

## Attitudes toward rape victims among University of Namibia students

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### Abstract

A common misunderstanding about rape is that the perpetrator is driven by a sexual desire motivated by the victim's seductive dressing or behaviour. The damaging impact of rape on the victim not only affects the victim's emotional, psychological and physical state, but its ripple effects impact the larger systems of families, friends and life partners. The literature on studies of attitudes toward rape shows that there is an overall negative attitude towards rape victims leading to discrimination, stigma and, consequently, under-reporting of rape. The main focus of the present study was to investigate university students' attitude toward rape victims. Furthermore, the study sought to explore gender differences in acceptance of rape victims. A convenience sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 131 students between the ages of 19-38 years. The socio-demographic questionnaire and Attitudes Towards Rape Victims Scale (ATRVS) were self-administered to collect quantitative data and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The results indicate that male students have significantly higher unfavourable attitudes towards rape victims in comparison to females. Most of the rape victims are judged by what they wear and their location. However, both genders showed an acceptance of rape victims, even though a small number of males indicated "mildly disagree" on the scale. To be effective at reducing victimization, results strongly suggest rape awareness programs and interventions targeting society's attitude and ways of dealing with a victim. Without community involvement and change in societal attitudes toward rape, legal policies will remain ineffective.

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Rape is a social and human rights violation. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2002) defines rape as any sexual act or attempted sexual act that is unwanted and directed towards another person using coercion. According to Cheung, Andry and Tam (1990), rape is often under-reported due to victims' fear of being judged and, possibly, accused of being the cause of the rape. Wilson and Miller (2015) found that out of a total of 5,917 women who had experiences of rape after age 14, 60.4 percent did not recognize their experiences as rape. They noted that this finding has implication for policy reform, provision of mental health services, survivors' understanding of their experiences as well as societal attitudes toward survivors. A report in Namibia showed police statistics of over 1000 rapes being reported each year for the period 2003-2015, with the vast majority of victims being women (Legal Assistance Centre [LAC], 2017). The report further reveals that between 2004 and 2012, each year 15 men were victims representing 2% to 8%.

With females being the more likely gender to be raped, there is a common tendency to blame the victim based on what they were wearing, how they behaved and, many times, on alcohol consumption prior to being raped. Briones (2009) notes that people believe that the victim brought rape upon herself, because of exhibition of reckless behaviour before the incident. With this intentional focus on the victim, perpetrators' actions are justified. It is this societal attitude that inevitably reduces the psychological impact of rape when perpetrator responsibility is eliminated (Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004).

A contributing factor to victim blaming, especially in the Namibian context is a lack of information on rape and its traumatic effects. With so much stigmatization and labelling of victims, there is ignorance around the psychosocial impact rape has on victims and the systems within which they find themselves (Grubb & Turner, 2012). Other aspects to consider in the general attitude towards victim may include cultural and gender norms whereby women are expected to behave and dress in a prescribed manner. A study concluded that male students are more likely to accept negative rape attitudes and blame the victims (Lev-Wiesel, 2004). Hubbard (2006) notes that about one-quarter of rapes are committed by men under the age of 21 years.

Studying the attitudes toward rape among university students, including gender specific attitudes may provide results indicating the need to develop public awareness about rape and

attitudes towards victims and perpetrators. Consequently, such interventions may also bring the needed support rape victims so desperately need from societies they live in hence this study.

## **Literature Review**

### **Rape Globally**

Historically, rape has been viewed as a crime involving men as perpetrators and women as victims (Weiss, 2010). This perception may be directly related to a general belief that men are physically stronger than women as well as gender roles within cultural contexts that paint women as being vulnerable to rape. Greeson, Campbell and Fehler-Cabral (2016) concluded in a study of 20 adolescent rape victims that majority of the victims had been involved in behaviours that can be said to be inappropriate such as consuming alcohol, hanging out with older people and getting involved in some sexual activity prior to the assault. Furthermore, the study also examined how certain characteristics such as blaming, being judgmental and sceptical contrasted with believing, authenticating, and non-judgmental reactions from police influenced survivors. The former proved to have negative consequences on victims' emotional states while the latter had positive consequences. Negative consequences increase the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and heightens symptoms of depression, anxiety and hopelessness. It can also lead to risky sexual behaviours thus increasing exposure to sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, and HIV (Moynan & Lindhorst, 2015).

Poor hygiene, isolation, poor school performance, drug dependence, depression, sleep and eating disorders are but a few of the undesirable lifelong consequences rape victims who are at risk of self-blame suffer. (Littleton, Grills, & Axsom, 2009; Mennicke, Anderson & Kennedy, 2014). Apart from the physical and mental consequences, building and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships becomes a struggle (Campbell, 2008). Rape attitudes over time indicate that men have no control over their sexual desires and when women dress "seductively", they are asking to be raped. Researchers have revealed that negative attitudes toward victims results in justification of the act of sexual violence (Kamdar, Kosambiya, Chawada, Verma & Kadia, 2017).

In a study conducted in 14 countries (United States, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico, Great Britain, Germany, India, Israel, Turkey, India, Singapore, Mexico and

Zimbabwe), the results indicated that, except for India, men in general had more negative attitudes toward rape victims than women (Ward et al., 1988). These negative attitudes were related to conservative attitudes toward women's role in society, acceptance of interpersonal violence and biased sexual beliefs (Ward et al., 1988). The study also reports that Indians were more inclined to report the connotation of social, instead of psychological magnitude of rape whereas the opposite was true for American participants. According to Hing-chu and Cheung's (1990) study, in China women tend to blame victims more than men. This was occasioned by remarks that Chinese women are generally taught by elders how to behave in society; the way they should dress and walk-in public. It is believed by the Chinese that failure to do as they were taught may result in rape. Victims are generally blamed because of their carelessness or being too trusting (Davies & Rogers, 2006).

Sleath and Bull (2015) did a comparative study on rape myths involving police officers and students and their findings indicated that male and female police officers rated 'she lied' myths higher than the student participants. Student participants tend to rate 'she asked for it' and 'he didn't mean to' higher compared to police officers. This would indicate that it is not only police officers that adhere to rape culture. A recent study by Sleath and Bull (2017) found that some police officers have a problematic attitude toward rape victims by judging victims' appearance and behaviour such as emotional expression and alcohol intoxication. This is a worrisome finding as the police are expected to provide support and assistance to victims of sexual violence.

Grubb and Harrower (2008) maintain that men blame the victims more than women especially when victims know their attackers. This creates a tendency to put more responsibility for rape on the victim. Their study further showed that participants who related more closely to victim characteristics were more inclined to blame the perpetrator, showing a correlation between "harm avoidance" and "blame avoidance". Across the board, it would seem that most studies show that men and women deviate in terms of assigning blame to victims. Specifically, men and women deviate in terms of victim blaming based on the information about the perpetrator (Strömwall, Landström & Alfredsson, 2014). Not only does the deviation between men and women play a role in victim blaming but it would seem that there is a general tendency to avert fear of believing in an unjust world (Eagan, 2016).

Whatley (1996), states that the way the victim is dressed has a greater influence than any other variable. The author further notes that people's attitude towards women's rights and roles in

society plays a role in perceptions about rape victims. According to Sinozich and Langton (2014), rape and sexual assault victimisations of students takes place when victims are taking part in leisure activities away from home. In a study, Osman (2014) found that females aged 18 to 24 years reported a greater rate of rape and sexual assault victimisations compared to females in any other age group. According to Sussenbach and Bohner (2011), rape attitudes or beliefs needs to be well-thought-out and addressed as a social problem and not just one that is isolated within specific populations. The authors contend that the acceptance of rape culture is a social issue. It is crucial to balance this viewpoint to the problematic attitudes towards rape victims.

### **Rape in the Namibian Context**

In a study on the explanations given for committing rape done by Kefas (2019) at the Windhoek Correctional Facility in Namibia, it was found that single men with little schooling were more likely to rape. Furthermore, factors such as alcohol, culture, television, finance, gender inequality, broken families and masculinity contributed to rape crimes. In Namibia, awareness raising campaigns have been few and limited in the past and seem to have been mainly taking place behind closed doors with training workshops for NGO's on gender-based violence. With increasing rates of rape reported, the need to create platforms for awareness raising for the larger community is clearly needed. Windhoek City Police, for instance, reported that from 2014 to 2015 incidences of rape had increased by 54 percent (Namibia Crime & Safety Report, 2016).

Although awareness and training workshops seemed to have been limited to specific audiences, in April 2019 a group of local women organised the first Slut Shame Walk in the country's capital, Windhoek (Mukaiwa, 2019). This was an intersectional women's march calling for the end of rape culture that includes victim blaming and slut shaming of victims of sexual assault. More visible over the past year is the #BeFree Movement launched in November 2016 by the First Lady of Namibia, Monica Geingos. This campaign was initially inspired by the UNAIDS drive to guarantee an AIDS-free generation by 2020 (United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2018). However, the youth-driven movement has expanded to create inclusive non-judgemental platforms where honest and healthy discussions have been taking place. Although the discussions focus exclusively on rape and sexual assault awareness alone, it does include many systemic psychosocial issues related to gender-based violence, rape and sexual assault awareness. The First Lady personally takes part in these discussions with communities across the country.

Another campaign was launched by the former Chairperson of the National Council of Namibia, Margaret Mensah-Williams. “The Journey” is a human rights campaign and focuses on visual and performing art exhibitions that took place at the Parliament Gardens in Windhoek from the 27<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019 (Lukas, 2019). The campaign addresses social issues such as gender-based violence, sexual violence, abortion, child marriage and abuse and human trafficking aimed at finding Namibian solutions to Namibian problems, offering victims and survivors a platform to speak and build support networks for healing. Ms Mensah-Williams has been and continues to host “The Journey” in other regions of Namibia.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive design. A total of 131 undergraduate students, enrolled in different courses at the University of Namibia participated in this study. The study employed non-probability sampling using stratified convenience sampling in selecting the participants for the study. The sample comprised of both males (57) and females (74), between the ages of 19-38 years.

Two research instruments were used to collect data; namely the socio-demographic questionnaire and Attitudes towards Rape Victims Scale (ATRVS). The socio-demographic questionnaire sought to obtain information such as age, gender, year of study and faculty. ATRVS designed by Ward et al. (1988) was administered to identify favourable and unfavourable attitudes toward rape victims. It consists of 25-items using a scale with scores ranging from 0-4. A few items were reverse scored. The greater the score the greater the negative attitudes towards rape victims. The ATRVS has also been applied cross-culturally and it has been used worldwide with the majority of the studies reporting Cronbach’s alpha scores which were greater than .80 (Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre & Morrison, 2005).

Permission was obtained from the University of Namibia Ethics Committee. Respondents were fully informed about the research and told that participation is voluntary. The researchers ensured anonymity of the respondents and that no harm was done or human dignity violated. Of the 150 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 131 were retrieved.

## Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using the statistical software SPSS (Version 24) and presented in the form of percentages, mean and standard deviation. ANOVA was used to test correlations.

### Results

The research participants were categorized according to their gender, age, level of education and educational streams. Analysis of variance was performed to compare the means of the groups of participants. In Table 1, the mean and standard deviation for gender distribution are presented. The sample consisted of a total of 131 respondents, 74 (56.48%) females M= 34.45, SD= 11.98 and 57 (43.51%) male M= 42.71, SD= 14.90.

Table 1

*Mean and standard deviation for gender distribution of participants.*

| <b>Gender</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> | <b>Std. Error</b> |
|---------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Female        | 74       | 34.4595     | 11.98422              | 1.39314           |
| Male          | 57       | 42.7193     | 14.90656              | 1.97442           |
| Total         | 131      | 38.0534     | 13.90203              | 1.21463           |

To see if there is any significant difference between the means of attitude toward rape victims and gender, an analysis of variance was performed. ANOVA is used to compare the ratio of within-group variance and between-group variance. Within-group variation is also called an error group (or levels). These are differences not caused by the independent variable. Sum of Squares (between) is linked to between-group variations while variance difference is caused by how different groups interact with each other. The results of ANOVA revealed that there was a significant difference in relation to attitude toward rape and gender, where the mean value of males (42.72) was significantly higher ( $P \leq 0.001$ ) than females (34.46) [see Table 2]. Similarly, in table 3 the mean and standard deviation for age are presented.

Table 2

*One-Way Analysis of Variance of Attitude towards Rape by Gender*

| <b>Source</b>  | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>P</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Between Groups | 2196.739              | 1         | 2196.739           | 12.360   | .001     |
| Within Groups  | 22927.887             | 129       | 177.736            |          |          |
| Total          | 25124.626             | 130       |                    |          |          |

There were 53 participants in the age range of 19-22 and 23-26,  $M=38.43$ ,  $SD=13.16$  and  $M=38.11$ ,  $SD=14.39$  respectively. Furthermore, in the age range 27-30 there were 17 participants ( $M=36.70$ ,  $SD=16.10$ ). There were a few participants in the age category 31-34 ( $N=5$ ,  $M=42.00$ ,  $SD=15.18$ ) and only 3 participants in the age range of 35-38,  $M=31.33$ ,  $SD=2.51$ .

Table 3

*Mean and Standard Deviation for the Age Distribution of Participants*

| <b>Age in years</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> | <b>Std. Error</b> |
|---------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 19-22               | 53       | 38.4340     | 13.16392              | 1.80820           |
| 23-26               | 53       | 38.1132     | 14.39506              | 1.97731           |
| 27-30               | 17       | 36.7059     | 16.10809              | 3.90679           |
| 31-34               | 5        | 42.0000     | 15.18223              | 6.78970           |
| 35-38               | 3        | 31.3333     | 2.51661               | 1.45297           |
| Total               | 131      | 38.0534     | 13.90203              | 1.21463           |

Table 4 reveals that there was no significant difference between the different age groups ( $F=.319$ ,  $P<=0.865$ ). The average value of subscale was 38.05.



Table 4

*Analysis of Variance of Attitude towards Rape by Age*

| <b>Source</b>  | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>P</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Between Groups | 252.090               | 4         | 63.023             | .319     | .865     |
| Within Groups  | 24872.536             | 126       | 197.401            |          |          |
| Total          | 25124.626             | 130       |                    |          |          |

Table 5 shows the mean score for first year students is  $M = 40.20$ ,  $SD = 15.49$ . For the second year, the mean score is  $M = 37.16$ ,  $SD = 12.87$ . For the third and fourth years, the scores were  $M = 39.78$ ,  $SD = 13.93$  and  $M = 35.45$ ,  $SD = 13.90$  respectively.

Table 5

*Mean and Standard Deviation for the Year of Study of Participants*

| <b>Year of study</b> | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> | <b>Std. Error</b> |
|----------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1st year             | 25       | 40.2000     | 15.49193              | 3.09839           |
| 2nd year             | 36       | 37.1667     | 12.87190              | 2.14532           |
| 3rd year             | 37       | 39.7838     | 13.93863              | 2.29150           |
| 4th year             | 33       | 35.4545     | 13.80012              | 2.40229           |
| Total                | 131      | 38.0534     | 13.90203              | 1.21463           |

To find out the statistically significant difference in mean of educational level scores, a one-way ANOVA was carried out. Table 6 shows that there was no significant difference between the years of study ( $P < 0.485$ ). The average value was 38.05. It can thus be concluded that the year of study does not have any influence on attitude towards rape.

Table 6

*Analysis of Variance of Attitude towards rape by Year of Study*

| <b>Source</b>  | <b>Sum of Squares</b> | <b>df</b> | <b>Mean Square</b> | <b>F</b> | <b>P</b> |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Between Groups | 477.174               | 3         | 159.058            | .820     | .485     |
| Within Groups  | 24647.452             | 127       | 194.074            |          |          |
| Total          | 25124.626             | 130       |                    |          |          |

Table 7 depicts the mean and standard deviation scores of the participants in relation to different faculties/streams of their study. The highest mean was observed for nursing and public health=45.00, SD=12.02. For faculty of education and law, the mean score was almost at par (M=41.02, SD=14.94 and M=41.66, SD= 15.75 respectively). While faculty of economics and management science had M=39.91, SD=15.54 and humanities and social sciences faculty participants scored M=30.43, SD= 8.07.

Table 7

*Mean and Standard Deviation for Faculty Wise Distribution of Participants*

| <b>Faculty/Stream</b>            | <b>N</b> | <b>Mean</b> | <b>Std. Deviation</b> | <b>Std. Error</b> |
|----------------------------------|----------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Education                        | 36       | 41.0278     | 14.94846              | 2.49141           |
| Economics and management science | 24       | 39.9167     | 15.54214              | 3.17253           |
| Humanities and social sciences   | 37       | 30.4324     | 8.07101               | 1.32687           |
| Science                          | 14       | 40.9286     | 14.33374              | 3.83085           |
| Law                              | 12       | 41.1667     | 15.75283              | 4.54745           |

|                           |     |         |          |         |
|---------------------------|-----|---------|----------|---------|
| Nursing and public health | 5   | 45.0000 | 12.02082 | 5.37587 |
| Others                    | 3   | 44.0000 | 12.12436 | 7.00000 |
| Total                     | 131 | 38.0534 | 13.90203 | 1.21463 |

Table 8 shows that there is a statistical difference between the faculties ( $P \leq 0.010$ ). The average value was 38.05, so the difference is not statically significant.

Table 8

*Analysis of Variance of Attitude towards Rape by Faculty*

| Source         | Sum of Squares | df  | Mean Square | F     | P    |
|----------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| Between Groups | 3130.144       | 6   | 521.691     | 2.941 | .010 |
| Within Groups  | 21994.482      | 124 | 177.375     |       |      |
| Total          | 25124.626      | 130 |             |       |      |

### Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to identify the attitude of university students towards rape victims and to investigate the influence of gender, age, educational level and faculties/stream on this attitude.

It is evident from the results that there was a significant difference in relation to attitude toward rape and gender, where the mean value of males (42.72) was significantly higher ( $P \leq 0.001$ ) than females (34.46). Gender norms determine the expectations and values of a female or a male in a particular context. Generally, gender stereotypes portray men as always keen for sex as well as dominant over sexually passive women (Gavey, 2005). Moreover, gender role attitudes and positive rape attitudes were again found to be significant predictors of victim blame thereby supporting the findings of vignette-based studies (Cohn, Dupuis, & Brown, 2009). High levels of

negative attitudes towards rape was recorded in male participants and this could be as a result of differences in levels of sensitivity between males and females. This could indicate that males tend to show less emotions as result of cultural norms and because of this, it creates less than favourable attitudes toward rape victims.

Most participants were from the Humanities and Social Sciences stream, followed by Education stream. The high numbers could be due to the fact that these two faculties have the most registered students. The majority of participants fell in the age groups of 17-22 and 23-36. In relation to the different age groups of the respondents, results revealed no significant differences ( $F=.319$ ,  $P\leq 0.865$ ). The mean value was 38.05. This may be because age does not matter in developing attitudes. In contrast, a study revealed that younger participants showed more favourable attitudes toward rape victims and this may be due to their upbringing as they are raised in a society that is more aware of violence (Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre & Morrison, 2005).

There was no significant difference noticed between the years of study ( $P\leq 0.485$ ). The average value was 38.05. The results of the study reveal that the year of study does not have any influence on attitude towards rape. But the results were not in line with a study stating that the participants who were more educated reported more favourable perceptions of victims of rape than participants who are less educated (Nagel et al., 2005). However, considering that the participants' level of education only differed by a few years, it can be assumed that differences in levels of perceptions may be less.

### **Conclusion**

The study attempted to explore attitudes of university students towards rape victims and to determine the relationships with other variables such as gender, age, educational level, and different faculties. The age of the participants had no influence on the attitude towards rape victims. The results revealed that there was a significant relationship between the attitude towards rape victims and gender. Furthermore, the age and educational level of participants were not significant. Based on the main findings, the majority of respondents follow a similar trend of behaviour which could indicate that these behaviours are merely habitual or routine and do indicate sufficient awareness. The findings of this study will aid both rape victims and others in understanding the processes that play a crucial role in the social perception of rape and rape victims.

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