

Truth about Rape Myths: Understanding the Effects of Sexual Violence and Date Rape Attitudes on Rape Myths Acceptance in Ghana

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Abstract: *Purpose:* Rape myths acceptance is a global phenomenon with dire consequences on how sexual assault victims are perceived and treated. People who hold strong sexual violence beliefs tend to blame the victims for their victimizations while praising the offenders. It has widely been acknowledged that such attitudes hinder crime reporting while promoting violence in society. The main purpose of the current study was to examine the factors that influence rape myths acceptance among students in Ghana.

Method: Data for the study was collected from students attending one of the largest universities in the country between 2021 and 2022.

Results: Our results revealed that sexual violence experience, college date rape attitudes, age, degree program, and ethnicity influenced rape myths acceptance among students.

Conclusion: Based on the findings, we recommend that colleges should create a conducive environment for victims of sexual violence whereby educating students about the harmful effects of rape myths acceptance.

Keywords: Rape Myths Acceptance, Date Rape Attitudes, Students, Sexual Violence, Patriarchy, Religion.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women, children, and the most vulnerable of society is recognized as a human and social rights issue not only because of physical injuries but also the mental and psychological effects in the aftermath (Abeid *et al.*, 2015; Ohene *et al.*, 2015). Sexual violence is “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality, using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work” (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002, p. 149). Sexual violence forms a major part of violence against women across the world. Some scholars have cited issues in male-dominated culture-patriarchal nuances, rape myth acceptance, a shame problem, social norms, beliefs, and practices including religion as contributing to this disproportion in society (e.g. Boakye, 2009).

Within most Ghanaian cultures, sex, and any talk about it is an enigma. A topic that is enjoyed by many, but few are bold enough to talk about it. This analogy represents how and why research on sexual assault or violence is historically scarce in Ghana. In a nationwide

Global School-based Health Survey conducted in 2015, it was clear that a fifth of high school students in Ghana had been forced to have sex in their lifetime. According to the UN’s global database on violence against women, 24% of sexual violence in Ghana can be categorized as lifetime Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence, 4% lifetime Non-Partner Sexual Violence (GSS, 2009), 21% child marriage (UNICEF, 2018) and 4% Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (UNICEF 2017). Risk factors for sexual violence include a history of sexual activity, feeling sad or hopeless, and being a victim of physical or electronic bullying (Knight, 2011). Notwithstanding its “taboo” status, sexual assault, especially against women, has recently become a popular discussion on most radio and television talk shows in Ghana. This has also attracted several studies and research that seek to prevent sexual violence, especially among young people (Munro-Kramer *et al.*, 2020). Not only have these concerns, studies, and interests shown the varying rates of prevalence but have also shown that sexual violence is underreported (Sulleyman, 2019).

According to Fakunmoju and colleagues (2021), persistence and rape-supportive beliefs continue to influence sexually aggressive behaviors and hostility toward women in most parts of the world. In the case of Ghana, it is noted that victims of rape and sexual

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violence are more likely to be blamed for the mishap, usually defending the perpetrators as not having the intention to rape the female victim (Fakunmoju *et al.*, 2021). It has also been established that most of the sexual abuse is committed by persons known to the victim (Robinson, 2017). This means that although victims would like to see perpetrators caught and punished, it is likely they will not report because of the closeness/familiarity of victims to the perpetrators (Boateng, 2015).

It is noted that although several factors such as patriarchal systems and others may account for the difference in approaches and myths about sexual violence, some similarities are observed among victims and perpetrators across the world (Fakunmoju *et al.*, 2021). Just as the case is in many countries, sexual violence against girls is usually underreported and significantly less researched. On a global level, it has been noted that one out of every 20 girls aged 15–19 years have experienced forced sex in their lifetime (UNICEF, 2015). Cross-country differences in rape myths suggest the need for formal and informal intervention in vulnerable countries (Fakunmoju *et al.*, 2021).

The main objective of this study is to examine factors that influence rape myths acceptance among Ghanaian college students. This examination is done using cross-sectional data obtained from one of the largest universities in Ghana. Specifically, the study aims to assess the influence of sexual violence on rape myths acceptance; assess the relationship between rape myths acceptance and date rape attitudes; and finally, determine whether individual characteristics of students predict their views about rape victims. Ghana offers an ideal setting for this examination for several reasons. First, an empirical examination of the subject matter is highly limited, and this is troubling because Ghana strongly espouses patriarchal norms and values as well as religious doctrines. As a result of adhering to these norms and values, Ghanaians have set strict standards for people to follow – there is no room for negotiation. This study will therefore offer valuable information about how citizens from an environment rife with patriarchal and religious beliefs form their views about rape victims. Also, the examination of a bi-directional relationship will significantly advance scientific knowledge on rape myths acceptance among students. Finally, the findings will highlight some of the ways through which policymakers can promote pro-social beliefs and attitudes about rape to protect the interests of rape victims.

Sexual Violence, Rape Myths and Attitudes: A Review

Since its introduction in the 1970s, rape myths have been widely studied by scholars from all disciplines, including sociologists and criminologists. After several decades of researching this behavior, scholars believe that rape myths may be widespread globally and this is due to the lack of recognition of marital rape in some societies (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Koss, Heise & Russo, 1994; Mittal, Singh & Sunil, 2017). In Ghana, like most African countries, rape in marriage is not fully recognized by the law. Until 2007, the Ghana Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29) did not include marital rape in the definition of sexual assault and exempted spouses from revoking consent to sex in marriage (Acheampong, 2010). This suggests that men cannot be prosecuted for raping their wives and women cannot press charges against their husbands for being raped. However, in 2007, the Criminal Code was revised and a new law, the Domestic Violence Act (Act 732) was passed to make it possible for husbands to be held account for marital rape.

The concept of rape myths has been variously defined. However, there are common elements among the various definitions – false beliefs, prejudice, and persistence. One of the first definitions was offered by Burt who considered rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980; p.217). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) argued that rape myths are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p. 134). These definitions offer several examples of rape myths. Among these include attitudes and beliefs such as “many women secretly wish to be raped”, “men from middle-class houses never rape”, and “women often falsely claim being raped” (see Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). The acceptance of these beliefs has serious consequences for society and the treatment of rape victims. For instance, rape myths acceptance demoralizes the victims and “praises” or supports the offenders. This will further empower the offenders to continue offending because society places zero responsibility on them.

Studies have shown that rape myths acceptance influences the perceptions of the perpetrator as guilty of a crime and provide an avenue for blaming the victim by society including the professionals of the criminal justice system (Pollard, 1992; Temkin & Krahé, 2008). By supporting the perpetrators and condemning the

victims, rape myths acceptance also hinders victims from reporting their ordeals, thereby preventing them from receiving the necessary treatment. Even among young children and adolescents who are raped, victim-blaming is prevalent due to cultural stereotypes (Tetteh & Markwei, 2018). Generally, rape myths disadvantage women and are incongruent with the experience of people who have been raped (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Burt, 1980; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Common understandings of rape and sexual assault are informed by widely accepted cultural myths, which also influence legal processes and institutions (Bechofer & Parrot, 1991).

Several empirical studies examined factors that influence rape myths acceptance among the population (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Burt, 1980; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008; Ching & Burke, 1999; Cowan, Campbell & Robin, 1995; Johnson, Kuck, & Schander, 1997; Mittal *et al.*, 2017; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Pierson, 2016). These studies have collectively found numerous variables that influence citizens' acceptance of rape myths. For example, studies have observed significant gender differences in rape myths acceptance (Burt, 1980; Chapleau *et al.*, 2008; Davies *et al.*, 2012; DeJong *et al.*, 2020; Johnson *et al.*, 1997; Pierson, 2016; Rosenstein & Carroll, 2015) and have consistently found a greater likelihood of rape myths acceptance among men than women. This suggests that men mostly uphold and endorse false beliefs about rape and rape victims.

Moreover, studies have also found the effects of age, race, and education on rape myths acceptance. Specifically, past research has argued that non-white citizens are less likely to support rape myths acceptance compared to their white counterparts (DeJong, Morgan, & Cox, 2020). However, studies conducted in the late 80s observed higher acceptance of rape myths among African Americans and Hispanics than whites (Dull & Giacobassi, 1987; Fischer, 1987). Furthermore, past research examining the effects of age has found greater support among younger people than older citizens (Aromaki, Haebich, & Lindman, 2002; Davis & Lee, 1996; Xenos & Smith, 2001). Thus, younger people, especially boys tend to have higher support for violence-supportive attitudes such as rape myths and attitudes toward rape victims.

Sexual Violence and Rape Myths: The Ghanaian Context

Globally, sexual violence has been recognized as a global health problem with serious health implications

(World Health Organization, [WHO], 2006). There appear to be some inconsistencies regarding the definition of sexual violence as it has been mostly restricted to rape or physically violent sexual assault (Macdowall *et al.*, 2006; Tarzia *et al.*, 2017), yet research has shown that sexual violence involves other behaviors such as coercion, reproductive control, unwanted sexual contact, and forced consumption of pornography (WHO, 2013). Despite the increased research and intervention on sexual violence in developed countries, much has not been done in sub-Saharan Africa as it is perceived as normal in many communities (Lalor, 2004). In Ghana, the lifetime Physical and/or Sexual Intimate Partner Violence is 24% (2009). Research indicates that 14 and 52 % of girls are victims of sexual abuse and gender-based violence respectively (Lithur, 2013).

In the last few decades, many countries around the world have signed on to several international treaties and conventions that seek to address the problem of sexual abuse. Ghana has been a signatory to many of these international treaties and conventions including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, as well as the Charter on Rights and Welfare of the African Child. Moreover, locally, there have been several legal and policy reforms developed and disseminated in response to the growing advocacy for the recognition and protection of women's and children's rights, including the right to sexual autonomy and protection against violence, particularly sexual abuse/violence. The establishment of a special unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOWVSU) in 1998, formerly the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU); the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 1998 (Act 554); the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560); the Juvenile Justice Act 2003 (Act 653); and, more recently, the Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) all sum up the significant strides made by Ghana to address the issues of domestic abuse particularly among women and children.

In Ghana, sexual abuse/violence is a common phenomenon even though there is a dearth of data on its occurrence. Over ten years, data from the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) show an upward trend in reported cases of rape, assault, incest, early marriage, and attempted rape from 181 in 2000 to 1,578 in 2007. This rising trend in sexual abuse/violence is consistent in school records and on

the streets of Accra (Ampofo *et al.*, 2007; Brown, 2003). According to Plan Ghana (2009), a non-governmental organization (NGO), 53% of sexual abuse cases occurred in the school environment, while 47% happened at home, 67% of the victims of child sexual abuse are in senior high school, 28% in Junior high school and 5% in primary school. Other studies (e.g., Ardayfio, 2005) have reported that six percent (6%) of the female respondents among 3,047 Ghanaians sampled, stated that they had been defiled. Out of this, 78% reported close relations, acquaintances, or family friends as the perpetrators, 8% of the female respondents indicated they had experienced forced sex before, while 5% of the males reported they had forced sex with their wives and girlfriends (Ardayfio, 2005).

Sexual abuse has been found to have a huge psychological impact on victims (Bennice *et al.*, 2003; Issahaku, 2015; Tarzia *et al.*, 2018). Studies have shown that victims of sexual abuse in Ghana experience psychological distress including thoughts of suicide (Apatinga *et al.*, 2021; Issahaku, 2015). However, international, and local efforts at addressing the problem of sexual abuse have not been successful as sexual abuse remains a significant social problem in many societies around the world including Ghana (WHO, 2013). This situation has been attributed to underreporting or undisclosed to intuitions and agencies established to officially deal with such cases (Coker-Appiah & Cusack 1999; Ghana News Agency 2006). Ahren (2003) found among rape survivors that some reasons that silenced them were negative reactions from professionals, friends, and family, this reinforced feelings of self-blame and uncertainty about whether their experiences qualified as rape. In some cases, many victims of sexual abuse instead of receiving support, are rather stigmatized and ostracized by their families and others because of the abuse (Ampofo, *et al.*, 2007; Boakye, 2009). Generally, in many low and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), violence against women and girls remains a hidden and sensitive issue where many females feel reluctant or lack the courage to report it (Boakye, 2009; Puri *et al.*, 2015).

Several myths surround sexual abuse in many African countries (Singleton *et al.*, 2018). Rape myths are those ideas or beliefs that “deny or minimize victim injury or blame the victims for their victimization” (Camody, 2001). There is considerable evidence that, despite years of public education and efforts at combatting sexual violence, rape myths, and gender

stereotypes are still accepted, believed, and propagated by communities (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Camody, 2001). In Ghana, various factors have been associated with underreporting of sexual abuse. Some of the factors are severe physical injury, fear of social retaliation, the economic cost of seeking justice or medical treatment, and negative experiences with formal agencies such as the police (Boateng & Lee, 2014; Coker-Appiah & Cusack 1999). There is also the issue of culture, where many people regard being abused as shameful and do not need to report to bring embarrassment to the family and fear of revenge from the perpetrator (Coker-Appiah & Cusack 1999; Pappoe & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 1998) or to be known by the perpetrator (Boateng, 2015).

Culture has been found to play a significant role in the disclosure of sexual violence (Burt, 1980; Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). The patriarchal system, a common cultural system in Africa, emphasizes male dominance over females, and this dominance is reflected in their values, beliefs, attitudes, and institutions of the society, and maintained through the process of socialization (Griffin 1971; MacKinnon 1989). There exist rape myths which are false beliefs about sexual assault which tend to shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim. Rape myths have evolved out of the long-standing gender roles, acceptance of violence, and incorrect information concerning sexual abuse/violence that exists in our society. Rape myths often underpin the system of underreporting and stem from patriarchal cultural systems, which justify sexual coercion, underestimate sexual abuse or violence, and devalue women, who are often victims of sexual abuse. These beliefs are entrenched in most patriarchal cultural systems and are hardly questioned because they serve as the basis of male/female relationships (Mager 1999; Ward 1995). Despite the significant role played by the patriarchal cultural system in sexual abuse, personality disorders and low socio-economic status are crucial factors that need to be considered in understanding sexual abuse among women (Ademiluka, 2018).

Current Study

The present study uses college-level data from Ghana to examine the effect of sexual violence experiences on rape myths as well as explore the relationship between rape myths and date rape attitudes. Specifically, we aimed to achieve the following objectives: examine the effects of sexual violence experiences and date rape attitudes on rape

myths acceptance among college students; and examine demographic effects on students' acceptance of rape myths. We test the following hypotheses:

1. We hypothesize that date rape attitudes will significantly influence students' rape myths acceptance. Here, we expect that students who have negative attitudes toward date rape will report higher rape myths acceptance.
2. We hypothesize that sexual violence experiences will influence rape myths. We expect that students who have a history of sexual violence victimization will be less likely to uphold or accept stereotypical beliefs about rape and rape victims. This is based on the belief that people with similar experiences will be more compassionate toward rape victims, understand their experiences better, and be less inclined to blame victims for what happened.
3. We hypothesize significant demographic differences among the students about rape myths acceptance. Here, we expect differences along the lines of gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, and religious background.

METHOD

Setting and Sampling

The current study used data collected in 2021 and 2022 from a large public university in Accra, Ghana. The study used a convenience sampling strategy due to students' busy schedules, the limited resources available to the researchers, and the restraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors made it unlikely to select respondents randomly for participation in the study. Nevertheless, efforts were made to obtain a sample representative of the demographic composition and discipline of the students in the University. Despite using a non-probability approach in selecting our respondents, students who completed the survey came from different backgrounds. Before completing the questionnaires, students were given full assurance that participation was voluntary, and refusal would not have any effect on their status as students in the university. Confidentiality was assured by asking students not to type their names anywhere on the questionnaires¹.

¹Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was sought from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the first author's institution. The research team obtained informed consent from all individual participants included in the study.

Sample Description

300 students were initially invited to participate in the study. However, 250 responded to our questions through Qualtrics. Of this number, about 104 of the students' responses were deleted due to incomplete responses or the students failing to answer the questions. The final sample size used in the analysis was therefore 146. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the variables used in the study. Respondents' average age was 24 years with the youngest being 18 years and the oldest being 47 years. About 52 percent of the respondents were males and 48 percent were females, 21 percent were pursuing graduate degree programs while 79 percent were pursuing an undergraduate degree. In terms of marital status of the respondents, about 94 percent indicated being single and only about 6 percent were married. Also, about 90 percent of the respondents self-identified as Christians while 10 percent identified as Muslims and other religions. Finally, slightly more than

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 146)

Variables	M (SD) / %
Age (Min. = 18 & Max. = 47)	24.41 (3.42)
Gender:	
Female	48.1
Male	51.9
Marital Status	
Married	6.2
Single	93.8
Degree type	
Undergraduate degree	79.0
Graduate degree	21.0
Religion	
Non-Christians	9.9
Christians	90.1
Ethnic background	
Akans	51.9
Ewe	22.2
Ga	14.8
Others	11.1
Rape myths (Min. = 5 & Max. = 50)	21.89 (12.22)
Date Rape Attitudes (Min. = 5 & Max. = 28)	15.22 (5.40)
Sexual Violence Exp. (Min. = 9 & Max. = 19)	11.55 (2.42)
Extroversion (Min. = 11 & Max. = 40)	30.08 (5.80)

half (about 52%) of the respondents were Akans while the remaining belonged to other ethnic groups such as Ga and Ewe.

MEASURES

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this analysis measures students' stereotypical beliefs and attitudes toward sexual assault and victims. The variable, rape myths acceptance, was assessed using five items adopted from a 20-item scale developed by Payne, Lonsway, and Fitzgerald (1999) to measure students stereotyped and false beliefs about rape. The five items used in this study were: Men from nice middle-class homes rarely rape, It is usually only women who dress suggestively that are raped; If the rapist doesn't have a weapon; you really can't call it a rape; Rape is unlikely to happen in the woman's familiar neighborhood; and When women are raped, it's often because the way they said "no" was ambiguous. Students were asked to indicate their levels of agreement with each of the items using a seven-point from 1 (not at all agree) to 7 (very much agree). The factor loadings for the items ranged from 0.64 to 0.84 (cumulative total variance explained was 59%) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.82.

Predicting Variables

The effects of several variables were examined to determine their effects on rape myths acceptance. These variables were sexual violence, college data rape attitudes, extroversion personality, and six students' demographic variables. Experience with Sexual Violence, in this study, we indicate instances where students experienced any form of sexually motivated crime, and it was measured using nine items (no or yes). These items were: someone stared at or eyed the sexual parts of my body, someone masturbated in public in front of me, someone exposed themselves to me, someone called me a name connected with sexuality or sexual parts of the body, someone pinched my behind, someone slapped my behind, someone forced me to watch pornography, someone forced me to engage in unwanted sexual touching, and someone forced me to engage in unwanted penetration (oral, anal, and/or vaginal). A factor analysis conducted revealed that the items measure the same construct the factor loadings ranged from 0.50 to 0.75 (cumulative total variance explained was 39%) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.77.

College date rape attitudes variable was measured using 11 items adapted from the 20-item scale developed by Lanier and Elliot (1997) to assess students' attitudes toward date rape. These items: If a woman dresses in a sexy dress she is asking for sex; If a woman asks a man out on a date, then she is interested in having sex; In the majority of date rapes the victim is promiscuous or has a bad reputation; The degree of a woman's resistance should be a major factor in determining if a rape has occurred; When a woman says "no" to sex what she means is "maybe; If a woman lets a man buy her dinner or pay for a movie or drinks, she owes him sex; Women provoke rape by their behavior; Women often lie about being raped to get back at their dates; It is okay to pressure a date to drink alcohol to improve one's chances of getting one's date to have sex; When a woman asks her date back to her place, I expect that something sexual will take place; and In most cases when a woman was raped she was asking for it. A five-point scale was used to assess each item and students were asked to choose from options ranging from 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. The factor loadings for the items range from 0.40 to 0.89 (cumulative total variance explained was 54%) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.91.

Five items were used to measure extroversion (personality trait). These items had the same lead-in statement – I see myself as someone who: is talkative, is full of energy, generates a lot of enthusiasm, has an assertive personality, and is outgoing and sociable. A five-point scale was used to assess each item and students were asked to choose from options ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The factor loadings for the items ranged from 0.53 to 0.79 (cumulative total variance explained was 39%) and the Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.55.

Demographic characteristics included in the model were age, gender, type of degree, religion, marital status, ethnic background, and living arrangement. The age of respondents was measured as a continuous variable, asking respondents to indicate their age at the time of the study. Gender was measured as a dichotomous variable (0 = female, 1 = male). Type of degree was dichotomously measured as 0 = undergraduate degree and 1 = graduate; marital status was measured as 0 = married and 1 = single (including those that had separated, divorced, or were widows). Ethnicity was categorically measured as 1 = Akan (reference category), 2 = Ewe, 3 = Ga, and 4 = Other ethnic groups. Living arrangement was dichotomously

assessed as 0 = off-campus living and 1 = on-campus living. Lastly, religion was initially measured categorically as 1 = Christianity, 2 = Muslim, and 3 = other religions. However, for the analysis and due to a lack of variability in the responses, the variable was dichotomized as 0 = other religions and 1 = Christianity.

Analytic Strategy

To achieve the study's purpose of empirically exploring relationships among data rape attitudes, rape myths, and sexual violence, and test our stated hypotheses, this study employed several strategies in analyzing the data. First, descriptive statistics were conducted to assess the distribution of the data. Second, a correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship among the latent variables. The analysis also helped to check for collinearity issues within our data, and as reported, there was no concern about multicollinearity because the correlation coefficient among the variables never exceeded the 0.77 cutoff (see Table 2). Additionally, we conducted collinearity diagnostics – Variance Inflation Factor and

Tolerance to further check for multicollinearity issues. These analyses confirmed the observation in the correlation analysis that there is no concern for collinearity in the data (See Table 3). Third, we used an Ordinary Least Square regression method to estimate the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable, given that the latter is a scale variable.

RESULTS

Table 3 presents ordinary least squares regression models estimating the effects of variables on students' rape myths acceptance. This model was significant ($F(12, 125) = 3.361, p < .001$) and explained 24% of the variance in the outcome variable. After controlling for the effects of other variables, experiences with sexual violence positively predicted rape myths among the students ($\beta = 1.75, p < .01$), indicating that students who experienced sexual victimization tend to hold or accept rape myths compared to those with no such experience. Also, college date rape attitudes positively and significantly influenced rape myths acceptance ($\beta = 0.13, p < .05$). This effect suggests that students who

Table 2: Relationship among Study Variables (N= 46)

	Y	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	X8	X9	X10	X11	X12	X13
Y: Rape Myths Acceptance	1.00													
X1: Exp. with sexual violence	.29 [†]	1.00												
X2: College Date Rape Attitude	.14	-.18	1.00											
X3: Gender - Male	.09	.24 [†]	-.01	1.00										
X4: Age	-.33 ^{**}	-.26 [†]	-.06	.03	1.00									
X5: Ethnicity - Akan	-.15	-.01	.01	-.03	.03	1.00								
X6: Ethnicity - Ewe	.20	.06	.06	-.01	-.08	-.55 ^{***}	1.00							
X7: Ethnicity - Ga	.08	.01	.09	.03	-.10	-.43 ^{**}	-.22 [†]	1.00						
X8: Ethnicity - Others	-.13	-.07	-.19	.03	.16	-.37 ^{**}	-.19	-.15	1.00					
X9: Marital Status - Single	.17	.18	.10	.26 [†]	-.66 ^{***}	.06	.01	.11	-.24 [†]	1.00				
X10: Religion - Christianity	.19	-.08	-.13	-.08	-.11	.01	.08	.14	-.28 [†]	.09	1.00			
X11: Degree type - Graduate	-.09	-.31 ^{**}	-.05	.08	.67 ^{**}	.01	-.20	-.04	.30 ^{**}	-.50 ^{**}	.07	1.00		
X12: Living arrangement	.250 [†]	.049	-.056	-.024	-.358 ^{**}	.038	.079	.085	-.262 [†]	.247 [†]	.236 [†]	-.254 [†]	1.00	
X13: Extroversion Personality	-.040	-.024	-.019	.197	.037	.036	-.079	-.075	.129	.137	-.177	-.033	-.223	1.00

Note: [†]p<.05, ^{**}p<.01, and ^{***}p<.001.

Table 3: Predictors of Rape Myths Acceptance among College Students in Ghana (N=146)

	B (SE)	Beta	t	Collinearity Statistics	
				Tolerance	VIF
Constant	18.36 (18.26)		1.01		
Prior sexual violence	1.75 (.58)	0.26	3.04**	.814	1.229
Gender - Male	1.17 (2.71)	0.04	0.43	.758	1.319
Age	-1.29 (.40)	-0.42	-3.23**	.352	2.838
Religion - Christianity	4.30 (4.51)	0.08	0.95	.772	1.296
Degree type - Graduate	11.63 (4.48)	0.31	2.60*	.419	2.386
Living arrangement - on campus	3.91 (2.67)	0.13	1.47	.785	1.273
Marital Status - Single	-6.52 (7.37)	-0.10	-0.88	.443	2.256
Ethnicity (RC = Akan)					
Ewe	6.50 (3.08)	0.18	2.11*	.851	1.175
Ga	2.58 (3.53)	0.06	0.73	.887	1.127
Others	-1.09 (4.46)	-0.02	-0.24	.709	1.410
College Date Rape Attitude	0.13 (.07)	0.16	1.95*	.901	1.110
Personality Trait - Extroversion	0.08 (.17)	0.04	0.50	.911	1.098
Model fit					
F-test	3.361***				
R-square	0.24				

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01, and ***p<.001.

had bad attitudes toward date rape were more likely to hold false and stereotypical beliefs about rape and victims of rape.

In addition to the above observations, the effects of three students' demographic characteristics were observed. Age ($\beta = -1.29$, $p < .01$), degree type ($\beta = 11.63$, $p < .05$), and ethnicity - Ewe ($\beta = 6.50$, $p < .05$) predicted rape myths among students. Specifically, older students were less likely to uphold false and stereotypical beliefs about rape than their younger counterparts. Moreover, students pursuing graduate degree programs were more likely to uphold false beliefs about rape compared to those pursuing undergraduate programs. In terms of the ethnicity effect, students who self-identified as Ewes were more likely to report greater rape myths acceptance compared to those who self-identified with the Akan ethnic group.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Violence-supportive attitudes such as rape myths acceptance are widespread, and several studies have found the existence of false beliefs and stereotypic judgments about rape and its victims among different

populations around the world. Rape myths acceptance has serious implications on victims' well-being, crime reporting, and societal responses, and it is about time that something is done to address this behavior. The current study, using college student data from Ghana, attempted to understand the existence of rape myths acceptance among college students by exploring the complex relationships among factors that would predict rape myths. Ghana is an ideal setting for this exploration for several reasons.

First, Ghana strongly espouses patriarchal cultural values and norms that emphasize male dominance and promote male superiority over women in society (Boakye, 2009; Fakunmoju *et al.*, 2021). In this society, victims of sexual assaults are largely blamed and reprimanded for their victimization, and as Boakye (2009) observed, people are quick to trivialize the offense and shift blame from the perpetrator to the victim. Second, though sexual violence is high in Ghana, and especially among college students, reporting of such incidents remains very low. While several reasons have been offered to explain the lack of disclosure among Ghanaians, scholars have mainly attributed the behavior to shaming, stigmatization, and the need to uphold family honor and status in society

(Boateng & Lee, 2014; Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999). Likewise, victims do not report sexual assault incidents out of fear of societal reactions as well as society's blame-shifting attitudes.

The current study made several important observations related to Ghanaian students' attitudes and beliefs about rape and rape victims. First, and as hypothesized, we observed a relationship between rape myths acceptance and date rape attitudes among college students. This observation is particularly crucial because such a relationship has barely been observed by prior victimological and sociological studies. While studies have generally found that attitudes and behaviors influence rape myths acceptance among people (see Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Reilly *et al.*, 1992). The observation made in this study suggests that students' attitudes toward date rape are important in explaining their propensity to uphold false beliefs about rape. Thus, date rape attitudes increase the possibility of students having higher levels of rape myths acceptance. Students who express negative attitudes toward date rape will tend to blame a rape victim for the incident.

Second, we observed a significant relationship between sexual violence and rape myths acceptance. While this observation generally supports the study's second hypothesis, the direction was highly unexpected. The finding was that students who had been previously victimized tended to endorse higher levels of rape myths acceptance. This trend in Ghana is quite surprising, especially when one considers existing arguments about the relationship between sexual violence experiences and rape myths endorsement. While empirical examination of this relationship is limited, the few existing studies have found little to no effect (e.g., DeJong *et al.*, 2020; Mynatt & Allgeier, 1990; Reilly *et al.*, 1992). For instance, DeJong and colleagues (2020) initially found a significant effect at the bivariate level but the effect disappeared at the multivariate level when other variables were included in the model. At this point, we can only speculate on why victims of sexual assault will uphold false and stereotypical beliefs about rape and rape victims but since the relationship is important, we will recommend an extensive exploration into the behavior of victims to understand why they hold such beliefs.

Third, we observed significant demographic differences in rape myths acceptance among college students in Ghana. This observation is important

because it gives us a sense of who is likely to uphold false beliefs and stereotypes about rape and its victims. More specifically, we found that age, degree program, and ethnicity influenced rape myths acceptance. These results are not only consistent with prior observations (Aromaki *et al.*, 2002; Boakye *et al.*, 2009; DeJong *et al.*, 2020) but affirm the study's third hypothesis.

Consistent with prior studies (Aromaki *et al.*, 2002), we found that younger college students are less likely than their older counterparts to accept rape myths. Our result suggests a linear relationship between age and rape myths acceptance, which may be contrary to what some scholars have concluded in the past. For example, studying factors influencing rape myths acceptance in Ghana, Boakye (2009) found a non-linear relationship with age. It is worth noting that Boakye's study focused primarily on the general population and therefore, his sample included people from different age groups. Whereas our study focused solely on college students who are mostly within the same age group or age range. This difference is important to note because the nature of the relationship between age and rape myths acceptance will depend on whether the data is from a college student sample or the general population.

Past research has consistently found a gender effect on rape myths acceptance and has offered a compelling argument to support why men will report higher levels of rape myths acceptance than women. These reasons include anti-women attitudes, males being less emotional, and traditional gender roles for women (Davies *et al.*, 2001). In the current analysis, we didn't observe any gender effect, and this is surprising given the cultural dynamics of the Ghanaian society which places high value on male dominance and superiority over females. This sense of dominance and superiority may over time, develop a sense of entitlement where men may begin to believe that they can do anything to women without being blamed. Also, the Ghanaian culture sets higher moral standards for women than it does for men in terms of their outward appearance. For example, while there are no strict dress expectations for men, women are expected to dress decently and unprovocative and are not supposed to be at certain places at certain times. Failure to meet these standards, a woman will have herself to blame if she is victimized.

Another important factor that has been found to influence rape myths acceptance, but which was not observed with the Ghanaian sample is religion (see

Barnett *et al.*, 2016; Boateng, Doumbia, Kooffreh, & Kwakye-Nuako, 2023). Most religious doctrines, especially Christian doctrines contain messages and texts that are widely believed to promote patriarchal attitudes and rape myths acceptance (Franiuk & Shain, 2011). For instance, within the Christian doctrines, female chastity and wifely duties are emphasized, and these are likely to create an environment that may support violence-supportive attitudes. In Ghana, most people identify as religious, and over 70% of the population are devout Christians who strongly espouse the Christian doctrine. This segment of the Ghanaian population has an “ideal woman” mentality, which ascribes traditional gender roles to women. They believe that a woman should be submissive to her husband, perform wifely duties, and only have sex after marriage. These Christians will chastise any woman who lives her life in what they would consider an “ungodly way.” The ideal woman mentality does not only create gender inequality in Ghana but also, promotes and endorses bad attitudes and behavior as well as determines how women are perceived and treated in society. Despite this line of reasoning, there was no observable difference between Ghanaian Christians and other individuals, especially, non-religious in terms of their levels of rape myths acceptance.

The current study has some limitations that we would like to acknowledge. First, our sample size is not large enough to make a conclusive case about college students' behavior in Ghana, concerning their attitudes and beliefs about rape. We suggest that future research should consider collecting data from a large sample of students. Also, though our sample was made up of respondents from different disciplines, we only collected data from one of the several colleges in Ghana. This means that the views and opinions of students from other institutions were not factored into our analysis. Further studies should address this limitation by conducting multiple campus field work to obtain representation. Based on the above limitations, we caution readers against further interpretation of our findings.

Despite the above limitations, the study's findings have important insights for research and policy. While it is one of the few studies that have attempted to shed light on factors influencing college students' attitudes toward rape victims, it is also the first study to our knowledge that has examined a relationship between rape myths acceptance and date rape attitudes in Ghana and other parts of Africa. The observation

ultimately helps to advance scientific knowledge in the field of victimology. However, given the importance of religion and gender in explaining rape myths acceptance, we strongly suggest that further studies be conducted to reexamine the effects of these variables in the Ghanaian context, probably using data from the public.

In terms of policy, we recommend that colleges in the country create educational and prevention programs on campus to educate students about the negative impacts of victim-blaming and the need to have positive attitudes toward victims of sexual assault. Furthermore, we suggest that university authorities develop workable plans to improve campus safety to reduce the rate of sexual violence on campus. Our findings indicated that students who experience sexual violence tend to uphold higher rape myths than those who have no such experience. Therefore, by reducing the rate of occurrence of sexual violence, acceptance of rape myths would be low. To reduce sexual violence, universities must enhance punishment for offenders and have a blind reporting system where victims can safely and freely report incidents without any fear.

In conclusion, the current study explored factors that influence rape myths acceptance among college students in Ghana. Three hypotheses were tested, and all were supported by our analysis. We found some important results that collectively advance our knowledge on what we know about rape myths acceptance among students. For example, the observation about date rape attitudes is critical to our understanding of rape myths acceptance. This is an important observation that establishes the platform for further exploration. Also, we found the effect of sexual violence and while our hypothesis was supported, the direction of the effect was not expected. Why will victims of rape endorse rape myths? We can speculate by arguing that because of the patriarchal system that shifts blame from perpetrators to victims and promotes victim-blaming, victims have not only developed a self-blaming mindset but have come to believe that whatever happens to anyone, is the person's fault. However, since this is just a speculation based on our knowledge of patriarchal culture, we believe the question will benefit from extensive empirical examination, preferably, one that uses a qualitative approach. Lastly, we observed demographic differences in rape myths acceptance. This observation tells us about the extent to which individual characteristics can help us understand college students' violence-supportive attitudes. It also calls for

the need to tailor preventive programs and training to specific segments of the student population if policymakers want to address sexual violence-related issues on campus.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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