

## **RISK AND PROTECTIVE PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN RAPE SUPPORTIVE ATTITUDE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW**

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### *Abstract*

*This systematic review examined the risk and protective factors that are associated with rape supportive attitude and other related concept such as Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA). Five published literature databases were searched using the relevant terms related to rape supportive attitudes. Articles that met the inclusion criteria were abstracted. The inclusion criteria included articles published in English language, with at least one measure of Rape Supportive Attitude, and associations of this measure with demographic and/or psychological variables, and published between 1985 and 2016. Out of 43 relevant articles, only 22 articles met the inclusion criteria. The studies predominantly demonstrated that the following risk factors were significantly associated with rape supportive attitude: male gender, gender role socialization, exposure to pornography, fraternity membership, ambivalent sexism, narcissistic personality. On the other hand, prior victimization was found to be both a risk and a protective factor as different studies had conflicting findings. Victim empathy, on the other hand was consistently found to be a protective factor against rape supportive attitude. The discussion, implications for research, policy and practice were also provided.*

Keywords: rape supportive attitude; rape myth acceptance; systematic review

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## **Introduction**

Rape supportive attitude is an important factor that needs to be considered in the explanation of aggressive sexual behaviour of men towards women (Osman, 2004). As a definition, rape supportive attitudes are attitudes and beliefs that justify rape and its surrounding situations (Sierra, Santos-Iglesias, Gutierrez-Quintanilla, Bermudez, & Buela-Casal, 2010). It includes but not limited to hostile attitude towards rape victims, false beliefs about rape, and erroneous belief about the victim and the perpetrator of rape (Sierra et al., 2010). Burt (1980) as cited in Burgess (2007) further defined rape myths as prejudicial and stereotyped beliefs about rape and situations surrounding rape. Lottes (1991) in buttressing this definition described the various types of such beliefs: women enjoy violence and aggression during sex and sexual activities, victims of sexual abuse are to be blamed for their abuse, rape is justifiable if it is victim precipitated, and women are responsible for preventing their own rape. Such beliefs not only justify rape but also shift the blame from the perpetrator to the victim. Generally, rape-tolerant or rape supportive views are commonly called Rape Myth Acceptance (Burgess, 2007), for this reason, for the purpose of this study, rape supportive attitude and rape myth acceptance will be used interchangeably.

Sierra et al. (2010) noted that early research on this area shows that acceptance of these rape myths is likely to promote various kinds of sexual aggressive behaviour towards women, as well as encourage tolerance of abuse. In other to demonstrate that rape supportive attitude is an important factor in sexual aggression, previous researchers (e.g. Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994; Lanier, 2001) demonstrated that a reduction in rape supportive attitude leads to significant reduction in aggressive sexual behaviour. Also, there has been significant amounts of research have suggested that men with higher levels of rape supportive attitude are likely to endorse sexually aggressive behaviour towards women than those with lower level of attitude supportive of rape (e.g. Flood & Pease, 2009; Haber, Malamuth, & Feshbach, 1980; Malamuth, 1986; Smith & Stewart, 2003; Winkler & Morry, 2001).

One aim of the review to enable a better understanding of the rape supportive attitudes, as well as the psychological and demographic factors that influence them. A better understanding of the rape supportive attitudes, as well as the significant predictors could help in the development of effective

interventions in the treatment of sexually aggressive individuals and may be used to develop effective educational programme on sexual assault prevention. For this reason, this literature review aims to explore the academic literature on the factors influencing Rape Supportive Attitudes and discuss the implications for research, policy and practice

## **Methods**

### *Eligibility criteria*

Eligible studies included those that investigated the psychological and demographic factors that are associated with (or influence) rape-supportive attitude or other related terms. The topics and abstracts of the articles were used to determine if the papers were eligible or not. For inclusion, studies had to have included at least one measure of Rape supportive attitude and associations of this measure with demographic or psychological variables, been written in English language and been published between 1985 and 2016, in a peer-reviewed journal. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included studies that examined theoretical, historical, and other aspects of rape supportive attitudes, studies whose primary research was related to general violence against women other than rape supportive attitude, measurement of rape supportive attitude were done after an intervention programme (this is because such studies are aimed at the evaluation of the programme's effectiveness).

### *Data sources*

Initial studies were identified through systematic search of the following five databases in March 2016: PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, Research Gate and Academia. These databases were selected because they are relevant to this topic area, and contain quality peer-reviewed articles. Multiple combinations of words that are related to rape supportive attitude were used to identify relevant articles. Using the following terms in all fields, the relevant articles were abstracted: rape supportive attitudes, rape supportive beliefs, rape accepting attitude and rape myth acceptance. These varieties of words were used in order to ensure that all

relevant articles were included. Finally, reference lists of review articles were screened to identify relevant articles.

#### *Study selection and data extraction*

The initial search of all the databases yielded 1354 articles / books / dissertations of which 938 were from academic journals. The search terms were purposely broad; as a result, many articles were not relevant and could be deemed ineligible from the title. The abstract of the articles that seemed relevant were reviewed for eligibility. As a result, full text was retrieved for 43 articles that seem relevant from the title and the abstract. However, by reading through the articles and following the exclusion criteria, 12 studies were excluded because they examined the theoretical, historical and other aspect of rape supportive attitude. Also, eight studies were excluded because they took measurement of rape supportive attitude after an intervention programme and seven studies were further excluded because they examined general violence against women. Overall, 27 studies were excluded and 17 articles included. In addition, 11 more studies were identified through scanning the references of the eligible review articles, six of which were rejected due to not meeting eligibility criteria and five were included in the review. This selection procedure resulted in the inclusion of 22 studies for systematic review (*see* Figure 1).

## **Results**

#### *Sample composition*

Table 1 presents details of the 22 studies included in the review. Participants with diverse racial background were recruited from the United States (11 studies), United Kingdom (8 studies), and Germany (1). Two meta-analyses included in this review were carried out on studies whose participants were from UK and USA. Out of the 22 studies 19 (85%) studies recruited students as participants. Out of the 19 studies that used students as participants, 11 (66%) recruited both male and female students (Baugher et al., 2010; Carmody et al., 2011 and others), while 3 (11%) recruited only male students (Bushman et al., 2003; O'Donohue et al., 2003) and 2 (11%) employed female students only (Miller et al., 2011; Carmody & Washington, 2001). Also, one (5%) study out of the 22 studies, employed rape victims and victims of other

crime (Egan & Wilson, 2012). Also, one study employed German residents (Sussenbach & Bohner, 2011) and two studies were meta-analyses.

*Measurement of rape supportive attitude*

The factors in rape supportive attitude were summarized in Table 1. The constructs were assessed primarily through either survey research or experiment. Five (19%) studies employed experiment and self-report questionnaire while 17(80%) studies used survey method. In the studies that employed survey method, 70% assessed rape supportive attitude using the Burt’s Rape Myth Acceptance Scale in assessing RMA, 20% employed the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and 10% used other measures of RMA such as Male Rape Myth Scale, Attitude towards Women Scale, Rape Empathy Scale and Attitude Towards Rape Victims Scale, Acceptance of Modern Myth About Sexual Aggression. And two studies were meta-analyses.

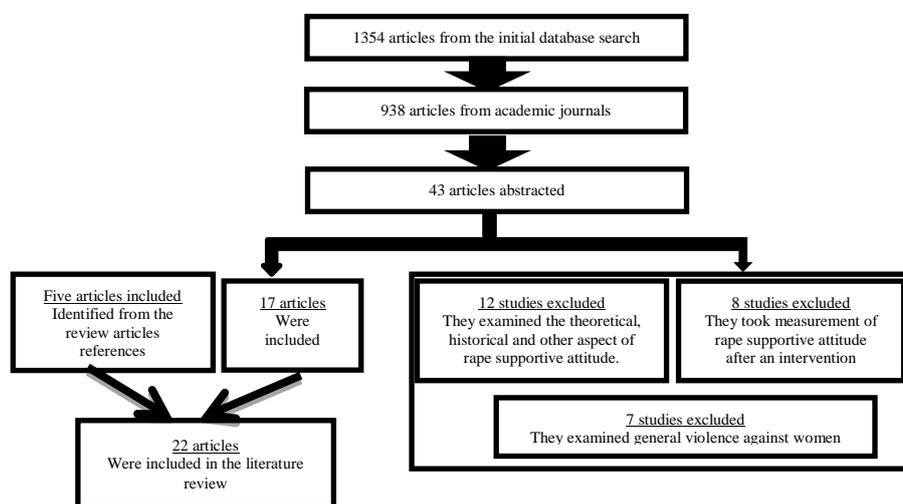


Figure 1. Flowchart of Study Inclusion

**Results**

The factors below are found to be associated with rape supportive attitude.

**Risk factors**

*Gender and rape supportive attitude*

The literature on gender as a significant factor in rape supportive attitude is inconsistent. While some studies found male gender to be a salient

factor in rape supportive attitude, other studies failed to find gender differences between males and females in rape supportive attitude. Five of the articles demonstrated that men are more likely to accept rape myths and blame the victim than women (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Vanderhaar & Carmody, 2015; White & Kurpius, 1999; Williams, Porter, & Smith, 2015). For example, the early work by White & Kurpius (1999), found that male undergraduates had the most negative attitudes towards rape victims, than their female counterpart; and the most favourable attitude was held by female mental health professionals. One might argue that the status of being a professional and being an undergraduate might play a role here. However, further analysis showed that all men still held more negative attitudes towards rape victims than do their female counterparts, regardless of their professional status (White & Kurpius, 1999). Also, a meta-analysis by Suarez and Gadalla (2010) found that in articles published between 1997 and 2007, male gender was the strongest factor that was highly correlated with rape myth acceptance. Similarly, a latest research involving 3,084 participants found that gender is a predominant factor in rape supportive attitude, with males endorsing more negative attitude towards date rape and exhibiting higher levels of rape supportive attitudes than females (Williams, Porter, & Smith, 2015). Similar pattern was found by Jimenez and Abreu (2003) and Vanderhaar & Carmody (2015). To the contrary, the study conducted by Frese, Moya, and Megias (2004) found no significant gender difference in the level of RMA. Similarly, Sussenbach and Bohner (2011) found no evidence of a gender difference in the acceptance of rape myths. These studies seem to suggest that a clear disparity in levels of RMA between males and females is not as implicit as some studies have suggested.

#### *Gender role socialization and rape myth acceptance*

Similar to gender, gender roles socialization was found to be an important correlate of rape myth acceptance. Generally, males and females develop their gender role attitudes and beliefs through the socialization process (Yamawaki, 2007). The feminist theory posit that gender inequality leads to sex role stereotypes that determine what is appropriate and inappropriate for a particular gender (Burt, 1980). The patriarchal society expects men to be dominant, authoritative, and sexually aggressive; but women are expected to be passive, submissive, and sexually reluctant (Yamawaki, 2007). Similarly,

Forbes and Adams-Curtis (2001) noted that men are usually considered the protector and provider in a relationship, and they may believe that they should receive sex as a reward for playing their role.

One of the studies (King & Roberts, 2011) examined the role of traditional gender role on RMA. An electronic survey method was used to collect data relevant to rape myth acceptance, traditional gender role and demographic information (home town type) from 2,000 undergraduate and graduate participants. In this study, rape myth acceptance was measured using some items from the Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale and nine items from Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1995) Rape Myth Scale. The results of their study showed that students who supported and accepted traditional gender roles significantly endorsed more rape myth than their counterparts who scored low on the traditional gender role scale. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that hometown type (either rural-farm, rural-non-farm, suburban or urban) did not have a significant relationship with neither traditional role socialization nor rape myth acceptance. This research found traditional gender role to be the strongest predictor of rape myth acceptance in a sample of university students.

Table 1. Studies examining the factors in Rape Supportive Attitude

Authors & Year	Title	Sample Size	Sample Demographics	Measure of RMA	Findings
Allen (1995)	Exposure to Pornography and Acceptance of Rape Myths	24 studies with 4,268 subjects	-	Meta-analysis	Nonexperimental methodology shows exposure to pornography does not increase rape myth acceptance, while experimental studies show positive effect between exposure to pornography and rape myth acceptance. Violent pornography has more effect than nonviolent pornography.
Baughner, Elhai, Monroe, & Gray (2010)	Rape Myth Acceptance, Sexual Trauma History, and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	1094 male and female students	Mean age: 23.7	Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Victims of sexual assault have a lower rape myth acceptance than non-victims
Bushman, Bonacci, van Dijk, & Baumeister (2003)	Narcissism, sexual refusal, and aggression: Testing a narcissistic reactance model of sexual coercion	403 college men	Mean age: 20.5 75% Caucasian	Rape Myth Acceptance Scale.	Narcissism correlated positively with rape-supportive beliefs and negatively with empathy for rape victims.
Carmody & Washington (2001)	Rape Myth Acceptance Among College Women: The Impact of Race and Prior Victimization	623 undergraduate college women	Mean age: 24.8	Modified Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Victims and non-victims reported similar attitude in terms of accepting or rejecting the varieties of rape myths.
Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell (2007)	How Ambivalent Sexism Toward Women and Men Support Rape Myth Acceptance.	420 college students	Mean age: 19.6	Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form.	Hostile sexism toward women positively correlated with rape myth acceptance. For benevolent sexism toward women, complementary gender differentiation was positively associated with RMA whereas protective paternalism was negatively associated.

Table 1. Studies examining the factors in Rape Supportive Attitude - *continued*

Authors & Year	Title	Sample Size	Sample Demographics	Measure of RMA	Findings
Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell (2008)	Male Rape Myths: The Role of Gender, Violence, and Sexism	423 college students	Mean age: 19.6 65% females and 35% men. 85.2% Caucasian	Male Rape Myth Scale, Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form.	Men are more accepting of male rape myths than are women. Benevolent sexism are strong predictors of rape myth acceptance for both men and women.
Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White (2004)	First- and Second-Generation Measures of Sexism, Rape Myths and Related Beliefs, and Hostility Toward Women	107 male and 157 female students	Mean age :19.5	Attitude Towards Women Scale, Modern Sexism Scale.	Ambivalent sexism was positively correlated with RMA. Also, There was no relationship between benevolent sexism and rape myth acceptance among men.
Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon (2011)	Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth and Acceptance	787 fraternity men	Mean age 20.3	Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Men who view pornography are significantly less likely to intervene as a bystander, report an increased behavioral intent to rape, and are more likely to believe rape myths.
Frese, Moya, & Megias (2004)	Social Perception of Rape: How Rape Myth Acceptance Modulates the Influence of Situational Factors	182 psychology undergraduates	Mean age: 19.2	Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Found no gender difference in rape myth acceptance
Jimenez & Abreu (2003)	Race and sex effects on attitudinal perceptions of acquaintance rape.	165 Latino, 171 European American undergraduates	Mean age: 22.9	Rape Empathy Scale, Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale.	Women reported higher perceptions of empathy, ascribed more credibility toward the rape victim, and were less accepting of rape myths compared with their male counterpart.
Johnson, Kuck, & Schander (1997)	Rape myth acceptance and sociodemographic characteristics: A dimensional analysis.	149 undergraduate students	Mean age: 20.5	Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	There is a negative correlation between age and rape myth acceptance.
King & Roberts (2011)	Traditional Gender Role and Rape Myth Acceptance: From the Countryside to the Big City.	2000 undergraduate and graduate students, US population	Mean age: 24.7	-Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scal - Lonsway and Fitzgerald's Rape Myth Scale	Traditional gender role was positively correlated with rape myth acceptance.
Lee (1987)	Rape Prevention: Experiential Training for Men.	240 college students	Mean age: 22.7	Experiment and self-report	Increasing victim empathy reduced the level of rape myth acceptance.
McQuiller, Porter, & Smith (2016)	Understanding Date Rape Attitudes and Behaviors: Exploring the Influence of Race, Gender, and Prior Sexual Victimization	College students (n =3,084)	Mean age:24.72	College Date Rape Attitudes and Behaviors Scale.	Gender was a salient factor, with males more likely to subscribe to undesirable attitudes toward date rape and to engage in behaviors that increase the risk of both men and women perpetrating date rape
Miller, Amacker, & King (2011)	Sexual Victimization History and Perceived Similarity to a Sexual Assault Victim: A Path Model of Perceiver Variables Predicting Victim Culpability Attributions.	69 female undergraduates	Mean age: 19.96	Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale-Short Form.	Rape victim empathy was inversely related to rape myth acceptance
Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison (2005)	Attitudes Toward Victims of Rape: Effects of Gender, Race, Religion, and Social Class	104 males and 101 females	77.7% whites and 23.3% African American	Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale	Found age difference in rape supportive attitude, older individuals were less sympathetic toward survivors of rape.
O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti (2003)	Rape Prevention With College Males: The Roles of Rape Myth Acceptance, Victim Empathy, and Outcome Expectancies	102 male undergraduates	Mean age: 22	Experiment and Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	The experimental video aimed at inducing empathy produced greater immediate changes on measures of rape myth acceptance, showing that Increasing victim empathy reduced the level of rape myth acceptance.
Suarez & Gadalla (2010)	Stop Blaming the Victim: A Meta-Analysis on Rape Myths.	Articles published between 1997 and 2007	Participants must be adults (18 years and above)	Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	The findings indicated that men displayed a significantly higher endorsement of RMA than women.
Sussenbach & Gerd (2011)	Acceptance of Sexual Aggression Myths in a Representative Sample of German Residents	397 German residents	German residents Mean age: 54.70	Acceptance Of Modern Myth About Sexual Aggression	No gender differences between male and females on RMA.

Table 1. Studies examining the factors in Rape Supportive Attitude - *continued*

Authors & Year	Title	Sample Size	Sample Demographics	Measure of RMA	Findings
Vonderhaar & Carmody (2015)	There Are No "Innocent Victims": The Influence of Just World Beliefs and Prior Victimization on Rape Myth Acceptance.	979 university students	62.15 females and 37.9% males	Burt's Rape Myth Acceptance Scale	Just-world beliefs and rape myths were also positively associated, and rape victims exhibited less support for rape myths than non-victims.
White & Kurpius (1999)	Attitudes Toward Rape Victims Effects of Gender and Professional Status	74 undergraduate students, 78 graduate students and 45 mental health professionals.	Mean age: 43.8 for professionals, 31.8 for graduates, and 22.4 for undergraduates	Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale	Males endorse more RMA than females.
Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz (2007)	The Moderating Role of Ambivalent Sexism: The Influence of Power Status on Perception of Rape Victim and Rapist	140 undergraduate students	Mean age: 20.4	Attitude Towards Rape Victim Scale	Individuals who scored high on the hostile power relation (HPR) measure tended to minimize the seriousness of rape incident. Participants who scored high on the HPR measure tended to believe that the alleged rapist held less responsibility

*Ambivalent sexism and rape supportive attitude*

Ambivalent sexism is a theoretical framework that posits that sexism has two subcomponents (Glick & Fiske, 1996). The first is hostile sexism, which justifies patriarchy and men's sexual exploitation of women by denigrating and objectifying women. The second benevolent sexism, often elicits feelings of protectiveness and affection. However, these feelings and the actions they may elicit, are based on perceptions of women's inferiority and inadequacy (Gordon, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004). Benevolent sexism has three sub-factors: heterosexual intimacy, complementary gender differentiation and protective paternalism (Chapleau et al., 2007).

All the articles on ambivalent sexism and rape supportive attitudes found a relationship between sexism and rape supportive attitudes (Gordon, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004; Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Chapleau & Oswald, 2008). These studies suggest that ambivalent sexism is linked to greater acceptance of rape myth. However, the literature on the relationship between benevolent sexism and RMA is mixed. The study of Chapleau et al. (2007) on how ambivalent sexism towards men and women support rape myth acceptance, concluded that sexist belief towards men and women are important factors in understanding rape myth acceptance. Using the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance (as a measure of RMA), Ambivalent Sexism Inventory and Ambivalence towards Men Inventory (as measures of ambivalent sexism), the study found a positive correlation between hostile sexism towards women and RMA among men. In examining the relationship between benevolent sexism and RMA, they found that each sub-

factor had a unique relationship with RMA. Among men, heterosexual intimacy towards women was not related to RMA. Complementary gender differentiation had a positive association with RMA; however, protective paternalism was negatively associated with RMA. Among women, benevolent sexism was positively associated with RMA, while hostile sexism was not associated with RMA. In respect to the subcomponents of benevolent sexism, they found that among women, heterosexual intimacy towards men was positively related to RMA, protective maternalism was positively associated with RMA, while complementary gender differentiation was positively associated with RMA. The studies of Chapleau et al. (2007) and Chapleau and Oswald (2008) have similar findings. These studies found hostile sexism towards women to be the strongest predictor of rape myth acceptance for both men and women. Also, in both studies, benevolent sexism toward men and women was positively associated with rape myth acceptance.

In contradiction to the above studies, the study of Forbes, Adams-Curtis and White (2004) on modern sexism, rape myths and hostility towards women, although found a positive relationship between ambivalent sexism and RMA, they found that modern sexism and benevolent sexism had not significant relationship with rape myth acceptance among men. For women, rape myth acceptance had a positive relationship between modern sexism, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism scales.

#### *Fraternity membership and rape supportive beliefs*

Several studies and debates have concluded that fraternity membership is associated with perpetration of sexual aggression against women (e.g. Boeringer, 1996; Crosset, Ptacek, McDonald, & Benedict, 1996; Koss & Gaines, 1993). Two of the studies in the systematic review (Bleecker & Murnen, 2005; Boeringer, 1999) investigated the association of rape supportive attitude with fraternity membership. Using a sample of 477 university males, Koss and Gaines (1993) studied the influence of fraternal and athletic participation on rape supportive attitude. The results of their study indicated that the scores of fraternity men on the rape supportive belief scale were significantly higher than that of non-fraternity men. Further analysis showed that fraternity men were more likely than non-fraternity men to endorse the following rape myths: “women like to be physically roughed up”, “women have a secret desires to be raped”, “women want to be forced into sex”, “men

should be the controller of a relationship”, “sexually liberated women are promiscuous”.

Bleecker and Murnen (2005) not only studied the association between fraternity membership and rape supportive attitude but also investigated the mechanism at which fraternity membership influences rape supportive attitude. Their study investigated the role of fraternity membership and display of degrading sexual images of women on rape myth acceptance. Their study concluded that fraternity membership significantly predicted rape supportive attitude as fraternity men scored higher on the rape supportive attitude scale than non-fraternity men; fraternity men had significantly more degrading images of women in their rooms than non-fraternity men; the amount of degrading images of women (found in participants' rooms) were significantly and positively correlated with rape supportive attitude scale. The findings of this study not only highlighted the association between fraternity membership and rape supportive attitude, but also demonstrated that one of the mechanisms necessary for this association is possession of degrading images of women.

#### *Exposure to pornography and rape myth*

Four studies identified exposure to pornography as an influential factor in rape myth acceptance (Allen, Emmers, & Gebhardt, 1995; Foubert, Brosi, & Bannon, 2011; Malamuth, 1985; Ohbuchi, Ikeda, & Takeuchi, 2008). The early experimental study of Malamuth (1985) on the effects of aggressive pornography on beliefs on rape myth clearly indicated that, audio-taped pornography portraying that rape victim experience arousal during rape contribute significantly to men's rape myth on similar situation. However, in the study, individual differences such as inclination to aggression against women mediated such relationship. Similarly, the meta-analytical study of Allen, Emmers and Gebhardt (1995) found similar results. In their meta-analysis, studies using experimental methodologies found positive effects in which exposure to pornography significantly increased rape myth acceptance. The meta-analysis further demonstrated that within experimental studies, violent pornographic had more positive effects in rape myth acceptance than non-violent pornography. However, in the non-experimental studies, exposure to pornography had no effect on rape myth acceptance.

Relatedly, the experimental study of Ohbuchi, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2008) on the effect of violent pornography upon viewer's rape myth belief

provided an inept insight in the association between exposure to pornography and rape myth acceptance. The study demonstrated that the effect of pornography on rape myth acceptance is dependent on the reaction of the rape victim. A pornography depicting a raped woman expressing pleasure had a positive effect on rape myth than a pornography depicting a woman experiencing pain and disapproval. Furthermore, Foubert, Brosi and Bannon (2011) conducted a survey study on the effects of pornographic viewing on rape myth acceptance and behavioural intent to commit sexual assault among fraternity men. Pornography viewing was classified into mainstream, sadomasochistic and rape pornography. The results of their study found that the three categories of pornography had significant positive effects on self-reported likelihood of raping and likelihood of committing sexual assault. However, just rape and sadomasochistic pornography had significant positive effects on rape myth acceptance.

#### *Narcissistic personality and rape supportive attitude*

One out of the 22 studies found that narcissistic personality was significantly associated with rape supportive attitudes (Bushman, Bonacci, Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003). They found narcissistic males to be more likely than other men to express beliefs that support rape myths. They were also more likely than other men to think that rape victims often share responsibility for the rape, and so by extension, perpetrators of sexual coercion should not bear as much blame (Bushman et al., 2003). Thus, in situations in which a narcissistic man (as compared with other men) wanted sex and a woman refused, he might be tempted to continue pushing for sex (possibly including by force) and might find it easy to justify his own use of coercive force as something she deserved or caused. However, although the findings were significant, the results are weak (small effect size of  $rs=.11$ ,  $ps<.05$ ). This small effect size could be an indication that narcissism is only weakly (if at all) related to rape supportive attitude. Also, the use of self-report measures in this study is a potential limitation since it is prone to response bias.

#### *Age and rape myth acceptance*

Some studies have identified a relationship between age and rape myth acceptance, although the findings have been inconsistent. For example, Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison (2005), found that younger participants expressed more favourable attitude towards rape victims than older

participants. The possible explanation to this finding is that younger people are more likely to have been raised in culture that is more aware of violence against women. To the contrary, Johnson, Kuck and Schander (1997), found a negative correlation between age and RMA. It is important to note that Johnson et al.'s research was based on student populations, whereas Nagel et al. (1987) was based on residents from a Midwestern city. It is possible that educational level could account for such discrepancies, as several studies have found that higher levels of education correlate with fewer RMAs (Komorosky, 2003; Nagel et al., 2005).

### **Risk/Protective factor**

#### *Prior victimization and rape myth acceptance*

One might expect an individual's attitudes and beliefs to be influenced by past experiences, but research on the relationship between prior victimization and rape myth acceptance/ rape supportive attitude is mixed. Weiss (*as cited in* Carmody & Washington, 2001) argues that a victim's perception of her own sexual assault may be greatly influenced by rape myths. When a woman is raped, she must try to make sense of what has happened to her. In an attempt to regain a sense of control, victims may blame themselves for the rape. This victim self-blame is further reinforced by rape myths (Weiss, 2009).

Using data from a survey of 623 undergraduate women, Carmody and Washington (2001) explored the impact of prior sexual victimization on acceptance of rape myths. They concluded that previous sexual victimization did not appear to affect women's attitudes concerning rape myths. In other words victim and non-victims revealed similar attitudes in regards to general acceptance or rejection of a variety of rape myths. In contradiction to this study, later research which employed 258 male and female college students found that victims of sexual assault have a lower rape myth acceptance than non-victims (Baugher, Elhai, Monroe, & Gray, 2010). Perhaps sexual trauma being associated with lower rape myth acceptance is as a result of increased empathy towards rape survivors held by other rape survivors. If this mechanism holds in future research, creating a rape prevention programme aimed at increasing such empathy could potentially be an effective strategy for reducing rape myths (Baugher et al., 2010). Furthermore, the recent study by Egan and Wilson

(2012) found that rape victims had lower levels of rape myth acceptance, but only when controlling for reporting to the police. Basically, rape victims who reported the crime had lower levels of rape myth acceptance than rape victims who did not report.

Overall, the contradiction in the above studies could be as a result of different methodologies. While the study of Carmody et al. (2001) employed only female participants, the study of Baugher et al. (2010), employed both male and female participants. Since females tend to share similar sex role socialization patterns (as stated earlier), and their attitude towards different rape myths were similar irrespective of the victimization status (*as found by Carmody et al., 2001*), perhaps, the inclusion of male participants in the study of Baugher et al. (2010) might have contributed to the dissimilar attitude in RMA, since males and females are likely to share different gender role socialization patterns (Yamawaki, 2007).

### **Protective factor**

#### *Victim empathy and rape myth acceptance*

The study that found that victims of sexual assaults have lower rape myth acceptance than non-victims (Baugher et al., 2010), highlighted empathy as the possible mechanism for such relationship. Fairly recent studies on empathy and rape supportive attitude suggested that empathy mediates the relationship between sexual victimization history and rape supportive attitude (Miller, Amacker, & King, 2011), and promoting victim empathy is often a component of sexual assault prevention programmes (O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003).

Also, there are some evidences from rape prevention studies that suggested that increasing empathy for victims may lead to reduction in rape supportive beliefs. Early study conducted by Lee (1987) evaluated the effectiveness of a rape prevention workshop which was aimed at increasing empathy for victims. The workshop was targeted to increase empathy by having participants (college men) listen to victims' stories of rape, engage in written empathy exercises, and imagine themselves as victims of rapes. The results showed that participants' post-test scores were significantly lower than their pretest scores on the Attitudes toward Rape Scale. Unfortunately, the design of this study did not include a control group; therefore, it is impossible to determine whether the difference in the test scores was as a result of

experimental manipulation. In other words, it was difficult to determine whether the workshop on victim empathy was responsible for the observed change. Consistent with Lee's findings, Schewe and O'Donohue (1993b) study which included both the experimental and the control group, found that a 45-minute videotape aimed at eliciting empathy produced a significant effect on number of rape-related measures when compared to the 45-minute videotape on rape facts, which did not target victim empathy.

### **Discussion**

The aim of this review was to explore the academic literature on the relationship between rape supportive attitude and psychological and demographic factors across published studies. A total of 22 studies report on the association were reviewed. A significant proportion of studies explored rape supportive in the context of the difference in attitude between men and women. In the studies, males reported higher level of rape myth acceptance than females (Jimenez & Abreu, 2003; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010; Vanderhaar & Carmody, 2015; White & Kurpius, 1999; Williams, Porter, & Smith, 2015). Despite some support for the gender difference, two studies (Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Sussenbach & Bohner, 2011) reported non-significant difference between men and women in rape myth acceptance. These studies indicated a potential interaction of gender with other factors such as age and cultural background. One way of explaining such contradiction is that the study of Sussenbach and Bohner (2011) employed German residents, while the studies that found male gender to be associated with RMA employed university students from USA. Therefore, it might be that some elements of cultural factors are responsible for such differences. In addition, since Sussenbach's study employed German residents and the other studies -that found gender differences in RMA- employed student population, it might be suggested that educational background might have accounted for the discrepancy. However, some studies do not support this hypothesis, as research has found that educational level correlates negatively with RMA (Komorosky, 2003). Overall, the conflicting findings imply that the role of gender in the acceptance of rape myths is not straightforward, and that factors such as age and perhaps culture could influence the extent to which gender difference is evident (Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison, 2005; Johnson, Kuck,

& Schander, 1997). Comparing the two conflictual finding, it could be seen that a more number of studies support the finding that males have a higher level of rape myth acceptance, endorse rape supportive attitude and have higher level of rape supportive beliefs than females. Also, the studies that found a relationship between gender and rape supportive attitude employed a larger number of participants than studies that failed to find such relationship. As a result of the contradictory findings on the gender difference in rape myth acceptance, it is critical for further studies to examine the role of gender in rape myth acceptance.

The second factor that was found to predict rape supportive attitude is gender role socialization. One way of explaining such finding is that most rape myths are related to the stereotypical beliefs about the behaviour of men and women within the patriarchal society. For example, women are supposed to be supposed to be subordinate to men. They should be submissive, docile and obedient. When a woman deviates from this tradition and expected norms, she is subjected to punishment, and King and Roberts (2011) noted that one weapon used to inflict this punishment is rape. Therefore, if a woman is raped, she must have precipitated the attack by deviating from her traditional gender role, and such belief is a rape myth. Similarly, Burt and Moyer, as cited in King and Roberts (2011) argued that adherence to traditional gender roles leads to a heightened acceptance of rape myths because these roles place stereotypes on men and women. However, the limitation of this study is that the sample was solely composed of college students. Hence, there may be some elements of educational bias. The researcher noted the participants were all from an institution of higher education, and they were unable to compare this sample to people who have not received postsecondary education. It is possible that significant difference exist between these two populations. However, despite the limitation, the finding of this study depicts that rape myth acceptance may be decreased by reducing adherence to traditional gender role.

Another influential factor in rape supportive attitude is ambivalent sexism. The literature on the relationship between ambivalent sexism, and RMA consistently shows that ambivalent sexism is positively related to RMA (Gordon, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004; Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Chapleau & Oswald, 2008). In respect to the components of ambivalent sexism, hostile sexism was consistently found to be associated with RMA (Chapleau et al., 2007; Chapleau & Oswald, 2008)

However, in respect to benevolent sexism—a subset of ambivalent sexism, there exist an inconsistency in the literature as some studies found a positive correlation between benevolent sexism and RMA (Chapleau et al., 2007; Chapleau & Oswald, 2008), while other studies did not find such relationship (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004). It might seem that positive correlation between benevolent sexism and rape myth acceptance is unexpected owing to the fact that benevolent sexism emphasizes that men should cherish and protect women. Ideally, such attitude should be negatively correlated with rape myth acceptance. To explain this, the researchers further stated that a specific component of benevolent sexism towards women is responsible for this association. According to Chapleau et al. (2007) complementary gender differentiation, a sub-component of benevolent is the belief that women are redefined ladies, and this may translate into the perception that women who violate this stereotype are partially responsible for making themselves vulnerable to sexual attack (e.g. by drinking alcohol). This factor has some similarities with victim blaming and therefore might have accounted for the positive correlation in the study. On the other hand, protective paternalism, another sub-component of ambivalent sexism acknowledges that men typically have physical and cultural advantages over women that men should not exploit. Thus, this factor is related to perpetrator accountability and hence negatively associated with RMA (Chapleau et al., 2007). Another way of explaining the mixed literature on the relationship between benevolent sexism and RMA is considering the methodologies employed by these studies. Benevolent sexism has two sub-factors: complementary gender differentiation and protective paternalism (Chapleau et al., 2007). As discussed earlier, these factors have unique correlation with RMA. Therefore, when these factors are lumped together as a unitary construct, the overall relationship between benevolent sexism and RMA is obscured. The study of Adams-Curtis and White (2004) considered benevolent sexism as a unitary construct and this may explain why they did not find a relationship between benevolent sexism and RMA. In further studies, it is critical to consider the factors that are embedded in benevolent sexism in order to categorically ascertain the influence of this factor on RMA.

Furthermore, narcissistic personality was found to be associated with rape supportive attitude. There are multiple reasons which could be used to explain the relationship with rape supportive attitude and narcissism. First,

Bushman et al. (2003) explained that the positive association between these construct could be as a result of inflated sense of entitlement and cognitive distortion. First, the inflated sense of entitlement that is characterized narcissistic personality have inflated sense of entitlements may make them think that women owe them sexual favors. Second, cognitive distortions which helps them maintain this inflated sense of entitlement might help them rationalize away any questionable rape myth, such as if they could convince themselves that the victims had really desired the sex or had expressed some form of consent (Bushman, Bonacci, Dijk, & Baumeister, 2003).

In addition, although the literature is mixed, prior victimization was found to be a factor in RMA. While some studies found no relationship between prior victimization experiences and the general acceptance or rejection of rape myths Carmody and Washington (2001), contradictory study reported that victims have lower rape myth acceptance than non-victims (Baugher, Elhai, Monroe, & Gray, 2010). Hence, suggesting that prior victimization is a protective factor in RMA. The finding on prior victimization been associated with lower rape myth acceptance could be as a result of increased empathy towards rape survivors held by other rape survivors, as high level of victim empathy is significantly associated with lower rape myth acceptance (Miller, Amacker, & King, 2011; O'Donohue, Yeater, & Fanetti, 2003). Contrary to the above studies, other studies found no difference between rape victims and non-victims in respect to rape supportive attitude. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, the similarities between victims and non-victims can be explained using the "just-world" hypothesis. According to the just-world hypothesis, bad things don't happen to good people, and people get what they deserve (Lerner, 1980). Clearly, this concept casts blame on the victim and lends support to a variety of rape myths. Hence, if victims and non-victims adhere to the perspective of the just-world hypothesis, then they would have similar attitude towards the different rape myths, irrespective of their victimization status. Also, Brown-miller (1975) argues that women are subjected to a patriarchal society that support rape myth and endorse stereotypical beliefs about women's social roles. This sex role socialization may encourage women to accept the blame for their own victimization.

The studies in the systematic review also highlighted the influence of exposure to pornography on RMA, stating that exposure to pornography both violent and non-violent is positively related to acceptance of rape myths, hence

a risk factor in RMA. And although violent pornography has more positive effect of RMA, than non-violent pornography, non-violent pornography still has a significant positive effect on RMA. The experimental study of Ohbuchi, Ikeda and Takeuchi (2008) demonstrated the mediating role of victim reaction in the relationship between exposure to pornography and RMA. Their findings suggested that pornography depicting a woman expressing pleasure during rape is positively associated with rape myth unlike a pornographic scene in which the victim expressed pain and disapproval.

#### *Limitations*

Majority of the studies gathered data through self-report questionnaires or experiments. The use of retrospective, self-report measures to assess sensitive information about participants' attitude leaves room for intentional and unintentional misreporting. In as much as participants might be tempted to provide pro-social responses, only three out of the 22 studies included measure of social desirability. Also, bias may occur in experimental research as other extraneous variables might be in play during the experiment. These variables make it difficult to certain if change in behaviour is as a result of the experimental manipulation or the influence of the extraneous variables.

Different methodologies -such as students in one study and non-student population in another study- could account for the difference in the finding. Therefore, this calls for a more consistent approach to investigation.

#### **Implications for policy, practice and research**

##### *Policy and practice*

- Since understanding the etiology of behaviour is important in the treatment of that behaviour and rape supportive attitude is associated with perpetration of sexual aggression, professional working with rape perpetrators should incorporate these factors in assessing their clients, in order to ascertain specific factors in their behaviour.
- Research suggested that lowering rape supportive attitude can lead to reduction in sexual aggression. Hence, in order to reduce rape supportive attitude, treatment developers should ensure that treatments (for sexual aggressors) incorporate elements that are directed to counteract these factors that are related to rape supportive attitude. For example, treatments programmes should be targeted at countering views that are consistent with

traditional gender role, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, victim blaming and victim perpetration, etc.

- Treatment should be designed in such a way that it increases empathy for rape victim, since it was found to reduce rape supportive attitude.
- The media should be discouraged from portraying images that rape victims experience pleasure during rape, since such image is associated with higher acceptance of rape myth.

#### *Research*

- Researchers can capitalize on this study's findings and subsequently design and carryout future studies by including the most promising variables and excluding those that are not likely to yield new information.
- The review also highlighted the importance of personality traits such as ambivalent sexism and narcissistic personality in explaining rape-supportive attitudes. There are other personality characteristics -that are likely to impact on rape supportive beliefs - whose influences have not been researched on. Hence, it is important to explore the influence of other personality characteristics that have not been covered by literature.

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