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**Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault in a U.K. Male Sample:  
Barriers to Reporting and the Impacts of Victimisation**

## **Abstract**

The present study explored the prevalence of myths about male sexual assault, assault by penetration and rape in a male general population sample (N = 98; mean age = 26.17 years), with the aim of determining potential barriers to the reporting of incidents of male sexual victimisation and reasons for reluctance to report. In addition, the impacts of prior experience of male sexual victimisation, both direct and indirect, on rape and sexual assault myth acceptance and on attitudes to reporting were evaluated. Participants completed an online survey indicating their levels of agreement with a range of statements reflecting different rape and sexual assault myths identified within the previous literature. Overall, there were high levels of disagreement (> 90%) with the majority of the statements. The only items generating higher agreement ratings were those suggesting that the police are unlikely to take male sexual victimisation seriously and – where the offence in question was sexual assault or assault by penetration and the perpetrator female – that men should be able to defend themselves against such crimes. Those without any prior experience of male sexual victimisation tended to disagree more with the rape myths than those with previous experience. When asked whether they would report these offences if they were to happen to them; participants said that they were more likely to report each of the types of offences when the perpetrator was male than when they were female. Potential implications of the findings, for male sex offence investigations and for the criminal justice system more generally, are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Around 400,000 females and around 72,000 males report being the victim of a sexual offence in the U.K. each year (Home Office, 2013). On average, of the total reported sex offences (including attempts) reported, around 85% are reported by women. Only 15% of all complaints of sexual assault, assault by penetration and rape are made by men.

An extensive literature has examined female victimisation and sex offences (c.f. Hovarth, 2009), exploring the factors that lead women to report or prevent them from reporting (e.g. Wolitzjky-Taylor, Resnick, McCauley, Amstadter, Kilpatrick & Ruggiero, 2011), their engagement in the criminal justice process (e.g. Patterson & Tringali, 2015), how complaints made by women are likely to be handled within the criminal justice system (e.g. Brown, Hamilton & O'Neill, 2007) and factors impacting upon the likely outcome of sex offences (e.g. Lea, Lanvers & Shaw, 2003; Kelly, Lovett & Regan, 2005).

In contrast, relatively little empirical attention has been paid to male sex offence victimisation. As Chapleau, Oswald and Russell (2008) discuss; although the need to examine male victims of sexual offences became apparent very quickly after researchers began examining female rape, researchers have been very slow to respond to these issues. Recently, there have been calls for more studies into male rape and sexual assault, in order to establish the actual prevalence of these offences (c.f. Burrowes & Hovarth, 2013), to seek answers to the question of why so few males report sexual victimisation (e.g. Sable, Danis, Mauzy & Gallagher, 2006), and to determine the factors that might impact upon the processing and likely outcomes of male rape and sexual assault (Hohl & Stanko, 2015).

It has long been recognised that the factors that influence male reporting of sex offences are likely to vary considerably from those that promote or hinder female reporting (Pino & Meier, 1999), although there has been little research into what these differences might be, or into the factors or processes that might underlie such differences.

It has been suggested that one particularly pertinent factor that is likely to impact both upon whether male sexual victimisation is likely to be reported and how likely cases are then to proceed and progress through the criminal justice process is the prevalence and acceptance of rape myths within society (Chapleau et al., 2008; Turchik & Edwards (2012), for example, discuss how false stereotypes may lead to under-reporting of male rape and male sexual violence, as men may fear how they will be judged and expect that their complaint might not be taken seriously. Javaid (2014) too discusses how public perceptions and the gendering of sexual offences in society mean that male victims tend to be either overlooked or under-represented in official figures on rape and sex offences.

Research is needed to map the uncharted terrain of male rape myth acceptance (Chapleau et al., 2008), in order to ascertain its impacts on male reporting of sexual violence victimisation. Further, consideration needs to be given to how male rape myths are likely to feed into, and resonate throughout, criminal justice processes. It is these issues with which the present study is concerned.

### ***Definitions***

The following definitions are provided by Sexual Offences Act of 2003, and will be referred to throughout the ensuing discussion:

Sexual Assault: “*A person commits the offence of sexual assault if he/she intentionally sexually touches another person who does not consent to the touching*”.

Assault by Penetration: “*A person commits the offence of assault by penetration when he/she intentionally penetrates the vagina or anus of another person, who does not consent with a part of his/her body or anything else*”.

Rape: “*A person commits the offence of rape if he intentionally penetrates the vagina, anus or mouth of another person, who does not consent to the penetration, with his penis*”.

## **Background**

### *The Classification of Male Sex Offences*

Up until 1994 there was no such offence as male rape under English law; rather, the only related crime classification was that of buggery (unconsenting penile-anal penetration) (McLean, 2013). This carried a much lesser charge than the equivalent offence of the rape of a female (a 10 year maximum sentence as opposed to life imprisonment). The Sex Offences Act (1956) was then amended in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) so as to include male rape. In the 2003 Sex Offences Act the current definitions were introduced.

The laying out of sexual assault and rape as offences for which males could too be victims was welcomed by many, and has been suggested to have promoted a greater recognition of male sexual victimisation (c.f. Rumney, 2009). However, the new definitions have also caused a lot of controversy. McLean (2013) and others have argued that a lack of consideration of the full range of ways in which males might be victims of sexual offences has impacted upon both reporting and prosecution rates for such offences. By maintaining that the crime of rape can only be committed by penile penetration, they argue, the definitions employed suggest that the offence can only be committed by males (McLean, 2013). This, they contend, denies the actuality of rape as an offence, and is likely to cause misunderstandings within society as to what the crime is constituted of (Abdullah-Khan, 2008), generating false perceptions as to the true nature of rape (Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

A further complexity is the fact that different justice systems in different countries employ substantially different definitions in detailing the nature and forms that sex offences can take. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice defines rape as:

*“Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim”*

(The United States Department of Justice)

As such, offences that would be classified as a 'sexual assault' in the U.K. would be fall under the definition of 'rape' in the U.S.. 'Assault by Penetration' is not a distinct offence category or a usable classification in most places; more typically it is included as part of the defined offence of rape.

Complicating matters further still, many states and countries do not acknowledge female-perpetrated sexual coercion as a prosecutable type of sexual aggression, and do not recognize male rape or even male sexual assault if it is committed by a woman (Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

Such definitional ambiguities, Fisher and Pina (2013) argue, serve to minimise the severity of male sexual victimisation, which in turn discourages reporting amongst male victims and has notable implications for the progression of complaints of male sexual violence through the criminal justice system.

### *The Nature and Prevalence of Male Sexual Victimisation*

These ambiguities regarding the definitions of sexual offences, and in particular the previous lack of legal recognition of male rape, have ensured that statistics regarding its prevalence have generally been low (Gregory and Lees, 2002). As such, it is difficult to get an accurate estimate as to what the true prevalence of male sexual victimisation has been and what it currently is, or of how rates are changing over time.

Since it was first legally recognised in 1994, there has been a significant increase in the number of offences of male rape recorded year-on-year by the police in England and Wales (Rumney 2009). In 1995, 150 offences of male rape recorded by the police. Ten years later, for 2004–05, the figure was 1,135. In 2011-12, around 1,250 incidents of male rape were reported (Home Office Statistics).

However, numerous researchers propose that the actual prevalence of male rape, and of male sexual victimisation more generally, is likely to be far higher (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Rumney, 2009; Burrowes & Hovarth, 2013). Sexual crime is known to have a notoriously low reporting rate (Kelly et al., 2005; Burrowes & Hovarth, 2013) and research suggests that this is particularly true for male victims (Sable et al., 2006; Burrowes & Hovarth, 2013).

Coxell, King, Mezey and Gordon (1999) conducted a study of 2,474 males, and found that, of these, 3% had experienced non-consensual sex as adults and 5% had experienced non-consensual sex as children. Only two of the forty men who reported having had non-consensual sex with men reported their victimisation to the police (Coxell et al., 1999). Abdullah-Khan (2008) finds a reporting rate for male rape and sexual assault of between 8% and 44%. Rumney (2009), on the basis of a review of the literature, puts the reporting rate at between 12-20%, but cautions that we cannot fully gauge how reliable such figures are.

Of the male rape and sexual assault offences that are reported, most are perpetrated by other males (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). Studies of male victims who sought treatment as a result of sexual victimisation show that only 6-15% of offences were committed by females. This might partly be due to a reluctance to report victimisation at the hands of a woman (Chapleau et al., 2008), or down to how then men themselves view and define their victimisation experience. Research has shown that many men who experience something that would legally qualify as rape do not label their experiences as such, and that one of the main reasons for not labelling the experience as sexual abuse or rape is that the perpetrator of the offence was female (Artime, McCallum & Peterson, 2014). Indeed, it has been contended that one of the main reasons for not reporting victimisation and/or for not proceeding with a sexual victimisation complaint is that it is not acknowledged by the victim as having been a sexual crime (c.f. Artime et al., 2014). This, it is argued, relates to the way in which victims, along with the rest of society, view and classify sexual offences.



*Male Rape Myths*

Turchik and Edwards (2012) discuss how that the invisibility and marginalization of male sexual victimisation results – in large part – from the prevalence and perpetuation of rape myths. Rape myths are “prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980, p. 217). These include beliefs such as the victim deserving the act of rape or sexual assault as a consequence of their actions or choices, or that victims even encourage the offence (wholly or in part). Other myths make reference to the prevalence of false allegations and the likely veracity of victims. Many revolve around false notions of what a ‘real rape’ constitutes, including what happens during the event and how the victim is expected to react.

Whilst mostly untrue, a considerable body of research has demonstrated that many of these myths are widely held in general populations (e.g. Grub & Turner, 2012). Flowe, Shaw, Nye and Jamel (2009) discuss how such beliefs originate from a variety of sources, including the media. Acceptance of rape myths has also been shown to directly relate to past experience (Hammond & Calhoun, 2007).

Rape myths have been shown to play a central role in the misperceptions and treatment of female rape victims (Chapleau et al., 2008). However, as Turchik & Edwards (2012) discuss; there has been a dearth of scholarship about rape myths concerning male victims. Research in the area is lagging, particularly in comparison to work surrounding female-centred rape myths (Chapleau et al., 2008), and most of the studies that have explored male rape myths have either been based on hypothetical conjecture, or have relied upon limited and non-generalisable samples (e.g. college samples) (Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

A number of male rape myths have been posited to exist in the literature. These are summarised by Turchik & Edwards (2012):

## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

- That men cannot be raped
- That 'Real' men can defend themselves against rape
- That only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape
- That men are not affected by rape (or not as affected as women are)
- That a woman cannot sexually assault a man
- That male rape only happens in prisons
- That sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality
- That homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant
- That if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it

(Turchik & Edwards, 2012; p. 211-212)

Those myths that have been suggested by researchers to be the most prevalent are those revolving around the notion that it is impossible for a man to be sexually assaulted or raped by a woman (including related myths such as that male rape is something that only occurs between homosexual men, that men have to be aroused or to respond in order for anything to happen and that therefore they must have wanted it, or that a man would be strong enough to defend himself against a woman). Coxell and King (1996) propose that this is because people are socialised to believe that women are sexually passive and men are sexual initiators, and it is therefore difficult for them to imagine a dominant woman coercing an unwilling man to have sex. Davies and Rogers (2006) suggest that many view the sexual assault and rape of men by women as implausible.

The findings of a study by Smith, Pine & Hawley (1988) were the first to demonstrate the existence of such common misconceptions. When asked to rate a range of different sexual violence scenarios, participants perceived a male victim of a female-perpetrated assault as

more likely to have encouraged the assault, enjoyed the encounter, and thus to have experienced little trauma.

To our knowledge, only two studies have examined rates of male rape myth acceptance directly. The first of these was conducted by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson in 1992. To assess the prevalence and acceptance of male rape myths, they developed a scale around three general beliefs: (a) that male rape does not happen; (b) that rape is the victim's fault, and; (c) that men would not be traumatized by rape victimisation. 315 college students (157 male and 158 female) rated their agreement with a number of statements reflecting these different beliefs, with the genders of the victims and perpetrators manipulated across the statements. They found that the majority of the sample disagreed with the statements, with respondents disagreeing most strongly with the myths surrounding traumatisation (or lack thereof). Females had significantly higher levels of disagreement across the statements than males. The myths that were most likely to be accepted (with the lowest levels of disagreement) were those in which the rape perpetrator was female and the victim male. There were no significant effects of past experience with sexual coercion in relation to the ratings given.

A second study, conducted by Chapleau et al. in 2008, presented 423 college students (276 females and 147 males) with a range of male rape myths, and asked the participants to indicate the degree to which they agreed with them. They found that the male respondents were significantly more supportive of male rape myths than the female respondents, particularly for those myths reflecting the idea that male rape victims are responsible for their having been raped. The lowest levels of agreement were observed for statements reflecting the notion that 'men cannot be raped'. Overall, between 2.7 - 45.9% of men and 1.5 - 23.4% of women indicated at least some level of agreement with the myths; rates similar to those observed in the earlier study by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992).

Chapleau et al. (2008) concluded by suggesting that male rape myth scales need to be developed, so as to include more items reflecting other misconceptions that are likely to be prevalent in society. Further; they suggest that more detailed research into the area is certainly warranted, in order to ascertain how such myths develop, who believes them, and how they function in determining attitudes towards male victims of rape.

Turchik and Edwards (2012) suggest that research needs to employ larger and more diverse samples in order to more reliably estimate the prevalence and general acceptance of male rape myths. Such samples, they propose, would allow differences amongst sub-groups to be examined, which would enable patterns of myth endorsement to be ascertained and tracked.

#### *Barriers to Reporting Male Sexual Victimization*

Chapleau et al. (2008) discuss how male rape myths are embedded into today's society, and suggest that - even though untrue - they can escalate into barriers that prevent men from reporting sexual victimisation. The ways in which rape myths may serve to prevent males from reporting sexual assault or rape are two-fold; firstly, they might not themselves perceive what happened to actually constitute a sexual violation, or may not deem it important and/or serious enough to report. Secondly, they may fear how they will be judged by others; by their family and friends, by the police and by the general public.

As evidence for the former; Arttime et al. (2014), in their study of 323 men who completed an online survey found that only 24% of rape victims used the labels of sexual abuse and rape. The majority of the sample did not view what had happened to them as a serious sexual violation (that warranted reporting and/or investigative/legal action). Correlates of acknowledgment of their victimisation included the offender's use of force and a male rather than a female perpetrator.

With regards to the latter; Davis et al. (2009) discuss in detail how for many male victims embarrassment, stigma or fear of not being believed stops them from reporting sexual offences. Biased legal definitions, myths, feminist theory, and stereotypical or negative beliefs, Fisher and Pina (2013) argue, create a problematic social environment for male victims of sexual assault to report crimes. This is likely to be particularly true if the perpetrator of the assault is female.

Davis et al. (2009) also suggest that many avoid reporting as they deem the assault to 'not be serious enough' for police involvement. These propositions are supported by the findings of a number of studies which have shown that men are more likely to report a rape when they can demonstrate they could have not protected themselves and that they were overpowered by the perpetrator. For example; men (and – indeed women) have been found to be more likely to report victimisation when there is physical evidence of the crime to corroborate their claims (Pino & Meier, 1999). Ellis (2002) discusses how male rape survivors often do not seek help unless they consider that the trauma is severe enough to warrant attention. Tewksbury (2007) too suggests that often male victims only seek medical or mental health help if significant injuries are suffered during an assault and immediate care is necessary.

Another, related, reason that men may not report sexual victimisation is that they don't believe that their case will be taken seriously by police or law enforcement agencies, and that – as such – it is unlikely to ever result in a prosecution or conviction. Jamel, Bull and Sheridan (2008) suggest that prevalence of commonly-held myths regarding the ways in which male victims are perceived and likely to be treated have led to male victims experiencing a lack of confidence in the judicial system.

Another possible factor impacting upon reporting rates for male sexual offences is the severe lack of information on male sexual assault and rape available within the public realm

and, relatedly, the lack of appropriate support services available to male victims (Scarce, 1997). These societal shortfalls, Chapleau et al. (2008) argue, are likely to have a notable impact on the decision of whether or not to go to the police or to seek help for victimisation.

One of the first of the few studies which have directly examined the reasons why men do not report incidents of sexual victimisation was conducted by King and Woollett in 1997. They examined the cases of 115 male victims of rape and sexual assault. Of these, only 17 victims reported their victimisation to the police and/or authorities. Eight of those who did report said that they found the police to have been helpful, and five said that they felt that the police reaction had been negative. The findings of Walker, Archer and Davies (2005) portray a similar picture; in their study of 40 male rape victims, only five reported the offence to the police. Only one of these said that he found the police to be responsive and helpful; the others all reported that they found the police to be unsympathetic, disinterested, and homophobic, and overall, felt that their complaint was not taken seriously.

### *The Present Study*

From the preceding discussion, it is clear that official figures on rates of male sexual victimisation are likely to underestimate the true prevalence of male sexual assault and rape. This is likely to be, in large part, down to the reluctance of men to report their victimisations; figures from previous research support this proposition.

Initial findings from studies looking at the prevalence and rates of acceptance of male rape myths provide one means of explicating potential barriers to reporting; however, research has yet to empirically examine the relationship(s) between male rape myth acceptance and likelihood of reporting.

The present study sought to evaluate levels of acceptance of rape myths in a general population sample. In addition to those myths examined in previous studies (c.f. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson, 1992; Chapleau et al., 2008), separate myths relating to sexual assault, assault by penetration and rape were included, in order to see whether the specific offence category had any impact on rates of acceptance of different forms of rape myth. In addition, the gender of the perpetrator was manipulated across the different rape myths presented, in order to ascertain whether this impacted upon levels and likelihood of rape myth subscription.

Relationships between rape myth acceptance and likelihood of reporting were subsequently examined. Respondents were asked whether they would report each of these offences if they were to happen to them, and in instances where they said that they would not report they were asked to explicate the reasons why. This qualitative approach was adopted in order to provide a more detailed understanding of when and under what circumstances men would or would not report sexual victimisation.

The impacts of prior experience of male sexual victimisation were also explored; participants were asked about their direct and indirect previous experience of male sexual crime, and the responses of those with experience compared to those without. This was with the aim of obtaining further insights into potential sources of rape myths and individual factors that might make an individual more or less susceptible to believing them.

A general population sample was used, as – to date – studies have only used college samples which, as Turchik & Edwards (2012) discuss, might be biased or unrepresentative for a variety of reasons. This sample was drawn from the U.K.; at present, there are no published figures on rates of male rape myth acceptance for British samples, and so an additional aim of the research was to determine how rates vary compared with those reported for U.S. samples.

## **Method**

### *Sample*

Participants were recruited via adverts on social media sites and through email distribution, using a snowball sampling method. The final sample consisted of 98 male participants, all currently resident in the U.K., ranging from 19 to 58 years of age ( $M = 26.17$ ;  $S.D. = 4.176$ ). In terms of ethnicity; the majority of the sample (95%) were white, three (3%) were black and 2 (2%) were 'other'. Eighty-one (83%) of the sample classified themselves as heterosexual, 8 (8%) as homosexual, seven (7%) as bisexual and two (2%) were 'other'. Almost half of the sample (44; 45%) were currently employed, eight (8%) were self-employed, 45 (46%) were currently students and one was retired. For most, the highest level of education was a university undergraduate degree (60%); 19% listed sixth form as their highest level of education, 18 had completed postgraduate education or doctorates, one specified that they had attained other forms of qualification and one reported his highest level of education as secondary school.

### *Procedure*

Participants completed an online survey comprised of sets of myths about male sexual assault, assault by penetration and rape. Statements reflecting commonly-held rape myths were derived from a review of the literature<sup>1</sup>, and presented in three sub-sections of the questionnaire, one for each of the three offence types.

In each sub-section, the legal definition of that offence classification (i.e. sexual assault, assault by penetration and rape) was provided, and participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement (on a scale of 1 – 5; strongly agree – strongly disagree) with each of

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<sup>1</sup> Many of these were adapted from the Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) Male Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, but more recently identified myths – such as those discussed by Turchik & Edwards (2012) - were also included.



the statements presented (e.g. “The police would not take it seriously if a man were sexually assaulted by a woman”). They were also asked whether, if they were the victim of such offences (perpetrated by both a female and by a male), they would report their victimisation (Yes/No), and what their reasons were for this decision.

Basic demographic information was collected from each participant, and they were also asked to indicate a) whether they themselves had been a victim of any of these offences or b) whether anyone they knew had been a victim of these offences.

Participation was entirely voluntary, and it was made clear to participants that they could stop at any time, and that they did not to answer any questions that they did not feel comfortable with.

## **Results**

### *Direct and Indirect Experience of Victimisation Reported by Participants*

In terms of direct experience of sexual violence victimisation; twelve of the respondents (12%) reported that they had previously been a victim of sexual assault, one respondent said that they had been a victim of assault by penetration, and two participants indicated that they had previously been raped.

In total, 46% of the sample reported having had some indirect experience of sexual violence victimisation (Table 1), with 23 (24%) stating that they knew someone who had been the victim of male sexual assault, 10 (10%) indicating that they knew a male victim of assault by penetration, and 12 (12%) reporting that they knew someone who had been a victim of male rape.

Table 1

*Levels of Agreement with Sexual Assault Myths*

Participants responses regarding their acceptance of myths relating to male victimisation and perpetration of sexual assault are summarised below in Table 2.

Table 2

On the whole, acceptance of the different myths was low, with more than 90% either indicating that they either ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’ with the majority of the statements. The main exceptions to this trend were the following two statements: *‘Men can defend themselves from sexual assaults’*, with which more than a third of the sample ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ (and a further 20% indicated that they were unsure about), and *‘The police won’t take it seriously if a woman sexually assaults a man’*, with which more almost 60% either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’, and about which another 20% were unsure. There was also moderate agreement (with 18% of the sample indicating agreement and 21% indicating uncertainty) with the statement *‘The police won’t take it seriously if a man sexually assaults another man’*.

*Levels of Agreement with Assault by Penetration Myths*

With regards to statements reflecting myths regarding assault by penetration, there was only one statement for which participants reported high agreement ratings: *‘The police won’t take it seriously if a woman assaulted a man by penetration’*. A quarter of the sample stated that they ‘agreed’ with this statement, and a further 14% said that they strongly agreed with it. Another 25% indicated that they were ‘uncertain’ with regards to whether they agreed or disagreed with this statement. Lower levels of agreement were reported for the statement *‘The police won’t take it seriously if a man assaulted another man by penetration’* (with 15%

of the sample indicating that they either agreed or strongly agreed), although these were higher than those for any of the other four statements (which each had agreement ratings of less than 10%); see Table 3.

Table 3

### *Levels of Agreement with Rape Myths*

Levels of agreement with male-focused rape myths are presented in Table 4. Seventeen participants (17%) indicated that they either ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement ‘*Rape is just unwanted sex*’. Whilst the majority of the sample either disagreed (36%) or strongly disagreed (37%) with the statement ‘*The police won’t take it seriously if a man is raped by another man*’, 11% of the sample indicated that a level of agreement with it (9% agreed and 2% strongly agreed). However, for the statement ‘*The police won’t take it seriously if a man is raped by a woman*’, much higher levels of agreement were observed (with 25% indicating that they ‘agreed’ with it and a further 15% stating that they ‘strongly agreed’ with it).

Table 4

Chi-square analyses showed that there were no significant differences in the agreement ratings provided in relation for the sexual assault, assault by penetration or rape myths between those respondents who classified themselves as ‘heterosexual’ and those who indicated that their sexual orientation was ‘homosexual’, ‘bisexual’ or ‘other’. In addition, chi-square analyses found no significant differences in relation to any of the other demographic characteristics recorded for the sample.

*Determining the Impact of Prior Experience or Victimization*

Mann-Whitney U tests were used to compare the average levels of agreement between those who had any previous experience of male sexual victimisation (either direct or indirect) and those who reported no previous experience of such offences.

There were significantly higher levels of agreement for those with prior experience of male sexual victimisation for the following male sexual assault myths:

- ‘Men cannot be sexually assaulted’ (U = 786.00 (Z = -2.54); p < 0.05)
- ‘If a man is sexually assaulted by another man, he is likely to become homosexual’ (U = 695.00 (Z = -2.97); p < 0.001)
- ‘An erection or ejaculation during a sexual assault means that you “really wanted it” or consented to it’ (U = 737.50 (Z = -2.15); p < 0.05)
- ‘Only homosexual men are sexually assaulted’ (U = 769.50 (Z = -2.19); p < 0.05)
- ‘Men are less traumatised from the experience of sexual assault than women’ (U = 770.00 (Z = -2.12); p < 0.05)

For only one statement were the levels of agreement significantly higher for those with no prior experience; ‘The police won’t take it seriously if a woman sexually assaults a man’ (U = 695.50 (Z = -2.39); p < 0.05).

For statements relating to assault by penetration, those with prior experience of sexual victimisation reported significantly higher levels of agreement with the following;

- ‘If you are assaulted by penetration you definitely wanted it to happen’ (U = 743.00 (Z = -3.05); p < 0.01)
- ‘The police won’t take it seriously if a woman assaulted a man by penetration’ (U = 704.00 (Z = -2.37); p < 0.05)

- ‘The police won’t take it seriously if a man assaulted another man by penetration’ (U = 683.50 (Z = -2.57); p < 0.05)

For the male rape myths there were significant differences between those with and without prior experience of male sexual victimisation for the following;

- ‘When rape happens, the individual was asking for it’ (U = 729.00 (Z = -2.80); p < 0.01)
- ‘The police won’t take it seriously of a woman raped a man’ (U = 709.00 (Z = -2.10); p < 0.05).

Those with prior experience displayed higher levels of agreement with both of these statements.

### *Reporting to the Police*

When asked “If you were to be sexually assaulted by a woman, would you report the incident to the police?”, 44 (45%) of the men stated that they would not. The primary reason cited for not reporting was that they did not think that the police would take the complaint seriously and did not think that they would take any action with regards to the allegation (12 respondents). Five of the men said that they would not report the offence due to feelings of embarrassment or shame, and the remainder did not provide a reason for why they would not report the crime. When asked the same question but with a male perpetrator (i.e. “if you were to be sexually assaulted by a man, would you report the incident to the police?”), 23 (23.5%) of the sample stated that they would not. Five said that this was because they did not believe that the police would take it seriously or act on the report, and three said that they would be too embarrassed or ashamed to tell anyone what had happened. To this question many of the respondents indicated that whether or not they would report the offence depending on both the circumstances and severity of the assault.

To the question “If you were to be assaulted by penetration by a woman, would you report the incident to the police?”, 32 of the respondents (33%) answered no. Thirteen said that they didn’t believe that the police would take it seriously, and/or feared that they wouldn’t be believed. Eight described how the shame embarrassment that they believed they would experience in those circumstances had impacted upon their decision that they would not report. When the perpetrator of an assault by penetration was male, fourteen participants said that they would not report the offence; five of these because they didn’t think that they would be believed, and five because they felt they would be too embarrassed.

Finally, when asked about reporting rape offences; 32 (33%) said that they wouldn’t report the offence to the police if it was committed by a woman, and 11 (11%) said that they wouldn’t report the crime if the perpetrator was male. As explanation as to why they wouldn’t report female-perpetrated rape victimisation, fifteen of the men said that they didn’t think the complaint would be taken seriously and that no action would be taken because of the difficulty of proving rape/lack of supportive evidence, and five said that they would be too embarrassed to report the crime. A further five said that they believed the police would be gender-biased, and would not be likely to place much impetus on the severity of the offence. When the perpetrator of the rape was male, five men explained that they wouldn’t report the incident to the police as they didn’t think it would be taken seriously, and three said that they wouldn’t report for reasons of shame/embarrassment.

### **Discussion**

Overall, the mean levels for support for the male rape myths examined in the present study were relatively low. Most of the participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the majority of the statements presented. As such, acceptance of rape myths was lower than might be expected on the basis of previous works in the area.

However, there were a number of the rape myths that participants were found to be more likely to subscribe to, which were seemingly more commonly-held across the sample. For sexual assault, participants were likely to agree or strongly agree with statements regarding the fact that the police would not take such offences seriously. Agreement ratings were highest when the perpetrator of these offences was female. Participants were less likely to agree with these myths when the offence was assault by penetration, although again agreement ratings were higher when the perpetrator was female. For rape, the majority of the sample believed that the police would take a complaint seriously if a man were raped by another man, but almost half of the participants did not think that a complaint would be taken seriously if a man were raped by a woman.

Further; when the offence in question was sexual assault, participants indicated higher levels of agreement with statements such as 'Men can defend themselves from sexual assault', showing that there is a persistent belief that male victims have a degree of responsibility for their victimisation of such offences.

These findings are similar to those reported by both Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson (1992) and Chapleau et al. (2008). Both of these studies found that members of the general public were more likely to accept myths in which the perpetrators were female rather than male. They also found that notable proportions of their samples endorsed the opinion that a man should be able to protect themselves from becoming a victim of such offences.

These kinds of myths, Turchik and Edwards (2012) argue, are those that stem directly from prevalent gender stereotypes and social norms regarding masculinity and male sexuality.

The findings presented here offer notable insights into the ways in which male sexual victimisation is currently viewed by men in the United Kingdom. In particular, many seem to believe that the police are unlikely to do anything about complaints of male sexual assault or rape, expressing doubts as to whether those reporting victimisation would be likely to be believed and/or taken seriously (particularly if the assailant were female). These perceptual biases manifested in responses given by participants as to whether or not they would report victimisation of any of these offences; across the board a high proportion indicated that if they were the victim of a sexual assault or rape they wouldn't report the offence to the police.

The most frequently cited reason for this was that they did not believe that the police would take them seriously, or that the case was likely to progress and/or result in a prosecution. One participant said *"I believe there is a lot of stigma around reporting to the police and do not believe they would take appropriate action"*. Another felt that the police *"wouldn't take it seriously and if they did, it's unlikely to get to trial"*. Many felt that it would be difficult to prove that the offence occurred. For example, one respondent said that *"It would be very difficult to prove that the act was non-consensual even if reported"*. Another said that *"based on the definition of rape provided by the Sexual Offences Act 2003, I would have to have an erection in order to be raped by a woman. I don't think I would be taken seriously as a result"*. This all accords with the propositions of Pino & Meir (1999), who suggested that general perceptions of sexual offences in society, stemming from media portrayals and general media coverage as well as from a range of other sources, were likely to lead to common misconceptions regarding how offences will be viewed and treated within investigative or judicial contexts.

Another frequently cited reason was that the respondents felt that they would be too embarrassed or ashamed to report their victimisation. One of the men said that *"I would be too ashamed to speak up"*. Another said that *"It would be degrading and embarrassing"*.



One respondent said that *"It would be like hell - I would rather die [than report it]"*. As such, the results support the arguments made by Turchik & Edwards (2012), who suggested that one of the main reasons for men not reporting offences is the fear of how they will be seen or judged, both by those around them and by society more generally.

In their responses, participants also indicated that they worried about the potential repercussions of their reporting their victimisation. One respondent said: *"I believe there is a lot of stigma around it, and would worry my family and friends would look at me differently"*. Another said that he would not report *"Due to social stigma; no one wants to be known as 'that guy'"*. Others said that they would feel emasculated as a result of victimisation – for example; *"I would feel emasculated and I believe people would treat me differently"*.

Many of the respondents said that whether or not they would report being the victim of a sexual offence would depend on the circumstances surrounding the event. One participant said, regarding sexual assault, *"Depending on the circumstances I would probably not report it unless it was particularly vicious and malicious and there was evidence that could lead to prosecution"*. Davies, Smith and Rogers (2009) also found that males were more likely not to report an offence if they deemed it not to be serious enough for the police to be likely to take it seriously. This also accords with the findings of Ellis (2002) and Tewksbury (2007), who showed that men were more likely to report victimisation when there was corroborative evidence or evidence of injury and/or serious physical harm. This, as Davis et al. (2009) discuss, is a harmful situation, as it means that all but the most severe cases are unlikely to be reported.

Across the board, respondents indicated that they were more likely to report if they were assaulted or raped by a male than by a female. Many of them felt that offences were less likely to be taken seriously if the perpetrator were female. Responses like *"Who would believe that 'she raped me'?"* were common.

Some felt that the law (and those involved in enforcing it) might be more likely to favour the side of the woman. For example; one man said that *“I feel it would spin out of control with he-said she-said accusations and currently I think the law system/public perception is in slight favour of the woman's view”*. Another said that he'd worry that *“fighting her off would then land me charges of assault!”*. One participant said that *“Everyone knows that there is still inequality between the sexes, and one major inequality is how the law room favours the women”*

Some of the men made reference to the gendering of sexual offences in society, and how that impacted on their likelihood of reporting an offence. One participant said that he felt that there is a prevalent attitude, *“That only women can be raped and only men are rapists”*. Another believed that *“British society still puts a certain emphasis on men being the strong ones that should be able to defend themselves from those considered weaker. Unfortunately for both men and women, Britain still practices gender inequality and women are some of those considered to be weaker than men”*. Quotes like these support the arguments made by Javiad (2014), who suggested that low reporting rates and the consequent under-representation of male victimisation in official figures on rape and sexual offences were likely to stem directly from the gendering and gender-biased perceptions of sexual offences within society.

Some respondents felt that if the perpetrator of the offence were female then the stigma and associated feelings of shame or embarrassment would be greater. For example, one said that: *“If the woman was stronger than me, forced herself on me and I was unable to physically resist her I would probably be less likely to tell anyone due to the feeling of shame”*. Another felt that *“Questions about masculinity would be brought up; for example - why I didn't have the strength to fight her off in the first place”*. Some participants even indicated that the general perception would be that they should enjoy it if a woman were to

sexually assault them; one said that *“Some might believe that I ought to be grateful for aggressive sexual attention from a woman”*. Another felt that *“I’d be laughed at, or told to stop complaining”*

A number of men also said they feared what family and friends would think or say about the incident because of the perpetrator being female. One man said, *“I doubt my friends or family would take it the same way as a male rapist”*. Another man stated, *“Only a few would believe me if I said it, but all would still have questions about how”*.

This all accords with the way in which female-perpetrated male sexual victimisation has been shown to be perceived by the general public in the previous literature, for example; in the studies of Smith et al. (1988) and Chapleau et al. (2008). These have shown that such offences are perceived to be less serious in nature, with many individuals questioning how and in what ways it is possible for a female to assault or rape a male (Fisher & Pina, 2013).

It was found that whether or not participants had prior experience of male sexual victimisation affected the responses that they gave.

In general, those with previous experience were more likely to agree with some of the statements relating to how cases of male victimisation might be dealt with by the police, suggesting that prior exposure has a negative impact on the perceived likelihood of positive outcomes for reported offences.

This might be the result of a negative experience; a possibility that Turchik and Edwards (2012) discuss. Findings suggest that less than half of male rape victims who report their assaults to the police feel that the police were helpful and that they dealt with their case appropriately. Many victims report that they found the police to be unsympathetic, disinterested and homophobic (Walker et al., 2005).

This also ties in with commonly reported findings regarding post-victimisation experiences of males, such as those presented by Walker, Archer & Davies (2005); male victims have been shown to suffer more long-term effects as a result of sexual victimisation than women, and one reason for this might be that the experience of reporting and the response that they receive after the fact is more negative for males, generating more negative post-event feelings and perceptions.

*The Implications and Potential Impacts of Biased Perceptions of Male Sexual Victimisation*

The findings presented here have notable implications for the recognition, reporting, investigation and processing of male sexual offences throughout all of the different stages of the criminal justice system. Firstly, they provide insight into potential barriers for the recognition of male rape and sexual assault as serious offences, ones that warrant reporting, investigative action, and/or prosecution. Both as a consequence of and in addition to this, they also demonstrate barriers to reporting male sexual victimisation. Many of these barriers take the form of widely prevalent rape myths. The combinatory effects of these different barriers are likely to contribute greatly to low reporting, low prosecution and low conviction rates for male sexual offences. These rates, in turn, are likely to generate higher levels of subscription to commonly held rape myths (such as those suggesting that the police won't take such crimes seriously or that these offences are likely to result in a conviction), thereby generating a self-perpetuating circle.

The sample utilised in the present study was comprised of a general population sample, and the views displayed are therefore likely to be – at least to some extent – reflective of those that prevail in general society. These may well manifest in groups of individuals who deal with victims of male sexual violence on a daily basis, such as police officers and law enforcement officials, lawyers, judges and jury members.

Flowe et al. (2009), for example, discuss how media representations of rape and associated public beliefs might impact upon rape prosecution on multiple levels, potentially influencing whether legal officials, from the police to jurors, find the victim believable and the perpetrator culpable. Turchik and Edwards (2012) suggest that male rape myths are not only prevalent among the general public and college students, but among counselors, medical trainees, law enforcement, and rape crisis workers as well, citing the work of Anderson & Quinn (2009), Donnelly & Kenyon (1996) and Kassing & Prieto (2003) as evidence.

Rumney (2009) reviewed the research on law enforcement services and attitudes toward male rape victims (particularly homosexual victims) and noted three main barriers to the recognition of male rape: (a) denying or minimizing male rape; (b) viewing male rape as less serious than other crimes, especially when homosexual victims are involved; and (c) blaming the victim.

Research needs to assess these impacts and influences of such barriers, establishing just how prevalent rape myths are amongst these groups, and to tackle head-on the potential repercussions of general rape myth acceptance in the management of male rape cases and in the treatment of male rape victims.

These findings for a sample of men in the UK suggest that many do not realise the severity of male sexual victimisation, and that most do not believe that they would receive appropriate support or treatment were they to be victimised and report their victimisation.

This emphasises the need for increased public awareness campaigns, to provide more accurate information about such offences and to encourage male victims to seek help, offering assurances that their cases will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

Du Mont, MacDonald, White and Turner (2013) propose that male-specific services and targeted support should be made more readily available. Enhanced support and more overt acceptance and recognition of male sexual victimisation would, as McLean, Balding and White (2004) discuss, lead to greater levels of reporting, as males find that their experiences and needs for assistance are acknowledged (McLean et al., 2004).

More recently, a number of positive changes have taken place in the UK which seek to promote accurate recognition of male sexual victimisation and better support for victims of male sexual violence. These are summarised by Turchik and Edwards (2012), and include the portrayal of male sexual victimisation in the popular literature and the implementation of targeted strategies for dealing with male sexual violence by the Ministry of Justice.

Research now needs, then, to assess the impact that changes are having on service provision and associated uptake (Du Mont et al., 2013). It is suggested that future research monitors these issues, and it is hoped that by providing some initial base rate figures that the present study will provide valuable assistance to such endeavours.

### *Limitations and Directions For Further Research*

The bulk of the limitations of the present research relate to the nature of the sample employed. Firstly, the sample was relatively small; further replications with larger samples are certainly warranted. Secondly, the sample was quite homogenous, in terms of characteristics and backgrounds. It would be interesting to see how acceptance of rape myths varies, for example; by background, profession, age and a range of other factors. Cultural comparisons would also be a fruitful direction for further research, as this might enable the sources of such rape myths to be explored to a greater extent. It could also be interesting to compare the findings from the present study with those for a general population sample of women.

Limitations also arise in relation to potential expectancy effects and social desirability factors. The possibility that participants provided what they deemed to be more socially acceptable responses cannot be ignored. This might be part of the reason why levels of myth acceptance were generally low. Quite how these effects might be countered in research paradigms is a challenge that future studies might seek to tackle in the methodologies that they utilise.

It must also be noted that, when discussing whether they would report male sexual victimisation if it were to happen to them, respondents were making their decisions in relation to hypothetical actions and on the basis of theoretical outcomes. It might be the case that their feelings and attitudes towards reporting may differ substantially if they had actually experienced victimisation. For this reason, the inferences made as to potential barriers to reporting are only tentative suggestions, and no firm conclusions as to the factors affecting male reporting behaviour can be drawn from the findings presented here.

Another potential reason for the low levels of male sexual assault and rape myth acceptance observed might also be the fact that participants were provided with definitions of each of the offences prior to completing the survey. Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992), in explicating similarly high levels of rape myth rejection, posited that by providing a definition of male rape in the instructions, they had “educated” their participants and dissipated the associated myths. Future research might employ a control group given no such definitions, in order to assess and counteract any such effects.

Finally, future studies could explore the potential benefits of information and education on levels of rape myth acceptance; for example – by providing different levels of factual information or explanatory materials and seeing how these impact upon the ratings of participants. This might enable the most productive means of countering rape myths and breaking down barriers to recognition and reporting to be established.

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## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

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## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

*Table 1:*

*Frequencies of Direct and Indirect Experience of Victimization Reported by Participants*

Question on direct and indirect experience	<i>N</i>	Yes	No
Have you previously been a victim of sexual assault?	98	12 (12%)	86 (88%)
Have you previously been a victim of assault by penetration?	97	1 (1%)	96 (98%)
Have you previously been a victim of rape?	96	2 (2%)	94 (96%)
Do you know anyone who has been a male victim of sexual assault?	98	23 (24%)	75 (76%)
Do you know anyone who has been a male victim of assault by penetration?	98	10 (10%)	88 (90%)
Do you know anyone who has been a male victim of rape?	98	12 (12%)	86 (88%)

## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

*Table 2:*

*Levels of Agreement With Sexual Assault Myths*

Sexual assault myths	<i>N</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Men cannot be sexually assaulted.	98	2 (2%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	12 (12%)	81 (83%)
Men can defend themselves from sexual assault.	98	7 (7%)	27 (28%)	20 (20%)	27 (28%)	17 (17%)
If a man is sexually assaulted by another man, he is likely to become homosexual.	98	0	0	7 (7%)	22 (22%)	69 (71%)
An erection or ejaculation during a sexual assault means you “really wanted it” or consented to it.	97	0	1 (1%)	6 (6%)	28 (29%)	62 (63%)
Only homosexual men are sexually assaulted.	97	0	0	1 (1%)	20 (20%)	76 (78%)
Men are less traumatized from the experience of sexual assault than women.	98	2 (2%)	5 (5%)	10 (10%)	17 (18%)	64 (65%)
The best way to get over the experience of sexual assault is for you to get on with your life and go back to normal.	97	3 (3%)	15 (15%)	34 (35%)	24 (25%)	21 (21%)
The police won’t take it seriously if a woman sexually assaults a man.	97	19 (19%)	39 (40%)	21 (21%)	12 (12%)	6 (6%)
The police won’t take it seriously if a man sexually assaults another man.	98	4 (4%)	14 (14%)	21 (22%)	46 (47%)	13 (13%)

## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

*Table 3:*

*Levels of Agreement with Assault by Penetration Myths*

Assault by penetration myths	<i>N</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Only homosexual men can assault by penetration.	98	0	1 (1%)	6 (6%)	25 (26%)	66 (67%)
If you are assaulted by penetration you definitely wanted it to happen.	98	0	1 (1%)	3 (3%)	13 (13%)	81 (83%)
Assault by penetration does not happen between heterosexual couples.	97	0	2 (2%)	10 (10%)	20 (20%)	65 (66%)
If you didn't fight back, you can't claim to have been assaulted by penetration.	98	0	7 (7%)	5 (5%)	24 (25%)	62 (63%)
The police won't take it seriously if a woman assaulted a man by penetration.	98	14 (14%)	26 (27%)	26 (27%)	19 (19%)	13 (13%)
The police won't take it seriously if a man assaulted another man by penetration.	98	3 (3%)	10 (10%)	21 (21%)	34 (35%)	30 (31%)

## Perceptions of Male Rape and Sexual Assault

*Table 4:*

*Levels of Agreement with Rape Myths*

Male rape myths	<i>N</i>	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagreed
Rape is just unwanted sex.	97	1 (1%)	16 (16%)	13 (13%)	36 (37%)	31 (32%)
Rape only happens to women.	97	0	4 (4%)	1 (1%)	21 (21%)	71 (72%)
If you are a big, strong man, you cannot be raped.	97	0	3 (3%)	3 (3%)	30 (31%)	61 (62%)
When rape happens, the individual was asking for it.	97	0	0	1 (1%)	17 (17%)	79 (81%)
You should enjoy it if a woman rapes you.	96	0	1 (1%)	5 (5%)	25 (26%)	65 (66%)
Men should not be affected by female rape.	96	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	7 (7%)	24 (25%)	63 (64%)
If you don't fight back, it's not rape.	96	0	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	19 (20%)	68 (69%)
Rape between homosexual couples does not exist.	96	0	0	0	27 (28%)	69 (70%)
The police won't take it seriously if a woman raped a man.	97	15 (15%)	25 (25%)	21 (21%)	23 (24%)	13 (13%)
The police won't take it seriously if a man raped another man.	97	2 (2%)	9 (9%)	15 (15%)	35 (36%)	36 (37%)