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EXPLORING VICTIM-BLAMING ATTITUDES ACROSS AGE GROUPS IN SEXUAL ASSAULT CASES: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND BIASES IN INDIA

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Abstract

This study examines the views of Indians from various age groups on victim blaming in sexual assault across culture, consent, and generations. Data were collected via a quantitative cross-sectional method using an online survey from 100 English-speaking participants with an age range that included 18 to 65, who belonged to one of five age categories. In addition to items pertaining to types of blame, beliefs about victims being at fault, consent, perpetrator responsibility, and institutional responsibility, six hypothetical scenarios of sexual assault were also presented. Results suggest that there were clear generational differences: young adults (18-35) have progressive attitudes, are far more resistant to victim blame, they argue more vehemently to implement reforms that would empower victims, introduce educational programs on gender egalitarianism, and consent. Adults in middle age (36-53) nicely balance recognising that systemic power imbalances exist and pushing for broad support and pragmatic, legal reform. Older adults (54-65) cling to their conservative values but do not condone victim-blaming, believe in moral leadership and new laws, and want the institutions to take responsibility. The results emphasize the need for age-based interventions. Interventions should target consent education and cultural change among young adults, combined support and legal interventions among middle-aged persons, and ethical leadership and culturally appropriate awareness among older persons. Using these generation-based lenses can increase initiatives to prevent victim blaming and enhance support for Indian sexual assault survivors.

Keywords: *Victim-Blaming, Sexual Assault, Consent, Generational Differences, Traditional Values, and Indian Cultural Norms*

INTRODUCTION

In India, victim-blaming continues as a persistent, detrimental problem. Cultural standards, gender assumptions that are difficult to change, as well as hierarchical authority structures influence responses to sexual violence from individuals and organizations. People who have survived are evaluated on behaviour, appearance, or wishes next to the perpetrator no longer becomes the focus. A culture of silence and shame emerges. Though awareness is increasing, only a few studies examine how opinions of victims and perpetrators differ among age groups in India. Studies present broad public opinions or center on particular types of victimization. Generational variation is not taken into account.

The present study addresses this lack of knowledge through a look at victim-blaming attitudes and biases. It examines five separate age groups: 18-27, 28-35, 36-44, 45-53, and 54-65 years. This happens through participants answers to six fictional stories. The stories show different types of sexual victimization. These include workplace harassment, marital rape, public transportation assault, child sexual abuse, assault on the way home next to breach of trust in a relationship. After each story comes a set of questions. These questions cover opinions of culpability, victim behaviour, cultural standards in addition to institutional accountability. This study seeks to understand how cultural views about consent and accountability affect judgments about victims and perpetrators. Generational norms also play a part. Through the revealing of prejudicial tendencies also the suggesting of important areas for

intervention, the study hopes to influence educational activities, regulatory reforms, along with public awareness campaigns. The goal is to encourage empathy, responsibility, as well as survivor-centered responses to sexual abuse. Finally, the findings will help to dismantle harmful narratives and create a more egalitarian and educated society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Understanding Victim Blaming and Causes

Victim blaming constitutes a societal and psychological reaction in which victims, especially of sexual violence, are viewed as contributing to or fully assuming the responsibility for their abuse. It takes the form, quite often, of skepticism, inquiry, or even outright accusation, resulting in what historians have identified as secondary victimization (Grubb and Turner, 2012). Theoretical models like Attribution Theory (Heider, 1958), and the Just World Hypothesis (Lerner & Simmons, 1966) tell us how people rationally attribute blame to victims in an attempt to explain, defend their worldview, or shield themselves from a perceived threat. Ryan (1971) went on to argue that victim blaming shifts focus from societal shortcomings reinforcing structural injustices.

Many different factors lead to the occurrence of victim-blaming attitudes. Some of the most common ideas include Rape Myth Acceptance (RMA), as they support or allow sexual assault because they are culturally ingrained (Suarez and Gadalla, 2010). Because of gender norms and sexism, males and supporters of regular gender roles are more likely to side with the abuser when looking at rape myths (Grubb & Harrower, 2009; Viki et al., 2004). When factors such as alcohol, seductive style, or a delay in informing authorities are added, it makes the accused guilty in the eyes of many, but things get even worse in honour-based, collectivist cultures like India (Nayak et al., 2003). The way the victim is involved matters a lot as well. Most often, it is the victim who is blamed for acquaintance rape, rather than when an attack occurs from a stranger (Bieneck & Krahé, 2011). These attitudes lead to survivors staying quiet, making it less likely for people to report violence, and also allow violence to be more accepted in society. It is important to know how psychological, cultural, and environmental factors work together to develop good therapies and prevent blaming the victims.

2.2 Cultural and Gender Norms in India and Victim-Blaming

India's sociocultural framework is shaped a lot by the idea that men are in charge and women should follow (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021). Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). They encourage the idea that people should accept questioning why women behave a certain way, thus making it possible to blame victims in cases of sexual assault. According to the community, women need to stay chaste, modest, and obedient to uphold the good name of the household (Jain, Kaur, & Jain, 2023). "In the case of deviating from the rules by staying out late, choosing a certain style of dress, or engaging in sex before marriage, violence often follows (Bhattacharyya, 2009).

Nayak et al. (2003) looked into how set ways in a culture can make some blame the victim in cases of home harm and sexual attacks. They noted that the strong belief for women to act under control is key in forming this bad way of thinking. Common myths about rape, such as the idea that "good" women can't be raped, are widespread and reflected in societal attitudes as well as institutional responses (Burt, 1980; Bhattacharyya, 2015). The media often makes things worse by depicting victims in ways that highlight their personal lives or "mistakes," particularly in cases of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA), instead of holding the perpetrators accountable. Mittal et al. (2017) looked into how acquaintance rape is frequently ignored in India due to cultural beliefs about consent and male pursuit. Victims are often blamed for "leading on" their attackers or not resisting forcefully enough. This victim-blaming not only hinders their access to justice and support but also breeds skepticism from police, family, and caregivers. Rani et al. found that this blame adds to psychological distress, including feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation, which can prevent many from seeking the help they need. In conclusion, cultural norms in India fuel victim blaming and block justice, especially for marginalized women. Challenging these biases is vital to support survivors.

2.3 Generational Differences in Attitudes towards Victim Blaming

Psychological, social, and cultural factors influence victim blaming—blaming victims rather than perpetrators. Generational differences play a major role: older people, influenced by traditional gender culture, are more likely to blame victims, while younger people, with a more casual culture. Manvi Chauhan (2022) found older people are more likely to endorse rape myths, so age matters.

According to Vranda and Lobo (2023), #MeToo encourages young people to question the narrative. Older generations are impacted by outdated media portrayals of victim's behaviour. Education and social status also matter. Sivakumar and Manimekalai (2021) found that higher education and wealth levels

reduce victim blaming across generations. Grubb and Turner (2012) found that older adults still hold "just world" attitudes, assuming victims are responsible for their misfortune, views that are less common among younger generations brought up in a more egalitarian environment. These generational gaps have implications for policy and prevention. The younger generation's rejection of victim blaming is in line with promoting empathy, consent, and gender equality. Continued education and ethical media portrayal are key to help victims and eliminate blame culture across all age groups.

2.4 Consent and Responsibility in Victim Blaming

According to Indian law, consent is defined as a clear and expressed desire to have sex under Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Consent can be revoked at any time and must be freely provided without coercion. One important aspect in determining the incidence of rape is the lack of consent. However, traditional cultural beliefs have shaped India's legal framework around consent, which frequently leads to the spread of victim-blaming, in which the victim's actions are emphasized rather than the perpetrator's (Gupta, B. D., & Chavali, K. H., 2016).

According to Garg (2019), Indian rape laws prioritize relationships above individual autonomy and encourage victim-blaming, reflecting traditional attitudes on marriage and gender. According to Kabra and Dube (2025), "stealthing" is one of the problems the legal system faces, which reflects a larger inability to acquire and uphold consent. The outdated "feeble no may imply yes" theory undermines the concept of unambiguous authorization. Such ambiguous definitions lessen the culpability of criminals and place the blame on victims, claims Kulshreshtha (2023).

The way that culpability is allocated in situations of sexual assault is also greatly influenced by society's views about gender roles. The study by Kahn et al. (2011) discovered that people's responsibility in sexual assault instances is impacted more by gender role identity than biological gender. Women were more inclined than men to blame the attacker and identify with the victim. This implies that cultural gender stereotypes influence how responsibility is assigned in sexual assault situations. The inclination to criticize women who do not fit the stereotypes is influenced by traditional gender standards, which frequently link males to aggressiveness and women to passivity. However, by defending their acts as a normal manifestation of masculine conduct, these standards might lessen the responsibility of male criminals (Burt, 1980). When the victim deviates from socially created norms of conduct, it is simpler to place blame on them because of this gendered perspective.

In contrast to the UK and Canada, India continues to employ antiquated interpretations of affirmative consent laws that shame victims and do not hold offenders accountable (Gogoi, 2022). India needs to adapt its current legal approach to make it more victim-centered and progressive in terms of involving consent in cases of sexual abuse.

When we blame victims, we impact these court outcomes. Victim blaming decreases the credibility of the victim and ultimately discourages justice for the victim, leading to lesser sentences or acquittals (Grubb & Turner, 2012) when victims are perceived as being partly responsible. The victim blaming concept is exacerbated by uncontested ambiguities in the definition of consent to sexual acts, especially for intoxicated victims (Muehlenhard & Kimes, 1999).

In India, cultural expectations, gender roles, and cultural norms strongly influence how attitudes toward victim-blaming often shift the blame from the offender to the victim. While there is growing recognition in society about sexual assault and consent, current literature does not consider age-related differences in these beliefs. The study fills an important gap in generational attitudes towards sexual violence by addressing attitudes regarding consent and blame amongst age categories. Next step will be to improve current education and awareness campaigns that support more empathic survivor focused responses.

METHODS

3.1 Sample Size

An online survey was conducted for this research purpose with 100 respondents from various cities in India. To ensure broad coverage across demographics and locations, respondents from different occupational and educational backgrounds were selected. To satisfy the inclusion criteria, all respondents needed to be fluent in English and within the age range of 18 to 65 years. To achieve age-wise representation, the sample was evenly divided into five age categories: 18–26, 27–35, 36–44, 45–53, and 54–65 years, with 20 participants in each group. Demographic analysis showed that 49 participants identified as female, 50 as male, and 1 as other. On school background, the group had 8 who did higher secondary school, 8 with diplomas or certificates, 26 with degrees, 53 with higher degrees, and 5 with M.Phil. or Ph.D. degrees. For where they live, folks stayed in 76 city spots, 17 between city and country spots, and 7 country spots. The study chose people from all age groups. By using a clear,

number-based setup for response collection, this study looked at the thoughts and perspectives of participants, trends, and age-based views.

3.2 Tools

The survey in this study was divided into eight sections. The first part was about the demographics of the participants based on their age, gender, education level, and where people live. The second part looked at how people feel about blaming victims, using set questions and a 5-point scale for answers. The next six parts dealt with six made-up stories. Each showed a different kind of sexual harm. These included: (1) Workplace Harassment Escalates, (2) Marital Rape, (3) Public Transport Assault, (4) Child Sexual Abuse by a Relative, (5) Assault on the Way Home, and (6) Breach of Trust in a Relationship. After each story, there were nine questions about how people think about saying yes, how victims act, common beliefs, who's to blame, and rules in places. These stories were made to show different places, links, and ages, so people could answer thinking of each set case:

1. Workplace Harassment: A boss makes advances toward a woman; coworkers and HR take no action.
2. Marital Rape: A husband rapes his wife, but societal norms leave her without support.
3. Public Transport Assault: Someone gropes a student on a train; police blame and dismiss her.
4. Child Abuse: A student tells of her uncle's abuse; her family responds with disbelief.
5. Commute Assault: A group rapes a woman at night; police and media pass judgment.
6. Breach of Trust: A boyfriend assaults a woman; her friends question if it counts as rape.

3.3 Procedure

Google Forms were used to collect the data. At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants received an introduction that outlined the goals and methods of the study. They were told that their answers would be kept private and anonymous, and that participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were asked to read six fictional stories that were based on different types of sexual assault scenarios, and following that, there were nine sets of structured questions that would help understand their feelings and perspectives on culpability and victim-blaming. The survey took about 20 to 25 minutes to finish. Participants were told to get in touch via Gmail or WhatsApp if they had any questions or trouble understanding the study. Participants were told that their honest answers were crucial to the study and that there were no right or incorrect answers.

3.4 Data Analysis

After data collection, Microsoft Excel was used for analysis. Categorical responses coded as numbers were counted with the COUNTIF function to examine how different age groups responded to each question and storyline. This analysis revealed significant differences between age groups in attitudes toward sexual victimization and victim blaming.

RESULTS

The 18–26 age group included 20 participants: 15 females, 4 males, and 1 "other." Nine had post-graduate qualifications, six were graduates, three completed higher secondary, and two held diplomas/certificates. Most (17) lived in urban areas, with 3 from semi-urban/suburban areas (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants by Age Group (N = 100)

Variable	Category	18–26	27–35	36–44	45–53	54–65
Gender	Female	15	9	7	7	12
	Male	4	11	13	13	8
	Others	1	—	—	—	—
Education	Higher Secondary (Class 11–12)	3	—	2	1	2
	Diploma/Certificate Course	2	1	2	2	1
	Graduation	6	10	4	3	5
	Post-graduation	9	9	10	12	11
	M.Phil. or Ph.D.	—	—	2	2	1

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Variable	Category	18–26	27–35	36–44	45–53	54–65
Area of Residence	Urban	17	13	10	14	16
	Semi-Urban/Suburban	3	5	6	3	4
	Rural	—	2	4	3	—

Note. Each age group includes n = 20 participants.

Among 20 participants aged 18–26, most understood victim-blaming, with 60% rejecting victim responsibility and 85% agreeing blame rises if victims drank or stayed out late. Views on clothing and delayed reporting were mixed. Most disagreed that women should prioritize family over career or dress modestly, though 75% accepted traditional gender roles (Table 4.2).

Participants demonstrated strong understanding of power misuse, institutional shortcomings, and victim-blaming in both scenarios. In Neha's workplace harassment case, many held Aditya and HR accountable, dismissed victim-blaming, and criticized HR for safety oversights and gossip culture. They recognized Aditya's power and noted societal skepticism, stressing HR's duty to assist victims. In Aarti's marital rape case, the majority placed full blame on Rohit, rejected victim-blaming, and noted the absence of support from Aarti's mother and the women's group. They strongly advocated for the legal acknowledgment of marital rape and emphasized the importance of family and community support, as well as consent education, reflecting a clear demand for legal and social reform.

In Rekha's case of being harassed in public, 18 people blamed the harasser, not those riding, or the cops. Sixteen said it wasn't about how she looked, and 13 hit out at those who just stood by. Fifteen cheered on Rekha's brave stand, while 13 slammed the cop's lack of action. Fourteen said blaming her clothes was wrong, and 12 urged for more safety, learning, and help. Stepping in and having officials act was seen as key. In the case of Ishita being hurt by a family member, 18 faulted the uncle, and 17 blamed her parents for not hearing her worry. Most didn't think that Ishita staying quiet was what led to the abuse, and 17 fought the idea that family issues should be hidden. 15 noted kids often don't get the concept of abuse, and 16 backed stronger laws and emotional support systems.

In Pooja's case, 19 blamed the car driver and men while on her way, with just 1 blaming Pooja. Thirteen stood up for her right to move safely, and 17 said looks and work should not count. Eight said the police's asking was not right, and 17 asked for police ways that are kind to trauma. Eighteen noted that wrong blame comes from how people see things, and 10 thought both must care for women's safety. In Megha's story, 16 pointed at Rohan, and 15 found his excuse bad. Twelve supported Megha's "no" as correct, and 16 stood by her against Rohan. Thirteen people believed people confuse love with overstepping, and 14 stated we should offer more emotional support. Ten stressed that a clear "yes" is essential in intimate moments.

In the age group of 27–35, 11 males and 9 females. 10 held graduate degrees, 9 had post-graduation, and one had a diploma/certificate. Most (13) lived in urban areas, with 5 from semi-urban/suburban and 2 from rural regions (Table 4.1).

Most participants (18/20) recognized victim-blaming. They rejected clothing as a cause but linked blame to alcohol, late outings, and delayed reporting. Views on male protectors varied, though traditional gender roles were largely opposed (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Age Differences in Blame, Evidence, and Gender Views

Age Group	Victim-Blaming	Evidence & Reporting	Gender Roles
18–26	Reject blame strongly	Doubt without evidence	Reject traditional roles
27–35	Reject blame, empathetic	Trust victims	Progressive
36–44	Mixed views	Some skepticism	Mixed
45–53	Aware of blame	High skepticism	Traditional

Age Group	Victim-Blaming	Evidence & Reporting	Gender Roles
54–65	Mostly reject, some blame	Some doubt	Traditional

Note. Key attitude trends by age group.

Participants ages 27 to 35 demonstrated a high level of knowledge in Story 1, with the majority blaming HR (16) and Aditya (14), rejecting Neha's friendliness as a cause (17), and viewing allegations that "led him on" as victim-blaming (14). Many emphasized HR's role in assisting victims (15) and noted Aditya's authority and social mistrust (17). Most criticized her mother's inaction (15) and rejected blame on Aarti (13) in Story 2. Many others disagreed with the recommendation to remain silent (10), and Rohit was generally held accountable (18). Support for legal recognition (13), small-town hurdles (15), and consent education and legal reform (18) were highlighted.

Few blamed others in Story 3, but 17 blamed Rekha's attacker. Eighteen cited societal bias, and 15 rejected victim-blaming based on looks. Thirteen condemned police, 14 noted clothing judgments, 15 supported bystander action, and 13 called for more security, awareness, and accountability. In Story 4, 18 blamed Ishita's uncle, while 16 said her parents did not care for her well. Most said her not talking did not allow harm; they noted kids have a hard time speaking up. 11 hit out at the "keep it secret" way of thinking, fourteen stood by help for victims and less shame, and thirteen called for stronger laws.

In Story 5, twelve supported Pooja's right to safety; most blamed the men and driver. Media stigma (12), victim-blaming (14), and poor police response (8) were criticized. Many called for shared responsibility (12) and supportive policing (16). In Story 6, most rejected Rohan's excuse (15) and blamed him for violating consent (17). Megha's confrontation was supported (15). Consent, support, and cultural confusion over love and entitlement were key concerns.

Table 4.1 shows the demographics of 20 participants aged 36–44, most were male (13) and postgraduates (10). Ten lived in urban areas, six in semi-urban, and four in rural areas. Education ranged from higher secondary to M.Phil./Ph.D.

Among 20 participants, most saw victim-blaming, but half blamed victims partly. Over 60% said evidence and delays affect belief. Nearly half rejected blaming victims outright. Views on women's roles varied, but 70% upheld men as protectors. Awareness coexists with some victim-blaming (Table 4.2).

In Story 1, 13 participants between the ages of 36 and 44 disregarded Neha's friendliness, with the majority placing the blame on Aditya and HR. Ten thought HR failed, while others sought a warning. Silence can often be interpreted as consent. Most people in Story 2 believed Rohit was in the wrong, but a small group blamed Aarti for coming late and society as a whole. Many people disagreed about whether or not it was good for her mom and the women's group to help. Many were willing to make marital rape legal, despite having some uncertainties. A lot of people brought up the importance of family support and the concept of consent.

In Story 3, the harasser received most of the blame, some participants also accused both the passengers and the police of failing to act. The majority were strongly against people just watching, blaming the victim, and judging someone's character only because of what they were wearing. More powerful bystanders, answerable police, and safer public places became the demand. Most believe Ishita suffered due to her parents and society, but Ishita's uncle gets most of the criticism in Story 4. The participants didn't support the claim that families matter most, but encouraged having stricter laws, more awareness, less stigma, and believing victim support instead.

The majority in Story 5 blamed the attackers and society for women's freedom of movement. Many thought the police interrogation was victim-blaming and inappropriate. The media's use of sensationalism was criticized. Demands included group accountability for women's protection, more female police officers, and improved police administration. The majority of people in Story 6 accused Rohan of violating consent, based on a misinterpretation of societal views on love and entitlement. The majority supported Megha's denial and confrontation, emphasizing that intimacy must always be voluntary. All participants agreed that victims need comprehensive, nonjudgmental care.

In the age group of 45–53 years, 13 males, 7 females; mostly postgraduates (12). Fourteen lived in urban, six in rural or semi-urban areas (Table 4.1).

Most (70%) agreed victim-blaming holds victims responsible; 60% said clothing influences views. Survivors face skepticism (75%), and victims are blamed more if drinking or out late (65%). Delayed reporting raises doubt (60%). Views on "they should've known better" were mostly situational (70%).

Opinions split on family over career (45% disagreed) and modest dress (45% agreed). Sixty-five percent agreed with traditional gender roles (Table 4.2).

This group more clearly saw the harassment in Story 1. Aditya and HR were mostly accused, and 13 comments opposed, saying the victim is partly responsible. Fourteen endorsed the need for the investigation and backup from fair support. Some supported 12 in blaming Rohit, but others argued that Aarti didn't act correctly and should have spoken out. Mothers and social groups were sought out for help by ten and seven of them, respectively. Could not agree on marital rape, with eight arguing for complete legal acceptance and eight arguing for partial acknowledgment. 10 reported that people often avoided asking for help because of social norms, leading experts to suggest adding more consent education.

Nine people said that the man who groped Rekha was to blame, 11 opposed victim blame, and 11 believed there should be more security and people who take action. 9 of the participants criticized how the police dealt with the situation, but some suggested mixed opinions. It was pointed out that Ishita's uncle was responsible for the abuse, and blame was placed on Ishita's parents for ignoring her problems. When shame and family confidentiality were barriers, 13 people suggested that laws should be improved and more transparency is required.

Most people criticized victim-blaming, the police, and the media in Story 5, placing the blame on the driver and the attackers. Seven backed Pooja's freedom of movement. Participants in Story 6 criticized victim-blaming, pointed out ambiguity around consent, and held Rohan responsible. In general, they emphasized victim support, legal reform, accountability, and consent education.

The 54–65 age group sample included 20 participants, mostly females (12) and postgraduates (11). Most lived in urban areas (16), with a few from semi-urban areas (4) and none from rural areas (Table 4.1).

Most (75%) understood victim-blaming; 60% agreed victims can be partly responsible. Views on clothing's role were mixed. Eighty percent saw skepticism of assault claims without evidence, and noted victims are often blamed more. Opinions on delayed reporting varied. Most (75%) saw "they should've known better" as situational. Over half (55%) rejected prioritizing family over career, and 75% accepted traditional gender roles (Table 4.2).

When the Story 1 group was aged 54–65, 16 participants blamed both Aditya and HR, and 13 recognized that HR might have failed to prevent the accident, while 11 believed that blaming the victim was often also due to power abuse and public opinion. While some doubted Neha's intentions, the majority called for taking care of the victims and doing a fair investigation. Out of the group, eleven people mostly blamed Rohit, not Aarti, in Story 2. Nine believed Aarti didn't deserve the mistreatment, whereas 7 thought she needed to speak up more. Many people did not find much support among their family or from women's organizations (10 and 12). Most supported introducing consent education and supporting victims (13).

Story 3 revealed that the majority (14) pointed to the groper as responsible for their actions, and very few said that appearance or someone's lack of action was to blame. Many believed that intervention was a good (13), criticized actions that discourage the police (11), and stated that society places a lot of blame (10). It was urged that better controls and fast actions be put in place. A majority (9) believed the uncle was responsible in Story 4, and few (6) named Ishita's parents, whereas society was mentioned by (3). They felt she didn't talk because she didn't understand, thus upsetting many people due to the parents not taking it seriously (12). Many agreed on improving education, therapy, making laws tougher (13), and encouraging openness.

In Story 5, people said it was the fault of Pooja's attackers and that society should not blame her but support her right to travel safely. They also disapproved of police asking her questions that might have sounded like faulting her and of newspapers making a big deal of her case. Most said that evidence-based police work focuses on how to help female officers, and making sure the community supports keeping women safe should come into play. Finally, most people in Story 6 said that Rohan was wrong for not asking permission and said it was okay for Megha to stand up to him. Not everyone is sure what consent means, but they all agreed that it's important to support victims and to make sure that any kind of physical contact is done with everyone's agreement (12).

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Table **4.3**

Age-Related Attitudinal Patterns Based on Fictional Storylines

Age Group	Victim-Blaming & Responsibility	Societal & Cultural Norms	Institutional Response	Legal Issues
18–26	Blame perpetrator; reject victim blame	Highlight stigma; urge consent education	Criticize inaction; seek accountability	Support reform & awareness
27–35	Empathy; blame perpetrator & system	Stress barriers & empowerment	Condemn poor support; urge reform	Back laws & victim rights
36–44	Blame perpetrator; reject victim blame	Acknowledge gender norms	Call for stronger protections	Demand better laws & safety
45–53	Reject victim-blaming; demand justice	Emphasize stigma; urge change	Demand ethical leadership	Stress reform & fairness
54–65	Blame both perpetrator & system	Call for change; highlight power gap	Advocate victim support	Push for stronger legal action

Note. Attitudes by age group across four themes.

DISCUSSION

Younger adults (18–26) often have more modern opinions, say they shouldn't blame victims for what happened to them, and think it's important to treat everyone kindly and respect them. With age, people tend to accept some part of the blame for victimization and believe in traditional opinions more. Members of the 36–44 and 45–53 groups believe that what the victim is wearing or the time they were out could contribute to what happened to them. Members of the oldest group mainly do not blame the victims and favour strong beliefs about men as protectors and women as those in need of protection. All in all, younger groups are aware of unfairness in society and strive for equality between genders. Elder groups tend to support age-old beliefs and are not sure if the victims had any role in the crime. Because of this, it appears that youth are becoming more thoughtful and willing to accept new ideas. As discovered by Valor-Segura et al. in 2011, youth nowadays tend towards even gender roles and are less willing to accept violence towards women. Furthermore, Yamawaki et al. (2009) claimed that liberal or feminist individuals were less likely to place the blame for sexual assault on the victims. Unlike younger participants, those aged 54 to 65 still did not agree with victim-blaming but instead tended to back the belief that women must be protected. This also matches the finding by Grubb and Turner (2012), who pointed out that older adults may accept common beliefs linked to patriarchy, which influences how they understand victim's responsibility.

At this age, many people are open to progressive opinions. They strongly reject placing the blame on victims and the traditional roles given to people of different genders. They focus on helping victims, treating them with empathy and fairness, and encouraging changes. This group focuses on helping hospitals and other organizations do a better job looking out for victims and supports making changes in the way society thinks and acts towards violence survivors. More and more young adults in India do not accept blaming people who have been raped. Chauhan's study showed that younger people showed less acceptance of rape myths than older people on the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. It demonstrates that young individuals are embracing modern outlooks toward sexual violence. Those of this age often try to blend their modern pursuits with the old habits passed down to them. According to Mittal et al. (2017), young individuals normally disapprove of rape myths, but how they feel about the victims

depends on their gender and socioeconomic status. The study showed that females had fewer rape myths and more sympathy for rape victims compared to males.

Middle-aged people (36-53) tend to have a balanced and mature outlook. They acknowledge power dynamics, structural failings, and societal norms, but prioritize victim assistance and professional accountability. This group emphasizes shared responsibility among families, institutions, and perpetrators, calling for meaningful legal reforms and enhanced support networks. Their approach is rooted in empathy and realism, with an emphasis on institutional and community-level solutions. Chauhan (2022) found that age negatively correlated with progressive attitudes towards rape, indicating that older individuals might be more accepting of rape myths. Das and Bhattacharjee (2024) performed a demographic study on rape myth acceptance (RMA) among Indian adults. These researchers learned that people ages 30-35 had elevated RMA, and being married or employed in business were two characteristics related to them having more rape myth beliefs. Even though this study does not study the 45-53 age range, it still indicates that some groups of adults sometimes find it easier to blame victims.

Older people (54-65) in this age group usually show traditional beliefs, but they always oppose hoping someone suffers the consequences. They stress that society should act with honesty, treat people with respect, and support changes in the law and ways of educating people. They agree on the importance of obeying family and societal rules, but additionally demand better protection of victims by authorities and institutions. They focus on maintaining law and order in society while also showing sympathy for the victims. In 2020, Hoppe studied the views of older women about traditional values. The research found that older women continue to play traditional roles and hold together their families, regardless of the abuse they suffer. This commitment to traditional beliefs might impact their views and responses to abuse, underscoring the challenge of treating domestic violence among older groups. Felson and Palmore (2021) examined the role that standard ideas play in blaming victims. The reports showed that individuals who viewed gay rights negatively were most likely to blame rape victims. This means that old traditions in a culture can still affect how much people blame the victim, but how much this happens can change based on what is going on.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at how different age groups perceived victim blaming and gender roles. It was revealed that younger people (18-35) are progressive, strongly rejecting victim blaming and calling for institutional reform, victim empowerment, and education on consent and gender equality. Middle-aged individuals (36-53) take a balanced approach, understanding power dynamics and systemic issues while stressing victim support, accountability, and achievable legal reforms. Older people (54-65) tend to maintain traditional values but consistently reject victim blaming, instead prioritizing ethical leadership, respect for boundaries, legal change, and institutional responsibility. Overall, the findings demonstrate clear age gaps in opinions, with younger groups calling for cultural and structural change while older groups emphasize maintaining social order and justice within existing frameworks.

This study emphasizes the necessity for age-specific interventions to reduce victim blaming in sexual assault cases in India. Policies for young adults should focus on consent education, gender equality, and addressing cultural norms, as well as educating institutions to adopt victim-centered procedures. Middle-aged persons require joint efforts from families, legal systems, and communities to improve support services and legislative changes that address power inequalities. Strengthening ethical leadership, law enforcement, and culturally appropriate awareness campaigns is critical for older persons who want to promote justice while maintaining traditional values. Integrating these generational views can lead to more effective, inclusive measures for combating victim blaming across society.

The research findings come from reported ideas of people living in a particular age group and setting, mainly in metropolitan and semi-urban India, so their meaning may not be the same in other parts of the country or rural communities. Cross-sectional data only shows opinions at the point it is taken, so it misses out on how they might develop later due to society's growth, law reforms, or the rise of knowledge.

Future research should use tracking studies to see how people's beliefs about victim-blaming change as time goes on and as they get older. Including victims from different economic backgrounds, levels of education, where they live, and their culture will help get a clearer idea of what causes people to blame victims. In-depth interviews or focus groups could help show how the way people learn from the media and from the community, and how they get educated, can affect the way they think about gender roles.

We can better comprehend victim-blaming in various groups by examining the connections between caste, religion, and gender identity. Government in India may be able to improve regulations, instill

respect, and provide better assistance to victims of sexual assault by conducting experiments that examine education campaigns, training sessions, or activities tailored to specific age groups.

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Appendix B: Storylines

Story 1: Workplace Harassment Escalates

Neha, a 29-year-old software engineer, works for a reputable IT firm in Bengaluru. For months, her team leader, Aditya, had made inappropriate remarks about her appearance. Neha attempted to ignore him by focusing on her job. During a late-night customer meeting, Aditya offered to stay with her to finish a presentation.

As they worked late in the vacant office, Aditya made unwanted approaches. Neha strongly rebuffed him, but he grabbed her and attempted to kiss her. When she refused, he threatened to destroy her career, alleging he had connections in the industry. Neha was traumatized and reported the event to HR the next day.

Instead of support, she faced hostility. Some colleagues speculated that Neha might have "led him on" by being too friendly. HR dismissed the issue as a "misunderstanding," suggesting Neha resolve it informally.

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Neha?
2. Could Neha's behaviour, like being "too friendly," have contributed to the incident?
3. How do you feel about HR dismissing Neha's complaint?
4. What do you think about colleagues speculating that Neha "led him on"?
5. Did Aditya's position of power influence the situation?
6. How do societal attitudes toward women affect such cases?
7. If Neha had ignored Aditya's comments, would the situation have been different?
8. Should Neha have handled the situation differently?
9. What should HR's role be in cases like this?

Story 2: Marital Rape

Aarti, a 34-year-old lady from a tiny hamlet in Rajasthan, had always felt that marriage was based on mutual respect and understanding. However, her reality was distant from the ideals she had always Rohit, her husband, was kind in front of others but had a domineering personality that permeated every part of their existence. Aarti's greatest efforts to be a loving and dutiful wife were frequently drowned out by Rohit's domineering behaviour.

One night, after a heated argument over finances, Rohit crossed a boundary that shattered Aarti's trust. He forced himself on her, ignoring her desperate pleas to stop. The pain of that night wasn't just physical; it was emotional, as she realized this wasn't the first time such an incident had occurred. Her sense of security crumbled, leaving her questioning her worth.

Aarti went to her mother for comfort and support. Instead of compassion, she received the harsh comments, "He's your spouse, it is his right." Desperation drew her to a local women's organization, but their advise was no better. They advised her not to speak out, fearing the repercussions. The absence of legal acknowledgment for marital rape in India locked Aarti in a circle of humiliation and powerlessness, preventing her from seeking the justice she so urgently needs.

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Aarti?
2. Do you think Aarti's behaviour or actions played any part in the incident?3. How do you feel about Aarti's mother dismissing her concerns?
4. What do you think about the local women's group advising Aarti not to speak out?

5. Should marital rape be legally recognized in India? Why or why not?
6. How do societal norms in small towns affect women like Aarti?
7. Could Aarti have done anything differently to prevent the situation?
8. How should families and communities respond to cases like Aarti's?
9. How can we challenge the belief that "it's a husband's right"?

Story 3: Public Transport Assault

Rekha, a 23-year-old college student in Kolkata, boarded a crowded local train during rush hour. The compartment was packed, and she found herself sandwiched between passengers. A middle-aged man standing behind her started groping her. Rekha froze, unsure of how to react in the overwhelming crowd. When she tried to move away, the man followed her, continuing his actions. Summoning her courage, Rekha shouted at him, drawing the attention of fellow passengers. Instead of support, some commuters blamed Rekha for "inviting attention" by not dressing conservatively. Others stayed silent, unwilling to get involved.

Although Rekha reported the incident to the railway police, she was discouraged from pursuing the case further, with officers questioning if it was "worth the trouble."

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Rekha?
2. Do you believe Rekha's actions or appearance contributed to the incident?
3. How do you feel about the commuters blaming Rekha for "inviting attention"?
4. What are your thoughts on the passengers staying silent during the assault?
5. Should Rekha have done anything differently in the situation?
6. How do you feel about the railway police discouraging Rekha from pursuing the case?
7. What role do you think societal attitudes about clothing play in such incidents?
8. How can public spaces be made safer for women like Rekha?
9. What should passengers do when they witness incidents like this?

Story 4: Child Sexual Abuse by a Relative

Ishita, a 20-year-old college student in Delhi, opened up to her friend about her childhood trauma. When she was 10, her uncle, who frequently visited their home, would find opportunities to be alone with her. He would touch her inappropriately and warn her not to tell anyone, saying it was their "special secret." Young and confused, Ishita remained silent for years, blaming herself for what had happened she grew older, she realized she had been a victim of child sexual abuse. When she confided in her parents, they dismissed her, unwilling to confront a family member.

The trauma continued to haunt Ishita, affecting her trust and relationships. Despite seeking therapy, she struggled with societal stigma and the belief that family matters should remain private.

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Ishita?
2. Do you think Ishita's silence contributed to the abuse? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel about Ishita's parents dismissing her concerns?
4. What are your thoughts on the societal belief that "family matters should remain private"?
5. Do you think Ishita should have told someone sooner? Why or why not?
6. How can society better support victims of child sexual abuse?
7. What role do you think shame plays in victims not speaking out?
8. How should family members respond if a loved one confides in them about abuse?
9. What changes are needed in how we address abuse within families?

Story 5: Assault on the Way Home

Pooja, a 24-year-old call center employee, finished her shift late one night. She usually took a cab, but her regular driver cancelled. Left with no other option, she decided to take an auto-rickshaw home. As the city streets grew quieter, the auto driver veered off the usual route, claiming it was a shortcut.

Feeling uneasy, Pooja tried to call her roommate, but the driver abruptly stopped in a dark, deserted area. Before she could react, two men appeared and dragged her out of the vehicle. The driver joined them, and they assaulted her despite her desperate attempts to fight back. Hours later, a passerby found her injured and in shock.

Pooja reported the incident, but the process was gruelling. Some police officers questioned why she was traveling alone at night. The media sensationalized her story, focusing on her attire and supportive voices were drowned out by those blaming her for "putting herself in danger."

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Pooja?
2. Do you think Pooja's decision to travel alone at night contributed to the incident?

3. How do you feel about the police questioning her for traveling alone?
4. Should her attire or job have any relevance to the case? Why or why not?
5. How do media portrayals affect perceptions of victims like Pooja?
6. Do you think Pooja had other options in this situation?
7. How should police handle cases like this to avoid victim-blaming?
8. What role does society's attitude play in blaming victims of such crimes?
9. Who do you think is responsible for the safety of women?

Story 6: Breach of Trust in a Relationship

Megha and Rohan had been in a relationship for two years. While they shared a close bond, Megha had always set boundaries regarding intimacy, which Rohan had respected—until one evening. After dinner at Megha's place, Rohan tried to initiate sex. Megha firmly said no, explaining she wasn't ready. However, Rohan dismissed her protests, accusing her of being "too uptight." When Megha resisted further, he overpowered her, ignoring her cries and pleas. She felt trapped and betrayed by someone she trusted.

The next day, Megha confronted Rohan, who justified his actions, saying, "We're in a relationship—it's normal." When Megha confided in her friends, opinions were divided. Some said she was overreacting since they were a couple, while others encouraged her to report the assault.

1. Who do you think is responsible for what happened to Megha?
2. Do you think Megha's refusal to be intimate could have contributed to the situation?
3. How do you feel about Rohan justifying his actions because they are in a relationship?
4. Do you believe Megha was overreacting by confronting Rohan? Why or why not?
5. What do you think about Megha's friends having divided opinions on whether to report the assault?
6. How do societal views on relationships affect how we see incidents like this?
7. Should Megha have done anything differently to avoid the situation?
8. How should people in Megha's situation be supported by friends and family?
9. What is your opinion on the belief that sexual intimacy is "normal" in relationships?