

PERCEPTION OF SOCIETY ON RAPE MYTHS IN MUMBAI, INDIA

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ABSTRACT: In recent times, rape incidents against women have increased drastically and various statistics confirm that it is a dire situation. In Indian society, people tend to normalize, excuse, tolerate, or even perpetuate rape, an environment where rape against women is present. An important question that always arises when we discuss rape case is, what causes rape and why are rape cases increasing at an alarming rate? Though it is said that the first and foremost cause of increasing rape cases against women is the lack of public safety but there is still so much that we do not know about the causes of sexual violence. In various studies, the acceptance of myths regarding rape are said to be one such cause of sexual assaults. Hence, this study was conducted to understand the perception of people of the Indian society (Mumbai, India) towards rape myths and also to find the difference in believing the various myth trends amongst the male and female population of the same. It was observed that the prevalence of rape myths was higher among the people and that men were significantly more biased and supportive of myth behavior compared to women.

Keywords: Rape myths, Indian Society, Rape cases against women, Rape Culture

INTRODUCTION: In India, sexual assault on women is a common phenomenon which includes molestation, eve-teasing, child sexual abuse, rape, marital rape, domestic violence, etc. Out of these, rape is one of the most violent crimes committed against women. The Metropolitan Police define rape as when a person intentionally penetrates another person's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without the other person's consent. However, according to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, rape means unlawful intercourse done by a man with a woman without her consent. Hence the definition of rape varies both legally and within cultures.

Rape is a horrifying and invasive crime that has the potential to completely change the victim's life for the worse. Many studies have demonstrated that high rape myth acceptance is associated with sexual assaults (Abbey, McAuslan and Ross, 1998; Iconis, 2008; Koss and Dinero, 1989). Rape myths are a specific set of attitudes and beliefs that may contribute to ongoing sexual violence by shifting blame for sexual assault from perpetrators to victims (Iconis, 2008). According to Sharma (2014), the desire to blame women is fed by a cult of masculinity promoted by corporate and political leaders who serve as role models for the rest of the society. The fear of rape keeps women off the streets at night, keeps women at home, keeps women passive and modest for the fear that they may be thought of as provocative (Riger, 2010). Women's perception of the risk of rape is based on a background of other

experiences of victimization (Deshpande et. al., 2016). Perceived likelihood of being raped, negative consequences of being raped, and ability to avoid being raped were assessed as key in the psychological model of fear of rape (Devilly, 2007). Changing societal beliefs about rape are in large part by-product of a large amount of misinformation and mythology about sexual assault (Easteal, 2011).

Rape is not limited to male perpetrators and female victims but it is strongly a crime against women. Hence the purpose of this paper is to understand the perception of the people of the Indian society towards rape myths directed towards women.

METHOD: The research approach adopted was quantitative and a cross-sectional survey was carried out during October 2020. The convenient sample consisted of 120 adults, both male and female, 60(50%) and 60(50%) respectively. The questionnaires were self – administered and included 20 questions related to whether participants agree with the rape myths (Agarwal and Brown, 2013). The responses were scored on a Likert scale, a psychometric response scale ranging from 1 to 5 where responders specify their level of agreement to a statement typically in these five points - strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. The investigators approached the participants through social media after which participants completed the self-administered questionnaire. All queries and doubts from the participants were promptly addressed during the process.

RESULT: Within the sample of 120, 60(50%) of respondents were female and 60(50 %) of respondents were male. The highest score indicates the greatest acceptance of the myth i.e. more bias/untrue opinion and the lowest score indicates the lowest support of the myth i.e. less bias/untrue opinion. The results obtained from the self – administered questionnaire are given below.

Figure A: Responses recorded from the study – ‘Perception of society on rape myths’.

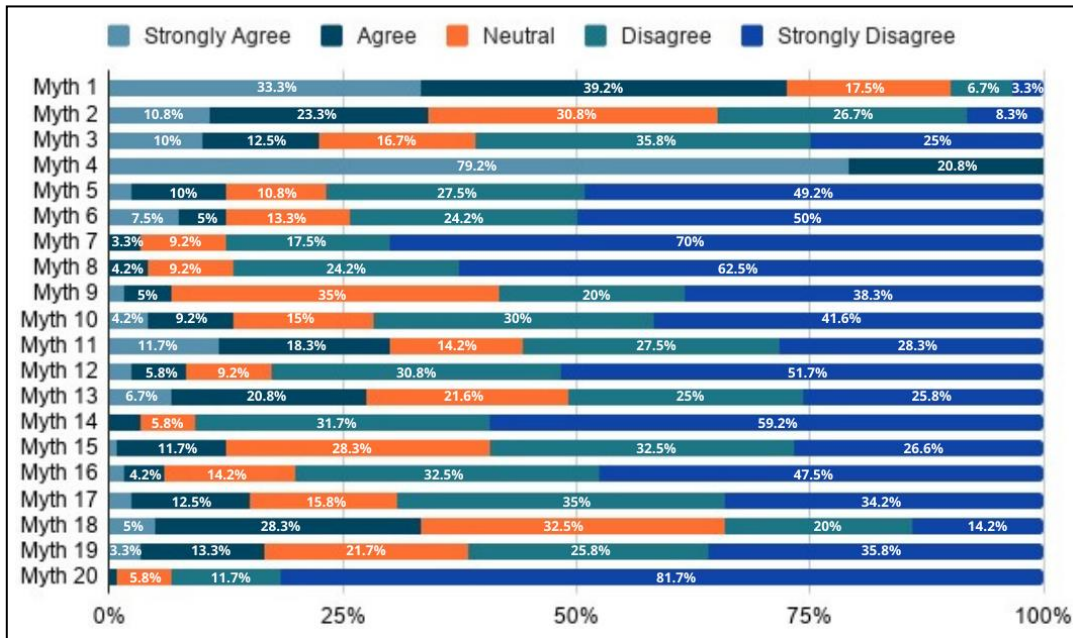
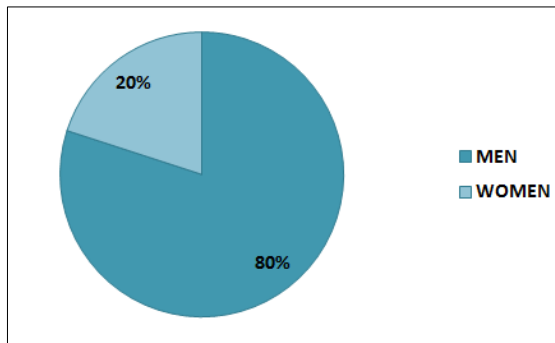
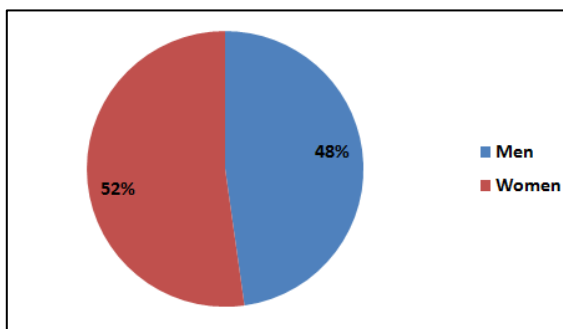


Figure B: Acceptance of Rape Myths among men and women of the Indian society.



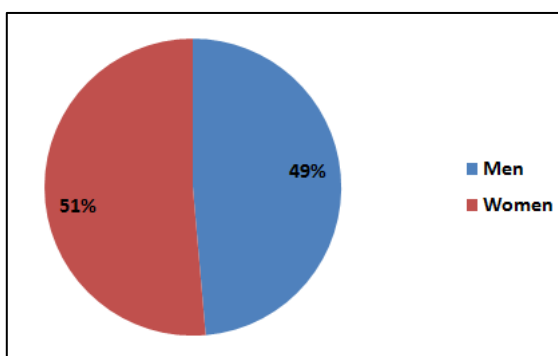
It can be observed from the above figure that men are more supportive of Rape myths as compared to women. Out of 20 myths, 16 myths were supported by men, 3 myths were supported by women and 1 myth was equally supported by both men and women.

Figure B1: Scores obtained for Myth 1 – ‘Indian culture is more rape tolerant than other cultures?’



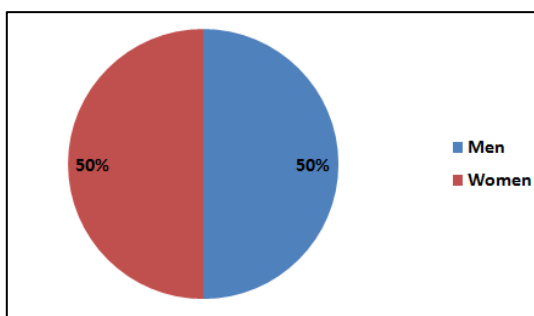
For this myth, it is observed that men scored a total of 225(48%) and women scored a total of 246(52%). This proves that women hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than men for this particular myth.

Figure B2: Scores obtained for Myth 2 – ‘Rape in India is more an urban than a rural problem.’



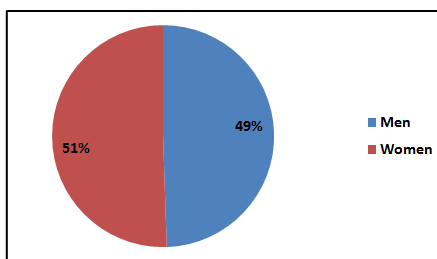
For this myth, men scored a total of 176(49%) and women scored 186(51%). This proves that women hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than men for this particular myth.

Figure B3: Scores obtained for Myth 3 – ‘Rape in India today is largely the results of western influences on Indian society.’



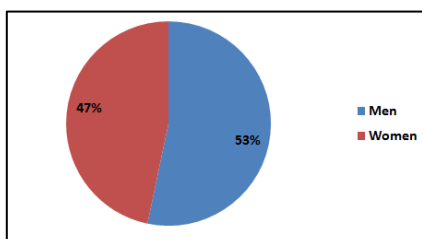
For this myth, men scored a total of 148(50%) and women scored a total score of 148(50%). This proves that both men and women equally hold much biased and untrue opinions about rape for this particular myth.

Figure B4: Scores obtained for Myth 4 – ‘India has a serious rape problem.’



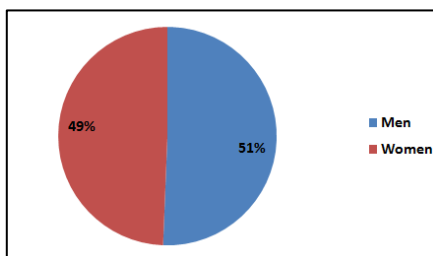
For this myth, it is observed that men scored a total of 286(49%) and women scored a total score of 289(51%). This proves that women hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than men for this particular myth.

Figure B5: Scores obtained for Myth 5 – ‘If someone didn’t scream or try to fight their attacker off, then it wasn’t rape.’



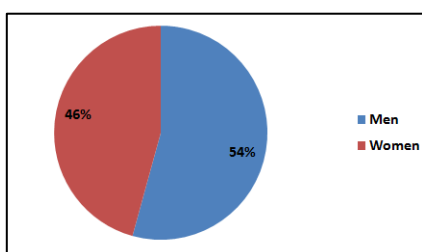
For this myth, men scored a total of 121(53%) and women scored a total of 106(47%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B6: Scores obtained in Myth 6 – ‘Women shouldn’t go out alone at night as they are likely to get raped.’



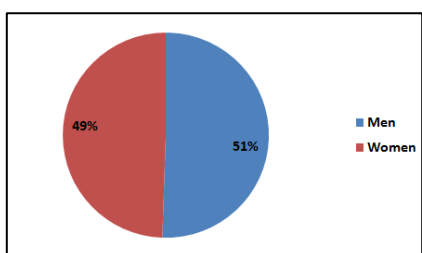
For this myth, men scored 119(51%) and women scored 116(49%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B7: Scores obtained for Myth 7 – ‘Women provoke men to rape them by wearing revealing clothes or flirting.’



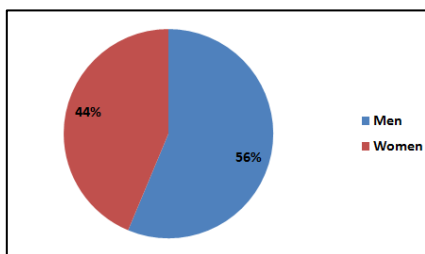
For this myth, men scored a total of 95(55%) and women scored a total of 80(46%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B8: Scores obtained for Myth 8 – ‘Once a man is sexually aroused he can't help himself; he has to have sex.’



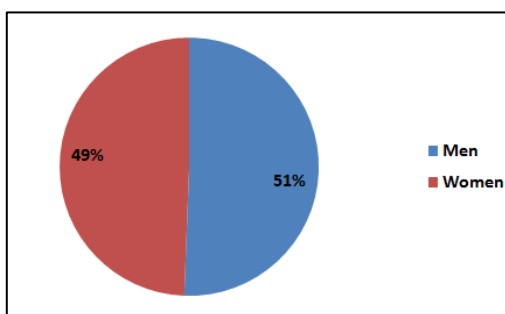
For this myth, men scored 94(51%) and women scored 92(49%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B9: Scores obtained for Myth 9 – ‘When it comes to sex, women and girls give out mixed signals. They sometimes play hard to get and say 'no' when they really mean 'yes'.’



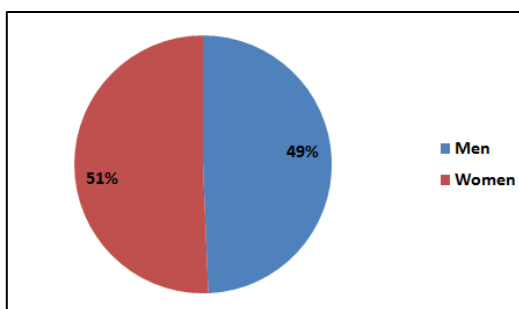
For this myth, men scored 143(56%) and women scored 111(44%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B10: Scores obtained for Myth 10 – ‘If someone gets really drunk, it’s their own fault if they end up getting raped. They should have kept themselves safe.’



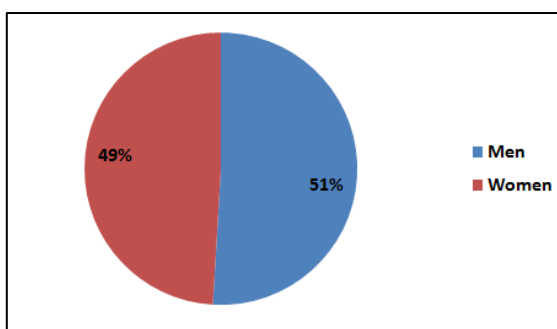
For this myth, men scored a total of 124(51%) and women scored a total of 121(49%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B11: Scores obtained for Myth 11 – ‘Individuals who commit rape are mentally ill or psychotic, and cannot help themselves.’



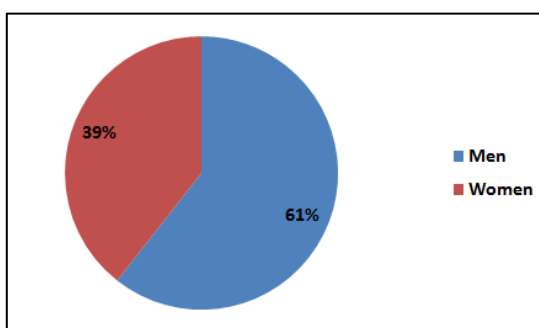
For this myth, it is observed that men scored a total of 154(50%) and women scored a total of 155(50%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B12: Scores obtained for Myth 12 – ‘Most sexual assaults are committed by strangers. It’s not raping if the people involved knew each other.’



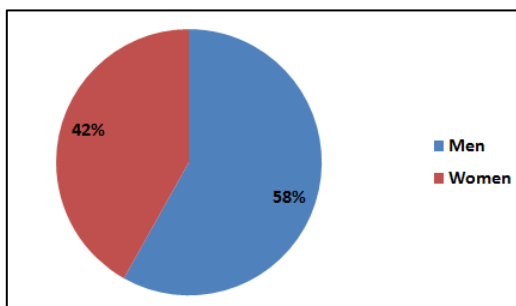
For this myth, men scored a total of 108(51%) and women scored a total of 104(49%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B13: Scores obtained for Myth 13 – ‘Rape can be avoided if people avoid dark alleys or other “dangerous” places where strangers might be hiding or lurking.’



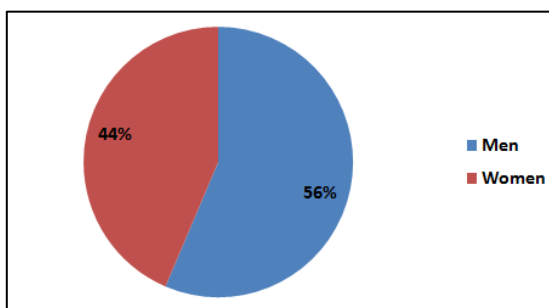
For this myth, men scored a total of 160(51%) and women scored a total of 149(39%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this rape myth.

Figure B14: Scores obtained for Myth 14 – ‘Only young, pretty women are assaulted.’



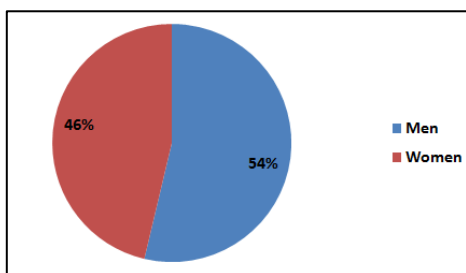
For this myth, men scored a total of 107(58%) and women scored a total of 77(42%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

Figure B15: Scores obtained for Myth 15 – ‘Women often lie about rape because they regret having sex with someone or because they want attention.’



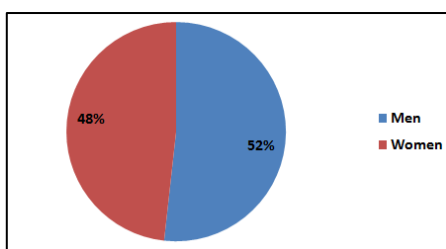
For this myth, men got a total score of 154(56%) and women got a total score of 119(44%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this particular myth.

Figure B16: Scores obtained for Myth 16 – ‘If a person is flirting, drinking, or dressing a certain way, they are "asking for it".’



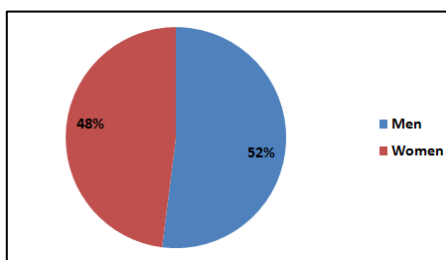
For this myth, men got a total score of 116(54%) and women got a total score of 100(46%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

Figure B17: Scores obtained for Myth 17 – ‘Someone can only be sexually assaulted if there is physical force or if a weapon is involved.’



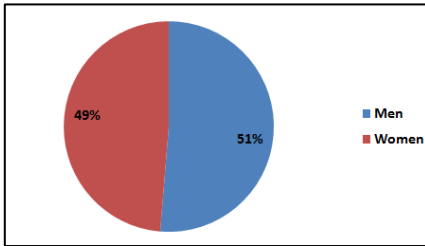
For this myth, men got a total score of 133(52%) and women got a total score of 124(48%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

Figure B18: Scores obtained for Myth 18 – ‘If someone said "yes" at the beginning of the interaction, it is fully consensual.’



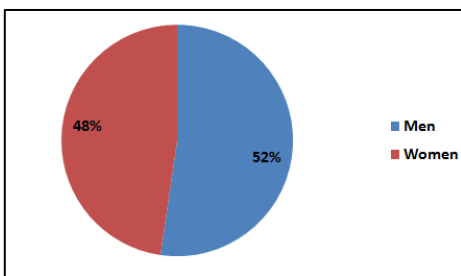
For this myth, men got a total score of 181(52%) and women got a total score of 167(48%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

Figure B19: Scores obtained for Myth 19 – ‘The best way to deal with a sexual assault is to try to move on quickly.’



For this myth, men got a total score of 137(51%) and women got a total score of 130(49%). This proves that men hold much biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

Figure B20: Scores obtained for Myth 20 – ‘Some people think women consciously or unconsciously enjoy being raped but others say this is not the case. To what extent do you agree with the statement that women enjoy being raped?’



For this myth, men got a total score of 79(52%) and women got a total score of 72(48%). This proves that men hold more biased and untrue opinions about rape than women for this myth.

CONCLUSION: The significant finding of the present study is that rape myths are deeply rooted among the people and that men have significantly more biased/ untrue opinions towards rape myths and are more supportive of myth behavior than women. A similar study conducted amongst the college students of surat city states that rape myths are prevalent among youth and higher among males (Kamdar et. al., 2017).

The present study focused specifically on the rape-supportive perception and belief predominant within Indian culture in the city of Mumbai, which may serve to facilitate continued acts of sexual violence against women. The results of the study revealed that people still do not have positive perceptions of rape and rape victims. Men and women have been shown to differ dramatically in their perceptions of and attitudes toward rape, rapists, and rape victims (Sivagnanam et. al., 2005). This is observed because of lack of sex education,

acceptance of sexual brutality, psychological rationale, the lethargic court system, lack of self-defense and various other reasons among the Indian population (Fakunmoju et. al., 2020).

Changes in social and cultural norms are needed for the prevention of sexual violence (Abeid et. al., 2014). Hence, we recommend the implementation of educational programs that will sensitize the Indian society against the prevalent rape myths. Educating people about why and how rape actually occurs will decrease rape-supportive perception to a great level.

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