, education level, place of residence, and income explain 28.7% of rape myth acceptance (p<0.001).

Table 4: Regression analysis results for predicting acceptance of rape myths

Variables	B	S.H	β	t	p	VIF
Constant	93,163	5,892		15,812	,001	
Gender	-	1,48	-	-6,915	,00	1,10
0: Male	10,27	5	,39		1	0
1:Female	0		5			
Employment status	2,897	1,049	,152	2,762	,006	1,024
0:Unemployed						
0:Student						
0:Officer						
0:Worker						
1: Self-employment						
Education level	-5,200	1,322	-,217	-3,933	,001	1,029
0: Primary school graduate-High school graduate						
0: Bachelor's degree						
1: Postgraduate						
Place of residence	-1,439	,816	-,099	-1,763	,079	1,068
0: Province						
0: District-town						
0: Village						
1: Metropolitan						
Income status	-,874	,594	-,084	-1,471	,142	1,109
0: Income less than expenditure						
0: Income matches expenditure						
1: Income more than expenditure						
R=,535	R2= ,287	F=19,377	p<0.001			

Discussion

The mean score of the participants on the rape myths scale was 73.97±12.69 (min-max:17-93). The widespread acceptance of rape myths can be considered as an indicator of cultural attitudes, beliefs, and traditional gender norms. Barnett et al. (2018) suggested that attitudes and opinions in this direction shape attitudes about rape. The high level of traditional sexist norms in our country is an example of the first steps of this social construction process.

Research on acceptance of rape myths shows that men have higher levels of acceptance of rape myths than women (Hayes et al., 2013; Swope, 2014; Karaman, 2022; Avezalma & Chusniyah, 2022). The rate of acceptance of rape myths among women is higher in India, Arab, and African countries (Jayalakshmi et al., 2016). In this study, the level of myth acceptance was found to be higher in women than in men.. The fact that our study did not consist only of university students may also have an impact on this result. In our study, individuals over the age of 38 constitute 25%. In the study conducted by Walfield (2018), it was determined that the acceptance rate of rape myths increased as the participants got older, too. In this case, it can be explained by the fact that both young women and this age group have adopted traditional sexist roles more. This may be an indicator of the patriarchal values and norms adopted in our country and is interpreted as an expression of the view that women are not powerless against rape. In addition, early age victimization increases has indirect effects on the acceptance of rape myths through traditional views of gender roles (Cooke et al., 2020) was also considered as an influence on this result.

Education is recognized as an important approach, especially in violent crimes or in awareness raising activities (Katran-Davran et al, 2022;). However, it may not always be effective enough to bring about the desired change. (Baysan Arabacı & Uygun, 2022). No matter how educated we are, it is not easy to change the attitudes and perceptions shaped by the environment, family, society or group we live in. In studies on violence against women, it has been found that as the level of education increases, negative perspectives

towards violence, progressive attitudes towards violence, and the tendency to experience violence decrease (Han Almiş et al, 2018; Nagel B et al, 2005; Francis et al, 2023). When the relationship between rape myths and education level was analyzed, a negative relationship was found (Bendixen et al.,2014; Yancı et al, 2018). However, in our study, it was determined that the acceptance of rape myths increased as the level of education increased. This may again be an indication that the participants are more committed to traditional gender roles and have stereotypical beliefs. The linear relationship between rape myth acceptance and education level also supports the view that it is an extension of social norms learned during the socialization process. It has been shown that rape education is effective on the acceptance of rape myths (Adesola et al., 2021), and it is thought that training in this sense will be an important approach in reducing the risk.

One of the most prominent variables revealed by studies examining the relationship between education level and attitudes and beliefs regarding violence against women and rape is ambivalent sexism. This situation is more common in individuals with higher education levels (Tarhan, Gündüz & Ekşioğlu 2017). The theory of ambivalent sexism was put forward by Glick and Fiske (1997) to explain the sexist ideology that legitimizes gender inequality with both positive and negative attitudes towards women. Researchers have suggested that sexism towards women has two dimensions: protective and hostile sexism. Hostile sexism is defined as an ideology that argues that women want to control men and try to gain privilege, therefore they are a threat to men, and thus legitimize men's privilege and dominance. Protectionist sexism is defined as an ideology that is seemingly positive, but legitimizes the superior position of men, stating that women are emotional, delicate and beautiful. Although these two forms of sexism involve different attitudes towards women, there is a high correlation between them and together they form a structure that legitimizes gender inequality (Alptekin, 2014). Chapleau, Oswald, and Russell (2007) also showed that rape myths are associated with hostile sexism. Viki and Abrams (2002) investigated the relationship between protective

sexism and blaming married and unmarried rape victims. The findings supported that protective sexists tend to blame marital rape victims if they know the perpetrator. This is because individuals with high protective sexism scores may have perceptions that the married victim was cheating on his or her spouse at the time of the incident.

In this study, a significant difference was found in the rape myth acceptance levels of the participants according to their income levels and employment status. It was observed that the level of acceptance of rape myths was high among unemployed individuals and individuals who perceived their income level as low. The role assigned to men in society is to bring home the bacon, while the role assigned to women is to take care of children, take care of housework and cook at home. Factors such as men being unemployed and having limited financial means create stress and are known to be a cause of domestic violence (Karaman, 2022). This traditional role is a reflection of cultural structure and explains the acceptance of myths. On the other hand, the effect of the just world belief theory as an influential factor on income level and employment status was also considered. In the just world belief theory, people deserve what happens to them and tend to want to believe that they get what they deserve. Therefore, individuals may sometimes resort to preserving the belief in a just world in order to cope with this disturbing feeling, thinking that the victim has behaved in ways that deserve what happened to him/her and that he/she already deserves this action. Thus, there is a tendency to blame the victim. (Yancı & Polat, 2019). In this way, the rate of acceptance of rape myths increases among individuals.

In this study, it was found that the level of acceptance of rape myths differed in terms of the residential unit of residence. Contrary to expectations, this difference was between those living in metropolitan cities and provinces and those living in districts and towns. In Karaman's (2022) study, the rape myth acceptance levels of individuals living in provinces are higher than those living in metropolitan areas. In metropolitan cities, the differentiation of the environment and the increase in opportunities may empower individuals, and their behaviors, attitudes and

habits may change negatively. In this case, there may be a tendency to blame the victim more.

Determining the region of origin of the people, which is one of the limitations of the study, actually shows the deficiency in the effect size of this factor. Because in societies like Turkey, which are built on the concept of honor, changing the perception brought by this concept is a long-term journey. At this very point, honor culture legitimizes inequality and violence between genders. The violence caused by the perception of honor basically stems from gender inequality. In this context, rape myths also automatically emerge in honor cultures. Rape myths are defined as thoughts, actions, and beliefs that justify or deny men's sexual violence against women (Gerger et al., 2007; Eker and Erdener 2011; Longway and Fitzgerald 1995). It is observed that these myths are more common in countries where honor is defined through women. Among rape myths, women secretly desire to be harassed, even if they don't show it. Women who wear revealing clothes and share them on social media leave the door open to harassment. There are assumptions such as women who speak and text in an inviting manner are subject to harassment, and women who consume alcoholic beverages invite rape (Şenses and Karaaslan 2023). In this context, the domination that is established/attempted to be established over women with the instinct of extreme protection and which includes constantly following women ensures that rape myths and the belief in a just world maintain their existence. With this approach, in patriarchal societies like Turkey that have adopted the concept of honor, it would be a better approach to focus on the perception of the social concept in which one is raised rather than on education or the region in which one lives.

Limitations and Strength of the Study

Since the data in this study were collected through the "Illinois Rape Myths Acceptance Scale" and "Personal Information Form", they are limited to the qualities measured by these forms. The data of this study were obtained from individuals between the ages of 18-65, and the low participation caused the study to be terminated on

a small sample size. Therefore, it cannot be generalized.

On the other hand, the fact that there are almost no studies on the community base in Turkey during the literature review process reflects the strength of our research.

Conclusion

It was determined that the acceptance of rape myths was above average, there were gender differences in the acceptance of rape myths and the level of blaming the victim was higher. Gender, employment status, education level, place of residence, and income explain 28.7% of rape myth acceptance. This situation was interpreted as a result of the widespread acceptance of traditional gender roles and the dominance of a culture with a patriarchal structure. However, this situation brings with it an important problem. This problem is the risk of leading to sexual and interpersonal violence, as well as the risk of legitimizing violence. In order to reduce this risk, examining the acceptance of rape myths with a higher sample size and raising awareness are thought to be approaches that will make significant contributions to public health, women's health and forensic sciences.

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