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## Meta-Cognition and Locus of Control in University Students in Context of Viewpoint to Rape

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### Abstract

Rape is one of the traumatic factors that has pervasive and devastating consequences. Unlike many other major traumatic situations the concept of “rape” is controversial and prone to various myths and gender-related perceptual biases. On the other hand it is important to detect possible cognitive-based factors rendering people more prone to adopt those biases and myths. 95 subjects (49 male and 45 female) with an average age of 19 were given Meta-cognitive Awareness Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Attitudes About Rape Victims Scale and Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. Our results indicate that negative attitudes about rape victims and stereotypic thoughts about rape is closely related to meta-cognitive awareness level and self-esteem as well as locus of control.

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### 1. Introduction

Among other traumatic events rape has a unique place on its own due to cultural-based relativities about its definition since definition of rape is subject to different national and cultural interpretations (Mertha, 1980). Such sort of obscure norms and being subject to cultural-based definitions it is often possible for many people to get confused between the “phenomena” and some cultural myths. Thus, a rape myth can be defined as “mechanisms that people use to justify dismissing an incident of sexual assault from the category of, real, rape” (Walker and Bright, 2009). Belief in these “rape myths” sometimes can express itself as negative attitudes about rape victims and might results in stereotypic thoughts like some people “deserves” rape due to some specific reasons such as their way of clothing, behaving etc.

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It is a possibility that there might be a relation between probability of committing in sexual assault and degree of belief in various rape myths. Therefore it gains importance to detect risk groups have and share these stereotypic myths and their cognitive, as well as personality, dynamics. There is relatively detailed, but somewhat interesting and conflicting, information about some personality features and their relation with stereotypic beliefs about rape in literature. For instance, both high and low self-esteem is shown to be among the risk factors in committing sexual offend (Bushman and Baumeister, 1998). In fact, self-esteem level seems to facilitate cognitive biases about rape and leads to negative attitudes about rape victims (Ryan, 2003).

On the other hand there is a little, if any, amount of research in the literature that has focused on cognitive features that might underlie and/or companion various myths and stereotypic beliefs about rape behaviour. For example level of meta-cognitive development through adolescence might be among possible determinants of the probability of internalisation of such myths and stereotypic thoughts. Metacognition I can be defined as thinking about thinking or a psychological phenomenon including someones feelings and motives about him/herself and about others (Flavell, 1979). According to Vos (2001), function of cognition is about problem solving and carrying out cognitive attempts in general. On the other hand metacognition is about making regulations related with necessary cognitive steps. From this point of view people not only have cognitive processes but also do have knowledge about knowledge itself (Garner and Alexander, 1989). With this aspect “metacognition” comes into prominence as an fundamental and executive feature of human mind (Yzerbyt, Lorries and Dardenne, 1998). In fact, meta-cognition is closely related with high-order cognitive functions including decision making and locus of control of planned and executed behaviors. Perspective taking is also among the executive cognitive features closely related with meta-cognition which can be deemed as a promoting factor for building empathy with others. Thus, it is possible that higher levels of meta-cognitive development and/or meta-cognitive awareness might decrease the level of belief in rape myths and stereotypic thoughts.

This study aims to, preliminarily, inquire the relation of stereotypic beliefs about rape with meta-cognitive awareness, self-esteem and locus of control in a Turkish late adolescent population. It is the first study in literature that is directly focusing on the relation among meta-cognitive awareness level and belief in rape myths along with other parameters including self-esteem and locus of control.

## 2. Materials and Methods

A total of 94 university students (49 female and 45 male) with an average age of 19 were given Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Attitudes about Rape Victims Scale (ARVS) and Internal-External Locus of Control Scale. Data were analysed with via SPSS16.0. One-way ANOVA was followed by Pearson correlation.

## 3. Results

One-way ANOVA revealed significant inter-group differences. Results are presented in Table-1.

Table-1 ANOVA results

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MAIS	Between Groups	28201,313	2	14100,656	279,275	,000
	Within Groups	4594,613	91	50,490		
	Total	32795,926	93			
MTARVS	Between Groups	2446,760	2	1223,380	10,041	,000
	Within Groups	11087,155	91	121,837		

	Total	13533,915	93			
LOCS	Between Groups	40945,847	2	20472,923	165,754	,000
	Within Groups	11239,770	91	123,514		
	Total	52185,617	93			
RSES	Between Groups	3,889	2	1,945	3,315	,041
	Within Groups	53,387	91	,587		
	Total	57,277	93			

Two-tailed Pearson correlation was run following one-way ANOVA. Results of the Pearson correlation is presented table-2 below.

Table-2 2-tailed Pearson Correlations (N=94)

	MAIS	MTARVS	LOCS	RSES
MAIS	1	-,407**	,725**	-,199
MTARVS	-,407	1	-,358**	,251*
LOCS	,725**	-,358**	1	-,113
RSES	-,199	,251*	-,113	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level and \* 0.05 level (2-tailed).

#### 4. Discussion

Our results indicate a strong correlation between scores taken on MAI, ARVS, LOCS and RSES. No gender or family-related parameters was taken under consideration in this preliminary research. In general, our results are in accordance with our previous findings (Karsli and Anli, 2011) that a positive correlation between self-esteem and myth beliefs was observed. It also gives support to the opinion that high levels of self-esteem might be related with offensive behaviour and negative stereotypes and beliefs about rape. In fact an important body of research indicates in the literature that high level of self-esteem is also related to violence as much as low self-esteem is (Walker and Bright, 2009).

In addition, individuals with high self-esteem are reported to have tendency to engage in violent acts with their partners in close relationships (Papadaki et al, 2009). This situation might reflect a theoretical distinction that concept of self-esteem can be divided into two parts as implicit and explicit self-esteem (Sandstorm and Jordan, 2009). Narcissistic individuals, especially, are known generally to have high explicit self-esteem whereas their level of implicit self-esteem is relatively low especially when “defensive narcissism” is the fact. It is also shown that individuals with both high self-esteem and narcissism are highly prone to feel and express aggression, however individuals with high self-esteem and low narcissism do not behave in a similar fashion (Pappsand and O'Carroll,1998). It should also be noted that parental attitudes, especially perceived parental attitudes, are among important determinants of the structure of self-esteem in children (Slyster, 1989; Stith et al, 2009) which in turn might result in pathological narcissism and related disturbances.

On the other hand, our results indicate a strong negative correlation among MAIS, LOCS and MTARVS which supports the findings in the literature that higher meta-cognitive development facilitates internal locus of control on choices and decisions made by the individual. In addition decisional self-esteem and vigilance subscale scores are

high in individuals with high levels of meta-cognitive awareness whereas subscale scores like compliance for instance are low in these individuals. This situation raises the possibility that, when significant negative correlation between LOCS and MTARVS also taken into account, people with higher meta-cognition make decisions with internal locus of control based attributions about their acts relying on high decisional self-esteem and probably take responsibility of their acts and their consequences. In fact, it should be noted that, previous findings in the literature indicate that narcissism in combination with high self-esteem led to extremely high levels of aggression. Furthermore, narcissistic individuals are known to make more external attributions about causal dynamics of their acts than non-narcissistic individuals which seems to bring about the way of thinking that some people with certain properties may “deserve” rape under certain conditions (Kohut and Tolpin, 1980; Karsli and Anli, 2010).

It should also be noted that ability of perspective taking might be another crucial point that meta-cognitive development also might facilitate perspective taking abilities (Mann et al, 1989; Decety and Jackson, 2006; Steinberg, 2007). Perspective taking ability might both enhance empathy building capacity with other people (Clary and Orenstein; 1991) and being flexible about thoughts and decisions which in turn might prevent from being stuck on myths and stereotypic beliefs about rape and other events in a general sense. On the other hand, the participants high on RSES probably having potential about defensive grandiose self are more prone to aggression and external attributions about life events and their low level of implicit self-esteem renders them fragile and sensitive to all kinds of criticism and rejection. In another words, it is possible that an important efficient underlying our results is the defensive self structure of subjects with high explicit self-esteem. Though, this possibility should specifically be taken under consideration in following studies.

In conclusion, our study indicates that there might be a significant and strong relation among MAI, LOC, RSE and MTARV scores in a Turkish late-adolescent university student population. Though, limitations of our study should also be taken into consideration. First of all, as asserted before that this is a preliminary study, number of participants should be increased in following studies. Also, as family structure is an important variable in meta-cognitive development following studies should also include measures on parental attitudes, perceived parental attitudes and measurements related to self concept as well. It should be focused on in future research whether it is possible to reduce the probability of adopting rape myths and stereotypic beliefs about victims through fostering meta-cognitive development in childhood and adolescence period by especially creating proper family and social environments in risk groups.

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