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Factors Modulating Responsibility (Victim and Aggressor) in Rape

Annick Lemoine , Samuel Demarchi

Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined rape myths as "attitudes and beliefs which are generally false but which are widespread and persistent and which serve to deny and justify male sexual assault against women" (p. 134). Yet despite awareness campaigns, these myths persist in the collective imagination. Women are still more blamed when they are close to their attackers (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005). While the perpetrator of a rape is - logically - the one and only person responsible, the attribution of responsibility is shared between the aggressor and the victim.

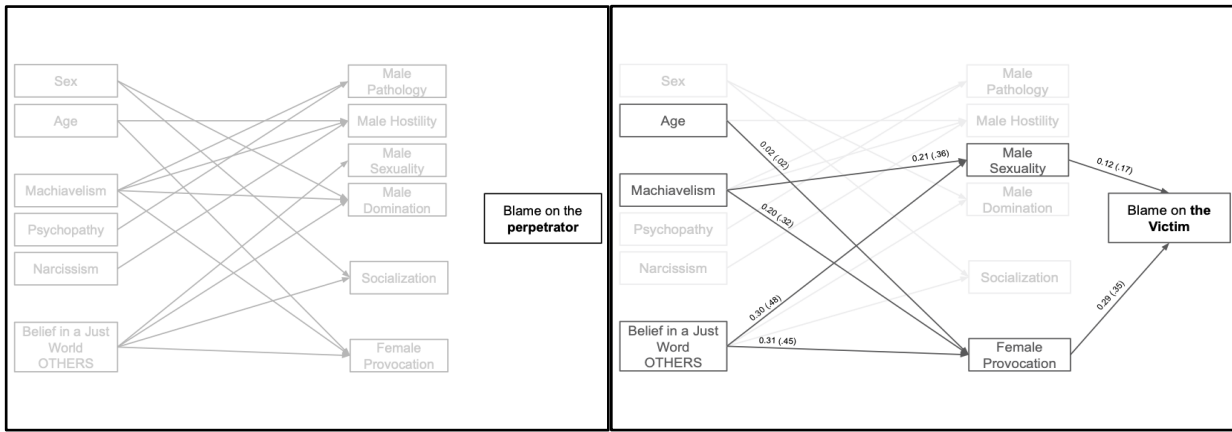
However, there is little research to explain the blame against women. In this research, we investigated the degree of blame of both victim and/or perpetrator with the attitudes towards victims of sexual assault (PCRS, Cowan & Quinton, 1997), the beliefs that we have about the events that happen to us or that happen to others (Just World Beliefs), dark personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) and various socio-demographic variables (age, sex, etc.).

Method

321 voluntary participants were recruited from the general population, including 84 men, $M_{age} = 36.12$ ($SD = 14.79$), and 237 women, $M_{age} = 34.39$ ($SD = 13.81$). After having been informed of the goal of the research and after having consented to the study, the participants first evaluated the level of blame of the victim and the perpetrator according to five different fictitious situations of rape leading to sexual violence (Example: "How much do you think XY (name of perpetrator) is responsible for what happened?"; "How much do you think XX (name of victim) is responsible for what happened? "). They then completed the Perceived Causes of Rape (PCRS) Scales measuring individual beliefs about the causes of rape (Cowan & Quinton, 1997), the Dark Triad Dirty Dozen-FC (DTDD) measuring three dark personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism; Savard et al., 2017), the Beliefs in a Just World scale (BMJ; Begue & Bastounis, 2003). Sociodemographic information was requested (Sex, age, etc.).

Results

Figure 1. Antecedent Factors and Mediators of the Attribution of Responsibility to the Perpetrator and the Victim.



Notes. The shaded arrows indicate the existence of a relationship between the variables. However, the statistics associated with these links have not been shown in the figure for reasons of readability. The first value shown on the black arrows corresponds to the value of the parameter (estimate) and the second to the effect size.)

Conclusion

Unlike the few existing studies, we have not found a link between psychopathy and the factors investigated regarding perpetrator blame. It therefore seems difficult to identify stable factors explaining the blame of the aggressors. Conversely, the victim's blame depends on several factors, some of which have been previously identified in the literature, such as Machiavellianism. However, we have shown that this impacts the blame of the victim through male sexuality and female provocation. So, if the Machiavellians blame the victims, it is because they consider both that the women provoked their attackers, but also that the men - because the men - fail to control their sexual outbursts. These same mediators also allow Belief in a Just World to be expressed: the more people are considered responsible for their behavior, the more female provocation is perceived as a factor increasing the blame of the victim.

References

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