



Rape myth acceptance in convicted rapists: A systematic review of the literature



Larissa Gabrielle Johnson *, Anthony Beech

Centre for Forensic and Criminological Psychology, School of Psychology, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, West Midlands B15 2TT, United Kingdom

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 17 October 2016

Received in revised form 24 February 2017

Accepted 13 March 2017

Available online 18 March 2017

Keywords:

Rape myth acceptance

Rapist typology

Rapists

Sex offending

Offence-supportive attitudes

ABSTRACT

Aim: The review examines studies on rape myth acceptance (RMA) within populations of convicted sexual offenders, changes in RMA due to interventions, comparisons between sexual offenders and community controls, comparisons within the offending population, and relationships between RMA and other psychological constructs linked to criminogenic need.

Method: The search employed electronic databases, OvidSP, Web of Science, and Proquest; hand searching reference lists; and contacting 35 experts in the field. Inclusion/exclusion and quality appraisal criteria were applied to each study.

Results: Eight studies met the inclusion criteria. Results highlighted differences in subgroups of rapists for different aspects of RMA; while rapists can be distinguished from non-offenders and non-sexual offenders on measures of RMA, they cannot be significantly discriminated from child molesters; rapists and sexual murders cannot be distinguished using RMA scores; RMA was not found to be a significant predictor of sexual or violence recidivism; and significant positive change in RMA was reported after sex offenders completed treatment programs.

Conclusions: Differences in scores on RMA subscales amongst rapists' typologies were discovered, which may indicate differences in beliefs within each type. Implications for practice are discussed.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Contents

1.	Introduction	21
1.1.	Rape myths and rape myth acceptance	21
1.2.	Measures of rape myth acceptance	21
1.3.	The current review	21
1.4.	Aims and objectives	22
2.	Method	22
2.1.	Scoping exercise	22
2.2.	Overview of search strategy	22
2.3.	Search terms	22
2.4.	Inclusion/exclusion criteria	22
2.5.	Screening and selection of studies (applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria)	22
2.6.	Quality assessment	23
2.7.	Data extraction	23
3.	Results	23
3.1.	Overview of studies	23
3.2.	Methodological and study characteristics	24
3.3.	Participants and recruitment	24
3.4.	Study focus and aims	24
3.5.	Measures of RMA	24

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: lgj489@bham.ac.uk (L.G. Johnson).

3.6.	Risk of bias ratings of included studies	27
3.7.	Narrative data synthesis and key findings	27
3.7.1.	Can adult, male rapists be distinguished from adult, male child molesters, non-sexual offenders, or non-offenders on measures on RMA?	27
3.7.2.	Are there differences in levels of RMA between different sub-groups of rapists?	27
3.7.3.	Can differences in levels of RMA discriminate between rapists who reoffend (recidivists) and those who do not?	28
3.7.4.	Is RMA amenable to sex offender treatment programs?	28
4.	Discussion and conclusions	28
4.1.	Main findings of the review	28
4.2.	Strengths and weaknesses of the review	28
4.3.	Implications for practice and future direction	29
	Disclosure statement	29
	Funding	29
	Appendix A. Characteristics of included studies (ordered by study ID)	29
	References	33

1. Introduction

Sexual offending research is often heavily weighted in the topic of child sexual abuse. Rape is underrepresented in the literature, resulting in limited knowledge and inefficient treatment. Often, sexual offenders will receive a generic treatment program despite it being important to separate treatment needs for those that differ in their criminogenic needs (Reid, Wilson, & Boer, 2011). Helmus, Hanson, Babchishin, and Mann (2013) note that cognitive distortions, specifically “attitudes supportive of sexual offending”, are a risk factor that have predictive validity for sexual recidivism. Rape myth acceptance has been identified as one of these cognitive distortions and will be the topic of this review.

1.1. Rape myths and rape myth acceptance

Martha Burt first introduced and subsequently defined the concept of rape myths in 1980 as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (p. 217). In later years, Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) went on to expand on the definition, stating that rape myths are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). For example, women “ask for rape” and rape is a result of the “uncontrollable” male sex drive (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999), shifting the blame for the crime toward the victim (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; Gray, 2006). Rape myths influence attitudes toward victims on a social level. High levels of rape myth acceptance (RMA) are strongly associated with rape proclivity – one’s likelihood or tendency to choose to rape (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010; Chiroro, Bohner, Viki, & Jarvis, 2004; Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011; Gray, 2006). Rape myths are thought to reduce the expectation of negative outcomes or consequences in sexual offenders (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010). There is evidence of RMA amongst convicted rapists, using myths to rationalize their behaviours (Chiroro et al., 2004). Rape myth acceptance has been a major topic in rape literature and research has identified the devastating impact of RMA across a variety of settings.

1.2. Measures of rape myth acceptance

There are a wide range of instruments designed to assess constructs related to rape myths. However, it should be noted that within the literature what defines a “rape myth” will vary across authors. Some experts state that the term “rape myth acceptance” is now interchangeable with “offence supportive attitudes” or “rape supportive attitudes” (C. Hermann, personal communication, May 4th, 2015; J. W. Van den Berg, personal communication, April 28th 2015). Alternatively, these terms could be viewed, arguably more appropriately, as overarching terminology under which “rape myth acceptance” falls as a subcategory. The varied literature on the topic looks at rape attitudes, knowledge on

rape, empathy toward rape, and rape aversion (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994).

Before the official introduction of the term “rape myths” by Burt in 1980, Feild (1978) developed the Attitudes Toward Rape Scale (ATR). The researcher found that counsellors differed from police, citizens, and rapists in their beliefs about rape, with citizens and the police being most similar. However, the scale failed to discriminate between rapists and police on approximately half of the attitudinal dimensions. As a result, many studies after this have chosen to utilize other tools for measuring rape myth acceptance or to pull aspects from the ATR and combine these with items that better discriminate rapists from non-offenders.

Arguably, the most widely used measure of rape myths is the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale developed by Burt (1980). The Rape Myth Acceptance Scale measures distorted beliefs around the sexual assault of adult women. This was the introductory measure for rape myth terminology. Research with the scale has found that men who are sexually aggressive toward adult women endorse more of these distorted beliefs about rape than do non-sexually aggressive men (Burt, 1980; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Bumby (1996) noted that approximately a third of the scale’s items do not specifically measure rape myths. Rather, he explained, the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale appeared to reveal how peoples’ biases regarding age, race, and gender affect their likelihood of believing an allegation of rape.

Bumby (1996) felt that Burt’s scale was highly susceptible to socially desirable responding and that there was weak evidence of its ability to discriminate between offenders and non-offenders. In response, he created the Bumby RAPE scale and found that it could discriminate between sex offenders and controls, but could not discriminate amongst sex offenders (i.e. separate rapists from child sex offenders). However, the RAPE scale has been discounted as well as a measure of rape myth acceptance and seen as a measure overall of sexual-assault-supportive attitudes (W. Murphy, personal communication, April 27th, 2015).

Also, building on Burt’s scale, and attempting to enhance it, Payne et al. (1999) created the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale to assess myths about female victims of rape, male perpetrators, and rape as a violent crime by examining gender-role stereotyping, adversarial sexual and heterosexual beliefs, hostility toward women, and acceptance of interpersonal violence.

Many researchers have developed extended or modified versions of Burt’s RMA and others have developed scales that are conceptually similar (see Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) for a comprehensive list of measures relating to rape myth acceptance and rape-supportive attitudes).

1.3. The current review

There is evidence to suggest that addressing rape myth acceptance is a relevant treatment need for adult male rapists but the research is

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4760092>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4760092>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)