

## Acceptance of Rape Myth Among Police Trainees

Swetha Thomas

*School of Gandhian Thought and Development Studies, Mahatma Gandhi University, India*

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**Abstract:** *A set of false beliefs that place the blame on the victim are rape myths. These myths exist in all domains of the society due to varied socialisation process. Presence of such myths in the Criminal Justice System could affect the victim- investigator relationship. The main objective of this study was to examine the existence of rape myths and to identify if any gender differences exist among police trainees. The study was conducted on male and female recruit police constables undergoing training at Kerala Police Academy, Thrissur, Kerala with the help of Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale.*

**Keywords:** *genderdifferences, rape myths, victim investigator relationship,*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon that exists both in domestic and working sphere. They occupy a significant place in the penal status of every country and the most shocking crimes against human conscience and morality are the sexual crimes against women. Rape is perhaps the most damaging and heinous crimes and has been recognised as the most serious offence against the dignity of women. Rape myths are set of false beliefs about rape that places the blame on the victim and not the perpetrator. Rape myths were originally defined by Burt on “prejudicial, stereotype, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists”.Lonsway and Fitzgerald described rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false yet widely and persistently held and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women”. Some of the commonly held rape myths and misconceptions are:-

- i. Rape is a crime of uncontrollable male sexual drive
- ii. Rapists can be easily identified by their appearance and behaviour
- iii. Some girls encourage rape just by the way they dress
- iv. No one can be raped against her will
- v. Most women are sexually assaulted by strangers
- vi. Women frequently “cry rape” falsely for reasons of revenge, pregnancy or to protect their reputation
- vii. Most sexual assaults occur in isolated places
- viii. A rape survivor will be bruised and hysterical

Rape myths functions as a way to exercise the actions of the perpetrator by causing society and individuals to doubt or disbelieve victim’s accounts of rape, therefore creating a lack of empathy for victims. Belief in rape myths affects the way society views sexual assault both as a cultural phenomenon and as a type of interpersonal violence. The process by which rape myths are systematically formed and supported by individuals is similar for men and women, as all socialisation process enforces rigid gender roles that confirm rape attitudes [1](Jones, Russell, &Byrant, 1998). While studies show that both women and men are susceptible to rape myth acceptance, evidence shows that men tend to endorse rape myths at higher rates than women [2](Aosued& Long, 2006; [3]Suarez &Gadalla, 2010).

Victims who are treated with empathy and respect are more likely to follow through with reporting procedures, cooperate with law enforcement investigation, and report satisfaction with Criminal Justice System [4](Campbell, 1998). Those who choose to report sexual assault often face numerous obstacles when seeking support from the Criminal Justice System. When victims attempt to access through medical, legal and community based support system after an assault, they are often faced with professionals who subscribe to rape myths [5](Campbell, 1988). Research demonstrates a positive relationship between public attitudes towards rape myth acceptance. Little is known about its existence within the police culture. Studies show that when police officers subscribe to rape myths, victims are reluctant to come forward, investigations are halted and perpetrators are not held accountable [6](Ask, 2010; [7]Campbell, 1998).

Various studies conducted in various countries show that rape myths influence perceptions of sexual assault, including those of law enforcement officials. A study conducted by [8]Sleath& Bull (2012) on 123 police officers found that the officer’s acceptance of rape myths was positively associated with victim attribution of blame. [9]Goodman- Delahunty& Graham (2011) found that in a study of 125 police officers, those with high rates of rape myth acceptance were less likely to view the victim as a credible witness, more likely to view the victim as a credible witness, more likely to believe that the assault was consensual, and less

likely to charge a perpetrator with crime. Thus it appears that specialised training and exposure to rape victims has had little bearing on rape myth acceptance. [10](Page, 2010; [11]Sleath& Bull, 2012).

While extensive research has studied sexual assault reporting behaviours and described negative experiences within the Criminal Justice System among the victim- survivors, fewer studies have explored police officer attitudes, knowledge and thought processes that may affect victim’s perceptions of negative interactions and unsatisfactory outcomes within reported sexual assault cases in India. Police officers are invariably influenced by their socialisation, as is any one raised within a particular society. To address this issue training concerning rape victims and other facts are attempted by police agencies to resocialise their views. Given the amount of discretion afforded to police officers is often a rape victim’s first contact with the Criminal Justice System, it is important to assess their attitudes towards women and rape. Doing so would not only contribute to the literature in these areas, but could provide the basis for changes in police training.

This study focused on the existence of rape myth acceptance among police trainees as they play a critical role in working with victims and investigating sexual assault cases as per their job demands.

**II. OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the existence of rape myths among recruit police trainees
2. To identify the gender differences of rape myths among police trainees

**III. METHODOLOGY**

The population for the study consisted of male and female recruit police constables (438) undergoing training at Kerala Police Academy (KEPA), Thrissur. The data for the study was collected through census method. The tool used to collect data was the updated version of Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale which was applicable to the Indian context. The scale consisted of 22 rape myths that existed in the society. The respondents had to mark their answer on a 5 point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The obtained data was analysed using the scoring key.

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the study showed that among 438 trainees (both male and female) 68.49 % had a positive attitude which means that they rejected the rape myths that existed in the society and have a positive attitude towards rape and women. Around 29.45% of them had a satisfactory positive attitude which means that they did not fully reject the rape myths that exist. They could sometimes interpret certain situations based on the rape myths that exist. Thus they have both positive and negative attitude towards rape and woman. Only 2.51% of the total population had a negative attitude towards rape myths which means that they accept the rape myths that exist in the society and view victims which such stereotypes that could affect their relationship with public and the victim.

**TABLE I: Results of police recruit constables towards rape myth acceptance (both male and female)**

A t t i t u d e	N	u	m	b	e	r	P	e	r	c	e	n	t	a	g	e	
N e g a t i v e	1					1	2	.	5							1	%
S a t i s f a c t o r y	1	2				9	2	9	.	4						5	%
P o s i t i v e	3	0				0	6	8	.	4						9	%

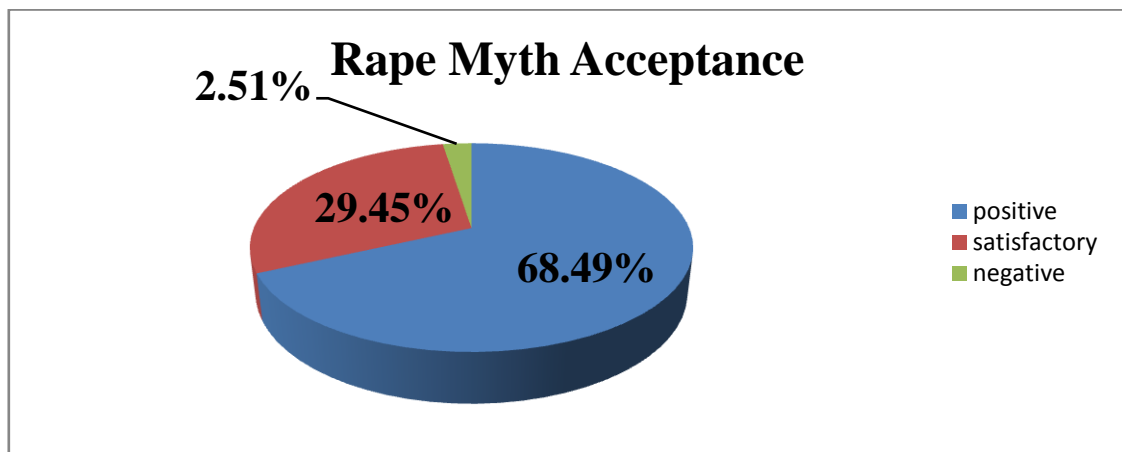


Fig 1: showing the acceptance of rape myths among male and female police constables

Thus from the above percentage results it is clear that majority of the police recruit constables (both male and female) have rejected the rape myths that exists in the society and have a positive attitude towards rape and women.

The data obtained from 438 trainees consisted of 195 female recruit police constables and 243 male recruit police constables. A percentage comparison was made of these two groups to find if any gender differences existed. The results showed that 77.43% of female recruits had positive attitude compared to male recruits (61.31%). However 35.80% of male trainees had satisfactory positive attitude compared to female trainees (21/53%). Further, 3.70% male trainees had negative attitude compared to female trainees (1.02%).

TABLE 2: Results of gender comparison on rape myth acceptance

A t t i t u d e	F e m a l e		M a l e	
	N u m b e r	P e r c e n t a g e	N u m b e r	P e r c e n t a g e
N e g a t i v e	2	1 . 0 2 %	9	3 . 7 0 %
S a t i s f a c t o r y	4	2 1 . 5 3 %	8	7 3 . 5 8 %
p o s i t i v e	1 5	7 7 . 4 3 %	1 4 9	6 1 . 3 1 %

The above results show that female recruit police constables reject rape myths and have more positive attitude towards rape and women compared to male recruit police constables. This shows that though both male and female have positive attitude gender differences exist and female have more positive attitude compared to men.

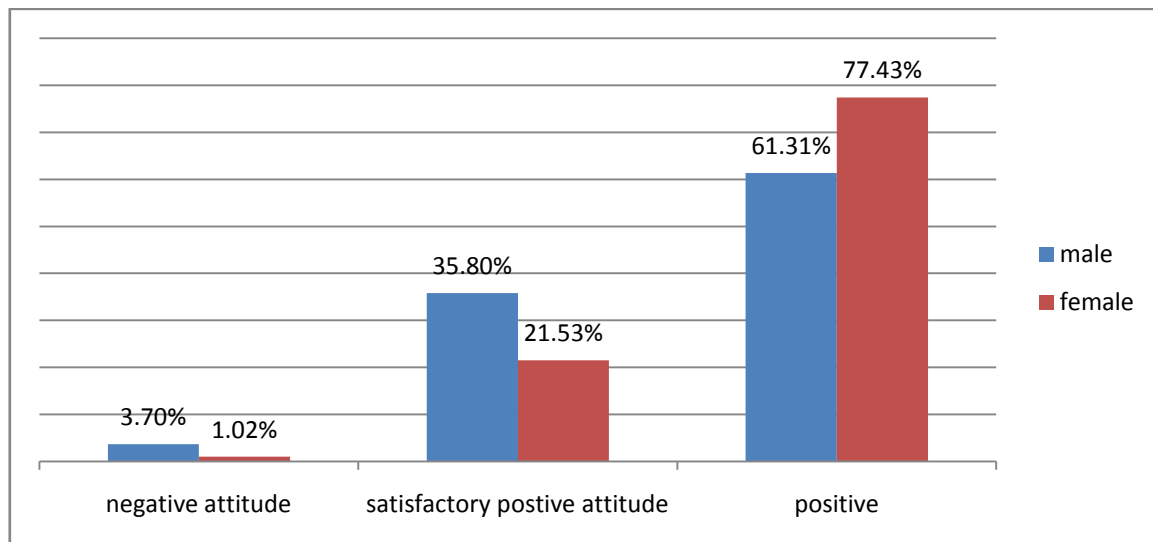


Fig 2: showing the gender difference on acceptance of rape myths

However while comparing who has more satisfactory positive attitude results show that men recruit constables have more satisfactory positive attitude compared to women recruit constables stating that they have few myths about rape that exists in their mindset which could affect their job demands. Even though both male and female recruit police constable have negative attitude male have more rape myth acceptance compared to female recruit police constables. Thus gender difference exists in accepting rape myths.

4.1 Findings:

- Majority (68.49%) of recruit police constables (both male and female have rejected the rape myths that exists in society.
- Gender differences exist in each attitude towards rape myth (positive, negative and satisfactory positive)
- Female recruits (77.43%) rejected rape myths compared to male recruits (61.31%)
- Only 2.51% (both male and female) recruits accepted rape myths.

V. CONCLUSION

Overall results showed that recruit police constables (both male and female) had rejected the rape myths that exist in society. They have positive attitude towards rape and woman. However gender differences existed which shows that female recruit police constables have more positive attitude compared to male recruit police constables. Only a few percentages of trainees had accepted the rape myths which could be further eliminated with training. The trainee’s attitudes were analysed in between training and thus whether training has

any influence is not known. Further studies could be conducted on periodic interval say at the beginning of training, in between training and after training. Thus it would help the authorities in knowing the effectiveness of training.

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