

# Impact of Education on Benevolent Sexism Toward Men and Post-Rape Empathic Views in Adults

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Empathy, Benevolent Sexism, Education, Rape Victim Attitudes, Mediation Analysis, Gender Bias, Cross-Sectional Study,

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Empathy towards rape victims is often influenced by gender biases, including benevolent sexism. Education plays a crucial role in shaping these attitudes.

**Objective:** This study aimed to investigate the impact of education on benevolent sexism toward men and post-rape empathic views in adults, with a focus on the mediating role of benevolent sexism.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional survey design was employed, involving 120 adults recruited through non-probability convenience sampling from universities and colleges. Data were collected using the Rape-Victim Empathy Scale and the Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory. Analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25, including descriptive statistics, correlation, regression, and mediation analysis.

**Results:** Education positively correlated with post-rape empathic views ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and negatively with benevolent sexism ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Regression analysis showed that education predicted benevolent sexism ( $B = -0.22$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). Mediation analysis confirmed that benevolent sexism significantly mediated the relationship between education and post-rape empathy (Sobel  $t = -2.93$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

**Conclusion:** Higher education levels are associated with lower benevolent sexism and greater empathy toward rape victims, highlighting the need for targeted educational interventions.

## INTRODUCTION

Sexual assault remains a deeply pervasive issue worldwide, affecting individuals regardless of gender, yet societal responses often perpetuate further harm through victim-blaming and diminished empathy, particularly in patriarchal contexts like Pakistan. Despite widespread awareness of the severity of sexual assault, survivors frequently encounter biased perceptions and negative attitudes that exacerbate their trauma and discourage them from seeking justice. Notable cases, such as the Lahore-Sialkot motorway gang rape and the Mukhtar Mai gang rape, highlight the gravity of the issue and the societal challenges survivors face in reporting these crimes (1, 2). Empathy, defined as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another, plays a critical role in shaping responses to survivors of sexual assault, influencing the support and understanding they receive (3). However, in the context of sexual violence, empathy is often selective and influenced by deeply ingrained gender biases and societal norms that dictate who is deemed worthy of empathy (4).

Education is recognized as a powerful tool for challenging and potentially reducing gender inequalities, yet its impact is mediated by the type of knowledge and values imparted. The societal response to rape survivors is often shaped by traditional views that blame victims and diminish their credibility, further perpetuated by media portrayals and

institutionalized sexism (5). Benevolent sexism, a form of sexism that encompasses seemingly positive yet patronizing beliefs about women, can subtly undermine empathy toward rape victims by reinforcing traditional gender norms that dictate how women should behave (6). This study aims to explore the complex interplay between education, benevolent sexism, and empathy for rape victims in adults, focusing on how education influences attitudes related to benevolent sexism, thereby affecting empathic responses to sexual assault survivors (6-8). Existing literature highlights the intricate relationship between education and empathy, revealing that higher levels of education are associated with more egalitarian views and greater empathy for victims of sexual violence (7). For instance, studies have shown that individuals with higher educational attainment are less likely to hold sexist attitudes and more likely to display empathic concern toward victims (8). However, the role of benevolent sexism in mediating the relationship between education and empathy has been less explored, particularly in patriarchal societies where traditional gender roles and sexist attitudes are prevalent. Research has consistently demonstrated that benevolent sexism is linked to less positive attitudes toward rape victims, suggesting that it can act as a barrier to empathy (9). Furthermore, the persistence of benevolent sexism in educated populations underscores the complexity of the relationship between education and

empathic responses, indicating that simply increasing educational attainment may not be sufficient to dismantle deeply rooted gender biases (10-13).

This study hypothesizes that education will positively influence empathic views toward rape victims, with higher levels of education associated with greater empathy. It also posits that benevolent sexism will mediate this relationship, with lower levels of benevolent sexism leading to more empathic views. By examining these dynamics in a sample of adults from various educational backgrounds, the study aims to provide insights into how education can be leveraged to foster empathy and reduce sexist attitudes, ultimately contributing to a more supportive environment for survivors of sexual assault. The findings are expected to have implications for educational interventions and policy development aimed at promoting gender equality and empathy in societal responses to sexual violence. Through a better understanding of the mediating role of benevolent sexism, this research seeks to inform strategies that can effectively challenge sexist attitudes and enhance empathy for all survivors of sexual assault (14-19).

The study employs a cross-sectional design, recruiting adults from various universities and colleges to explore the relationship between education, benevolent sexism, and empathy for rape victims. The findings will contribute to the broader discourse on gender, education, and empathy, highlighting the need for educational frameworks that not only impart knowledge but also challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes that hinder empathic responses to sexual assault survivors. By addressing the nuanced ways in which education and benevolent sexism interact to shape empathic views, this study aims to provide actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and advocates working to create a more just and empathetic society (12, 20).

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study utilized a cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationship between education, benevolent sexism toward men, and post-rape empathic views in adults. A sample of 120 adults, including both males and females, was recruited using a non-probability convenience sampling method from various universities and colleges. The inclusion criteria specified participants who were enrolled in higher education institutions, aged 18 years and above, and fluent in English, while those who were mentally or physically disturbed were excluded. The survey aimed to gather data that could provide insights into how education influences attitudes toward benevolent sexism and empathy for rape victims, with a specific focus on understanding the potential mediating role of benevolent sexism in these relationships.

Data collection was conducted using online methods, specifically through a customized Google Form. The survey form was carefully designed to address several key factors, including the prevention of incomplete submissions, the prohibition of multiple entries from the same email address, and the inclusion of a consent form at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participants were provided with a brief

explanation of the study's objectives, after which they were asked to provide informed consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were assured of their right to withdraw at any point without any consequences. All ethical guidelines outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki were strictly adhered to, ensuring the protection of participant confidentiality and the ethical conduct of the research. Institutional approval was obtained from the relevant ethics committee prior to the commencement of data collection (21-23).

To assess the study variables, the Rape-Victim Empathy Scale (REMV; Smith and Frieze, 2003) was used to measure participants' empathic views toward rape victims, while the Benevolence toward Men subscale of the Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory (Glick and Fiske, 1999) was employed to assess benevolent sexism toward men. The REMV scale comprises eighteen items designed to evaluate empathy both during and after a rape incident, though this study specifically focused on items related to post-rape empathy. Participants rated each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater empathy; scores for certain items were reversed to maintain consistency in response interpretation. The reliability coefficients for the REMV and Benevolence toward Men scales were acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha values of .87 and .83, respectively, demonstrating high internal consistency (6, 7, 24).

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample, and the psychometric properties of the scales were examined through reliability analysis. Normality of the data was assessed by examining skewness and kurtosis values for the main study variables. Inferential statistical analyses, including Pearson's correlation, regression analysis, and mediation analysis, were conducted to test the study hypotheses. Correlation analysis was used to explore the relationships between education, benevolent sexism, and post-rape empathic views. A linear regression analysis was performed to investigate the predictive role of education on benevolent sexism. Mediation analysis was conducted using Sobel's test to assess whether benevolent sexism mediated the relationship between education and post-rape empathic views, with all assumptions for multicollinearity and independence of observations being met (tolerance > .2).

The findings were presented in terms of unstandardized coefficients, with significance levels set at  $p < .05$  for all statistical tests. The results indicated a significant negative relationship between education and benevolent sexism, and a positive relationship between education and post-rape empathic views, supporting the hypothesis that higher levels of education are associated with more empathic views toward rape victims. Furthermore, benevolent sexism was found to significantly mediate the relationship between education and empathy, highlighting its role as a critical factor in shaping societal attitudes toward sexual assault survivors (9, 10).

## RESULTS

The data were analyzed to examine the impact of education on benevolent sexism toward men and post-rape empathic views in adults. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression, and mediation analysis were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.

The descriptive statistics for the main study variables, including education, benevolent sexism toward men, and post-rape empathic views, are presented in Table 1. The normality of the data was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values, indicating that the data were normally distributed.

**Table 1: Descriptive and Psychometric Properties of Study Variables**

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Benevolent Sexism Toward Men	36.85	4.81	24-49	-0.06	-0.45	0.72
Post-Rape Empathic Views	39.70	8.69	28-56	0.43	-1.22	0.86
Education	15.67	2.38	12-21	0.15	-0.50	-

Note: N=120

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, kurtosis, and reliability coefficients for the study variables.

The reliability coefficients for benevolent sexism and post-rape empathic views were 0.72 and 0.86, respectively, indicating acceptable internal consistency for the scales.

The relationships between education, benevolent sexism toward men, and post-rape empathic views were explored using Pearson's correlation analysis, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix for Education, Benevolent Sexism Toward Men, and Post-Rape Empathic Views**

Variable	1	2	3
1. Benevolent Sexism Toward Men	-	-0.22*	-0.30**
2. Education	-	-	0.41**
3. Post-Rape Empathic Views	-	-	-

\*Note: N=120, \*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01.

Results from Table 2 indicate a significant negative correlation between benevolent sexism toward men and both education ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and post-rape empathic views ( $r = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Additionally, education was positively correlated with post-rape empathic views ( $r = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that higher levels of education are

associated with lower levels of benevolent sexism and greater empathic views.

Linear regression was performed to determine the predictive role of education on benevolent sexism. The results are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3: Linear Regression Predicting Benevolent Sexism from Education (N = 120)**

Predictor	B	SE	t	p-value	95% CI
(Constant)	2.87	15.28	0.19	0.85	[38.2, 49.5]
Education	-0.22**	0.18	-2.47	0.02	[-0.8, 0.1]

\*Note: N=120 \*p < 0.01.

The regression analysis in Table 3 indicates that education is a significant negative predictor of benevolent sexism ( $B = -0.22$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ), explaining 49% of the variance in benevolent sexism scores. This suggests that as the level of education increases, the level of benevolent sexism decreases.

Mediation analysis was conducted using multiple hierarchical regression to explore the mediating role of benevolent sexism between education and post-rape empathic views. The results are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Multiple Hierarchical Regression for Mediation Analysis (N = 120)**

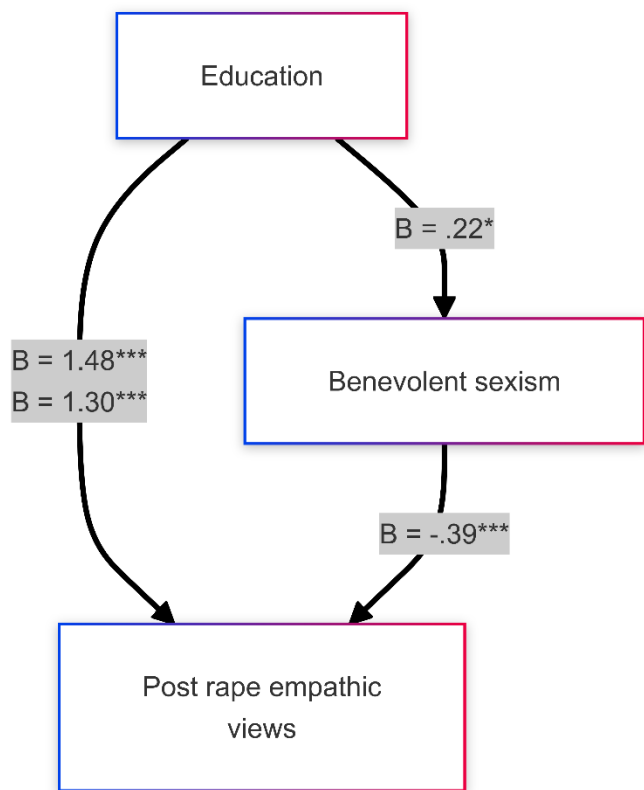
Step	Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	95% CI
1	(Constant)	16.50**	6.87	-	0.17***	0.17***	[6.87, 26.12]
	Education	1.48***	0.87	0.41***			[0.87, 2.08]
2	(Constant)	34.01***	8.18	-	0.21***	0.04***	[17.79, 50.22]
	Education	1.30***	0.69	0.35***			[0.69, 1.91]
	Benevolent Sexism	-0.39**	0.15	-0.22**			[-0.70, -0.09]

\*Note: N=120 \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001.

The hierarchical regression analysis demonstrated that benevolent sexism significantly mediated the relationship between education and post-rape empathic views. In Step 1, education was found to be a significant predictor of post-rape empathic views ( $B = 1.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), explaining 17% of the variance. In Step 2, when benevolent sexism was added

to the model, the variance explained increased to 21%, and benevolent sexism negatively predicted post-rape empathic views ( $B = -0.39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). The Sobel test confirmed the mediating role of benevolent sexism (Sobel  $t = -2.93$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that benevolent sexism partially explains the relationship between education and empathic

views toward rape victims. Furthermore, the emerged model depicts the relationships between education, benevolent sexism, and post-rape empathic views. Education positively influences both benevolent sexism ( $B = 0.22, p < 0.05$ ) and post-rape empathic views directly, with strong positive unstandardized coefficients ( $B = 1.48, B = 1.30, p < 0.001$ ).



**Figure 1** The emerged model showing the relationships between education, benevolent sexism, and post-rape empathic views. (Note\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , B=Un-Standardized Coefficient)

Benevolent sexism, in turn, negatively affects post-rape empathic views ( $B = -0.39, p < 0.001$ ). This model suggests that while higher education levels are associated with increased benevolent sexism and more empathic views post-rape, benevolent sexism itself diminishes empathic views following rape incidents. The coefficients indicate the strength and direction of these relationships, with significant paths at varying levels of statistical significance ( $p < 0.05, 0.01, 0.001$ ).

These findings underscore the importance of addressing benevolent sexism in educational contexts to enhance empathy toward survivors of sexual assault, particularly in societies where traditional gender norms are prevalent.

## DISCUSSION

The present study explored the relationship between education, benevolent sexism toward men, and post-rape empathic views among adults in Pakistan, aiming to understand how education influences empathic responses to rape victims and the mediating role of benevolent sexism. The findings revealed that higher levels of education were significantly associated with greater empathic views toward

rape victims, aligning with previous research that suggested education enhances critical thinking and awareness, thus fostering empathy (13). The study also demonstrated that benevolent sexism served as a mediator between education and post-rape empathic views, indicating that individuals with higher education levels exhibited lower benevolent sexism, which, in turn, correlated with higher empathy for rape victims. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that have shown a negative relationship between benevolent sexism and empathy, where benevolent sexism often undermined empathic responses due to rigid adherence to traditional gender norms (14, 15).

The study's results highlight the complex interplay between education, gender-based attitudes, and empathy. Education, as a critical factor in shaping social attitudes, was found to reduce benevolent sexism, thereby enhancing empathy toward rape survivors. This aligns with the findings of previous research, which noted that higher educational attainment was a strong predictor of less sexist attitudes (12). The mediating role of benevolent sexism suggests that while education can positively influence empathic views, the presence of benevolent sexism can significantly hinder this effect, as it perpetuates gender stereotypes that subtly justify discrimination and limit the capacity for genuine empathy. These insights underscore the need for educational interventions that not only increase general knowledge but also specifically target and challenge sexist beliefs, as these beliefs are deeply embedded in societal norms and continue to influence attitudes toward victims of sexual assault (8).

However, the study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The use of a cross-sectional design restricted the ability to examine changes in attitudes over time, making it difficult to establish causality between education, benevolent sexism, and empathy. Future research should consider longitudinal approaches to better understand how these relationships evolve across different life stages and educational experiences. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported measures, which can be subject to social desirability bias, potentially affecting the accuracy of the reported empathic views and levels of benevolent sexism. Cultural differences in the interpretation of the scales used, which were originally developed in Western contexts, may also have influenced the results, suggesting a need for culturally adapted tools that better capture the nuances of gender attitudes in Pakistan (3).

Another notable limitation was the use of a convenience sample from universities and colleges, which may not be representative of the broader population, especially given that the sample primarily consisted of individuals with higher educational backgrounds. This sampling approach limits the generalizability of the findings, as it does not capture the perspectives of those with lower or no formal education, who might exhibit different levels of benevolent sexism and empathy. Future studies should aim to include a more diverse sample that encompasses a wider range of educational levels and socio-demographic backgrounds to enhance the representativeness of the findings (21, 22).

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into the role of education in shaping empathic responses to rape victims and the critical impact of benevolent sexism as a barrier to empathy. By highlighting the mediating role of benevolent sexism, the study underscores the importance of incorporating gender education that challenges traditional sexist beliefs into curricula at all levels of education. Educational programs that promote gender equality and empathy could serve as effective interventions to reduce benevolent sexism and improve societal support for rape victims. Such initiatives are particularly crucial in patriarchal societies where traditional gender norms are pervasive and continue to influence public perceptions of sexual violence (5).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach that combines educational reforms with targeted gender sensitization efforts to address the underlying sexist attitudes that hinder empathic responses to rape survivors. By fostering a more empathetic and supportive environment, education can play a pivotal role in transforming societal attitudes toward sexual violence, ultimately contributing to greater justice and support for survivors. Future research should continue to explore these dynamics, with a focus on developing and evaluating interventions that effectively reduce benevolent sexism and enhance empathy, thereby promoting a more equitable and compassionate society.

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