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Police Perceptions on False Accusations of Sexual Assault

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice & Criminology

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Criminal Justice & Criminology

by

Danielle Ostrander

May 2018

Dr. Chris Rush, Chair

Dr. Dustin Osborne

Dr. Jennifer Pealer

Keywords: Police Officer, Sexual Assault, False Accusations

ABSTRACT

Police Perceptions on False Accusations of Sexual Assault

by

Danielle Ostrander

The purpose of this study was to expand current literature regarding police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault; specifically, focusing on perceptions of the frequency of false accusations, rape myths and behavior displayed by women reporting sexual assault. Police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault were examined by administering a 21-question survey consisting of close-ended and open-ended questions. The survey included questions about police perceptions, false accusations, rape myths, training, and behaviors of women reporting sexual assault. The sample consisted of 40 sworn law enforcement officers from different municipal police departments in Tennessee. The results showed that, despite empirical evidence, police officers were more likely to perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault, as well as endorse certain rape myths. Findings also showed a number of police officers perceived different behaviors of women making a false report than those not making a false report.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of false accusations of sexual assault is not unfamiliar to the criminal justice system in the United States (Jordan, 2004). The International Association of Chiefs of Police (2005) defines false accusations as a sexual assault report that proved no crime was committed or attempted after a thorough investigation was conducted. The familiarity of this issue leads to problems within law enforcement and can cause negative outcomes for victims, offenders, and community-police relationships. False accusations of sexual assault can cause the public to become distrusting of the police, but also cause the police to become distrusting of individuals reporting sexual assault (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009; Sable, Danis, Mauzy, & Gallagher, 2006). If police officers do not trust the individual(s) reporting, the individual(s) may choose not to report victimization. Other negative effects caused by false accusations of sexual assault include: negatively influencing police officer's perceptions, for instance, perceiving high rates of false accusations; acceptance of other rape myths, such as "women cry rape" or "men cannot be raped;" and underreporting (Allen, 2007; Lisak, Gardinier, Nicksa, & Cote, 2010). Underreporting sexual assault is already a frequent issue within law enforcement; therefore, false sexual assault accusations further the problem (Allen, 2007; Jordan, 2004).

There is limited research on police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault. The research that does exist addresses different issues, such as underreporting, false accusation statistics, and general perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Lonsway & Archambault, 2008 Lisak et al., 2010). Most research on this phenomenon was conducted in the late 1970's to the early 2000s, but since then, approximately four other

quantitative studies on false accusations of sexual assault have been conducted (Lisak et al., 2010; Rumney, 2006). This study aimed to add to current research by examining how perceptions of false accusations of sexual assault affects police officers' perceptions. The data used came from surveys completed by police officers in Tennessee to provide a better understanding of police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, as well as possible reasons to explain their perceptions. Training on police response to sexual assault was also examined in this research.

This thesis explored and expanded current literature on police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault and how the perceptions affected personal views of victims of sexual assault. More specifically, the study was conducted to determine if police officers in Tennessee perceived frequent rates of false accusations of sexual assault. Police perceptions on six different rape myths was also examined to determine if a relationship exists between police perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths. Furthermore, the study investigated police response to sexual assault through training; specifically, it determined if police training was required, and if police officers that underwent training had different perceptions than those who did not have training. Understanding the problem will make it possible for other researchers to create solutions to combat the negative outcomes from police perceptions.

The present study added to prior literature and research by examining police perceptions in West and East Tennessee. It focused on four different primary research questions. The first question focused on *police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault*. Specifically, it examined if *police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault*. Examining the perceptions that police officers have was important in

understanding how officers view many aspects of sexual assault and rape. The second research question was: *Is there a relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths?* It was important to determine if there was a correlation between police officers' perceptions and rape myths because prior research suggests that officers who endorse rape myths are likely to have negative perceptions of women reporting sexual assault (Belknap, 2010; Jordan, 2004). The third research question asked: *Is there a correlation between training and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault?* This helped determine if training on police response to sexual assault affected police officers' perceptions. The last research question focused on *if police officers perceive different behaviors of women who falsely report sexual assault than women who do not make a false report.* Prior research has shown law enforcement officers have a list of certain behaviors and characteristics women show when reporting sexual assault (Buddie & Miller, 2001; Gross, 2009; Lonsway et al., 2009).

To answer the previous research questions, sworn law enforcement officers at different departments in Tennessee completed hand-administered surveys that included questions on five different areas: information about the officers, personal experiences, specialized training, rape myth acceptance, and personal perceptions. To accomplish the goals of this study, a 21-question survey was designed. The questions were created by the researcher and included a mixed methods approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed by coding and entering the data into SPSS. To measure perceptions on rates of false accusations of sexual assault, a Likert Scale was used that ranged from "never" to "often." To measure rape myth acceptance, a Likert scale was used that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Prior research has shown police endorse rape myths, perceive frequent rates of false accusations of sexual assault,

and believe women making a false report portray different behaviors than those not making a false report (Jordan, 2004; Lonsway et al., 2009; Lisak et al., 2010). The information regarding police officers covered questions about training on sexual assault, experience on the job, and how many investigations on sexual assault has the department conducted over a period of five years. This information was utilized for analysis to determine if a relationship existed between police perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and perceptions of behaviors. The responses regarding rape myths were analyzed in order to determine two things: (1) which rape myths were endorsed by police officers, and (2) was there a relationship between police perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault and the rape myths. By researching this information and analyzing responses, this study expands on the current literature on police perceptions of sexual assault, specifically false accusations. Understanding police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault is necessary because the perception of high rates of false accusations has direct consequences, such as underreporting and secondary victimization (Lisak et al., 2010). Also, this research may be valuable to policymakers by providing information about current training on police response to sexual assault.

The next chapter addressed previous literature that is available on sex crimes, victim and offender characteristics, offender misconceptions, rape myths and rape myth acceptance, feminist theory, police perceptions, specialized training and false accusations. Chapter 3 addressed the research questions, hypotheses, research design, variables, methods and analyses, and limitations correlated with this study. Chapter 4 discussed the findings and responses from the survey. The last chapter provided the discussion and conclusion associated with this study and discussed future research possibilities and policy implications.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault is an issue in the criminal justice field that is not often researched. A major reason for why research on false accusations of sexual assault is limited is because the topic is personal for many individuals involved (Gross, 2009). This causes other limitations, such as difficulty obtaining accurate statistics of the rate in which false reports are made (Gross, 2009). Research has shown there is not an exact number of false accusation reports, but the most methodologically accurate study to date revealed less than five percent of sexual assault accusations are false (Lisak et al., 2010). Though prior research suggests a small number of sexual assault reports are false, police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault (Belknap, 2010; Jordan, 2004; Lisak et al., 2010). Current statistics on false accusations of sexual assault were discussed in detail later in this chapter, but first general sexual violence statistics were addressed.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) (2015), residents age 12 years or older, experienced five million violent victimizations. The number of rape and sexual assault victimizations during 2014-2015 were 5,006,620 (BJS, 2016). These numbers increased from 1.1 victimizations per 1,000 to 1.6 per 1,000 in one year (BJS, 2016). Other statistics showed females who were younger than 34, lived in lower income households in rural areas experienced the highest rates of sexual violence (BJS, 2013). Also, statistics revealed the victims had some relationship with the offender, and the offender was armed with a weapon (BJS, 2013).

The purpose of the current research was to explore police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault. By exploring perceptions, the study determined the perceived frequency of false accusation reports, behaviors women display when falsely reporting, and what

influenced police perceptions. This study sought to expand on past research on police perceptions on rape myths, especially regarding false accusations (Lonsway et al., 2009; Page, 2010; Ward, 1995). The rest of this chapter addressed sex crimes, offender characteristics, victim characteristics, rape myths and myth acceptance, feminist theory, police perceptions, specialized training and false accusations. The research aimed to provide a better understanding of perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault commonly held by police officers based on current research. To begin, the first section in this chapter discussed sex crimes.

Sex Crimes

Sex crime research has recently increased revealing that sex crimes are much more prevalent and problematic than previous research found (Flowers, 2006). There are numerous types of sex crimes that exist, such as sexual murder, incest, pedophilia, prostitution, and rape (Flowers, 2006; Holmes & Holmes, 2002). Flowers (2006) stated that rape is the second most violent sex crime, sexual murder being the first. One in three females become victims of rape and sexual assault (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2016; Flowers, 2006). Rape is largely underreported, in fact it is the most underreported crime in the justice system (Flowers, 2006; Jordan, 2004). One reason victims of sexual assault and rape do not report is because few offenders are caught, and fewer are prosecuted (Sable et al., 2006; Flowers, 2006). Some victims fear secondary victimization, which is feeling victimized by the criminal justice system process, as well as the actual assault (Williams & Holmes, 1981; Martin & Powell, 1995; Flowers, 2006). Secondary victimization often refers to victims feeling bad about themselves, violated, or to blame for their own victimization after being interviewed by the police (Shaw, Campbell, Cain, Feeney, & Hamby, 2017). Research suggests that victim-blaming happens often during sexual assault

interviews, partly due to negative perceptions and rape myth acceptance (Shaw et al., 2017; Venema, 2014).

Rape affects both women and men regardless of their background and demographics (Amir, 1971; Flowers, 2006). Amir (1971) studied patterns in forcible rape and established numerous findings. First, he found rape was mostly intraracial, meaning the rapist and victim were the same race; however, rape occurred more often between blacks than between whites. Next, rapists were generally between the ages of fifteen to twenty-nine years old, while victims were between the ages of ten and twenty-nine years old. This is similar to findings from BJS (2015/2016) who found the majority of victims were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four years old. Lastly, Amir (1971) found that victims and their offenders usually lived near each other. More recent research provided different offender characteristics; for example, sex offender were generally Caucasian males, who were unmarried, and knew their victim(s) (Scalora & Garbin, 2003). Research also shows substance abuse, such as alcohol consumption, plays a role in sexual offenses (Chambers, Horvath, & Kelly, 2010; Scalora & Garbin, 2003). Amir (1971) suggested that characteristics of offenders depends on the type of rape that occurred.

There are multiple types of rape that currently exist; specifically, marital rape, date rape, acquaintance rape, stranger rape, and statutory rape. Marital rape has only recently been recognized in legal terms as a form of sexual violence (Flowers, 2006). Historically, there were no laws regarding rape in a marriage; therefore, a husband could rape his wife and suffer no consequences. It was not until the 1990s when martial rape became illegal in the United States, but like other forms of rape, many cases go unreported to police (Flowers, 2006). Marital rape studies have found that between 10 and 14 percent of married women have been victims of rape

by their spouse (Finkelhor & Yllo, 1985; Russell, 1990). The next types of rape discussed, date rape and acquaintance rape, are similar to marital rape.

Generally, date rape has been defined as rape involving girlfriends and boyfriends, previous partners, or individuals going out on a date (Flowers, 2006). Date rape is often identified with college communities because of several risk factors that exist (Flowers, 2006). For example, substance abuse and sexual experimentation are factors that increase the risk of date rape (Abbey, 2002; Flowers, 2006). Koss (1988) conducted research on characteristics of date rape finding that 86 percent of date rape occurred off campus, 57 percent of rapists were dates, 73 percent of rapes occurred while the victim and perpetrator abused a substance, and 42 percent of victims never reported the victimization.

Acquaintance rape involves friends, neighbors, coworkers, or individuals who know the victim (Flowers, 2006). The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2015) estimated that one in ten women has been raped by an intimate partner in her life time, and in eight out of ten cases of rape, the victim was acquainted with the rapist. Abbey (2002) estimated that 90 percent of alcohol-involved sexual assaults reported by females are victimized by an acquaintance, and over half of those were committed by an intimate partner.

Date rape, acquaintance rape, and marital rape are the most common forms of rape, while stranger rape is not as common (BJS, 2015; Flowers, 2006; Russell, 1980). Statistics show that approximately 6 percent of all sexual violence was committed by a stranger (BJS, 2015). Koss, Dinero, and Seibel (1988) researched stranger rape and found sexual assaults committed by strangers were perceived as more violent and perpetrated by multiple offenders. Also, stranger rapes are more likely to only happen once, unlike other forms of rape (Koss et al., 1988).

The last type of rape to discuss is statutory rape. Statutory rape is defined as an individual having consensual sex with another individual that is not old enough to give legal consent (Flowers, 2006). The age of consent varies between states. The FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System conducted the most comprehensive analysis of statutory rape cases between 1996 to 2000. Results showed that 95 percent of statutory rape victims were female; over half of the victims were age 14 or 15; 99 percent of offenders of female victims were male and 94 percent of offenders of male victims were female; and the majority of offenders were the age 21 or older.

More research is needed to understand the relationship between different types of rape and characteristics of offenders and victims. Much like offenders, victims of sexual assault share certain characteristics. The next section addressed common victim characteristics based on recent statistics.

Victims

Sexual assault is not limited to one specific race, gender, or age; however, research reveals common characteristics of victims. For example, the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (2016) reported approximately 321, 500 individuals become victims of sexual assault each year. Individuals between the ages of 12 and 34 have the highest risk of being sexually assaulted. Statistics show that 91 percent of adult victims and 82 percent of juvenile victims are female, which reveal women have the highest risk of becoming victims (NSVRC, 2015). Males can become victims too. The NSVRC (2015) reported that 9 percent of victims were males, and estimated that one in 71 males will be raped.

Research on male sexual assault could not be generalized because rates and reports were small, therefore recent reports focused only on female victim characteristics (Planty, Langton,

Krebs, Berzofsky, & Smiley-McDonald, 2013). Planty et al. (2013) conducted a special report on female victims of sexual violence between 1994 and 2010. Results found that white and black females were sexually assaulted at higher rates than any other race between 2005 and 2010. The findings also showed females who had never been married or had been divorced were sexually assaulted more than females who were married or widowed (Planty et al., 2013).

Other researchers have studied victim characteristics beyond simple demographics. To illustrate, Rodabaugh and Austin (1981) stated that perceived vulnerability was one characteristic. A sex offender may have chosen a target based on age, physical weakness, or location and time (Rodabaugh & Austin, 1981). Though statistics reveal general victim characteristics, any person can become a victim of sexual assault (Holmes & Holmes, 2002). While research has found common characteristics of offenders and victims, there are several misconceptions about sex offenders and victims (Flowers, 2006; Holmes & Holmes, 2002). The next section went into further detail regarding the misconceptions of sex offenders and victims.

Misconceptions

Several misconceptions exist when discussing sexual assault ranging from the sex offender to the victim. A major misconception of sexually based crimes is that children are the main targets for abduction and sexual victimization (Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012). The media emphasizes cases involving kidnapped and sexually assaulted children, but statistics from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children estimate around 115 children per year become victims of stranger kidnappings who hold them overnight, travel with them, kill the child, or demand a ransom (Galeste, Fradella, & Vogel, 2012). This number is astoundingly lower than sexual victimizations committed against adult females – 54 percent of sexual assault victims are females ages 18 to 34 (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, 2016).

Another misconception of sex offenders is that strangers commit sexual assaults. The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (2016) reported that 7 out of 10 sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim. This means 28 percent are committed by a stranger. Juvenile sexual assaults are the most publicized, but only 7 percent of cases reported to police in 2015 were strangers to the victim (Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network, 2016). This research showed that stranger rape does not occur as often as acquaintance or familial rape.

It has been perceived that sex offenders have a high recidivism rate. Prior research suggested sexual victimizations have high rates and offenders often repeat themselves (Bench & Allen, 2013; Doren, 1998). For example, Hanson and Bussiere (1998) conducted a study following 28,972 sex offenders up to 5 years after being released. Results showed 13.4 percent committed another sex offense, 12.2 percent committed a nonsexual violent offense, and 36.3 percent committed another type of offense. Prior research has been difficult to generalize because of the broad definition of recidivism and measures used; however, recent literature has shown most sex offenders are not convicted of new sex offenses once they have been released (Bench & Allen, 2013).

One last misconception involves the demographics of sex offenders. Sex offenders consist of all genders, professions, and classes, including police officers, youth pastors, teachers, and family members (Sex Crimes, 2016). Sex offenders are more often like other people than many people believe (Sex Crimes, 2016). Malamuth (1981) found that 35 percent of the college males surveyed would be willing to commit a sexual assault if they would not be punished. Men are not the only gender to commit sexual assault, however. Women make up less than 10 percent of sex crimes based on FBI statistics in 2006 (West, Friedman, & Kim, 2011). Vandiver (2006) characterized female sex offenders as generally white, between ages 20 and 30, and had been

sexually victimized before. Victims of female sex offenders had similar characteristics; for example, the victims were minors and had been relatives or acquainted with the child (Vandiver, 2006). When comparing male to female sex offenders, females often have past sexual abuse trauma, while men do not (Miccio-Fonseca, 2000).

These misconceptions often distort reality of who sex offenders are and who their victims are. Like misconceptions about sex offenders, myths about sexual assault victims exist. The following section discussed rape myths.

Rape Myths

Rape myths are defined as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists” (Burt, 1980). Brownmiller (1975) was the first theorist to identify rape myths, as well as express that male attitudes about rape may be influenced by rape myths. Brownmiller (1975) identified four common rape myths; “all women want to be raped,” “no woman can be raped against her will,” “women enjoy rape,” and “she was asking for it.” Recent examples of rape myths include: (1) dressing provocatively contributes to rape and sexual assault, (2) sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable urges, (3) stranger rape occurs more than acquaintance rape, (4) alcohol consumption contributes to rape and sexual assault, (5) men cannot be sexually assaulted, and (6) women falsely claim rape (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011; Deming, Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013; Lisak et al., 2010; Ward, 1995).

It is important to understand and breakdown the rape myths to change perceptions about rape, and disregard rape myths all together. Focusing on the recent examples, the first rape myth stated, “dressing provocatively contributes to rape and sexual assault.” Specifically, this myth implies that provocative clothing is a major contributor to rape and sexual assault (Edwards et

al., 2011). Moor (2010) conducted a study on perceptions on women's dressing styles and its relation to victim blaming. Results showed that 82.1 percent of the female participants agreed that the primary motivation for wearing revealing clothing was because they liked the look, while only 5.3 percent chose the style to seduce men. Near 80 percent of the male participants in this study reported that temptation and seduction were the primary motivations for women wearing revealing clothing (Moor, 2010). This study correlates with male misperceptions of women's sexual intent. Men often perceive women's friendly behavior as a sign of sexual attraction and interest (Abbey, 2002). Abbey, Zawacki, and McAuslan (2000) conducted a study that found men believe women are more sexually interested in them than the women actually are. This finding also correlates with the next rape myth.

The second rape myth stated, "sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable urges." Women are blamed for men losing control because women are not interested or openly available for sex when men are aroused (Beech & Ward, 2006). Rape, however, is generally not committed for sexual pleasure, but rather nonsexual needs (Groth, 1979). For example, theorists state that rape is used to maintain power (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993; Groth, 1979). Other theorists believe sexual offenders rape because of aggressive behavior (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993). Groth (1979) stated that sexual offenders suffer from psychological dysfunctions and use rape whenever feeling emotionally unstable or insecure; however, Fedoroff and Moran (1997) argue this perception stating that not all sex offenders suffer from psychological illnesses. Another misconception among sex offenders is that they have too much testosterone, but past research has concluded that testosterone cannot be the entire cause of sexual assault because sexual desire is not the intended goal (Brownmiller, 1975; Fedoroff & Moran, 1997).

The third rape myth was, “stranger rape occurs more than acquaintance rape.” Though research shows most victims of sexual assault know their offenders, a minor number of cases are considered stranger rapes (Lundrigan, 2014). Stranger rape is characterized as a rape where the victim and offender have no association (Lundrigan, 2014). Prior research shows that offenders of stranger rape are mostly male offenders with violent and hostile behaviors, and offend because of power and control (Lundrigan, 2014). Lundrigan (2014) found that offenders in stranger rapes involved multiple perpetrator offenses with a higher rate of violence than lone perpetrator offenses. During investigations of sexual assault, research indicates that a victim seems more credible if the victim and offender are strangers, but police officers are reluctant to believe stranger rapes occur more than acquaintance rapes (Lonsway et al., 2009).

The fourth rape myth was, “alcohol consumption contributes to rape and sexual assault.” While research suggests that alcohol is a factor in sexual assault and rape victimizations, it is not the leading cause of rape and sexual assault (Abbey, 2002; Horvath & Brown, 2006). Alcohol consumption increases a potential victim’s vulnerability, while decreasing the ability to react or resist (Abbey, 2002; Zimmerman & Benson, 2007). Drinking is typically done in a social manner with friends or coworkers, therefore a woman usually trusts the person(s) she is with not to take advantage of her (Abbey, 2002). Women are often criticized, and criticize themselves, for a sexual assault that occurred while drinking (Abbey, 2002; Richardson & Campbell, 1982).

The fifth rape myth stated, “men cannot be raped.” Traditionally, there are social norms for the male population, such as being masculine, strong, and desired (Weiss, 2010). There are certain characteristics a “real” man is supposed to have to display masculinity. For example, having sex with multiple women makes a man masculine (Kimmel, 2003; Weiss, 2010). However, men can be raped. Statistics from the National Crime Victimization Survey show 9

percent of victims of sexual assault are male (Weiss, 2010). The legal definition of rape was changed in 2012 to include all genders for both victims and offenders. Like female victims, underreporting is a common problem for male victims too. Men who are overpowered and raped are in fear of being judged for failing to maintain their masculinity. Men also do not report for reasons such as embarrassment or police distrust (Weiss, 2010). Another similarity between female victim rape myths and male victim rape myths is male victims are expected to fight back, however that cannot always be done. For example, an offender can subdue a male victim using a weapon or threat of harm (Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

The last rape myth addressed was, “women falsely claim rape.” For a sexual assault report to be deemed as false, there must be evidence that no crime was committed or attempted (Lisak et al., 2010). Evidence of no crime may include physical evidence, witness statements, or recant statements (Lisak et al., 2010). Little research has been conducted on the prevalence of false accusations, but evidence-based statistics reveal an estimate of two to eight percent of sexual assault reports are false (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Heenan & Murray, 2006; Lisak et al., 2010). The statistics suggest that the public drastically overestimates the number of false reports (Lonsway et al., 2009). The problem of overestimation occurs in the criminal justice system, especially policing. False accusations cause suspicion and faulty credibility to victims of sexual assault (Lonsway et al., 2009).

When suspicion occurs, police officers may look for certain characteristics of behavior in the victim reporting. Past research suggests women who falsely report rape have different characteristics than women who do not make a false report (Lonsway et al., 2009; McDowell, 1985; Ward, 1995). The characteristics of behavior are based on the societal stereotype of “real rape” (Lonsway et al., 2009). For example, a person reporting a genuine rape would have

evidence of physical violence, report the victimization immediately, report all the specific details, and would not know the offender (Lonsway et al., 2009; McDowell, 1985; Ward, 1995). If a victim's behavior did not fit this stereotype, then police officers were more likely to be suspicious of the victim's credibility (Lonsway et al., 2009). These characteristics are inaccurate according to research on sexual assault (Lisak et al., 2010). Police officers and investigators, however, do not base the final decision solely on behavioral characteristics. Instead, there must be enough evidence to establish a sexual assault did not occur (Lonsway et al., 2009).

Rape myths tend to preserve and perpetuate sexual violence against women (Edwards et al., 2011). Research indicates that rape myths are widely accepted in society, especially in law enforcement (Edwards et al., 2011; Page, 2010). The next subsection discussed rape myth acceptance.

Rape Myth Acceptance

Research has shown that rape myths are widely accepted in society, and influence individual attitudes (Burt, 1980; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010; Suarez & Gadalla, 2010). For example, men have used rape myths as justification for committing sexual assault, while women use them to deny sexual abuse and avoid blame (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). The prevalence of rape myth acceptance is higher among college students, as well as police officers, across both genders (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010; Page, 2010). Statistics show that men supported rape myths more than women, and black men supported them higher than white men (Giacopassi & Dull, 1986).

Carmody and Washington (2001) conducted a study on rape myth acceptance among college women. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of race and prior sexual victimization had on rape myth acceptance. Results showed that out of 724 respondents, 34.3

percent had been sexually assaulted in the past. There was no statistically significant difference between race among acceptance of rape myths. Among the different myths presented in the survey, the women accepted two rape myths the most: (1) one reason women falsely report rape is because they need or want attention, and (2) women who go out in public without a bra, or wearing tight tops and short skirts are asking to be raped (Carmody & Washington, 2001).

The reasons for acceptance of rape myths among men differ from women in several ways. For example, a correlation was found between acceptance by men and a likelihood of committing a sexual assault (Bohner et al., 1998). Several studies have shown that men who accept rape myths are more likely to be sexually aggressive and/or commit a sexual assault (Burgess, 2007; Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010). For women, the reason behind accepting rape myths is because of denial, not justification (Hayes-Smith & Levett, 2010).

The acceptance of rape myths is common in society, including in criminal justice professions such as law enforcement (Sleath & Bull, 2012). Evidence has suggested that police officer's belief of a sexual assault accusation is influenced by his or her own perception about sexual assault (Edward & MacLeod, 1999). Page (2008) conducted a study on police acceptance of rape myths and found that the majority of participants did not accept rape myths, but the respondents that did are similar to findings on the general population. For example, police officers were more likely to accept the rape myth that women who dress provocatively were more likely to be sexually assaulted or raped (Page, 2008).

The idea that police endorse rape myths has been related to feminist theoretical views. These theorists believed that acceptance of sexism and violence, shaped by patriarchal values, contributed to sexual assault (Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1971; Ward, 1995). The next section addressed feminist theory and how it relates to rape myths and acceptance.

Feminist Theory

The history of feminist theory can be linked back to the mid 1800s, but it was not until the 1970s that feminist theorists wrote about sexual assault and rape (Ward, 1995). Susan Brownmiller and Susan Griffin were the first classical feminist theorists who began their research and writings on rape. Early feminist theorists emphasized the gender differences in power and believe that sexual violence against women is a fundamental part of a patriarchal society (Ward, 1995). To simplify, sexual assault is a social tradition of male dominance and female exploitation (Brownmiller, 1975). The central theme of feminist theories on sexual assault is power and dominance; men are powerful and women are powerless (Ward, 1995). Historical legislation demonstrates the perspective that women are property, while current legislation does not; however, current legislation still reflects the historical ideals on women and sexual violence (Clark & Lewis, 1977; Ward, 1995).

The premise of feminist theory revolves around patriarchy – the idea that women are property; therefore, must be owned (Madigan & Gamble, 1991). Historically, women belonged to their fathers first, and then to a husband (Brownmiller, 1975). Rape against a married woman was considered a property crime; meaning a crime of man against man. Rape was punishable by death for both the offender and the victim. There were no laws against rape of a single woman. In fact, early laws stated that an offender could purchase his victim by paying her father and family (Brownmiller, 1975).

The feminist movement in the 1970s sparked a shift for reform on rape laws. After this shift, states started implementing new rape legislation, including rape shield laws, laws against marital rape, and laws against sexual harassment (Little, 2005). Current legislation still reflects patriarchal views, however. The feeling of being objectified during one's own trial has been

commonly expressed by victims (Madigan & Gamble, 1991). Victims have been objectified not just in the court process, but during initial reporting process (Martin & Powell, 1995). Many victims are reluctant to report sexual assault because of fear of being blamed or not believed (Sable et al. 2006).

This fear is one reason why police perceptions are crucial to understand. Police perceptions are especially important when it involves cases of sexual assault. The following section covered police perceptions on crimes, including sexual assault, and how the perceptions impact victims and the criminal justice system.

Police Perceptions

Perceptions affect individual police behavior, which is why perceptions are important to understand. Police officers respond to many different calls a day, such as domestic abuse, rioting, homicide, and sexual assault, that influence perceptions and attitudes. Police perceptions can shape victims' perceptions of the police causing trust or distrust (Gracia, Garcia, & Lila, 2011). Also, police perceptions affect officers' responses to certain situations (Gracia et al., 2011). For example, Dejong et al. (2008) found that police officers with patriarchal perceptions about women were less likely to make arrests in cases involving intimate partner violence, including sexual assault.

Another example of how police perceptions influence behaviors is what is known as the Ferguson Effect. The Ferguson Effect is the hypothesis that officers are aware of negative public perceptions because of their profession, therefore, the officers are less willing to do their job to avoid scrutiny (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). Though research is limited on this effect, Wolfe and Nix (2016) stated that if police become less willing to do their job and enforce laws concerning

murder, rape, and robbery, violent crime rates would quickly increase. This example shows how negative perceptions between police and the public could have negative impacts on crime.

Similarly, police have individual perceptions of sexual assault victims that could have negative effects on both the victims and officers. Police officers assume several misconceptions about how sexual assaults occur and how victims should react to victimization (Darwinkel, Powell, & Tidmarsh, 2013). For example, many police officers have the perception that if victims are attacked, they will fight back, report the assault immediately after it occurred, a stranger assaulted them, and the victim is willing to fully cooperate (Lonsway et al., 2009; Darwinkel et al., 2013). For many sexual assault cases, however, the previous characteristics are untrue (Lonsway et al., 2009). The endorsement of these misconceptions has negative effects on sexual assault victims; for example, cases that do not align with the misconceptions may be considered as suspicious or false (Darwinkel et al., 2013).

The police have constantly had negative perceptions towards victims of sexual assault (Ward, 1995). Reports and complaints have been filed against police officers for mistreatment of sexual assault victims (Ward, 1995). Ledoux and Hazelwood (1985) researched police perceptions of rape victims and found many officers were unwillingly to blame victims, however, officers were most likely to agree that women who dress provocatively provoke assault. Ledoux and Hazelwood's (1985) research supports the notion that police officers endorse certain rape myths. Page (2010) conducted a study on police officers' attitudes toward rape myths. The findings show that, while it is less often than previous research suggests, police endorse common rape myths. For example, 19.7 percent of police officers agreed that women falsely claim rape for attention (Page, 2010). Prior research suggests that police perceptions on

rape myths influence their perceptions of victims reporting sexual assault (Page, 2010; Venema, 2014; Ward, 1995).

Negative police perceptions about victims have two main consequences. First, victims become reluctant to report a sexual assault for fear of suspicion by police, or not being believed (Sable et al., 2006; Weiss, 2010). Sable et al. (2006) conducted research on barriers to reporting sexual assault. The results showed that the fear of being believed was ranked as the third highest barrier for men and fifth for women. Consequences of this result in victims giving incomplete or inconsistent information to police so the police will believe the victim (Lonsway et al., 2009). Second, victims fear being blamed for sexual assault, therefore do not report the victimization (Belknap, 2010; Martin & Powell, 1995). If the police endorse rape myths, such as victim-blaming, then community-police relations may become compromised causing problems in reporting and negative perceptions of police. Current research suggests that police attitudes and perceptions can change if the officers attend extensive training on police response to sexual assault (Darwinkel et al., 2013). The next section addressed police officer training in response to sexual assault reports.

Training

Police departments focus on training police officers to become highly skilled and efficient professionals in the United States (Hansen & Culley, 1973). Typically, police officers are sent to larger cities to attend a police academy to become trained on policing (Auten, 1973; Hansen & Culley, 1973). Attending a police academy is considered to be the first part of training, called basic training (Auten, 1973; Hansen & Culley, 1973). Basic training provides effective training and education to prepare police officers for their new role (Caro, 2011).

Many police academies conduct similar training curriculums across the United States. For example, Meadows (1986) found that 46 states had training curriculums involving criminal investigation, firearm use, and patrolling. Presently, the majority of police training curriculums are aimed at firearm training, driving, self-defense, and use of force (Chappell, 2008). The majority of training focuses on firearms and investigations which leaves limited time for sexual assault training.

Sexual assault training is generally taught during a thirty-minute timeframe consisting of two topics: laws on sexual assault and the basic dynamics of the crime (Lonsway et al., 2001). During the training, police officers listen to a lecture, have a discussion, and are given little demonstration during police response role-play exercises (Lonsway et al., 2001). Research suggests that basic curriculums do not focus on victim response, sexual assault investigation, or intervention (Lonsway et al., 2001). Two studies have been conducted to measure the effectiveness of sexual assault response training on changing perceptions, attitudes, and responses. To illustrate, Lonsway et al. (2001) tested the effectiveness of a basic sexual assault training curriculum versus an experimental training program. Results showed that officers who went through the intensive experimental training program were more likely to use the techniques learned in the class than officers that attended the basic curriculum. However, there was no improvement in investigations or perceptions in either training course (Lonsway et al., 2001).

The second study examined 77 police officers from Victoria Police Service, Australia who underwent a mandatory four-week training course on sexual offending (Darwinkel et al., 2013). The findings revealed that police officers had a better understanding of sexual offending and response techniques after completing the training. Also, the officers experienced some change in their perceptions and attitudes of sexual assault victims resulting in more positive

attitudes and decreased endorsement of rape myths (Darwinkel et al., 2013). This study supports the idea that sexual assault training can decrease or change police perceptions, which could lead to a decrease in the acceptance of rape myths and other perceptions, such as the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. The following section discussed false accusations of sexual assault.

False Accusations

The notion that women lie about sexual assault has been assumed by large populations in society (Lisak et al., 2010). False accusations were defined as untrue statements that were made to deceive an officer. The frequency of false accusation reports varied greatly in past research (Rumney, 2006). For example, Rumney (2006) conducted an analysis of studies on false accusations of sexual assault. In his analysis, he included twenty studies of false accusations of sexual assault to gain perspective. Rumney (2006) found the range of false accusation reports was between 1.5 percent to 90 percent.

Recent research, however, contradicts past research showing the frequency of false accusations range between 2 percent and 10 percent (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Kelly et al., 2005; Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway & Archambault, 2008). For example, Clark and Lewis's (1977) obtained data pertaining to 116 rapes investigated by the Toronto police department. Seventy-four cases were classified as "unfounded," however, those included cases where police decided the victim was an unsuitable witness, the police could not produce enough evidence, the victim became uncooperative, or police perceptions were prejudice against the victim. When the cases were separated, 12 cases were found to have evidence that a rape did not occur. Of those 12 cases, 7 were found to be false accusations (Lisak et al., 2010).

Another example is McCahill, Meyer, and Fischman's (1979) sexual assault victim study. There were 1,401 cases of sexual assault in Philadelphia to conduct their study. The victims in all of the cases were evaluated by medical examiners and interviewed by police. In 709 cases, the victims were also interviewed by a social worker. Of those 709 cases, 15 percent were classified as "unfounded." They were classified as unfounded if police believed the report to be false, if the crime did not meet the legal criteria for rape, or if the victim was seen as skeptical. Their results showed, after further investigation, only 3 percent were classified as false accusations (Lisak et al., 2010).

In the United Kingdom, two British Home Office studies were conducted. First, the 1999 British Home Office Study was conducted after a decline in rape cases resulting in convictions. There were 483 rape cases from England and Wales used in this study. Data was collected from victim and police interviews and police classifications. The results concluded that out of 123 "unfounded" cases, only 53 were classified as false accusations (Harris & Grace, 1999; Lisak et al., 2010). Second, the 2005 British Home Office Study was conducted, which is considered the most comprehensive study of false reports that is currently available. Over a 15-year period, there were 2,643 cases that were analyzed. Data was collected from police reports, case files, forensic reports, medical examinations, questionnaires completed by police investigators, victim and service provider interviews, and victim and witness statements. 8.2 percent of the cases were classified as false accusations. These cases, however, included those based on the skepticism of police about victims who were mentally ill, victims whose statements were inconsistent, and victims who were under the influence. After addressing these bases and retesting, only 2.5 percent cases met the criteria for false accusations (Kelly et al., 2005; Lisak et al., 2010).

One last overseas study was conducted in Australia over a three-year period looking at 850 rape cases. Heenan and Murray (2006) used a mixed methods approach to find conclusive results. The analysis was designed to identify police perceptions on whether to proceed with an investigation or not. There were 77 cases that were “unfounded.” Only 17 of those cases were classified as false accusations (Lisak et al., 2010).

Currently, there are only two legitimate United States-based studies of false accusations. The Making a Difference (MAD) study was the first to be conducted. The MAD study used a methodologically rigorous approach. Eight communities in the United States had participated in the MAD project. Within these communities, the law enforcement officers were trained on how to classify sexual assault cases. Data were collected on all sexual assault reports over an 18 to 24-month period. Police officers were also provided technical assistance to ensure reliability, consistency, and random selection. Cases were also classified under new definitions for better accuracy. These definitions included: (1) “cleared by arrest,” (2) “closed as an informational report,” (3) “Unfounded/False,” and (4) “Unfounded/Baseless.” With these new definitions, the researchers found that 6.8 percent of the 2,059 cases investigated were false accusations (Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway & Archambault, 2008).

Lisak et al. (2010) conducted the second study to create another credible estimate of the rate of false accusations of sexual assault. The researchers looked at a major Northeastern university police department from 1998 to 2007. The data they collected was based on case studies that included investigative detailed notes based on interviews of victims, suspects, and witnesses. They created a detailed coding system that was used to classify all reports. There were 136 cases examined and coded. The results showed only eight cases were classified as false

accusations (Lisak et al., 2010). A major finding from this study was the classification system of sexual assault reports.

Sexual assault reports are classified into different categories according to set guidelines (Lisak et al., 2010). This is important because, according to the FBI's uniform crime report, the category "unfounded" include sexual assault cases determined to be baseless or false; in other words, no crime occurred (Lisak et al., 2010). A case can be deemed baseless if it does not meet the legal definition of a sexual assault, meaning if no evidence is found that a crime occurred it is put into the "unfounded" category. False accusations are put into the same category. False accusations are specifically cases in which a crime did not occur based on evidence (i.e. a victim said she lied) (Lisak et al., 2010). This misclassification can skew accurate statistics on the number of false accusations and could lead police officers to perceive higher rates of false accusations of sexual assault.

These studies on false accusations of sexual assault all share two major themes. First, these studies were shown to be methodologically accurate. Second, these studies show that false accusations only range between 2 percent to 10 percent. With these credible studies, there was support that false accusations of sexual assault happen less frequently than led to believe (Lisak et al., 2010). The next section examined the most common debates among false accusations of sexual assault and how resolving these debates would contribute to changing attitudes and perceptions.

False Accusation Debates

The phenomenon of false accusations of sexual assault causes much debate in the criminal justice field (Lisak et al., 2010). For example, one debate is that false accusations are expanding in the United States. Specially, this perception is common among criminal justice

personnel. This debate can be seen in several studies that have been conducted in the past that show high percentages of false accusations of sexual assault (Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway et al., 2009; Rumney, 2006). These studies lead newer researchers to reexamine the reports finding different results than originally found (Lonsway et al., 2009).

Another debate focuses on the reasoning for suspicion of women who report sexual assault. Feminist theory argues that police officers are suspicious of women because of their dominance and powerful status (Brownmiller, 1975). Another argument would be that the police are influenced by rape myths, and the acceptance of rape myths creates doubt against women who report sexual assault (Jordan, 2004; Page, 2010). According to research, police have negative perceptions about women who report sexual assault due to several factors that make the police suspicious of the accusation. Some examples include, a victim being drunk at the time, delayed reporting, previous sexual encounters, previous complaints of sexual assault, and concealment (Jordan, 2004; Lonsway et al., 2009; Wentz & Archbold, 2011).

One last debate in research is the idea that because women can be inconsistent and uncooperative causes police officers to believe the sexual assault report is false. As stated previously, Lonsway et al. (2009) explain several reasons why victims omit, conceal, or alter details of the crime; they also explain reasons why victims are uncooperative and inconsistent. For example, victims may be afraid that they will not be believed, or they will be blamed for the sexual assault. Being inconsistent or uncooperative does not mean that a sexual assault report is false (Lonsway et al., 2009). To be able to resolve the debates, further research on false accusations of sexual assault is needed in the criminal justice field.

The Present Study

This thesis was built from past literature regarding police perceptions on sexual assault, specifically false accusations, rape myths, and behaviors of women reporting a sexual assault. The present study intended to add to previous literature by providing information about police officers' perceptions in the state of Tennessee. Unlike past research, this thesis recorded perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault and looked for relationships among perceptions. Specifically, this study had the following objectives: (1) To determine police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault; (2) To examine whether there was a relationship between perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths; (3) To examine whether there was a correlation between perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and training; and (4) To determine whether police officers perceive different behaviors of women who falsely report sexual assault than women who do not falsely report. To achieve these objectives, a survey was created and administered to 40 police officers in the state of Tennessee. By surveying police officers in different departments, a better understanding of police perceptions will be possible. The next chapter addressed the methodology of this study, including the research questions, hypotheses, research design, variables, sample, data, methods, analyses, and the limitations of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter addresses the research method used in this study, which includes the research design, research questions and hypotheses, definitions of terms, the independent and dependent variables, the sample and sampling technique, method and analysis, and the limitations of this research. Limitations of this research were also discussed in this chapter. This study used a mixed methods approach using a non-experimental survey research method. A survey was created to collect self-reported responses from a sample of 40 sworn law enforcement officers in Tennessee to explore police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, rape myths, and behaviors displayed by women making a false accusation. Furthermore, qualitative responses were collected and analyzed to provide examples of the different behaviors of women that police officers perceive. First, the research questions and hypotheses that guide the current study will be discussed.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The current study attempts to answer four main research questions. The first research question was: *Do most police officers perceive frequent rates of false accusations of sexual assault?* Prior research has shown that police officers combine false accusations of sexual assault and unfounded cases, meaning cases with not enough evidence, together that has cause a misrepresentation of accurate statistics (Rumney, 2006; Lisak et al. 2010). The concepts within this research question are police officers, perceptions, frequent, false accusations, and sexual assault. *Police Officers* were operationalized as sworn law enforcement officers. *Perceptions* was defined as a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression. *Frequency* was operationalized as the approximate percentage false sexual assault reports during

one year. *False Accusations* were operationalized as statements that are unproven and untrue in the spirit of deliberateness or deceit. *Sexual Assault* was operationalized as any type of sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the explicit consent of the recipient; forced sexual intercourse, forcible sodomy, fondling, and attempted rape. The hypothesis for this research question was *police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault.*

The second research question was: *Is there a relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths?* Page (2010) researched police officers and rape myth acceptance and found that police are more inclined to endorse certain rape myths. For the current study to research this question, multiple questions were asked regarding rape myths with a Likert answer scale. *Rape* was operationalized as the unlawful sexual intercourse or any other sexual penetration of the vagina, anus, or mouth of another person, with or without force, by a sex organ, other body part, or foreign object, without the consent of the victim. *There is a relationship between police perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths* was the hypothesis tested.

The third research question asked: *Is there a correlation between training and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault?* Training programs on sexual assault response for police officers consists of lectures, discussion, and a small amount of demonstration (Lonsway et al., 2001). Training not only effects police response, but also attitudes, perceptions, and behavior, which makes it important to include as a factor of perceptions (Lonsway et al., 2001). *Training* was operationalized as the action of being taught how to respond to a sexual assault or rape. The hypothesis tested for this research question was *police officers who receive training are less likely to perceive high rates of false accusations.*

The final research question was: *Do police officers perceive different behaviors of women who falsely report sexual assault than women who do not falsely report? Characteristics* was operationalized as the behaviors and actions of an individual. Lonsway et al. (2009) addressed a list of characteristics of women's behavior when reporting a sexual assault that police officers notice. These characteristics may negatively influence police officers' perceptions. Finally, the last hypothesis tested was *police officers perceive different behaviors for women who falsely report sexual assault compared to women who do not falsely report.*

Research Design and Variables

This study used a mixed methods approach to explore police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault. Specifically, this study used a convergent design that mixed both quantitative and qualitative data and interpreted the findings cohesively in the results section. The quantitative data was analyzed through SPSS statistical software that included frequencies, descriptive statistics, crosstabulations, a correlation analysis, and multiple chi square analyses. The qualitative data used deductive coding to interpret themes based on police perceptions of certain behaviors that women display when making a false accusation.

Police officers were administered a confidential self-reported survey at the beginning of their shift. The survey consisted of two open-ended questions and 19 close-ended questions; however, two of these questions asked the respondent to provide qualitative data by explaining why they chose "yes." The close-ended questions consisted of information regarding demographics, personal experiences, false accusations, specialized training, and rape myth acceptance. The rape myth acceptance questions used a Likert scale that ranged from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The question about the frequency used a Likert scale that ranged from "never" to "often." The last question asked if the police officer's perception had changed

over the years, and why. The answers were important for comparing if all officers had similar changing perceptions or if they differed. There were three open-ended questions. Two asked for personal definitions of the words “rape” and “sexual assault,” and one question about false accusations. The purpose for open-ended questions was to receive honest full-length answers about perceptions from individual police officers. The open-ended questions asked about the police officers’ personal definitions to the terms “sexual assault” and “rape,” and personal experience with false accusations of sexual assault.

The research measured two dependent variables: police perceptions on rates of false accusations and police perceptions on women who report sexual assault. It also determined how the dependent variables were affected by three independent variables including, demographics, training on sexual assault response, and endorsement of rape myths.

Table 1

Description and Coding of Variables

| Variable/Label | Description/Coding |
|-----------------------|--|
| Gender | Male or female (0= Male; 1= Female) |
| Age | Age of participant (0= 18-20; 1= 21-29; 2= 30-39; 3= 40-49; 4= 50-59; 5= 60+) |
| Race | Race of respondent (0= White; 1= Black/AA; 2= Hispanic; 3= Other) |
| Education Level | Highest level of education (0= High School Diploma/GED; 1= Some college, no degree; 2= Associates degree; 3= Bachelor degree; 4 =Graduate degree) |
| Years of Experience | Years of experience of participant (1= <5 years; 2= 5-10 years; 3=11-20; 4= 21-30 years; 5= 31+ years) |
| Received Training | Has the participant received specialized training? |

(0= No; 1= Yes)

False Accusation Frequency Perception of false accusation report rate
(0= Never; 1= Rarely; 2= Sometimes; 3= Often)

Recoded False Accusation Frequency Perception of false accusation of report rate
(0=Never/Rarely; 1=Sometimes/Often)

False Report Behaviors Perception of behaviors women show when making
a false accusation
(0 = No; 1= Yes)

For this research, the rape myths were manually labeled for organizational purposes.

Table 2

Rape Myth Labels

| Label | Rape Myth |
|--------------|--|
| Rape Myth #1 | Women often claim rape to protect their reputation. |
| Rape Myth #2 | Dressing provocatively may contribute to sexual assault. |
| Rape Myth #3 | Sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable sexual urges. |
| Rape Myth #4 | Stranger rape occurs more than acquaintance rape. |
| Rape Myth #5 | Alcohol consumption may contribute to sexual assault |
| Rape Myth #6 | Men can be sexually assaulted. |

Sample

The total number of participants in this survey consisted of 40 police officers from municipal police departments in Tennessee. The sample was formed of 33 males (82.5%) and 7 females (17.5%), most of them White (95%), and had received training in response to sexual assault (80%). The majority of the sample had an education level of either a high school diploma/GED (37.5%) or some college, but no degree (37.5%). There was much variation in age and experience, with age ranging from 18 to 59 years old ($\bar{x} = 2.3$; $S = 1.07$); and experience ranging from less than 5 years to more than 31 years ($\bar{x} = 2.5$; $S = 1.17$).

Table 3

Police Officer Demographics

| Officer Characteristics | N | % |
|-------------------------|----|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 33 | 82.5 |
| Female | 7 | 17.5 |
| Age | | |
| 21-29 | 11 | 27.5 |
| 30-39 | 12 | 30.0 |
| 40-49 | 10 | 25.0 |
| 50-59 | 7 | 17.5 |
| 60+ | 0 | 0 |
| Race | | |
| White | 38 | 95.0 |
| Black/African-American | 2 | 5.0 |
| Hispanic | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 |
| Education | | |
| High School Diploma/GED | 15 | 37.5 |
| Some College, No Degree | 15 | 37.5 |
| Associate Degree | 0 | 0 |
| Bachelor Degree | 9 | 22.5 |
| Graduate Degree | 1 | 2.5 |
| Experience_ | | |
| Less than 5 years | 9 | 22.5 |
| 5-10 years | 12 | 30.0 |
| 11-20 years | 10 | 25.0 |
| 21-30 years | 7 | 17.5 |
| 31+ years | 2 | 5.0 |

Participants were selected using two types of non-probability sampling. The first was snowballing. Through contacts, the researcher was able to discuss the opportunity of administering the surveys to sworn law enforcement officers. To be able to extract police officers' participation, permission had to be granted by a contact or chief within the department before administering the survey. Once permission was granted, the researcher administered the

surveys during a convenient time for the officers. The second type of sampling was convenience sampling. The survey only consisted of officers that were available and willing to participate at the time the study was administered. The participants had ample time to complete the surveys before the researcher collected them for review.

Any police officer in the state of Tennessee, who met the criteria and wanted to voluntarily complete the survey was eligible to participate. Participants must have been a sworn law enforcement officer, over 18 years old, and currently active in order to take this survey; this excluded other members within the police departments, such as dispatchers and secretarial workers. The following section discussed the different methods and analyses conducted to test the four hypotheses.

Methods and Analysis

The methodology selected in this study relied on the use of a 40, 21-question, both closed and open ended, surveys. The survey included questions about perceptions of false accusations, rape myths, and training. Analysis was conducted through the use of SPSS software, while qualitative data was collected and examined by hand.

Data

The data used was made available by collecting surveys from police officers throughout Tennessee. After collecting the data, it was manually examined for missing and incomplete information. The missing or incomplete data was coded as missing and eliminated from the data set. The missing data resulted in the reduction of responses on certain questions. The sample size (n) for each analysis was recorded individually for each finding in the next section.

Analysis

The data was entered into SPSS to conduct statistical analyses. To test the first hypothesis, *police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault*, the frequency distribution of police officers' perceptions on false accusation rates was examined. The question used a Likert scale ranging from "never" to "often." Perceptions of high rates of false accusation reports ranged from "often" to "sometimes," and low rates ranged from "rarely" to "never." Descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and standard deviation, were also ran. A correlation analysis was conducted to further examine the relationship between police officers' perceptions on false accusations and other variables included in the data. To test the second hypothesis, *there is a relationship between police perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths*, a chi square analysis was conducted¹. The crosstabs included six different rape myths and the frequency of false accusations. Additionally, the frequency distribution and an item by item analysis of the rape myths were examined. The percentage of police officers supporting each statement regarding rape myths was reported. Further analyses were conducted to examine the differences in demographics and police perceptions on rape myths and the frequency of false accusations. For the third hypothesis, *police officers who receive training are less likely to perceive high rates of false accusations*, a chi square analysis was conducted. The analysis included variables regarding specialized training and the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. A correlation analysis was also examined to determine if a relationship existed between training and police officers' perceptions of false accusation rates. Furthermore, frequencies and descriptive statistics, including the mean, median, and standard deviation were calculated. For the last hypothesis, *police officers perceive different behaviors for*

¹ A logistic regression was conducted, however, the findings were statistically insignificant, therefore it was excluded from the research.

women who falsely report sexual assault compared to women who do not falsely report, the data was first separated into quantitative and qualitative categories.

To test this hypothesis, the quantitative data was collected through the closed-ended questions from the survey. This included a series of questions on police officer demographics, perceptions on the frequency of false accusations, and perceptions of behaviors women portray when making a sexual assault report. The frequencies and descriptive statistics were collected and reported. To further test this hypothesis, open-ended responses were collected.

An example of the open-ended question asked was: “Do you believe there are certain behaviors women show when making a false report? If yes, please provide examples below.” These types of open-ended questions provided the police officers the opportunity to express their perceptions from personal experience, providing insight for the reasoning why they might think there are certain behaviors women show when making a false report. Once the surveys were complete, the researcher sorted through each response. The responses were collected and manually coded to provide more information. Deductive coding was used to determine particular themes that arose from the responses. In some cases, police officers described multiple types of behaviors women display when making a false report.

Conducting mixed methods research allowed the study to expand and explore police perceptions in further detail. Converging the quantitative and qualitative data allowed the researcher to better understand police perceptions, compare the findings to prior research to determine the difference and similarities, and draw conclusions from the data. The following chapter provided these results. The last section of this chapter addresses the limitations and threats to validity of this research, and methods to overcome these issues.

Validity Threats and Limitations

The main threat to validity was the sampling techniques used in this research. The two types of sampling techniques used were snowball sampling and convenience sampling. Using these techniques, the representativeness of the sample could not be guaranteed. The data used to examine police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault and other perceptions was gathered from a small sample of police officers in Tennessee. Therefore, it could not be assumed that the sample was representative of all police officers in the United States. A nation-wide, greater sample with random sampling is needed in order to generalize the findings to all police officers in the United States. Furthermore, the data set was affected by missing data due to error or unwillingness to answer certain questions on the questionnaire. Therefore, some responses were eliminated from the sample. The next chapter will discuss in further detail the samples used and the missing data.

In regard to the survey's validity, all items had face validity because they were selected and designed in alignment to the purpose of this study. Also, the survey was expected to have construct and content validity because the items were selected from previous research that have been suggested as valid. All ranges of the concepts (false accusations, rape myths, training, and behaviors) were taken into consideration in this study, and numerous indicators of the same concept were included.

An internal threat to validity was also a concern in this research. The internal threat, called testing, refers to the exposure the respondents had to the information about this research. Respondents might have been aware of the purpose of this study which could have influenced their responses. Though this could have been a problem, anonymity was ensured to avoid bias and gather honest responses. Hardcopies of the survey were administered to the participants.

They were given ample time to complete the survey, a consent form was attached to the survey's ensuring voluntary participation and anonymity, and no personal information was collected. Therefore, it was impossible to link a survey back to the respondent. The confidence in the generalizability and validity of this study's findings could be strengthened by creating a similar study with a much larger sample. The next chapter addressed the results of the survey and responses from police officers.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This research examined and reported police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, rape myths and behaviors displayed by women reporting sexual assault; as well as determined if police officers had received training in response to sexual assault. To answer the research questions, four testable hypotheses were created: (1) Police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault; (2) There is a relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths; (3) Police officers who receive training are less likely to perceive high rates of false accusations; and (4) police officers perceive different behaviors for women who falsely report sexual assault compared to women who do not falsely report. The next section discussed the statistical analyses conducted and the results in detail. The following statistical analyses used an alpha level of 0.05 to reject the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was: *Police officers perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault.* A frequency distribution was conducted to review police officers' perceptions on the frequency rates of false accusations of sexual assault. The results showed that the majority of officers (82.5%) perceived high rates of false accusations (Table 4).

Table 4

Percentages of Police Officers' Perceptions of False Accusation Rates

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| Rarely | 6 | 15.0 |
| Sometimes | 20 | 50.0 |
| Often | 13 | 32.5 |
| Missing | 1 | 2.5 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |

Out of 40 participants, males ($\bar{x} = 2.3$; $S = .602$) were more likely than females ($\bar{x} = 1.4$; $S = .535$) to perceive high rates of false accusations of sexual assault. Age varied, but the majority of participants who perceived high rates were between the ages of 21-29 ($\bar{x} = 2.09$; $S = .701$) and 41-49 ($\bar{x} = 2.55$; $S = .527$). Lastly, those that perceived high rates of false accusations had either received a high school diploma ($n = 15$; $\bar{x} = 2.30$) or had taken college courses but did not received a degree ($n = 14$; $\bar{x} = 2.21$). Results of those who perceived low rates of false accusations of sexual assault were more likely to be a white female (17.5%) between the ages of 21-39 (17.5%), with either a Bachelor or Graduate degree (10.0%), and have been a sworn law enforcement officer for less than 5 years (15.0%). Lastly, the correlation analysis reported a relationship between gender and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault.

Table 5

Crosstabs on Gender and False Accusation Frequency

| | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Total |
|--------|--------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Male | 2 | 17 | 13 | 32 |
| % | 5.1% | 43.6% | 33.3% | 82.1% |
| Female | 4 | 3 | 0 | 7 |
| % | 10.3% | 7.7% | 0.0% | 17.9% |

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was: *There is a relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths.* Chi square analyses were conducted on each of the rape myth variables and the frequency of false accusations. All six chi square analyses violated the assumptions, therefore the "Likelihood Ratio" was used to determine significance in each test. The first chi square test found a relationship between rape myth #1 –

women often claim rape to protect their reputation - and the frequency of false accusations, $G(3, N= 39) = 21.19, p<.001$. Females were more likely to strongly disagree or disagree (15.4%) with this rape myth, while males were more likely to be neutral or agree (53.8%). A correlation analysis was conducted, and findings showed a correlation between rape myth #1 and level of education. A crosstabulation analysis was also conducted, but results varied between rape myth #1 and other variables (training and years of experience). The adjusted residual for rape myth #1 and the perception of low frequency rates of false accusations (5.0) indicated an overrepresentation. The adjusted residual for rape myth #1 and the perception of high frequency rates of false accusations (-5.0) indicated a much smaller expected count.

The second chi square analysis performed did not find a relationship between rape myth #2 – dressing provocatively may contribute to sexual assault – and the frequency of false accusations, $G(4, N= 39) = 5.79, p = .26$. There was, however, a correlation between rape myth #2 and gender and level of education, according to a correlation analysis. The male participants were more likely to agree (41.0%) or strongly agree (2.6%) with rape myth #2, while females were more likely to disagree (10.3%) or strongly disagree (2.6%).

The third chi square analysis was conducted and found a significant relationship, based on the likelihood ratio, between rape myth #3 and the frequency of false accusations, $G(3, N=39) = 8.68, p = .03$. The crosstabulation between rape myth #3 – sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable sexual urges – and gender reported mixed results. For example, almost all females rejected this rape myth, but the male participants were almost evenly distributed throughout “disagree” to “agree”.

Table 6

Crosstabulation by Gender

| Sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable sexual urges | Male | | Female | |
|--|------|-------|--------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % |
| Strongly Disagree | 7 | 17.9% | 5 | 12.8% |
| Disagree | 8 | 20.5% | 1 | 2.6% |
| Neutral | 8 | 20.5% | 1 | 2.6% |
| Agree | 9 | 23.1% | 0 | 0.0% |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0.0% | 0 | 0.0% |

The fourth chi square test performed included rape myth #4 – stranger rape occurs more than acquaintance rape – and the frequency of false accusations. The results of this test showed no relationship, $G(3, N=39) = 6.91, p = .075$. The majority of the participants, both male (61.5%) and female (17.9%), rejected this rape myth according to a crosstabulation analysis. The adjusted residual for rape myth #4 and the perception of high frequency rates of false accusations (-3.0) indicated an underrepresentation of expected counts. The fifth chi square analysis recorded no relationship between rape myth #5 – Alcohol consumption may contribute to sexual assault – and the frequency of false accusations, $G(4, N=39) = 2.56, p = .63$. The majority of the participants, both male (71.8%) and female (12.8%), accepted this rape myth according to a crosstabulation analysis.

The final chi square analysis reported no relationship between rape myth #6 – men can be sexually assaulted – and the frequency of false accusation, $G(2, N= 39) = 3.43, p = .18$. The correlation analysis, however, showed a relationship between this rape myth and gender. A crosstabulation test was conducted and found that 89.8 percent of participants rejected this rape myth.

The results of the six chi square analyses showed relationships between police officers' perceptions of the frequency of false accusations and rape myths #1 and #3: (1) Women claim rape to protect their reputations, and (2) Sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable sexual urges. The other four chi square analyses showed no relationship between police officers' perceptions of the frequency of false accusations and rape myths #2, #4, #5, and #6. Correlations were found, however, between: (1) gender and the frequency of false accusations, (2) gender and rape myth #1; (3) gender and rape myth #2; (4) gender and rape myth #3; and gender and rape myth #6.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis tested was: *police officers who receive training are less likely to perceive high rates of false accusations*. A chi square analysis was conducted. Findings showed this test violated the assumptions; therefore, the "Likelihood Ratio" was used to determine significance. The results showed no relationship between training and frequency of false accusations, $G(2, N= 39) = 2.65, p = .27$. The null hypothesis must be accepted because the significance level was much higher than .05. This means there is no association between police officers who received training and the officer's perceptions of false accusation rates. A correlation analysis was also examined to determine if a correlation existed between training and other variables, but no significant correlations were found.

Hypothesis 4

The last hypothesis was: *police officers perceive different behaviors for women who falsely report sexual assault compared to women who do not falsely report*. A frequency distribution was examined revealing out of 35 responses, 50 percent of the participants did not perceive

different behaviors of women making a false accusation, while 37.5 percent did perceive different behaviors.

Table 7

Frequencies of Perceived Behaviors

| | N | % |
|------------------|----|------|
| Behaviors | | |
| No | 20 | 50.0 |
| Yes | 15 | 37.5 |
| Missing | 5 | 12.5 |

If participants believed women who make a false accusation portray different behaviors, they were asked to provide examples based on their experience. The qualitative responses revealed common themes throughout the data and were coded accordingly (see Table 8 below).

Table 8

Themes

| <i>Code/Theme</i> | <i>Description</i> |
|-------------------|--|
| Inconsistency | When a victim changes stories, is inconsistency with the report, and details were missed/changed/left out on purpose |
| Emotions | When a victim shows anger towards officers or investigators during interview process; or starts a fight; lack of emotions from a victim reporting. |
| Lie Detection | Officers can detect obvious lies; a victim fails to maintain eye contact when reporting or is unsettled. |

Table 9

Frequencies of Themed Behaviors

| <i>Behaviors</i> | <i>Frequency</i> |
|------------------|------------------|
| Inconsistency | 4 |
| Emotions | 6 |
| Lie Detection | 5 |

Inconsistency

Inconsistency (26.7%) was a common perceived behavior of women making false accusations. Police officers often describe inconsistency with characteristics such as changing stories, lack of credibility, and leaving out details – intentionally or unintentionally. For example, one officer stated:

“Usually when a female makes a false report, her story changes every time an officer interviews her and she will leave out or add details.”

This response details that women who make false accusations makeup a story and maintain inconsistency because she is lying. Other responses include simple details like, “inconsistency in statements” and “changing story.”

Emotions

Emotions were the most common theme among police officers who perceived different behaviors of women making a false accusation. Emotions refer to the female’s reactions during the interview process. Five out of the six participants reported “anger at the investigator” as the main emotion women portray when making a false accusation of sexual assault. For example, one police officer stated,

“When a woman gets real mad or fights with me and other investigators, that is a good indication that she is lying.”

The one officer that did not report anger as an emotion stated:

“I believe that women who are not upset when reporting a sexual assault are making a false accusation.”

This specific example indicates that no emotion is also a sign of false accusations.

Lie Detection

Lie detection was the last theme to be pulled out of the responses to different behaviors. Police officers described having the ability to detect a lie, and therefore can tell when a victim is making a false accusation. For example, one officer stated,

“After doing this job a while, you can often tell when people lie.”

Another officer stated,

“Women making false reports create obvious lies.”

Lastly, 80 percent of those who made a statement about lie detection, also stated that when an individual is lying, they fail to maintain eye contact.

A correlation analysis was conducted using the quantitative data. The results showed a relationship between the number of sexual assault investigations conducted and whether or not police officers perceived different behaviors. Though half of the police officers do not believe there are different behaviors, there was evidence that 37.5 percent of police officers do, which provides some support for this hypothesis.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the results in the current study. The results indicated that most sworn law enforcements officers in the sample perceived high rates of false accusations of sexual assault. There was indication that some police officers perceive different behaviors for women making a false accusation report, and examples of different behaviors were provided.

Independently of their perceptions about the frequency of false accusations, police officers were likely to support two of the six commonly held rape myths: (1) Dressing provocatively may contribute to sexual assault, and (2) Alcohol consumption may contribute to sexual assault.

Additionally, females were more likely than males to perceive low rates of false accusations of

sexual assault and reject rape myths; however, these relationships were not statistically significant. There was no association found between training and the frequency of false accusations; however, most police officers in the sample had received training on police response to sexual assault. The next chapter provided a more detailed discussion of the current findings, limitations, implications, and future research.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis explored and examined how police officers perceived the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault, along with perceptions on rape myths, training, and behaviors displayed when reporting a sexual assault, by focusing on four hypotheses. First, it examined police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. The results of this hypothesis revealed how often police officers believe false accusations of sexual assault are reported based on their experience, not empirical data. Second, it examined if there was a relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual and commonly held rape myths. Previous studies have stated that police officers support commonly held rape myths, but limited studies have examined if police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations – whether they perceive high or low rates – is influenced by other rape myths (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Jordan, 2004; Page, 2010). In other words, this thesis examined whether police officers support or rejection for rape myths, had an effect on their perception of the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. Third, it examined if there was a correlation between training and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. This allowed exploration into sexual assault training to determine if training was effective at reducing the number of perceived false accusations of sexual assault. Lastly, it assessed police officers' perceptions of behaviors displayed by women who report sexual assault. Specifically, it examined whether police officers believed there were different behaviors women portrayed when making a false accusation compared to women not making a false accusation. Previous research has shown that police officers perceive several different behaviors of women who are making a false report than women who are not (Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway et al.,

2009). The current research studied whether this sample reported similar behaviors of women making a false report as those in previous research.

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, data was collected from self-reported data from sworn law enforcement officers in the state of Tennessee. Data was collected using a 21 open-ended and close-ended question survey administered to police officers. The survey included questions about perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, rape myths, training, behaviors, and demographics. Statistical analyses including, chi square, correlations, crosstabulations, and logistic regression were conducted to investigate police officers' perceptions. Frequency distributions and descriptives were included to provide more information about police officers' perceptions. The findings of this research added to current literature regarding police perceptions on sexual assault by exploring a phenomenon that is limited in research: police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault. This chapter will discuss the overall findings of the present research, limitations of the research, implications, and future research.

Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one examined whether sworn police officers in the state of Tennessee perceived high or low rates of false accusations of sexual assault. A frequency distribution was conducted to review police officers' perceptions on the frequency rates of false accusations of sexual assault. The results showed that the majority of officers perceived high rates of false accusations. Males were more likely to perceive high rates of false accusations than women regardless of age, experience, and education. Also, a correlation analysis reported a relationship between gender and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. Contrary to empirical data (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Kelly et al., 2005; Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway &

Archambault, 2008), police officers perceived the rate of false accusations of sexual assault to be high based on their personal experience. This could be explained by the officer's subjective definitions to the terms "false accusation," "sexual assault," and "rape." It may also be explained by the current classification system of sexual assault cases, where false accusations of sexual assault reports are combined with unfounded/baseless cases – which means there was just not enough evidence to prove a sexual assault took place.

In general, these findings supported previous research, which found police officers perceive higher rates of false accusations of sexual assault (Jordan, 2004; Lisak et al., 2010; Venema, 2014). All sworn police officers were located in the same state, had similar training and experiences, therefore, it was expected that the officers would share similar perceptions on sexual assault, specifically about the frequency of false accusations. Furthermore, police officers may deal with several cases of sexual assault that do not result in arrest of the offender because little or no physical evidence could be found. When this happens, police officers are quick to assume that the sexual assault was false (Jordan, 2004; Venema, 2014). This problem leads to the problem of perceiving higher rates of false accusations, as well as wrongful classification of false accusation reports which skew accurate statistics.

The second hypothesis examined in this study researched the relationship between police officers' perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and rape myths. Chi square analyses were conducted on each of the rape myth variables and the frequency of false accusations. Only two out of the six chi square analyses resulted in statistically significant findings between rape myths and the frequency of false accusations. Results also found that police officers generally accepted two out of the six rape myths: (1) Dressing provocatively may contribute to sexual assault, and (2) Alcohol consumption may contribute to sexual assault. These findings are similar

to other research on police officers and rape myths (Page, 2008; Shaw et al., 2017). Prior literature has shown that the endorsement of rape myths by police officers can be seen during investigations and effect the way police officers respond to sexual assault case (Shaw et al., 2017). If the endorsement of rape myths negatively effects the way police officers conduct an investigation, women may be less likely to report a sexual assault occurrence. This adds to the current problem with underreporting.

Hypothesis three sought to examine if police officers less likely to perceive sexual assault reports as false if they have gone through training on the subject. After a chi square analysis was conducted, no association was found between training and police officers' perceptions of the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. Research on perceptions on the frequency of false accusations and training is extremely limited, thus it was difficult to compare these findings to prior research. Previous research (Darwinkel et al., 2013; Lonsway et al., 2001) suggested that training on police response to sexual assault consists of limited hours or minutes, rather than other training topics such as firearms and patrolling. This may explain the reason police officers perceived high rates of false accusations, though they had training. Additionally, whether police officers received training in response to sexual assault was measured by only one yes or no question. More information about response to sexual assault training, including its content and duration, is needed in order to draw conclusions about the impact on police perceptions. However, one research study suggests that training on police response to sexual assault decreases negative perceptions about sexual assault and can lead police officers to be less accepting of rape myths (Darwinkel et al., 2013). Increasing training times and discussion about police response to sexual assault could have a positive effect on their perceptions.

The last hypothesis explored police officers' perceptions of behaviors women portray when reporting a sexual assault. Specifically, it looked at whether police officers perceived different behaviors of women making a false accusation compared to women not making a false report. The quantitative findings reported that some police officers believe women who are making a false report portray different behaviors than women making a genuine report. These responses were measured by only one yes or no questions; therefore, an open-ended response was added to provide further information. If police officers answered "yes," they were asked to provide examples of perceived behaviors. Responses included responses such as, "show of inconsistency in their stories," "emotions such as anger or no emotion at all," and "make limited eye contact or seem unsettled." The research took the qualitative data and categorized them into themes. The themes addressed were: (1) inconsistency, (2) emotion, and (3) lie detection.

This data is consistent with previous research. For example, Lonsway et al., (2009) stated that police are more likely to believe a victim was fabricating a sexual assault because the victim gave inconsistent or untrue information in the original statement. Other research shows that police are more likely to believe a report is false if a victim does not meet perceived expectation of "normal" emotions. For example, police officers assess victim's credibility based on the emotions displayed (Jordan, 2004; Lonsway et al., 2009). Example of emotions that a victim is expected to portray after a sexual victimization include anger, frustration, and upset (Jordan, 2004). Lastly, police officers are more likely to perceive a false accusation of sexual assault after conducting an interview using techniques to identify inconsistencies and false statements by victims (Venema, 2014). Police officers are trained on how to conduct interviews, specifically looking for behaviors that imply a statement is false; for example, not making eye contact, being unsettled, and inconsistency in stories (Venema, 2014). Police officers are more inclined to

believe a sexual assault or rape happened if a victim reports right away, without inconsistencies, makes eye contact, or has proof of physical injury (Lonsway et al., 2009; Venema, 2014). The perception of different behaviors, specifically inconsistency, lack of emotion, and demeanor, can often lead police officers to believe a sexual assault is a false accusation.

The results of this study provided a further understanding of police officers' perceptions on sexual assault, false accusations, and rape myths. This thesis found that most police officers had similar perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, regardless of what empirical evidence suggests. Police officers in the current study also had similar perceptions on rape myths. Police officers' perceptions, referring to false accusations, needs further examination to determine if police officers perceive high rates of false accusations regardless of empirical data that suggests otherwise; as well as, examine the influences of their perceptions. The following section discussed what future research should look at in terms of police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault.

Future Research

This research suggested police officers base their perceptions off of false accusations of sexual assault, rape myths, and behaviors of victims. This study did not find an association between false accusation frequency and influences, such as rape myths or training. This can likely be explained by the small sample size and missing data. Future research should conduct research using a much larger, random sample to access results that could be generalized to the entire police officer population. Sexual assault is the most underreported crime, therefore, collecting accurate data on false accusations is important. Future research should also look deeper into police perceptions on women who report rape, specifically at behaviors and characteristics. According to this research, and prior literature, police officers perceive a set of

behaviors women portray when reporting a false accusation (Lonsway et al., 2009; McDowell, 1985; Ward, 1995). These perceptions of behaviors should be looked at using a much larger sample size to see if an association exists between perceptions of behavior influencing perceptions of false accusation rates.

Furthermore, future research should review specialized training in response to sexual assault. It is important to determine if longer periods of sexual assault training could influence their perceptions or how they respond to a sexual assault report. Police officer's might have responded differently to questions about false accusations and rape myths if proper training on sexual assault was conducted. The current study suggests that training on police response to sexual assault is often times required, but past research suggests the duration of training is not long enough to provide adequate training; specifically, most training on sexual assault is completed in less than one hour (Lonsway et al., 2001). Darwinkel et al., (2013) provided evidence that supported longer research decreases negative perceptions of sexual assault. Research on longer training on police response to sexual assault is needed to provide more information on its effects of reducing negative perceptions, especially on the frequency of false accusations.

As stated previously, there is limited information regarding police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault, and influencing factors like rape myths and training. This research is critical because police officers' perceptions could affect their response to a sexual assault investigation or report. Their perceptions, solely based on experience, also have the potential to affect policy. This thesis concludes by exploring policy implications associated with the results of this research.

Policy Implications

There are two major policy implications that were addressed in this section: (1) The improvement of the classification system of sexual assault cases, and (2) the improvement of training on police response to sexual assault. These policy implications are based on the findings of this research and previous results of similar studies. The policy implications will be further addressed in this section.

The current study and previous research found police officers perceived high rates of false accusations of sexual assault (Lisak et al., 2010). Research on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault only shows between two to eight percent of sexual assault reports are false. The most comprehensive study to date on false accusations found less than five percent were false accusations, but because the classification system police departments use, false accusations are clustered with reports that were “unfounded” or “baseless” (Lisak et al., 2010). The lack of information on a sexual assault report does not mean that a report is a false accusation; however, the current classification system in many departments clumps these together. This presents a problem when gathering accurate statistics on false accusations. A different classification system needs to replace the current one in order to prevent this problem. If a classification system that separates false accusations from unfounded, more comprehensive research can be conducted to find the more accurate rate of false accusations. This data could then be used to show police officers the approximate frequency of false accusations. If future research finds false accusations are actually much lower than what police officers currently perceive, that information could be used to possibly change perceptions. Positive effects could result from a change in the classification system.

The second policy implication is the improvement of training on police response to sexual assault. This thesis found that most of the police officers included in the sample had training on sexual assault, but still perceived high rates of false accusations. The lack of information on how much training and a description of their training could explain why police officers perceive high rates. Past research suggested police training on sexual assault is not the main focus on training, but one limited section (Caro, 2011; Chappell, 2008; Lonsway et al., 2001). Thus, police training on sexual assault should be extended. Educational programs aimed to inform police officers on information about sexual assault could be useful and effective at changing their perceptions. As stated previously, police perceptions can cause distrust between individuals reporting sexual assault and the police. Changing perceptions, or increasing positive experiences between police officers and victims, could improve the problem of underreporting.

If policies focus on improving how police officers perceive sexual assault cases, it allows solutions to arise to combat problems, such as false accusations, and could lead to a decrease underreporting. Current policies have led to negative reactions by the public; therefore, revising or changing current policies could lead to a positive change. Future research should look into other policy implications that could benefit the relationship between the public and police officers.

Conclusion

The results in this thesis validated previous studies that found police officers perceived high rates of false accusations of sexual assault, though empirical evidence suggests the opposite is true (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Kelly et al., 2005; Lisak et al., 2010; Lonsway & Archambault, 2008; McCahill et al., 1979). Police officers seemed knowledgeable on rape myths, though generally, only two out of the six rape myths included in this research were endorsed. This

research included a sample not large enough to generalize over the entire police population, though previous research indicates police officers continue to endorse most rape myths (Campbell & Johnson, 1997; Page, 2010) Additionally, no correlation was found between police officers' perceptions on rape myths and perceptions on the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault. An important note to consider is that gender was correlated to several variables including the frequency of false accusations of sexual assault, four rape myths, and police officers' perceptions of certain behaviors women portray when making a false accusation. Presently, there is a limited amount of research that focuses on police officers' perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault; therefore, it could prove challenging to generalize the findings to the entire population. Additional examination relating to this topic should be conducted to understand police officers' perceptions on false accusations, rape myths, the variables that influence those perceptions, and how police perceptions can be positively changed. Policymakers should consider the empirical data to when revising laws and policies to ensure the necessity of revision, then study the effectiveness of the policy. For example, training could be improved by including an educational program that provides empirical data on accurate rates of false accusations of sexual assault. If police officers were knowledgeable on these statistics, there is a possibility for change in their perceptions.

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APPENDIX

Survey

Dear Participant:

My name is Danielle Ostrander, and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am working on my master thesis in Criminal Justice. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete this research project. The name of my research is "Police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault."

The purpose of this study is to explore and expand current literature on police perceptions on false accusations of sexual assault. I would like to administer a brief hardcopy survey to sworn police officers. The survey will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. You will be asked a series of questions associated with sexual assault such as false accusations, myths, and definitions. This study will assist in providing more information about police officers' perceptions in regards to sexual assault and false accusations, and possibly contribute to future research. There is no direct benefit in taking this survey.

In order to ensure confidentiality, your name will not be present on the survey nor the consent form. Your rights and privacy will be maintained, only the personnel particular to this research (the primary and secondary investigators associated with this research) and the ETSU Institutional Review Board (for non-medical research) will have access to the study records and all information will be kept confidential.

If you do not want to fill out the survey, it will not affect you in any way. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can stop at any time.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me, Danielle Ostrander at (901) 568-3457. We are working on this project together under the supervision of Chris Rush, PhD. You may reach her at (423) 439-5963. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at (423) 439-6054 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you cannot reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at (423) 439-6055 or (423) 439-6003.

Sincerely, Danielle Ostrander

By completing the survey you agree that:
You have read the above information.
You voluntarily agree to participate.
You are at least 18 years of age or older.

If you do not agree to participate you can simply turn in your blank copy of the survey.

**BLANK PAGE, PLEASE KEEP
ATTACHED**

Police Perceptions on False Accusations of Sexual Assault

1. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

2. What is your age?

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

3. What is your race?

- White
- Black or African-American
- Hispanic
- Other

4. What is your highest level of education?

- No degree
- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g. GED)
- Some college, but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Graduate degree

5. How long have you been a sworn law enforcement officer?

- Less than 5 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21-30 years
- 31 or more years

6. What does the term “sexual assault” mean to you?

7. What does the term “rape” mean to you?

8. Approximately how many investigations of sexual assault has your department conducted in the past 5 years?

- 0-20
- 21-40
- 41-60
- 61-80
- 81-100
- 101 or more

9. Have you ever received official training for police response to sexual assault?

- Yes
- No

10. Does your department require training for police response to sexual assault?

- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know

11. If not required, does your department offer optional training for police response to sexual assault?

- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know

12. In your experience, how often do false accusations of sexual assault occur?

- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

13. In your experience, how do you confirm an accusation of sexual assault is false?

14. Do you believe there are certain behaviors women show when making a false report?

- Yes
- No

If 'Yes' please provide examples below.

From "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree", please select your level of agreeableness to the following six statements.

15. Women often claim rape to protect their reputations.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

16. Dressing provocatively may contribute to sexual assault.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

17. Sexual assault happens because men have uncontrollable sexual urges.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

18. Stranger rape occurs more than acquaintance rape.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

19. Alcohol consumption may contribute to sexual assault.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

20. Men can be sexually assaulted.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

21. Have your perceptions on sexual assault changed since you first became a law enforcement officer?

- Yes
- No

If 'Yes,' please explain why.

VITA

DANIELLE OSTRANDER

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Collierville High School
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B.S. Criminal Justice & Criminology
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