The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 13, Issue 4, October- December, 2025
DIP: 18.01.024.20251304, DOI: 10.25215/1304.024
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Rape Myth Acceptance and Attribution of Rape Blame: An Empirical Study across Stranger and Acquaintance Rape Scenarios

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ABSTRACT

Rape myths and blame attribution represent central psychological factors that sustain rape culture globally. The present research explored how acceptance of rape myths relates to assigning blame toward victim and perpetrator in both acquaintance and stranger rape contexts. Data were collected from 800 participants (400 men and 400 women) distributed across four age groups. They completed measures of rape myth acceptance, encompassing four dimensions ("She asked for it," "He didn't mean to," "It was not really rape," and "She lied"), along with attribution of blame scales. Correlational analyses were conducted for the overall sample as well as by gender and age categories. Findings indicated that stronger rejection of rape myths was consistently linked to reduced victim-blaming and increased perpetrator responsibility, or the reverse. Compared to men, women demonstrated stronger links between myth rejection and blame attributions, while younger participants showed higher correlations than older ones. These outcomes emphasize how rape myth acceptance or rejection shapes judgments in sexual assault cases and stress the importance of designing interventions that are both gender-responsive and age-specific.

Keywords: *Rape Myths Acceptance, Victim Blaming, Perpetrator Accountability, Acquaintance Rape, Stranger Rape, Gender Differences, Age Differences*

Sexual violence is a pervasive issue that crosses cultural, geographical, and social boundaries, affecting millions of women globally. The World Health Organization (2021) reports that around one in every three women across the globe encounters physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, most commonly by a current or former partner or by acquaintances.

Survivors of sexual violence often experience lasting impacts that extend beyond the incident itself, influencing their physical and psychological health, interpersonal bonds, personality development, and ability to readjust socially (Rogers et al., 2023). Despite the

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Received: September 29, 2025; Revision Received: October 15, 2025; Accepted: October 19, 2025

magnitude of this problem, societal responses to sexual violence remain heavily influenced by entrenched stereotypes, cultural norms, and psychological beliefs. Societal responses often perpetuate harm through the endorsement of rape myths and the misattribution of blame that makes victim responsible for her misfortune. Among the most significant of these are rape myths acceptance and attribution of rape blame to victim, which serves as crucial mechanisms in perpetuating rape culture. Rape myths are defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). These myths function to justify sexual aggression, excuse perpetrators, and shift responsibility from offenders to victims (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Examples include beliefs that women provoke rape through their clothing or behavior, because of which perpetrators act out of uncontrolled, failed to control his sexual desires, or that false accusations are common.

Closely tied construct to rape myths is attribution of rape blame. Attribution theory suggests that individuals seek to explain events by assigning responsibility either to victims or perpetrators (Shaver, 1985). In rape contexts, this manifests as victim blame-the belief that the victim's actions, dress, or choices caused the assault, or perpetrator blame which holds the offender accountable for his act (Grubb & Harrower, 2009). The interplay between these constructs is critical because high rape myth acceptance is consistently linked with higher victim blame and reduced perpetrator accountability (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

Rape Myths Acceptance

Rape myths are defined as "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (Burt, 1980, p. 217). These myths function to rationalize sexual violence and reinforce damaging societal attitudes (Burt, 1980). Emerging from traditional gender roles and a broader cultural tolerance for violence, rape myths were first systematically explored in the 1970s by feminist scholars and sociologists, notably by Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1974). Examples of rape myths are assumptions that survivors bring violence upon themselves through their attire or conduct (e.g., flirting, drinking, or perceived promiscuity), that men commit rape unintentionally due to alcohol, that women falsely report rape out of spite or regret, that "real" rape requires visible physical violence, and that only strangers perpetrate sexual assaults (Burt, 1980; Edwards et al., 2011). These beliefs not only cast survivors as deserving of hostility but also reflect rape supportive attitudes that excuse offenders, shift blame to victims, and destroy survivors credibility. Such attitudes often deter survivors from reporting assaults (Egan & Wilson, 2012) and influence judicial outcomes, as demonstrated by mock jury studies showing that higher rape myth acceptance correlates with increased victim blaming and leniency toward perpetrators (Krahé & Beger, 2010). Men with a history of sexual violence are also more likely to endorse rape myths, and those who do are more prone to sexually aggressive behavior (Begany & Milburn, 2002). Religious practices, gender norms, and power dynamics shape RMA (Fakunmoju et al., 2021). For instance, the myth that "women out at night invite rape" prevails in cultures restricting women's mobility (Begum & Barn, 2019).

Attribution of Blame

Social psychologists have used attribution theory to understand how people explain and assign responsibility in cases where individuals become victims of crime. So, attribution of rape blame refers to judgments regarding responsibility for sexual violence, specifically how blame is distributed between victims and perpetrators (Calhoun et al., 1976). Much of the research attention has centered on individuals who have experienced sexual assault,

especially rape survivors. In contemporary world, the issue of attributing blame in rape cases has become a significant concern for both professionals and the wider public. Social psychological studies have particularly highlighted the unfavorable social perceptions directed toward rape victims. It is widely recognized that people often view victims negatively sometimes as much as, or even more than, the perpetrators themselves. A considerable body of social psychological research has examined the factors shaping perceptions of victims. Studies have shown this tendency among young adult in controlled settings (Acock & Ireland, 1983) as well as among professionals in helping fields (King et al.,, 1978; Resick & Jackson, 1981). Findings indicate that both men and women may attribute responsibility to victims for the incidents, and such patterns have also been documented across diverse cultural contexts (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Kanekar, Pinto, & Mazumdar, 1985). Rape survivors occupy a distinct position, as despite being the targets of violence, they are not always met with sympathy. In certain cases, observers may even attribute responsibility to them for provoking or contributing to their own victimization (Goldner, 1972). Extensive research has documented the inclination to blame rape victims and demean them for the assault they have suffer (Calhoun et al., 1976; Cann, Calhoun, & Selby, 1979; Rodgers, 1993).

LITERATURE OF REVIEW

Ayala et al. (2015) examined female participants with feminist leanings, finding low RMA reduced victim blame across victim gender, though perpetrator blame varied-lower for female perpetrators, higher for males-indicating gender of actors also influences attribution. The intersection of gender and age reveals nuanced blame patterns. Young males, socialized into traditional masculinity, often attribute more blame to young female victims, especially peers.

Research findings consistently highlight that individuals endorsing rape myths are more inclined to attribute blame to victims instead of perpetrators, especially in cases involving acquaintance rape, alcohol use, or perceived victim non-resistance (Grubb & Turner, 2012; Frese et al., 2004). Conversely, lower levels of RMA are associated with greater perpetrator accountability. Victim-blaming attitudes also have been shown to discourage disclosure, reduce reporting rates, and exacerbate survivors' psychological distress, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and self-blame (Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Grubb & Harrower, 2009). Research demonstrates gender and age differences in these attributions. Calhoun et al. (1976) found that male undergraduates, after viewing a standardized videotape of a rape victim interview, rated the victim as more responsible than females did, particularly attributing the rape to her personal traits (e.g., disposition) rather than situational factors.

Victim blame is typically higher in acquaintance rape cases than in stranger rape cases, as societal narratives often suggest that victims of non-stranger assaults somehow contributed to the crime (Frese et al., 2004). Conversely, RMA also minimizes perpetrator accountability. Myths such as "men cannot control their sexual urges" or "he didn't mean to" excuse rapists' actions and frame sexual violence as an inevitable outcome (Johnson & Miller, 2020). This effect is particularly strong when the perpetrator holds social power, reinforcing cultural narratives that protect male privilege (O'Connor, 2021).

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant relationship between rape myth acceptance and attribution of blame to the victim and perpetrator in acquaintance and stranger rape scenario.

Sample

Population comprised peoples living in Haryana. This study targeted males and females of various districts in Haryana.

The study included 800 participants drawn from various districts of Haryana to ensure broad representation. The sample was balanced by gender (400 males and 400 females) and evenly distributed across four age groups. For analysis, respondents were divided into four cohorts: 15–26 years (Group I), 27–38 years (Group II), 39–50 years (Group III), and 51 years and older (Group IV). Each age group comprised 200 participants.

Procedure

The present study follows a quantitative research design, emphasizing the collection and analysis of numerical data. This quantitative approach was chosen after a literature review of worldwide approach of researchers who researched on under study phenomena. This approach allows systematic investigation of relationship between variables and also allows the application of statistical techniques to analyze the data. A cross-sectional research design was employed to gather information from participants. This approach made it possible to collect data at one point in time, enabling the examination of relationships among variables and differences between groups.

Instruments:

Data were collected using 2 standardized and validated scales:

Socio-Demographic Profile

Age, gender, education, and residential background which were collected to describe participant characteristics and examine their influence on factors contributing to rape culture.

The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMA)

IRMA originally developed by Payne et al. (1999) and later revised by McMahon and Farmer (2011), was employed to assess participants' endorsement of rape myths. The instrument consisted of 22 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Higher scores indicate greater rejection of rape myths. The scale is divided into four subscales: (i) She Asked for It (6 items; possible score range 6–30; midpoint 18), (ii) He Didn't Mean To (6 items; score range 6–30; midpoint 18), (iii) It Wasn't Really Rape (5 items; score range 5–25; midpoint 15), and (iv*)* She Lied (5 items; score range 5–25; midpoint 15). Previous research has established the reliability of the IRMA, with Cronbach's alpha values reported between .64 and .80 for subscales and approximately .87 for the total scale.

Attribution of Rape Blame to Victim and Perpetrator Scale

Attribution of blame was measured using two vignettes adapted from Abrams et al. (2003), which depicted scenarios of acquaintance rape and stranger rape. Each vignette presented a hypothetical case of non-consensual sexual activity, followed by 14 items—7 assessing victim blame and 7 assessing perpetrator blame. Responses were measured on a 7-point

Likert scale, where 1 indicated strong disagreement and 7 indicated strong agreement.. Higher scores on the victim-blame subscale reflected stronger tendencies to hold the victim responsible, whereas higher scores on the perpetrator-blame subscale indicated greater attribution of responsibility to the perpetrator. Each subscale (victim and perpetrator blame in both scenarios) yielded possible scores between 7 and 49, with a midpoint of 28. Internal consistency was found to be high, with Cronbach's alpha of .87 for victim blame and .88 for perpetrator blame. Previous research has likewise demonstrated strong reliability for these measures ($\alpha > .80$; Abrams et al., 2003).

Table 1 Descriptions of Codes of Variables

Sr. No	Name of Variables	Code
1	She asked for it	**RMAI**
2	He didn't mean to	**RMAII**
3	It was not really rape	**RMAIII**
4	She lied	**RMAIV**
5	Attribution of Blame to Victim in Acquaintance Rape	**AVB**
6	Attribution of Blame to Perpetrator in Acquaintance Rape	**APB**
7	Attribution of Blame to Victim in Stranger Rape	**SVB**
8	Attribution of Blame to Perpetrator in Stranger Rape	**SPB**

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 The Mean Scores (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) of the entire sample (N=800) and Male Separately for (N = 400) And Female (N = 400) for all the variables for all the variables

Variables	Mean	SD	SK	KU	Male		Female	
					M	SD	M	SD
RMAI	16.20	6.096	.43	-.52	16.62	5.76	15.77	6.38
RMAII	18.76	4.63	.04	.38	18.64	4.49	18.89	4.77
RMAIII	15.42	4.93	-.07	-.69	15.76	4.69	15.08	5.15
RMAIV	13.00	4.46	.48	.19	13.20	4.31	12.81	4.61
AVB	31.30	15.25	-.12	-1.57	29.80	15.33	32.80	15.03
APB	23.40	13.15	.25	-1.30	23.79	12.98	23.02	13.32
SVB	16.16	8.71	1.12	.73	16.24	9.02	16.08	8.40
SPB	36.14	14.77	-.68	-1.21	35.19	14.94	37.10	14.56
Total No.	800				400		400	

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all study variables are displayed in Tables 2 and 3. The skewness and kurtosis values suggested that the majority of variables approximated a normal distribution., except SVB, which demonstrated positive skew (SK = 1.12), suggesting that while most participants attributed low level of victim blame in stranger rape scenario, a minority expressed considerably higher levels.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the total sample (N = 800) as well as separately for males (N = 400) and females (N = 400). The Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (IRMA) subscales revealed differential endorsement patterns. For She asked for it (RMAI**)** the mean score of the total sample (M = 16.20, SD = 6.09) was slightly below the midpoint value of 18, indicating moderate acceptance of this myth. Males (M = 16.62, SD = 5.76) scored

marginally higher than female participants (M = 15.77, SD = 6.38) suggesting that both gender continue to endorse rape myths. For RMAII (He didn't mean to**)** the total mean (M = 18.76, SD = 4.63) slightly exceeded the mean value of scale, reflecting mild rejection of intent-based excuses. Gender differences were negligible, both males (M = 18.64) and females (M = 18.89) scoring similarly. RMAIII (It wasn't really rape) yielded a mean score (M = 15.42, SD = 4.93) just above the midpoint value15, pointing to slight rejection of minimization myths; males (M = 15.76) were marginally more rejecting than females (M = 15.08). Conversely, RMAIV (She lied) was endorsed with a mean score below the midpoint (M = 13.00, SD = 4.46), indicating stronger acceptance of false accusation myths, with females (M = 12.81) showing slightly higher acceptance than males (M = 13.20).

Attribution of blame patterns also reflected clear distinctions across scenarios. For victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB) was high (M = 31.30, SD = 15.25), exceeding the midpoint of 28. Notably, females (M = 32.80) scored higher than males (M = 29.80) which indicates greater internalized victim-blaming among women. By contrast, perpetrator blame (APB) in acquaintance rape was low (M = 23.40, SD = 13.15), falling below the mean, with minimal gender difference. For victim blame in stranger rape (SVB**)** was very low (M = 16.16, SD = 8.71) very low than the mean value of this dimension, indicating strong disapproval of victim-blaming in stranger contexts. Inversely, perpetrator blame (SPB) was high (M = 36.14, SD = 14.77), far above the midpoint, with females (M = 37.10) attributing slightly greater responsibility to perpetrators than males (M = 35.19). Overall, these results indicate that participants were more inclined to blame the victim in acquaintance rape while blaming perpetrators more harshly in stranger rape scenario.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics four Age Group I, II, III & IV for all the variables

Variables	**Group I**		**Group II**		**Group III**		**Group IV**	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
RMAI	17.99	5.25	16.03	5.88	14.74	6.45	16.04	6.31
RMAII	18.51	4.69	19.05	4.64	18.60	5.10	18.89	4.05
RMAIII	16.46	4.36	15.43	4.85	14.76	5.47	15.05	4.87
RMAIV	14.16	4.03	12.83	4.80	12.02	4.20	13.01	4.56
AVB	24.86	12.44	32.22	15.80	35.81	15.18	32.32	15.32
APB	25.93	11.91	22.79	13.27	20.75	13.39	24.16	13.49
SVB	15.26	7.43	15.97	8.94	17.12	10.02	16.29	8.20
SPB	31.17	15.17	35.90	14.82	39.46	13.76	38.05	14.05
Valid N =800	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics across four age groups. For group I younger participants of this group scored RMAI (M = 17.99, SD = 5.25), approaching the midpoint, suggesting greater acceptance of rape myths among youth. In contrast, group III scored lowest (M = 14.74, SD = 6.45), reflecting stronger rejection. For RMAII, all groups scored slightly above midpoint, with group II (M = 19.05) rejecting intent-based excuses most strongly. RMAIII was highest in Group I (M = 16.46), indicating greater rejection of minimization myths among younger participants, while groups II-IV scored closer to the midpoint. Finally, RMAIV was lowest in groups II (M = 12.83) and III (M = 12.02), suggesting that middle-aged adults were most likely to endorse false accusation stereotypes.
Patterns of blame attribution varied considerably by age. For AVB, group I (M = 24.86) below midpoint assigned the least blame to victims in acquaintance rape, while group III

(M = 35.81) well above midpoint reported the highest victim blame. Groups II and IV also scored above midpoint, though less strongly than group III. APB showed the opposite trend group I scored highest (M = 25.93), indicating greater accountability of perpetrators among younger participants, while group III reported the lowest blame (M = 20.75). Group IV demonstrated a partial rebound (M = 24.16). For SVB**,** all groups scored well below the midpoint, reflecting consistently low victim blame in stranger rape, though Group III scored slightly higher (M = 17.12). SPB increased with age, from group I (M = 31.17) to group III (M = 39.46) before stabilizing in group IV (M = 38.05), suggesting that older and middle-aged adults more strongly hold perpetrators accountable in stranger rape than younger adults.

Taken together, these descriptive findings demonstrate that rape myth endorsement and attribution of blame are shaped by both gender and age. While men and women differ only slightly in their overall myth rejection, females paradoxically reported greater victim blame in alongside stronger perpetrator blame in stranger rape. Age comparisons indicate that younger participants reject minimization myths and assign greater perpetrator blame in acquaintance scenarios, whereas middle-aged participants show the highest levels of victim blame. These patterns underscore the complex and context-dependent nature of rape culture attitudes.

Correlational Analyses

Pearson's product-moment correlations were conducted to examine the relationships between rape myth acceptance subscales (RMAI- RMAIV) and the blame attribution toward victims and perpetrators across both acquaintance and stranger rape scenarios (Tables 4-10). In Table 4 to 10, the level of significance is as follows:

Table 4 Inter-correlation Matrix of Variables of all sample (N=800)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.382**	.654**	.723**	**--.635****	**.393****	**-.265****	**-.279****
RMAII		1	.374**	.378**	**-.0108****	**.187****	**-.170****	**.103****
RMAIII			1	.614**	**-.438****	**.401****	**-.270****	**-.226****
RMAIV				1	**-.582****	**.294****	**-.208****	**-.367****
AVB					1	-.157**	.261**	.672**
APB						1	-.133**	.242**
SVB							1	.036
SPB								1

**Correlation is significant at p < .05 (two-tailed)*
***Correlation is significant at p < .01 (two-tailed)*

For the total sample (N = 800), all four RMA subscales demonstrated significant correlations with blame attributions. A strong negative correlation was found between rejecting the "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) and victim blame in acquaintance rape ($r = -.635$, $p < .01$), alongside a positive correlation with perpetrator blame in the same context ($r = .393$, $p < .01$). This myth also showed moderate negative correlations with blame in stranger rape (victim: $r = -.265$; perpetrator: $r = -.279$, both $p < .01$).

The "He didn't mean to" myth (RMA II) showed the weakest but still significant relationships, with negative correlations for victim blame (acquaintance: $r = -.108$, $p < .05$;

stranger: r = -.170, p < .01) and positive correlations for perpetrator blame (acquaintance: r = .187; stranger: r = .103, both p < .01). Rejecting the myths "It was not really rape" (RMA III) and "She lied" (RMA IV) followed a clearer pattern: both were negatively correlated with victim blame across scenarios and positively correlated with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape, with RMA IV showing the strongest effect on reducing acquaintance rape victim blame (r = -.582, p < .01).

Table 5 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of Female Group (N=400)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.402**	.733**	.755**	**-.670****	**.420****	**-.212****	**-.295****
RMAII		1	.354**	.390**	**-.099***	**.160****	**-.155****	**.152****
RMAIII			1	.657**	**-.501****	**.409****	**-.290****	**-.242****
RMAIV				1	**-.565****	**.362****	**-.133****	**-.319****
AVB					1	-.200**	.219**	.671**
APB						1	-.114*	.176**
SVB							1	.019
SPB								1

When separate analyses were carried out for women, consistent patterns emerged across the four rape myth acceptance subscales, though with differences in effect size.

RMA I **"***She asked for it***"** showed strong and significant associations with blame attributions. "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) showed a powerful, inverse relationship with blaming victims in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = –.670, p < .01). It was also negatively correlated with victim-blaming in stranger rape (SVB: r = –.212; SPB: r = –.295, both p < .01). Conversely, rejecting this myth correlated with increased perpetrator-blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .420, p < .01). The myth "He didn't mean to" (RMA II) had weaker, though still significant, associations. Its rejection was negatively correlated with AVB (r = –.099, p < .05) and SVB (r = –.155, p < .01), and positively correlated with increased perpetrator-blame in both acquaintance and stranger scenarios (APB: r = .160; SPB: r = .152, both p < .01).Rejecting "It was not really rape" (RMA III) significantly reduced victim-blaming across contexts (AVB: r = –.501; SVB: r = –.290; SPB: r = –.242, all p < .01) and was positively associated with perpetrator accountability in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .409, p < .01). Finally, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) was strongly predictive of decreased victim-blaming (AVB: r = –.565; SVB: r = –.133; SPB: r = –.319, all p < .01) and increased perpetrator-blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .362, p < .01).

Table 6 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of male Group (N=400)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.366**	.555**	.683**	**-.594****	**.361****	**-.323****	**-.255****
RMAII		1	.404**	.367**	**-.124***	**.218****	**-.185****	.049
RMAIII			1	.560**	**-.364****	**.390****	**-.254****	**-.202****
RMAIV				1	**-.599****	**.217****	**-.286****	**-.414****
AVB					1	-.111*	.304**	.669**
APB						1	-.152**	.313**
SVB							1	.052
SPB								1

The analysis of male participants (N = 400) revealed a pattern of blame attribution similar to that of women, although the strength of the correlations was generally weaker. Disbelief in the "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) was strongly associated with reduced victim-blaming in both acquaintance (AVB: r = –.594, p < .01) and stranger rape (SVB: r = –.323; SPB: r = –.255, both p < .01), and positively correlated with increased perpetrator-blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .361, p < .01).Rejection of the "He didn't mean to" myth (RMA II) also showed significant, though modest, relationships, correlating with lower victim-blaming (AVB: r = –.124, p < .05; SVB: r = –.185, p < .01) and higher perpetrator-blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .218, p < .01). Similarly, rejecting the minimization myth "It was not really rape" (RMA III) was linked to decreased victim-blaming across scenarios (AVB: r = –.364; SVB: r = –.254; SPB: r = –.202, all p < .01) and increased perpetrator-blame (APB: r = .390, p < .01). Finally, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) showed the strongest associations, with a powerful negative correlation to victim-blaming (AVB: r = –.599; SVB: r = –.286; SPB: r = –.414, all p < .01) and a positive correlation with perpetrator accountability in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .217, p < .01).

Table 7 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of Age Group 1 (N=200)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.506**	.496**	.664**	**-.309****	**.221****	-.072	.102
RMAII		1	.456**	.423**	-.003	**.292****	-.063	**.300****
RMAIII			1	.504**	-.102	**.148***	-.098	.070
RMAIV				1	**-.399****	.123	-.131	-.073
AVB					1	.208**	.253**	.589**
APB						1	.008	.613**
SVB							1	-.025
SPB								1

Further analyses were conducted across age groups (Tables 7-10).

Analysis across age groups revealed distinct patterns for younger participants (Group 1). The correlations between rape myth acceptance and blame attributions were generally weaker in this group. Rejection of the "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) was negatively correlated with victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.309, p < .01) and positively correlated with perpetrator blame in the same context (APB: r = .221, p < .01).For the "He didn't mean to" myth (RMA II), while no significant link to victim blame (AVB) was found,

its rejection was associated with increased perpetrator blame in both acquaintance and stranger rape (APB: r = .292; SPB: r = .300, both p < .01). Interestingly, rejecting the minimization myth "It was not really rape" (RMA III) showed a weak but significant positive correlation with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .148, p < .05). Finally, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) demonstrated a strong negative correlation with victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.399, p < .01). However, it showed no significant relationship with perpetrator blame measures, indicating its effect is more specifically tied to reducing victim-blaming among younger individuals.

Table 8 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of Age Group 2 (N=200)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.281**	.645**	.709**	**-.721****	**.313****	**-.278****	**-.410****
RMAII		1	.299**	.281**	-.107	.087	**-.152***	.093
RMAIII			1	.640**	**-.453****	**.344****	**-.238****	**-.307****
RMAIV				1	**-.610****	**.211****	**-.254****	**-.472****
AVB					1	-.105	.200**	.674**
APB						1	-.149*	.238**
SVB							1	-.048
SPB								1

The most robust correlations were observed among early adulthood participants (Group 2). "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) demonstrated a powerful negative correlation with victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.721, p < .01). It was also associated with increased perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .313, p < .01) and reduced blame attributions in stranger rape contexts (SVB: r = -.278; SPB: r = -.410, both p < .01). For the "He didn't mean to" myth (RMA II), the relationships were weaker and more limited. While no significant link to AVB was found, rejection was associated with a slight reduction in victim blame for stranger rape (SVB: r = -.152, p < .05). Conversely, rejection of the "It was not really rape" myth (RMA III) was negatively correlated with victim blame across both scenarios (AVB: r = -.453; SVB: r = -.238; SPB: r = -.307, all p < .01) and positively correlated with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .344, p < .01).Finally, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) showed strong, consistent negative correlations with victim blame (AVB: r = -.610; SVB: r = -.254; SPB: r = -.472, all p < .01) and a positive correlation with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .211, p < .01).

Table 9 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of age Group 3 (N=200)

	RMAI	**RMAII**	**RMAIII**	**RMAIV**	**AVB**	**APB**	**SVB**	**SPB**
RMAI	1	.371**	.680**	.725**	**-.708****	**.442****	**-.316****	**-.446****
RMAII		1	.391**	.427**	**-.141***	**.156***	**-.260****	-.056
RMAIII			1	.600**	**-.548****	**.529****	**-.368****	**-.351****
RMAIV				1	**-.587****	**.324****	**-.201****	**-.480****
AVB					1	-	.240**	.730**

	RMAI	RMAII	RMAIII	RMAIV	AVB	APB	SVB	SPB
						.261**		
APB						1	-.110	.068
SVB							1	.073
SPB								1

The pattern of blame attributions for middle-aged adults (Group 3) closely mirrored the strongest findings from other groups. Rejection of the "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) showed a strong negative correlation with victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.708, p < .01). It was also positively correlated with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .442, p < .01) and negatively correlated with blame measures in stranger rape (SVB: r = -.316; SPB: r = -.446, both p < .01).

For RMA II ("He didn't mean to"), significant but modest correlations were found. Rejection was linked to a slight reduction in victim blame (AVB: r = -.141, p < .05) and a slight increase in perpetrator blame (APB: r = .156, p < .05) in acquaintance rape, as well as a more notable reduction in victim blame for stranger rape (SVB: r = -.260, p < .01).Rejection of the "It was not really rape" myth (RMA III) was strongly associated with reduced victim and perpetrator blame across both contexts (AVB: r = -.548; SVB: r = -.368; SPB: r = -.351, all p < .01) and showed a particularly strong positive correlation with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .529, p < .01). Similarly, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) correlated with reduced victim blame (AVB: r = -.587; SVB: r = -.201; SPB: r = -.480, all p < .01) and increased perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .324, p < .01).

Table 10 Inter-correlation Matrix of Study Variables of age Group 4 (N=200)

	RMAI	RMAII	RMAIII	RMAIV	AVB	APB	SVB	SPB
RMAI	1	.506**	.496**	.664**	**-.309****	**.221****	-.072	.102
RMAII		1	.456**	.423**	-.003	**.292****	-.063	.300**
RMAIII			1	.504**	-.102	**.148***	-.098	.070
RMAIV				1	**-.399****	.123	-.131	-.073
AVB					1	.208**	.253**	.589**
APB						1	.008	.613**
SVB							1	-.025

For the oldest participants (Group 4, 51 years and above, N=200), the correlations between rape myth rejection and blame attributions were less consistent and generally weaker than in younger age groups. Rejection of the "She asked for it" myth (RMA I) was negatively correlated with victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.309, p < .01) and positively correlated with perpetrator blame in the same context (APB: r = .221, p < .01), but showed no significant links to stranger rape attributions. Rejection of the "He didn't mean to" myth (RMA II) was associated with increased perpetrator blame in both acquaintance and stranger rape (APB: r = .292; SPB: r = .300, both p < .01). The "It was not really rape" myth (RMA III) showed only a weak positive correlation with perpetrator blame in acquaintance rape (APB: r = .148, p < .05). Finally, disbelief in the "She lied" myth (RMA IV) was significantly associated with reduced victim blame in acquaintance rape (AVB: r = -.399, p < .01), but was unrelated to perpetrator blame or any stranger rape measures. Across the total sample and all subgroups, rape myths were associated to victim and perpetrator blame. RMAI and RMAIV emerged as the most powerful predictors of victim blaming, whereas RMAIII most strongly supported perpetrator exoneration. RMAII was consistently the

weakest and least reliable predictor. Gender comparisons revealed that women displayed stronger and more consistent associations than men, suggesting heightened sensitivity to the victim-blaming functions of rape myths. Age comparisons showed that the middle-aged cohorts (groups 2 and 3) exhibited the strongest correlations, whereas younger (group 1) and older adults (group 4) demonstrated weaker, more inconsistent patterns. These findings highlight the persistent role of rape myths in shaping attributions of blame and underscore the importance of targeted interventions addressing specific myths across demographic subgroups.

The present study's outcomes demonstrate considerable support for this hypothesis within each of the four age groups The inter-correlation matrices (Tables 7-10) demonstrate that rape myth acceptance (RMAI, RMAII, RMAIII, RMAIV) is strongly and significantly related to attributions of blame in both acquaintance and stranger rape situations. Across age groups, higher endorsement of rape myths was consistently associated with greater attribution of blame to victims (AVB, SVB) and lower attribution of blame to perpetrators (APB, SPB). Conversely, higher rejection of rape myths corresponded with less victim-blaming and greater perpetrator-blaming. This confirms the hypothesis and reflects the broader literature linking rape myth acceptance to biased responsibility judgments (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010).

The strong influence of myths such as "She asked for it" and "She lied" on victim-blaming judgments echoes earlier studies highlighting the role of gender stereotypes and credibility biases in shaping public attitudes toward survivors (Abrams et al., 2003; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). Similarly, the tendency of "It was not really rape" to reduce perpetrator blame aligns with prior evidence that acquaintance rape is often minimized or dismissed compared to stranger rape (Littleton, 2011). By confirming these patterns in the current sample, the study reinforces the enduring and cross-demographic impact of rape myths on attributions of blame.

Limitations and Implications

Despite the important contributions of this study, several limitations warrant consideration. First, the use of a cross-sectional and self-report design of study restricts the causal inference and may be subject to social desirability bias, particularly given the sensitive nature of rape myths. Second, the non-probability sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific cultural and regional context of Haryana, India. Third, although vignettes provided ecologically valid scenarios, participants' responses may not fully capture real-life decision-making in rape cases.

The findings of this study hold important practical value for policy-making, educational initiatives, and awareness programs aimed at reducing rape culture and fostering accountability. The persistence of myths highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive legal reforms and victim-protection policies. Policymakers should integrate myth-reduction frameworks into law enforcement training and judicial proceedings, ensuring that victims are not victimized through stereotyping or disbelief in legal processes. Positive and nurturing parenting fosters children's mental health (Singh et. al., 2021) and maturity, which in turn promotes the development of ethical and non-discriminatory attitudes toward women, ultimately contributing to a safer and better society for them.

Future Directions

Future studies should overcome these limitations by using longitudinal or experimental designs to examine causal relationships between rape myth acceptance and blame attributions. Additionally, including a more culturally, socio-economically, and regionally diverse sample would improve the generalizability of the findings. Incorporating additional psychological constructs in research such as empathy, moral disengagement, belief in just world, consumption of pornography, sexism, and similarities with victim or perpetrators may provide deeper explanatory power. Further, qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews or focus groups) could uncover the lived experiences and cultural narratives underlying these attitudes. Intervention research is also needed to evaluate how educational and awareness programs targeting specific myths e.g., She asked for it can reduce victim blaming and enhance perpetrator accountability across demographic subgroups. Finally, future studies should consider how intersectional factors such as caste, rural/urban residence, or media exposure interact with gender and age in shaping rape culture.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study underscore the pivotal influence of rape myths in sustaining patterns of victim-blame while simultaneously diminishing perpetrator accountability. Importantly, the differential effects across gender and age suggest that targeted interventions must account for demographic variation. For example, challenging myths such as she asked for it may be particularly critical among males, whereas addressing minimization myths "He didn't mean to" may be more impactful among older participants.

The major findings underscore that rape myths are not merely abstract beliefs but active cognitive frameworks that shape blame attributions, thereby perpetuating rape culture. Addressing and dismantling these myths, particularly those that minimize male responsibility or blame female victims, is essential for promoting justice for survivors and fostering cultural change. By highlighting demographic differences in the myth-blame nexus, this research emphasizes the need for targeted, age- and gender-sensitive interventions to effectively combat rape culture and advance gender equality.

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Acknowledgment

The authors are sincerely grateful to all the subjects who consented to participate in this research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Rani, A., Singh, V. & Behmani, R.K. (2025). Rape Myth Acceptance and Attribution of Rape Blame: An Empirical Study across Stranger and Acquaintance Rape Scenarios. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *13*(4), 259-274. DIP:18.01.024.20251304, DOI:10.25215/1304.024