

There are various myths concerning sexual violence; for example, according to a study conducted by the European Commission in 2016, 27% of EU inhabitants believe that there exist circumstances that justify having sex without the other person's consent, like, for example, intoxication of the victim/survivor or wearing revealing clothes by the victim/survivor. System justification theory may help explain the phenomenon of rape myths. According to system justification theory, stereotypes, including rape myths, help people to maintain the belief that the system where they live is fair and just, and, consequently, they help to alleviate the frustration caused by the impossibility of changing the system.

The studies demonstrate that victims/survivors with low socioeconomic status are more often perceived as responsible for their victimization, and perpetrators with high socioeconomic status are more likely to be justified and exonerated. We also know that the victims/survivors whose experiences do not match the stereotype of a "real rape" (e.g., those who knew the perpetrator before the incident) are more often blamed. This phenomenon exists not only among lay people but also among criminal justice system professionals.

An overwhelming majority of the studies concerning cognitive distortions concerning sexual violence have been conducted with questionnaires. Thus, we do not know to what extent this phenomenon translates into the work of the criminal justice system. Thus in Study 1, we are going to analyze rape case files to check whether the sentences are predicted by the aforementioned factors, like the socioeconomic status of the victim/survivor and the perpetrator, intoxication of the victim/survivor and the perpetrator, and the previous relationship between the victim/survivor and the perpetrator. In Study 2, we are going to check whether the link between those factors and the perception of the rape case depends on system justification, gender, and age. In order to do that, we are going to compare judges and law students. In Study 3, we are going to check whether judges' beliefs concerning rape are related to system justification and daily functioning, inter alia job burnout symptoms. The project will help to understand better, what are the factors on which depends the perception of rape cases by criminal justice system professionals and what is the function of cognitive distortions concerning sexual violence.