



# Prison Officers' Perceptions of Prisoner Male Rape Victims in England and Wales

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## Abstract

Male rape literature is limited in the UK, with little public attention and limited research about prison officers' perceptions. The aim of the current study was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of prison officers in England and Wales. Two groups of participants were recruited: Group 1 included 24 retired prison officers; group 2 included 17 participants from the general population. A mixed method design was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Findings showed that prison officers did not accept societal myths on male rape, although some had negative attitudes towards male rape occurring in prison. Participants from the general population displayed similar results, demonstrating how being a prison officer does not affect beliefs and attitudes of male rape any more than the public. Support strategies for prisoners would further reduce the stigma of raped prisoners.

**Keywords** Prison officers' perceptions · Prisoner male rape · Male rape myths · Prison legitimacy

## Introduction

Male rape inside prisons is a vastly under-reported crime, receiving little attention in the correctional literature (Davies 2002), even though almost 96% of the prison populations in the UK consist of male inmates (Howard League for Penal Reform n.d.) In the last decade, UK Home Office figures show that the reporting of male sexual victimisation has increased considerably (2017), making prison officers'

role in enforcing and preventing prison rape more critical now than ever.

In prisons, rape is a prohibitive behaviour which is subjected to disciplinary sanctions. Prison officers have the responsibility to charge those who encounter this behaviour. However, whether officers regularly report or choose to ignore these violations is not always clear (Eigenberg 2000a, b). Based on the myths, beliefs, and level of acceptance that officers have on rape, they can contribute or not to a rape-prone culture in prison.

Although police officers' rape myths have received extensive scholarly attention (Sleath and Bull 2017), very little research exists on rape myths amongst correctional officers (Kim et al. 2021) and how their beliefs and attitudes could influence rule enforcement or order maintenance activities (Eigenberg 2000a, b).

The aim of this project was to provide an exploratory investigation of attitudes towards male rape to inform on whether new strategies and further research are required to reduce the stigma.

## The Nature of Male Rape in Prisons

Most findings around the study of male rape in prisons agree on the fact that prisoners tend to perform sexual acts due to sexual deprivation (Sykes 2007), the need for power and

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control and dominance. Sykes (2007) found that the deprivation of heterosexual relationships exacerbated sexual violence. The Social Bonds Theory (Hirschi 2002) supports this conclusion, considering violent sexual acts to cope with the deprivation of heterosexual relationships. Consequently, rape is considered as a method of prison survival. Furthermore, Irwin and Cressey (1962) explained that a prisoner's sexual orientation is often developed and established before their induction into prison life, with the experience of being in prison being the factor that exposes heterosexual male prisoners to homosexuality. This contrasts with the misconception that male prison rape is caused by homosexual prisoners being sent to prison. Adding to this, male rape has been considered as a peer control mechanism, where the perpetrators who commit rape in prison gain power and respect amongst their peers, whereas victims of prison rape are often 'feminised' and characterised as weak by their peers. This coincides with the theory presented by Groth et al. (1977), where they found that rape is primarily committed to express power and dominance, with sexual satisfaction and sexuality often not being a relevant factor in the rapist's motivation.

To understand the mechanisms involved in this behaviour, Eigenberg (2000a, b) proposed the Prison Rape Model. This theoretical framework is based on two antecedents: (a) distal factors which include individual and organisational characteristics and (b) mediating factors which include attitudes towards women, male homosexuality and inmates. Results from Eigenberg's study (2000a) found that distal factors in the Prison Rape Model process directly contribute to three anti-attitudes towards homosexuality, women and prisoners. The application of this model became crucial in the USA for developing and implementing educational strategies to address prison rape and prepare officers to prevent these behaviours (King and Hanrahan 2015).

### Male Rape Myths in Prison

Rape myths are 'prejudicial, stereotyped or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists' (Burt 1980, p. 217). Although mostly untrue, the literature has demonstrated that many myths are widely accepted by the general population (e.g. Grupp and Turner 2012). They can be fuelled and originated by several different sources, including media (Flowe et al. 2009) and past experiences (Hammond and Calhoun 2007). This was showcased by Jamal (2014), who found that newspapers that discussed male rape often suggested that male rape is an anomaly that very rarely occurs and that the term 'rape victim' is often perceived to be gendered as female, potentially increasing the false beliefs and stigma that surround the phenomena of male rape and further encouraging the acceptance of male rape myths.

Turchik and Edwards (2012) have summarised some of the most common male rape myths found in the literature: Men cannot be raped; 'real' men can defend themselves against rape; only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; men are not affected by rape (or not as affected as women are); a woman cannot sexually assault a man; male rape only happens in prisons; sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; if a victim physically responds to an assault, he must have wanted it.

Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) tried to assess the prevalence and acceptance of these male rape myths, developing 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 traumatised by rape victimisation. In their study, 315 college students were asked to rate their agreement with statements that would reflect these assumptions. Results showed that most participants disagreed with the statements, with respondents disagreeing strongly with the myths surrounding victimisation. Chapleau et al. (2008) conducted a similar study, and the results showed that the male participants were significantly more supportive of male rape myths than the female respondents.

With the intent to investigate perception differences in other sub-groups, Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson (1992) found that myths on male rape in prison arise from masculine beliefs, where masculinity is considered a social construct which influences myth acceptance. To uphold masculinity, prisoners often decide not to report being raped. Therefore, masculinity is evident in prison culture and affects both rapist and victim perspectives.

The literature on male rape culture agrees with the fact that myths correlate with both traditional gender role stereotypes (e.g. Davies et al. 2012; Kassing et al. 2005) and homophobia (e.g. Davies and McCartney 2003). Both these elements can have a crucial role in creating a rape culture in prisons.

Research demonstrates a discrepancy between how officers claim to be towards acts of homosexuality and rape compared to their actual behaviour (e.g. Eigenberg 1994). Although officers report that they should and would respond to acts of rape, prisoners report that officers contribute to the rape culture in prisons with their no-responsive attitudes (Lockwood 1980). It was argued by O'Donnell (2004) that prison officers' personal beliefs on prison rape may influence the rape culture of that prison, with officers who display a resigned or accepting behaviour of prison rape potentially encouraging the development of this culture further. This effect may also be further enhanced through

the low morale of the officers and the insufficient training they receive to deal with the issues that may arise in the prison system, such as rape (Howard League for Penal Reform 2017).

Different factors may influence officers' perception, thus, attitude towards rape: Some officers might choose to ignore sexual acts because they think that it is consensual between two men. Particularly, it might be difficult to determine whether it is a consensual act because rape in prison also relies on extortion techniques where coercion is as important as outright force (Eigenberg 2000a, b; Wooden and Parker 1982). In two studies conducted by Eigenberg (1989, 1994), it was found that most officers thought rape and consensual homosexual acts were the same things, dramatically affecting their attitude towards acts of rape. Similarly, it was found that officers overestimated the perception of the number of prisoners involved in homosexual activity compared to rape acts. These different perceptions of male rape eventually have a crucial influence on prison officers' attitudes towards rape, directly and indirectly contributing to the rape culture in prison (Rantala 2018).

Research has provided strong evidence that male rape myths are a significant predictor of prison officers' negative attitudes towards prison rape victims. For example, in a study conducted by Cook and Lane (2017) those prison officers who accepted male rape myths tended to blame victim prisoners. Conversely, those officers who rejected the male rape myths tended to encourage the victimised prisoners to report the assault and use proactive measures towards rape in their prisons. Eigenberg's Prison Rape Model (2000b) provided an essential contribution to explain rape in prison, showing how young, male, religious, and less educated officers tended to endorse anti-homosexuality attitudes. Conversely, young, female, less religious showed more supportive attitudes.

Finally, another theoretical approach that could be used to explain prison officers' rape myths is the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979). This model illustrates the interaction between individual (e.g. gender, attitudes) and system-level factors (e.g. institution, peers) on experience. This has been previously used to explain rape survivors' and police officers' perception of rape (e.g. Tillman et al. 2010; Kubiak et al. 2016). It is valuable to reveal whether the same interaction can influence other individuals' experiences and impressions of rape. Kubiak et al. (2016) stressed the importance of exploring moderating influences on experience, such as rape myths. Hence, the rejection of societal rape myths may decrease negative attitudes and positively impact zero tolerance for male rape. Similarly, this theory could be used to explain whether being a prison officer affects myth acceptance differently in society.

## The Present Study

Police officers are responsible for identifying potential victims, preventing rape situations, investigating cases inside the prison and pressing charges against perpetrators (Kim et al. 2021). Although an extensive portion of the literature has shown that US prison officers can have negative attitudes towards male rape (e.g. Cook and Lane 2012, 2017; Eigenberg 1989, 2000a, b; Nacci and Kane 1984; Wooden and Parker 1982), there is a lack of similar studies conducted in the UK.

For this reason, the present project aimed at exploring UK prison officers' perceptions of male rape during incarceration, rape myth acceptance and opinions of prison rape. This research also tried to determine whether UK prison officers possess more negative male rape myths and misconceptions compared to the general population due to their working role.

## Method

### Participants

Snowball sampling was used to recruit 41 participants through social media (e.g. Facebook), as Dosek (2021) highlighted how social media snowball sampling is a widely used and effective method of collecting information and gaining access to hard-to-reach population samples (e.g. retired HMP prison officers). Two groups were created: group 1 which included prison officers ( $N = 24$ ) and group 2 which included participants who were not prison officers ( $N = 17$ ) (see Table 1). Participants were separated into six age groups: 21–30, 31–40, 41–50, 51–60, 61–70 and  $\geq 71$ . The mean average was 50–60-year-old ( $SD = 1.32$ ) for prison officers and 41–50 ( $SD = 1.58$ ) for the general population group. Retired HMP prison officers were preferred as active officers had a prolonged access approval.

### Materials

An online questionnaire included seven questions on the participant's demographics (age, gender, employment, education, sexual orientation, religion and race), followed by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's (1992) Rape Myth Scale (p. 90); the 12-item questionnaire was remodelled for this study as there are no relevant scales to measure male prisoner-on-prisoner rape myths. The six statements utilised were related to male-on-male victimisation:

**Table 1** Characteristics of participants

Variable	Retired prison officers	Control group
<b>Age</b>		
21–30	17% (N=4)	47% (N=8)
31–40	8% (N=2)	18% (N=3)
41–50	25% (N=6)	(N=0)
51–60	42% (N=10)	23% (N=4)
61–70	4% (N=1)	12% (N=2)
≥ 71	4% (N=1)	(N=0)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	75% (N=18)	35% (N=6)
Female	25% (N=6)	65% (N=11)
<b>Employment</b>		
Yes	83% (N=20)	100% (N=17)
No	12% (N=3)	
<b>Education</b>		
No education	4% (N=1)	(N=0)
High school	42% (N=10)	23% (N=4)
College	29% (N=7)	18% (N=3)
Bachelor's degree	4% (N=1)	23% (N=4)
Master's degree	8% (N=2)	12% (N=2)
Doctorate	4% (N=1)	(N=0)
Other	8% (N=2)	12% (N=2)
<b>Sexual orientation</b>		
Heterosexual	96% (N=23)	94% (N=16)
Homosexual	4% (N=1)	(N=0)
Other	(N=0)	6% (N=1)
<b>Religion</b>		
No religion	50% (N=12)	41% (N=7)
Christian	46% (N=11)	59% (N=10)
Other	4% (N=1)	(N=0)
<b>Race</b>		
White British	92% (N=22)	100% (N=17)
Black ethnic	4% (N=1)	
Other	4% (N=1)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>N=24</b>	<b>N=17</b>

Myth 1 – *'It is impossible for a man to rape another man'*.

Myth 2 – *'even a strong man can be raped by another man'*.

Myth 3 – *'Most men who are raped by a man are somewhat to blame for not being more careful'*.

Myth 4 – *'Most men who are raped are somewhat to blame for not escaping or fighting off the man'*.

Myth 5 – *'Most men who are raped by a man are very upset after the incident'*.

Myth 6 – *'Most men who are raped by a man do not need counselling after the incident'*.

The modified 6-item scale was measured on a 6-item Likert scale (1 = 'strongly agree', 2 = 'moderately agree', 3 = 'slightly agree', 4 = 'slightly disagree', 5 = 'moderately disagree', 6 = 'strongly disagree'). Previous research compounds its reliability, although it concluded the scale

required further examination (Chapleau, Oswald and Russel 2008). Seven open-ended questions measured the perceptions of male rape in prison, focusing on masculinity, prison regulation and male rape myths. The language was adapted for group 2 to ensure prison regulation and terminology were understood.

## Research Design

A mixed method design was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously with equal weight. Relationships and differences were examined between the participants' background characteristics and agreement scores on rape myth statements, while perceptions of male prisoners being raped were explored through open-ended questions; together, the results formed an overall interpretation of the extent of male rape stigma in the prisons.

## Procedure

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the University of Huddersfield, after which an online link to the questionnaire was distributed to the participants via social media and email. Once opened, participants read an information statement and provided their consent by selecting 'Yes' ('No' would terminate the webpage). Upon their consent, the questionnaire gathered self-report data on the participants' demographics, acceptance of male rape myths and opinions of prisoners being raped. Participants answered the questionnaire individually; the mean length of time was 18 min. Each response was allocated a number to ensure anonymity, and the participants could withdraw at any point until submitting the questionnaire. After completion, participants read a debriefing statement about the study; this included a publicly available contact detail for the mental health charity 'Mind' for participants who may have been emotionally affected by talking about rape. Mind was chosen as the supplied support network for this research as not only they are a well-established and effective mental health charity but also they can provide guidance on sexual abuse support options, such as outside organisations and charities, for participants who may have been a victim of rape previously and require further support post-study.

## Data Analysis

Multiple linear regression models examined the effect of different background characteristics on agreement scores. The study expected to find the variable 'education', 'race' and 'sexual orientation' as predictors of prison rape myths acceptance.

The qualitative data was analysed through thematic analysis and smallest space analysis (SSA). Thematic

analysis was used to code the questionnaires to detect patterns which could be assigned to ‘themes’ to explain the differing attitudes to prison rape. SSA was used to explore the co-occurring beliefs held by prison officers. SSA is a non-metric multi-dimensional scaling procedure (MDS) to examine the relationships between variables within a matrix of association coefficients (Guttman 1968). The coefficients were ranked to form a spatial representation of items; clustered variables show high co-occurrence, and distant variables show low (Canter and Youngs 2009). The coefficient of alienation determines how well the spatial representation fits the co-occurrences; a small value represents a better fit (Borg and Lingoes 1987). Previously found to be a productive and credible test are in the literature (Canter and Heritage 1990; Karni and Levin 1972; Ioannou and Debowska 2014; Ioannou and Oostinga 2015; Ioannou et al. 2015; Grayson et al. 2020; Ioannou et al. 2018).

## Quantitative Results

### Descriptive Statistics

Participants from group 1 (83%) ( $M=5.17$ ,  $SD=1.90$ ) and from group 2 (65%) ( $M=4.24$ ,  $SD=2.46$ ) strongly disagreed with myth 1, strongly agreed with myth 2 (87% group 1 [ $M=1.33$ ,  $SD=1.09$ ], 88% group 2 [ $M=1.12$ ,  $SD=0.33$ ]), strongly disagreed with myth 3 (87% group 1 [ $M=5.62$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ], 76% group 2 [ $M=5.65$ ,  $SD=0.78$ ]), strongly disagreed with myth 4 (92% group 1 [ $M=5.79$ ,  $SD=0.83$ ], 88% group 2 [ $M=5.76$ ,  $SD=0.75$ ]), strongly agreed with myth 5 (87% group 1 [ $M=1.12$ ,  $SD=0.34$ ], 94% group 2 [ $M=1.05$ ,  $SD=0.24$ ]), and strongly disagreed with myth 6 (71% group 1 [ $M=5.54$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ], 76% group 2 [ $M=5.59$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ]).

### Multiple Linear Regression

The variables ‘race’ and ‘employment’ were excluded from group 2’s results as they were too similar. Table 2 presents the results from the test. Prison officers’ race was a statistically significant predictor for myth 1 and sexual orientation for myth 5. Neither model was statistically significant; therefore, both variables were significant at individual levels. Group 2’s age and education were statistically significant predictors for myth 6. The model was not statistically significant, meaning the two variables were also significant at individual levels. Neither group had statistically significant predictors to the remaining scales, having insufficient evidence to conclude a relationship exists.

### Kruskal Wallis

Table 3 shows the results for the Kruskal Wallis (H). Like the multiple linear regression, race and employment were excluded from group 2. The analysis found that there were no significant differences between the gender of the participants and the agreement scores of the myths. There was a statistically significant difference between group 1 scores on myth 1 and their race. The Dunn-Bonferroni pairwise test found a statistically significant difference between Black ethnic and White British ( $p=0.059$ ) as well as other and White British ( $p=0.59$ ). The mean rank for White British is 13.41 and 2.50 for both Black ethnic and other. There was a statistically significant difference between group 1’s scores on myth 5 and their sexual orientation. A Dunn-Bonferroni pairwise test could not be conducted as the participants only fit into two categories. It was calculated that homosexuals (23.00) had a higher mean rank than heterosexuals (12.04). There were no statistically significant differences in any of the myths in group 2.

### Thematic Analysis

Two themes were identified from the participant’s responses, ‘positive attitudes’ and ‘negative attitudes’; multiple sub-themes were acknowledged throughout. Participants from groups 1 and 2 had similar responses.

### Positive Attitudes

#### Supportive Beliefs

Participants from both groups that commented on their support and showed sympathy and sensitivity about raped prisoners used words such as ‘traumatising’, ‘abhorrent’ and ‘disgusting’ when describing the act, believing prison rape was ‘the same as outside of prison’ (e.g. prison officer 3). Hence, most people deny male rape myths, regardless of being a prison officer.

#### Prisoner Credibility

Prison officer 3 claimed, ‘it is not the role of a prison officer to believe or not’. Claiming all rapes should be respected and taken seriously. However, only two participants in group 2 agreed, stating ‘they should be believed until proven otherwise’. Alternatively, the other individuals from both groups believed prisoners lie, saying ‘it’s probably like the boy who cried wolf’ (group 2 – 41). Hence, the public may stereotype prisoners more, but prejudice is increasing for both.



**Table 2** Multiple linear regression predicting the prison officers' and the control group's agreement scores

	Myth 1			Myth 2			Myth 3			Myth 4			Myth 5			Myth 6		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
Age	-.38 (.20)	.73 (.65)	-.26 (.13)	.20 (.01)	.56 (.09)	.24 (.07)	.20 (.04)	.57 (.22)	.24 (.07)	-.17 (.16)	.42 (.21)	-.27 (.34)	.01 (.10)	.14 (.06)	.05 (.68)	-.28 (-.51)	.55 (.19)	-.35 (-.93*)
Gender	.09 (-3.73)	1.91 (2.87)	.02 (-.75)	.49 (.00)	1.48 (.42)	.20 (.00)	1.10 (.12)	1.51 (.99)	.43 (.08)	-.05 (.17)	1.10 (.94)	-.02 (.11)	.20 (.09)	.37 (.28)	.27 (.18)	-.68 (-.48)	1.43 (.83)	-.28 (-.27)
Employment	1.60	1.71	.29	-.96	1.32	-.30	.13	1.25	.04	.81	.98	.34	-.07	.33	-.07	.47	1.28	.15
Education	.10 (.36)	.27 (.48)	.09 (.27)	-.08 (-.01)	.21 (.07)	-.12 (-.06)	.18 (-.08)	.21 (.17)	.26 (-.19)	.11 (.08)	.16 (.16)	.22 (.18)	.01 (.02)	.05 (.047)	-.06 (.16)	.03 (-.36)	.20 (.14)	.05 (-.76*)
Sexual Orientation	-.23 (.76)	2.43 (.98)	-.02 (.22)	.18 (-.09)	1.88 (.14)	.03 (-.20)	.90 (.12)	1.92 (.34)	.16 (.11)	-.21 (.06)	1.40 (.32)	-.05 (.05)	1.00 (-.11)	.47 (.09)	.61* (-.32)	-1.34 (.45)	1.83 (.28)	-.26 (.37)
Religion	-.14 (2.29)	.30 (2.97)	-.10 (.47)	.03 (.20)	.23 (.43)	.04 (.31)	-.13 (-.58)	.24 (1.02)	-.16 (-.37)	-.07 (-.75)	.17 (.98)	-.13 (-.51)	-.04 (-.07)	.06 (.29)	-.19 (-.15)	.12 (.25)	.23 (.86)	.16 (.20)
Race	-1.22	.49	-.57*	-.28	.38	-.23	.10	.38	.08	.19	.28	.20	-.07	.05	-.20	.29	.37	.25
R <sup>2</sup>	.49 (.25)			.07 (.13)			.10 (.14)			.12 (.14)			.38 (.28)			.07 (.50)		
F	2.052 (0.753)			0.158 (0.328)			0.259 (0.347)			0.301 (0.355)			1.321 (0.860)			0.174 (2.180)		
df	22 (16)																	

The control group's results are presented in brackets

'\_' denotes missing values

\**p* < .05

**Table 3** Kruskal Wallis showing differences between background characteristics for the prison officers and the control group on agreement scores

	Myth 1		Myth 2		Myth 3		Myth 4		Myth 5		Myth 6	
	$H^2$	$p$	$H^2$	$p$	$H^2$	$p$	$H^2$	$p$	$H^2$	$p$	$H^2$	$p$
Age	2.76 (.37)	.737 (.946)	2.40 (3.53)	.792 (.316)	6.59 (4.41)	.253 (.220)	2.92 (3.14)	.712 (.370)	6.35 (7.50)	.273 (.058)	7.24 (5.38)	.203 (.146)
Gender	.00 (1.33)	1.00 (.250)	0.12 (1.16)	.728 (.281)	1.09 (0.29)	.296 (.587)	0.70 (1.16)	.404 (.282)	.12 (.54)	.727 (.460)	0.03 (0.37)	.867 (.543)
Employment	.69 --	.405 --	0.49 --	.492 --	0.88 --	.349 --	0.31 --	.575 --	.49 --	.482 --	0.00 --	.955 --
Education	6.05 (5.01)	.418 (.415)	1.39 (2.40)	.966 (.791)	2.46 (2.64)	.873 (.755)	2.92 (2.40)	.819 (.791)	10.73 (3.25)	.097 (.662)	5.19 (3.40)	.519 (.637)
Sexual Orientation	.20 (5.45)	.655 (.460)	0.14 (0.13)	.706 (.715)	0.14 (0.30)	.706 (.582)	0.09 (0.13)	.763 (.716)	7.00 (.063)	.008* (.803)	2.12 (0.30)	.145 (.583)
Religion	.21 (.22)	.901 (.638)	0.33 (1.49)	.848 (.222)	3.87 (0.62)	.145 (.429)	0.11 (1.49)	.948 (.223)	.43 (.70)	.806 (.403)	0.59 (0.73)	.743 (.394)
Race	10.45 --	.005* --	0.30 --	.862 --	0.30 --	.862 --	0.19 --	.909 --	.30 --	.861 --	0.85 --	.654 --

The control group's results are presented in brackets

'—' denotes missing values

\* $p < .05$

## Legitimacy

Prison officers' beliefs on protocol corresponded with the PSO 1300, including enforcing security, health checks, informing police and senior officers and focusing on *'physical wellbeing by reference to medical attention'* (prison officer 6). Hence, legitimacy is not always affected by personal beliefs. A consensus is that *'the law is there to protect people from such a vile act'* (prison officer 19), showing prison rape is viewed in the same way as general rape. Participants from group 2 shared similar opinions, agreeing that it would be appalling *'if it was pushed under the radar'* (group 2 – 41). Some participants from both groups ensured police were involved in some cases and had even *'called to take samples of clothes and body fluids'* (prison officer 14), thus showing that pragmatic attitudes may be increasing, bolstered by prison officers defying societal male rape myth; for example, *'in most instances, the men who rape other inmates are not homosexual'* (prison officer 22) and *'not always sex-starved'* (prison officer 7). Perceptions appear to be improving as one prison officer said, *'homosexuality does not bother me anymore'* (prison officer 4), and group 2 appeared to agree.

## Negative Attitudes

### Apocryphal

False ideas and bias towards male prison rape were prevalent. Six prison officers thought prison rape was unusual and *'heard very little of such crime'* (prison officer 1), while

another thought it was an *'urban legend'* (prison officer 15), despite indications that rape and sexual victimisation occur highly in prison, thus showing the lack of knowledge or direct experience of male rape while carrying out their duties. Group 2 agreed, stating *'I don't know much about it, but I think it happens more than what it reported'* (group 2 – 39), proving that increased awareness is needed. Bias was shown through prison officers claiming prisoners are untrustworthy due to *'a long history of dishonesty and false allegations'* (prison officer 20). Whereas group 2 thought this was due to *'stereotyping'* (group 2 – 37), being *'a high-risk prisoner'* (group 2 – 29) or *'their record'* (group 2 – 34). Prison officers claimed their experience with prisoners helped them identify liars, as *'individuals in a prison setting manipulate the use of statements for their own ends'* (prison officer 7). Other prison officers demonstrated greater bias due to believing that homosexuals are the only targets, refusing to believe heterosexuals can get raped. For example, *'there are prisoners who clearly are not homosexual and do not fit the profile for putting themselves at risk'* (prison officer 8), therefore highlighting how prison officers and the public can accept apocryphal information about prisoners, especially prison officers, as it affects whether they take reports seriously.

### Illegitimacy

Many responses were unjustified; certain prison officers, albeit not the public, believed the blame was *'sometimes the victim for allowing this to happen'* (prison officer 8), thus holding beliefs that oppose standard rules. Whereas other

prison officers and the public blamed the prison, claiming *'they should have assessed if this could happen before it happened'* (prison officer 14) and whether prisoners are believed *'depends on their background with some officers'* (group 2 – 31). Many thought protocols were overlooked, primarily *'in an understaffed prison service. Management are happy to sweep it under the carpet'* (prison officer 20), although both groups knew this was inappropriate. Retirement helped officers gain perspective, improving their beliefs. For example, *'its only being out of the job for a few years that I understand it more'* (prison officer 18). Therefore, illegitimacy and inappropriate attitudes may be reduced; however, many still advocate that police are rarely involved.

### Survivalist Beliefs

Masculinity and sexual deprivation were present in responses, identified as reasons behind the lack of reporting in prison and survival. Prison officers believed prison rape was inevitable, stating it is *'an act of sexual frustration due to the lack of females'* (prison officer 3), thus supporting Sykes' 1958 deprivation theory. Some participants from group 2 also thought rape was associated with *'sexual urges'* (group 2 – 25 and 29), although the majority connected the act to power. Most prison officers shared this belief, using typical phrases such as *'it's a power thing'*, *'it's a game'* and *'it's a weapon'*. Masculinity is therefore evident in the prison system and associated with survival, *'for men, shame and self-preservation within the "society of captives" mattered'* (prison officer 6). There was a consensus that reporting a rape would cause *'a scene'*, and both groups believed bullying or grooming would continue.

### Smallest Space Analysis

The SSA supports the thematic analysis. Figure 1 shows the SSA plot for the distribution of open-ended responses from the 24 prison officers, excluding group 2, as the focus was solely on revealing what beliefs co-occurred in prison officers' perceptions. Twenty-two beliefs were identified, matching the sub-themes identified from the thematic analysis. The Guttman-Lingoes coefficient of alienation for the 2-dimensional SSA equalled 0.14693, meaning the Jaccard coefficients and the configuration distribution have a good fit.

The SSA plot supports the idea that positivity and negativity are distinct themes for officers' attitudes. Positive attitudes were placed towards the top of the plot and spread down to the bottom right corner, while negative attitudes clustered around the bottom left corner. The only crossover is the variable (6) *prisoners lie or withhold information*; centred on the axis, this variable may link to positive and negative outlooks.

The SSA shows prison officers within the positive region were supportive and followed protocol. Whereas those in the negative region were susceptible to bias, and misconceptions and perceived rape as survival methods rather than disgusting, consistent with the thematic analysis, strengthening the credibility of what prison officers perceive about prison rape.

### Discussion

The study aimed to explore prison officers' perceptions of male rape during incarceration, rape myth acceptance and opinions of prison rape. Prison officers from this study showed mixed beliefs towards male rape in prison, rejecting societal myths as previously demonstrated by Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's study (1992). However, unlike Struckman-Johnson and Struckman-Johnson's study, there was no relationship or difference between gender and myth acceptance. Since male and female prison officers may have had equal exposure to male rape victims, the experience could have influenced their perception, reducing prejudice (Hodson and Busseri 2012). Although some prison officers showed a negative predisposition towards male rape in prison, many were supportive, suggesting negativity is not predominant. The public had similar responses, suggesting that the expression of positivity or negativity depends on the individual and not on the working role. This was also confirmed by the qualitative responses, as nearly all prison officers expressed disgust towards rape, always blaming the perpetrator for the crime. These results differ from the finding of the USA studies (e.g. Cook and Lane 2012; Eigenberg 1989, 2000a, b; Nacci and Kane 1984; Wooden and Parker 1982), as UK prison officers showed sympathetic attitudes towards male prison rape. Both prison officers and the public provided mixed beliefs about male rape in prison, demonstrating that the perceptions of male rape cannot be determined by their working role. Tillman et al.'s (2010) use of the ecological theory suggests that when interpretations of male rape were similar, the interactions which formed the perception were different. Hence, the prison environment cannot have a large detrimental effect on rape myths as most of the public and prison officers were equally compassionate towards male rape.

In addition, heterosexual prison officers strongly agreed more than homosexuals on male victims being upset after rape. This could suggest that a connection between sexual orientation and sympathy for raped prisoners is not arbitrary (Eigenberg 1989). Multiple prison officers and public participants believed the deprivation of sex affected prison rape, consistent with Sykes' (2007) findings. Accepting the belief that rape in prison is inevitable can be damaging, causing prison officers to ignore the crime and affect regulation (Eigenberg 1989; 2000a). In line with Eigenberg's



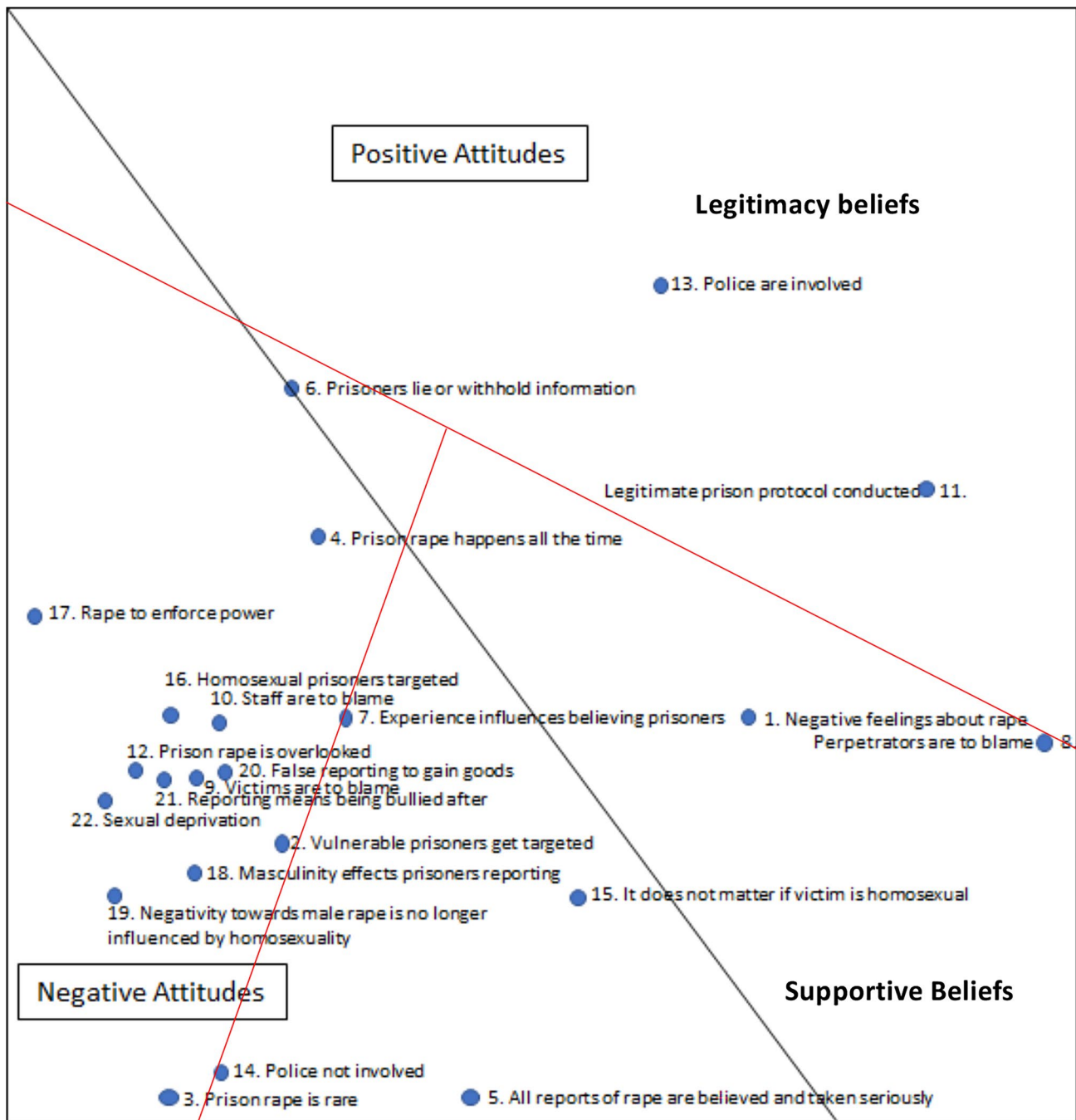


Fig. 1 Smallest Space Analysis of the distribution of the 24 prison officers' attitudes to male rape

results (1989), many officers perceived rape as a 'survival' technique to manage the lack of heterosexual sex. This perception is highly controversial because it normalises rape in male prisons and enhances victim blaming.

Finally, some minor differences were identified between White and Black officers. White prison officers strongly disagreed more than Black ethnic prison officers on male rape being impossible, indicating a relationship between

different races and support for male rape. These results are in line with Jimenez and Abrell's study (2003), suggesting that White British prison officers have less negativity towards male rape. Both races disagreed with the myths, but White participants held stronger positive beliefs. Although there were no clear racial differences in prison officers' attitudes, this factor should be tested further.

A few limitations need to be considered. The prominent flaw is the sample size. This limits the study as results have a greater risk of outliers. The gender ratios of the two groups also present a potential limitation to the study, as they were not both not equally balanced, with the prison officer group being mostly male and the control group being majority female. This potentially presents an issue regarding the generalisability of the results, as it does not accurately represent the samples it is investigating. However, a headcount of prison officers provided by the Ministry of Justice (2014) showcased that the percentage of male prison officers in the UK prisons was 79%, which is almost directly corresponds with this studies' male prison officer percentage of 75%, potentially highlighting that this gender ratio is an accurate reflection of the investigated sample. Nevertheless, the control group sample was unequally balanced, highlighting a potential limitation that would need to be addressed in future research in this area to gain a more accurate representation of the general public. Moreover, the study cannot compare the associations between the prison officers and the general population group's race or employment on agreement scores. It is unclear whether the associations are similar or different; hence, future research should use a larger and more diverse sample to compare them. In addition, the perceptions found in this study lack generalisability. All the prison officers from this sample were retired from the HMP estate, but active prison officers may show a different perception of male rape. Future studies should focus on working with prison officers, investigating their experiences and present perception of male rape.

Although these are only preliminary findings, this study was able to provide the fundamentals to a vastly under-reported problem, contributing to a developing field of research in the UK. Further research on the topic would help to reduce the stigma held in the institutions and allow prison officers to give prisoners equal protection. This will also help to inform the development of strategies to respond to and prevent prison rape, such as employing more educated and trained officers, but also promoting global support for victimised prisoners to lessen the stigma around male rape.

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**Data Availability** The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to data protection but are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Permission to use the included materials was granted prior to the project's start.

## Declarations

**Ethical Approval** The procedures used in this study adhere to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was sought and granted by the University of Huddersfield.

**Informed Consent** The project was ethically approved by the SREP committee of Huddersfield University, and informed consent was obtained from the participants.

**Conflict of Interest** No conflict of interest to declare.

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