



Knowledge and Awareness of Rape Myths among the People of Gusau Town in Zamfara State, Nigeria: A Medical Sociology Perspectives

Ahmad Yahaya Maigemu (Ph.D.)¹; Rufai Sani Adamu²

¹ Department of Sociology, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

² Department of Social Development, Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic, Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria

E-mail: ahmad.maigemu@udusok.edu.ng

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v8i2.2464>

Abstract

This research work is aimed at the study of the knowledge and awareness of rape myths among the people of Gusau town in Zamfara State Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to find out the knowledge and awareness of the people of Gusau town on female rape myths; to discover the extent of knowledge and awareness of the people of Gusau town on male rape myths; examine the knowledge and awareness of the people of Gusau town on alcohol and substance rape myths; to know the knowledge and awareness of the people of Gusau town on dating rape myths; and to suggest ways through which rape myths are confront and tackle. The study used the quantitative method of research for data collection. The quantitative data was collected using questionnaire as research instrument. Among the 300 questionnaires distributed 279 was return. Finding from this study demonstrate the level of acceptance of rape myths. Additionally, this study recommends that since rape myth can harmfully affect the victims of sexual violence, contributing to increased shame through aspects such as victim-blaming it is better to provide a strong knowledge and awareness among the general public about holding and believing of such rape myth.

Keywords: *Knowledge; Awareness; Rape Myths; Medical Sociology*

Introduction

Brief introduction and Problem Statement

Rape is defined according to Lee and Jordan (2014) as an act or attempted attack involving unwanted sexual contact, either forcibly or non forcibly. According to a report carried out on rape in Nigerian universities, it was discovered in one of the top federal universities, 100 percent of rape sexually

harassed victims are female students. Of that number, 67 percent did nothing after they were raped while 33 percent made some kind of feeble report of being raped to friends, a course adviser and others made reports to their parents or guardians (Lee & Jordan 2014).

Many victims of rape and other sexually related hostility may be living with emotional and psychological difficulties. According to Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, and Turner, (1999) experiencing any type of rape and sexually assault mugging can be drastically damaging for any individual and has been shown to result in feelings of anger, depression, low self-esteem, shame, anxiety, and difficulty trusting others to mention but a few among several other miseries (Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, & Turner, 1999; Lisak, 1994, Perilloux, Duntley, & Buss, 2012; Walker, Archer, & Davies, 2005). Perilloux et al. (2012) stated that rape and sexual violence can also cause the victims to have issues with romantic relationships, sexual intimacy, work satisfaction, and family relationships (Perilloux et al., 2012). Ultimately, sexual trauma can result in the development of eating disorders, substance abuse and suicidal ideation (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Ullman, Relyea, Peter-Hagene, & Vasquez, 2013).

According to Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, and Turner, (1999) rape myths originate from various cultural stereotypes, such as traditional gender roles, acceptance of interpersonal violence, and misunderstanding the nature of sexual assault. He stated that rape myths first became a topic of research during the 1970s, when a number of studies and books explored the concept. In 1974, for example, feminist writer Susan Brownmiller decried "male myths of rape" which "deliberately obscure the true nature of rape" in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Furthermore, Giacomassi, D. J., Dull, R. T. (1986) cited in Larimer, Lydum, Anderson, and Turner, (1999) averred that criminologists Julia and Herman Schwendinger studied common misconceptions about rape, including the notion that rape was impossible. These mean that any woman who really wanted to could prevent a rape.

Rape myths are therefore, false beliefs people hold about sexual assault that shift blame from the perpetrator to the survivor. Rape myths have grown out of the long-standing acceptance of violence, and wrong and inaccurate information regarding sexual violence that exists in our society. These false statements not only shame survivors into silence; they also hurt our community's general knowledge of sexual assault, dating violence, and other sexually related harassment. The most effective way to confront and tackle rape myths is to find out the people perception about rape myths and educates them on the facts and reality. Consequent upon the foregoing, this research was conducted to answer the following research questions;

The Concept of Myth

From the Greek *muthos* (plot or story), this term now circulates in religious studies and in anthropology largely free of the association with error, delusion, or childish flights of imagination that it had for many scholars of the nineteenth century and still has in popular usage today (Perilloux et al., 2012). The common use of myth to mean a story which is untrue makes an essence out of what for scholars is an accidental feature. Myths are not by definition untrue. Rather, they are religious or sacred folktales which explain the origins of the world, a people, a God or some social practice such as a way of hunting (Perilloux et al., 2012). Because we have often been interested in the social functions that myths perform (and because we know that a God coupling with a swan cannot produce a human) we tend not to take the content of myths at face-value; this rather tends to imply that those people who appear to believe in them cannot be entirely serious. According to Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer, (2002) it is worth stressing that shared beliefs can only have latent functions if they are actually believed. Hence we cannot expect those whose ritual actions support certain myths to be as skeptical about them as is the observer. Social scientific interest in myths has concentrated on what they can tell us about the central values of the peoples who hold them; about the perennial psychological and social tensions they express; and about the underlying structure of the human mind that might be discerned through their analysis. The general problem with the interpretation of myths is the same as that for dreams: there is no limit to the competing

interpretations that can be generated and no way of knowing which of the diverse alternatives is correct (Ackard & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002; Ullman, Relyea, Peter-Hagene, & Vasquez, 2013). Hence we can do literary criticism with myths but it is hard to see how we do social science.

Research Design

For the purpose of this research, a quantitative research method was employed in the data generation. The research instruments used was structured questionnaire. 300 Questionnaires were administered to people in the areas under study to examine the knowledge and awareness of rape myths among the people of Gusau town in Zamfara State Nigeria. Out of 300 questionnaires 279 was successfully return.

Study Setting

Study Area

The study area is Gusau metropolis in Gusau Local Government Area, capital city of Zamfara State, in North Western Nigeria. Gusau was created by the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime in 1973. Formally, it includes the present Tsafe and Bungudu Local Government areas. In 1989, Tsafe and Bungudu Local Governments were carved out of Gusau Local Government. Gusau Local Government is one local government playing a significant role in the socio- economic and political developments in Zamfara State, in the North West region of Nigeria.

Based on the results of the 2006 national census, Gusau Local Government has a population of about 383,712 people (NPC, 2006). Gusau is situated in the northern savannah zone of Nigeria. Its mean annual temperature ranges from 36^oC to 41^oC, with lower temperature around 17^oC to 20^oC. It has a tropical climate with distinct wet and dry seasons, and the duration of rainfall is from April to October with precipitation ranging from 10mm in April to 310mm in August and 13mm in October. The area experiences 7 months of wet and 5 months of dry season (November to April). Its relative humidity is about 50%, reaching 96% during rains (ZADP, 2008).

The inhabitant of Gusau is civil servants, farmers, livestock keepers, fishermen, blacksmiths and traders. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people. They are predominantly Hausa/Fulani ethnic groups, even though other indigenous ethnic groups such as Yoruba, Nupe and Igbo can be identified. Hausa is the commonest language spoken by the people. Because of the cosmopolitan nature of Gusau, the state capital, other languages are also spoken. This research work did not cover the whole area of Gusau Local Government due to limited time and resources.

Sample Size and Procedure

A population may be infinite in which case it size is not conceivable. Therefore, sampling enables us to be more thorough and afford us better supervision than a complete coverage of the entire population. Adopting the quantitative sampling method, this study used multi-stage cluster sampling to obtain the data. Gusau metropolis was divided into clusters i.e. from faculties down to departments and 10 departments were selected. A systematic sampling was used in administering the questionnaires to people in Gusau metropolis. The systematic sampling procedure allowed the study population in the selected area an equal chance of being included in the sample. It equally eliminated potential personal bias in the researcher's sampling

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS package is very efficient in quantitative data analysis hence justify using it for the analysis in this research.

Results/Analysis

Table 1. Respondent Demographic Profile

Occupation	Frequency	Percent (%)
Civil Servant	32	11.5
Business	8	2.9
Farming	121	43.4
Others	118	42.3
Total	279	100.0
Religion		
Islam	274	98.2
Christianity	5	1.8
Total	279	100.0
Gender		
Male	177	63.4
Female	102	36.6
Total	279	100.0
Tribe		
Yoruba	102	36.6
Hausa	175	62.7
Igbo	2	.7
Total	279	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020

Results from respondents occupation shows that majority of those participated in this study 121 representing 43.4 percent are farmers. This is followed by those that indicated others type of occupation with 118 representing 42.3 percent. Respondents that are civil servant stand at 32 with 11.5 percent and only 8 respondents with 2.9 percent engaged into business. On respondent’s religion, 274 respondents representing 98.2 percent are Muslims. Only 5 numbers respondent representing 1.8 percent are Christians. On the other hand, 177 respondents with 63.4 percent are male while 102 respondents with 36.6 percent are female. Majority of the respondent 175 in number with 62.7 percent are Hausa by tribe. This is followed by 102 representing 36.6 percent are Yoruba. Igbo have only 2 respondents with .7 percent.

Table 2. Knowledge and Awareness on Female Rape Myth

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	1.1
Disagree	39	14.0
Neutral	73	26.2
Agree	82	29.4
Strongly Agree	82	29.4
Total	279	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

This section asks questions on knowledge and awareness of female rape myth type. The questions ranging on the statement that many of the rape cases happen to only certain types of women. It

is further indicate that it's not really rape when a lady changes their mind in the middle of sexual activity and if a lady goes to their boy's friend room, it implies they are willing to have sex. The rape myth statement goes further to indicate that if a lady doesn't fight back, they weren't really raped and what the lady is wearing can lead to a sexual assault. The rape myth shows that when a male pays for a dinner or date, a woman is expected to reciprocate with intercourse.

All the above statement is some of the female rape myth that the respondent was ask questions on. The level of acceptance and rejection of those false statements on female rape myth signify their level of knowledge and awareness of female rape myth. From the results of this study it is show that majority of the respondents 82 (29.4%) strongly agree with those untrue statement and another 82 respondents representing 29.4 percent also agree with those statements. This is followed by 73 respondents with 26.2 percent that are neutral. Only 39 respondents with 14 percent and 3 respondents with 1.1 percent disagree and strongly disagree with those statements respectively. Accepting those female rape myth statements connote a strong sign of lack of knowledge and awareness about female rape myth.

Table 3. Knowledge and Awareness on Male Rape Myth

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	1.1
Disagree	44	15
Neutral	45	16
Agree	89	31.9
Strongly Agree	98	35.1
Total	279	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

This section also deals with another rape myth type that is male rape myth. The untrue statement ask the respondents of this study to test their level of knowledge and awareness include that men are unable to control themselves once they become sexually excited and that rape must be sexually motivated. The statements further demonstrate that consent to one sexual encounter constitutes consent to another and being raped by a male attacker is synonymous with the loss of masculinity. In addition to this it is indicated that men who are sexually assaulted by men must be gay and are incapable of functioning sexually unless they are sexually aroused. Another male rape myth is that men cannot be forced to have sex against their will because men are less affected by sexual assault than women and men are in a constant state of readiness to accept any sexual opportunity.

Majority of the respondents 98 representing 35.1 percent and 89 representing 3.9 percent strongly agree and agree with those statements respectively. This is followed by 45 (16%) respondents that are neutral. In this section 44 respondents with 15percent disagree with those untrue statements. The number here is appreciating if compare with the previous section. Only 3 respondents representing 1.1 percent strongly disagree with those untrue statements about male rape type. This result is able to confirm that there is lack of knowledge and awareness of male rape myth type because a significant number of the respondents agree and strongly agree with male rape myth statements.

Table 4. Knowledge and Awareness on Alcohol Rape Myth

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	11	4.1
Disagree	13	4.2
Neutral	23	8.3
Agree	46	16.6
Strongly Agree	186	66.7
Total	279	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

This part of the analysis centered on the knowledge and awareness of the respondents with regard to alcohol rape myth. The statements that form the questions are alcohol is a tool that some perpetrators use to control their victim and render them helpless. It is further stated that an offender may encourage the victim to use alcohol or other drug substance and if victims would just stop drinking so much, they wouldn't be sexually assaulted. Similarly the untrue statement reads that offender identify an individual who is already drunk.

Responses from the respondents reveal that 186 with 66.7 percent and 46 representing 16.6 percent strongly agree and agree with untrue statement of alcohol rape issue. Among the respondents 23 with 8.3 percent are neutral. The respondents 13 (4.2%) and 11 respondents (4.1%) disagree and strongly disagree with the alcohol rape myth statement. It is base on this result that knowledge and awareness of alcohol rape myth is lacking among the respondents from the area this study was conducted.

Table 5. Knowledge and Awareness on Dating Rape Myth

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	29	10.4
Disagree	29	10.4
Neutral	30	10.5
Agree	87	31.3
Strongly Agree	101	36.2
Total	279	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

In this part of the analysis, respondents was ask base on the questions bordering on the dating rape myth statement. The assumption of this study was that those statements are untrue and they were used to test the level knowledge and awareness of their acceptance among the respondents. Those statements comprise that people in abusive relationships stay because they enjoy being abused and dating and rape is not a problem in the society. In a similar instance people do not have to worry about becoming victims of dating rape and dating and rape abuse is not a problem to subsequent marriages and relationships.

Results from the findings of this study which is also from the above statements shows that majority of the respondents 101 with 36.2 percent and 87 respondents with 31.3 strongly agree and agree with those statements respectively. Moreover, 30 respondents with 10.5 percent are neutral. In the same way 29 respondents with 10.4 percent each disagree and strongly disagree with those untrue statements. From this finding also it is averred that there is lack of knowledge and awareness of dating rape myth type, because most of the respondents agree with those untrue statements.

Discussions

Results of this study on female rape myth indicate some level of acceptance of rape myth statement which to some extent signifies the victim blame situation. This is in line with Studies that have shown that individuals who accept and believe rape myths are more likely to engage in that victim-blaming, accept interpersonal violence, and commit acts of sexual violence themselves (Chapleau et al., 2008). Furthermore, the existence of rape myths has been shown to negatively impact victims of sexual assault. Through the perpetuation of victim-blaming, rape myths can re traumatize survivors and discourage them from reporting their assault (Chapleau et al., 2008). Male rape myths in particular can contribute to the lack of services provided to male victims of sexual violence.

Findings from this study show that there is a greater level of acceptance of male rape myth among the respondents. This finding has been confirmed by a number of studies (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996;

Sleath & Bull, 2010). Their finding reported that approximately 21% of females and 22% of males agreed with the statement “many men claim rape if they have consented to homosexual relations. Most common male rape myth is the belief that men cannot be raped due to their ability to physically resist and fend off any potential perpetrator (Donnelly & Kenyon, 1996).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Finding from this study demonstrate the level of acceptance of rape myths. First, it is essential that people should recognize the existence of rape myths and the unfavorable effects they cause for the victims of rape. A finding from previous studies has provided frequent proof that rape myths exist, and that many individuals (as shown by this research) believe them. Additionally, this study recommends that since rape myth can harmfully affect the victims of sexual violence, contributing to increased shame through aspects such as victim-blaming it is better to provide a strong knowledge and awareness among the general public about holding and believing of such rape myth. A public enlightenment campaign is advocate to make people understand that rape myth is an untrue and bias statement and therefore, they need to disregard them due to their potential consequences.

In conclusion this research provided the empirical investigation of the knowledge and awareness of rape myth among the people in Gusau metropolis, Zamfara state Nigeria. The findings provided that people in Gusau metropolis accept and recognize the existence of rape myth and that considerable number of them accept and believe them. This research serves as a foundation leading to the building of knowledge and awareness of rape myth. In general it is the wish of this study that findings of this study will serve as an avenue proving people with understanding of rape myth.

References

- Ackard, D. M., & Neumark-Sztainer, D. (2002). Date violence and date rape among adolescents: Associations with disordered eating behaviors and psychological health. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 26(5), 455–473. doi:10.1016/S0145-2134(02)00322-8.
- Larimer, M., Lydum, A. R., Anderson, B. K., & Turner, A. P. (1999). Male and female recipients of unwanted sexual contact in a college student sample: Prevalence rates, alcohol use, and depression symptoms. *Sex Roles*, 40, 295–308. doi:10.1023/A:1018807223378.
- Lee, R. & Jordan, J. (2014). Sexual assault. In L. Jackson-Cherry & B. Erford (Eds.), *Crisis assessment, intervention, and prevention* (2nd ed.), pp. 193–217. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2016). Relationship between household behaviour and malaria prevalence in Zamfara state Nigeria: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Public Health and Clinical Sciences*, 3(1), 2289–7577.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2015). Malaria as a cause of morbidity and mortality: A socio-economic overview. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences (Online)*, 5(8), 2225–484.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2021). The role of poverty and household economic conditions to the treatment of malaria in Zamfara state North West Nigeria. *Journal of Social and Development Sciences*, 6(2), 30–36.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2015). Influence of religion on malaria control practices among household heads in Zamfara state North West Nigeria. *Journal of Culture, Society and Development* 10, 78-84. Retrieved from www.iiste.org.

- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2015). Influence of household behaviour on malaria control in Zamfara state North West Nigeria: A pilot study for instruments validation. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*,6(3 S2), 183.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2015). A Conceptual Overview of the Effect of Household Behaviour on Malaria Control and Prevention. *Proceedings of USM International Conference on Social Sciences 2015*. 174-178 eISBN 978-967- 11473-3-7.
- Maigemu, A. Y., & Haji Hassan, K. (2015). Household Behaviour as Caused of Malaria Prevalence: A Qualitative Study in Zamfara State North West Nigeria. *E-proceedings of the International Conference on Social Science Research, ICSSR*. 230-239 e-ISBN 978-967-0792-04-0.
- National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] & ICF Macro (2004). *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey*. Abuja: National Population Commission and ICT Macro.
- Perilloux, C., Duntley, J. D., & Buss, D. M. (2012). The costs of rape. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 41(5), 1099–1106. doi:10.1007/s10508-011-9863-9.
- Ullman, S. E., Relyea, M., Peter-Hagene, L., & Vasquez A. L. (2013). Trauma histories, substance use coping, PTSD, and problem substance use among sexual assault victims. *Addictive Behaviors*, 38(6), 2219–2223. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh. 2013.01.027.
- Walker, J., Archer, J., & Davies, M. (2005). Effects of rape on men: A descriptive analysis. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 34(1), 69–80. doi:10.1007/s10508-005-1001-0.
- Zamfara Agricultural Development Project (ZADP), (2008).

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).